

# The Pinch and the Ouch

*Loosely from PR Lessons in The Pinch & The Ouch by Narciso Tovar*

One of the first things I learned in my actor training was that there is no true acting done in a vacuum – yes, folks have soliloquies and people may have long speeches, but this is all done in response to something that has propelled the character to ‘speak out.’ You have to listen/pay attention to your other actor(s) on stage to respond in an honest way.

Nothing really brought this home more than ‘the pinch and the ouch’ idea that was founded by Sanford ‘Sandy’ Meisner – an acting technique based on active listening that we learned from my first year acting teacher. The idea behind ‘the pinch and the ouch’ is based on two principles:

- *“Don’t do anything unless something happens to make you do it.”*
- *“What you do doesn’t depend on you; it depends on the other fellow.”*

While it may sound as exciting and revolutionary as watching grass grow, it was surprising to see how ‘theatrical’ we could be without even trying. It took me some time to strip away some of my ‘isms’ and tricks before I began to ‘get real’ with myself.

In the word repetition game, you don’t think about what to say. Your only task is to repeat what’s said to you. If your instinct says to say something different, then do. But don’t think. Meisner says there is no reason to be “polite.” Follow your instincts. “You cannot be a gentleman and be an actor.”

Mr. Meisner illustrated this ‘act-react’ once by giving one of his students the line: “Mr. Meisner.” He waited a moment and then pinched this student suddenly, who (startled) shouted out “Mr. Meisner!”

The pinch justified the ouch. The reaction is spontaneous and truthful.

The repetition removes need for the brain. It removes the intellectuality of improvisation — saying what you *think* will be effective — and relies solely on impulses.