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INTERVIEWING

When Nerves Take Over... Beating Interview Stage Fright

By Karl Rozemeyer

“Sometimes nerves take over and you don’t show who you are.”

Those are the words of an auditioning actor in “Every Little Step,” a 2008 documentary that follows the process of casting the 2006 Broadway revival of “A Chorus Line.” But they could just

See *STAGE FRIGHT* Page 2

PHOTO:Karl Rozemeyer



An Actor’s Life for Me

By Matthew Rothenberg, Editor-in-Chief, TheLadders.com

CONFESSION: I WAS A TEENAGE THESPIAN. I caught the acting bug at a tender age and performed in children’s theater companies and high-school productions with kids who went on to careers in the performing arts.

What brought my own theatrical career to an end? Besides a questionable depth of talent, I was struck in my junior year by a sudden and paralyzing case of stage fright. I can still remember that icy feeling of blind terror minutes before taking the stage; while I went on to perform with rock bands, it was many years before I could address a crowd without a guitar between us.

I’ve often wished I could bring that guitar into job interviews. After all, what command performance is more important than the one that could decide your next career move? Whether you’re waiting in the wings or in the lobby, anxiety can affect your body, your voice and the message you need to deliver to your audience.

In this package, veteran entertainment reporter Karl Rozemeyer talks to Broadway actors and theatrical coaches to bring job seekers the specific techniques thespians use to beat stage fright and deliver a winning performance. From body language to breathing to rehearsal, these tips will prepare you for a starring role at your next job.

Break a leg! ■

IN THIS PACKAGE:

- Interview and Negotiate Like a Lawyer *Page 2*
- Body Language Speaks Volumes *Page 4*

What did you think of this package? Got a story of your own to tell? Have ideas for future coverage? Please write Editor-in-Chief Matthew Rothenberg at matthewr@theladders.com.

► STAGE FRIGHT

as easily have been spoken by anyone who has ever been nervous before a job interview or looked back on his interview performance with regret.

Whether you are an actor stepping onto an audition stage or a job seeker entering a conference room, the pressure to perform to the best of your ability can cause anxiety that threatens to cripple your performance.

For some job seekers, nerves can be disabling. Something happens when they walk through the door of the interviewer's office. Cold sweat trickles down the back of their knees. Their minds draw a blank when asked basic questions like, "Where do you see yourself in 10 years' time?" or, "Why would you like to work for this company above all others?" These candidates feel like they're back at school in front of a crowded assembly, unable to make those words pass their lips.

Actors call it "stage fright" – the fear of underperforming in front of a paying

audience or at an audition – and almost all good actors acknowledge battling it at one time or another. Many learned tricks early to overcome a paralyzing phobia that can kill their careers. (Remember the instruction to imagine the audience in their underwear?)

TheLadders asked several actors and acting coaches to share the tactics they use to keep stage fright from paralyzing their performance and tips to deliver the best audition during your next job interview.

Be prepared

There are many things that job interviewees can do to stave off stage fright. For actor John Treacy Egan, star of such Broadway hits as "The Producers" and "The Little Mermaid," the key to overcoming nerves and ensuring you ace the audition is simple: preparation.

"In 'Every Little Step,' " he said, "it is fantastic to see how prepared a lot of these performers were for their audi-

tions." Egan, a veteran of stage, cinema and television and an authority on auditioning, was inspired by the documentary.

"I really need to be more prepared," he realized after seeing the film. "You sometimes think, 'Oh, I will do fine, and it will get me to the

next stage.' You can get lax like that as an actor. You really need to give that performance the first time and not rely on a callback. Be as prepared as you can be."

Jodie Bentley, owner and co-founder of The Savvy Actor, a New York firm that coaches actors on the business of acting and teaches them how to market themselves, supports Egan's philosophy that preparation is vital. "So many people just wing it and say, 'I am just



Egan

Interview and Negotiate Like a Lawyer

Actors aren't the only professionals who can teach job seekers a thing or two. Consider what two veteran attorneys have to say about your job negotiations.

By Kevin Fogarty



Pynchon

LAWYERS ARE TRAINED NOT ONLY to argue a position but persuade judges, juries and even adversaries to try to see things their ways.

What can they teach job seekers about convincing a hiring manager to give them the job (and the money) they're after? TheLadders asked two attorneys, who coach other lawyers on how to interview and negotiate, for tips and tricks.

Stephen E. Seckler, president of Seckler Legal Consulting in Newton, Mass., spent 15

years as a legal recruiter. He now runs his own business helping law firms manage their businesses more effectively.

Veteran litigator Victoria Pynchon works as a mediator at ADR Services, helping other lawyers negotiate their way out of sticky conflicts.

Don't burn the interviewer

The first thing to remember when taking advice from a lawyer on how to persuade and negotiate is that your end goal is very different from a lawyer's end game, Pynchon said.

going to be me!’ And then when we get in the interview situation, we all clam up if we don’t have something planned and prepared.”

Comfort with your costume

What you wear for your interview or audition can set the stage for your nerves – it can sap your spirit or boost your confidence, Bentley said. “I’m coaching an actress right now who is really a leading lady, but she is having trouble owning (those roles),” she said. “You need to dress that part, and that confidence will come. I think (the right clothing) helps body language in an interview as well.”



Bentley

Your appearance goes beyond clothes, Egan said. It extends to all aspects of

your physical presentation – your posture, pose, expressions and voice.

“Always try to put yourself in comfortable situations,” Egan said. “You have a lot of people around you in the professional world to help you. Ask them, ‘Does my outfit look correct? Does my voice sound right? Is my hair cut right?’ Practice interviews with your friends.”

Breathe and shake!

What if you are well dressed, well groomed and well prepared but you still feel like a panic attack is approaching? Stage fright, said Egan, usually occurs about five minutes before the actor goes on stage. Actors beat back the paranoia by breathing, he said.

“Whenever you start to experience fear, the first thing that you have to do is remember to breathe. Fear stops your breathing, and everything starts to tighten. Breathing opens the door to relaxation.”

“You can tell right away when someone walks up and they are not breath-

ing,” Bentley said. “They are not in their body, and they look uncomfortable. Breath is a force of life. I really believe that.” She recommends a breathing exercise that she does before going on stage or before a big meeting or audition: “It is rapid breathing through the nose. It really centers you and calms you.”

Egan advises that you give yourself a chance to shake it off. Literally. “Shake your limbs and jump up and down and give the adrenalin the chance to have an outlet of actual movement.”

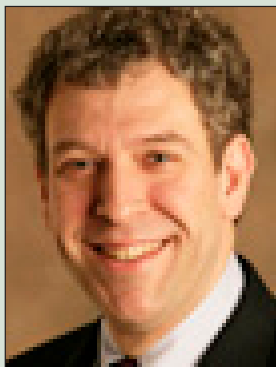
If you’re feeling the pains of panic set in, find yourself a private space – a lobby bathroom or a secluded corridor – and practice these breathing and shaking tips to beat back stage fright.

The elevator pitch

Bentley instructs her clients to practice role-playing exercises before an audition and to have an elevator pitch or monologue memorized and at the ready. Everyone’s interview routine should include a 45-second blurb, she said. “If someone

See STAGE FRIGHT Page 7

When lawyers argue, their goals are to win, not generally to meet the other party halfway or form a lasting bond, she said.



Seckler

“You negotiate based on positions — I’m right, and you’re wrong, and here are 10,000 reasons why you’re wrong and I should get the biggest share of the pie,” she said.

That’s not a bad approach in the courtroom or across the negotiating table from an opponent after the lines have been drawn and the first shots fired in a dispute, she said.

“It’s not so good in a job interview when what you’re trying to do is establish a relationship,” Seckler agreed.

A salary negotiation isn’t a conflict to be resolved, Pynchon said. There is a lot of push and pull, but what you’re building is a relationship which you both hope will last a long time, not a scorched-earth business deal.

Still, there is more back-and-forth in a good negotiation than most Americans are comfortable with.

Pynchon’s other tips on negotiating:

- Make the first offer. This goes counter to every guide to salary negotiations, but lawyers know that the person who names a number first sets the range for the discussion. Even if the other side disagrees, everything else is judged by how much higher or lower it is than that first number. “That’s why they call it an anchor,” Pynchon said. “It’s a cognitive issue; we can’t help it. Any number you introduce early in the negotiation will exert a pull on your negotiating partner.”

See NEGOTIATE Page 6

Body Language Speaks Volumes

Broadway actor John Treacy Egan and acting coach Jodie Bentley share body-language tricks to use (and some to avoid) during a job interview.

By **Karl Rozemeyer**

ACTORS KNOW THAT BODY LANGUAGE speaks volumes, and the good ones use it subtly to persuade the audience.

Poses, positions and postures tell the audience what to think about the character.

A job interview is no different, said Jodie Bentley, owner and co-founder of The Savvy Actor, a firm that coaches actors on the business of acting and teaches them how to market themselves. Your body language tells the interviewer things about you.

“I think it is important to have body awareness before you go into an interview,” she said. There are many actions and habits that we should consider doing or avoid doing to tell the right story during the interview setting.

Actor John Treacy Egan, featured in such Broadway hits as “The Producers” and “The Little Mermaid,” demonstrates some of the body-language tricks he uses and avoids on stage.

“Practice these, and you will take it over,” he said. “It’s like muscle matter.”



1) Wardrobe

Bentley emphasized the importance of wearing clothes that show you in your best light during an interview. “I really think that the clothes that you wear impact who you are, and if you wear something that makes you feel fabulous, your body language is going to be so much more comfortable in the moment.”



2) Hold onto a talisman

“Wear a piece of jewelry or a scarf or something that has meaning to you and can ground you in the moment,” Bentley said. “If I get nervous, sometimes I will look at my wedding ring and think of my husband who supports me, and I realize I should be doing this and I am on the right path. When we get nervous, we feel ourselves being removed from our bodies slightly. I think that having that talisman is a great way just to keep us grounded and present in the moment.”



3) Feet on floor

Egan recommended that you keep both feet on the floor and sit up straight. Crossing your legs, he said, portrays complacency.



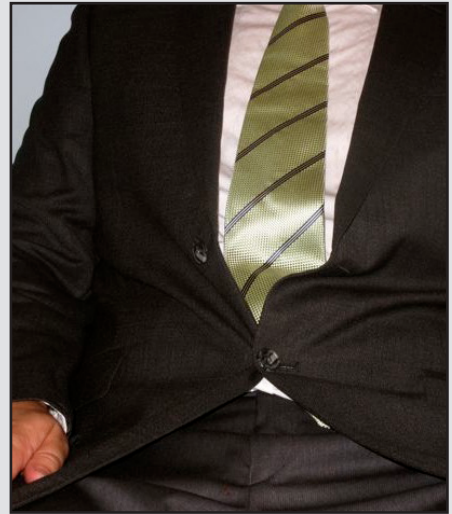
4) Sit still

“Nervous energy isn’t good,” Bentley said. “And so a lot of people cross their legs and shake their legs over and over again. Not that we need to sit with ankles crossed and be stiff.”



5) Hands on knees

“If you have to make a point,” Egan said, “you can use your hands.” But rather than speaking with your hands, he recommends you rest your hands on your knees until you need to make a gesture.



6) Sit a little bit forward

“You don’t want to sit back,” Egan said. “Leaning backwards can leave the impression that you are overly relaxed and can make you look untidy.”



7) Don't fold your arms

“I think that is a bad habit that a lot of people fall into. It definitely closes you off (from the interviewer). Not a lot of actors do it,” Bentley said.



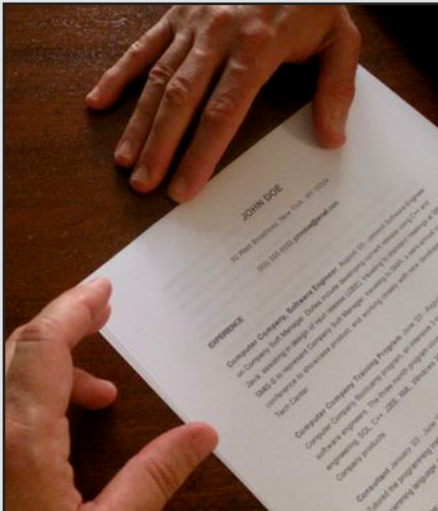
8) Avoid body tics

Don’t crack your finger joints or fiddle with your cufflinks. “I have big, red, curly hair, and I used to twirl my curls when I got nervous,” Bentley said. “It is about really being honest with yourself and saying to yourself: ‘What are my habits when I get nervous, and how can I eliminate them?’ ”



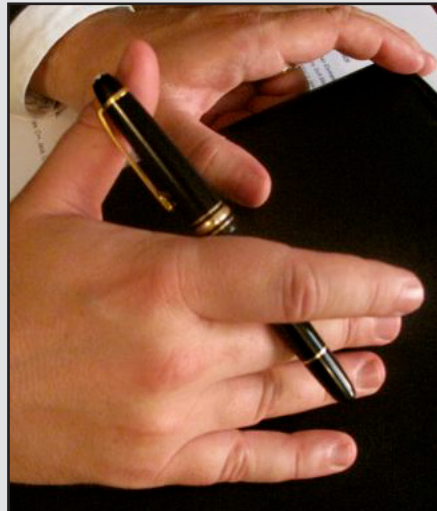
9) No hands in pockets

“If you are standing at all in the interview, then hands in the pockets are a big no-no. That just looks so clumsy and messy,” Bentley said. “Let your hands drop to your side, and talk,” is Egan’s advice. “When you need to use your hands, engage them.”



10) Don't invade the interviewer's space

"Some people just get too close for comfort," Bentley said. "They think that they want to make a connection, so they get closer. Really knowing that boundary is really important." For example, don't stretch your hands or body over the interviewer's desk.



11) Props

"If you need a prop like a pen, use it if it makes you feel a little bit more comfortable," Egan said. "Start with the place where you feel safest, holding your hands together or holding a prop, but give yourself the chance to step away from that during the presentation or interview. It makes you look stronger."



12) Don't stare

"In a conversation, (actors) never fully lock eyes with people," Bentley said. "We talk, we look people in the eyes, we have a thought, and we look away. We look to the right, and we look to the left." Sometimes in an interview setting, you focus too much on impressing the audience. "And we start really staring at them, and staying focused so much, that we start to look a little crazy." Egan concurred: "If you feel like you are looking the person in the eye too long, hold it one more second and break away." ■

► NEGOTIATE

- Don't negotiate with yourself. "One of the things they did teach us at law school about negotiating is, don't bargain against yourself," she said. "If you say you want \$190,000 and the other person says that's well beyond the range, don't come back and say, 'How about \$150,000?' Wait for their response; don't bargain yourself down."
- Justify and rationalize. Always give a reason, preferably a good

one, for what you're asking for. If you don't have a good reason, give a bad one. In studies of human behavior, people offering a ridiculous reason for asking a favor have nearly the same success rate as those offering logical reasons, Pynchon said. Offering no reason drops your success rate by more than a third. A "good" reason in this case would be a favorable comparison with what others in your position make, or

a quantification of your contributions in your last job that demonstrate your real value.

- Be generous, long before you need to be. Reciprocity is one of the strongest human motivational factors, Pynchon said. It's why waiters put mints on the plate with your bill — a little gift for which you'll feel obligated. Hiring managers will feel the same way if they have a reason to feel

See NEGOTIATE Page 8

► STAGE FRIGHT

says, “Tell me about yourself; you already have a monologue or blurb ready to go.” She encourages her clients to rehearse their elevator pitches and asks that it convey “something personal about you, showcase your strengths and show what you are passionate about.”

Bentley believes the elevator pitch should be carefully crafted and learned. “Type it out. Say it to yourself in the mirror. Look at yourself while you are doing it.”

Also, research all you need to know about the company where you hope to work. Prepare your thoughts about the business and industry and have some ready answers about the them, she said.

From the moment you walk in, be real

The interview isn’t just how you answer questions or explain your skills, Egan said. That would be like limiting an actor’s audition to his reading and singing, he said. “From the moment you walk through the door, you have to be available as a real person. You cannot shut down when you aren’t singing and dancing. You want to be present for all of it. It is the same for an interview. You take yourself on as a character.”

Bentley warns her clients about being overly intimidated and losing the essence of their personalities in the process. “Many people get into interview settings and look at that person across the table as an authority figure. I think that is the worst thing that you can do.”

Bentley encourages interviewees to show their passions and interests because people want to work with people they like. “That is definitely a rule in theater. If a director is going to be working with you for four to eight weeks straight, he has got to like you first. And it is the same if somebody is going to bring you onto a team in their company: they need to like who they are going to be working with. People want to work with people who are passionate.”

The multiple-person interview

In a one-on-one interview, you can balance your energy against that of the other person.

“You can sense the temperature in the room much quicker in a one-on-one than with a group,” Egan noted. If the interview is with a group of interrogators, your balance and attention are taxed like an actor on stage connecting to an audience.

The first rule: Acknowledge everybody in the room, he said.

Bentley agreed. “When you have a room full of people,” she said, “I think it is your job to keep the energy up in the air a little bit more. It is more of a hot-seat situation. I think you really need to take in the whole room and not just answer one person. Eye contact is really important.”

Ask questions; don’t freeze

Confidence in the interview or audition is evident when you are fully prepared. “I would recommend preparing stories about your resume that show your personality, your strengths or your work ethic,” Bentley advised. “If you have these prepared and memorized to a certain degree, you will always have something that you can pull out of your back pocket if the nerves begin to take over.”

Egan suggested notecards as a last resort. “Even if you have to look down, at least you’re getting your point across as opposed to freezing.”

Another way to keep grounded and in the moment it is to have a few questions prepared to ask the interviewer. “If you get stuck and you don’t know what else to say, don’t just sit there. Have a couple of questions prepared and know your audience,” Bentley said. She instructs her clients to have three personal questions and three business questions prepared that they can insert at any moment. “So if you know that a person lives in a certain area of the town, you could ask if they have ever gone to a particular pizza parlor. Or if you know that they went to a certain college and you know someone that went there, you can bring that up.”

“Always ask questions,” Egan said. “An interested person is an interesting person.”

“From the moment you walk through the door, you have to be available as a real person. You cannot shut down when you aren’t singing and dancing. You want to be present for all of it. It is the same for an interview. You take yourself on as a character.”

— John Treacy Egan

Take your time when you speak, and select your words. “Don’t talk too fast. Speak clearly and slowly,” he said.

Faking it

The interview is underway, and you still feel insecure. How can you project something you’re not feeling? “Act it,” Egan said. “You really have to fake it. No one will know. You have to tell yourself to be confident. It really is about projecting confidence because nobody wants to hire somebody who is not confident.”

A lot of actors walk into an audition and apologize for not being ready because they only received the music that day. Directors don’t want to know that, he said. He recommends that the actor approach the situation with confidence by declaring his intention to sing something else. “Don’t apologize. Walk in and show them that you can carry the show. I hate to say this because it can be taken another way, but you are doing them a

favor by being there. They need somebody to fill their position, and you are going to be really good at it.”

Analyzing the performance afterwards

“Don’t judge the interview until it is over,” Egan said. “Oftentimes, you can go into an audition and feel you got the job, but you may never get the phone call. And if you feel like you did blow an opportunity, you should take a moment to learn from it and build upon it rather than repeat it.

“You should always analyze what your stage fright is about,” he said. “If you can identify what you are afraid of, you can address it. Often, for people who suffer from stage fright (the feeling originates from) one big thing.” But it is (also) more likely that minor aspects of performing cause you anxiety. Do you feel you are being judged? Do you feel unprepared? Do you focus too much on your own behavior or appearance? Identify the crux of your stage fright, and performance anxiety could be a thing of the past. ■

► NEGOTIATE

obligated to you for the answers or support you’ve given members of his or her team through a social-networking site, for recommending job candidates or business opportunities — anything that is clearly generous and selfless that affects hiring managers or someone who works with them.

- Be real. “It has to be genuine, though, and you have to do it all the time,” Pynchon said. “People don’t like it when you’re clearly out to gain something. It makes them feel hustled.”

- Make small concessions. “Research shows that people’s satisfaction with the outcome of a negotiation is primarily tied to the number of concessions the other side makes,” Pynchon said. “Set your expectations high and make small concessions, or offer to do more work for the same money, to make people happy. You’re trying to build something durable, so it helps if both people come out feeling as if they’ve won something.” ■



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karl Rozemeyer is a freelance syndicated columnist, journalist and photographer who has worked as international editor for Premiere magazine in New York and the director of photography for Hachette Filipacchi magazines in Prague. He was born in Zimbabwe and was educated in Cape Town, South Africa.

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