

## Earn Your MBA

I was talking to a fellow yesterday in the Big House – no, not Sing-Sing (the Feds haven't caught me yet), but rather the University of Michigan football stadium. He was explaining how Michigan was using folks from the theatre department to teach business students how to present themselves more effectively ("The Bard in the Boardroom," etc.) Great, I said, but let's also see the converse: I want the business students and faculty to train and coach theatre majors how to market themselves and become more business-savvy.

By business-savvy, I don't just mean learning more about the business (though that is a significant part of my MBA – Masters in the Business of Acting – program.) I mean learning to treat one's acting or stage-managing career as the small business that it is. If you are acting for a living – whether you are 18 or 78 – you would be well advised to have a one-year plan, a five-year plan, and a ten-year plan: know where you're heading and what steps are necessary to get there.

Know what you're selling: what is your strength, your long suit, the sweet spot in your casting profile? What roles are you hammer-on-the-head-of-the-nail, dead solid perfect for? What well-known actors have your career, playing the roles you could do? Of course, I know – we're ACTORS! We can play anything! (I'm still mad at Olga Merediz for beating me out for Abuelita in In the Heights.) But unless you're already in a repertory company, you need to develop your career with what you do best and then expand your range to take advantage of your chameleon-like gifts.

Know the market: know what's being produced where. Know the material: know which plays and musicals have roles that are really right for you. Know the players: who's the director? The casting person? The musical director? The stage manager?

This brings us to the most important adjuration: Network. This is a people business; you need to make connections. "Only connect," says E.M. Forster (fabulously successful actor.) Meet people. Shake hands. Smile. Get your name, your face, your credits in front of as many people as possible –

business cards, e-mail, postcards, Facebook, LinkedIn, Plaxo, etc. (A young actor of my acquaintance keeps me apprised via Facebook of every job he does; I have no idea if he has any talent, but his marketing drive makes me think he'll be successful.)

Your network should have breadth, height and depth: not just all your fellow actors and as many casting people, directors and producers as you can meet, but stage managers, accompanists, technical directors, costumers. When the soubrette breaks her arm in tech rehearsals, the replacement may come down to the lighting designer saying, "I just worked with a fabulous Ado Annie." Networking is completely critical for a stage manager: referrals are the lifeblood of the craft. Get to know as many other stage managers as you can. Get to know and attach yourself to talented young directors.

Speaking of young people, be very, very nice to the assistants, the receptionists, the interns. "Today's gofers are tomorrow's *machers*" (Yiddish for powerful people.) They'll remember you if you treat them well – and they'll remember you if you're a jerk. And don't just look beneath you on the age continuum, look up. Find a mentor, someone a level or two up from you on the show biz food chain to advise you – and not necessarily an actor or a stage manager: it could be a producer, a musical director, whoever.

I hope these ideas have stimulated your business instincts. We at Equity are working on some clever interactive ways for you to mentor or to be mentored, to share your wisdom or to learn more about Mastering the Business of Acting. Remember, it's not show art, it's show business.