

## **To the Actor New to Hollywood**

By Christopher Showerman

Based on my experience, I'm much more qualified to write to the new actor about what *not* to do in Hollywood. Then again, good decisions come from good judgment which comes from experience which usually comes from bad judgment, so there are no wrong answers!! Too many people are paralyzed by the fear of doing something wrong. Don't become one of these people. The important thing is that you do *something*, learn from it, *and keep going!*

### **Find a place to live**

I spent much of my youth developing my survival skills and then would test them out in the wild. You learn that the first things you should do when you are stranded out of civilization is not to go kill an elk for food, but to a) find a source of water and b) build a shelter. See, you'll survive a lot longer when you have a home base because you'll do everything else with more calm and awareness. So when you arrive in the wilds of Los Angeles, I suggest you a) have a glass of water, and b) find a place to stay. Sounds basic, but when I came from a relative wilderness to Los Angeles, I thought it was going to be much easier. In fact, my plan was that my first day I would get an apartment and find an agent. The second day I was going to land my first big gig. Well it took me a year and a half to complete my to-do list for the first day!

Check the local papers of the areas you want to be. Also, you can check out [Westsiderentals.com](http://Westsiderentals.com) and [Roommates.com](http://Roommates.com). There are fees for these services, but I know a lot of people who have used them successfully.

### **Find an acting class**

Yeah, I know, you were the lead in your college production of Hamlet and you're better than DeNiro so there is nothing anyone else can teach you. That's a given. I suggest that you get yourself into an acting class anyway just to meet other actors and to keep acting in between the big movie contracts. There are kajillions of acting teachers and schools out here. You can learn even from the bad ones if you are open but centered. Audit as many classes as possible before actually dropping your hard earned cash on one of them. Personally, I wouldn't pay someone to tear me down. Teaching style is every bit as important as content. If you find yourself in a class where the teacher is using you as a door mat to the empire of his own ego, he is teaching you a valuable lesson about your own self worth. GET OUT and find someone who agrees with and nurtures your self esteem as well as your craft. I study with a guy named Rick Walters at Theater Craft but there are literally hundreds of teachers to choose from. Find the one that makes the difference for you.

### **Get an agent**

Agents get thousands (*literally thousands*) of headshots every week. Actors will spend hundreds of dollars mailing their headshots to a long list of agents. As ridiculous as this may sound, sometimes it works. If you get about a .75% success rate, you're doing great. (Math Challenged: That's 2 phone calls from agents for every 300 mailings.) What is even more effective and cheaper is to send out photo postcards announcing an event that you will be performing in – be it a live play or TV commercial or your bus stop monologue series every morning at 9:15 before you hop on the metro. Now that you are networking with your new friends in your acting classes, you may want to ask around to see if they recommend any agencies, and if they would recommend you to them. Bigger IS DEFINITELY NOT better when you are picking your first agency. Smaller agencies will have more time and incentive to hustle for you. For now, don't even waste the stamp on unsolicited material to CAA, William Morris, or ICM. I guarantee you it will go directly in the trash unopened.

### **Things to do in the meantime**

Unless Spielberg has invited you out to star in his next big picture, in which case you may set this article down now, you might want to find a job that will tide you over until he does. You must find work that will allow for auditioning during the day. Many actors I know make their living waiting tables or bartending. The best day job I ever had was being a self employed massage therapist. Check out the book 100 Day Jobs for Actors and 100 Acting Jobs for Actors - both by Glen Alterman at the [Samuel French Bookstore](#). I also highly recommend background performing (sometimes known as EXTRA work) to the actor new to Hollywood. The pay is lousy, you're seen as a prop they have to feed, and the hours can get really long. *However*, it is the easiest way to get on a film set and learn how things work. Don't make this a career choice though, it is just another aspect of your tinsel town education.

### **Online resources**

The internet has proven itself a marvelous tool to developing a career. Some of the sites below are subscription services but the fees are minimal.

[Actors Access](#)

[Castnet](#)

[Now Casting](#)

[Craigs List](#)

[Entertainment Partners/Central Casting](#)

Also, here are some publications that you can get either online or at the news stand:

[Back Stage West](#)

[Hollywood Reporter](#)

[Variety](#)

Don't forget that you can use the internet in the other direction as well. Many of the actors I know, myself included, have their own websites to garner support and create easy-access self promotion. It is not necessary to have an extremely elaborate site. [My](#)

website was designed by [The Ahrens Design Group](#) and is one of the more elaborate actor sites you'll find. You can probably put your own basic site up or find someone to do it reasonably. At the very least, be sure to have your headshot digitized so you can submit yourself online should the opportunity present itself.

### **Networking**

I mentioned before that a good way to meet people in your field is to take acting classes and on set if you are an extra. Some actors have success in Networking Groups or Casting Workshops. I don't know of anyone who has made a lot of valuable contacts clubbing, unless you are networking to be a bartender. The party scene in Hollywood is much celebrated and, in my opinion, grossly overrated. Believe me, you'll make a much more quality connection with the sober folks you happen to bump into at the coffee shop. That said, try not to stalk every stranger you see driving a black Mercedes. Real power is subtle, and you might not even know when you are speaking with someone who can help you. Morale of the story: Treat everyone you meet as if they were the president of Paramount *AND* learn something else out about them that you find interesting. You reap what you sow, and if you are always fishing for someone you can use, you'll find yourself being used by a lot of users.

### **Final Thoughts**

If you are reading this, you may be considering a fascinating journey that will change you forever. Decide now who you are and what you stand for, your principles and values, then remember that always and live it every day. Keep a group of real friends around you who will love you unconditionally and be honest with you when no one else will. Don't sell your soul for recognition and don't do anything to get a job that you wouldn't do anyway without an agenda in mind. Remember, it's just a job - you're not curing cancer. If you don't have other interests, you will cease to be interesting to yourself and others. Stay awake and open and always look for ways to celebrate being alive in the moment. Enjoy where you are right now! Have another glass of water. Good Luck!!