

Know Yourself?

Why Self-Awareness Will Make You a Better Actor

From Backstage by C. Stephen Foster

Focused on helping actors heal from acting “blocks” and gain the courage to act again after being discouraged, C. Stephen Foster's Awakening the Actor Within: A Twelve-Week Workbook to Recover and Discover Your Acting Talents invites creative growth and inspiration for actors. In the following excerpt, Foster introduces the most important, most basic building block to a successful acting career: you.

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The basic building block of your acting is yourself. You are completely 100% unique, and this is good news. This gives you a great foundation from which to build. What you look like and how you behave is the clay you'll work with when creating characters.

So who are you? What makes you tick? What are your physical attributes? Are you shy? Are you outspoken? Are you athletic or a bookworm? Are you tall or short? Are you male or female? Are you old for your age or young at heart? Are you Southern or from Argentina?

All of these questions are very generic, but they help to decipher the code to yourself. It's a good idea to know who you are before you begin to create characters. The town you were born in, the family you came from, your brothers, your teachers, your home, and your social circle have all been important ingredients in the creation of your most fundamental tool of acting: You!

Part of recovering ourselves as actors involves the work of digging ourselves out of “automatic pilot” or “just one of the team.” We must begin to look for areas that set us apart, and we must learn to embrace them if we are going to claim them and use them. That is one of the vital things about writing “I remembers...” as it helps you to see different particles of you that create a full person.

Everything that has happened to you in your life is fodder for your work as an actor. Everything can be useful if you will harness it and put it to work for you. A hardheaded personality can give you the drive to succeed. On the other hand, a very shy, wallflower personality can help you play dark, deep emotional scenes. What you will discover when you start this sleuthing work is you contain elements of all persons, but you express them in different ways.

On the surface, I am short, funny, and have a high-voice, but I'm also driven, smart, and ambitious. So the two people can live side by side within me.

Are you talkative or are you withdrawn? Do you have a high-paying job or are you a waitress? All these things that you discover about yourself and even things you think of as your defects of character or flaws can serve you when you become aware of them. It's this dawning process that appeals to me as an actor. I think I know who I am until I

bump up against a situation and I think: "Wait a second, maybe I'm different altogether!" And we do grow and we do change as we evolve as actors.

I spent most of my life pining about not being like other actors, and later in life, I realized it was a great benefit. And it was this difference that sets me apart at auditions and gives me attention in an audition room where everyone can look alike.

This sorting process will help you also help you identify parts of you that have been bottled up or kept a secret. For example, you might be a class clown instead of the schoolyard bully. These hidden parts are like little nuggets of gold. They will also help you later when you begin to "market" your talent. It's much easier to "sell" yourself when you give others an example of who you are. (I am a hybrid of Woody Allen, Leslie Jordan, and David Sedaris.) It will serve you in what roles you are best suited to play. It's much easier for me to find work as a comedian than it is for me to do Ibsen.

But before I started to find myself, I would attempt to posture and act with false identity. I would always "act" a part instead of the character acting through me. I would cover myself up with costumes or wigs or furniture, but as I've shifted out of that, I find I have more range of motion and depth as an actor.

Look at yourself in an objective sense. Think of the creation of you as a very rare and valuable gem.

C. Stephen Foster is an actor/writer originally from Ft. Worth, Texas currently living in Hollywood. He is featured in the award-winning comedy short "That's Opportunity Knocking." His two-man show (with Scott Wilkerson), "Divanalysis: the Mechanics of Camp," played as part of the summer series at the renowned Highway's Performance Art Space. Foster penned (and starred in) the comedy "Legends and Bridge" which was extended three times at the Group Repertory Theater. "Legends" received rave reviews including Critic's Pick in The Valley Scene, Spotlight in Backstage West, and was recommended by the LA Weekly. It garnered three ADA Award nominations including Best Comedy and Best Play. As a stand-up comedian he's played the Comedy Store, Improv, Flappers and Laugh Factory. Stephen co-wrote the book to the hit musical "The Green Room." He's featured in the indie movies "Off Hollywood," "Hidden Hills," "Expect Delays," and "Big Bear Weekend." He played Icarus in the Hollywood Fringe hit show "Seven Dreams of Falling." He is featured in the webseries "Studio Lot," "What's My Intention," "C.P.R.," and "Ground Floor."