Take Your Step



A simple 7 step guide for cultivating an actorfor those who believe that a craft of acting is an art of living.

By Artur Lago-V.

2018

This	booklet is dedicated	l to you	
he emptied himself an	nd took a slaves form	m and became hun	nan
	Philippians 2:7	,	

A Space of Content

Step 0	Our Entrance (4)	
Step 1	Your Book (5-6)	
Step 2	Your Choice (7-9)	
Step 3	Your Brand (10-12)	
Step 4	Your Character (13-15)	
Step 5	Your Scene (16-19)	
Step 6	Your Craft (20-22)	
Step 7	Our Beginning (23-25)	

Step 0: Our Entrance.

Dear Actor, our challenge is a unique nature of an actor's destiny which requires more than an ability to act. There will be no fast or easy way to a personal growth or a professional success. But the path is only yours to walk.

My childhood neighbors and friends thought I was crazy. I can't blame them. I grew up in Osh, a small town of former Soviet Republic known as Kyrgyzstan, in crazy 90s right after Soviet Union collapsed. We had no running water. We had no country either. And I dreamed about making films in America! You'd think I was insane too. God sees things differently though.

I won a green card lottery and came to this country alone at age of 21 with little English in my head and \$ 2000 in my pockets but a lot of dreams and ambitions in my heart. I was inspired to live my life my way. The reality hit me tough. I suffered a cultural shock and a depression. But I learned how to move on and be flexible. This is my way of sharing with you the principles I had to learn to heal my physical and emotional wounds and to rediscover my childhood inspiration to live as an actor in America. Moreover, I now have the whole team to make films with.

Feel free to email me regarding anything in this guide. I love discussions if actors involved in them have a genuine desire to learn. Otherwise, discussions turn into arguments and waste **energy** and **time**. As an actor, I can't afford this political luxury. Instead, let's use them wisely. Let's take our first step toward cultivating an actor till the very **beginning**...

Step 1: Your Book.

Books are one of the easiest, fastest, and cheapest ways to cultivate your acting potential. Reading about business, psychology, art, culture, history, and other subjects will enhance your overall understanding of human nature and the world surrounding it. An actor with a keen perception of these two elements will feel confident cold-reading for either a stock broker from Wall Street or a pimp from Compton. He/she will have enough wisdom to look deep into these characters to see that at the core of both is the same force of human nature manifesting through **different actions; specific intentions;** and under **unique circumstances**. Now, all you have to do is to embody these characters in a realistic and entertaining way.

Here is another little tip: if you want to get wiser and to improve your cold reading skills at the same time, start reading out loud every day for 15-20 minutes. When you do it, pay close attention to your annunciation and pronunciation. These 15 minutes of fun activity will make an experience of cold reading way more familiar to your mind and body. It will also make memorizing your lines easier since you already have been exercising all the muscles involved in the process of memorization. The busy actors that never have time to read... I suggest you listen to the audio books. Although, it is a different experience, you still will benefit from the information you find in the books. But most of all, you will practice the ultimate acting skill: ACTIVE LISTENING.

The books included in this booklet are not many but each one will enrich your prospective on acting/creative career and what it truly encompasses:

- The Art of Learning by Josh Waitzkin- inspires and explains how to become a lifelong curious and efficient student which is the key to actor's success.
- 2. Acting Class. Take A Seat by Milton Katselas- contains an ocean of practical acting tools and techniques.
- 3. *Michael Caine Acting in Film: An Actor's Take on Movie Making* by Michael Caine- describes interesting points on camera acting and other details of acting career.
- 4. *Choose Yourself* by James Altucher- will widen your world view on overall business and personal level with a lot of practical tools.
- 5. *never eat alone* by Keith Ferrazzi- the powerfully written book to learn the deeper meaning of networking and its impact on your life.
- 6. Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Steaks Are High by Joseph Grenny, Al Switzler, Ron McMillan- will give you practical tools to improve your communication skills for any situation in your life.
- 7. Analyzing Character (free to download on app Free Books) by Katherine M.H. Blackford and Arthur Newcomb- explains character types and how they affect one's professional and personal life. Something every actor has to deal with every day.
- 8. *The Renegade Writer* by William G. Griffiths- will inspire you to live your art and to practice your craft like a true master.

Now drop this booklet. Get one of those books. No hard feelings.

Read to Practice

Step 2: Your Choice.

Your acting instrument is ALL of YOU. Your body, mind, and soul need to be well taken care of on a daily basis. Your health is the key to your professional longevity. Healthy organism produces **positive energy** which infuses your mind with **creative thinking**. These two elements are the major factors of an actor's long term success.

Being an actor myself with some self- destructive behavioral tendencies that all sensitive people have in common, I know how often we might ignore or even damage our health without giving it a second thought. Even some of the most successful actors destroy their careers or lives by simply falling into an unhealthy lifestyle. As an actor who just begins his/her journey, every single time you make a healthy choice, you add years into your career.

There are hundreds of opportunities during the day when you can sneak in a few moments of healthy activity. Yoga, Tai-Chi, any form of dance or fitness activity will improve your physical and emotional state and train you to dive into your creative mode with ease. I used to believe that in order to benefit from such activities one needs to spend hours on practicing them. However, even spending 15-20 minutes working out, stretching, walking, or mediating are great ways to maintain healthy prospective on your last and next audition. Every deep breath of gratitude and positivity you take can turn into the healthy moment which will take your acting craft to a new level.

In my practice, I often witness inexperienced performers and students driving their performances by emotions. This tendency is not

technically sound method to approach your acting choices. Self-infused emotions are tiring and selfish. Moreover, a camera or a well-trained eye of a casting director can easily see through and get turned off by the forced emotions. On the other hand, simple and realistic behavior driven by a specific intention is the best way to charm your audience and evoke your truthful emotions.

Next time you work on a role, instead of trying to feel the emotions of your character, read your lines out loud; change their rhythms; stress different words; walk around the room in different dynamics; and explore many fun opportunities to pay close attention to and to play of the lines of other characters in the scene. These actions will help you to get physically and emotionally involved in your exploration. You will also notice that every line you say makes sense and every action you take feels effortless when you are **LISTENING and REACTING rather than saying and acting.** These healthy choices will ignite your emotional responses to the circumstances you find yourself surrounded by in this specific moment. The emotions will flow out of these actions in a liberating and natural way.

Let us consider a simple example from an actor's life. Our actor had a long night serving a table with extremely rude customers purposefully giving our actor a hard time. The actor comes home exhausted with just enough energy for a quiet greeting. However, his pragmatic roommate or partner says well intentionally: "Hey, maybe you need to get a real job so you don't have to deal with all this nonsense just to have flexibility for your acting dream". Only a moment ago our actor was exhausted, but now our hero is full of energy to defend his career choice by screaming, breaking the dishes, and going to the gym to calm

down. It's not his emotions that triggered his behavior but his *listening* to what has been said first and adding to it all the moments that happened before which resulted in his *emotional actions*. Eventually, our actor remembered to pick up the broken dishes and apologize for his dramatic behavior. Next time, he might want **to make more subtle choices** than screaming and breaking things; and this **subtlety** will get him a part or at least save his relationships.

Listening attentively and reacting subtly will make your acting more interesting and natural. These are the healthiest choices you can ever make to have a long term career.

All the movement and voice activities can be a part of your healthy acting tool kit that you can use anytime anywhere.

The secret is to be aware of the thought process while performing those activities. Thoughts are the most powerful actions an actor can utilize during his/her choice making process. That's why, it's extremely important you choose only healthy thoughts to guide your choices.

Step 3: Your Brand.

An actor who aims to succeed in this extremely competitive industry has to develop a unique brand to be noticed. Luckily and unfortunately, in these days with the easy access to unlimited stream of information, it's easier than ever to find and to lose your true brand.

The sacred rule is to brand yourself without lying to your self.

An actor who brings into an audition room his/ her well- developed personality is one of the most appealing brands a casting director can ask for. A lot of young people confuse branding with creating an appealing main stream image.

My friend has been building her fitness brand for almost two years now. She is a single mom who gained about 50 pounds during her difficult pregnancy followed by even more traumatic birth giving which left her with physical and emotional scars. However, she did not let it stop her from quitting her safe job in a bank, getting her Zumba and personal trainer certificates and start building her own business.

Nevertheless, and I think it has to do with a hidden fear of being vulnerable that we all share, instead of branding herself by using her real story, she portrayed herself as a cool chick who can whip your ass and get you in shape. There is nothing wrong with it except it's extremely opposite of what her brand actually is. Her brand is a resilient woman and a single mom who can inspire and guide you toward your wellbeing despite all the hardships you might be going through. This is her true story. That would be her genuine brand. She would never have a lack of single or married mothers in her classes benefiting from her inspiring life

story. She also would not have to worry about having this or that part of her body to look certain way and to spend hours on tweaking her social media pictures.

When I asked her why she chose this way of branding herself, she simply said: "That's what sells". I highly disagree. Working in the Ballroom dance environment driven by sales, I learned that selling immediately and building long term success are two different things. Sometimes, it's better to start with less sales but stick to your true brand. This philosophy will attract the right customers eventually and those customers will pay more than enough for what you have to offer. It is especially true when your business is as personal as acting. I think you get my point. Do not think what sells now. Think what your value is. Learn new skills. Create even more value. Think what your true story is. Find an appealing way of telling it. Share it vulnerably. Your brand is now ripe and you can start to reap.

Diversity on multiple levels is number one priority for the success in any industry. That's why, your unique look; your inspiring story; and the engaging way you share them with others is your best bet.

I can't tell you what your story is but more genuine you are in sharing it the more engaging it will be. And nothing gets more attractive than engaging authenticity.

Healthy and humble are the main traits of an actor who a director can trust with a job and is interested in communicating with. Adhering to those elements can also make you more resilient to all the rejections and more prepared to all the successes you will be dealing with throughout your long career.

That's why, every audition you attend, every picture you share, every letter you send to a casting director is an opportunity to share your true story and to build your genuine brand. You need to be extremely strong to be vulnerable enough to share the key moments of your life you believe shaped you as a human being and an artist. The best way to do it is to learn a little bit about another person's story before you decide to share yours. It will show your authentic interest in building long lasting relationships. We all have some similarities in our stories. Find that common ground and it will give you a solid point for connecting with another person. The rest is just a lot of fun work of building relationships. And remember, every single person you connect to will be a part of your brand as well. That's why; always choose wisely who you connect with and allow yourself to be influenced by.

Your brand is only as good as the quality of your acting and living is. You keep those two innate elements of your personal acting brand well taken care of and people will be inspired to build lifelong professional and personal relationships with you.

Initially, your story is only yours to share.

Eventually, your brand is only yours to live with.

Ultimately, everybody will know its genuine intention.

Step 4: Your Character.

There are many ways to build your character. However, some facts never change. To study your script attentively to be able to ask your director solid questions about his/her vision is a great start of the process. However, especially in *the beginning* of your career, your director will know very little about your acting craft or have very little time to discuss it. Most directors are already occupied with a thousand aspects of the film making and rely on you to do your job of bringing your character to life.

If you stay true to the script and allow yourself be guided by the experiences your character is going through; you will become your character. To give you some ideas on where to begin, I included the key concepts to create a realistic, multidimensional, and interesting character:

- 1. **Be in love.** Find common traits you share with your character and fall in deep love with his/her every word and gesture.
- Be positive. Always choose positive words to describe your character. Instead of 'angry' think passionate. Instead of 'stupid' think naive. Instead of 'stubborn' think persistent. Instead of 'weak' think sensitive etc.
- 3. **Be curious**. Constantly search for more cues in a script to help you make tangible choices.
- 4. **Be creative.** Add flavor to your interpretation by adding details to your character that might be missing in the script and can *pleasantly surprise* your director.

- 5. **Be brave.** Keep challenging your comfort zone by asking uncomfortable questions about your character.
- 6. **Be informed**. Investigate what other characters think of you by studying the whole script.
- 7. **Be mysterious**. Keep your character's thoughts for yourself. Use them as your magic potion to fuel your creative choices.
- 8. **Be physical**. Use subtle behavior and mannerism to embody your role. Find character's posture and develop his/her walk. Writer writes your words. You choose your actions.
- 9. **Be detailed.** Continue adding details to your character till the last day of filming to keep your character alive and interesting.
- 10. **Be flexible.** Remember that being confident in your choices is the first step to success and failure. If a director asks you to make a different choice, do it. It always helps to have a different take when your film goes into an editing room.
- 11. Be multidimensional. Every human has contradictions. By using those to give your character a touch of internal conflict, which we all have, can be just what you need to believe in your hero.
- 12. Be real. Even if in this specific scene your character's decision is predetermined by an author, you still need to dive into the underlying process that resulted in your character's actions.. Find solid explanations rather than made up excuses for his/her actions. It will make your character real for you.

These twelve concepts are not the only ones you can use in your approach. However, I find them practical, simple, and holistic enough to

guide you through the creative process of building a truthful and interesting character.

Acting is an art form and a craft. There are no exact formulas that produce the same results for every actor. There is an unlimited amount of tools and techniques that can help an actor to craft his/her role. Feel free to pick the ones that work best for you and make you feel confident in your choices.

The proper tools

will help you to accept everything in the script as it is.

Give yourself enough time and courage to bring your unique experiences and traits into the role. Now, you and your character can become one harmonious expression of a unique persona.

Step 5: Your Scene.

Every scene you are in is a specific time of your character's life that a writer and/or a director finds crucially important to share with the world. Your job is to have your steaks high enough to be actively involved in that scene. Here are some key points to help you to achieve high level of commitment to your scene:

- 1. **Start with WWW? -** *Who are you? Where are you? Why are you here?* Being a judge in a courtroom who is about to decide one's fate is very different than being a serial killer at your victims' house who tries to clear his/her fingertips. However, playing a judge who is a serial killer and about to convict an innocent suspect is very different. So, which one are you? Are you a victim?
- 2. **Keep your steaks hot without burning them-** know the intensity and emergency of the event so that you bring yourself into the proper state of mind, body, and soul. Did you make steaks high enough for your character to be motivated to sacrifice his life for this young woman you met three days ago?
- 3. **Deal your cards to find some answers** *look for activities that allow you to be fully invested in your scene*. Use every single opportunity to explore the behavior of other characters in the scene. Imagine you are a poker player whose victory depends on his/her ability to perceive other players' tiniest movements.
- 4. Save some money by being your own doctor- evaluate your emotional and physical state in the scene. Are you hungry and

- angry? Did you just have some delicious wine and now feel sexy? These are important details that will affect the way your character behaves in the scene.
- 5. You've been alive before you were born- start living your scene before you enter it by creating an interesting moment that you believe happened to your character right before the scene.

 This moment will make your character full of life before you hear 'action'. Be specific with it. Walking into your bosses office after having an ugly phone talk with your soon to be ex-wife or after having a hot kiss with your handsome boyfriend will make a huge difference in how you react to your boss' firing you for faking financial accounts of non-existent clients.
- 6. Simplicity is a shadow of complexity- be simple in the expression of your character's complex thoughts and emotions. Some of our most complex internal experiences usually manifest through very simple external behaviors. When I was told that my nephew died, all I did was take a step back from a person who was delivering the message. I just stepped back from him and stood there for a minute or so. For five days, I did not want to shave my face. A week later, I was scheduled for a surgery to remove some type of excrescence on my neck. According to some doctors it was caused by a serious shock that my body went through because of my grief. But all I did was stepping away from the person and refusing to shave my face. That's real life.
- 7. **Get that fire burning insight with some smoke outside** *create your inner life to fuel your outer expression.* It's always more

interesting to have your desire burning inside while your behavior being of opposite or different nature. Are you being cool and chill with your new mysterious neighbor while you're burning with a desire to kiss her? Are you smoothly seducing your boss while your heart is filled with a desire of revenge? Imagine being a volcano that is about to erupt but takes its time to do so.

- 8. **Be faithful to it but not a slave of it-** *improvise within a structure of the scene*. Play your scene as a comedy, tragedy, or melodrama. Be a clown. Be a dramatic hero. Be your favorite actor. Be loud. Be quiet. Be silent. Be fast. Be slow. Play with it.
- 9. **Practices flirting with it without hurting it-** *explore charm and humor in every scene you play.* These two secret weapons will give you a lot of creative space to play with and allow you to get out of your head.
- 10. **Live or die in it but never hide behind it-** *commit to your choices*. Once you are in it, you go for it. No doubting. No questioning. Just doing it.
- **11.** Be loose and do not lose- just like a good fighter, you need to be loose in your body and focused in your mind to give a good fight for your character's goals in every single scene.
- 12. Without oxygen, there is no second chance-always find a moment to take a deep breath in your scene. It will give you an opportunity to get back into your body and find new moments to explore.

All of the elements described in Steps 3 and 4 are not acting rules but an actor's tools. Think like an artist. Some actors

sculpt their roles like Michelangelo did his sculptures with an extreme attention to the anatomical elements of the human body and its beauty. Some actors are better off being expressionists using the essence of human nature to paint their characters.

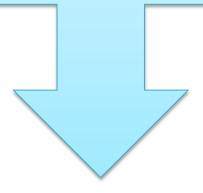
Your approach will also depend on the character that you are working on.

Some characters will demand more thoughts.

Some will ask for more feelings.

Some will beg for more movement.

Eventually, you choose whatever works best for you to embody a director's and your vision.

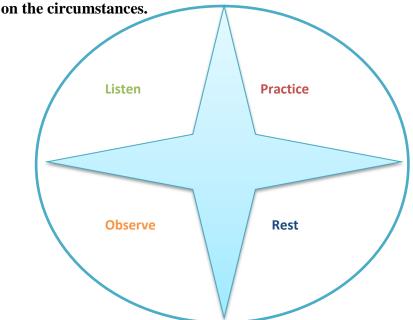


"Consciously adopt the mindset of a young child, to whom all of life is a grand adventure."

-Jonathan Lockwood Huie

Step 6: Your Craft.

The hardest and the easiest thing for an actor to do is to practice his/her acting craft. It is hard to do if you believe that the only place you can do it is in your acting class or when you are on set. It is extremely easy to do when you realize that you can practice your acting anytime anywhere. As an artist whose job is to embody other people and capture their essence, you can use any minute of your life improving at least one of your tools. All you need to do is to get into your acting star space that consists of 4 simple activities that you can immerse yourself into depending



Listen: You can do it anytime and anywhere you choose to. It is the most important ACTION an actor can learn. Listen to what your boss is saying. Listen to how your heart beats. Listen to how the wind is blowing into your window. Listen to how birds are singing. Listen to silence. Listen to it all as if you never heard it before.

Observe: Instead of spending another ten minutes staring into your phone, use these ten minutes to observe the world around you. Observe your room's design. Observe the beauty of nature. Observe people's behavior around you. Observe your behavior around different people. Observe how you observe.

Practice: Life of a true actor is a never ending practice. Practice your diction when you speak. Practice your annunciation when you read. Practice your movement when you walk. Practice your lines when you cook. Practice your patience when you wait for your agent's call. Practice gratitude when he/she finally does. Practice your practice.

Rest: You need to rest to be your best. You've got to rest enough to have enough energy to listen, to observe, and to practice.

Working as a dance teacher in a ballroom dance studio, I learned one thing: A person can always find time for the things that he/she truly loves. Some of our students ran some of the biggest companies in the country but still found time to be rested enough to take dance classes. Some of them would dance to rest.

I often hear young actors talking about how little time they have for sleep and rest. Then they would discuss a thousand useless activities they do during the day. The only thing I can recommend in this case is to simplify your life. Say no to anything or anyone that does not add quality into your life and say yes to the ones that help you cultivate your skills and talents. That's the best choice you will ever make if you plan to make acting your long term commitment.

Adding 20 minutes of active rest during your day can help tremendously to refresh your creative spirit. To be able to rest requires quiet and calm mind which means you need to be doing nothing that will make your brain busy and your body tense. Yes, you need to do nothing for those 20 minutes but actively rest your whole organism from thousand thoughts and things that constantly but falsely try to convince you of their importance.

Learn to get into your star zone on a daily basis. It will make your muscles so strong that gravity will help you jump high enough to reach one. 22

"In order to best serve the moment, you have to be still long enough to hear what it is saying."

-Michael Jeffreys

Step 7: Your Beginning.

An actor's journey is always another beginning. Even the most successful actors have to start from an unknown open space in their mind and heart when approaching their next role. With a million dollar contract on his/her table, a humble actor still remembers that this role is just the beginning of another creative chapter in his/her life. Beginnings are the most scary and exciting places. One day you're having a role that you dreamed about and worked hard for all your life; the next day you are battling demons of ego and fear that crawl into your head. These are the universal truths about any actor whether he/she just got his/her first headshots done or is getting his/her fifth Golden Globe. It's our acting human nature.

As you already know, I came to this country from Kyrgyzstan alone at age of 21 with two thousand dollars; broken English; and my faith in God's and human kindness. While going through a serious cultural shock and dealing with all other little things that a young immigrant deals with on a daily basis, I decided to take an acting class at age of 23. Since then, my acting and living paths immerged into one another. I am 32 now. During my 10 years of American life, I picked up a broken heart and a depression. I tore my knee joint at age of 29 and was told by my surgeon I would never dance again a month before graduating with BFA in Dance/Theater that I spent 6 years working on. Because of my accent, I was advised by some people to reconsider my acting ambition. But I made my choices. This guide is one of them. And

if you contact me, you will know the value of these choices by hearing my new acting accent today.

The steps and concepts described above help me to persist with my mission of sharing people's stories through all the noble channels accessible to an actor. I also constantly have to give myself enough time and space to develop my vision as a person and an actor because when life hits you in your early twenties or late fifties and you feel like you have a lot of "disadvantages", you simply turn those "disadvantages" into a precious gift-box of experiences that you bring into your craft of acting and your art of living.

Like any other form of art, acting requires one's willingness to recognize or reevaluate the true motives behind his/her creative drive. I found my new mission after I left Los Angeles and came to Philadelphia where I met Steven Michael who gave me an opportunity to work as an actor and action choreographer in his sci-fi action adventure The Omega. The final day of filming lasted for 18 hours with a lot of action scenes. We started filming at 7 a.m. Sunday at a farm in New Jersey. It was now Monday 4 a.m. winter time in a huge abandoned warehouse in South Philly. We were cold, hungry, and exhausted. Steven who spent two years of his life developing this unique sci-fi adventure series looked at me and said: "We might need to pick it up some other day". But deep down, we knew that if not now, we might never pick it up again. We started running around the set like madmen. We finished filming the pilot that Monday. Then, it hit me. Every single person was there for one simple reason: A desire to create something of value together. That's when I knew no matter where I end up as an actor, I'd make it my mission to always inspire those who are driven by the same desire.

Often, all it takes is to share what you already have with those who can benefit from it. My short but extremely rich life experience taught me 3 simple lessons: 1) A poor place where people share generously turns into the place of prosperity. 2) The tough times during which people choose to share kindly do turn into the best memories. 3) The ideas that are born in these places and get inspired by those memories shape the future generation of creative individuals.

On behalf of all my friends and mentors, I invite you to join this mission by cultivating an actor within you and share your unique voice with those who can benefit from it.

