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3 Ways to Find Your Courage

By **Lisina Stoneburner** | Posted May 2, 2016, 3 p.m.

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Many years ago, I was working with an actor who I knew to be wonderfully gifted and skilled. I shared with this actor, something the director had asked me repeatedly about him: "Is that all he can do?" I would become so frustrated when I heard it. I always wanted to scream, "No, definitely not." My defensiveness of the actor and his abilities did not help ease the concerns of the director, so instead I finally shared this with the actor.

He was not surprised. He listened, almost defeated, as if he knew something was wrong before I mentioned it. I said, "In rehearsal with me, I see and hear strong choices—courageous, risk-taking choices. What is happening when you get to set?" The actor shared with me that he had taken many classes over the past half a decade in which the teacher kept asking him to "bring it down," "make it simpler," and "more subtle." He now found himself at a place

where he was so focused on seeing how tiny he could make his performance, that he was no longer alive in a moment. He stopped reacting for fear of reacting too big. He stopped listening for fear of not having control over his reaction. In an effort to give this actor a more emotionally focused and nuanced performance, the instructor guided him into being much less interesting. *The actor had lost his courage.*

Making courageous choices comes from the heart first. Emotional actions are motivated by your gut, not by your head. Courage comes from the gut. When you don't know anything you can be so brave, right? Ah, ignorance is bliss. Consider in your acting, that ignorance is not *not* knowing, it's not knowing the *outcome*.

Consider being more physical in your fact-finding. If you allow the script comprehension and analysis portion of your work to be a completely intellectual process, it can be a harder shift to trigger your emotional responses. You spent a tremendous amount of time in your head before you ever translated anything into your body, that your heart only discovered things through a journey that began in your brain. Try having a more physical response to the process, but physically activating the script by speaking it out loud and physically rehearsing it as you discover things. Apply them as you

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learn them. Rehearse while you research.

Use sensory triggers to help you land in a more emotionally responsive place. Music and other sensory stimuli are unbelievably effective in activating your heart and eliciting an emotional reaction and connection to the material.





Make your objective for the character the most important thing. Make your objecting the thing they cannot live without, and give yourself the most daring actions to play to achieve it. Consider the phrase, "By any means necessary." Your character should make an agreement to pursue their objective by any means necessary.

What makes us courageous in life makes us courageous in our work. Not caring what people will say when we behave a certain way, forgetting to care about social norms and correct behavior, and knowing you need something more than life itself will motivate you to go beyond the subtle approach. This approach will not make your performance fake or too big, but rather more passionate and engaging. Find your courage again in the classroom and remember how much you can do.

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Lisina Stoneburner is an Atlanta-based acting coach, founder of the [Company Acting Studio](#), and [Backstage Expert](#). For more information, check out Stoneburner's [full bio!](#)

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