

sound advice

the most complete voice-over demo service

January 2006

“Your greatest asset, my boy, is your *availability*.”

—Daniel Day Lewis’ talent agent at the onset of his career

“The object of a new year is not that we should have a new year. It is that we should have a new soul.”

~G.K. Chesterton

“New Year’s Day is every man’s birthday.” ~Charles Lamb

“What is this in reference to... exactly?”

Improvisational training affords you some of the greatest skills a talent can possess because it:

- a) allows you to think on your feet,
- b) fleshes out your imagination,
- c) develops your ability to collaborate with others-- and
- d) hones your prowess to play.

And, as the late, great **Martin de Maat**, of the Second City Training Center used to say, “It’s called a ‘play’. Isn’t that ironic?”

All performance—all of it—whether it be film, television, stage, voiceover or commercial work requires a firm base in ‘play’. But in order to do that you must have a common ground with your audience and/or those you’re collaborating with and this is referred to as a **reference base**. (Continuing our one term a month from the ‘Encyclopedia’...here’s this years’ first installment.)

reference base—A reference base is a concept that comes from Improvisation, which refers to the pool of knowledge and/or experience a talent draws from to relate to and play a scene. It’s rather difficult to play or talk about something you know absolutely nothing about. If you don’t have any *reference* to the subject at hand, it will read as if it were a foreign idea, which is counter-productive.

The objective of *every* talent should be to continually expand their broad body of knowledge as much as possible because, very simply, the more vast and all-inclusive your reference base, the greater your ability to relate, understand and play.

In any other profession this would be considered an IQ.

In this industry, ‘building your reference base’ is a staple, which is precisely why I suggest you study television and film extensively. Pop-culture is referenced continually in commercial work and film. And these two mass media are most often referred to most by copywriters and directors trying to achieve a particular attitude or emotion. For instance: “I want her to appear inquisitive like...um, ‘Amelie’! Did you see ‘Amelie’? Okay, like her.”

Drawing from your ‘reference base’ is one of three of the most important precepts an actor, writer *and* director can benefit most from by studying Improvisation. The other two precepts are: “the rule of 3” and “yes...and”.

In fact, if these three very basic, yet *vital* precepts are not laid out as a standard in your Improvisational training within the first year of your study, your Improv education is being seriously compromised and you must to demand them.

“Oh, to be heard above the din...”

Kimberley Reid has a naturally unusual voice. No, I mean it-- she has a *really* unusual voice. So much so, in fact, nearly *everyone* she meets (even those in the industry) comment on how much she sounds like an adorable six year old child, when in actuality

she's a 30-something corporate professional. The following e-mail is a good example of one of her many recent adventures:

I have another story for you about the power of Networking, being nice to people, and being prepared. A few weeks ago I was attending a company dinner to kick-off a two-day meeting of our team. We went to a place that is part restaurant and part bar where local bands play on an outdoor patio. While seated outside, the waiter began to take everyone's order. He got to me and when I began to speak, he said, "Man, you sure have an unusual voice". I thanked him and told him about my voiceover aspirations. He went back inside the restaurant to place our order. After getting our food and finishing dinner, he asked me if I could help him play a little joke on his coworkers. He wanted me to speak over the microphone on stage to make some announcement. I went along with the joke and everyone got a kick out of it. Immediately after speaking, one of the waitresses came over to me and said that her friend does voiceover work with a local animation company in Fort Worth, TX. She asked if I had a business card because she would like to pass it on. She took my voiceover business card, which I happened to have handy (thanks to advice from my mentor Kate!). Long story short.....she gave my card to her friend who passed it along to the folks at the company and would you believe that I have an audition this Thursday for a couple of roles in their new anime series. You never know where opportunities will come from, so it pays to always be prepared. –Kimberley Reid

One night this past December, Kimberley graced our workshop us with her presence. Afterward she wrote: Kate, your workshops are still the best I've seen. Keep up the awesome work and I look forward to my next visit. Three words (re: the Workshop) Podcast... wonderful training tool. I love being able to listen to coaching via my iPod. Very cool.

Encouraging words! Kimberley has been coached and taken workshops all over the country for the past two and a half years and from some the greatest voiceover talent/casting coaches available. We appreciate the feedback because our unified aim is to deliver a superior product—*always*.

Shades of things to come?

Nothing like starting the new year off with a bang, and the following article is certainly a firecracker... but frankly I think the following AP story makes a good case for *joining* the union if nothing else to help set it straight. We need these unions to establish national standards, to create greater revenues (through residuals) and to subsidize ourselves in other media. The union deserves to be supported, although I have to say I'm not a fan on the current administration or it's newly elected President. Unfortunately, there are hacks in every profession and this industry certainly has more than its share. Read on...

Turmoil in Actors Union Could Cause Split

By GARY GENTILE, AP Business Writer *Sun Dec 4, 1:53 PM ET*

The largest union representing actors has promised a new, tougher stance in contract talks with powerful media conglomerates. But the Screen Actors Guild may self-destruct before it ever gets the chance.

The labor union's long-running infighting has escalated into what could become a mutiny after the election in September of SAG President Alan Rosenberg.

Rosenberg and his allies gained a majority on the national board by pledging to squeeze more money from the studios from the sale of DVDs and new technologies, including downloading of films and TV shows. He also pledged to unite SAG's feuding factions.

Instead, Rosenberg, 55, divided the union even more by almost immediately firing popular SAG national executive director Greg Hessinger. He had been hired by the previous leadership, which Rosenberg accused of surrendering too easily on key economic issues in contract talks last year.

Many union members see the firing as an arrogant display of power by Rosenberg that could finally split the union into two groups — one that represents film and TV actors, primarily based in Hollywood, and another mostly comprised of members in New York, Chicago and elsewhere who do commercials and voiceovers.

Paul Christie, president of SAG's New York branch, said talk of a split has heated up since the election of Rosenberg, who was a regular on the TV series "LA Law" and "The Guardian," and is married to "CSI" star Marg Helgenberger.

"I think he's capable of better things," Christie said.

With 120,000 members, SAG has always been a fragmented labor union, representing both multimillionaire superstars and rank-and-file membership with an unemployment rate of more than 80 percent.

Membership in the union is all but required to work in films, television and commercials. Many SAG members also belong to the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, which has jurisdiction over the prime-time schedule of major networks, among other areas.

Rosenberg's agenda mirrors that of the newly elected president of the Writers Guild of America, west. Patric Verrone also ran on a promise to get tougher with studios and also fired his executive director soon after taking office.

Both men justified the firings by saying they needed staff who would push their agendas of increasing membership, fighting the rise of reality TV shows and gaining more economic concessions from studios.

Rosenberg's action deepened the geographic rift that already existed in the union. Actors outside Hollywood are not as reliant on residuals from DVDs and other technology and are less inclined to endure a lengthy, costly strike over the issue. Those actors also fear Los Angeles-based members, who control the guild because of their numbers, will abuse their power and push through an agenda that ignores the needs of actors in other regions.

Rosenberg acknowledges that bridging these differences is his most pressing challenge. "You have people living in all different areas of the country who feel like they're muzzled and don't have a voice or are afraid they're going to be muzzled," he said.

He has visited the New York and Miami branches in recent weeks and plans on visiting other locals in the hope of creating a more unified front for upcoming contract talks.

"It doesn't serve us well at all for our employers to know that our union is basically split down the middle," Rosenberg said. "That gives them a lot of leverage."

Uniting the union will be critical for Rosenberg, who faces his first big test next year when SAG's contract with advertising agencies expires. The guild's pact with studios expires two years later.

"If we don't strengthen the core of our union, we're going to be fighting a losing battle," said Kathy Christopherson, a Los Angeles actress, writer and producer.

In the latest sign of dissension, three SAG members last week asked the U.S. Department of Labor to void Rosenberg's election, alleging illegal campaign tactics by Rosenberg's Membership First party.

Based on new, tough talk from SAG and the Writers Guild of America, media companies have developed contingency plans that would include stockpiling scripts and productions in anticipation of a strike. That move could lead to a "de facto" strike, similar to the one that led to an industry slowdown in 2001 that put thousands of entertainment industry employees out of work.

Rosenberg's election underscored dissatisfaction with last year's contract talks, which won higher wages but failed to budge the studios on paying a bigger share of the lucrative DVD market.

"I think we just walked away too soon and too easily without fighting," Rosenberg said.

"We sent a message of weakness."

Now, studios are also experimenting with new sources of revenue, offering TV shows on demand over the Web, without explaining how they intend to pay actors and writers. Rosenberg's views, especially on the challenges of new technology, aren't that different from those of Christie or others in the union. But guild members differ over whether they should strike to win concessions.

"It's not going to be the toughest guy at the table, it's going to be the smartest guy at the table," Christie said.

Fighting over DVD revenue may be a waste of time, Christie said, as the industry looks at new ways to distribute content, including sending movies and TV shows to cell phones, iPods and other devices.

"We're having a fist fight over something that's going to be a memory in a very short period of time," he said. "What are the next three or four things beyond DVD? That's what I want to deal with."

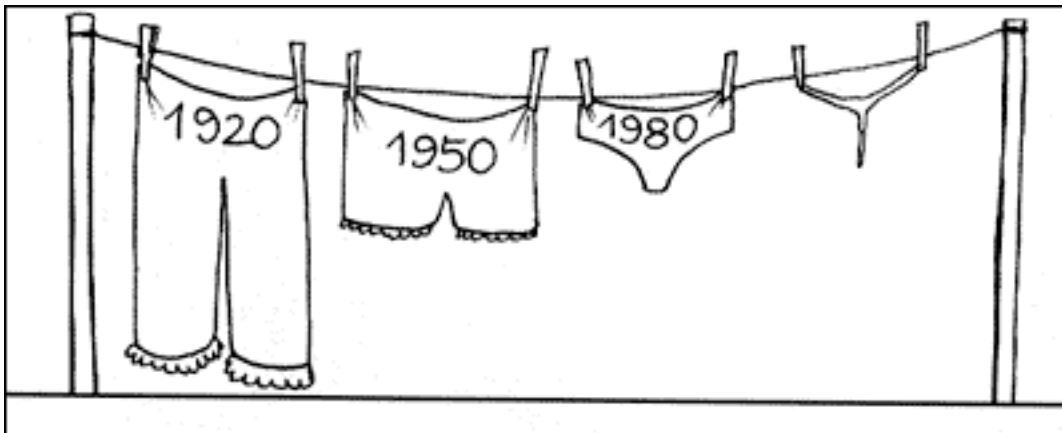
Christie pledged to work with Rosenberg and expressed his support during a testy meeting between Rosenberg and members of the New York branch.

Rosenberg's actions in the next year will have a major impact on the future of the guild. He could try to force through his agenda with the slim majority he has on the national board room, Christie said.

"The more difficult choice is to be his own man and do what he can to finally put a stop to this," Christie said. "If he doesn't do that, you run the risk of possibly splitting the organization irreparably."

Eeek. Easy stomach. When does this ship dock, already? It's making me queasy and there's a mighty storm brewing ahead. We'll keep you posted of any changes in the tide.

THE PROOF OF GLOBAL WARMING



Jim Robesky sent this month's cartoon entry to us. (Maya's will return next month!) These things take some getting used to—or, at least, that's what I've been told.

Wrapping up

Keep warm. Stay out of trouble. Call us for coaching or a workshop or a question.

We're here for you, you know? We want to see you succeed!

Here's to a playful and profitable New Year...

Cheers!

-Kate & crew