

The Art of Pitching

All right! You know I love the process of pitching! :) Soon you will too. In our MP3, I covered the **why** of pitching, and really, the reason we want to get very comfortable with the process of talking about ourselves in a meaningful way is because it helps our potential buyers, our potential representatives, our potential fans *easily* understand what it is we do, who we are, and how they can benefit from getting on board.

Let's think about Coca-Cola. Their brand is so easily identified, right? Just thinking: "Coca-Cola" or "Coke," you see their logo, you see the font they use, you see their iconic brand images. What's their company logline? "Drink Coca-Cola." Period. That's their mission. That's their brand. That's their pitch! Should you be able to come up with something so simple, that's *ninja*. But don't stress out if you cannot come up with something quite that iconic. I mean, Coca-Cola does have a good century or so on most of us, where building a brand—and talking about that brand—is concerned.

So, let me first take you through the process that Helenna Santos-Levy went through, in cultivating her pitch, back when she was experiencing "Pitch Clinic" in the *Self-Management for Actors Seminar* in Los Angeles. (Her words are in a different font from mine, so you can tell when it's Helenna sharing her process.)

First we did a typing exercise. We actors have done a bunch of these. You gather adjectives about you and make a list of what keeps getting said. This is to help determine your primary (and secondary) type, age range, perceived ethnicity, etc.

After the most recent typing exercise we did, I took the top descriptors and created this list:

AGE RANGE in order of most popular:

20-25 (5)

18-25 (3)

20-28

PRIMARY TYPE in order of most popular:

sorority girl/college student/high school student (6)

funny/comedic (5)

sexy (4)

exotic (4)

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girl-next-door (4)
lead's girlfriend (3)
the best friend (3)
urban/trendy/club-goer (3)
popular/cheerleader type/"gossip girl" (3)
bitchy/snobby/sarcastic (3)
quirky (3)
straightforward/tell it like it is (2)
middle to upper class/daddy's rich girl (2)
hot girl (2)
sweet (2)
badass/street smart (2)
perky/energetic (2)
intelligent (2)

(There were lots more, but those are the main ones.)

Then I looked for things that were synonymous and looked for the best adjective amongst them or found a better word (i.e.: "quick-witted"). Then I tried to find phrases that would encapsulate other things. Like... Care Bears for best friend... or the praying mantis for sexy/urban/club-goer/daddy's rich girl, etc.—things that gave me the FEEL for the descriptors.

After that I just started playing around with phrases. After finding my favorite words I pretty much started with: "I'm a quirky, quick-witted, exotic girl-next-door; sweet as a Care Bear, with a bite like a praying mantis."

Then I went to class and we shared our personal pitches in a simulated Pitch Clinic. After pitching to everyone, we did a discussion with each of us in the hot seat to learn what worked and what didn't. Turns out Care Bears were not good! So I tried to find something better that would give the same feel... but not so "cutesy." Something soft and sensual but still sweet, hence "honey."

So the logline became: "I'm a quirky, quick-witted, exotic girl-next-door; sweet as honey with a bite like a praying mantis."

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This phrase I think kicks ass because it has a ying and yang effect. I'm very quirky and sweet and kind, but can also play bitchy cynical and mean, etc. It shows that I'm smart and sassy, but sweet and energetic too.

The next stage of the process included coming up with my hybrid type match. I tried to look at actors my age doing the things I want to do who are like me, hence: "Mila Kunis meets Jordana Brewster." Both of them can be somewhat ethnically ambiguous. Mila Kunis plays cute, quirky, bitchy, etc., and Jordana Brewster has the sensual side... and I actually do look like a melding of the two!

Awesome! Now, keep in mind that a pitch does not HAVE TO include a logline, nor does it have to include a hybrid-cross type blend of known actors. ONLY if these things serve your pitch—by making it *easier* for the folks on the receiving end of the pitch to GET YOU—should you work to include them. But no matter what, your pitch should flow organically and easily. Even the words you choose to use in your self-description should be on-brand. For instance, I'll always have a "y'all" in my pitch, at some point. I'm folksy. Using the word "y'all" makes sense for me, and it is not only on-brand, but it's a very efficient way of conveying my folksiness!

Let's go back to Helenna and how the SMFA pitch-development process really served her. Helenna had been struggling with finding the perfect headshot. She had taken more headshots in the past five years than anyone I know. Finally, after nailing down her personal pitch, she went back through *old headshot proofs* to see if there might be something in there that absolutely nailed her logline. Guess what! There were plenty of options. And now—without even having to re-shoot—she has her type-nailing headshots. Ninja!

If you've ever found yourself feeling stuck when someone asks how they might best cast you or what you're best at, as an actor, developing a personal logline is going to do nothing but help you. It'll also drive your focus when you're submitting on breakdowns. Sure, you're "allowed" to just go ahead and click submit EVERY time you see your gender and approximate age range mentioned in the breakdowns, but isn't it far better use of your energy, your optimism over whether you're going to hear from casting, and your FOCUS to submit only when the role is absolutely 100% within your brand?

If you're keeping tabs on the "agents and managers only breakdowns" somehow (I don't ask; I don't tell. I think it's good for research, when that's how it's used), isn't it nice to know there's a role that is *so you* that you can send a little email to your agent, stating, "Hey, remember when I took you to lunch last month and we got really clear on my personal logline and primary type? I saw a breakdown

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for a role that is totally there. Just want to make sure it's on your radar for me, when you do today's submissions."

No fuss, no muss. Done and done.

Now, what if you're a hyphenate? You write, you direct, you produce your own work (YAY! More on that next month!), and you also act (and maybe even sing or model or dance or whatever). Well, this is where it becomes essential that you know your audience. Review **Resumé Feng Shui** for the finer points on this, but remember the bottom line is that you do not want to confuse people with your materials—and that includes your pitch! If you're a hyphenate (like me), you may not want to create a logline that (you feel) limits you. You may not want to say that you're a certain type of actor when you also sing and dance and model and write and produce and and and... yeah. Stop feeling that specificity limits you.

But isn't all the stuff you DO relevant? Sure. To you. And if it's relevant to anyone else, it'll come up in conversation. I'm a hyphenate, and when anyone hints interest in something that I left out of my pitch—because I'm a ninja at networking (more on that below)—I can find a way to work "fun facts" in there. At the point at which we're having this level of conversation, anyone who is meeting with me—either for my casting or writing or coaching services—pretty much knows the "other stuff" I do. So I don't have to put that in my logline. And neither do you.

Lead off with how you want the industry to see you. (And if you want to be seen as, "I can do anything and everything," I remind you that the Jack of All Trades is usually the Master of None. Sure, you may be a master of several things. Save that nugget 'til they've bought and paid for your services in the one thing for which you are primarily associated. Trust me. This is the shortest distance between two points—those points being wherever you are right now and where you ultimately want to be in this industry.)

So, let's have you do a little homework on **The Art of Pitching** at this point, and then we'll get into how to avoid the pitfalls of sloppy networking practices (which can totally undo all the power of a brilliant pitch). Start by reviewing the best words from the worksheets you used with **Your Bullseye**, along with the common themes that appeared in the **Show Targeting** work you did.

Look into the essence words associated with the characters in your target shows. If you "interviewed your bookings" to track your best-fit money-making roles, log those here too. Then hit a website like www.visualthesaurus.com to find words that help you with your pitch. If your target shows star actors of a very similar "feel" or "vibe" to what you put out into the world, flirt with including these folks in a hybrid-cross... but not if you're actively targeting those shows NOW.

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Now, go through and circle or highlight any words that really resonate with you, that continue to come up (especially across columns, as that's a great thruline for you to use), or that you'd simply love to say, when asked to talk about yourself, the types of roles you play, or where you see yourself as a brand. You're going to try and work these words into a few sentences that feel delicious, frankly. Because—even if your pitch is *accurate*—if it's not a blast to deliver, you will come off as fake, which is on-brand for almost no one.

While that good stuff ruminates, let's talk a bit about networking, and how a paradigm shift or two can make a huge difference in your ability to come off as natural, authentic, and on-brand (no matter what that brand may be) during networking opportunities that most creatives dread. First, let's make networking less "me, me, me" in its format.

There's this episode of *Friends* in which Ross and Rachel each come up with a list of famous people with whom they could "mess around" without their partner considering it cheating. When Isabella Rossellini—who was on an earlier draft of Ross' list—enters the coffee shop, Rachel tells Ross he can still "go for it" with Ms. Rossellini, even though his final list (without her on it) has been laminated. When Ross approaches Ms. Rossellini and propositions her, he assures her that "this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity." Her response? "For you."

Luckily, there's a kind of networking that's beneficial for everyone to the same degree. People come together to build relationships that could pay off in several different directions. Producers connect with directors whose vision they find inspiring. The directors need financial backing from people who believe in them. The producers need directors whose creativity inspires them to throw open their wallets (or find investors willing to go on the ride). Agents connect with casting directors on whose projects they want their up-and-coming actor clients seen. The CDs need access to the agents' highest-end clients in order to fulfill the producers' mission of a cast list that can make their project profitable. Casting directors connect with filmmakers whose work they enjoy. The filmmakers need CDs to help align them with top actors. The CDs need to work on higher-level projects to create relationships with higher-level agents who rep the higher-level actors. It all feeds into itself.

And actors network to connect with everyone. They meet writers who want to create vehicles for them (or at least who want to recommend the actors, on projects they've created). They need to meet up with filmmakers and showrunners and producers and playwrights and agents and casting directors... and find a way to spark some sort of motivation in each of us to *think of them* when we need an actor of their type. But when actors network, is it always one-directional? Is it always about how wonderful the opportunity would be *for the actor*, should this networking turn into something? Does the relationship, inherently, exist at the superstar Isabella Rossellini/"random goofy coffee house guy" Ross level? Or is there a way for actors to maximize what they "offer" the pros they encounter, in their networking endeavors?

Well, of course there is!

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I was thinking about the networking I see going on at the bigger actors' showcases. For instance, the network diversity showcases are always "see and be seen" events among casting directors, agents, managers, and even writers, directors, and producers. In addition to seeing some really talented actors doing great material in a fast-paced, comedic environment, we all also seem to dig the pre- and post-show reception opportunity to connect with our colleagues and, you guessed it, do a little networking. There will always be a manager whose voice I know well, over the phone, but who I've never met in person, when I hit one of these showcases. And it's great *for both of us* to get a little face time, so that our relationship is a little deeper, next time he calls to pitch an actor on a project I'm casting.

The actors who have just showcased for us will definitely be surrounded by industry types. We now know their work and, assuming we like it (and, c'mon, of course we do; these network showcases are very high-end, selective showcasing environments and these actors are generally ready for primetime), we're going to be approaching them to talk about our little indie film project or the pilot we've been tapped to cast. Agents are going to do a lap and chat up the actors they hope to represent in the future. In addition to our own industry-to-industry networking, we're looking to connect with the actors at these things. Lots of multidirectional networking going on.

But when a new-to-town actor reaches out to a CD or agent and says, "Let me take you to coffee," there's a whole lot of potential up-side for the actor getting this meeting. And a whole lot of potential down-side for the industry pro. Which is why this sort of invitation isn't often accepted. You maximize your chance for making this type of networking thing happen by bringing something to the table other than a sparse resumé, out-of-market headshots, and new-to-town enthusiasm. Obviously, the greater the chance that we might be scooping the rest of the town on tomorrow's "hot new star," the greater the chance that we're gonna see that meeting as filled with up-side for us too.

And that's what you want to create: a win-win meeting. It's good for you. It's good for us. Your ability to sell us on why it's good for us (we all already know why it's good for you, potentially) is key. I like the idea of approaching networking opportunities as if you are a host at a party, trying to introduce as many guests to one another as possible. The "who can I put on your radar" approach is a great way to add to the potential up-side, when you're trying to network.

For example, it's one thing to say that you've worked with the hot young filmmaker everyone's trying to score a meeting with at Sundance this week. That certainly helps eliminate some of the risk, when we're deciding whether to take time out to meet with you. But to say that you and the hot young filmmaker *du jour* are meeting up for coffee and you'd both love to have a particular agent join you to see if there's possible synergy in the relationships is to present a whole different level of opportunity. Now the agent might not only be meeting with a great future client (you) but perhaps meeting with someone (the hot young filmmaker) who will be a long-term source of work for potentially everyone on that agent's roster, should they hit it off and become besties.

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Whenever you can add to the incentives for a meeting to take place (by introducing a third party to whom the industry pro would love exposure OR even by being a powerful hyphenate yourself), you're far more likely to be met with anything other than that painful "don't call us, we'll call you" vibe, after you've gone to the trouble of reaching out. A word of caution: "Being a powerful hyphenate" does not mean "trying to be everything to everyone." It's only if you already ARE getting traction in another area of your career that you can wield your hyphenate status in a meaningful way, generally.

Here's another point I'd like to make about directional networking: Take advantage of opportunities that are presented to you. There *are* times when we do a little one-direction networking with you, without needing any of the up-sell on the up-side. It's mentoring. It's an important part of our job. It's good karma. When we show up at SAG Foundation events to provide a glimpse into what it's like, when you come in the room for us, take advantage of these opportunities. Sign up and show up. And don't follow us out to our cars afterward, begging us to help you get an agent (and then follow up the next day with a phone call, an email, and a fax for good measure). Be professional and be a professional. We'll notice that. I promise.

Yeah, we're hoping to demystify the process of how we do our jobs, somewhat, when we speak at these events. So there's an up-side in that the folks who attend, hopefully, will rock that much more when they're invited in for an audition or meeting, thereby making our jobs easier. But it's not like we're there *specifically* hoping to find "the next big actor" while we're speaking about whether we watch demo reels or if postcards are effective marketing items. In fact, we don't expect that to happen at all. (We're thrilled if it does, but that's not our motivation in showing up at these events.)

Here's a question for you: How often do you network in the direction you're asking us to network? How often do you meet with new-to-town, enthusiastic, completely-clueless-to-the-biz actors upon whose lives you could make a huge positive impact, just by showing them how to format their resumé or where to download sides? Not too often, right? ("Why would I? What's in it for me? Who has the time?" Exactly.) Well, let's seek to change that. Do a little mentoring. Pay it forward. Invest in a relationship with someone who offers you absolutely nothing whatsoever in return. (And let two things wash over you, here. One: note that agents, managers, casting directors, producers, and directors are asked to do exactly this type of thing *every day* by *many newbies*. You do it a few times and consider the ridiculous volume of requests to do it we're fielding and you'll understand why it's both rare that we engage in it and a huge deal when we do. Two: mentoring can be a wonderful way to remind yourself of how far you've come. It can allow you to get a different perspective on the day-to-day stuff you're facing. It could even connect you with someone whose career will skyrocket long before yours does, and that person might be so grateful to you for the early support that you'll benefit in ways you never imagined possible.)

Networking in Hollywood is often seen as an "all about me" venture. That simply doesn't have to be the case. We can change the direction of networking right now.

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Next, let's look at networking as an opportunity to improvise! That's always fun, right?

Occasionally, an actor will want to talk with me about the "torture" of networking. Of course, I don't see networking as torture. I see it as something I used to be bad at and now, something that I'm very good at. That took work. And research. And practice. But many actors see networking as a "necessary evil" affiliated with pursuing a career in showbiz. And it's certainly necessary, but that doesn't make it evil. ;)

So, let's consider the improvisational staple of "Yes, and...." It's that wonderful way that every question is answered, in which every line of dialogue is met. Okay, so you know how to "yes, and..." when you're acting. Let's look at networking as a great opportunity to do even more of that.

First off, realize that no one is at a *legitimate* networking event because he or she has been *paid* to be there. Of course, there are networking events for which professionals are paid for their time, but even with those types of events, the high-profile people who might've lined their pockets in exchange for an hour or two don't *have to* stick around and chat with you unless they want to.

Therefore, the biggest misconception of networking—that no one really wants to meet you or spend time with you—is exactly that: a misconception. If the CD, the agent, the manager, the producer, the director, the writer, is *there*, talking to you, it's because he or she wants to be there, talking to you.

Now, how to make that a less-than-torture-filled experience. ;)

Well, if you're at a networking event that takes place after a play or a showcase, you know that these fine folks have experienced your work and want to chat with you to get to know more about who *you* are, outside of that work they just saw you do. If you're at an event that begins with a Q&A or panel discussion by the industry pros and then ends with a mixer, well, then these folks may not know anything about you other than the fact that you belong to this group. Start from there.

No, your job isn't to sidle up next to someone in the industry and begin spouting off an oral resumé. Honestly, the best opening line you can give to anyone is very simply: "Thank you so much for being here." If that is met with a reply of, "Well, thank you so much for having me," then you're given the greenlight for continuing communication. (If you get a polite smile and nod, just move along.) Most folks are going to say, "Oh, no problem! I enjoy this group so much. You did good work tonight," and then you have your opportunity to reply with a: "Wow! Thanks! I had a blast doing it." (Remember, never tell someone they're wrong for having enjoyed your work. That's a very bad actor habit, and one that's so easy to overcome with practice.

Must you have things in mind, ready for networking chitchat? No. Not if you're a good improviser. Here's where that "yes, and..." comes in.

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CD: I really liked your scene.

You: Thank you so much! I had a really good time working on it. My scene partner is awesome.

CD: Yes. She did a very nice job. But so did you.

You: It's a blast when you have great material, a wonderful partner, and a support team to make you look good.

CD: Don't downplay your talent. You are very talented.

You: Well, it means a lot to me that you were here to see the show. Is there anyone you wanted to meet that you haven't seen yet?

CD: Actually, yes. Thank you for asking. I'd love to meet your director. Is he here?

And on from there. This is a great example of how someone who would ordinarily deflect compliments in the way Wonder Woman deflects bullets with her bracelets can turn every bit of the conversation into an opportunity to "yes, and..." while not feeling like an egomaniac or a denial-driven actor.

What about audition room chitchat? Is that a form of networking? Absolutely! Is it a sign that you're more likely to book or less likely to book, if it happens or doesn't happen, after your audition? Nah. Sometimes we know we're running behind, so we don't do pre-audition chitchat but will take the time after to do so with a really strong candidate (or even an actor who is wrong for THIS role but perhaps right for another role—or even a role in another project—but we don't have time to have him read for that other role, so we'll chat in case there's a natural glint in his personality that shows us he could do that other role). But I've seen actors asked to stay in for a chat and be the absolute last choice in producers' minds; they're just fascinated by something on the actors' resumés or want a date or something. Many times, the chitchat has *nothing* to do with whether you're close to booking the role.

Can bombing that small talk can keep you from booking when you did a really strong audition? Well, yeah. Absolutely. And that's why we're working this month to help you get ninja with your pitch! Let's say you're totally right for the role and you did a great job at the audition. But the director has another actor in mind who he knows really well in person. He knows, based on this relationship and the subtleties of the non-work-environment interactions, that that actor is a great fit for the role. And if you can both be a better actor than that other actor who is on his mind AND hit those subtle levels of personality that come out in chitchat, the role is yours. If instead you choke in that moment and give really bad "room," you're less likely to book, simply because these folks know they're investing in days or weeks on set with you, and they have to "feel you" sometimes. This is where it gets back to the whole, "it's a lot like dating" thing: No one wants to spend a ton of time around someone they're feeling no connection with.

Okay, so outside the audition room, outside the meeting room, when you're looking to get practice with this whole networking thing, let's start with being sure you've got that proverbial deck stacked in

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your favor, when it comes to working the room. The best way for you to keep working at networking is to start having good experiences, early. Here's how to help make that happen.

Choose the right scene. Make sure you're not setting yourself up for failure by showing up at a place that is too cool for you (or an event that's not cool enough for you). The mismatch will be what we see and feel in you and it'll be what you remember about the event. Know your speed and go there. That doesn't mean, "Get trapped in a comfort zone," but it does mean, "Don't go to a velvet rope party if you'd rather hang out at a place with peanut shells on the floor."

Do your homework. If there's anything you can figure out about the people you're meeting before you meet them, do so. This is the point the person who most pissed me off at one particular Hollywood Happy Hour event violated (yes, really). You *know* I'm going to be there. I'm co-creator of the networking group itself, and it's due to my promo blasts that you even know this thing is happening. So, dude, Google me. Don't come up, shake my hand, and ask, "So how do I get in on projects you're casting?" No. No, no, no, no, no. I've—many times—posted info online about exactly how that process happens. Why waste your facetime with me asking about something you could've learned before we met? Why make sure the impression I'm left with, of you, is not about YOU, but about what you didn't bother to look into, ahead of time.

Build your networking skills. Confidence is attractive. We like being around people who (seem to) feel comfortable in their own skin. Fake it if you have to. Talk about things, not people. Things are better/safer topics. Things are easier topics. If someone insists on bringing the topic back around to people, always find a way to compliment others; never gossip. Remember that it's not about you even when it's about you. Almost no one comes to a networking event with a singular agenda to become an expert on YOU. Even if you feel like the spotlight is right on you (and you're feeling the heat), it probably isn't... even if you're the topic of conversation. If compliments make you uncomfortable, do a totally covert type of deflection using responses like, "Isn't this fun?" at a show reception or "Wasn't that a great film?" after your big screening. If you're really struggling with remembering names, employ kinesthetic remembering and repetition to help with that. The simple act of physically connecting with someone else while saying their name does wonders for cementing that person's name in your memory. Handshakes, touches of the arm, hugs (when appropriate, of course) all work. And if you're in an environment where that's not possible, repeat the person's name a few times within a few moments (once or twice aloud, early in the conversation; the rest of the time in your head, as the conversation is just getting started and you're unlikely to miss more than early pleasantries). Develop talking points and fun facts as backup. For example, think of three to five bullet-point items you would have your publicist hand to David Letterman, before you appeared on his show. Even though you won't be prepping a host for interview topics, the fact that you have a couple of fun facts in your back pocket could yield some great conversation starters--especially if you have done your homework and know where your fun facts intersect with the fun facts of those with whom you're meeting!

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Use a wingman. I love this tactic. The buddy system worked for grade school field trips and it works for Hollywood networking. Have an ally and check in with each other. Do so for meeting folks you don't already know, remembering names, taking the pressure off when you feel the need to carry a conversation, and for getting "tapped out" when you drink too much. I remember a HHH event at which we had a few folks who *way* overindulged. It's not pretty when I have to say to a producer, "I'd love to introduce you to that awesome actor over there, but she's falling down drunk, so let's do it another time." A good wingman keeps that from getting so ugly. A good wingman also helps you from being vulnerable if someone skeezy is on the prowl, rather than actually looking to do authentic connecting with fellow professionals.

Play host. I know, I've covered this before, but it's one of the most effective ways to survive networking, if you're filled with anxiety about it. Introduce folks who don't know one another. Again, this takes the pressure off you as the one doing all of the meeting, and gives you the comfort of a familiar face standing next to you as you muster up the courage to meet someone you've been targeting. Don't play host the whole night, just long enough to loosen up about what may have you filled with anxiety: Meeting that next new person of your own. You'll see—by introducing others—it's no big deal.

Finally, I'd love to go through some of what NOT to do when in networking opportunities where you may get that opportunity to pitch.

Being too vague. Now, of course there are projects you might be working on that have elements not yet open to the public. Got it. But when you say too little about anything, we wonder if it's actually "for real" or if it's fictional action going on. It's like mentioning a boyfriend no one ever meets. At least give the guy a name.

Being cliché. Just like no one wants to read in your bio that you began acting "at the tender age of five" or that "Hollywood was calling," no one wants to hear you *speaking* in Hollywood clichés. Come up with actual, meaningful, not-overused words and phrases that help cement your brand and let us get to know you. Yada, yada, yada.

Being all about the business cards. I'm sure somewhere, some well-meaning career coach thought it would be brilliant to tell actors, "never leave an encounter without that person's business card." Bullshit. If you're obsessed with getting or giving out business cards, you're missing the whole point of an in-person networking event. It's to *get* one another. It's to *connect* as people.

Complaining. Dude. No one comes to a party to listen to you grouse about how much the economy sucks, or how crappy your little apartment is, or how much you hate Los Angeles, or how you're dropping your "useless agent," or anything else you need to go to therapy about. Chronic complainers are like that Peanuts character Pig Pen. The cloud of ick stays around far too long. Don't be that guy.

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Dressing poorly. Now, I have to be careful on this one, as I am absolutely never going to be accused of being a fashion plate. I have one or two things I like to wear and that's what I wear *all the time*. But when I see an actor show up at a networking event in gym-wear, I'm just kind of shocked. This isn't yoga class. Put on a bra for cryin' out loud! And please, run a comb through your hair and swish some mouthwash around. Finally, for the love of all that is holy, do not *bathe* in cologne. *shudder* Thank you.

Ingratiating yourself into conversations. I get that this one is a tougher balance, especially if you're not so good at reading signals from others. (Oh, dear God, you're an actor. Get good at reading people! Please!) But when you pop over to say goodbye—interrupting the conversation to do so—make it quick and then go. Don't turn it into an opportunity to launch into a story that no one wants to hear, now that you have the attention of someone. Sure, hang out near people who are talking and nod along with their chat, but unless you're given the physical or verbal signal to join in, be careful. And whatever you do, don't join in and then make it *all about you*.

Arm yourself for success. If you're mentally prepared to succeed, you will. Know (and stick to) your limit on drinks, have a wingman, know the scene and the people who will be there ahead of time, feel good about yourself and be prepared to chat but not to come on too strongly. Go in with a gameplan and be good at reading the room! This is key.

Find balance. Devote some time to your existing friends, of course, but don't let them dominate your time to the exclusion of meeting new people. Meeting new people *is* the whole point of being there, right? You need to connect with folks and broaden your circle, find connections you never knew existed. Be ready to grow your business with like-minded people. Have fun while doing business.

Read the room. Read people. Yes, I've already said this, but it's so vitally important. *Feel* when the conversation has reached its natural end and excuse yourself to return to the bar, say hello to another colleague, or—when all else fails—hit the restroom. Be good at engaging and knowing when to disengage too.

Don't be needy. Needy throbs like a toothache. Find a way to turn that stuff *off*. Don't think about how among these people could be your next agent or someone who could cast you in something or anyone who may "change your life" in any way. That's like going on a first date thinking up baby names. Just don't do it. We all feel it. Relax and enjoy getting to know people. Take the pressure off yourself and off us!

Be ready. Be ready for the tough questions ("How long have you been in town?" "What are you working on?") and the easy ones ("How do you know so-and-so?" "Where are you from?") but try not to ask the tough ones of anyone. You know it feels like crap to be asked what you're working on when the answer is, "Nothing." And you know it's tough to spin that you're "new in town" when asked, directly, how long you've been here. So don't put others through that, unless they offer a bit up.

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Some of my favorite people to meet at networking events are actors new to town. The truly ninja folks volunteer that information, saying, "I just got here and figured I should jump in and meet people!" Then I can follow up with asking where they're from or how long they've been here, without putting someone who's been here a decade and who has yet to build any sort of career traction in an uncomfortable spot. We can chat about what they have learned about LA thus far and what still confuses them (usually the freeways) and then can talk about "must do" things or "must see" places. Easy stuff. No pressure. All personality.

Producers, directors, writers, casting directors, etc., can get really tired of being asked what they're working on. It's not because they're not working on anything, it's that they can be made to feel like just grabbing a mic at some point and announcing the list to the entire venue, once and for all, because having to repeat it all so many times becomes tedious. Sure, we're often defined by others through what it is that we do, but shouldn't we—the most creative people on the planet—find a way to have a little more fun with this topic?

I attended a networking function with a group of non-industry-related folks and a creative non-industry colleague and I talked about different ways to answer the, "What do you do?" question. We came up with, "I pursue happiness," and, "I have fun," and, "I make sure all of the best people I know know one another," and, "I avoid answering that question," and, "I do something different every day," and many other creative and not-so-creative options. Even better, we decided we'd no longer ask that question of others, at networking events. She pledged to ask, "What are you good at?" and I pledged to ask, "What makes your heart sing?"

Trust me, the answers to those questions are far more interesting, revealing, and fun to listen to! Better yet, the answers may be more in-line with your pitch, your brand, your logline than you may ever imagine possible! Won't that be fun to bring together, organically? :)

So, why get good at networking? Well, you don't have to, of course, but it sure does help! Considering the fact that those of us in the business of filtering talent to buyers will use any excuse to remove someone from a list, that you were *bad* at networking when we last encountered you could be enough to keep you from advancing on a project or staying on a list at an agency. The numbers are huge, and we'll use whatever help we can to thin them sometimes. So, increase your odds that it's not your "bad networking" that got you uninvited from the room.

Let yourself off the hook when it doesn't go well. You're building a muscle and that takes time. Practice shaking hands, schmoozing, and entering and leaving ongoing conversations with a safe group of friends and colleagues 'til you get more confident. Don't strive for perfection, just "better than last time" each time. And remember Maya Angelou's ultimate bottom line on all issues related to relationships: "People don't remember *you*. They remember *how they feel while in your presence*." Let that always be a positive thing.

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Here's what I love about not just getting GOOD at networking, but about getting NINJA with networking: It leads to the opportunity for you to come into the room and pitch, one-on-one, later. Yes, that's the truth of all this: You must get good at networking so you can get more opportunities to pitch. Of course, you may be invited in to pitch just based on your headshot, your resumé, your reel, one great performance that builds a new fan of your work. Awesome! But hitting networking venues and giving good room is a surefire way of boosting your chances of getting invited in for meetings in which you can pitch yourself like a pro!

How's your homework going? Have you taken advantage of family dinners to test out your pitch? Have you practiced networking at non-entertainment-industry events? Have you fired up your webcam and shot a pitch to test out your wording and presentation, even your wardrobe? DON'T DELAY! Practice now will benefit you later, when that golden opportunity comes along. The time to get ninja at pitching is NOT the day you've received the invitation to do so!

Please submit your questions for our follow-up MP3 this week, so we can get you covered before the end of this month's interactive module! Email: ninjaassistant@cricketfeet.com and use the subject line: **Pitching Question**, so we can easily track it and get you in the queue to help out with your questions, before we head into next month's awesome interactive module in *SMFA Essentials*. Yippee!

Enjoy your journey to the next tier, y'all. I hope **Pitching** is becoming more and more fun for you already. Yeah, I know... not likely. It's tough for most creatives! So, that's why I want you to practice, arm yourself for success, and get your questions over to me. :) We'll make this **The Art of Pitching** the more we do it! Next month, we'll move on into producing your own content, specifically using EVERYTHING we've done all these months so far to be sure what you create is the ultimate representation of what it is you do best. What a great way to help the buyers feel there's no risk in hiring you to do just that! Ninja!

We are ridiculously lucky to have a life in which we get to live our dreams, every day. Being blissed out, confident, and absolutely capable of achieving your every goal along the way is totally do-able. Unless you're SURE it's impossible, folks, every little dream you hear whispering to you is absolutely, totally attainable. The *Self-Management for Actors* principles **work**. Ninja badassery abounds. **Bonnie Gillespie is living her dreams by helping others figure out how to live theirs.** She casts SAG-AFTRA indie feature films and series such as the zombie smash hit *BITE ME*, which made the leap from web to TV with **Lionsgate** in 2012. Bonnie is founder and producer of Hollywood Happy Hour, Somebody's Basement, and Get A-Listed. Her weekly column, **The Actors Voice**, runs at Actors Access and her podcast, **The Work**, is available on iTunes. Her books include *Casting Qs: A Collection of Casting Director Interviews*, *Acting Qs: Conversations with Working Actors*, and *Self-Management for Actors: Getting Down to (Show) Business*, which has been named one of **The Top Ten Best Books on Acting Ever Written** and featured at the Tom Cruise actor resource blog. Bonnie regularly facilitates seminars based on this top-selling book and has traveled internationally—to demystify the casting process and the business side of pursuing an artistic career—as a guest instructor at colleges, universities, actors' unions, and private acting studios. Bonnie has been interviewed on *Good Morning America*, *BBC Breakfast*, UTV-Ireland, CBC Radio One, BBC Radio 5, E! Online, and in the *LA Times*. To hop on Bonnie's mailing list, please visit BonnieGillespie.com.



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