

Your Bullseye

Ready to really hit **Your Bullseye**? Ready to walk around with the confidence that comes from knowing exactly what it is that you deliver, most effortlessly, and from knowing that your only job is to show the buyers, "This is what I do. All day. Without even thinking about it. This is my bullseye," so they can feel at-ease in casting you? This principle is at the core of everything else we do in *Self-Management for Actors*. Let's get to it.

First, let's talk about the importance of having a specialty. I've seen posts all over the Internet by artists who quote Robert A. Heinlein's 1973 *Time Enough for Love* à la, "specialization is for insects." Actors in particular love this quote, because it allows them to be all the various characters and types they want to be, as they pursue acting. It also goes against my oft-repeated philosophy that this business is about specialists, and that actors need to know—and market to the top buyers of—their specific brands in order to get a shot.

I'm going to beg you not to get too excited about a quote that—taken out of context—gives you permission to be all the colors of the rainbow as an actor, but instead ask you to drill deeper to understand how using your primary brand, your specificity, **YOUR BULLSEYE** actually gets you farther faster... and to a place where you absolutely can, *eventually*, show your range. But it's knowing, selling, and living your bullseye that gets you the shot at showing the world what *else* is on your dartboard.

Okay, so, an insect specializes. Got it. I can visualize a group of ants working tirelessly to bring discarded food, bit by bit, across the yard, up the anthill (built by specialists), down into the belly of the space that is a maze of caves (all created by other ants who specialized in that task). Most actors don't want to be ants, doing the same task over and over again, in service to the community. I say "most actors," because some do actually *get this* and totally know that being paid to do the same boneheaded character between "action" and "cut" for years on a top series is a lovely "insect-like" thing to do... **all the way to the bank.**

But for those who want to be everything, play everything, never specialize, I simply ask that you reflect on the careers of the successful actors you love most. They probably specialized 'til they reached a certain point in their careers, at which point they were invited to show the world what else they could do.

Back to visualization: Now it's not an anthill. It's a studio lot. And you—and another thousand or so folks—are driving a car (or being driven in a car—yay, you!) onto the lot. You're a specialist who has been hired to act. The guy being let through the gates ahead of you is the one who's been hired to do makeup a particular way (a specialty for which he has become known). The one in the car behind you is a script supervisor whose unique skills are valued. Everyone has a specialty. Yes, you may like to do drama sometimes, but this particular show is a sitcom and you're being paid very well to come to set and do the "same damn thing" that made the buyers fall in love with you (way back at the preread—and at many years of prereads before that), over and over and over again. Cash the check. You're a specialist... **all the way to the bank.**

Eventually, you'll be a specialist who gets to show the world other specialties you have. You'll have so many *different* specialties that your fans (based on your having done the drudgery of "insect work" all the way up to and then *on* that first project that got you known as a commodity worth investing in, of course) will follow along and check out your range. Some may love it. Some will want you to stick to your specialty. Think about how you feel, as a consumer of music, when your favorite band has an album in which they "try out something

Ready for the tier-jump of your life? * **Get A-Listed** * www.GetA-Listed.com



new." You hate it! You want them to deliver that thing they're known for. You want them to provide you with more brilliant music that is their specialty. :) Same thing!

Heck, I get the reluctance. I remember watching the Super Bowl earlier this year and seeing an ad for the next in the *Transformers* series. Before I even knew what the ad was for, I said, to myself, "Pff. Michael freakin' Bay." How did I know it was Michael Bay (or at least, Michael Bay-like) from the first seconds? Well, he's well-branded for his specialty. It may not be for everyone, but it's a brand that served him while he was starting out and got him to where he is today. (And if you think about how much it must suck to be so well-branded—AKA pigeonholed—I suggest you consider how often such a specialist can wipe his tears with hundred dollar bills.)

When you think about how far you'd like to stretch your range, rage against the Hollywood machine, and try to prove that you can be cast being all things to all people at all times, please consider that the "specialization is for insects" thing is only offensive if your specialty is moving bits of food from the yard to the anthill. If your specialty is getting paid well to show up on set and deliver *that thing* that you make look effortless, your youth, your bullseye—then lucky you!

Let's talk about that whole "effortless" thing. My partner, Keith, loves to talk about the casting process like this: **"They want you for what you make look effortless."**

I love that. It's so true. Whatever it is you're providing—if you're an actor, that's your interpretation of the sides at your audition; if you're a writer, that's your well-crafted sentences that take readers on a ride; if you're a producer, that's your detail-oriented logistic ninjassity that saves everyone money and time—when you make it look like it's just "no big thing" that you created the intended result, you've made it look *effortless*. And the buyers want that.

I watched an infomercial for something called a Magic Bullet recently and actually left that half-hour experience thinking I *could* be a fine cook (even though I burn water and am not to be trusted in the kitchen, ever) because this thing made prep, cooking, and clean-up look *effortless*. Now, I know better, because I have an entire closet filled with exercise equipment of some type or another, each bought with the enthusiasm of "look how easy it is" that didn't measure up to the truth of actually *using* the dang thing.

But the point is, when it's made to look *effortless*, it is *desired*.

When athletes are in the zone, they can pull off a half-court shot at the buzzer and make it look like they sink that shot *every* time. Same with the hole-in-one, the amazing end-zone catch for a touchdown as the clock ticks over to 0:00, the outfielder's gravity-defying leap to catch a ball destined for the seats far above his head. Effortless work looks phenomenal. It makes us cheer.

Let's be clear: It takes a *lot* of work.

Make sure you've prepared. Make sure you're well-trained before you even attempt to *get work*. Practice enough that you can make your choices look effortless when you score that audition. Start with what you already make look effortless and build from there. What are you seriously badass at doing, right now? Sure, part

Ready for the tier-jump of your life? * **Get A-Listed** * www.GetA-Listed.com



of the fun of acting is stretching beyond your comfort zone, and you should do that too, of course, but start by embracing the effortless. It's different for everyone, and everyone has something, so start there.

That's how you'll build toward your bullseye, by way of celebrating your "youness."

So, do you celebrate your youness? You know, that stuff that makes you uniquely you. Or do you show up for an audition and immediately start angling, based on what you think they're looking for?

One of these choices makes you an actor. The other puts you in the psychic business, and *that's* not anywhere close to what they're looking for! I get that it's tempting. You *are* a chameleon, based on years of actor training. You *can* change up your choices, based on years of practice doing so. You *are* an intuitive critter and you *do* want to please others—especially if pleasing someone gets you this gig right now!

But I'll recommend that you get out of the habit of trying to read the room—or worse, hustling for info in the waiting room, or taking seriously whatever other auditioning actors are saying as The Truth about what *they* believe they're looking for in the room—with the goal of changing up your read to please anyone. Get information, sure. But don't let *anything* throw off the hard work you've done in prep for your time in the room.

Beyond the auditioning room, this advice goes for selecting headshots or putting together your demo reel! By trying to be everything to everyone, you successfully accomplish only one thing: Not being yourself to anyone.

I like to use the analogy of a dartboard, with the bullseye being your ultimate youness. It's where you are, at your core, when you work on a role. Sure, you may play the creepy bad guy and not truly be a bad guy, but that bad guy is your bullseye and a trusted clergyman is somewhere in the outer rings of the dartboard. Doesn't mean you can't hit that role—of course you can, you're an actor—but it means it's a bit off the mark of who you are, effortlessly.

More importantly, it's someone else's bullseye.

And in a town like Los Angeles in particular, specializing in hitting your bullseye is the smartest use of your time, your effort, and your focus.

Sure, you can walk in, read the room, figure they're looking for someone younger and try and come off younger in your read. But someone else is going to walk in younger, be younger, bullseye younger. Why compete with that? Instead, chalk it up to one of those auditions where you got to show 'em your take on the role (even if it's going to go to someone younger, creepier, quirlier, whatever) and, most importantly, you got to show them your youness, so that they can call you in "better" next time.

Okay, but what if you don't yet know **Your Bullseye**? You have an idea. You know who you are, pretty much. But you hear so much about TYPE and you see so many words in the breakdowns and—because of your training as an actor—you know you can *do* just about anything, so you do the same thing that most actors do: Submit on anything that fits, show up, do your best, and then... wonder why you've not been successful in building a BRAND. Ah. Well, type is a tool to lead us to **Your Bullseye** (which is where your brand lives, by the way). So, let's start with an easy, fun, fairly common typing exercise to build toward the good stuff at a tier above that simple foundation.

Ready for the tier-jump of your life? * **Get A-Listed** * www.GetA-Listed.com



How do you type yourself? You get outside help. You provide a list of words, approach others (especially folks who know you not at all, ideally), and get them to tell you how you present in the room. Take the below list (which is by no means an exhaustive list), a clipboard, and a pen, and go take a survey!

addicted	comical	enabler	husky
adventurous	commanding	enthusiastic	hyper
aggressive	community leader	entitled	ill
all-American	complex	ethical	ingénue
aloof	concerned	excitable	innocent
amoral	condescending	excited	insecure
analytical	conservative	exotic	integrity-filled
angry	cool	fearful	intelligent
anonymous	cougar	feisty	intense
anxious	cowboy	forthright	intuitive
articulate	crazy	fragile	jerk
artistic	cunning	frat boy	jock
assertive	curious	frustrated	judge
athletic	curvy	fun-loving	judgmental
attractive	cute	funky	keeping a secret
awkward	cynical	funny	know-it-all
bad	dangerous	gay	laid-back
badass	dedicated	geeky	law enforcer
bastard	defiant	girl-next-door	lawyer
beautiful	desperate	good ol' gal	leader
best friend	detective	good-natured	leading lady/man
big-city	determined	goofball	lecherous
bitch	direct	gorgeous	liar
blue-collar worker	disgruntled	grounded	lighthearted
bold	distant	handsome	loose
bootylicious	doctor	happy	loveable
boss	dogmatic	hard-boiled	loyal
bouncer	doofus	healthy	menacing
boy-next-door	douchebag	heartthrob	metrosexual
busy-body	druggy	helpful	middle-class
caring	dumb	hero	MILF
charming	eager	hippy	military
chatty	eccentric	homebody	misunderstood
cheerful	educated	honest	moody
childlike	efficient	hooker	musician
chubby	elderly	hottie	mysterious
clever	elegant	humble	nerdy
close-minded	embodiment of evil	hunky	newbie

Ready for the tier-jump of your life? * **Get A-Listed** * www.GetA-Listed.com



nosy	religious	slimy	trust-fund baby
nurse	reserved	small-town	trustworthy
open-minded	resilient	smarmy	uneducated
optimistic	responsible	smart	unemployed
parental	rich	smarty-pants	upper-crust
partier	rockstar	smooth	vapid
patient	romantic	socialite	victim
perfectionist	rugged	soft	villain
perky	sad	solid	violent
perplexed	sarcastic	sophisticated	vivacious
philosophical	sassy	sporty	voluptuous
police officer	scientist	stripper	waiter
poor	searching	strong	weak
popular	secretary	stylish	wealthy
poser	seducer	suave	white-collar
positive	seductive	suck-up	wicked
powerful	self-assured	suspicious	wild child
pragmatic	self-made	sweet	wimpy
precious	selfish	tabloid reporter	wise
predator	sensible	talkative	witty
pretty	sensitive	teacher	world traveler
princess	sensual	tech-savvy	young
privileged	sentimental	technophobic	yuppie
professor	sexual	terrorist	zany
proper	sexy	thrifty	zealous
provocative	shameless	thug	
psycho	shocking	tolerant	
punky	shy	tormented	
pushy	sidekick	tough	
quirky	slacker	tourist	
relatable	sleazy	troubled	

For the truly **ninja**: Include ethnicity and age range, plus nationalities, types of shows that would be a good fit, genres of films, products, all of it!

Ready for the tier-jump of your life? * Get A-Listed * www.GetA-Listed.com



Overwhelmed? Great! Now let's get it to a manageable state. What are you supposed to do with all of these words? Well, the best thing to do is to carry around copies of the master list (especially once you get rid of words that will *never* describe you as you now are—but don't limit the list *too* much) and whenever you have time to kill (you're early for a CD workshop, you're on a break during acting class, you're in the lunchroom at your day job, you're at school, you're at the DMV), start asking folks to circle the half-dozen words that best describe you. Over time, you'll see patterns emerge. You'll learn which themes align for the storyteller you are. Clusters of words will keep coming up and you'll soon realize that you're way more small-town than big city. Or you're coming off as an intellectual when you've always felt you were a doofus.

Why does this matter? Well, when casting directors put out a breakdown, sometimes they ask actors to submit on the one role for which they're best matched then use the notes section to list other roles for which they might like to be considered. When an actor instead submits on all seven of the male roles, it conveys three things: 1. He can't read; 2. He's desperate to play any role, no matter what; and 3. He doesn't know his primary type, because clearly he believes he could be both a 20-year-old nerd and a 45-year-old punk rocker, which simply isn't likely.

As we've already discussed, Hollywood is a town of specialists. Whatever market you're in, knowing your specialty is going to help you communicate your brand to the buyers. Most folks don't want to know *all* the things you can do. We want to know about the one thing you do *best* and we want you to do that every time we call you in... **all the way to the bank**. We like to know that *you* know your strengths. It's not impressive to see that you think you could play *every* role equally well. It's impressive to see that you know where *you* rock the most and we love it when you rock exactly like that, every time we call you in. Once you've been at it for a while and have built fans out of the buyers, you can spread out and show them the other amazing things you can do. But actors who LEAD with that "I can do anything" agenda are seen as scattered, unfocused, *desperate*. Don't be that actor!

Now, about your headshot. :)

You don't have to wait until you've nailed your bullseye to find out what type your headshot is selling. Yes, your headshot is a placeholder for those of us who already know your work, but because you may be trying to get in front of casting directors who don't yet know you, it's also important to be sure your headshot sells exactly what you're going to be able to deliver when you walk through the door in person.

All right. So. Let's do some MORE homework.

Ready, ninjas? We're going to get into your typing words, how to organize the data you get, how to map out your castability, and then how to spend your energy going forward.

Since the typing exercise is one most actors have done before, the bulk of this module is focused on the stuff you can do on your own, to "yes, and..." the work you've likely already done, in self-typing!

FIRST, TRY THIS → Post a link to your most-used headshots on your blog or your Facebook page or your Twitter stream or whatever space you use to interact with folks the most. They don't have to be in the business. They don't have to know you. (In fact, the less they know you in person, the more effective this exercise will be, because they're going to be able to tell you what type your headshot **says you are**,

Ready for the tier-jump of your life? * **Get A-Listed** * www.GetA-Listed.com



irrespective of what they know about you as a person.) Better to NOT provide a list of words, here, because you don't want to lead the people who are helping out toward something when they're already gonna have a hard time divorcing themselves from what they know of you, personally, to do this.

Is your headshot selling what you're selling? If those types don't align, you're running the risk of committing the number-one top sin of all sins in this industry, the number-one top pet peeve mentioned by casting directors worldwide: You don't look like your headshot. You're misrepresenting yourself with a headshot that doesn't sell what you're selling. It's like having a business card with a misprint in your phone number. What's the point?

A great tip on typing (especially if you're shy and don't want to do typing exercises as we've outlined, here) comes from typing expert Mark Atteberry, who suggests you pull out your old yearbooks from high school, and make a list of all the things folks wrote about you back then. It's eerily accurate! Did your besties call you "my rock; my go-to when things are tough" or "silly, funny, quirky" in your yearbook? That stuff is GREAT typing information. Truly! ***Because your essence never goes away.***

NEXT, LET'S INTERVIEW YOUR TRACK-RECORD —> On the following pages, you'll find a spreadsheet that you can use to map out exactly what's *already* going on in your career. Let your previous bookings help you define your bullseye! For each project, write in the TYPING WORDS you were given in the breakdown, then check off how far you got through the casting process. Ready? Let's go!

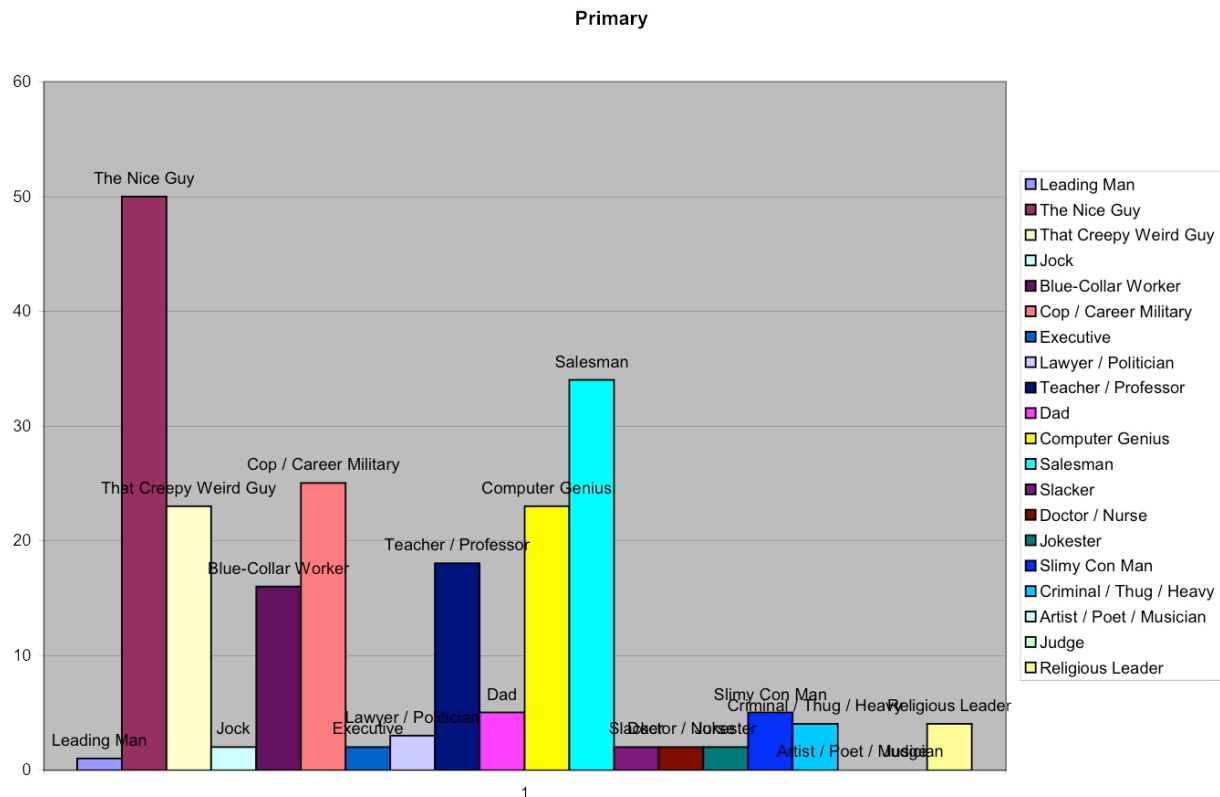
PROJECT/ TYPE WORDS	AUDITIONED	CALLED BACK	WENT TO PRODUCERS	ON AVAIL/ ON HOLD	BOOKED

Ready for the tier-jump of your life? * Get A-Listed * www.GetA-Listed.com



Now, let's take a look at some very cool ways to structure your data, once you start getting results from each of the three bits of homework you got, above: Typing, Headshot Typing, and Track-Record Typing.

Here's a line graph created using Microsoft Excel, but it's also do-able in the Mac Numbers software. Any program in which you can put together a count and have it represented graphically will do. Notice that this SMFA ninja did this typing exercise multiple times and continued to add to his results, to get even clearer on which words are "keepers" and which are "outliers" that, statistically, can be discarded, once the bigger pattern is established.



Not surprising that this particular actor would "read" as a nice guy, salesman, computer genius, etc., with his use of a bar graph as a mode of mapping out his results!

Ready for the tier-jump of your life? * **Get A-Listed** * www.GetA-Listed.com



Ah, there's the dartboard. You knew it was coming, right? Next up, three versions of the dartboard on which you can start writing in your major type words, and a fourth, for the final result. Put the type words that are most-often repeated closest to the bullseye. Leave those outliers way out on the dartboard.

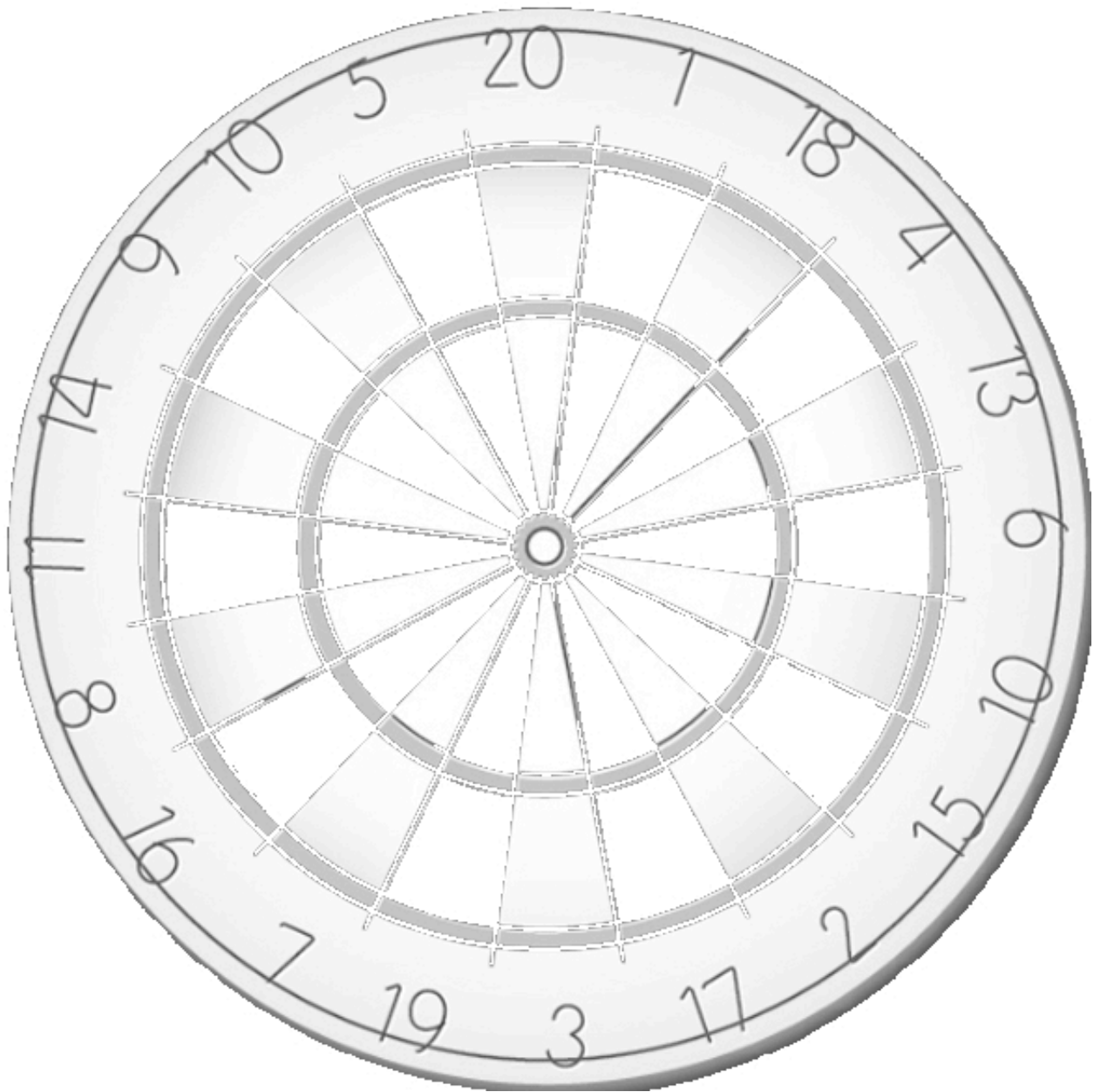


Meet me at the pub? ;) Dartboards always make me crave Dry Blackthorn cider. Ahh... grad school.

Ready for the tier-jump of your life? * Get A-Listed * www.GetA-Listed.com



MY TYPE:

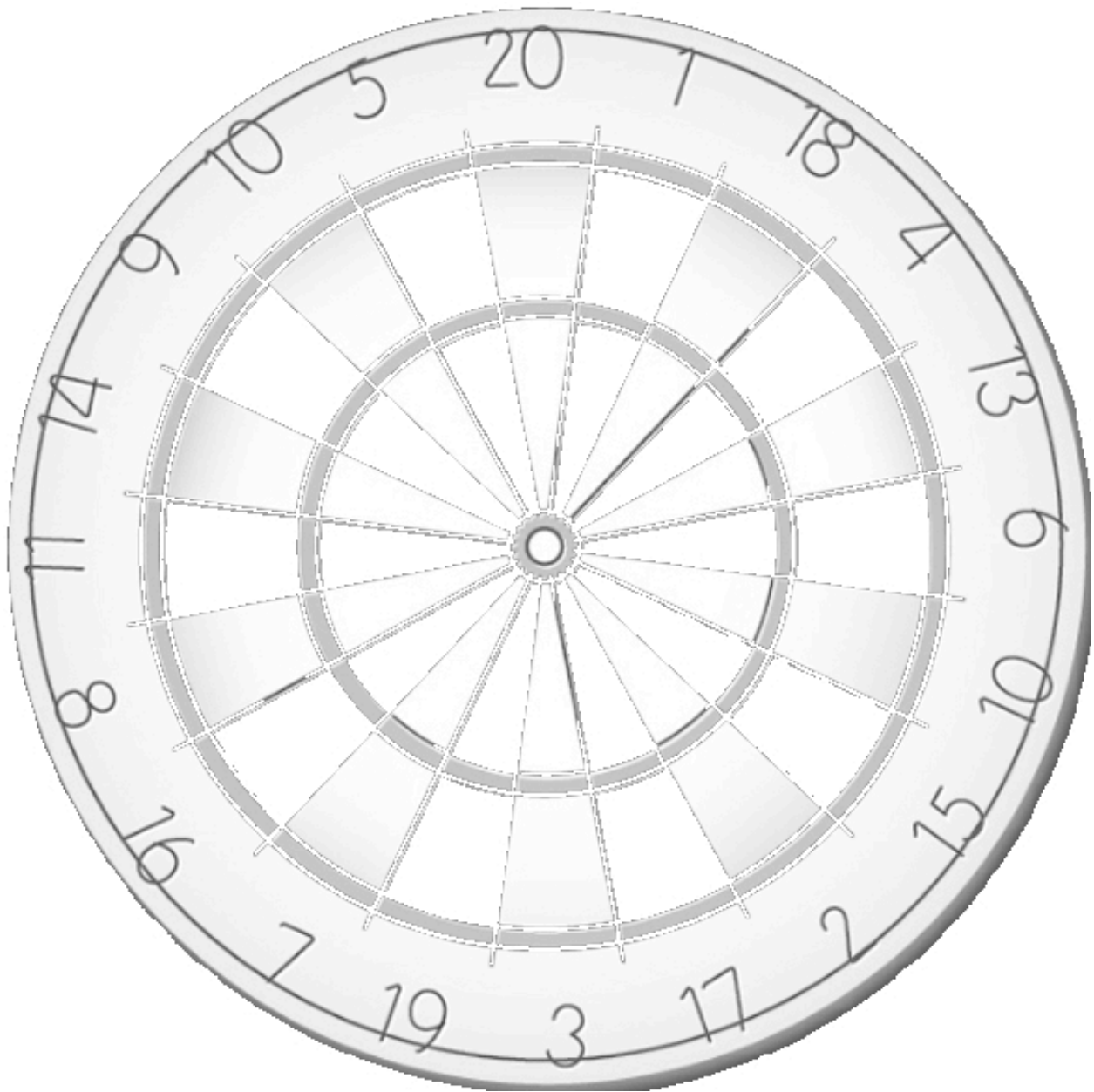


Observations/thoughts:

Ready for the tier-jump of your life? * **Get A-Listed** * www.GetA-Listed.com



MY HEADSHOT TYPE:

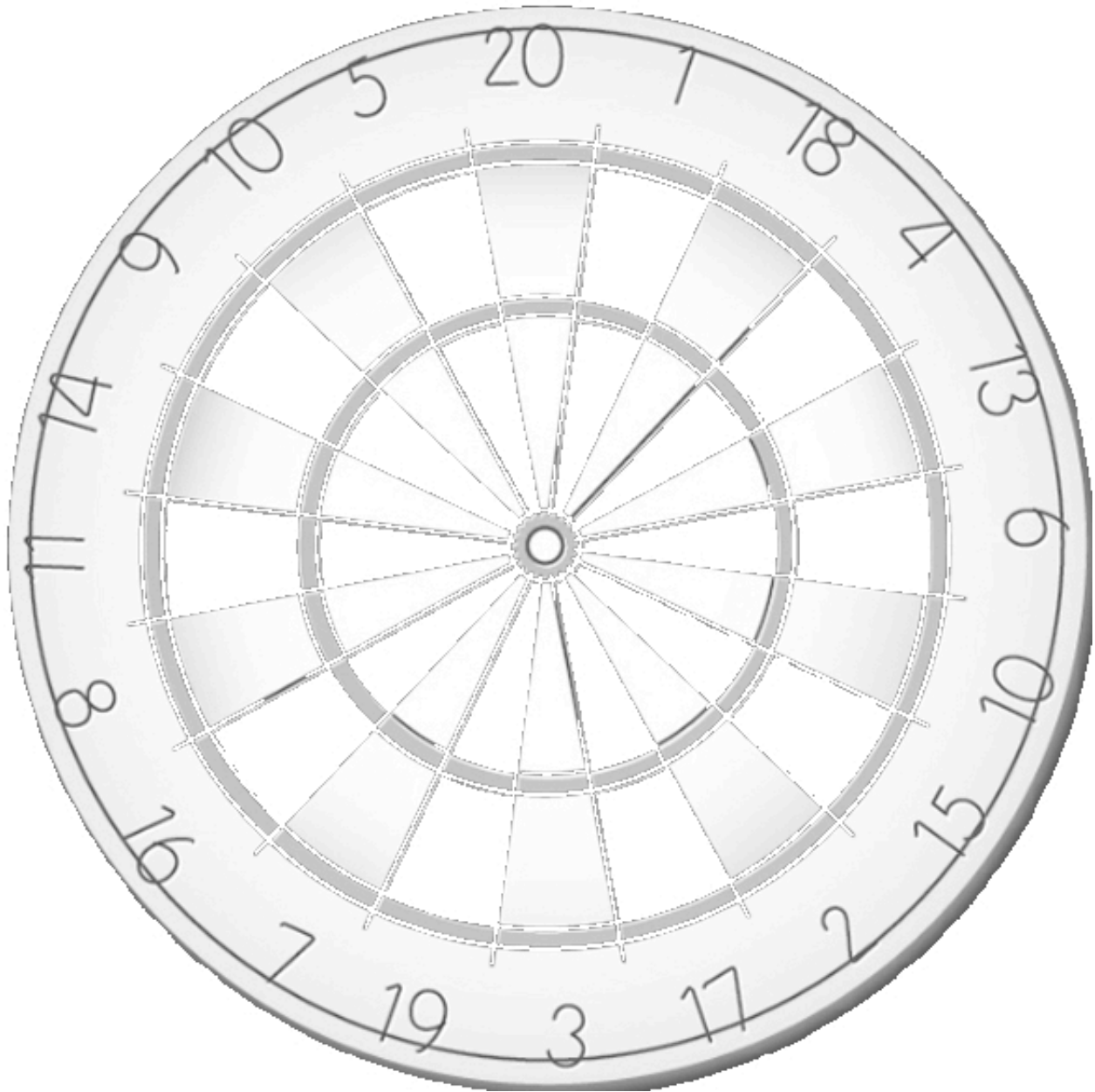


Observations/thoughts:

Ready for the tier-jump of your life? * **Get A-Listed** * www.GetA-Listed.com



MY TRACK-RECORD TYPE:



Observations/thoughts:

Ready for the tier-jump of your life? * **Get A-Listed** * www.GetA-Listed.com



Phew! Finally! The best thing you can do is post the FINAL DARTBOARD above your computer monitor, or on the wall with your vision board, your office supplies, whatever motivational items you keep tacked around to remind you to stick it out, in this creative pursuit!

That final dartboard, with your bullseye clearly THERE in the center, begging for your attention, will keep you focused on how to submit, project to project. It'll help you refine your target list (more about that in other editions of *SMFA Essentials*). It'll help you with your logline (ditto). It'll keep you focused in such a ninja way that you start seeing the rest of the characters, the rest of the breakdowns, the rest of the projects out there as NOISE.

What a beautiful place to live, as an artist: Focused. Completely aware of what you bullseye, daily. Ready to deliver the goods—effortlessly—when invited in to do so. Never hustling to try and prove anything to anyone. Confident that your brand is, indeed, castable. It's all about lining up with those who most need to know it exists, then showing 'em how it looks when you hit the bullseye. **All the way to the bank.**

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: **Your Bullseye 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. **Your Bullseye** is probably the most important foundation of all the other *SMFA Essentials* and we're so excited to share these tools with you. Let us hear how it's going, as you continue to embrace the badassery!

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.



Ready for the tier-jump of your life? * **Get A-Listed** * www.GetA-Listed.com

