

SO YOU WANT TO BE
A CORPORATE ACTOR?

Paul Clayton



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Introduction

When I'm teaching presentation training on a one-to-one basis to people in the corporate sector, I encourage them to let their audience understand the point of the presentation right at the beginning. If you take someone on a car journey, then they want to know where they're going, so they can sit back and enjoy the trip. It's the same with a presentation: if the audience know where they're going, they will enjoy the journey. And it's the same with this book too. You need to know the benefit of it to you from the start.

For any actor – whether you're an international film star or a jobbing television actor in the UK – a career is about survival and longevity. There are a lucky few who are given a break within the first couple of years of their career, and by further good opportunity and good management, are able to sustain a fulfilling career, doing what they enjoy, and making a good living from it.

When times are trickier, and when there are fewer opportunities, you can do one of two things. You can sit and wait for the phone to ring. If it doesn't, then you can blame this fairly and squarely on your agent. Or you can try and multiply the number of opportunities that may offer themselves to you in any one day. You can cast your net wider. Unemployment has always been an inevitable part of an actor's career. Being prepared for it, and how to deal with it, should be among the skills every actor possesses.

You're a trained professional. You have spent several years learning skills that can be difficult to master, and yet can be

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useful in so many situations. Suddenly you're deprived of a place to practise them. Work can be easy to find in a coffee bar, a pub, or behind the counter of a shop, yet finding fulfillment for the soul does not come so easily.

In a world where we no longer have a great network of repertory theatres, the opportunities for work for younger actors are just not available. Having worked as a director in drama schools during the 1990s, I can attest that many young and extremely talented people are no longer pursuing acting as a career by the time they reach thirty. Not because their ability has diminished. Sadly the opportunities to fan the flames of their ambition never presented themselves, and they have refocused their energies into another career. They are often aware that it's a second choice. But it pays the bills.

Many actors don't reach their full casting potential until their mid-thirties or early forties. You may be aware that while you'll never be Romeo, you're going to be brilliant as Juliet's dad – if only you're still acting when you're thirty-eight.

This book will show you that there are a whole range of opportunities in the corporate world where your skills as an actor can be integral to the job. Jobs around the world, from Reading to Reykjavik. Jobs where the skills that you have mastered will be a revelation to others. Jobs that will pay the bills. As well as an examination of the work that's available and how to do it well, this book will explain how to get the work in the first place.

Actors learn from other actors – from watching them in rehearsal, and from their anecdotes in the pub. So in this book you will also find tales of personal experience from people who have worked in the corporate market, and how they have made it work for them.

You may find that as you read the book, you decide that corporate acting is not for you. It can be a major mind-switch

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because the work is all about other people, and not about you. But you may find that using your skills as an actor to help other people in their own personal and professional development is something you find uniquely fulfilling and want to pursue full-time. There are hundreds of actors who now work only in the corporate world, and they do very well. Whatever your choice, you've made the first step towards the next stage of your career by reading this book.

Enjoy the presentation.

Paul Clayton

Why Work in Corporates?

So what is a corporate actor, and why would you want to be one?

As a small child you didn't decide that you wanted to be a corporate actor. You wanted to be an actor. Perhaps it was because you had taken part in school plays. Or, like me, perhaps you had an unreasoned inner knowledge that the stage or screen was a place you desired to be.

So why would you want to become a corporate actor, a strange, half-life creature that works by day in training rooms and conference centres?

You would not be alone. Thousands of actors across the country derive income from the corporate sector in many forms. But why would you want to join them?

You may have been an actor for several years. The joy of the work is still there, but the gaps between jobs are constantly a problem. These jobs are not what you want to do, and they don't use the skills and experience that you have gained. Ultimately the jobs you do between work can become your life, and can take over. As you have grown older the need for financial stability can change – families, mortgages, the future, etc. The prospect of more regular work can become very attractive, and yet you just can't let go of that bug, that dream that started you on this journey. So often being an actor is just about carrying on. To be able to say in the words of the Sondheim anthem: 'I'm Still Here'.

You may have graduated recently from an excellent course at a top drama school, and yet the work has not come

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Role-play... And How to Do It

So you've got your first role-play job.

Great.

You are now probably wondering what you might have let yourself in for. What will be asked of you? How do you do the role-play? What types of role-play are there? How do you do the best job possible?

Time to find out.

You have had a conversation with the role-play company. If the job is going to go on for several bookings, you may have had a training day at the role-play company. At the very least you have received a briefing sheet with all the details of the job. But before you get down to studying what the scenarios are and what the information is that you're going to need, it's a good idea to check through all the logistics.

Get Me to the Place On Time

Do you have a venue address? Do you have a telephone number of someone to contact should something happen on the journey? This can quite often be the mobile numbers of your fellow actors, but also it is sometimes useful to have a number for the venue or for the person leading the course.

Double-check the travel arrangements. Many companies insist that you travel on the cheapest possible ticket and that you share taxis to and from the venues with the other actors. It's always a good idea to check this. You don't want to

Pre-briefed role-play

Here you will be given a written brief outlining the scenario. Most often the role-play company sends this to you several days in advance. On rare occasions, you are given the written brief on arrival at the job. A brief can vary from a single side of A4 to a booklet some twenty or thirty pages long. Whatever the size, this will tell you who you are and what the situation is.

Your job is to work through the information and take out what you need in order to be able to play the role.

You can see an example of a role-play brief here. This is a training role-play used with medical students.

Actor Brief

Background

Your name is Philip Williams and you are a successful accountant with a bank in the City. You are married to Fiona, a personal assistant in the same firm. You are financially secure, enjoy an active social life and have recently bought a large house in Surrey. Fiona is expecting your first child in two months' time. You are planning on starting up your own company and have an important meeting coming up soon with your bank manager, to discuss finance for the new venture.

Scenario

You have recently recovered from two attacks of something you have been told is called optic neuritis – you experienced blurring of the vision and pain behind your right eye. This has now cleared up. While you were out jogging about three weeks ago you noticed stiffness in one of your legs, which has persisted to some degree. You feel extremely fatigued at times. Your GP sent you to see a neurologist, who examined you and ordered blood tests, and you had an MRI scan of your head and an 'evoked potential' test (which involved you having lots of electrodes placed on your

learning gained from it can be enormous. You need to resist the temptation as an actor to make sure that the scene 'works'. Resist the temptation to push the scenario to a climax. It really isn't needed for it to be a successful role-play.

However, sometimes the behaviour of the participant is so effective that the role-play might be over very quickly. You might need to try and prolong the meeting. You may need to introduce new impetuses in order to challenge them further.

Role-play Techniques

Let's take a look at some techniques that you might use:

Get them talking

In any role-play, the other person should be doing the majority of the talking. It's not an opportunity for you to regurgitate all the facts from the brief. Most role-play situations provide a problem or challenge. In a perfect outcome, the participant will solve this.

You don't want them solving it, however, in thirty seconds.

You might find the use of the non-specific question particularly advantageous. If they've just given you a lot of information, information that you as an actor may or may not understand, then there are ways of responding to move the role-play forward without necessarily having to start regurgitating lots of facts.

Responses such as 'I'm not absolutely clear about that,' 'and what would you do?' or a carefully phrased '... And?' will all encourage the participant to give you more information or to make the picture clearer. In moments of utter panic when the other person has just given you a load of information that you really don't understand, you could always try 'just run that by me again'.

Work... And How to Get It

So you now understand the principles of role-play. You have looked through all the different possibilities available to you in the live event market. You are beginning to think what your special skills might be most suited for. The big question remains: how do you get the work?

On many occasions throughout this book you will be aware that I have referred to the fact that this is a business sector. It's not arty, it's not fluffy, and sometimes it's not caring. It's a business sector and it is looking for a commodity, a specially honed skill, or a service. The important word is business.

You may be one of those actors who are very good about running their career as a business.

At drama school I was privileged enough to have a lovely old tutor called John Macgregor. Every Friday morning for two hours he taught us all those fantastic bits of acting technique such as the double-take, the slow-burn, how to answer a telephone, and how to make a sip of a drink in an Agatha Christie to heighten the tension. He had started out as a promising young hopeful during the 1950s and indeed played alongside Olivier at Stratford. Stardom hadn't beckoned, but he had worked for over three decades as a jobbing actor, making a living out of it. He was full of brilliant advice as to how you actually managed the job of acting.

The two pearls of wisdom that I remember and indeed have tried to adhere to are:

APPENDIX A

Survey Results

This is a very quick snapshot of some of the questions I asked actors and agents doing research for this book.

The survey for actors was circulated using social media, mainly through The Actors Centre in Covent Garden, and 171 responses were received.

The survey for agents was circulated through the casting service Castweb and a total of 41 responses were received.

Actors

1. Have you ever done any corporate work as an actor?

