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What to Expect on Your First TV Job

By Lisina Stoneburner | Posted July 20, 2015, 3 p.m.

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Of all the mediums, television is the one that I, as a coach and an actor's advocate, find the most challenging for actors. Actors need experience and training to handle the rigors of television work.

Being able to foresee some of the challenges can help actors of all levels better prepare for the experience so that they can do their very best work.

One of the first things to wrap your mind around is the lack of rehearsal involved in the process. Depending on the size of your role when you are cast, you are given whatever current information is available to you. Sometimes you need to ask the right people for this information. However, the expectation typically is that you will be able to function on limited information, as the story is often being written as you live it. If you are on the show for only a day, expect to know only what your specific scene is about and

prepare accordingly, which means: know your lines, have a clear objective, and commit to your choices, but do not over-rehearse to the point where you cannot be flexible on the day.

The second thing to remember is how very technical the process is. An actor looking for room to discover an emotional experience in a moment must realize they need to be prepped and ready to achieve that under a variety of technical circumstances. This prep must be done prior to arriving for the moment, and you must have a strong process that keeps you dually connected to the scene and moments, as well as open for notes and instructions that will alter your performance along the way. You cannot be so lost and wrapped up in your prep work that you are unable to respond to technical adjustments and changes. Very importantly, you must have your triggers ready and handy for the moment when you are expected to have a genuine emotional moment, and there are all these other factors that will steal your focus and invade your energy.

Television works on a tight schedule. The good shows are well-oiled machines and the new actor on

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set must come in and participate as another working piece of that machine. Just like the old acting school warm-up game “The Machine,” in which every actor adds a sound and a movement to an overall working machine. An actor who adds to the machine without commitment, without momentum, without an understanding of what they are currently walking into, and with fear or weakness in their choice will not further the functionality of the machine.

A great coach friend of mine, Mary McCusker, uses the phrase, “Be 100 percent prepared and 100 percent willing to give it up.” This means, your success on set will be measured by your ability to change and accomplish the direction given to you, while having organic believable moments in the process.

As you approach your first television job, know this: you need to own what you know and do it well. Do not give up your process, just be ready to make alterations to it.

You are expected to bring a believable character to the day. If you do not have acting training and experience behind you and you are thinking you can accomplish a day on set without issues, you need to adjust this thought process. Very few professions in the world would allow you to step into a high level position on your first day without previous knowledge and experience to back it up. If you are feeling lost and out of sorts simply due to the newness of the experience, that is perfectly normal and acceptable. If its because you have not really acted before or experienced the development of a character or have not been trained in skills to achieve the emotional moment, then you have some work to do to be ready for this very demanding medium.

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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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