

sound advice

the most complete voice-over demo service

August 2005

"Not only couldn't I get a job as an actor, I couldn't hold down the temporary non-acting jobs I managed to get. I got fired as a waiter in restaurants and as a lifeguard at a spa. If I hadn't gotten into Scent Of a Woman, I wouldn't be where I am today. It's been a domino effect ever since".

-Phillip Seymour Hoffman

"To have that concentration to act well is like lugging things up staircases in your brain. I think that's a thing people (non-actors) don't understand. It is that exhausting. If you're doing it well, if you're concentrating the way you need to, if your will and your concentration and imagination and emotional life are all in tune, concentrated and working together in that role, that is just like lugging weights upstairs with your head."

-Phillip Seymour Hoffman

"Success isn't what makes you happy. It really isn't. Success is doing what makes you happy and doing good work and hopefully having a fruitful life. If I've felt like I've done good work that makes me happy. The success part of it is all *gravy*."

-Phillip Seymour Hoffman

(...pass the gravy, please...)

By any other name...

It happens all the time. New talent ask me, "Do you think I should change my name?" To be honest, with a name like 'McClanaghan', that's sort of a silly question.

Frankly, unless someone in SAG already has your name, I'd avoid it. I say that primarily because what may seem harmless at the onset will become an obstacle when it comes to cashing your checks unless you do it legally. And, frankly, you really don't need *an additional obstacle* coming between you and getting paid.

Okay, so this presents yet another question: "How do you find out whether your name is taken already by another SAG member?" Well, naturally being as forward thinking as they are, here's what SAG suggests (according to their web site): "Because the list of available names changes daily, it would not be helpful to you for us to research your name choices before you join. During your joining appointment, we will ask you for three alternate name choices, in case your first choice is not available. A final name-availability check is done at the time the initiation fee is paid. Only then can an applicant be assured of having a particular professional name."

Now, I have to say, I think this is lousy advice. It's convenient for SAG but not for you. In fact, this is how Phillip Seymour Hoffman ended up professionally known as Phillip Seymour Hoffman. He NEVER used his middle name, for obvious reasons, (my apologize to anyone named Seymour) prior to joining SAG at the ripe old age of 25. He was told he could always change it later. (Yeah, right, like that's gonna happen, Frances Gumm. This isn't old Hollywood anymore, y'know.) Certainly, it didn't hurt his career any and we all know who he is, but having to accept a name you rarely or, worse, *wouldn't care to answer to* isn't much of an option, now is it?

Best advice: keep your name as it is whenever possible. If you must change it, be sure you can still cash your checks. If your name is relatively common, best look it up on the SAG registry ahead of time so you can rule it out in advance and allow yourself the opportunity to make arrangements for something you, the bank and SAG all can live with.

The 'Part-time' Job

Consider this: if you're working your chops 8-10 hours a week (cold reading, taking a workshop, getting one-on-one coaching, repeatedly listening to your initial coaching CDs, studying the commercial styles, doing your vocal warm-ups **so you're prepared when an audition or booking comes up**) and you're spending additional 8-10 hours pursuing representation and promoting your demo (promoting your demo and postcards to the producers—*whether you have representation or not*, pursuing representation from the talent agents) then *for any other field* you'd certainly be considered 'part-time'. Well, this is a profession. If you truly apply yourself for what is considered part time for *any other line of work*, and you do so for an extended period of time (say, a year or more) then voiceover/acting is very likely to become your *primary job*.

If you're bothered because you went after the agents for a few weeks a year ago and little if anything came of it, then you need to get back into the swing of this thing and work your skills so you can deliver at a moment's notice. (That's how quickly these things come up!)

It would help a great deal if you begin by getting honest and straight about how many hours you're really applying yourself to this field, and make it your goal to do this 'part-time'. You have to work your skills regularly and promote yourself constantly and consistently to succeed—at anything. This is true of ANY field, but even more so if you are freelance and that's what a voice talent—what an actor is, by profession. A freelancer. It's well-known you have to self-motivate yourself to a great degree for any small business to thrive. And that's especially true at the onset—the first two years you are establishing your small business.

By the time you get your demo you may feel as if you did all your work already. Well, think again. You're still on planet Earth, my friend. Working your skills with me for two to three months is great—but it can't end there. You'll never get this thing off the ground if you don't keep going. That demo we produced for you is built to last—but you have to keep the ball in play! It only represents you well if you continue to work your chops! You always have something you could be doing to further yourself in this field. If you do you'll find it's incredibly rewarding on many levels. Besides, that's your job—that's the only way you will get a return on your initial investment. At the end of the day this is your small business and this is the only way you will succeed. No one will do it for you. Here at Sound Advice we're here to help as much as we can, but ultimately the onus falls to you. If you fall off the wagon—you can always hop back on and get the ole motor going again. Like most small businesses, this thing takes dedication, tenacity and momentum. It's up to YOU to keep this puppy going. We're here to help.

Giving Animation a New Voice

Mr. Dave Shropshire sent me this. I thought it worth sharing.

“What happens when a cartoon character loses its voice?” By Daniel Engber

John Fiedler, the voice of Piglet in Disney's *Winnie the Pooh* movies, died recently. Fellow cast member Paul Winchell, who played Tigger, died the day before, and Howard Morris, the voice of Gopher in some early Pooh films, passed away a month before that. When a voice actor dies, what happens to his cartoon characters?

They get a new voice actor who sounds like the old one. "Sound-alikes" clamor for auditions whenever a famous cartoon loses its voice. When the original Donald Duck, Clarence "Ducky" Nash, fell ill in the early 1980s, Disney received an avalanche of unsolicited audition tapes from would-be replacements. The role eventually went to Tony Anselmo, a Disney animator who could mimic the voice perfectly. In rare cases, a character will be retired when a voice actor dies. The producers of *The Simpsons* decided to abandon the recurring roles of Troy McClure and Lionel Hutz rather than casting a sound-alike for the deceased Phil Hartman.

An actor who can't be replaced tends to be expensive; studios prefer to have a stable of backups who can step in if needed. The cartoon legend Mel Blanc made himself irreplaceable; he played almost every Warner Bros. character for decades. Before his death, Blanc tried to create a voice dynasty by passing his voices on to his son Noel. In the end, though, the studio auditioned widely for Blanc's parts and cast a handful of actors for each. Several different people now play Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck, and none is more "official" than the others.

Producers don't always wait until a voice actor passes away before they make a switch. As an actor gets older, his voice might be deemed too raspy for the part. (Paul Winchell had been replaced as Tigger several years before his death.) And sometimes an actor simply doesn't have the time to keep playing a character. Walt Disney provided the voice of Mickey Mouse for many years but passed the torch to a Disney sound engineer in the 1940s. John Kricfalusi, the creator of *Ren and Stimpy* and the original voice of Ren, ended up leaving his own show; Billy West, the voice of Stimpy, took over for him.

Good Questions!

Hey, Kate--If someone asks me how many of the spots on my CD are real—do I incriminate myself by telling the truth and admitting they are all (or mostly) produced solely for demo purposes? —George W.

...the reason we voice talent have demos in the first place is to define the work we're most likely to land professionally.

Great question, George. To ANYONE, and I mean *anyone* who asks, “Are these real spots?” The best (and only) response is: “Is there a spot on there that *doesn't* sound like the real thing?” (I challenge *anyone* to that.)

Here's the deal...talent only began putting demos together some twenty-five years ago or so to service the Ad Industry producers, directors and copywriters. And

like the producers, directors and copywriters who hire commercial talent, the “Creatives” (as they’re called in advertising) must have ‘reels’ to define their best skills and abilities to those most likely to hire *them*. Ironically, not everything on their ‘reels’ are real either. Some of the work may have actually aired, some things were created specifically for Creative Directors with whom they are (or were) trying to secure a job. Similarly, not everything *you ever do* (that actually airs) will be worth including on your future demo. (You’ll want a copy of the spot just the same. That’s called ‘collecting your elements’.) That said, the reason we voice talent have demos in the first place is to define the work we’re most likely to land professionally. Additionally, if the person who asked you can’t determine the real spots from spots created specifically for your demo, then we’ve all done our job well and your demo is accomplishing precisely what we set out to accomplish. Ultimately, it’s a silly question. Bottom line: once anyone listens to your demo, they can always (and most likely will) audition you to test your metal. Can you deliver what you are peddling with the demo? Best advice: *be prepared!* Be sure you are continually working your performance skills. I’ve been doing this a very long time and it still amazes me how spontaneous this business can be. You never know when the next opportunity may suddenly arise. It’s your job to be on top of your game.

Kate, What do you make of this? I got this e-mail from one of my agents.

‘Due to the increasing number of talent with multiple agents and the ever increasing shift to nationally web-based auditions via sites such as Voicebank, we have found it necessary to make certain changes to our Talent contract. These include such things as being the exclusive with our agency in the state of (Wisconsin, for example), having no more than 3 additional agents throughout the country etc.’ Do you suppose there will be more of this going around with other agents all over the country? I was just interested in your thoughts! --Jim R

Not necessarily, Jim. This often the ‘suggested’ rule of thumb most talent agents recommend to their talent pool --no more than 3 talent agents total.

Certainly difficult to enforce, however, most talent can’t manage more than four or five agents at one time. So, I’d say—no more than 5 nationally, no more than three or four locally. And, remember, if you are sent the same audition more than once—whoever sent it first—THAT’S who you audition for and politely decline the other agency the audition. “Sorry. I’ve already auditioned for this spot.” They’ll call you again, if you handle it correctly. --Kate

The Great Glenn-dini

It’s been great having Glenn Haines (former LA Casting Director and Chicago Talent Agent, established Director and nationally renowned acting coach) here in Chicago most of the summer, as so many of you can attest. He manages to draw things out of talent that change you forever. I for one really appreciate the extent he backs me up both professionally (with what I hope you’re gleaning from your training here at Sound Advice) and personally as a talent. Surprised? Don’t be. All talent require a good, stable professional career/performance coach they can count on no matter how long they’ve been in the business. Sometimes they even need TWO. (Insert wink here.) I’m glad so many of you have made use of his presence. It’s incredibly validating to have someone as accomplished and respected as Glenn reiterate the same tenants as I’ve been imparting to you. (So, thanks, Glenn, for being there!) You may discover what I’ve been telling you all this time isn’t simply my own subjective opinion but rather based in educated fact.

Hearing the same thing for another source often shakes the thing loose where you can get at it. He’s the man! If you haven’t worked with him yet—he’s here till the end of August. I’d hop on it if I were you! Contact him directly at glennfh@eathlink.net. You’ll never be the same. (Have I ever steered you wrong?)

New addition to our Newsletters

I’ve always wanted to include a cartoon in our newsletters. Maya, our chief engineer, found this one. If you find one you feel deals with Advertising, Acting, Voiceover, starting a new business or is anyway related to what we try to impart to you—please pass it on to us and maybe we’ll include it in our Newsletter.



Hail, Hail the Gang's All Here...

If you've called **Sound Advice** recently, you may find yourself speaking with yet *another* welcome new addition to our happy crew. **Priscilla Quirino** (priscilla@bighousecasting.com) has taken over Kourtney's former position as the Studio Manager and Casting Director. **Joel Erickson** (joel@bighousecasting.com) is our resident Copywriter, Casting Director and the go-to-guy for anything dealing with promoting your demo and our notorious mailing lists. He's in charge of the daunting task that is keeping our many massive national and regional mailing lists current. **Lynette Maas**, our in-house Speech Path, is still around, as is our remarkably talented, chief Engineer and Associate Producer, **Maya Kuper** (maya@bighouseaudio.com). And just when you thought we were done shifting gears—sadly, we will be losing Maya's clever assistant and our loyal workshop engineer, **Ben McKinney** (ben@bighouseaudio.com), at the end of September as he returns to Northwestern to finish the last year of his Undergrad degree. (We LOVE Ben and hope he return's to us in the Spring. But being his last year of Undergrad—anything could happen between now and then.)

Nevertheless, we have a steadfast, committed staff here all the time to assist you on every level. Who said the work ethic is dead? Well, it's alive and well in this bunch, Thank God! So feel free to introduce yourself if you speak with one of them on the phone. They're each and all quite wonderful to know and at the ready to help you in anyway possible. It's our tradition here at Sound Advice. You can count on it!

See you in September...if not sooner. The next workshop begins August 22nd—call or e-mail Priscilla to make sure you're included. Tah for now! -Kate