

Agents and Casting Essential Cheat Sheet

At ICAT (Independent Centre for Actor Training) we have a thriving membership community: The Coffee Club (because it costs the same as one coffee a week to join!).

Our members regularly meet and work with industry leaders from Casting Directors to Agents. Here is a super useful collection of thoughts from a host of our professional guests that will help you in your pursuit of success!

On agent and agent relationship

- You be the driver of your career. Be passionate about you and what you offer. If you're not, who else will be?
- Communication is important with your agent. Let them know if you're availability, if you are away on holiday etc.
- We (agent and actor) work together, not for each other.
- Agents will look for work countrywide for their artists regardless of base, so don't necessarily think that being with a n agent in one city stops you from working in another .
- An agent will automatically put you on Spotlight if you are not already with them.
- It's not untypical to have one agent looking after around 30 actors, so agencies may have several agents with a stable of around 30 each.

On auditions

- You are professional auditionees. That is where you should be focusing. Become comfortable with and energised about the audition process as it is the gateway to your work.
- Don't just get through them, become very good at them.
- "Book the room". As hard as it is, try to think of the audition as the main thing and the possible job as an added bonus. Make all your preparation about affecting those in the room with both your etiquette and professionalism as well as your performance. So, rather than booking a job, book the room!

- Stoicism is key. The only power you have is in the audition room.
- Always look forward, never behind. Leave it go when you have walked out of the audition and onto the next thing.
- Have another job/focus/passion to throw yourself into so that you can be occupied and energised outside of acting. What you might call a 'resting job'.

On self-development

- For an hr a day do something that makes you an actor. Work a monologue, cold/sight read out loud, work on accents.
- Practice makes perfect. We have been likened to musicians:
 - 1 day no practice** - you notice
 - 2 days no practice** - the orchestra notices
 - 3 days no practice** - the audience notices
- Fame is not something to reach for, it is something you have to put up with.
- I (the agent) nurture talent, that's how I see my job.
- Lean towards the character in your physical presentation i.e don't turn up in ripped jeans for the role of a solicitor.
- Read the play! If you are going up for a published play, read it and know the context.
- Go and see as much theatre as you can and equally, try and watch a show that you are auditioning for on television.
- Go into the room with a relationship already established (see above). Know the company's work and have an opinion.
- The audition time is yours as much as theirs.
- If you have started badly, stop and ask if you can start again*

* This goes against ICAT's cancel and continue policy and we would recommend that you demonstrate your ability to deal with 'cock ups' as much as possible. Jane is understandably trying to show sensitivity to the casting directors time and not waste a read through. Each occasion will require a different approach.

On contracts and fees

- An agent will justify their negotiating figures based on previous work you have done. It is never random or arbitrary.
- Always know why you want to do a job if you think your agent will not be as interested as you, they will listen to you if you are passionate and again, reasoned.
- The only contract you should sign is a terms and conditions sheet with percentages of commission etc.

- Never sign up for time with an agent or pay an agency unless they are a co-operative in which case it goes into a fund for the benefit of the whole group. It is effectively buying into a company.

Kinds of agent

- **Co-op agents:** where actors work for each other and run it as a board. You may have to do several hours a week in the office.
- **Boutique/mid range agencies:** have a limited list and are often working for less clients so tend to be slightly hungrier to produce work.
- **Big agents:** tend to have major 'stars' as well as creatives (directors etc). Sometimes a director may get a job and the agent negotiates so that one or two clients will get a role in the same project.

On headshots and contacting agents

- Emails are good, hard copy letters are not.
- Send files (showreels etc) in compressed links and not too big.
- Make it easy for the agent to see what you have sent, you should never be more than two clicks away to your spotlight or showreel.
- Make your headshot look like you, not some glamorous version.
- Hair down so we can see the length.
- Wear something simple, no patterns.
- Let us see your eyes, they are the windows to the soul.
- Make your showreel no longer than 3 mins long
- We will know in 30 seconds if we like you.
- You don't need credits on it.
- No montage at the beginning please, straight into the work.
- Invite us to stuff with as much notice as possible.
- The power is yours! Once you have had an offer it is up to you.
- It (headshot) must look like you!

- Your photo is your 'label on the can'.
- Be as neutral with colour as possible as well as style. If you think you are going to be good at period drama, please don't have a headshot with ringlets and a bonnet!
- A lot of agents take on people purely based on liking their work.
- If you want an agent to show interest you must email them, they will not approach you as 'poaching' is a huge taboo from their side. They don't know you are looking unless you tell them.
- If you are making your own work, tell you agent so they don't put you up for something that clashes in terms of time. Also, make sure you do a midweek evening show as agents and casting directors don't really like to have to go out at weekend evenings to watch things unless essential.

General thoughts

- Dream big!!
- Don't be just a 'creative' be a business. Be informed!
- At best, 75 % of your wage is yours, put 25% in a separate tax account.
- The stage teaches you everything!
- Self tapes - do a couple of different versions of the scene for variation.
- The 1st rule of acting is...don't 'act'.

Practice

- Start self taping for practice. Download scenes or speeches, get into the habit of learning what the camera is seeing.
- Be your fiercest critic, but have some love for yourself!

Self taping for auditions

- Never get swayed by technology (though it's good to work to a reasonable/the expected standard) go for performance.
- Bring 'choices' in. Place them into the beats. Don't reinvent the wheel - analyse the text and bring your own choices. Throw an eyeline out etc. (When he says 'beat', the casting director in question is referring to the events and changes in the scene).

- Choices will be rewarded!
- Commit to your choices, don't be 'vanilla'. Don't play it safe.
- Sometimes actors come in, give something that is like a 'punt up field', the director runs with it but you can leave the audition at the level you should have come in at.
- Come in 'on your third read'. Meaning, don't warm up in the room, make your first read in the room feel like you have done this a few times today already.
- Put a read down that is like 'funky playdough' that's got bigger and more colourful, give them something to work with.

On preparation

- Read the scene like a piece of literature so you can understand and quantify the scene in one sentence - that's your foundation. NOW make it your own.
- Identify the beats (events and event changes)
- Read the scene as the other character and you will learn something about YOUR character. You will have a writer's view of the scene.
- The hardest parts to cast are the small parts!

On contacting casting directors

- When reaching out to casting directors, just send a 5 sentence paragraph.
- Don't take anything personally.
- Find out how they like to be contacted (it should be on their website).
- Casting assistants are worth their weight in gold, much more approachable.
- Give love for a project that a casting director has worked on (tell them which projects of theirs you have enjoyed).
- It is all about resilience, there is always someone else to write to.
- Your relationship with a casting director is a marathon not a sprint.