

TEN TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL AUDITIONS

Ed Hooks

TIP ONE: REMIND YOURSELF THAT YOU ARE HAVING FUN

Actors too often make auditioning a grim source of dread. They hate to audition, but they know they have to, so they paste a smile over their grimace and plunge in. Listen: The avoidance of failure is not the same thing as the pursuit of success. If you walk into an audition thinking the auditors are looking for ways to trip you up, it is almost a given that your audition will suck. Success and failure are self-fulfilling prophesies. Half of getting cast has to do with the vibe you take into the audition. What you want to do is put the auditors at ease, let them relax and have fun.

TIP TWO: MAKE ACTING CHOICES THAT ARE BOLD ENOUGH TO COST YOU THE JOB

An audition is no place to play it “safe”. They don’t know what they want. They simply want an actor – any actor – to come into the room and show them how the role should be played. When auditioning, don’t try to be what you think they want to see; show them how it will be if they cast you.

TIP THREE: USE POSITIVE VISUALIZATION

Do what Olympic athletes do: imagine yourself winning. Picture yourself walking into the audition room and the auditors relaxing. Imagine yourself as being the leader in the audition room, as if the audition was being held over at your place and you are the host. They like you immediately. You see yourself deliver a powerful audition, thank the nice people and then smile at the other actors in the waiting room as you depart. Imagine the auditors’ reaction after

you leave. See them nodding affirmatively to one another, smiling. They have the best actor.

TIP FOUR: BE CAREFUL ABOUT OVER-COSTUMING FOR AN AUDITION

You'll get conflicting advice on this. I know some actors who believe the main reason they get cast is because they costume themselves for audition. My problem with it is that it feels a bit too subservient to me. I don't like the status transaction. I costume myself as a Charles Dickens character, and the implied message is, "Look at how much I need this job. Look at all I am willing to do to get it." I believe that an actor in audition should lead, should control the dynamic in the room, should set the pace. Why would a successful actor have time enough to go find costumes for auditions? Could it be that the actor is not so successful? Could it be that he has too much time on his hands? Why is he not working more? Maybe there is something wrong with him. It's cute, the costume thing, but let's call in the next actor.

TIP FIVE: DO NOT ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR CHARACTER

Usually, they will ask, "Do you have any questions?" before you begin the reading. The answer is "No". An audition is no place to be asking about this character's relationship to that character, and what your motivation is. They probably don't know the answer anyway, which is why they called you in. They want you to show them what the character's motivation is. Trust me on this: It will not get you any points to engage the auditors in a discussion about how much you like the character or the many different options you have for how to play it. They don't care; they don't know; they don't want to talk about it. Go ahead and plunge right in. Make strong choices. If they like your approach but want to see another acting choice, they'll ask you to do it again with adjustment.

TIP SIX: BE AWARE OF THE POWER STRUCTURE IN THE ROOM

For television shows, the power resides with the producers and writers. Directors come and go and, anyway, the directors are just trying to impress the producers and writers. For commercials, the power usually resides with the director, unless he is new at his job. For movies, the power resides with the

director. For stage plays, the power is also with the director. Casting directors have the power to give you access to the decision makers, but they usually do not themselves make casting choices. I mean this in the nicest way possible: The casting director is your friend, but she is standing in between you and the job. You need to get in the room with the person who can say, “yes”.

TIP SEVEN: THE BEST AUDITION SLOTS ARE MID-MORNING AND MID-AFTERNOON

If possible, try to avoid scheduling your audition right before, or right after lunch. Don't be the first audition of the day. By mid-morning, they are beginning to have an idea of what the role is going to look like on its feet. Mid-afternoon is an excellent slot unless an actor has knocked their socks off in the morning. That is usually not the case. More likely, they will be getting a little anxious by mid-afternoon, more eager to fall in love. And, yeah, I'd avoid being the last audition of the day. The role is already cast by then and, if it is not, the auditors are too depressed to be watching your audition properly.

TIP EIGHT: IF GIVEN AN OPTION, STAND DURING YOUR READING

Nervous actors tend to hang on to furniture, so you don't want to do that. It will be perceived as self-doubt, and self-doubt will sink your boat every time. If the scene you are reading requires that you sit behind a desk or if you are driving a car, then you have no choice. Take a seat. Most scenes, however, can be played standing or sitting. Standing is a higher status position, more dominant in the room, and that should always be your default choice.

TIP NINE: ALWAYS HAVE A NON-THEATRICAL STORY READY

“So, what have you been up to?” is a terrible question to ask an actor, but they do it a lot. My experience is that you do best if you talk about your recent trip to Paris, or how excited you are with the new baby. Don't start with, “I've been auditioning a lot” or “You know, hanging out”. If you are currently appearing in a play, mention that, but don't go on and on about it. The truth is that they don't care what you have been up to. They're just talking. Talk back a bit and then get on with the job at hand, an audition.

TIP TEN: YOU ARE AN INSIDER

The psychology of audition is at least as important as how well you interpret the character. Nobody really wants to work with a new person for the first time. Directors all have a list of actors they love to work with. Having spent my time on some of those lists, I know how it works. Actors who work tend to work again. A new actor may seem exciting in the audition room, but you can never be completely certain she won't go postal or something on the set. Therefore, even if it is the first time you have ever met the auditors, treat them like family. Professional family, but family nonetheless. Keep it loose and friendly, but don't kiss up to them. The idea is to let them know it is perfectly okay to cast you.

ABOUT ED HOOKS

Ed Hooks is a member of Screen Actors Guild, AFTRA and Actors Equity Association. He has been a professional actor for more than thirty years, appearing in over one hundred television shows, including "Murder, She Wrote", "Days of our Lives", "Quantum Leap", "Home Improvement", "Full House", "Golden Girls", "Hart to Hart", "Knight Rider" and "The Fall Guy". Films include "Striking Distance", "Raising Cain" and "Heart and Souls".

His countless television commercials include major campaigns for AT&T, Holiday Inns, Pampers, Bounce Fabric Softener, McDonald's and Motorola. You have heard his voice on radio and TV spots for Turkey Selects, Ultra Brite Toothpaste and El Torito Restaurants, among many others. On stage, he has worked extensively in New York, Los Angeles, in regional theater and summer stock, as an actor and director. His credits include "Whitsuntide", "Colonial Dudes", "Dr. Faustus Lights the Lights" (Gertrude Stein), "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown", "You Can't Take it With You", "Our Town" and "Hamp".

Mr. Hooks is also a respected author. Titles include "The Ultimate Scene and Monologue Sourcebook", "Acting Strategies for the Cyber Age", "The Actor's Field Guide (Acting Notes on the Run)", "Acting for Animators" and "Acting in Animation: A Look at 12 Films".

As an acting teacher and coach, Ed has trained thousands of actors in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Chicago. His past students include Heather Locklear ("Melrose Place"), Teri Hatcher ("Lois and Clark") and many other recognizable and working actors. It is difficult to watch television for a single evening without seeing several of Ed's past or current students at work on various shows or in commercials.

In addition to his regular acting classes for actors, Ed Hooks teaches acting to animators, the kinds of people who make movies like "Horton Hears a Who" and video games such as "Half Life". In this capacity, he has taught widely in the U.S., Europe and Asia. For an in-depth look at this side of Ed's career, go to his other web site, [Acting for Animators](http://www.actingforanimators.com) (<http://www.actingforanimators.com>).



