



THE ACTOR'S GUIDE TO BOOSTING YOUR CAREER

written by Rebekah Seeger

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Entertainment is a notoriously competitive industry. Every actor essentially has the same goal: to work. Some actors see themselves as character actors. Others believe they have what it takes to be the next big action star. But mostly, they want to do good work in good projects.

And many actors who are just starting out will be looking for a shortcut or an edge. The truth is, there's no magical formula for success as an actor. There are almost no shortcuts, and sometimes trying to find one can hurt your career more than it helps it. The truth about acting is that it's all about working on the craft, being persistent and staying prepared.

As a performer, try not to compare yourself to other people too much. Even your friends. Every actor's career arc will look different. It's true that a lot depends on training and experience. All actors should take courses in scene study, improv, and cold reading. On-camera classes can make an actor very marketable for film and TV. But there are a lot of different paths that lead to a successful career.

Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson started off as a football player. He even wanted to play as a pro. Later, he became a professional wrestler before transitioning to acting. Meanwhile, Meryl Streep has an MFA from Yale. She took a much more traditional pathway. But both of these actors have enviable, if very different, careers. Acting isn't a field where formulas always work.

The qualifications to get hired aren't set in stone. Acting is more like trial and error. People try out for jobs, and they're rejected from many of them. A lot still comes down to feeling and perception in the entertainment industry. Is the actor's look on-trend? Are they believable in the role? Some character actors may work a lot when one genre is popular, and then much less when the industry moves on. For example, things like westerns and pirate movies tend to ebb and flow in popularity. Some actors have worked extensively in those genres but find it hard to book other work.

For all of these idiosyncrasies, the entertainment industry has allure for many bright, talented people. It has many similarities with other competitive careers. Like actors, athletes have a lot of downtime, and then have to be ready when it's go time. Scientist Louis Pasteur famously said, "Chance favors the prepared mind." That was true for his lab and it's true for the entertainment business today. One of the best things any actor can do for themselves is to be prepared. Getting and staying organized is key.

The good news is, you already know this. Otherwise, you wouldn't have this book. Chances are, you're going to walk into the room better prepared than many of your competitors. This ebook

is designed to give you tips, tricks and insights into the industry to help you make the most of opportunities that come your way. In acting there are no guarantees. But following these guidelines and having all your ducks in a row means you'll be ready to go when opportunities come your way.

If you've worked in another industry, you've probably heard the phrase "Know Your Why." This slogan contains a lot of condensed wisdom. Knowing why you've chosen any career is important. That self-knowledge can help keep you motivated when things are rough. It also helps you promote yourself better to others. Every actor needs to know how to pitch themselves, and knowing their "why" is the key to having an effective pitch. Take some time to think about why you enjoy acting and why you're pursuing it as a career. Money? Fame? Fulfillment? Knowing this will help you chart your career course.



The Right Mindset

Mindset is everything. This is true in every industry. For actors, mindset is critical. Every acting career will have peaks and valleys. It's important to stay level no matter what's happening in your career at the moment. Don't get carried away at the high points, and don't get too discouraged when you're not flying off the shelf.

Another issue that can affect an actor's mindset is the solitary nature of acting. It can be a lonely pursuit. As an actor, you'll be collaborating with other artists in class and while you're working. But submitting for work, contacting agents, auditioning and marketing yourself will all basically be done on your own. Keep checking in with yourself. Make sure you're keeping your tank filled. It's important to find good support networks. These can include friends, family members, volunteer opportunities or a faith community.

Mindfulness

Practicing mindfulness is one of the best ways to lay groundwork for a successful acting career. Mindfulness has become a buzzword in recent years. It's often associated with practices like meditation. But all mindfulness really means is paying attention. Mindful people are aware of how they feel and what they're doing. They're not just drifting through life. They're noticing and interacting with the environment around them.

There are plenty of mindfulness exercises to choose from. Everyone knows about breathing exercises, but there are also great tools like body scans. This involves noticing, tightening and then relaxing major muscle groups from head to toe (or toe to head if that feels better for you). Body scans can be a wonderful way to relax and fall asleep after a difficult day. There are plenty of toolkits and books available if you're interested in learning more about mindfulness techniques and what they can do for you.

Gratitude

Gratitude can be another way to help improve mindset and mood. [Studies](#) have shown that keeping gratitude journals or making gratitude lists can literally change the way the brain works. Being grateful and humble can be key in building a successful acting career. One small gratitude exercise actors can do is to thank casting when they're accepting their audition times. Typing, "Thanks so much for this opportunity!" isn't just reminding casting that you're a polite and reasonable actor. It's also reminding yourself that you're lucky to have this chance and that you're going to make the most of it.

Track Yourself

Another practice that goes along with a mindfulness is tracking yourself. Try noting your moods and what you do with your time for two weeks. Tracking yourself this way can be a huge help. It will help you notice patterns and how they influence your life. For example, it's common

for actors to over-schedule themselves. Tracking can help them see why. Actors tend to have many commitments: a day job, a relationship, classes, friendships. That's a fulfilling life, but it can also feel draining sometimes.

Making your thoughts, goals and feelings concrete is a wonderful way to gain self-knowledge. Writing things out manually can make them a lot clearer. If you always feel good on Tuesdays and Thursdays, consider why that might be. Maybe you have a great acting class on those days. Or maybe they're your days off from your day job. How can you extend that good feeling to other times? This kind of self-knowledge will be helpful in all areas of your life, not just in your acting career.

The arts are one area that have always been resistant to this kind of tracking. But data can be beautiful and useful, even for artists! Tracking yourself is a gift to yourself and your career. The insights gained from doing this can be really illuminating. It will show you what you're doing right and also where your pain points are.

Packaging Yourself

Actors are always excited to work. You know how good it feels to be up there performing. There's nothing quite like being on set or on stage, present in the scene. Bringing characters to life is an amazing, transformative feeling. Watching the audience react to your performance is incredible, too. Actors have the chance to really touch people from all walks of life. It's a gift to be able to do this kind of work.

But the actual acting is only a small part of the job. Casting director Jiten Bhatt has worked in casting in Mumbai for seven years. He makes the distinction between "acting" (the actual performance) and "being an actor" (everything that goes into building a career). In order to get the opportunity to perform, actors have to learn a number of other skills, like networking and marketing, that are common to all businesses.

Bhatt observes that in Mumbai, only about 10% of what performers do is the actual performing. This is probably true in every big media capital around the world. The other 90% is the groundwork that has to be laid in order for the actual performance to happen. In order to become actors, especially actors who make money, artists need to be open to researching opportunities, making new connections and possibly even producing their own work. Sometimes, even with all the training in the world, it takes a good indie project for an actor to get noticed by other producers.

In order to get the attention of casting professionals like Jiten Bhatt, actors need tools. They

need a way to be able to let people know who they are as a performer and what they can do. Wherever an actor is based, they need some concrete aids to help market themselves. Whether it's New York, London, Toronto or Los Angeles, actors need tools like good headshots, reels and resumes to help them get ahead.

Get the Right Tools

Headshots

Headshots are deceptively simple. They can be quite tricky. Actors want a beautiful photo showing casting something about their personality and the range of characters they can play. That's understandable, but sometimes actors end up with photos that look too editorial. They're beautifully composed, using creative lighting and unusual poses, but they're not great headshots.

What casting professionals need from a headshot is something more simple and direct. They need to be able to see the actor's whole face. They want pictures taken in natural light, not warm yellow or moody blue looks. The focus should be on the actor and their features. It's a good idea to go jewelry-free in a headshot. Solid colors are better than prints. The background should be neutral, not distracting.

Remember, casting is always under a time crunch. They're looking at hundreds of pictures in a short period of time. An eye-catching headshot needs to be focused on the actor. It has to let casting know a few things almost instantly. The best way to do that is by following a few simple guidelines for creating effective headshots:

Headshot Basics

- Wear a solid color. Sometimes prints don't read well, or they're too distracting. *You* should be the focus in your headshot.
- Your headshot should be in color. Even in the UK, and even for the theater world. Black and white headshots haven't been common since the 1990s. Color headshots let casting see your exact eye color, skin tone and other details that they need to know.
- Use a neutral background. You don't want distracting items in the background of the shot. Simpler is better.
- Wear little to no jewelry. Casting needs to see YOU. You're the product being promoted.

- Use natural light. Artificial light can look too moody. It can also make it harder for casting to understand what your actual skin tone is. Natural light is the most flattering light for everyone.
- In markets like LA and NYC, sometimes there's pressure to go with an expensive, big-name photographer. But the most important thing is really to find someone who you're comfortable with. There are plenty of talented photographers out there. You can find someone who brings out your best and will work with your budget.
- Professional headshot photographers are the first, best choice. But if you're just starting out, or if you can't afford to re-take your headshots, you do have options. A photography student may be willing to take your headshots for little or no money. Sometimes, even a headshot taken by a friend with a good eye and a recent iPhone can work. Have them take the photo in natural light. Get some feedback from other people you trust before deciding to load any headshot onto your casting sites.

Resumes

Another important tool for any actor is a resume. Your resume should feature your name and union status in a big, bold font. When casting scans your resume, they need to easily see what your credits are, where you trained and what additional skills you have. Sometimes a project requires an actor with a sport skill, movement skill or even vocational skill. Letting casting know that you can do tai chi or that you're a qualified phlebotomist can be as important as letting them know about your improv team.

If you have an agent, use their contact information on your resume, not yours. There are a few reasons for this. The first is because it signals that you have representation. You're a serious actor and you have a team working on your career with you. The next reason is that agents are experts at cutting deals. In fact, they're the only representatives who can legally negotiate for you. Essentially, their job is to connect you with work and then get you the best deal. A good agent will push back against bad terms. Sometimes, an actor may be tempted to work for a low rate for a one-year term. But an agent may insist on a better rate, and better terms like one year guaranteed and an option to renew for a second year. If you trust an agent enough to be signed with them, trust them enough to be listed on your resume.

There are a lot of resume formats for actors out there. Sometimes, actors are advised to include additional photos on their resumes. That's not really necessary. Consider the context for your

resume. Casting is either looking at it on your website profile, next to all your headshots, or you handed it to them and your best headshot is stapled to the other side of it. It's more important for a resume to look clean, clear and easy to read than to have pictures on it. There's a resume format that works well for most actors included at the end of this book.

Today's actors also need to have casting profiles on websites. In the UK, actors will need to have a profile on Spotlight. In the US and Canada, the big sites are Casting Networks, Actors Access and Casting Frontier. These websites are platforms where the whole casting process comes together. Actors set up their profiles on the site. They load headshots, reels and list their skills. They may also load a .pdf version of their resume and include links to their personal websites.

Casting professionals list breakdowns on these websites. They can control who sees them: some are open to submissions from representatives and actors. Others are restricted to agents and managers only. It's a good idea to include a comment with a submission. Casting loves comments. It should say something about the actor and provide their height and weight. Examples of comments include: "Experienced commercial actor. 5'6, 125lbs" Another is: "Warm, likable. Pro-level dancer. 5'3, 110lbs" In these comments, be brief but let casting know why you're right for the job.

When you're submitting yourself, read the breakdown carefully. Casting professionals are busy. You don't want to over-submit yourself to jobs that aren't right for you. Be confident and know that the right opportunity is out there for you. You're going to be prepared and ready when it comes along. Casting director Jiten Bhatt compares actors to other artists. When dancers get ready to get to work, they stretch and warm up. What, as an actor, can you do? Put work into getting ready. Be mindful: pay attention. When your opportunity comes along, you'll be ready to seize it!

Reels

Reels are your chance to show casting how you work in action. Your reel, sometimes called a showreel, should feature you at your best. The reel should open on you, not on another actor in the scene. Remember, this is an advertisement for you, not your former scene partners. The material in your reel should be recent. Like with headshots, if your hair color has changed, or if you've gained or lost a lot of weight, it's time to make a new reel.

Many actors have more than one reel. They may have 1 minute of dramatic footage as one reel. They may also have a second reel that features their comedic acting. If an actor is also a professional-caliber dancer or singer, it's a good idea to have that footage in their casting profiles, too. On most casting sites, it's possible to attach a specific reel to a submission. Adding

more than one reel to your profile gives you and your agent more flexibility to submit you for projects that fit your exact skills.

Sometimes, an actor will market themselves incorrectly, and they can start to feel stuck. One actor couldn't understand why their agent was submitting them for so many serious roles. Their submission report was full of roles like judge and doctor. They didn't see that in themselves, and they weren't getting auditions. This person views themselves as a free spirit. They love nature. They're skilled in yoga and Tai Chi.

Taking a look at this actor's casting site profiles, it was easy to see the problem. The tools on that profile weren't showcasing them properly. They had a few yoga pictures up, but they weren't effective. In fact, in some of the poses, this actor's face wasn't even visible. It could have been anyone in those photos as far as casting knew! This actor's other headshots didn't feel authentic, either. They mostly featured very serious, unsmiling expressions. While their footage was great, it was all very dramatic, featuring tense interrogation scenes.

This actor needed to make big changes to their profiles in order to communicate who they were and what they could do. They needed to show both their agent and casting who they really were. Changing their footage and photos helped them to really "pop" and come into their own. Remember, your acting career will only be about 10% performances. You'll need to be your own marketing director in some ways. When you assemble your profiles, try to also see them through your agent's eyes or casting's eyes. Do those photos and performances really tell them who you are?

Tips for Submitting Yourself

- Understand your type. What are your favorite roles to play? What parts are you cast as most? If you're having trouble finding your niche, ask your acting teacher or classmates for help. Knowing how they see you will help you.
- Make an appointment to submit yourself. You can sign up for email alerts from casting sites. These will let you know when jobs fitting your type are available, and then you can submit from your phone. New breakdowns tend to drop between about 10-2 or 10-3 daily.
- Time is of the essence. Submitting right away means you'll have a better chance than if you wait.

- Respect casting's time. Never call the casting office. If you have a question, have your representative call for you. If you have no rep and are running late for your audition, then and only then should you call. Use the number casting provided when they notified you of the audition.
- Only submit yourself for roles you actually fit. If you are 40 but look 25, don't submit yourself for the role of Mom to a teenager. You are technically old enough to play the part, but casting won't see you that way. If you can't ride a motorcycle and they need someone with a motorcycle license, don't submit. You won't have time to take the test and get one before shooting. If you see skills you wish you had right now, use it as fuel! Take the initiative to go out and get them. But don't submit now.

Get the Right Help

Most working actors have an agent, talent manager or both. Agents help connect actors with work and negotiate for them. SAG franchised agents are permitted to take up to 10% commission. Talent managers are different. They provide actors with a lot of advice and help shape their careers. In fact, managers are often responsible for introducing their clients to agents and helping them gain representation that way. Managers are less regulated than agents. They typically take 10-15% commission from their clients.

There is one big exception to these percentages, and that's non-union work. The rates for non-union work tend to be lower. It can also take longer, time-wise, for checks from non-union jobs to arrive. Finally, SAG has no input when it comes to these projects. Because of all of these factors, agents and managers will generally take 20% commission on non-union work. In general, non-union work is a great way to get started as an actor and gain experience. But you will probably want to move on from those jobs for higher-paying, union work as soon as possible.

Today, actors can self-submit for prominent acting jobs. This is especially true in the commercial world. But if an actor is serious about working in film or television, they really do need a representative. Often, the breakdowns with theatrical roles are only released to agents and managers. Finding representation really is important. Finding an agent or manager is a big, important step. But it's important to wait for the right fit. You want to find the right person or people to help you succeed and reach your goals.

Casting sites often have a feature that allows agents and managers to view unrepresented actors. But most actors still find representation the old-fashioned way. That means by showcasing and submitting their materials to management companies and agencies. The most

important step in this process is really to do your research before you start submitting. A good agent or manager should meet with you in person, or at least over Zoom, before extending an offer. They may ask you to perform a monologue. They will have standards that they expect you to accept and live up to.

But *you* have standards, too. Before going into a meeting with a manager or talent agent, know what they are and be able to articulate them. What do you expect from your representation? Obviously, you want someone good. But what does that really mean to you? You want someone who's a go-getter, who submits and pitches their clients aggressively. You also want someone who communicates, and who will answer your emails or calls in a timely fashion. Try making a list of qualities you want in your representation, and place them in order of priority.

If you get to the meeting and the person doesn't tick those boxes, you don't have to sign with them. If you have the meeting and they don't extend you an offer to come aboard, don't take it personally. If it wasn't a good fit, you don't want to work with that person, anyway. There are plenty of good representatives out there, and you will find the right one who understands you, your talents and your potential.

There's a sample cover letter for submitting to a manager at the end of this e-book. This can be modified as needed. For example, say you've been referred to the manager by your friend who is already signed with them. Include that in the first paragraph. (And remember: **ONLY** say you were referred by your friend if your friend has given you permission to do so!) But the heading and short, sweet two-paragraph structure work well. Before submitting to a representative, always check out their website. Look them up on [IMDBPro](#). Find their submission guidelines and respect them.

Auditioning

You've been submitting yourself and your agent's been submitting you and it's finally happened: you've got an audition! Now how do you increase your chances of getting the job? Being confident is a big asset when auditioning. At an audition, you're not just portraying a character. You're also asking someone to invest in you. You want the casting team to really see you shine. You want them to know that you can handle the pressure of a long day of shooting. And, of course, you want the producers to select you for the part. You want them to feel comfortable investing time, money and energy in you.

One of the most important to do when auditioning is to respect the space and time. If you got the sides the day before, you should have them memorized. Of course, bring them with you anyway, just in case. If you're just getting your sides the day of the audition, you should still spend some time preparing. If you're having problems with the sides, don't make excuses. Don't be defensive with the casting team. Stay present in the moment and do your best. Respect their time and work by being as prepared as possible.

All actors love to perform. Not everyone shines in auditions, though. If that's an issue for you, examine why. Insecurity and nervousness can be a form of self-sabotage. Finding ways to be more comfortable and prepared in the audition room can lead to more bookings. A lot of this goes back to the mindset piece. Your mindset can help set you up for success. When you walk into an audition, be confident. Leave your worries outside the door. You can always meet them there later and pick right back up with them. Also, remember: you're an actor. Auditions are what you were born for! This is *your* opportunity, a time set aside for you to wow casting.

When you arrive for an audition, be respectful to the assistants who are signing people in. Assistants are gatekeepers. Casting professionals trust their assistants and their judgement. Casting assistants are often actors or former actors. They know what you're going through, and chances are, they took the job because they like actors. They're the casting associates and casting directors of tomorrow. They can be your allies if you'll let them.

When you get in the room, don't be afraid or intimidated. Don't be pompous. Los Angeles-based casting director Danielle Eskinazi advises people to be authentic. When she brings an actor in, she wants to see who they are. You don't have to pretend to be something or someone you're not. Eskinazi has made casting her career because she loves the process. For her, it's interesting to see actors take a character from the page and bring it to life. She wants to see actors succeed, and most other casting professionals feel the same way, too. They wouldn't be doing the work if they didn't like to see great acting.

Sometimes actors leave auditions with regrets. They didn't know where to look, so they guessed. They didn't know where to stand, and then someone corrected them gruffly. Feel empowered to ask a quick, polite question like, "Excuse me, where's my eyeline?" if you need to. Remember, you *belong* in the room. You're an actor and it's an audition. It's *your* space. Danielle Eskinazi advises against ruminating on auditions that didn't go perfectly, saying, "Don't complicate things in your head." Just let it go. It's not your last audition. There are always more opportunities. Stay prepared and stay confident.

Sometimes, you'll have a great audition and nothing will come of it. This can be especially true in the early stages of your career. Casting may have loved your audition, but maybe their client wasn't 100% sure just yet. It doesn't mean they didn't notice. As you circulate more and see the same casting professionals, they will start to understand your strengths. Someday, they may even call you in for something before your agent has a chance to submit for it, because they know how right you are for the part.

Audition Tips

- Have a duck's back. Even successful actors who book a lot of work have to face rejection sometimes. Acting is something that can be done at any age. There will always be more opportunities for actors who take their work seriously and keep working on their craft.
- Be prepared. Know the material as well as possible, and always bring it with you. Having your sides can save you if you get a case of nerves.
- Be adaptable. Sometimes, casting may want you to read for an additional role. Or the sides may have changed entirely. When this happens, it's a great opportunity to show everyone that you can think on your feet and rise to meet a challenge. Use it!
- Communicate with your agent. Be reachable: always have your phone on you. When you get an audition notification, try to respond within 15 minutes. If for some reason you're running late on the day of the audition, **call your agent**. Your agent will communicate with casting and let them know what's happening and when to expect you. After the audition, text or call your agent and let them know how it went.
- Be respectful. Show up for the timeslot you're scheduled for. You should try to arrive about 15 minutes early, so you can find parking and get yourself situated. If you're running very early, more than 20 minutes, wait in your car for a few minutes. If you're going to be at all late, **call your agent**.

- If you missed your time slot, **do not** just show up at the casting office and crash a later session. This should go without saying, and it's probably something you don't need to hear. But unfortunately, some actors have done things like this. Typically, they're dropped by their representatives for it.
- Don't be overbearing and act like you know more than the casting director does. I know **you** won't do this. But unfortunately, it is something that casting professionals report dealing with. It's great to be confident and assertive. But arrogance and aggression are different, less desirable qualities.
- Most of the time, there's no feedback after you leave an audition. The only feedback is getting a callback. Remember, casting is always under pressure, they don't have much time. Don't take it personally! If someone does take the time to offer feedback, whether that's praise or constructive criticism, receive it gratefully. Taking the time to reach out is a huge compliment.
- Self-tapes: Increasingly, actors are being asked to tape their own auditions at home. When you do a self-tape, use natural light if possible. The background should be plain. If you use a sheet or tablecloth as a backdrop, it should be clean and as wrinkle-free as possible.

Conclusion

Acting can be a wonderful, fulfilling, creative career. It's an art that makes space for all ages, personalities and body types. Anyone who nurtures their craft and becomes comfortable expressing themselves can find a place to act. But what really sets some careers apart from others is the work done on the business side of the business. Laying proper groundwork can lead to a more fulfilling and much busier career.

That means always working on your craft, in classes or in small projects. It means marketing yourself effectively with high-quality headshots, footage and up-to-date casting sites. Be ready to submit yourself, at least until you find a good representative. Respect other people in the industry, like casting professionals and representatives. And most importantly, never stop getting to know yourself better. Knowing your patterns and knowing your "why" will help you to be more effective in all phases of your acting career.

Your Name
UNION STATUS

WEBSITE LINK

TALENT AGENCY

HEIGHT: X'X" WEIGHT: XXX LBS

CONTACT: Agent Name

HAIR: COLOR, LENGTH, EYES: COLOR

STREET ADDRESS, SUITE #

(COUNTRY) PASSPORT

CITY, ST 00000

(123) 444-5555

agent@agency.com

FILM/TELEVISION/WEB

SHOW NAME	ROLE	DIRECTOR
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THEATER/LIVE PERFORMANCES

SHOW NAME OR THEATER	ROLE	DIRECTOR
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TRAINING

CLASS NAME NAME	INSTRUCTOR	SCHOOL
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DIALECTS

SOUTHERN ACCENT, STANDARD AMERICAN

LANGUAGES

LANGUAGE (LEVEL)

MOVEMENT

DANCE: STYLE, STYLE, STYLE, STYLE

MARTIAL ART: STYLE, STYLE, STYLE, STYLE

SPECIAL SKILLS

SPORT, SPORT, FITNESS ACTIVITY, JOB SKILL

(SAMPLES: BASKETBALL, WEIGHTLIFTING, LICENSED PARAMEDIC)

Your Name
Your Address
Your Address
Your Email
Your Phone

Date

Manager Name
Address
Address

Dear [Name]:

I am looking for a proactive, intelligent and communicative manager based in the Los Angeles area. I love the professional way you present yourself and the results you've helped your clients achieve. I'm currently represented by [agent], but I know I need an effective manager to really round out my team.

Right now, I'm working on my craft in [class] with [instructor]. I'm also getting ready to film my short film [title] in [month]. My credits include commercials for [product] and roles in films like [title] and [title]. I think that together, we could really take my career to the next level.

Thanks so much for your time. I'd love to set up a time to meet at your earliest convenience.

All the best,

[Name]