

WHAT'S YOUR PLAN?

@brianmedavoy

**MANAGER. PRODUCER.
HOLLYWOOD NAVIGATOR**

**A BUSINESS PLAN
FOR ACTORS**

“We don’t need to sit around and wait for Fate to come knocking at the door. We simply need to believe in the power that’s within us and use it. When we do that, and stop imitating others and competing against them, things begin to work for us.”

— Benjamin Hoff, *The Tao of Pooh*

How to Use the Actors' Business Plan to Grow Your Career

What should I do?

For more than three decades I've sat in meetings with actors who ask me that crucial question about their career.

No matter their experience, previous amount of success, or whether they're a client of mine or not, they're all trying to figure out how to solve the puzzle and navigate Hollywood to get where they want to go.

You've probably asked it of yourself and others as well.

While it's a simple question, it's not a simple one to answer because your goals, challenges, and resources are unique to you.

But as a talent manager, a big part of my job — and a key to my success — is to figure out how to answer that question so I've spent countless hours trying to figure it out.

I've had conversations with experts in every nook and cranny of this industry to get their thoughts, worked with countless actors and seen first hand what it takes to build a successful career, and studied tons of research about how careers are built both within and outside the entertainment industry.

All of that led me to create a framework designed to help you answer that crucial question.

It's called The Actors' Business Plan and I'm excited to share it with you in this post.

Why Actors Need A Business Plan

Most people wouldn't think to attach a business plan to an actor's life, but the truth is a great acting career starts before you get a role.

While acting is a craft, it's also a business, just like any other.

Talent doesn't matter if you don't have a way to present and market it and no two talents can be marketed the same way.

That's the beauty of the Actors' Business Plan — it allows *you* to work through what makes *you* a viable actor.

And believe me, that is one of the most important things to know nowadays. You need to know what makes you special and what makes your personal brand unique so casting directors will know to immediately call you for the right role.

Otherwise, you'll just be another headshot on a pile, and there you'll stay.

Just as no two actors will have the same strategy, no one actor will have the same strategy year to year.

The Actors' Business Plan is meant to be a living, breathing document that evolves as your career does.

It's designed to help you take stock of where you're at and guide you to the next step — whether that's landing your first supporting role or your 50th starring one.

As your goals change, your strengths, abilities, and accomplishments will as well. The Actors' Business Plan gives you a way to track your progress,

identify what's working and what's not so that you can adapt your career strategy as you go.

This is a lifelong tool — one that's hopefully as valuable two months into your career as it will be two decades later.

What's crucial, no matter where you're at in your journey, is to be honest.

The Actors' Business Plan is a chance for you to look in the proverbial mirror and understand your strengths and weaknesses to better yourself.

There's always room for improvement, and that the desire to improve is one of our greatest strengths. But to do that, you need to understand where you've come from, where you want to go, and why you want to get there.

There are no right or wrong answers in the Actors' Business Plan. But the onus is on you to find the answers that enable you to take charge of your own career.



The Three Core Values Of The Actors' Business Plan

The exercise of answering the questions and creating your plan will provide value to you in three distinct ways:

1. It helps you think through and clarify exactly what you want, where you want to go and develop a concrete plan to get there.
2. It helps you figure out how to talk about and market yourself. How to explain your goals, strengths, and unique story to other people you meet in the industry, from reps and execs to casting directors and other actors. Going through the process helps you learn how to present yourself.
3. It gives you a document you can continually refer to in order to measure your progress toward your goals. Are you meeting the people you want to

meet? Are you giving back to the community? Are you adding new strengths?
Removing weaknesses? The Actors' Business Plan helps you stay
accountable to yourself.

And Now, Here Are The Questions To Ask Yourself...

Because the Actors' Business Plan is designed to be flexible and applicable to whatever your situation may be, it consists of a series of questions and prompts for you to consider and act on.

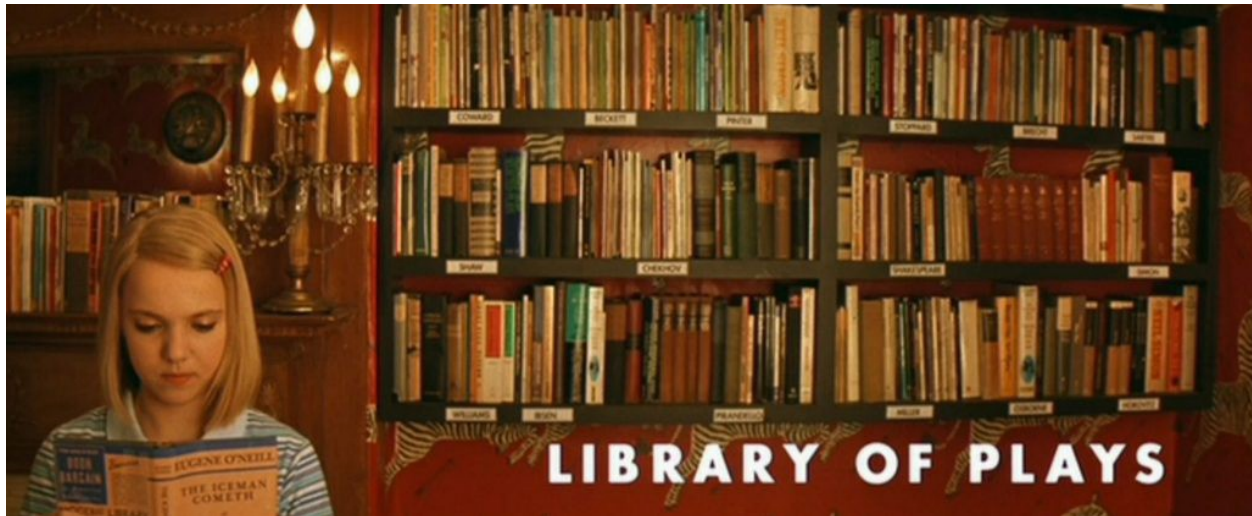
The following 15 questions are the core of the plan — spend some time thinking about each one and analyzing your answers to guide your actions.

When I do with this with clients, I help break down their answers and implement their plan. While I can't, unfortunately, do that for you at the moment, your answers should give you enough insight to help you take steps in the right direction.

For additional feedback, you can always discuss your answer with a mentor or somebody close to you who may help you see things in your answers that you may have missed.

Again, use this tool as a jumping-off point — what's important isn't that you have all the right answers, but rather that you're considering the right questions.

Here they are...



1. What's Your Story?

All branding and positioning is storytelling.

That means your ability to stand out from a crowd, get noticed, and be remembered is directly related to your ability to tell your own story.

Consider what the story of your life, your work, and your dreams is and how best to tell it. Pay special attention to the elements of your story that are unique — the things that make you different are the things that make you special so elevate those instead of hiding them in an attempt to fit in.

A helpful hack to learn how to do this is to look at musicians who tend to be very good at sharing their stories. For example, Jewel's backstory about living in her car when she was younger went a long way toward shaping the industry's connection to who she was and what she was about.

2. Who Do You Know?

They say who you know in Hollywood is as important as what you know and while that's not entirely true, there's definitely a lot of truth in it.

The strength of your network will go a long way to determining the trajectory of your career, but don't get discouraged because there's good news on this front.

You're more connected than you realize.

You'll discover there are connections everywhere when you actively look for them. Your friend in yoga class may work as a script supervisor for a major filmmaker. The Uber driver who drove you to the airport might be producing a YouTube series you could star in. And today's low-level agent's assistant is tomorrow's head of the casting department at a studio.

Make a concentrated effort to connect with as many people and start by taking stock of EVERYBODY you already know and deciphering who they may know that they could introduce you to.

3. Who Do You Want to Know?

Better yet, understanding who you admire and who the people are who you would most like to work with can give you a clear direction and goals.

Life is all about research and learning, and that goes double in entertainment. Reading the trades every day and making connections about who is working with who, who is doing what, and just generally understanding the Hollywood scuttlebutt will help you figure out who the best people are for you to connect with.

Knowing which agents and managers work for which clients will help you figure out different niches in the industry and recognize who can help you most. Knowing who's working on a particular project you're excited about may help you get a foot in the door.

It really is all about who you know so it's exceedingly valuable to think about who you'd love to meet in a perfect world so you can get out there and make it happen.

4. Why?

Everybody should ask themselves “Why?” from time to time. If you can’t definitively, passionately answer why you want to become an actor, then it may not be for you.

Acting is an arduous, constant, often cruel career and there is absolutely no point in pursuing it if you aren’t truly in love with the pursuit. If you can’t confidently tell yourself you’re doing it because you want to and *have* to, then it’s probably not worth the pain.

Passion’s a powerful motivator but even passion needs a check-in from time to time to make sure it’s still going strong.



5. Are You Willing to Be Uncomfortable?

Being an actor is all about being able to put yourself in uncomfortable situations and thrive. Are you ready to push yourself into discomfort?

On the road to success, you may be asked to do some discomfoting things. Being vulnerable on set or in casting rooms and overcoming nerves are real things you may have to do for a role.

Can you get yourself into completely foreign mindsets? Can you access the darkest, saddest parts of yourself when a role calls for it?

You can't hide any part of yourself from yourself when you're an actor. There's no burying trauma for an actor, you have to know how to use it. Harnessing the pain in your life can be extremely uncomfortable yet it's extremely necessary.

6. Are You Reading Enough?

You should have 3–5 entertainment news sources you're consistently checking. Knowledge is power and that goes double in Hollywood.

Reading and staying informed connects to virtually every aspect of your acting career. Knowledge is power. Knowing who the power players and rising stars are will help you figure out who you want to meet. Knowing what the studios are looking for will help you understand what to work on as an actor. Knowing what people are working on will put you on more impressive footing when you do meet them.

Whether it's the trades, scripts, books, magazines, *The New York Times*, or anything else, it's crucial that you keep your brain fed and current. You never know when something you read in passing may come up in conversation.

7. What Are Your 6-Month and 1-Year Goals?

Start small and keep building. It's crucial to establish reasonable benchmarks so you can keep up with your progress.

You're not going to become George Clooney or Scarlett Johansson in a day. The greats spent years working for their big break and decades honing their craft to become the best in the business. If you set your goals too high at the start, you're going to get burned out.

When you can set short, attainable goals you can clearly see the progress you've made and celebrate what you've accomplished rather than dwell on what you haven't.

A buzzy tech industry term is SMART goals and they apply well to the Actors' Business Plan as well.

SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely. Consider this method when setting your goals.

8. Who is Slightly Above Where You Are?

Again, it's not sustainable or healthy to expect to be George Clooney or Scarlett Johansson overnight. It can be valuable to measure yourself against other actors but only if they're around the same level as you are so you can learn from their progress.

People in your classes can be great benchmarks. Not that everything should be a competition — there's enough cutthroat action in entertainment — but it's valuable to know how your contemporaries are doing so you can evaluate yourself and adjust your goals as you need.

Did your partner in an improv class just get a guest star spot on a network show? Well, you're performing with her and holding your own so "guest star on a TV show" may be a good SMART goal for you to set for the next six months.

We constantly tell children not to compare themselves to other people but I'm telling you the opposite. Because you *need* to be able to evaluate yourself against your peers to get a proper gauge of your own personal and professional development.



9. What Are Your Strengths and Weaknesses?

Everyone in any field should be able to identify their strengths and weaknesses so this one speaks for itself.

Don't cop out by twisting your weaknesses into strengths. "I care too much" or "I work too hard" are nice tricks in a job interview but when the interviewer is yourself, you have to cut the bullshit. Working too hard *is* a weakness if it's burning you out and sacrificing your strengths.

When thinking about strengths and weaknesses, also think about how they can be changed. Are you good at memorizing? Nice, try to memorize the entire script rather than just your part. Do you have a tough time with an RP English accent? Okay, what steps are you going to take to improve it?

All self-evaluation should be action-oriented because the industry is constantly evolving, and you have to be able to evolve with it.

10. How Do You See Yourself?

We all have to take good, hard, discerning looks at ourselves from time to time. Understanding if you're an ingenue, character actor, charming, intimidating, etc. will help you know the best way to market yourself.

Different agents work better with different types of actors. Different directors and writers specialize in different kinds of movies with different kinds of actors. Knowing who you are and where you fit in will help you make more beneficial connections and relationships.

Don't try to make yourself into something you're not. We can't all look like Chris Hemsworth. Focus on leaning into the things you can control.

Identifying who you are will help you understand what makes you different. Chris Hemsworth has leading man good looks, sure. But what makes him different is his charm and sense of humor. There are not a lot of leading men who are as willing to be self-deprecating or play the fool as Hemsworth is and that keeps him in high demand. It makes him different. And you, by virtue of being you, *are different*. Just figure out how.

11. What Are You Giving Back Daily?

Nobody makes it on their own. You're going to need help from time to time and if you're going to be *worth* helping, you have to earn that good karma and pay kindnesses forward.

You don't have to be particularly spiritual to understand the value of being kind. It may sound cynical but helping others and giving back is just a practical way to make a good impression. Who knows, maybe that guy who just dropped a stack of papers is an agent. Help him out.

In a less cynical sense, it just feels good to give back! Doing nice things puts you in a good mood and you do your best work when you're feeling good.

12. Who Are Your Top 5 Agents and Managers And Why?

You have to do your research on who is in the best position to help you reach your goals and who can excel in the areas in which you want to excel. Remember, your agent and manager are your employees — they work for *you*. Do you want to be the lowest on the totem pole of a superagent or the top priority for a hungry hustler?

There are benefits to both. Simply being on that superagent's roster will at least get you in on most projects you're interested in. But while the hustler may not be able to get you in on everything, you can always rest assured they're following up on your behalf and doing everything they can to make sure you get a callback.

Really, this is a personal preference. If you want a very active relationship with your agent/manager and a hands-on role in shaping your career path, you probably want that hungry hustler. If you just want to get your feet wet and are willing to do any project that comes your way when you're starting out, that superagent will do you just fine.



13. Should You Get A Manager Or An Agent First?

As mentioned above, if you're interested in racking up credits and figuring out a career path later, an agent is probably the right way to go. If you want a partner to help make a game plan, it's probably best to find a manager first. This just depends on you as an artist.

Some people want to create, some people want to perform, some want to do a little of both. Only you can say where you are in your journey and only you can really determine where you want to devote your attention.

I have clients that I speak to every day, who want to know exactly what I'm working on for them, who are constantly creating and looking to produce their own projects. I also have clients who I won't touch base with for a few weeks at a time, who just trust me to do my thing and don't want to stress themselves out thinking about all the details.

Either way, you want to get somebody who is going to work hard for you and that you genuinely enjoy collaborating with. The decision may just be made for you based on your meetings.

14. What Can You Do Today?

Every question in the Actors' Business Plan should be action-oriented but this one is even more literally framed as such. Acting is an extremely active career that you have to constantly work at and push for.

You're not going to score a defining role every day but you can put in valuable work every day towards achieving your goals.

So, what can you do today? Make a couple SMART goals? Take a class? Read a script? Make a few phone calls? Hone an accent?

You're not going to be in a position to put in a ton of work every day but you can take baby steps. Each day is different so each day try to accomplish what that day allows.

15. How Do You Define Success?

Success means a lot of things to a lot of people. Do you want to make a ton of money? Do you want to achieve a certain level of fame? Do you want to make art that you genuinely believe is important? Maybe all of these things!

When you can define what success means to you, you can better inform your decisions on the road to get there. In fact, the road itself becomes clearer.

Equally as important, if you can't determine what success looks like, you won't know what failure looks like either. Failure is a powerful motivator.

Think about what it would mean to be successful in this business. What, specifically, will you have accomplished once you're feeling fulfilled and truly successful? Now, go out and accomplish those things.



One Final Note...

There's one last thing I need to say about the Actors' Business Plan.

Like all plans, it only works if it's implemented.

Action drives success — not intent, not desire, and not passive consumption.

The Actors' Business Plan can only help you if you take the time to work through it and implement it. I sincerely hope you will.

It's been valuable to myself, my clients, and to many colleagues along the way so I know it work. I want it to work for you too.

And now I have a favor to ask of you.

As I mentioned, the Actors' Business Plan is a living document and I regularly adjust the questions and add to it.

With that in mind, I'd love to hear from you — what do you think would be a helpful question for me to add to it?

Now that you have a business plan, the next step is to learn how to get an agent or manager's attention.