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**PAST, PRESENT, AND HOW TO PROCEED:
CREATING MY ACTOR TOOL KIT**

by

JOSHUA TRENT KIMBALL
B.F.A in Musical Theatre, Southern Illinois University of Carbondale, 2014

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the School of Performing Arts
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ABSTRACT

As theatre graduates walk across the stage and receive their diplomas, the message they hold close to their hearts is “Go forth and act.” The next day, week, or month the question becomes very clear, “HOW?” This thesis focuses on a practical problem facing theatre graduates whose goals are pursuing the field of acting professionally. Theatre students are given basic tools for honing their skills but are unequipped to create a viable, sustainable career in the field. The objectives in this paper are to outline problems actors encounter when attempting to build a career and offer practical advice for starting, building, and maintaining a career in the performing arts.

The methodology I used was primarily qualitative. The examples and data were collected primarily through personal experience. In addition, I gathered advice and personal examples from professionals who have been faced with the daunting task of pursuing a career in theatre and solutions they offer when navigating the field. This methodology was the best choice in light of the fact that those faced with the uncertainty of how to begin and maintain a career know best the problems young actors will face. Practical suggestions do not come in the form of numbers. This paper reveals the problems faced with this difficult task and gives actors the tools necessary to pursue a career as well as adjust to the ever-changing requirements of a theatre career. Actors may then use this advice as it applies to their individual careers.

Using the tools given during academic training, the actor must build the foundation and structure of a career, and then begin marketing that career. The primary focus of the foundation in this thesis is creating a strong audition package. Through my research, problems involved in creating this package were delineated and practical solutions were offered. The structure of the career focused primarily on the rehearsal and performance process. Emphasis was placed on not

only performance excellence, but the communication skills and etiquette needed to build a reputation in the theatre community. Finally, marketing the career gives practical advice for demo reels, headshots, resumes, websites, and financial concerns.

No path to an acting career is the same for every actor. Success can never be guaranteed, but a viable, sustainable career in theatre is possible. Actors need to understand the problems they will face, and this thesis gives practical approaches to be used to overcome the many obstacles they face.

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INTRODUCTION

My dad used to have an old tool shed in the backyard, filled with rusty tools. I used to think, how are any of those of value? He would go out there and grab a tool and amazing things happened. He started by using a rusty old hammer and saw and constructing the foundation of whatever wonderful apparatus he was creating, then continued building that structure. Finally, he would design the outside and put it on the market. Unbelievably people wanted to buy it. In undergraduate school, students are told that they must have a box of tools to incorporate into their construction of a career. Unfortunately, many of these tools seem rusty and useless, because students are often not taught how to use them to build their careers.

All actors are given tools, whether they be techniques, training, methodologies, and even pedagogies that they are encouraged to use to create a successful career as an actor. No actor's toolbox contains the same tools, and many professionals disagree on what tools are necessary for an actor to keep in his or her tool shed. Lucas Brandt, a 2016 MA in Theatre Arts graduate of the University of California Santa Cruz, defines his tool "box" by what methodologies he uses in approaching his performances, both in his preparation for his rehearsal, and in the rehearsal process itself. UCLA's class "The Actor's Tool Box: Creating Emotional Truth" focuses on learning insightful tools such as sense memory, relaxation, imaging, and voice and body work to create a tool kit for rehearsals and performances. However, Michelle Danner's Acting Studio and StageMilk.com, focuses on the business side of an actor's career including marketing and networking to further a career. One can draw the conclusion from the diverse collection of tools considered essential by various sources that no actor's tool kit is completely the same. One actor's rusty tool is far from rusty and an invaluable tool for creating a career in theatre. All of

these toolboxes are insightful but incomplete. Every actor must choose the tools provided in their training ground that works for the career path chosen and must contain a variety of tools for success. One cannot build a house with only a hammer and saw. The toolbox should contain tools for constructing a foundation, such as acting methodologies, creating a healthy voice and body, and creating insight into script and character work. Specific tools are also necessary for building the career through the rehearsal and performance process. A rehearsal process is more than just what methodologies are used to create a well-rounded character. One needs to have tools for creating a healthy and productive rehearsal environment and establishing relationships with directors, production crews, and fellow actors. Finally, the toolbox should include tools for marketing an actor's career such as resumes, demo reels, networking, and various promotion techniques. Much like my father's process of building a foundation, constructing the product, and marketing that product successfully, an actor's toolbox must give tools for the entire process.

In addition to filling the toolbox with all essential items necessary, it is important to explore how to use these basic tools effectively and which tools are not necessary for the actor's unique career choices. Too often actors are given a box full of rusty tools, but never taught how to use them effectively. So many performers leave universities with degrees and "rusty tools" but are unsure of how to apply them to build a career in the "real theatre world." Personally, I took away many valuable tools from my BFA in Musical Theatre at Southern Illinois University of Carbondale (SIUC) and my MFA in Acting at the University of Central Florida (UCF); however, the classes, auditions, and musical rehearsals were simply playgrounds to collect the actor's tools I wanted to incorporate into my life. In this thesis I want to share the tools I feel have been essential to me to construct the foundation of my career, build a successful career, and market that career. These tools, of course, are specific to me and are constantly changing as my career

progresses but may provide insight for young actors trying to find the tools they need for their own toolbox and how to use them effectively.

CONSTRUCTING THE FOUNDATION: THE AUDITION

When constructing the foundation of a career, the first task is to begin the audition process. Success in an audition is often dependent upon creating an audition package that shows your personality, is based in solid acting techniques, and is flexible for various styles of performance. No definitive criteria exist for success in an audition. Often success depends upon the casting director's vision of a role and the chemistry that exists between the production staff and the actor. In other words, often it is simply who "looks right" for the role. In the book *Audition*, Michael Shurtleff states that "casting is a very subjective process for the auditors, naturally, no matter what objective criteria they use. Given readings of equal excellence, they are more than likely to decide because 'I like her'. There's nothing you can do about that, so it's better not to concern yourself with it." The key phrase to be taken from this advice is "equal excellence." Excellence during auditioning is the basis needed to be considered for landing a role, which is essential to begin constructing the foundation for a career. I would like to share some insight into the tools to be included in the actor's toolbox and how to use those tools when constructing "excellence in the audition."

The Tape Measure: Choosing The Monologue And Song

The basis for an excellent audition is an effective audition monologue and song. Those are the "tape measures" the toolbox needs for beginning to create an audition package. The difficulty most actors face is discovering a monologue and song that best shows this excellence and helps them "measure up." One method for honing an effective monologue and song package is to seek out feedback. In my Junior year at Southern Illinois University of Carbondale (SIUC),

the musical theatre majors took an Audition Techniques class. This would be my only class based in auditioning until I reached my third year of graduate studies, where I took another audition class with the same name. Audition Techniques explored the process of auditioning, discussed how to choose engaging monologues and songs, and helped the students understand and practice dance auditions. In these two audition technique classes, the average assignment looked like “please prepare a monologue and a 16-bar cut of a song for a specific production.” Through these assignments, I began to connect what elements of my classmates’ audition package got them “hired” and what their audition lacked that kept them from being “hired”. When I look back at these two audition classes, I realize that the upside to these audition assignments were that we received immediate feedback on how our “audition” went, but more importantly, it gave me the vocabulary to articulate why someone’s audition was successful. In a classroom setting, I could ask the questions I would never be able to ask in a real audition. Outside the classroom setting, obtaining objective feedback becomes more difficult. Seeking out feedback from professionals and peers after graduation and throughout a career is essential for growth in constructing that foundation. Those academic courses provide actors the basic tools, the hammer and saws, for preparing for an audition. However, understanding how to utilize these tools to construct that audition must be developed and must continually be reexamined. Once leaving academia, an actor must seek out experiences to hone auditioning techniques. Observation is key for continuing to grow. Often veteran actors stop trying to learn from observing others and are afraid to adjust the audition techniques that are within their comfort zones. At many auditions, I witnessed actors audition from different states, different colleges, and with varying levels of training. I would like to believe I learned from watching those auditions. I learned what works for that actor and what might work for me as an actor. I also

began realizing after seeing so many different variations of an audition that, like Michael Shurtleff said, every audition I went to was subject to what the director wanted out of my audition. I have no control of their expectations when seeing my audition, but what I can do is utilize my tools to create the best audition I can.

Part of the process for measuring an audition is preparing in advance. Some essential components for this preparation include a book of 16 and 32 bar cuts of audition songs. These books are essential tools actors should compile and add to as they advance in their careers. Audition Book Checklist (From your friends at Actor Therapy) by Ryan Scott Oliver and Lindsay Mendez offer tips on preparing an audition song book. They suggest this book include two or more contrasting Golden Age, two contrasting Pop/Rock songs, one to two New Musical Theatre songs post 2000s, a mega-musical song, a 50s/60s song, a folk/country song, a Sondheim song, a specialty song which shows special interests such as an operetta, jazz, or R&B, and the singer's favorite song. (Oliver and Mendez September 14, 2018) The songs chosen should include both comedy and drama, songs that show creativity and the ability to handle complex texts, and songs that show range but are comfortable for the singer. Above all, the songs must sound good! The book should not include songs that do not highlight the voice at its best, despite a desire to "show off" that amazing high note. The degree of difficulty of the accompaniment is also a consideration. When my brother auditioned for THE MUNY in St. Louis as a child, he chose a song from Big River. The accompanist was not familiar with the choice and could not play the accompaniment. The director finally told him just to sing Happy Birthday in a key that he was not comfortable with. The audition was a failure. Choice of songs to include is just the beginning of this process. The audition book should not be completed and put on a shelf. Singers should prepare all songs included. The songs should be memorized, studied for characterization,

and at performance level. At any point, a casting team may ask the audition-er to sing another song. Some may even ask to see the book and choose one. When I auditioned for the Princess Cruise lines, I finished my song and they said, “Now sing the highest song you have in your book.” This happens often in a casting session. My cousin, Nicole Scimeca, is a thirteen-year-old equity actor who has performed on Broadway, in multiple regional theatres, and in film, presently participates in ten or more auditions in a given week. Her real-life experiences have been a valuable source of advice. When she was eight years old, Nicole auditioned for the Broadway show *Anastasia*. She went into the audition with the required song and after she ended, the director said to sing another song in her book. She was only eight, but she felt comfortable with the song she sang in the tour of *Grinch*, so she chose *Santa for a Day*. That song had no connection to the show *Anastasia*, but she knew it well, was comfortable with the character, and loved it. She was given the role of Young Anya.

A repertoire of monologues is also invaluable to an actor, especially when there is little time to prepare for an audition. Although many sources give monologue recommendations, I have gathered some basic tips that I have found invaluable when choosing audition monologues. Your repertoire should include a comedic monologue, a dramatic monologue, a classical monologue, a film monologue, and a monologue that displays a particular quality in your acting. For example, if you are great at voices or cartoon characters, you might find a monologue that accentuates that talent. Not only memorize the monologues but read the plays and study the character as if you were playing that character onstage. Never use a monologue that was Googled on the internet or that was written for an audition. One mistake an actor makes is believing simply memorizing the monologue is sufficient. By completing a quick memorization, the

character is not embodied as it would be in a production. Too often the acting demonstrated by a monologue is not indicative of the actor's abilities.

Most professional auditions in today's market include a cold reading. After the initial submission, actors will often be asked to come in to read from the script. Sometimes, the script will be given to the actor prior to the audition, but the length of time the audition-er is given to prepare may be very brief. In fact, often actors are sent a "side" to prepare which they diligently work on and perfect. They enter the audition with confidence and are handed an entirely new script and given 10 minutes to familiarize themselves with the text. In the article, 10 Ways to Master the Dreaded Cold-Read by Matt Newton, posted in backstage.com, tips are offered on how to utilize those ten minutes and produce an effective cold read. Immediately answer the big questions such as who am I, who am I talking to, where am I, and what do I want. Mark the script quickly with pauses to utilize for the acting between the lines. Do not simply read the lines as quickly as possible. Memorize your first and last line. Those opening and closing moments are so important. Listen and respond to the other reader or readers. Those reactions are every bit as important as the line delivery. Stay in character. If you stutter or lose your place, do not apologize. Maintain that character. Finally dig deep and keep the emotions real and honest. (Newton October 13, 2020) How an actor handles that cold reading professionally and makes quick choices regarding the character are keys to a successful audition.

The Blueprint: Read The Play

A wise instructor once told my class, "Do not for a minute think that you will get away with not reading the whole play. You must read the play that your monologue is from so that you will have an understanding of your character and the situation that your character is speaking

about and/or is involved with. It is always easy to spot an actor who has not read the play!” The mistake many actors make when preparing a monologue is ignoring the blueprint, the text. Shuffling through a play to find a long enough paragraph for a monologue or finding a cut monologue online is an excellent way to insure the foundation of the audition crumbles. When I found my monologue from *Boys Life*, the very next thing I did was read the play because all I knew of this play was what I read in the monologue. Once I had read it, I read it again. I read the play multiple times for two reasons. An actor must know the circumstances leading up to the audition segment of script and the consequences following the monologue. The actor must understand the relationship the character has with the other characters in the play and the circumstances motivating and driving the monologue. If the monologue from *Boys Life* is performed without a clear understanding of the given circumstances and without insight into the fact that Don is an amoral, teenage boy from New York, then the monologue falls short. The playwright has given the actor a blueprint, details to use. If the blueprint is not studied and utilized to create a complete character and situation, the monologue will not be as engaging to the casting director and the performance will be flat and lacking any depth. Another important reason to read the play multiple times is that the actor has a small window of time with casting directors. If the casting team asks a question about the play, it can be key to success to be able to engage them in a dialogue for as long as possible. The more the directors talk to the actor, the more they get to know the person behind the monologue. The more the directors know the actor, the better chance the performer will be noticed out of everyone auditioning. The directors and actor have made a connection together.

Shovel: “Need” Something In A Monologue

Once the blueprint has been examined, the construction on the foundation begins. It is important to “dig into” the monologue you are performing. That monologue must uncover a need in the actor. That need becomes the driving force, or foundation, for constructing the monologue. “Need is the greatest help in doing a monologue. Needing a specific reaction or series of reactions from your invisible partner.” (Shurtleff, *Audition* p.217) When searching for a monologue, if the “need for something” is strong, the monologue will be successful in an audition. However, the “need” for something must always come from the person the character is addressing. It is not enough to simply “need” something; the character must need it from the other character specifically. For example, one of my favorite monologues to use is from *Boys Life* by Howard Korder. I have been using this monologue since I was a senior in my undergraduate program. The monologue begins with the character Don begging a girl, Lisa, to not leave him. In a desperate attempt to keep her in the room with him, he makes up a fake dream about how she was a mermaid that saved his life when his spaceship crashed onto a deserted island. The need for Lisa to stay grows more and more as the fake dream becomes more farfetched, and at the end of the monologue, he loses the battle to keep her there. I have used this monologue for so long because Don’s need is so strong due to the fact that he loves her and knows that if she leaves now, he’ll lose her forever. This monologue has a clear need, but it also gives the director all the information they need to be engaged in the monologue. The casting director knows who I am talking to, why I am talking to them, and what I will lose if I fail at gaining what I need.

Rebar: Connect To The Imaginary Character

When constructing the foundation of a monologue, rebars are essential tools to begin strengthening the components of the structure. Connecting during a monologue is essential to building a successful monologue with depth of character and a strong foundation. Tyler O'Neill discussed in a Backstage article the importance of making sure that an actor is talking to someone during a monologue. "I've seen so many monologues over the years that were just a series of words spoken into the air. There was no particular point of view because the actor had no idea who they were talking to. Establishing who you are talking to and how you feel about that person in a deeply personal and specific way is what connects you to the piece and to the viewer." When I am working on my *Boys Life* monologue, I need to figure out what my "Lisa" looks like. Before I begin the monologue, I can imagine a clear picture in my mind of what my Lisa is wearing, what facial expression she is making as I am talking, and I can hear her say the line she says before I speak. Michael Shurtleff calls this the "moment before." "I find actors tend to work with generalizations. The more specific, the more focused the moment before, the better the entire monologue will go." Her line before my monologue, "I am out of here," gives me a reason to start speaking. When I begin a monologue without this clear image and specific line, I do not feel connected to the character and the given circumstances of the scene. Connecting with the character during a monologue is the rebar tools that give strength to the performance.

The Gravel: Find The Arc Of The Monologue

Pouring the gravel begins the creation of a sturdy foundation. The "gravel" of any audition monologue is finding an arc within the text of the monologue. Gravel provides yet another solid foundation for your concrete. Without an arc, the gravel, the performance becomes weak, flat,

and uninteresting. In this Backstage.com article, Gwen Gilliss urges the actor to find a monologue which begins at one place emotionally, builds to something new, and ends at another destination. “Avoid the Johnny-one-note monologues that show one emotion throughout. They’re boring and tedious, and there’s nothing worse than watching someone rant and rave angrily at the audience for four minutes. We all love to hear stories with twists and turns, so bring us along with you.” When I look back at my *Boys Life* monologue, the arc of my monologue lives in the build-up of the “dream” I am describing to Lisa. It starts in a desperate plea for her to stay, becomes a story about a plane crash and Don’s survival because of the love that they share, and ends in the realization that Lisa does not believe anything Don is saying and no more can be said. Gilliss urges the actor to take the director on a journey. The actor must build that journey. Finding the need, connection, and arc for the monologue creates a strong foundation for the beginning of the structure of an actor’s career.

Molding: Treat Your Song Like A Monologue

Often an audition includes multiple elements and too often the actor forgets that the song or dance included in the audition is part of the opportunity to act and develop a character for the casting team. Although the concrete foundation of the audition may be the monologue, the foundation will have no shape without outer molding to form the overall shape of the concrete. The song and dance portions of the audition are the moldings that form a strong, well developed, cohesive audition. “A song is basically a monologue set to music. Singers fall into the trap of focusing so much on the musical preparation that a nuanced connection to the text and story is an afterthought.” (Ardin Kaywin, Backstage.com) A song should be chosen in much the

same way as a monologue. In an article titled “Don’t Strive To Be A ‘Triple Threat,’” Abigail Morris emphasizes that acting, singing, and dancing are not equal when it comes to Musical Theatre. “You can sing without acting, but it's boring. You can dance without acting, but it doesn't mean anything. You can even act without acting... Singing and dancing are means by which you can act/tell the story.” A good song choice has a clear and defined character, has a beginning, middle, and end, and has a need. My song of choice auditioning for my master’s program was “Words Fail” from the musical *Dear Evan Hansen*. For my audition, I started in the middle of the song when Evan is alone on the stage, but I like to think of the song being addressed to his girlfriend and her family, which gives me someone to connect to. I find this song has a great arc to it and takes the audience on a journey. In the beginning of the song, Evan explains that because he has been lying to his girlfriend the whole time they were dating, their relationship was not real, even though he wanted it to be. He goes on to explain that he does not like who he really is, that living in his lie made him and everyone around him happy, and he has never felt this kind of connection to people before. He then ends the song by stating that he will never try to be close to anyone like this ever again. He will not let anyone truly know who he is, because he does not like himself. With a clear story in this song, I can connect to my imaginary girlfriend in front of me and I can play my “need” for her forgiveness. Both the monologue and song must demonstrate actor’s skills, create a connection, and take the director on a journey. They mold the concrete of the audition into a whole experience and create the excellence needed to be considered for the role.

Concrete: Include Dance As An Essential Element

Many actors only consider a need to prepare a monologue and song for an audition and dismiss the dance element of an audition because the dance is often taught at the audition and therefore, they are unable to prepare. These performers do not consider that the dance call is another opportunity to show acting and performance skills. By pouring the concrete in the molding, a strong foundation begins, encompassing not only acting and singing, but dance. All three of these elements are the concrete that must demonstrate a strong performance. During a recent audition I had, I was asked to learn choreography from a video and film myself doing the piece. Once I learned the routine, my friends who were auditioning with me asked if I would go over the choreography with them. They realized that I had learned the choreography in one day and asked how I could do that. The New York Film Academy Student Resource website discusses the eight tips for a successful dance audition. In this article they discuss that “regular dance classes will “continually test your mental ability to pick up choreography quickly. Perform each combination in class to its fullest potential and take corrections in stride, employing them immediately.” When I was an undergraduate student, I took three to four dance classes a week at a dance studio. In these studio classes we were taught a new dance combination every class and I had to know it within an hour and perform it for anyone invited to watch. Dance classes are not just a place to learn how to be a dancer, but it is also a place to practice a dance audition. At dance calls, it is a fast-paced process because most of the time the dance call is not the only thing the auditioners are doing that day. When the choreographer only has an hour to teach a hundred people a routine and then split everyone up so they can be seen in groups by the director, there is not a lot of time to stop and go over the routine. Memorizing the routine quickly is a guaranteed way to do get the director and choreographers attention. When I memorize the choreography fast,

I have time to think about what the choreographer is trying to say with this routine, and how I can act through their movements. The actor must “solidify” those skills to create a sturdy foundation for the audition.

Water For Curing: Think Of The Choreography As A Story

When building a foundation, the foundation gains strength through the curing process. The curing process through hydration enhances the strength of the concrete foundation. Knowing the dance steps for the audition is not sufficient for excellence in an audition. The dance steps must be enhanced by incorporating the acting techniques exhibited throughout the audition. Bethany Emery from Virginia Commonwealth University in her 2011 Graduate thesis “Emotional Storytelling Choreography—A Look Into The Work of Mia Michaels” she discusses that during a class called “Storytelling Through Musicalized Movement” they learn how to “score” their choreography. For example, she will choreograph parts of her piece and then write out that “these set of movements are more ‘dialogue’ movements.” These moves help the story progress forward. “This type of scoring helps to know what each physical movement or phrase of movements is about and how it connects to the overall storyline. It also helps the audience to understand that like in verbal communication, the movements or “words” being used could have various meanings.” This kind of work during a dance call is usually the last thing on any performers’ mind. However, when this style of thinking is used when learning a combination, it helps the performer learn more quickly and convey the story more easily. The tool of applying intention to an action during a monologue can be transferred to a dance routine and sets an actor

apart from the others. The actor is telling a story, rather than showing the casting director a set of moves. The concrete foundation becomes even stronger through this curing process.

Screed: Audition Like You Are Sick That Day

A voice teacher once asked me “can you sing this song when you have a cold?” In that moment, I realized the material I was attempting was too high for me to sing at an audition. Every actor needs a screed to smooth out the concrete of the audition before it is sealed, and the structure begins. Logistically, the *Dear Evan Hansen* song I sing at auditions goes up to an A4, which is one full step lower than my highest note I can healthily belt. I know that even on days filled with allergy problems, I can still get to that A4. I understand that “impressing” the casting director with a high vocal range can get an actor noticed during an audition. However, if my audition song has notes that are not always available to me, and I get hired because my song gave the casting director an unrealistic view of my vocal register, I run a greater chance of losing my voice much quicker during rehearsals. Losing my voice can halt a rehearsal process, change the schedule of a rehearsal, and possibly not get me hired again by this company because I gave them false information at my audition. To smooth out the audition process and guarantee success, actors must create auditions that not only demonstrate their talents but make them feel confident.

The Sealer: Warm Up The Body And Voice

After using that tape measure and assembling the audition package by building the frame and pouring the concrete, the foundation must be sealed to prepare for building the structure of the career. The audition day approaches. The next tool for creating that successful audition involves the final seal, working through tension and preparing mentally

and physically for a smooth audition. Michelle Danner's actor tool kit consists of some very important notes when going to an audition. Showing up on time and bringing the right materials to an audition, such as headshots, resumes, pen and pencil, and any sides or scripts needed, are essential to starting an audition right. However, a good audition begins before packing up these materials and heading to the audition. An audition day can be strenuous on the body from anxiety or physical activity. In my experience, warming up the voice and body help me settle my nerves, prepare me for my monologue and song, and provide a boost of endorphins to keep my energy high throughout the day.

It was not until my graduate studies that I heard of the Alexander Technique or Kristin Linklater. The Alexander Technique is an educational method that teaches how to change faulty postural habits, improve mobility, performance, and alertness along with relief of chronic stiffness, tension and stress through physical exercises. Kristin Linklater is a world-renowned teacher of voice production and has created techniques and exercises that include awareness of breathing, the experience of voice vibrating in the body, how to open the throat, the development of resonance and range, and the articulating activity of lips and tongue. Learning these exercises in my movement and voices classes has helped me design a warm-up that works best for me. For example, when I wake up on an audition day, I will take myself through different stretches to help me find my center of gravity and correct my posture so my rib cage opens up, my shoulders relax, and I can take a full deep breath. After that, I will begin combining the voice and body together in a Linklater vocal warm up, focused on finding resonance in my voice, checking my vocal range that day, and activating my articulators. Finding a way to "seal the audition" by reducing tension and preparing your body for the audition not only is a tool useful physically, but also an excellent tool for preparing mentally.

The actor's toolbox has the tools for creating a successful foundation for a career in theatre. Too many actors are given a box full of tools and told to go out and act! However, in order to have the opportunity to further build a career during the rehearsal process and performances, an actor must learn to use the tools given to create a successful audition. The actor must make sure a monologue has a need, an arc to it, and a clear picture of the connection with other characters. The song must also be treated as a key acting element in the audition package. The song for an audition must be treated like a monologue and much of the same tools must be applied. Singing is just a means of telling a story, and the more the directors are told that story, the more engaged they will be. Finally, the dance section of an audition must not be an afterthought, but another opportunity to engage the directors. This can be done through continued study and practicing dance calls. By increasing ease of memorization of choreography through practice, the performer creates time to think about the choreography being a story to portray to the casting director. And most of all, the actor must observe, learn from others, be willing to change and grow, and never stop developing the craft. Actors cannot control all the variables in the casting process. The actors only have control over the excellence of the audition package they present. These tools are invaluable for building the foundation for that ever-important audition. If the foundation is strong, then the actor can go back to the tool shed and gather the tools to create the structure of a successful career.

CONSTRUCTING THE STRUCTURE OF AN ACTOR’S CAREER: TOOLS FOR THE REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE

Once a foundation is laid through auditioning and preparation, construction begins on building a successful career. A role has been secured and thus begins the process of building that role into a career. Although an actor may be striving for Broadway, no professional role is too small to aid the actor in creating a resume, begin networking, and establishing a reputation in the world of theatre. The basis of this construction is finding the tools for excellence in the rehearsal and performance process. The actor must go back to the tool shed and find the tools necessary to achieve this goal. When discussing his pre-rehearsal dramaturgical research for his upcoming production of *Guys and Dolls*, Brandt said “This research had two purposes: the first was to make myself as informed as possible going into the rehearsal room, and the second, undoubtedly tied to the first, was the hope that in doing the research, I could find a nugget of wisdom or inspiration that would influence my approach to the role.” Hopefully the following tools will serve as nuggets of wisdom to inspire the actor as the rehearsal process begins.

The Write Rendering: Utilize Uta Hagen’s Nine Questions

After studying the blueprint for the foundation, the next valuable tool is the rendering, or design plan. This sketch of what will be the finished product creates a clear picture of what the actor needs to take into a rehearsal to be successful. Being informed and doing as much research as possible about the production is an incredibly important tool. However, unlike Brandt, I find that the nuggets of inspiration lie in the details of the character rather than in the isolated research of the stories themes and super objectives. In Brandt’s research for *Guys and Dolls*, Brandt pointed out that the playwright’s super objective in creating this show “was to try to create a show that spoke to the modern cultural struggle between the rigid ideals of religion and

the freewheeling lifestyle of gamblers.” He states that the main themes and super objectives of a story are important and must be found before a rehearsal begins. Although valuable information and certainly essential for the actor to understand, knowing those themes and super objectives is only the beginning of the research necessary in bringing characters to life. Research into the character is a part of the rendering that must be utilized.

Uta Hagen wrote a book entitled “Respect for Acting,” and in the introduction to her second half of this book, she breaks down what questions she asks herself when constructing a well-rounded character. The nine questions should become a staple in an actor’s pre-rehearsal study of the rendering as they evoke a wealth of information about the character. A performer can walk into the first rehearsal with ideas for the character that the director can mold into his or her vision. The actor will walk into the rehearsal room with all the given circumstances of a character ready and available. The nine questions were introduced to me when I was a Freshman during my first acting class of my undergraduate studies. Our final assignment for this class was a performance called “New Faces.” We were given scenes or songs to perform, and we were required use Uta Hagen’s nine questions to research our given performance piece, and I have continued to utilize this tool. I find these questions so helpful when analyzing the script from beginning to end because they force me to search for the details in the script. They also help me identify the holes that the script does not fill. For example, during my “New Faces” performance, I sang the song “Romeo and Juliet” from *Reefer Madness, The Musical*. I realized that my character did not have a given age I could find in the script. So, I could either bring this question to my director or fill in that information for myself after making sure it did not affect the given circumstances of the script. The following questions should be examined:

1. Who Am I?

Who is your character? Identify all the details: name, age, physical traits, education, personal opinions, likes, dislikes, fears, ethics, beliefs, etc.

2. What time is it?

The year, the season, the day, the minute. What is the significance of that time?

3. Where am I?

Identify the country, the city or town, the neighborhood, building, room, or where in that room are you?

4. What surrounds me?

What is happening in the environment surrounding you? What's the weather? Landscape?

People? Objects?

5. What are the given circumstances?

Identify events in the past, present, and future: What has happened? What is happening? What is going to happen?

6. What are my relationships?

More than just your relationship with and to other people, it's your relationship to objects, characters, events, etc.

7. What do I want?

What do you want right here, right now? What does your character want overall: an ultimate want?

8. What is in my way?

What obstacles keep you from getting or achieving what you want?

9. What do I do to get what I want?

What actions do you take - verbally, physically, both? What tactics do you implement?

Once these questions have been explored by the actor, they have a basic rendering available to begin the rehearsal process effectively. However, other tools should be employed before going into the rehearsal.

Color Rendering: Find Character Objectives And Obstacles

With Uta Hagen's nine questions answered about a given play, some actors could say that the white rendering is sufficient pre-rehearsal research. However, this research should be taken one step further to create a more vivid vision of the character. The "full color sketch" reflecting the image of the finished structure serves to clarify the vision of the character. Analysis of number seven, eight, and nine should be explored even further. "What do I want" as a character is fundamentally the objectives. Each character has an overall objective, or the super objective. However, each scene also has an objective for the character, and each scene has an obstacle, or something/someone "in the character's way." Defining the objectives and obstacles for each scene help the actor further detail the character, and this detailed analysis helps answer the last Uta Hagen question even further and define the character with more clarity.

Color Rendering Reexamined: Breaking Down The Beats And Tactics

“A beat is the smallest unit of action in a play. It contains a distinct beginning, middle, and end. In a beat, characters pursue a simple objective. However, unlike acts or scenes, beats are not delineated by the author. Very seldom will an actor hear anyone refer to the famous line “To sleep, perchance to dream” as *Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 1, Beat 3, because beats are discoveries made by actors or directors. This work is called beat analysis.” (Jake Cullens, Dramatics Magazine) Beat analysis is a technique used by an actor or director throughout a career. A beat is the shifting from one thought to another. What helps me break down where a beat is in a script is searching for what tactics my character is using in that scene to reach the objective in a scene. *Actions: The Actor’s Thesaurus* was one of the first books I bought when I entered my undergraduate studies. It is filled with tactics, or action verbs, which can be used to achieve an objective as a character. Once actors establish what action verbs they will be using during a scene, they can begin to breakdown the beats. For example, during a coaching session with an acting student of mine, I had her breakdown what tactic she was going to use in this monologue, using the Actor’s Thesaurus.

Memory House by Kathleen Tolan

1. Katie: And if there is anything of value, any thought, or feeling, why put it in a college essay? And what business is it of anybody’s? (to Question)
2. My past, and everybody’s assumption about my past, and putting it in a glass jar to look at and have theories about? And get degrees about? (to Interrogate)

3. Let's get a degree off my dead mother. Let's write a paper about how I'm a refugee from a broken land. (to Guilt)
4. That's my angle. That is what my dad thinks. Got to have an angle, an argument, why not reduce all of it. (to Mock)
5. I should be able to score off this as long as I don't mind using my dead mother as collateral. (to Hurt)
6. Hey why not, she's not gonna care right? Why not sell my memories to the highest bidder? (to Shame)

As a young actor, I did not do this kind of analysis on a script. Now I see that this detail work does two things for me: it helps me further understand my character and what kind of tactics they will use during the play, and it helps me create a more interesting character. Between lines number 3 and 4, I can see there is a shift in tactics. Katie has changed from almost guiltling her teacher, trying to get some response, to a new point about "having an angle" and mocking her dad for saying that everyone needs an angle. One point she was making led to a new point, which is a beat change. Tactics during a rehearsal change, beats can change, but this kind of detailed work on a script before entering a rehearsal gives me insight into my character and gives the director as much to work with as possible. This analysis helps color the rendering and gives the performer a clear vision when beginning the rehearsal process.

Hammer And Saw: Build A Vocabulary With The Director

After the rehearsals begin, tools must be found to enhance the rehearsal experience for both the director and actor. Actors must pick up the hammer and saw and begin the frame of a

productive rehearsal process. The frame begins with building communication with the director. “When pressures are high in any social intercourse, communication is often first to deteriorate. When communication is blocked or damaged, professionalism soon will follow. When actors do not have their lines memorized, directors cannot block the scenes. Likewise, if the director is unable to choreograph the scene and does not offer proper guidance when the actor requires it, stress and tension will rise.” (wordpress.com) The key point in this quote is communication is often the first thing to deteriorate when there is tension between an actor and a director. Often this is due to the director and actor not having the same vocabulary when it comes to a rehearsal process. When the vocabulary of a director and actor do not match, directors will become frustrated and conclude simply “they were not easy to work with.” One key to avoiding this communication breakdown is to work at asking the questions that need to be asked, clarifying notes directors have given, coming in with ideas, and understanding the director is not an enemy whose goal is to make life harder. Directors want actors to succeed. They want set designs to succeed. They want Stage Managers to succeed. They want beautiful sounds emanating from the musicians. They want everyone involved to make bold choices and to have fun in a creative and productive manner. When it comes to understanding the director’s vocabulary, an actor needs to come in prepared with choices and an understanding of the show. Choices help a director as much as it helps the performer to find the right blocking. It also helps the actor and director come up with the vocal and physical characteristics of a character. For example, when I was in the production *White Christmas* my sophomore year of undergraduate school, I was given the note to “brighten my eyes when I say this specific line.” This could mean many things. It could mean that I physically open my eyes and raise my eyebrows. However, if I make that choice, it must have intention behind it; giving the eyebrow raise and widening of the eyes meaning. When

that physical adjustment is made and the director tells me that it is not what they want, this is not a personal attack, but more of a hint to go back to my kit and either change my intention (or tactic behind my eyes), re-introduce the same tactic just with a deeper intent, or I could raise my vocal pitch, or even put the emphasis on a different part of the sentence. These are tools from basic acting classes that can be used to give the director as many options for a line reading as possible. The more actors understand how to apply the tools they have utilized in preparation for a rehearsal, the easier it is for the performer to achieve the director's vision. I have learned over the years that every director wants the actors and the production team members to succeed. So, coming into a production with a positive attitude, striving to communicate effectively, and showing gratitude for everything that the production team is doing, helps to keep focused on what needs to be done as an actor.

Nails: Follow Acceptable Rehearsal Etiquette

The rehearsal process and performance experience provide the opportunities necessary to showcase the actor's talent, network with other professionals in the field, and complete a resume and references that further that career. To build a structure effectively, a construction worker must have nails to hold the structure together. For an actor, the nails are often rehearsal and performance etiquette. Actors must follow certain guidelines during the process that showcases them in a positive and professional manner. Most actors are introduced to these "nails" during their academic years, but often do not take them out of the toolbox and they become rusty. Remembering some basic rules of etiquette is essential in showcasing themselves in a positive and professional manner. The director and other members of the production staff must want to hire them again and pave the way for future endeavors. This means an actor must demonstrate

professionalism and a willingness to give one hundred percent in every rehearsal and performance. The tools for nailing this structure involve understanding and practicing some basic rules of etiquette. Actor's Equity Education Department provides some guidelines for proper etiquette which are republished by Ithaca College (www.ithaca.edu) Although the list is quite lengthy, several key items are particularly important to keep in mind as the rehearsals and performances progress.

1. Half Hour: The unwritten rule is that an actor should arrive thirty minutes prior to the performance or rehearsal. Equity warns that this is a "misnomer. The stage manager may set up any reasonable arrival time for any actor in any show." Punctuality is essential and an actor should arrive early and welcome that time in the theatre to warm up and prepare.
2. Quiet! Keep the noise down when you are backstage or even in the dressing room. This would seem like a rule that would only be broken by amateur performers; however, my niece was in the Broadway production of *Anastasia* at the age of 10. The show ran eight times a week and the cast became like family to her. Anya even showed her how to make "flubber." In this situation, or any similar situation, the quiet warning becomes forgotten, and if an actor is always the culprit, the stage manager and director becomes frustrated with that performer.
3. Tech Rehearsals: Many times, actors do not approach a tech rehearsal with the respect it deserves. This the only time the designers get to "fine tune" their work with the actor's present. Equity advises, "don't disrupt rehearsal and stay close to the stage, because they are always going to go back a few scenes when they resume."

4. **Costume Fittings:** An actor must respect the designer. Concerns may be voiced; however, avoid trying to do his or her job. Equity warns again, “Too much unwanted advice to a designer and you could end up in a tube top or out of a job.”
5. **Props:** Most actors are fully aware that playing with props is unacceptable and an actor should always check his or her props prior to the performance. Unfortunately, these rules are rarely followed. Following them is of utmost importance. The first time an actor goes onstage as Professor Marvel in *The Wizard of Oz* and no diploma is in the bag for the scarecrow, this will become a rule never to be forgotten.
6. **Marking a Performance:** Equity warns that “the lone audience member today paid the same ticket price as the full house that loved your performance last night.” An actor has a responsibility to perform the show as rehearsed and perform to the best of his or her ability. That lone audience member could be someone important in the business!
7. **Maintaining a Performance.** Often a show may run for many weeks, months, or even years. The actor can look at this as a chore or treat this as the opportunity to perfect his or her craft. Stay fresh. This could be the gateway to future jobs.
8. **Respect:** Finally, Actor’s Equity warns that this final category is “the most obvious and the most abused. Respect of staff, crew, directors, designers, and yourself is vital to further the structure of a career. Nothing spreads faster than your reputation. Following these rules of etiquette are the nails to solidify the structure of a career.

The Square: Create A Mental And Physical Health Routine

As I was researching other actor’s tool kits, I failed to find one person that added any tool for an actor to utilize when it came to their mental and physical health. These are important

issues for an actor to keep in mind. Building a good structure for the rehearsal does not guarantee that it is sturdy without a framing square to keep that structure solid. Mental and physical health are the framing squares that are important for that solidity. When discussing the positive results of incorporating P.T.S.D. therapy practices into the rehearsal space, Mark Seton, a psychiatrist and an Honorary Research Associate in the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Sydney, said that “this enables actors to prepare themselves more wisely as they construct an embodied performance.” My job as an actor is to be emotionally vulnerable when creating a character. However, to be emotionally vulnerable as a career is mentally difficult for an actor. To have a lasting career as an actor, this is an important pre-rehearsal tool for me is going regularly to a therapist. Incorporating therapy into my weekly routine helps me sort out the emotional stresses a production can place on me, and I can use that time to sort out my personal life so it does not affect my rehearsals. For example, before a recent production of *Urinetown* began, I was thrown so many curveballs that semester that, at times, mentally, I did not think I could handle another production. I was cast in three productions in the Spring semester of 2020 at UCF. At first, I thought I could handle this load, but what I had not taken into consideration were my responsibilities as a graduate student - teaching, grading, and advising on top of my own schoolwork and three productions. I also had not considered that the stresses of life outside of school do not stop, and three shows at the same time was just too much for me. During my two years of graduate school leading up to my production of *Urinetown*, I had gained 20 pounds and my lower back began to act up. Mentally, I was having family issues which were tough to deal with and my self-esteem was gone because of the weight I had gained. I was not sleeping well. I could not breathe deeply because of my lower back pain, and all of this began to affect my work both in class and in productions. I knew I had to address my mental and physical issues.

I began a therapy session once a week, and I immediately felt the results. I was sleeping better, I was managing my weight, and I learned to prioritize my life and schoolwork. The next step in the process was working on my physical health.

“It’s not about becoming someone you’re not or finding that perfect body. The best thing to do is to just do something. Anything. Find something that suits you. Find what you love and follow that.” (Fitness for Actors: Why Being Fit Will Help Your Acting Career, *StageMilk* 12 Sept. 2020) Physical fitness in acting is essential. There is not one “right way” to be physically active, but there are elements of fitness actors need to be more cognizant of to help their career, and there are a variety of ways to work on those elements. Cardiovascular health is a major component to an actor’s success. The tools as an actor are voice and body. Both need to be active every day in some way. Exercises that incorporate strengthening lung capacity and cardiovascular health should be a priority to keep energy high and engage more fully in rehearsals. For me, physical health also became about working on preexisting conditions. Because I was having back problems, I was unable to move and breathe as effectively as I would like. When I went to the doctor to check on my lower back, I learned I had an extra piece of vertebra that lessened my flexibility because of inflammation to the muscles in my lower back. After the doctor’s referral to a physical therapist, I began a recovery process for my back -- something I still am working on to this day.

Finally, diet should be examined. During the school year I found myself undereating, then binging on food to make up the difference in calories. My body was in fight or flight mode, and the binge eating was forcing my body to store all the calories it could get to survive, hence the weight gain. After a visit to the dietician, I began to follow a health plan that gave me the tools to eat healthily and regularly. Many websites give health tips and tricks for the actor when

it comes to dieting. Backstage.com recommends bringing snacks to rehearsals, choosing nutrient-dense breakfasts, trying fasting, avoiding heavy carbs at lunch, and drinking tea daily. These tips are helpful, but everybody is different, and a dietician can be particularly helpful in creating a diet specific to the individuals and their requirements. During my undergraduate studies, I felt invincible, as most people at that age do. I could eat anything, barely had to stretch when dancing or working out, and mentally I never felt like anything stressed me out. However, the physical and mental health routine I have made for myself will be something I will always prioritize first from now on.

Before entering a rehearsal process, actors must do the research necessary to understand the overall themes and super objectives of the text and the character study necessary to begin the rehearsal process. Actors must also demonstrate their ability to communicate effectively, show professionalism, and perform each and every time to the best of their ability. Finally, actors must maintain their mental and physical health to ensure the ability to do the job effective.

MARKETING YOUR CAREER: TOOLS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

After completing the construction of the project, a contractor's task becomes marketing the product. The home or building must be made attractive to real estate agents and the current market. Promotion of the product is key to the contractor's success. In much the same way, an actor must find the tools to market his or her "product." "The unemployment rate for theatre majors is higher than most because making a career out of acting is tough," states Angela Brazil, a graduate from the University of Iowa's graduate theatre program in 1977 and a working actor. "Only 20 percent of people in the Actor's Equity Association are in acting jobs at a given time." Although this outlook seems grim, often "giving up on theatre" stems from a lack of knowledge about the tools needed to pursue it. One young man I recently spoke to graduated with his theatre degree and loves performing but has no idea how he should go about building a career. He said to me, "What do I do? Where do I go? I feel like I was given the skills... I was taught to act... but given very little guidance on how to break into the business." I have not yet "made it" and am working diligently to market myself and pursue my dream. It will not be easy, but I will continue this pursuit because this is what I love. Through my pursuit thus far, I have discovered many tools that are essential for marketing a career in theatre and becoming a working actor.

The Paint: Demo Reels

When setting out to market a product, that product must be made as attractive as possible to the target market. One tool to achieve this is the paint. When pursuing a career, actors must paint an attractive picture of their talents for the potential "buyers." The first coat of paint is the

demo reel. A demo reel is an important selling tool for any actor. “Now, that’s not to say with a professional-looking reel you’re going to be Angelina Jolie by tomorrow. But you’re definitely increasing your odds. Most entrepreneurs need to put some money down and trust themselves. Actors need to think of their demo reel as a business investment.” (ActingFrontier.com) The demo reel is a promotional tool that can be prepared in many different ways to endorse an actor’s work and showcase various talents. Many types of demo reels are needed. Some demo reels include video clips while others are purely audio clips for voice-over actors. Most music theatre professionals need a voice reel, a dance reel, and an acting reel. Each facet of the film and theatre industry wants to see something unique from those demo reels. StageMilk.com offers several tips for demo reels for film. The site suggests an actor choose two to three self-tapes, or film clips from previous films on location, and combine them together to make a video reel no longer than five minutes. “Either way, make sure you choose only your BEST work – if you’re unhappy with it, and it doesn’t represent you well, then shoot it again until you get it right.” The same advice is true for theatre demo reels. Whatever an actor puts in a demo reel must show that performer at his or her best. Using videos that are diverse with different styles of musical theatre or plays is advantageous; however, the high quality of the performances is of utmost importance. When I first made my demo reel in my Senior Seminar class at SIUC, it was tough for me to find quality clips of my performances. I did not think about a demo reel during my four years at school until it was too late. So, my first reel was limited to the two productions my final year of undergraduate studies because I had video footage of those productions. I also included clips I chose to create myself. Despite the scarcity of clips, this reel was incredibly useful when it came to landing my first professional job at Cedar Point Theme Park, which required a demo reel in the online application. YouTube is the most widely used platform for uploading and distributing

the reel to casting directors and various submission sites. The video can be easily transported via URL code and can also be downloaded on a website the actor creates for promoting his or her business. Michelle Danner discusses the importance of high-quality demo reels. “The reel should not be more than five minutes in length and should show only those scenes which best highlight your work.” While I will agree with her assessment of its importance, the length of the demo reel is too long in today’s market. Anything past two-three minutes of footage is too excessive and will probably not be watched in its entirety. Casting directors are often only going to watch about two to three minutes before they have a good idea of the quality of your performance. Many examples of quality demo reels can be found on professional acting websites, and actors need to watch a wide variety of these reels to choose the format and content to best exhibit their talents. Although some pay someone to create the reel, the actor can easily create a reel on iMovie or Moviemaker. The paint job of the actor’s career begins with the demo reel and is a good beginning for marketing a career.

The Trim: Headshots And Resumes

Although the demo reel paints a picture of the actor’s career, the trim is often the first element directors or casting teams sees when they receive a submission. The trim is the headshot and resume. Regarding headshots, StageMilk.com gives this advice regarding a professional headshot. “Look like you (on a good hair day), feel relaxed and natural, but not boring and lazy. Be engaging and interesting (professional headshot photographers are great at nailing this element). Meet all the requirements of an industry standard headshot, and ideally show warmth, and personality.” A professional headshot is NOT a school picture. A good headshot requires a knowledge of theatre and the nuances unique to this type of photography. The one aspect of the

headshot that this website does not discuss is the large price range that photographers are asking for when it comes to paying for the headshots. In undergrad I attempted to have a friend take photos of me to create a cheap headshot, but I ended up paying him fifty dollars for headshots that I did not want to use. The quality of a low-budget headshot just does not meet the professional standards that casting directors are looking for. Finally, after I graduated, I went to Chicago and paid a bit more for a few high-quality shots. The one thing I did not expect from the photographer was that she wanted me to examine every shot as she was taking them. This ensured I left with the look and quality I was paying for. The minimum cost in the Chicago area is around \$400. Although many actors find this a large amount of money to spend on photographs, the headshot is often the ticket into an audition and reflects how the director will remember the actor after the audition. Every performance genre has a particular preference on the look required from a headshot and every director reacts differently to the style chosen for that shot. Some aspects, however, can be controlled by the actor. Often, if the quality of the paper and the quality of the photo are good, then the headshot looks professional despite differences in preference. Another piece of advice I have for how long an actor should keep a headshot is once you do not look like it, get rid of it. When dealing with high quality and expensive headshots, do not get rid of those shots unless you have changed in some way. A weight loss or gain, drastic changes to a hair style, or aging out of the headshot are the main reasons to invest in a new set of headshots.

The resume is another area that provides trim to a paint job. “Keep the resume simple and neat. List credits, beginning with the strongest, including title, role played, and where performed. Be honest; don’t make up things, and don’t hesitate to list small roles and bit parts. If there aren’t any professional credits as of yet, list all your community theater or school theater experience.

Past accomplishments are important to note. If you're a state champion ping-pong player, make sure you put that under "special skills." (Michelle Danner) A resume needs to be honest, beginning with professional credits listed first, then filling the one page with other productions, trainings, and skills. What needs to be added to this list of resume requirements is what StageMilk.com says about professionalism and new industry standard practices. "Keep the resume easy to read and professional – no super small type fonts, no fancy colors and lettering. Include a headshot in the top right-hand corner (this is good to have so that casting directors / agents / producers have a visual reference and saves you attaching multiple files)." The headshot in the top right corner is a great addition to the industry standard of resumes. It gives the director a second headshot that has a different look and feeling to it. Also, if the director asks an actor to staple a headshot onto the back of the resume, they are still seeing a face while taking a look at the work.

Crown Molding: Websites

Often when marketing a product, a flat paint job is not sufficient. Crown molding is another tool needed to make the structure more attractive and inviting. An actor also needs those finishing touches to create a vivid picture of work as an actor. This crown molding is often a website. Why is a website important? For the same reason the audition package an actor creates is important - there is only so much time a casting director can give to each individual auditionee. If the casting team or director is curious about an actor's performance quality, having a website can give the people hiring a greater insight into an actor's past work. I have several separate websites. I created a website to promote my classes in voice lessons, choreography, and acting for auditions. All of this was possible through the website Godaddy.com. On this website,

an actor can purchase domain names for a low price, create professional websites promoting a career or business, and make a more professional email account. This website promoting my classes is not my actor's website. I have a separate site through Godaddy.com that is just for my demo reels, larger clips of more of my work, updated headshots and resumes, and more information that a casting director might need prior to hiring me. Now that I have created these websites, it is up to me to market myself and take advantage of social media platforms to get my website out there for people to find. My website provides the crown molding for my demo reels, headshots, and resumes.

Photograph: Find The Jobs

After a structure or property receives the final touches of construction, photographs must be taken and submitted as advertisements to market the product. As an actor, I am my own research and public relations department. I am the one who must look after my finances and make the best business decisions for my career, while promoting myself any way possible. Actors must find job opportunities and theatrical venues to submit the "photograph" of their finished product. During the course *Theatre Careers* at the University of Central Florida, I became familiar with a few websites that are valuable in finding those opportunities to market my career. First, *Backstage* and *Actors Access* are databases full of reputable companies placing advertisements for their upcoming auditions. These companies give information about the location of the production, audition information, salaries, and so much more. Reputation is incredibly important when it comes to working with a theatre, so doing additional research on the companies and their productions is a valuable tool. Too often actors blindly say yes to jobs with theatre companies because they are desperate for work. In these situations, I encountered theatres

that underpay or breach contracts and do not follow through on pay or benefits. With these two websites, I can make informative decisions when it comes to furthering my career.

Determine A Price: Know Your Finances

When determining a selling price for the property, the construction manager must understand the cost that went into building materials and labor and the market value at the time. Money is always a consideration, even when the structure created is a theatre career. Unfortunately, an actor rarely becomes wealthy through performance alone and must consider all aspects of a marketing plan, including finance. Financial considerations include cost of living and budgeting as well as utilizing talents and training to supplement income and create a sustainable career. Financially, Nerdwallet.com can be used to stay in budget when researching for an ideal city to live in. Location to an actor is so important to the career, but the dream of working in New York City cannot be accomplished without a basic understanding of the financial ramifications. With NerdWallet, I can specify what location I would like to move to, enter what my current financial situation is, and they give me information that helps me plan my best course of action. It lets me compare cities, gives me information about schools in certain areas, average commute expenses, transit information, crime rates, and even more about the demographic. For example, I would like to move to Chicago, Illinois in the summer of 2021. I found interesting and exciting theatre companies in Chicago plus ample opportunities to audition for tours and productions nationwide. Once I decided I wanted to audition for these companies, I went to NerdWallet where I found the estimated income I will need monthly for me to be financially stable if I want to move from Orlando (where I am now) to Chicago. The cost of living is thirty-five percent higher to live in Chicago than it is to live in Orlando. With my yearly income as it is now, I need to increase my yearly income by thirty-five hundred dollars to

maintain my standard of living. I live alone in a two-bedroom apartment now, and will be living with a roommate in Chicago, so I also looked up average two-bedroom apartment prices for Chicago on NerdWallet and calculated the savings I would get by living with a roommate. The rent for a midsize two-bedroom apartment in Orlando costs roughly \$1,148 a month. In Chicago that increases to \$2,210 a month. Knowledge is power. As an actor, I am my own business. Taking the time to learn about my financial situation and how I can build my business will be how I am successful as an actor. I have created a list of goals that I need to set for myself financially and career-wise to make this move possible using *Actors Access*, *Backstage*, and NerdWallet's "*Cost of Living Calculator*."

Another financial consideration when planning a marketing strategy is finding avenues to utilize talents and training to supplement a career. One huge barrier many actors face is the inability to audition daily and still supplement their income for survival. Too often actors do not consider ways to use their extensive training to increase their salary and instead take a job at a local coffee shop or bar. Although these jobs will supplement an income, many other opportunities are overlooked that can not only enhance an income but help build the career. In my graduate studies, we took a class called *Theatre Careers as a Performer*. This class covered many facets of life as a performer, including understanding taxes as an actor, marketing our careers through websites, headshots, and resumes, and discussing the many avenues actors can pursue to create a salary. One day in class, we were shown a pie chart that laid out our instructor's jobs, broken down into percentages of how much money each job brought in yearly. I could see that being a professor took up a very large segment of that pie chart, but I also saw that our professor had many other theatre jobs filling out the rest of his pie chart. The rest of his chart showed that he is an artistic director for a theatre company, a playwright, a consultant

for other theatres, an Equity actor, and an active participant in many additional theatre projects. After that class, I decided to examine my pie chart. I could see that acting in shows was a huge slice of the pie; however, I began to realize it was just one piece of my career. My salary could include jobs creating choreography, online work as an acting and singing coach, and certified personal trainer. My master's degree opens opportunities to teach workshops and classes in acting, musical theatre, voice, or dance.

I have already begun to create my own theatrical opportunities to supplement my performance career. Lin-Manuel Miranda said when writing *In the Heights*, "I did not see any shows on Broadway that represented me, so I made one." I had never attempted to create my own opportunities to teach or perform until I took *Theatre Careers*. I have since found inspiration to start teaching theatre classes of my own design. I have just recently created a website that is just for coaching young students. I have developed my own curriculum for teaching voice for the beginner, classes on how to start choreographing, and I have been coaching young actors for their upcoming auditions. I may not be using my master's degree to teach in academia in the next few years, but having this tool will give me the opportunity to do so in the future.

Another slice of my pie includes dance. Since I was in the seventh grade, I have been taking dance classes. I studied many areas of dance, but I found that I best understood hip hop and musical theatre dance. I grew from taking classes to assisting my teachers in classes with younger students. As the assistant, some days I would teach on my own if the teacher was unavailable, which led me to begin creating my own dance class curriculum. My family saw my talent in creating choreography for those classes and trusted me to choreograph for their community theatre productions. As my choreography resume grew, I found

opportunities to be paid to choreograph productions. My plan moving forward is to take more workshops and classes in choreographing after graduate school and make it a permanent part of my pie chart.

My love for dancing, choreographing, and exercising has also inspired me to make personal training and professionally choreographing a part of my pie chart. During the Coronavirus lockdown, I earned my Personal Training Certification with ACE Fitness. Throughout my graduate studies I found it difficult to keep up a healthy diet and exercise routine due to the added stress of school. I realized that other students were dealing with the same issues. I wanted to become a certified personal trainer so I could create a fitness program that catered to theatre students and our hectic schedules. When I became certified in January of 2021, I began to create that program and hope to be teaching it as soon as possible. Creating my pie chart has helped me look at my career with a new perspective. Every actor pursuing a career in theatre should complete a pie chart and seek out creative ways to utilize talent and training to make theatre a sustainable, viable career.

THE CONCLUSION (BUT NOT THE CONCLUSION)

Although perhaps not a typical academic thesis, this paper addresses a very real problem facing theatre graduates. The task of pursuing a career in the performing arts is daunting. Many experts are anything but encouraging. In fact, *The Daily Beast* lists theatre arts number two of “The 13 Most Useless Majors.” Alan MacVey, chairman of the University of Iowa Theatre Arts Department states, “If you can be happy doing anything else besides being an actor, do that.” The key phrase this paper addresses is “if you can be happy doing anything else.” It is possible to build a career in theatre if the desire is strong and if actors truly believe their place is on the stage. This paper provides guidelines and real-life solutions for building a career in the theatre using the tools actors possess. Actors must begin by building the foundation of a career through an audition package designed showcase their talents. “A casting director’s response to your audition should never be allowed to define you as an actor. Success is not defined by others, but only by what YOU define it to be.” (How to Audition, Briana Rodriguez, February 18, 2019, Backstage.com) That audition package defines the actor and begins the process of building a career. The construction continues as the structure of the career begins. The rehearsal and performance experiences serve as the means to build communication with directors and other actors, establish a reputation in the theatre community, and hone an actor’s skills. Finally, that career must be marketed. Demo reels, headshots, and resumes must be created to best “sell” the actor’s career. The actor must work diligently to create websites, search for auditions, network, while finding financial means to make that career a viable, sustainable career.

The Building Seems Complete, But A New Project Has Already Begun - One Final Tool

Everything that I have been discussing in this thesis has been about what an actor can do to make theatre a viable and long-lasting career. However, I firmly believe that no actor has a successful career on their own. In 2019, according to U.S.News.com, the average union actor made up to \$58,000 a year on just acting contracts alone, and almost half that amount if an actor was non-union. Looking at these statistics, a support system is a tool an actor needs to survive in this business. That support is not simply financial, but emotional. With my prospects of moving to Chicago after graduation, the first thing I do after I have done my budgeting and research about my future endeavor is call upon my support system. I have been lucky to have a supportive and knowledgeable family who understands my career choices and has been helping me from the beginning. I decided at a very young age I was going to follow in my family members' footsteps and become a performer. I remember driving in my dad's car one day and he told me he was excited that I was going to college for musical theatre. However, in that car ride, he told me the truth about being a full-time actor. As a theatre professor, he had seen so many students struggle to survive on theatre jobs alone. He told me the struggle to perform requires determination, belief in oneself, and acceptance of rejection. I knew then that my career was not going to be an easy one. However, he also told me he would support any decision I make and would do whatever it takes to assist me in following my dreams. My family as a support system has helped me move to multiple states to work, paid for headshots when I could not afford them, sent me scripts and scenes to help with auditions, paid half my rent when I was in between jobs, and so much more.

I understand there are people who are not as lucky as I am to have a family as their support system, but support can come in many forms. Whether your support is your family, friends, mentors, or teachers, every actor needs to seek out support to survive this career. I have found

auditions because a friend knew of one coming up and we shared gas money to get to that audition together. I have asked my professors to keep an eye out for potential jobs, and to this day I still ask advice from a few directors I loved working with. For me, asking for help is one of the toughest things to do, but I have a drive to succeed in acting and the only way to do that is to seek out support. The foundation of the career is complete, the structure of the career is built, and the finished structure is marketed. The tools cannot be put back into the old tool shed. The structure is never “finished”; a new project is always on the horizon and continued support can get an actor through the difficult stages.

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