

Taking On Acting One Step At A Time

Many people work a long time, perhaps an average of six years is typical, in order to secure the first beachhead on the island of success. Some actors, and it happens all too often, mistake that first beachhead for the island. They think they've clinched the career itself when all they've really got is a foothold on it: a foothold on the first rung of a very tall ladder. There are many beachheads to be taken, many rungs to the ladder. Each new role that can be made to serve as a springboard to the next, and better, role is a beachhead. Each new level of your career is a beachhead. As you work your way up the ladder from being a "day player" to that first enviable niche, an actor with an "established" weekly salary, and from there to the point where you are paid a certain sum for playing a part, and on to a guarantee of X number of pictures a year at a fixed sum - all these are beachheads. But you, as an actor, haven't got the island of success secured until you have taken the last beachhead; the one that assures you of continuity in your career and a genuinely solid place in the entertainment world. In the early phases of his career an actor is as great as his last show. Only the seasoned star rises above his vehicle and has the staying power to survive a bad show, lift a fair one above mediocrity, and always enhance a good one by his very presence. If you want to "live your own life," don't become an actor. As an actor you will have to live the life that will be best for your career. And you will have to accept one final source of authority to determine what that best is. You will have to put your money into the right kind of clothing and accessories for the furtherance of your career, not into a helter-skelter assortment of clothes that you happen personally to prefer. You'll have to get the haircut that will get you a job, not the one that follows a fad. The world of the actor is made up of highly competent specialists who are vastly important to the entertainment industry - and to your career. No single person ever "makes" an actor. Many people have a hand in creating him - possibly from some of the very substances inherent in you. The head electrician, you will eventually discover, is just as much a specialist in his particular field as the writer or director is in his. The man in the cutting room is, in his way, just as important to a film as its producer. The people in wardrobe, hairdressing and make-up departments know how the actor should appear in relation to a production as a whole. With their specialists' eyes, they "see" the actor as he can rarely see himself. The sound engineers, who have learned to hear as the sound system hears, know how the actor should sound. The publicists know how to spotlight public interest in him. The agents know how he should be presented for available roles that are right for him, just as the teachers and coaches know what he is professionally capable of doing. All these people, along with other specialists, know best what is right for the actor. They are not prejudiced by personal whim. They arrive at their decisions by workmanlike co-operation, functioning in a chain of command that goes, link by link, to the top. Thousands of careers have been wrecked by actors who "changed horses in the middle of the stream." Those actors go from teacher to teacher without ever finding out what any of them have to offer. They switch from agent to agent before a long-range plan for their career can be developed. They go from one publicist to another, destroying the valuable groundwork of every publicity campaign. Finally, they fight their way out of legitimate contracts - and into oblivion. The entertainment field is the only business on earth in which a girl who might never make more than forty dollars a week running an elevator can be molded by specialists into a commodity worth thousands of dollars weekly to one of the major industries of our time. While the successful actor acquires prestige and social standing in plying his well-paid profession, he attains other gratifying goals.

About the Author

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