

sound advice

the most complete voice-over demo service

June 2006

"I find television very educating. Every time somebody turns on the set, I go into the other room and read a book."
-Groucho Marx

Objective vs. Subjective

The training you receive from **Sound Advice**, as you may have noticed, is unique in that it is purpose-driven. In fact, even beyond the intentions of our very insightful and dedicated staff, it's easy to attribute the success rate of our clients to this very '*objective*' training.

objective

1: involving or deriving from a sense of perception or experience with actual objects, conditions, or phenomena <*objective* awareness> <*objective* data>
2a: expressing or dealing with facts or conditions as perceived without distortion by personal feelings, prejudices, or interpretations <*objective* art> <an *objective* history of the war> <an *objective* judgment> **b** limited to choices of fixed alternatives and reducing subjective factors to a minimum

That's because the primary objective behind our coaching is: if you know what you're striving for, if you know what to look for in the script—even if the producer, director or copywriter aren't quite sure what the piece needs, you can still deliver a handful of strong creative options within the context of the piece, all of which will be uniquely yours.

sub:jective

1: bias <a *subjective* point of view>
2: modified or affected by personal views, experience, or background <a *subjective* account of the incident>
3: random notions; random activity; without objectivity <most acting training is considered *subjective*>
4: lacking in reality or substance

At **Sound Advice**, our goal is to remove as much *subjectivity* from your training as possible and replace it with ardent *objectivity*.

The truth is most acting training is completely *subjective*, based solely on the whim of the coach or director. That is to say, most coaching is done without any specific purpose or intended result. Frankly, if you don't know what you're trying to accomplish then you're at a decided disadvantage. This could explain, in part, why so many talent go off and unnecessarily spin their wheels on random details that ultimately derail their progress and performance. It's this lack of results that ultimately frustrates them to the point of utter paralysis.

This is precisely why our training is tailored to make you a very valuable player on any production regardless of the medium; voiceover, television, film or stage. Instead our purpose-driven training concentrates on the fact that if you know 'why' something is necessary, you're more likely to find it useful. Our goal in coaching, recording and workshops give you specific *objectives* for each performance which are determined by incorporating "**The 10 Principles of Performance**"®. Applying these simple, yet powerful principals allows them to become second nature and consistently give you something interesting to play, take after take, production after production.

These principles are the common denominators that make up the best-kept secrets in the business, all of which are required of you on the job *regardless* of your experience level. This is precisely why we *don't* deliver "beginner, intermediate or advanced" coaching, but rather address your individual needs as an artist and what's expected of you in the field.

This unique process was designed to replace that critical little voice in your head and allow you to concentrate on the adjustments you need to make each delivery the most playful and skillful performance. And that's what will make you the most effective talent you can be simply by keeping your eye on the ball in play during the session. With that, your skill level increases rather rapidly and your personal 'objectivity' becomes far more astute.

Most of you know each coaching session at **Sound Advice** is recorded to CD to help you work your skills on your own. These sessions consist of both *theory* (study through reading and lecture) and *practical application* (the opportunity to repeatedly *apply* what you've learned), offering you the greatest opportunity to master your performance skills. It's our dedicated intention to see you succeed. Through discipline and attention to these principles, we're confident that's precisely what you'll do! ☺

dis·ci·pline

- 1: a field of study
- 2a: control gained through order
- 3: to train or develop by instruction and exercise
- 4: to impose order upon (a subject)

prin·ci·ple

- 1a : a comprehensive, fundamental law, doctrine, or assumption b: a rule or code of conduct
- 2: an ingredient (as a chemical) that exhibits or imparts a characteristic quality

The objective behind our training at **Sound Advice** is to develop and strengthen your impulses, stamina and confidence.

What's 'Normal'?

Here at **Sound Advice**, we make it our business to keep you well informed as to the demands expected of you as a talent when it comes to performance, production, promotion and, of course, your demo. Thus... the ever-loving Newsletters!

With that aim, the single most common question seems to be: "*What's normal?*"

Well, in the spirit of full disclosure, and provided there is such a thing as "normal", may we present an added feature to our Newsletters focusing on *the most common inquiries* and their solutions, especially those you're likely to encounter during the first few years of setting up shop as a small business/professional talent.

Isn't that what the Newsletters have been so far? Well, yes, but this time we're focusing on questions you might not think to ask until you're faced with the situation first hand.

In an attempt to plan just a little ahead and with the intention of preparing to delivery on a grand scale this summer and fall, we're going to concentrate our efforts on securing representation from the talent agents and building your relationship with them—two of the most elusive items associated with becoming a working talent.

Now, you may run across something here you may feel you know already—or at the very least THINK you already know. If so, just consider these installments a 'refresher' to validate what you already think.

On the other hand, you might just discover by perusing these pages that the information you've been basing your promotion or even your performance on has altered or even changed completely.

This is, after all, a very kinetic industry. Nothing stays nailed down for long. (Much like life!)

If all this is new to you---well, guess what? You're at a decided *advantage* for a change in as much as you don't have to 'un-learn' something you might (like so many small business owners) find yourself clinging to out of habit.

Suffice it to say regardless whether you've heard it all before or not, it never hurts to hear it all again and again to drive home your certainty on the subject.

No matter your experience level, if you continue to follow these Newsletters you can consider yourself among the *well informed*.

So, here goes...

"How many talent agents should I have?"

Most agents will ask you to limit your representation to about 3 (locally). The operative word here is 'ask', because unless you are *signed exclusively*, they can only *request* this of you and, frankly, it's a rather sane request.

Beyond that, it's very easy these days to audition from your home or a small local studio (like our **Big House Casting & Audio**, www.bighouseaudio.com) making it feasible to secure representation from

a variety of voiceover agents in numerous markets outside your own.

So don't limit yourself to only one or two talent agents locally. If you settle for those one or two agents in your hometown, even if you live in a major Metropolis, you will be restricting the amount of work you're truly capable of booking. So don't limit yourself! Same goes if you only promote your demos to Ad Agencies that are in your vicinity alone.

That said, and in an attempt to answer the question posed, I suggest you secure **no more than 6 agents total, nationwide**. Any more than that can be difficult to manage and may create more confusion than it's worth. So, ideally you want at least one strong, local agent whose long suit is UNION voiceover and 3 to 5 agents in other regions to expose you to work from different locations. Most agents specialize in one medium over another. Be sure you discover the emphasis the agents you're promoting yourself to concentrate on most and whether that's the work you intend to pursue. If they only book magazine or catalogue work (a.k.a. "*print work*") and you're aiming at commercial voiceover it's not likely to do much for your career. You'll only succeed in frustrating yourself.

As it is, if you are called in for the same audition from more than one agency, the agent that sent the audition to you *first* is the agency you audition through and that agency ALONE.

This means you have to take a pass from the other agent or agents that made an attempt to audition you on the same spot or campaign. E-mail the agent you'll be declining by saying:

"Thanks for thinking of me, but I've already auditioned for this job. - Joe Talent"

No need to tell them who you auditioned the spot through. In fact, I'd avoid even bringing that subject up! Doing so only pits agent against agent—and that's a game you'd be best to avoid. It's a fast track to losing representation from *both* of them.

Does it feel strange to take a pass from an agent for the audition? You bet, since auditioning is really your aim. But you're a grown up. This too shall pass.

Will you be in trouble with one agent or the other if you audition twice—YOU BET! Especially, if the client (the producer) says something about receiving more than one audition from you—and from multiple agencies.

Frankly, it's far more professional to just face the music and opt out of auditioning for the spot more than once. Trust me, every agent faces this and probably a few times a week if they're busy.

If you think auditioning for the same spot through a number of sources might entitle you to more opportunity, think again. It's flat out unprofessional. It makes the producer think you don't know what you're doing. (Which you don't.) So save yourself, save face and simply audition for the spot ONCE with whomever sent the audition to you *first*. It's an e-mail. How hard is that? ☺

"Booking Out"

Speaking of e-mail—be sure to "BOOK OUT" when you head out of town on vacation this summer, *even if you haven't heard from the agent in question for more than a month*.

It never fails—leaving town creates a vacuum. The simple act of going somewhere will create a demand and you'll hear from the one agent you've totally given up on!

The fact is EVERY agent who has agreed to rep you needs to know your availability *at all times*. As far as they're concerned, you're available to work unless you tell them otherwise.

While you're at it—you better let US know (here at **Sound Advice**) whether or not you're available for auditions or bookings, too! No, we aren't your talent agents. (We're simply the greatest cheering section you've ever had other than your parents! No one wants to see you thrive more than we do.) If your demos are hosted on our web site and you leave town *without so much as an e-mail*, it's very likely you'll miss out on booking a big, fat gig.

Wouldn't be the first time. In fact, if you're looking to book something—I suggest you consider leaving town. Works for me every single time.

To 'book out' with your agents begin with a simple e-mail at least a week in advance of your departure, stating:

"I won't be available for bookings or auditions beginning Wednesday, July 5th until Thursday, July 13th. However, I look forward to booking like a maniac with you when I return. In the meantime, have a great 4th...Best, Joe Shmoe"

Then give them a call to make sure they got your e-mail at least 2-3 days before you leave and to remind them you'll be back soon. It's always best to put it in writing. If your agent does NOT accept e-mails (and, yes, there are one or two that don't, as odd as that may seem) call first, ask the agency what their 'booking out' policy may be and snail mail your book-out schedule if you have to. ☺

dress the part

We recently held a rather extensive on-camera audition and, I swear, it looked as if we were having a black and white parade in here. It seemed everyone either wore *all white* or *all black*, the 2 'colors' that, in their entirety completely offset the white balance on any camera.

The fact is when you're called in for an on-camera audition you should *never* wear all black or all white—ever. Ever, ever, ever. The reason being: all white will glare up and then proceed to darken your features so much all that valuable expression you gave in your performance is liable to be

upstaged and lost completely. On the other hand, all black will wash you out completely and make you appear sickly.

And all that great detail white and black afford you in person (and which happen to be so hot this season) is sadly missing on-camera.

Certainly used in moderation with other colors, it's a completely different story and far more effective.

Additionally, something I noticed after seeing nearly 300 young hotties for Honda... Guys in the cobalt blue shirts (as great as that looks on-camera) and black pants... gets one's wheels turning. From the casting perspective, it was like watching the 'temp parade' go by. As if we asked guys to wear wrinkled cobalt blue shirts and black pants on purpose or something. I felt like saying, "Hey, are you the temp? Can you file this for me? Thanks. When's Bob coming back?" (I know. I'm bad. Kick me under the table if it'll make you feel any better.)

Thing is, as your mother once told you back when you were starting high school, "Dressy-casual is nearly *always* appropriate." She was right then and she's right now. (Who knew?)

If you're too dressed up, you can always tone it down a bit. But if you're already in raggy jeans and flip flops, it's likely to look like you're standing in line for the Rotoblaster at Great America.

We had almost 80 talent arrive dressed this way the first day, supposedly because it was so hot out, even though the specs ('the specifics' required of you at the audition) read: 'sophisticated, somewhat upscale, urban-chic'.

I'll never use 'urban-chic' as a descriptive for an audition again as long as I live. Apparently it translates to wear the baggiest, torn jeans you can find. Honestly, it looked like they let the ballgame out early. (Holy cats, I've turned into my mother. It's official.)

My point is: pay attention to the specs. Read them. Don't try to read *into* them. Keep it simple.

Ignoring them make your agent, the casting director and the producer look bad. It looks like they're not doing their job by telling you what you need to know. And the truth is—they did.

Here's a tip: keep a few spare wardrobe items in your car if you can, including shoes—you carry yourself very differently in dress shoes compared to your favorite Pumas.

If it's boiling hot out, arrive a little early and change in the bathroom. Your clothes will remain in better shape if you do, too.

If you're short on funds and trying to build your audition wardrobe—head over to your local Salvation Army or, here in Chicago, the Brown Elephant is a terrific resource for slightly used (often designer) clothes available on the cheap and all the proceeds go to charity. These are great places to find a decent pair of chinos, a pair of loafers someone never wore, a nice looking jacket and so on. So, stock up! It's your job.

Granted you might be looking for clothes your mom would like you to wear when you visit your Gram and Grampy. Bite the bullet. You're attempting to play a part here, remember?

Again, do us all a favor and add *color*! It will make you stand out on screen. In fact, look for something in the red family. A smart pink or red shell or shirt under a black or white jacket or sweater would look great and stand out in a very good way, provided your clothes fit properly. After scanning scads and scads of images that only sport gray, white and black—I'm begging you.

Eddie Bauer has these nice non-wrinkle shirts that come in camera-appealing colors like rust, leaf, aubergine, and—yes, even cobalt! Now, that I have you frightened of this wonderful color—that honestly wasn't my intention...just try it with a decent pair of khaki Dockers instead of the ever popular black pants, will you? "The Temp' no-no I mentioned earlier has more to do with appearing overworked, underfed and just this side of unkempt. Unless that's what the call is for—I suggest you clean it up a bit.

Now, what to wear to your next voiceover? Hmm? That's easy. Everyone knows voiceover is done naked. At least it is around here, my friend, if you expect to get any place. (Ironically, no one really cares what you sound like after that.) ☺

History Repeating Itself?

Most of you know my disdain for the stupidity of the former (2000) SAG Administration that tossed the rank and file talent under the bus by forcing the issue that resulted in the most devastating strike ever endured by professional talent to date. Sadly, that SAG administration that threw caution (and good sense) to the wind has finagled their pompous way back into the driver seat of our Union once more, wearing down the courage and hard won gains of our most recent former SAG Prez, Melissa Gilbert and her allies, who did their level best to restore sanity and unity among the members ranks.

The cage is being rattled once again, gang.

This article sent in by one of our folks from the **Daily News** details the changes in the air:

Actors unions, advertisers seek study on pay

By Greg Hernandez, Staff Writer

With just over five months left before the expiration of the current labor contract for commercial performers, negotiators for the acting unions and the advertising industry have agreed to seek proposals for a joint study to identify alternate models for compensation in the age of emerging new media.

The Screen Actors Guild (SAG), the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) and the advertising industry's Joint Policy Committee on Broadcast Talent Union Relations announced Wednesday that they have invited nine consultants from both industry and academia to submit proposals for a study which, if chosen, would be used for consideration during the bargaining process.

Both sides are seeking to avoid a repeat of 2000 when commercial actors were locked in a six-month-long strike, one of the longest walkouts in entertainment industry history. "We are doing something that is pretty unprecedented in labor," said Doug Wood, JPC lead negotiator. "In general, we'd like their proposals for models on how to create a new system to fairly compensate actors and allow advertisers the creative freedom they need an ever-diffused audience in an ever-increasing array of media choices."

SAG spokesman Seth Oster said that while a study has not yet been selected, the union is hopeful one can be agreed upon.

"We are proceeding in our joint effort to find a qualified consultant to conduct the study that is especially important to both sides," Oster said. "The landscape of the advertising industry, like that of the entire entertainment industry, has changed dramatically and we think it's in our best interests to have an objective third party expert give us insight into how these changes are affecting actors in order to ensure that we can best protect our members and their interests as we renegotiate this critical."

AFTRA National Assistant Executive Director Mathis Dunn, the union's chief negotiator for the commercials contract, reflected Wednesday that, "in their initial day, radio and television were new technologies. AFTRA then worked with the advertising industry to establish a fair method of compensating performers."

Dunn said the study "is a step to help us determine what changes, if any, could be made to continue fair compensation to performers."

"These consultants need to have true independence and be credible to both sides so there is reason to take their recommendation seriously," Wood said.

With the current contract expiring Oct. 29 and the requests for proposals just going out now, Wood said he expects both sides to discuss an extension in order to have time for the study to be completed and digested.

"It's one step at a time," he said. "The important thing is we are having a productive dialogue with the unions and I'm optimistic."

You've heard me say it before, I'll say it again: we need these Unions (SAG & AFTRA) to establish and maintain national standards in pay and business practices. However, we must make our Unions understand the realities of production and making a living in this industry.

The fact is if you de-value your own talent, skills and efforts to make yourself available (which as you know is no small task in and of itself)—then no one will value you or your work, including those in a position to employ you.

Time to stand up and be counted.

This is YOUR business and they don't call it a 'business' for nothin'.

That's all she wrote...

The weather's been wonderful and summer's here for all intents and purposes. Enjoy it! But save Monday nights for our workshops. There's plenty of room and therefore plenty of on-mic opportunity. We're featuring commercial, promo, industrial, dialogues and cold reading. Think of it as vocal 'softball' practice. It'll keep you in the game!

Give Matt a call to get scheduled! 773.772.9539... See you next month!