

Being in the Moment

6 Ways to Live in the Moment as an Actor

From Backstage – By Constance Tillotson

We always hear, “It’s about the journey, not about the destination.” What a perfect mantra for actors! Our paramount goal is to “Be in the moment,” yet, once the stakes have risen, “The Moment” can be the first thing an actor sacrifices. Actors can get caught up emotionally in the end result of either “booking” or – even worse – “not booking” the job. When this thought occurs, it creates an immediate disconnect to the abundance of the actor's creativity. In life and in acting, living in the moment is one’s greatest gift.

Here are six ways to make the most of each blissful moment.

1. **Believe.** You never know when your “big break” is coming. You simply must believe that it is. This has to be number one, because without it you will get stuck in your story and never advance. Your actions and responses always reveal what you truly believe. If you find yourself procrastinating, not truly doing the work, doubting yourself before or after an audition, your belief is that this is never going to happen for you. Your belief is that you are not good enough. You have the power to focus energy on your dreams or on your fear. To become successful or to hit a higher level in your art, you first must steadfastly believe you will.

It took Bradley Cooper 12 years of consecutive work to be ready to tackle his Oscar-nominated role in “Silver Linings Playbook.” Just a mere three years earlier, when he auditioned for “Hangover” he didn’t get the part. He was told there were budgetary problems and they were going to cast a name. Four months later, he was doing a small play in Massachusetts when he received the call that he booked it. He was only considered after several big names passed and the budget was cut. Thankfully, he didn’t spend these four months feeling sorry and doubting himself; he just pushed on to get better. If he hadn’t taken these steps, he wouldn’t have been ready for this job when it came. He believed something good was coming to him.

2. **Listen.** I can always tell when someone is going to be nominated for an Oscar. It is always in a moment of silence – when they are simply listening and living in the moment. The camera always picks up the unpredictability in an actor's eyes. You cannot play unpredictability. You must live in the moment of it. Our focus is to fill up the silence with true emotion. I can instantly spot “belief” when I watch actors about to go into an audition. Actors who are going over and over their sides and worrying about the lines. They are worrying because they either have not prepared to the degree that is required or they “believe” they are going to go up on their lines. In either case, the actor will not be available to truly listen in the scene, which robs them of each precious moment.

3. **Feel.** It is impossible to feel the moment when your mind is worried about the future. When in an audition or in class, an actor can get so caught up on “delivering the end result” of the scene, their feelings become about that and not about the scene. Make the choice of allowing each moment to be truthful and real. There is no end result in acting. It is always a process. You are living a few minutes of the character's life, not the end of it. And even if your character is dying in the scene, just like in life, we never know the exact moment comes that will be the end. And neither should you in the scene if you are actually living it. If you can immediately shut off the emotion of your character as soon as you hear cut, you are faking it. You know it. And so will those in the audition room or on set.

4. **Focus.** One night, I happened to be at a private screening of “The Departed” and was very surprised at Leonardo DiCaprio's artistic evolution from his previous work. When I met him, I wanted to be gracious, but my curiosity was wild in needing to know what had changed. He told me (in paraphrase) “Wow, you really noticed a difference? That means so much to me. Last year, I took a hard look at myself as an actor and finally admitted that in all these years I was never truly doing the work. The focus this takes is beyond imagination. I love films. And if I am going to continue to be immortalized in them then I decided I must commit to the true focus it requires. Which is why I have decided I will now only do one film a year.” The focus of a top athlete or actor is exactly the same. Every time you do a scene, you should feel some mental exhaustion and exhilaration. Be honest of how much commitment to the craft you are willing to give. This focus is a required element to truly live in the moment of any character.

5. **Gratitude.** We are so lucky as our job is to “Live in the moment.” Have gratitude every day for this blessing. Every audition, if your first feeling is not gratitude then it is fear. And this goes back to belief in one's own ability. With any fear-based thoughts, excuses or procrastination kicks in, simply change your thought to giving thanks for this moment you get to practice doing what you love most.

6. **Love.** I saved the best for last. Love is an energy all can feel. We devote our time to what we most love. When we walk into an audition, everyone in the room can feel when we love what we do. We are so prepared and ready to put our heart on the line and to experience each moment as if it is the first time. We do not fear direction nor are we stuck in doing it one way. It is our intention that we are given direction to do it 10 different ways because that will allow us to play to experience brand new moments.

Many people in the world are not doing what they love as a career. Life got in the way of their dreams. They are caught up in fear, control, and not feeling safe in their own vulnerability. They do not trust everything will work out in their favor and think they can protect their heart and stuff their pain away because they do not think strong enough to get through it, which is why they go to the movies – to forget about the problems in their lives, let down their walls, and feel.

This is the end game of what we do and our duty as artists. This is why I am so deeply in love with acting. Witnessing a great, honest performance can give an audience a moment of healing,

enlightenment, and clarity. Even if it is just to laugh for two hours. In order for this to occur it is our responsibility to be so present, to have courage, and to surrender all to our creativity and imagination so that we truly have the feelings of our character. If we do not feel it, it will be impossible for our audience to do so.

And we will rob them and ourselves out of the amazing experience of acting.

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