

SMFA Summit Interview with Kim Estes, premiering 19 May 2021, 2pm PDT

Bonnie Gillespie

All right. Y'all know. I mean it. Probably my very favorite human on the planet. It's Kim Estes. Hi Kim.

Kim Estes

Hello! Right back at you, little favorite human being on the planet. Nice, nice to be in that category period.

Bonnie Gillespie

Very special to me. I'm so appreciative to you for coming back and doing the SMFA Summit again. You are such a lighthouse for so many people in the "Self-Management for Actors" community and beyond, obviously. You know you're not you're not exclusive to us but we feel as though there's just so much hope and promise and commitment to just being in it for the long haul, in looking at you, and the joy that you bring along the journey. It's just it's I'm looking at your backdrop, can you...? Yeah. Handsome fella. I know him.

Kim Estes

You know that guy?

Bonnie Gillespie

I do.

Kim Estes

What a journey. What a life, and you know you want to share that those pieces of life with this crowd, this this inspirational crowd. Of course, it inspires me... they inspire me as well... if they think I inspire them, oh it's right back at them. It's the rubber band theory, that it's coming right back. I mean, it's so awesome to see the work. It's so awesome to hear about the work. It's so awesome, it's really awesome to be able to communicate to them about the drive, the leadership, the continuous improvement. The, the taking care of self. It is like it's, it's so important. So, if I get a chance to talk about all those things, that's great. If I get a chance to inspire somebody, reach back and get one, grab one, pull one up, and they get a chance to reach back and grab one of them and pull one up and get them out of wherever they need to wherever they were, and bring them up to where they need to be, or at least start that and start that motion.

Bonnie Gillespie

Amen. I have so much fun thinking about that bringing people along the... you know, because I have always said it... we can want to change—this whole conversation is about creating the Hollywood we want—we can want to change what looks wrong with any kind of system and it's so much easier if we can just get a little bit on the inside, and then go, "Okay, I got a crack in

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Bonnie Gillespie

the door. Come on, come on, come on." How, when the crack the opportunity for a crack is itty bitty bitty bitty, how, how do you stay in it? Trusting someday there's gonna be a bigger window of opportunity?

Kim Estes

Yeah, I think first of all this trust in yourself, that's one. It's that inner peace that says that's going to happen. The belief, the knowledge, is that you are enough. That if you get that opportunity at that crack, you can get in there and with your self-confidence and with your knowledge and with your skillset, you can do this. Knowing that is I think three-quarters of the foot that's in the door.

Bonnie Gillespie

Yes, yes.

Kim Estes

And then the other quarter of the foot is that person who's just like dragging you along and saying, "Yeah, you know, I believe that you can do this, so come on. We're going to, we're going to, we're going to we're going to do this," and you get that get those opportunities once in a while from mentors, even mentors you don't even know. People you don't even think you know. There are people out there looking for you, hoping for you, believing in you, even when you get to that point where you, you start to doubt yourself and you haven't really haven't had that pick-up message from Bonnie today. And you need that inspiration and you got those people who just really respond to those messages of being enough, and that's what it should be the driver.

And then it's just to know that you are, to know that you are, and the confidence in yourself, know that you are. And you get that crack, you keep it open by still being you, being the you you are. The confident you you are. Yes, and of course you've got all the faith in the world in yourself, you won't lay yourself down... now listen... does that mean you will not screw up from time to time? No, but it means that you will continue down that path. Get up. Get up and take it again and yeah, it's it's not, it's not the getting hit, and getting knocked down, it's the ability to get the heck back up and put your nose back out there where you know it belongs right to the crack of that door. And then, and then it then it happens.

Bonnie Gillespie

I like to say: "Fail forward."

Kim Estes

Fail forward. That's right, that's right. And the biggest action, the biggest reaction is not the action of getting knocked down, it's the action of getting the heck back up and hittin' it again because that takes... that takes a lot. It takes sometimes everything you have in you to say, "Oh, darn. Let's, let's okay let's, let's gather. Let's get all your tools back together again. Pick up your

tool bag and let's go back up and challenge everything and go against everything," which means going sometimes going against that closed door. Go back again, let it, let it slam and hit you in the nose. Noses are... they're fragile but they, it's, it's okay. Don't get... shake 'em up, shake 'em up a little bit.

Bonnie Gillespie

I have a phrase that comes to mind already with this conversation we're having, that I love to use: "Satisfied and striving." What I mean by that is, "I am so blissed out happy exactly where I am, you know, this or something better. It's so good right here right now, but I'm striving because it feels good to grow. I'm pushing because I like to push and I'm gonna come back to that closed door because it won't always be closed. There'll be a crack in it, I'll find a window or whatever." How does it, just, does that sort of represent your, your feelings about every tier that you've been at? It's like... it's good here and keep going?

Kim Estes

Absolutely! In our, in our, in our pregame conversation that is, that thing is like I have never done that before. I've never been called out for a week to work, and that's... I'm at, I'm there, and it's like, "Feels good here." Now I didn't get here by accident. I got here, I got here because I did the job. I did that job and got it. And now that I'm here it's like, "Okay, what does it take to stay here and I want to be here. I like it here." Do I know what is next? I don't know. I think there's something up and out. But... and I feel very good having taken that jump and leap... and am I ready for the next jump and leap? Oh yeah, yeah, let's go with the next jump and leap. And I'm not, I'm not going to be extremely, extraordinary, extraordinarily happy that I'm just right here, I'm going to be joyful at that next step and I'm going to go ahead and grab it. Grab that bull by the horns and if I get shaken off, I get shaken off. I'll get back up again. I swear to you, I will. And I'm gonna challenge myself and I'm gonna be better than I ever was. So, that is... that's striving, it is... and then when you accomplish that and it's like, all right. Okay.

Bonnie Gillespie

I think it has to come from a place of not pushing against what you currently have. At least that's how it plays out for me that if I'm striving because I hate where I am, I'm just going to hate where I get. But if I'm striving because this is great, let's get more then it just seems to land differently.

Kim Estes

Yeah, it does, it does land differently. I, I like me and where I am and where I'm... where I've been driven to. And I know that there are places to drive to beyond where I am, and it feels good knowing that, yeah, okay, I can accomplish this. You let me get my foot in the door, and I'm going to make you proud of me. I will do that thing and I'll do it. What... I will give you everything I have on that day. Everything. Every tool I got at my disposal, give it to you and, you know, I believe that the confidence that I have, and the, and knowing that I'm enough that they usually, that does it. That does it. Give me the opportunity and I'll challenge myself.

Bonnie Gillespie

We talked, again in the pre-show, we talked a bit about, about your upbringing, your family, your... just the positive outlook the joy as a setpoint. Do you think that enoughness comes from that... it's something that's just baked into us or can we, can we correct, maybe some more... let's just say, less-awesome parenting and less-awesome upbringing to get to a place of confidence? If we don't have it naturally?

Kim Estes

Yeah, yeah, I believe you... I believe you can you can acquire. I believe, you know you just started to... started bringing some things up in our pre-conversation but I will tell you, and I will tell you that I remember... jeepers, Bonnie, it is, and you don't know these things and I think a lot of the exploration of one's self and one's past... one's parenting. Maybe, maybe, the parenting wasn't ideal. Maybe it had little moments of real passion in there, maybe sometimes, or maybe it wasn't, or maybe, maybe it was... I think, in all of us as I as I go back and, and I had a wonderful childhood and was taught wonderful things by my parents about love and about non-hate, and about just being the best person you can be on any given day. Because you can you can and you will shock them on those days where you have, you are totally all there, and you're giving everything you have and you will surprise yourself. I mean, in those little nuggets that you get and now you... I can share that with others. I can say, "Yeah, you give it your best. You give it everything you have. Do not... don't flinch. Go. Give it." Okay, and then you receive. And it's a matter also of giving to others, people who may not... or may have something lacking in their past... some, some little element that you want to share with them to bring them forward. How wonderful is that? And that gift that you're giving them, you'll get that back tenfold. You get it back tenfold.

Bonnie Gillespie

So true, so true. Now, when... gosh I have so many different places that I want to go.

Kim Estes

I know. I do too, and we only got a couple minutes.

Bonnie Gillespie

I know, right? Where are we gonna go? Where're we gonna go? You sit down with people and help them kind of get out of their own way, sometimes. I know that is one of your values is to be able to help people as they're coming up. And I say "get out of their own way" but it's it's mindset stuff. What are some of the tools that work for you or that you recommend for those who are doing a little self-coaching, who don't have you, maybe?

Kim Estes

I think one of the, one of the big tools... just, just like we were talking just now, the reflection of... just self-reflection. Wherever you, wherever you've been, what, what were those shining

little moments that somebody gave you? Those little nuggets that someone gave you and you realized at one point and you ended with a smile on your face because they gave you some inspiration, stuff you didn't have before? So, I, I try to let people... one of the, one of the ways to get out of their own way is think about those things, those valuable moments that... those little pieces that someone gave you at some point in time: have you ever heard about, or did anybody ever, or, you know, have you have you ever given? And once you flip that and start that conversation, and that reflection takes place, then people realize that, "Yeah, yeah, those are those are moments." And those are moments that are real.

No matter how bad the rest of the world is, no matter how bad the rest of your life has been, you've had some of those moments and you need to self-reflect and get those... they're in there. Get 'em out, start talking about 'em. Start start breathing them because they're so good for you to breathe out in there so good for others to breathe in. And that way, that, that, that helps. So, I do have people tell me those things, and I think that starts the dialogue and it helps me understand them a little bit better, and starts them from it starts scooting... starts them scooting to the side of getting out of your own way. Like, okay, all right, so now you're moving in the right direction. Now, now you're starting to get a clear path on where you need to be and where you need to go and where you need to grow. And what what tools you need to work on.

Bonnie Gillespie

When we're talking about creating the Hollywood we want. We're, what is our responsibility as leaders in this industry and I believe we're all leaders if we've ever been given an opportunity on any set any size audience ever. What what is our responsibility, what is our... what do we have the... "the right" is the wrong word but it's it... I keep coming back to "responsibility", but what what is it that we *get* to do? What is it that we get to do with that leadership?

Kim Estes

A biggest, I will call it, I guess, obligation, or that the thing you get to do as leaders, where we can talk about ourselves and where we've been all week long and all year long... the ability for a leader to listen is a big, big tool. It's huge. Because, yes, I can give them those, those, those moments and nuggets and everything going on in my life and everything that has been goin' on and I've been so fortunate. But, but I think the biggest tool is the ability to listen and take it in and have them tell me what that thing was. Tell me what that thing is that you have given. What that, where, where in your situation, where in your life, in your situation currently, past, present... tell me, tell me about that. And that gives me a place to offer advice. Gives me avenues and tools that I can use to help them. I want to know where I can help you, so the only way I can figure... find that out is if you tell me. And so I want you to, to grab me, pull me by the shirt like. "Hey Kim. Hey, listen, this is where I am," and good. Because that helps me understand better where you are and what tools do I have to give you that can help you move along the way and get out of your own way. And realize darn it, you are enough. You're good, you're good. You are striving and you're moving down this road and that's, that's enough.

Bonnie Gillespie

I love that... two questions. First, what do we do when there's someone who's not listening, who's not active in that dance that you're describing?

Kim Estes

Other than shaking them?

Bonnie Gillespie

Yeah, 'cause sometimes we don't have the option. It's a studio head or if you know an ad exec, you know.

Kim Estes

Yeah. There's a, yeah, it was... how does that saying go and I think you... I got it either off of you, it's that confidence, it's a term that says what? Yeah, it's not it's not a matter of, you know, if they'll like me, it's a matter, it's a matter of, I know that I'm enough. It's that studio head that may not be shaken by what it is you're saying, realize that you're not going to, you're not going to convince everyone at that time. At that time! But I will tell you, they sleep at night, they think at night, they're going to think about what you have said they're going to think about those things, and it may look like they're not listening, but I'll guarantee you that they are. Subconsciously, it's going to be, it's going to be playing with them all through the night.

Bonnie Gillespie

That's good!

Kim Estes

I think, maybe, you know, it really, people will shut you down. You know, and it looks like they have totally shut you down and, you know, closed the curtain. But realistically a good person, they will... they'll put that in that... it stays right back here in this left rear bank, and it will come out at some point in time and they will realize that, "Yeah, I've heard that. Shoulda been listening. I should have paid attention to it. I should have reacted at that point in time. Now I have an opportunity to do that. Nice to have that point of view." And I just think the more times that's offered and not angrily, not in a bad way. It's just that you have voiced an opinion, which is not being heard. And the studio head is not really paying attention to you. Right at that moment.

Bonnie Gillespie

And I love that. That that is such an opening, again, getting that foot in the door. That's such an opening, because trusting there's, there's a part, there's a soul, there's a spirit there's something beyond just the ego that heard me all the way through, heard me, heart to heart. They just don't know it yet.

Kim Estes

That's right, heart to heart and have faith in that. And have faith that to have delivered that and you have done your job. You have delivered that, and I think that's so important. It is.

Bonnie Gillespie

So, so much of what you're describing, keeps coming back to what feels like a dance. That it's a co-creation. That there is partnership in all of this. How do you filter through all the opportunities, or all the possibilities to discern who are the partners that you want to dance with?

Kim Estes

You know, it's, it's not as if you are at the prom and you came with a date. It's as if you went to the school, the high school dance, where there were a bunch of opportunities, and you, and you just don't know. However, upon initial meeting there's something. And there's something more, or there's something less. And there's something, and the dance begins. And once that dance begins, you'll, you know, it's like you will meet people who have the same mindset, who are of the same ilk as you. And that's when that thing starts.

You know how amazing this this little strange town is. It's Hollywood. It'll be, it could be months, it could be months. And then you re-meet that person and it's almost like, "I met you at the dance. Yes, and I never forgot you. Don't think I'll ever forget you. I met you at the dance." So, writer, director, producer, hairstylist.

Bonnie Gillespie

Everybody.

Kim Estes

Some member... showrunner... some member, who, who had... you and them had a connection, and it could be it could be months, years. But how fun is that? To be able to, to, to go through that and go to and have as many dance partners as you can in life and meet them and shake hands and kiss babies... and shake babies and kiss hands. Yeah, kiss hands and shake babies, one of the two. So, it's like the, the ability, the wonderful piece about that is that even, even the shyest of us can have those relationships. And does it take someone to grab you and go, "Hey let me show you how to... let me show you this is this... c'mere. Come on, and let me, let me, let me help. Let me let me help guide, and this is, this is, these are the tools you use, the shyest creature on the planet, and I'll show you how some of that works. And I'll walk you through some of those."

Bonnie Gillespie

I want us to wrap on that specifically because I know that is a passion of yours, helping folks who identify themselves as shy. What advice would you give to anyone watching now who

says, "Yeah that's me and I'm mortified by promoting and networking and it all feels so icky"? Where's the starting point for that?

Kim Estes

The starting point is, I would say start... you can't come out of there like shotgun, if you don't have the right mixture of gunpowder. So, start small. Do it gently, and make it grow organically and I will tell you, you will surprise yourself by just doing the little things. The, the shaking of hands... well now it's... it's COVID but hopefully we'll get past this a little bit.

Bonnie Gillespie

Elbow bump or...

Kim Estes

It's something that says, it's very nice to meet you, whatever that gesture is. And it's not the head nod, it's not the... and of course a more gregarious person will definitely be a little more outgoing, and that may be the person who you are actually trying to engage. You don't have to match that, all you have to do is be you, and be whatever, wherever, whatever pace you are within that, within yourself to say, "Very nice to meet you." Big step, huge, because a shy person will just, will... the wallflower will just melt, go away, end up in a puddle. But we want to get you. I want to get you up off that off that ground, out of the puddle and at least being able to hold your ground and being able to utter those words or other words that will start a conversation with an individual. Does that take a little bit of homework? Maybe; it may take a little bit of background investigation. You have to do some work, especially if you're going to meet someone. If you don't, if you have... if you don't know who you're gonna meet then that's okay too. It's okay, just engage as much as you can. Don't go overboard but just engage as much as you can, as much as you're allowed to do so.

Bonnie Gillespie

I encourage setting baseline criteria, and sometimes it's: "Connect authentically with one person." That's the goal. And an authentic connection can be a look, can be a smile, can be a "big fan," can be "nice to meet you". And then it's done. Everything else is bonus points but I think so often we get into the "I have to network with 10 people" or "I have to send..."

Kim Estes

"I need 50 business cards before the night's over."

Bonnie Gillespie

Yeah, we've got to be done with that.

Kim Estes

Yeah. No, you are correct. The one person, and now it's really weird how that one person can change your life.

Bonnie Gillespie

That's right.

Kim Estes

That one person, because that one person, plus two more people plus three more people plus four more people.

Bonnie Gillespie

You never know.

Kim Estes

You never know; you have no idea.

Bonnie Gillespie

Kim, you've changed my life. Can you please tell everyone where they can plug in with you, keep up with you, stalk your ascent further and further to having more of those ladies around you?

Kim Estes

I know. Thank... thank you for giving me the opportunity to do that. You know, I'm, I'm on Instagram at @TheKimEstes and I've got a couple of pages on Facebook. Sometimes I get lost even trying to figure it out, and I think they've shut down my 5000-friend limit so I have to talk to my gurus to figure out why how do I meld this? I think I know... somebody sent me a note to figure out how to do it but I've got to do it so when I calm down, I'll meld the two pages together and make a fan page or something like that, I think that's the way it's done. So that's Instagram, Twitter, but you know, I am public. Which means that if you want to find me you can find me. I got phone numbers out there, I have email addresses out there, I'm public. So, by all means, if you're a friend of Bonnie Gillespie's, then you're a friend of mine, and that's for life. That is, she's my ride or die partner.

Bonnie Gillespie

I cannot wait to dance with you in person again very soon Kim. I love you. Thank you.

Kim Estes

All right. I love you too, Bonnie.