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7 Pointers From Veteran Actor Mike Pniewski

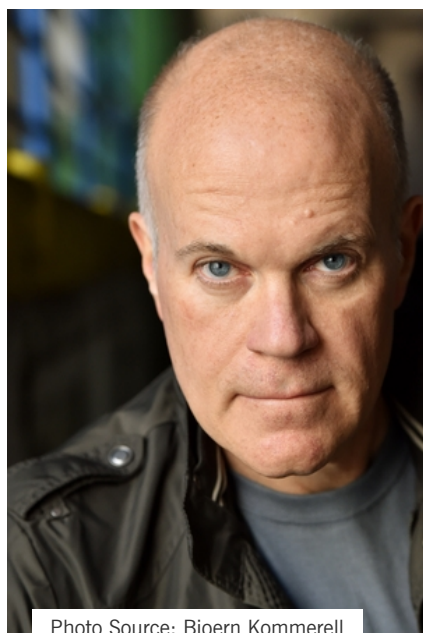
By [John Stoneburner](#) | Posted April 5, 2016, noon[ACTING ADVICE](#) [ACTING COACHES](#) [BACKSTAGE ATLANTA](#)
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If you've turned on a TV or gone to the movies in the past 32 years, you've seen Mike Pniewski. A southern California native who moved his family to Atlanta for a better quality of life more than 20 years ago is reaping the rewards of his dedication to his craft and business. With over 150 film and TV credits, including recurring roles on network hits "The Good Wife," "Madam Secretary," and "Blue Bloods," he's proving wrong all those who said moving to Atlanta was a bad idea.

How was working in Atlanta in the early '90s compared to now?

I've always had that tenacity and fierce dedication to succeeding in this business but it took a couple years to get the ball rolling. I learned quickly that being a working actor in Atlanta meant working the entire Southeast region. I would drive hundreds of miles for two minutes in the room and then had to drive back. That was the main difference between Atlanta and L.A. But I knew there was work here and if that meant I had to travel then that's what I did. After I did the film "A Time To Kill," that's when things really started to take off for me.

The volume of work concentrated in Georgia is huge. There's also the new dynamic of **self-taping**. While it's leveled the playing field it's also taken a people business and made it very impersonal. I think actors are missing out by not having to make their living in the room. I built a reputation by doing good work in the room at each audition. People started to know me and I began to develop relationships with directors and producers based on that work. Actors should have that experience; it's important and necessary. But that's the nature of the actor: we adapt.

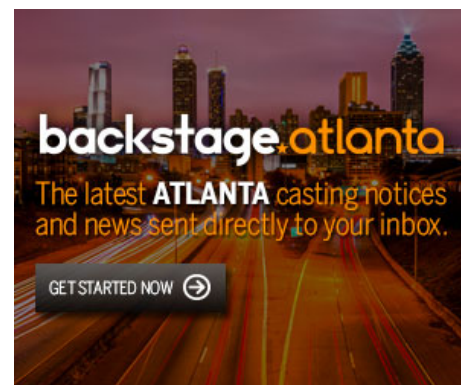
To have a sustainable career like yours—what should an actor expect?

It's going to be tough, a lot of work. The good stuff is hard, and it should be, otherwise everyone would be doing it. The more you can accept in the beginning, the less of an obstacle it's going to be. You're going to need to take classes. You're going to need to develop skills, a solid foundation of your craft that's going to sustain you and evolve with you over the years. There are no shortcuts.

You'll go through highs and lows. The ups and downs of getting a job, or not, can be a challenge. It can be easy to get bitter because it never goes the way you want. Just accept that. Have your moment, blow off some steam, and then get ready to do it all again.

Learn to be smart and not let the emotions overcome you. You'll need to work hard to maintain the line between the emotions you use to do your work and then how you cope with life and who you are as a human being. That separation will help you maintain your sanity.

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What has contributed the most to your longevity?

Formal training. If you have great instincts that's wonderful but you have to know how to use them. You need to know how to develop them, how they can and should apply to the craft and you have to learn the medium you're working in. [UCLA](#) taught me the craft but I credit one of my early teachers, Brian Reise, with teaching me how to translate what I'd learned to working on camera and how to get a job.

How do you stay inspired?

I still love it. The whole deal. Mostly I'm incredibly grateful for still being in this game, working with great material on really quality shows with some of the best people in the business. The longer you do this the more you appreciate it and I'm proud of the way I've been able to do it. My ambition didn't dictate my life, my life dictated my ambition. I put my family first, moved to Atlanta, and have been able to build a nice life for us doing something I love.

What's your definition of success?

Several years ago I created my definition: a stress-free life filled with love, adventure, service, and joy for my family and me. I pursue that everyday and so far it's still working.

Mike can be seen in upcoming episodes of "Madam Secretary" and "Blue Bloods" and in feature films "The Founder" with Michael Keaton and "Mena" with Tom Cruise. He also offers career coaching for artists; check out his website [here](#).

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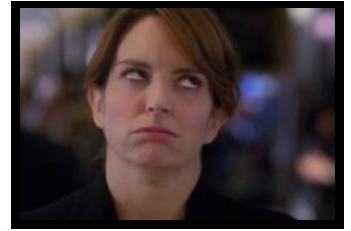
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