

## “Be Not Just A Smart Actor, But an Actor With Smarts”

By Michael J. Wallach

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You are an actor because it's in your guts and the burning desire is there.

Yet, perhaps unfortunately, it is not enough to possess the ability and the spark. You need to be fully aware of the other steps it takes to be successful – to make your living solely doing what you love, to have them request your services, instead of the other way around.

It takes knowledge, savvy if you will, of how the system and the business work. Knowing how to handle yourself the moment you walk into the room for the audition and the split second the camera begins to roll. Being comfortable with interviewing prospective agents and managers as well as being interviewed by them. Interacting effectively with producers, directors, other actors, the crew, and, eventually, the public.

You need to know that a casting director is not an impediment to meeting the director and doing the audition that gets you the role. Rather, the casting director is potentially your greatest ally and advocate in the process, telling you how to adjust your reading to be on the same page as the faces in that audition room.

You want the right agent who provides auditions even when you're not ostensibly “right” for the part, and who makes “good deals,”

not just financially, but in such potential career-builders and career-sustainers as billing.

You should choose a personal manager who sees the big picture, recognizes a good agent, publicist, and other support professionals, and can work with you to put the best marketing elements together – picture, resume, composite reel, audition attire, grooming and “look.” This is someone who knows what is expected of a movie or TV pilot deal, who can recommend the best acting coach or dialect coach is needed, knows what tax deductions to which you are entitled, or can just give you the number of the most masterful dermatologist if that is required.

Believe this: Great success for you is a real possibility. Being successful and staying successful is not easy, *but it can be achieved!*

My own understanding of the business and success in the business comes from having been a manager for more than 20 years. I’m also a lawyer and was previously a business affairs executive – making the deals and negotiating with your agents – for television, film, and record companies in both Los Angeles and New York.

This has made me sometimes frustrated with clients who are resistant to developing their business “smarts” alongside their ability to do a cold reading. So, I decided to channel that frustration by creating a course at UCLA Extension called “This Business of Acting™(Reg#R7853U for the upcoming Winter Quarter ’06),” to motivate actors to build those very business “smarts” they need in order to give one the very best chance for great success. It is a course filled with guest speakers including agents, managers, and casting directors, etc.

It is the foolish actor who remains complacent when a

representative says, “You go act and leave the business to me.” And the “business” is much more than numbers but also the practical methods one can use to succeed. Otherwise, you can become an actor who ends up broke, forgotten, and surely very disappointed.

Don’t freeze and think, “Well, I never had a head for business.” This is not a question of balancing your checkbook (although that is a nice skill to have). It’s an issue of making informed and rational choices, and of never – not ever – being taken by a slick operator who promises you the world, but delivers you to Pacoima.

The process of being successful is fun. It can also be arduous. You choose the best team of representatives – manager, agent, and when appropriate, a business manager, publicist, attorney et al – to take the pressure off. But choose them well. My grandmother used to say that every family has its “wise one” – the relative whose advice is best, who always seems to have the answer. Use your informed instincts to choose an entire family of “wise ones.”

Incidentally, if you have not already seen it, one of the most entertaining and actually *informative* movies for an actor and others in the industry is the feature “The Big Picture” (1989) starring – who else? – Kevin Bacon. It’s worth checking out.

And lastly, remember this about making it in the entertainment business – **THERE ARE NO RULES!**