

sound advice

the most complete voice-over demo service

July 2006

“Defeat is only momentary.”

–*Carl Denham*, the character played by Jack Black in “King Kong”

a matter of confidence

Where does confidence come from and how do you stockpile a healthy supply of it?

Certainly repetition brings experience. With experience comes confidence.

And by continually exposing yourself to the work, through continuous auditioning, working your articulation prowess, building your technique through coaching and cold reading . . . these are the elements we refer to collectively at **Sound Advice** as “flexing your (performance) muscle”—it only stands to reason you’ll fine-tune and develop the skills necessary to make every production you’re connected with the best it can be.

This is precisely why we get paid the big bucks when we do get paid as talent because all of these items are expected of you whether you’re Union or not, no matter the job. You are always expected to carry yourself as a professional.

Your commitment to exposing yourself to these elements can only lead to greater precision, and precision is the single most common characteristic of a pro.

The irony of it all, in my estimation, is that in order to develop real precision, you must be free enough to take a complete leap of faith by allowing yourself to experience full-on abandon with each and every take, because that is where real discovery lives.

As counterintuitive as it may feel at the onset, you must be willing to “stretch the canvas,” as we call it. In other words, aim FAR beyond the your limitations or common defaults you might normally impose upon the read just prior to: opening your mouth while on mic, stepping in front of the camera or walking on the stage.

If you commit yourself completely to play *beyond* your comfort zone at every audition, you’re more likely to book on a regular basis, because you *didn’t* play it safe—but instead took a chance.

If you think of all the times you’ve truly succeeded at anything—there’s an element of risk involved. Every single time.

I doubt that instills confidence, unless you’re a real thrill seeker. But then, letting your head leave the pillow every morning demands a certain amount of chance about it.

Embrace it!

Experience. Allow the freedom of the experience into the equation. Make it your mission. Without it you’ll never realize just how confident you can become.

To continually work your skills, call and get scheduled for a one-on-one coaching session tune-up or enroll in our Monday night workshops where you can work the kinks out of your auditions.

Call **Priscilla** to get scheduled at 773.772.9539 ☞

According to *Dennis Kneale* of **Forbes** Magazine (April 2006), “‘Advair’ (the purple ‘hockey puck’ asthma inhaler) is a miracle of *advertising* rather than *science*.” This statement comes in light of the fact that recent statistics released showed 1 in 700 die from its use, where the statistics of fatalities are 1 in 7,000 from car accidents. Food for thought. Advertising wields some powerful muscle. Something you might want to consider before accepting that next ‘Advair’ job and adding it to the front of your demo.

Too Much of a ‘Good’ Thing

More than a decade ago, we ceased encouraging our voiceover demo clients to ask potential talent agents for “feedback” on their demos prior to mass production.

And here’s why...

#1) We discovered most agents felt it put on the spot, as if we were trying to ‘test’ what they knew about production and the business. Responding to questions like, “What works on this demo? And what doesn’t?” is, as it turns out, something of a loaded question. Besides, a talent agent could only respond from a subjective point of view—why? Because they *aren’t* producers. Their job deals primarily with knowing their talent pool and who works best for the job. Then, and this is crucial, how much that job is worth. A talent agent

deals in time, place, form, event and the negotiation of these details PRIOR to production and immediately following the job. That's it.

#2) *Asking an agent for input on your demo gives the agent a problem rather than a solution.* The demo is supposed to be a solution. This is precisely why we changed our question to, "Do you have a call for my type?" And the answer is either they do or they don't, simple as that. (Which leads us to our next point...)

#3) No one likes being put in the position to reject you . . . not even an agent. In fact, *especially* an agent! (No wonder the frustration-factor is so high in these waters.) This precisely why it takes so long for the agent to respond to your promotion and why you shouldn't give up so easily. Your promotion needs to be continuous, repetitive and specific. Eventually they'll listen to it, if it looks smart and professional and appealing. And if we produced it—*it sounds as good as it looks!*

Additionally, if the agent you're pursuing is a highly sought-after or A-List agent, you have to understand they are likely to be quite busy. So, unless you already have established a good strong relationship with your agent, it's not very likely they'll give you "feedback" at all on your demo and even if they do, their input may be quite valid or it may be completely random. It's honestly not the agent's job to give you feedback. It's not their forte necessarily either. Talent agents are simply trying to manage a mountain of negotiations everyday and maintain a schedule packed to its parameters with the constantly changing 'ice flow' of auditions and bookings that would make even the heartiest hostess at the busiest hot spot in town keel over into a heap. Give 'em a break. Show up with your shoes shined, your professional materials up-to-date and you're ready to work for you. Be prepared, my little Eagle Scout!

#4) If the agent didn't like your demo, then they're put in something of an awkward position to have to straighten it out, wouldn't you say, if you're asking them—"Whatta ya think of my demo?" Now, we're talking about talent agents here for the most part, not producers. (Not that you want to survey producers randomly for feedback. Again, you're supposed to *already know your job*. You're expected to present yourself as a complete professional to these folks right from the start.) It takes a quite a bit of trial and error to determine what sounds best in a single spot even if you have a great deal of experience and, frankly, the agent is at a decided disadvantage, having not spent much time in a recording studio mixing and editing. Besides it's really unfair to ask them to straighten out something that's ultimately YOUR responsibility. An agent is NOT a manager. A manager defines and grooms a talent, not an agent. If they did, they'd get paid more than 10%.

The aim of the demo is to get you booked, or at the very least *auditioned*. But that requires your continued effort in making it available to those most likely to hire you. That means you're responsible for maintaining a constant flow of promotion via your web page and physical mailings of your CD and/or postcards—in addition, you must continually seek representation from talent agents across the country until you are booking steadily (2-8 bookings a week) through a handful of agencies that have the most demand for what it is you bring to the table.

However, if while pursuing these agents you open each or *any* correspondence with requiring feedback on your promotional materials—the basics, the foundations of what establishes you as a professional—well, careful what you wish for, *you might just get it*. In today's market, that reads as rather insecure or unsure of who you are and what you're doing in this industry, which in and of itself does not instill confidence.

It honestly doesn't matter how true that actually may be. This is *always* the case at the onset of any profession. You must assume the role of a professional, then expose yourself to the opportunity to act upon your training and in doing so actually *become* that which you intend to be. That is in fact how you succeed in any endeavor.

So, in closing, quit asking for input on what it is you're already expected to know as a pro. Trust the professionals you've enlisted to help define your "brand-identity". Generally, a talent manager would do this, not the talent agent. In lieu of a manager, Sound Advice came into existence to save you the aggravation, help define you. We aim to assist you the best we can through the maze. So, suffice it to say, there are precious few you can *and should* consult for feedback regarding your

demo and professional promo—just keep it to a minimum and always, always, *always* consider the source.

Otherwise you will only succeed in confusing the hell out of yourself and foolishly waste money and time. And we can't have that, now can we? ☹

Summer Training Assignment

Here's a terrific exercise created to expand your knowledge and perceptions of the industry. The object is to make yourself familiar with film styles and develop your imagination an reference base. Most of you have heard me state again and again: film is a parallel medium to voiceover. I say that because both rely heavily on your imagination, vivid imagery—even when the script/text affords us precious little. Both film and voiceover require timing, emotion, attitude more than other mediums. And both require a placement of performance, on the other side of the instrument (the mic or the camera) in order for your performance to read.

Let's call this exercise "*The Director Challenge*". Why? Because I *challenge you to do this exercise* in its entirety. I want you to observe the specific film styles of a handful of top Hollywood directors, thereby increase your ability to deliver a more *imaginative* performance in this (voiceover) and other mediums and to build your reference base.

It's fairly simple and effective task—provided you know what to look for. This month discover for yourself who and what these directors have done, do and even are slated to do:

1. **Bryan Singer** ("*Usual Suspects*", "*Superman Returns*")
2. **Sam Raimi** ("*Evil Dead*", "*Spider-Man*")
3. **Christopher Nolan** ("*Memento*", "*Batman Begins*")
4. **Brett Ratner** ("*Prison Break*" executive producer, "*X-Men: The Last Stand*")

Q. How many of these guys directed commercials? A. *ALL* of them.

Go to www.imdb.com and pull up *each* of these directors. Then make a point to actually *see one or more of their most well-known films* and their recent summer blockbuster. While doing so, be sure to *observe the following*:

-*What does the film look like?*

(Each director listed have taken a 'comic book' classic—kept that, and ADDED their own sense of style to it. Each is imaginative yet unique unto itself.)

-*What did these guys do that was similar? What was different from one to the next?*

-*What concepts/topics do they concentrate on most regardless of genre?*

-*Did they use the same editor and/or cinematographer on one or more of their films?*

-*Have you seen this film style somewhere else? In the latest BMW commercial perhaps? For Nike? Gatorade? McDonald's? Are you sure about that? Look again.* How about that insurance ad you couldn't turn away from? (In case you were wondering what this challenge had to do with commercial work or transferring your skills to other mediums such as film, stage or voiceover.)

Interesting, isn't it? Now, we're getting somewhere. Do your homework—and this is certainly part and parcel in sharpening your imagination and observational skills. In doing so you'll not only have a greater understanding of the 'pop-culture reference' a copywriter (CW) may give you at your next recording session, you'll also be able to imagine something quite specific for your next audition. And using your imagination to its fullest, to quote Martha Stewart, would be a *very good thing!* If nothing else you'll certainly be playing from the top of your intellect and that can't be all bad.

If you love your work, it might just love you back. ☹

Every year around this time...

"It's so slow." "Can you believe how slow it is? It's really, really slow." Ugh.

How many times can you listen to that tired, old mantra week after week and not start to believe it? I swear, whoever started that way back when, did it to throw everyone off the rails so they wouldn't feel bad for being a total slacker.

Frankly, talent and agents alike have been ringing that bell every year about this time for as long as I can remember. Well, don't believe the hype. It'll only bring your business to a screeching halt if you

buy into this notion. And if you're just getting started—that could cause a professional paralysis, the direct opposite of what we're trying to create here. We're trying to amp up your career—not the other way around. I'm convinced people who fear you might succeed beyond them and their abilities created this adage to shut you down, only because they don't feel like working at their career right now and if YOU keep going they'll be left in your dust, Hmm. Can't have that.

That's not to say business doesn't slow down a bit in the summer—it often does. But it doesn't totally *stop*. There's still work to be had.

Developing a career requires momentum and July and August are two of the very best months to do just that. Why? Because the talent agents tend to clean house in the summer, especially if business isn't generating at the typical, rapid-fire pace it does in other months and that means they're more likely to have time to meet and greet with “*new talent*”.

There's *always* something you could be doing to propel your career forward. Always. Whether that be training with **Glenn Haines** while he's in Chicago (till the 14th of July—call him directly to book a valuable one-on-one at: 206.949.9990.) Or come in for a coaching or take our in-studio workshop on Monday nights to keep that on-mic muscle toned. Think of yourself as a fighter preparing for the next big challenge.

Just remember, the next time some lemming repeats that worn-out, old phrase to you, (“I can't believe how slow it is right now”) keep in mind *there are ads on the air right now*. I've heard 'em—I'll bet you have too. So they haven't quit making them. There are new spots airing *everyday*. And right now many campaigns are gearing up for the fall and winter season.

Make it your mission to:

- a) make yourself known to those likely to hire/audition you
- b) create a momentum with your promo-- and
- c) keep that ball in play. Then...
- d) be sure you can deliver the product you're promoting by keeping your skills sharp.

Commit yourself to it and keep the faith. ☺

Terms of the month

listed— If you are listed with a talent agency then that agency has agreed to represent you.

'Listed' means you are 'registered' but NOT 'exclusively'.

The agent you are 'listed' with will call you for auditions on a 'freelance-basis' and usually only after they have called their 'exclusives' first. This is usually the period in which they get to know what you're like professionally and personally to deal with and how well you do on auditions. You may land work for this agent but they may retain a freelance status with you for a year or more. The agent will still negotiate your contract for a job and call you in on work they believe suits what you do best—based on your type.

look-see—An audition based solely on how you look. These auditions rely almost solely on 'type'.

Your agent will tell you what you're expected wear to complete the 'look'.

These are generally 'cattle call' auditions, in other words, there will be a great many talent called, so you may be there a while. You walk in, after waiting sometimes for an hour or so, and are photographed (with a Polaroid or Mini DV digital camera). You'll be cast from that basic shot or series of shots. Simple as that.

Generally, 'look-sees' are for non-speaking roles in commercial print and television.

You either get the job because you look most like the kid they want to play your son or because you just plain look most like the type they are trying to convey *and you were dressed appropriately*.

Enjoy!

Enjoy your summer, enjoy your work! Keep the professional ball in play—or if you've dropped it, time to pick it back up again and get it going.

Tah for now! -Kate & crew ☺