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THE TOP TEN REASONS YOU DID NOT GET CAST

You gave it your all at the audition, but the only feedback you got afterward was, “You did a really great job, but we’re casting someone else.” What’s the deal? Read on to learn the top ten reasons directors give for not casting someone, and what you can do to improve your chances.

Reason #1: Someone else gave an interpretation that was closer to what the director wanted.

Many times when reading a script, it seems that there is only one way to play a role, and that’s what you try for when auditioning. There are, however, many different ways to interpret most parts. Maybe you played it very “up,” and the director saw something darker, or you played “understated” when the director wanted broad. If someone else comes closer to the director’s vision of the part, that actor may be a better choice because the director has far less work to do to get the actor to match that vision.

How to better your odds: Many directors explain their vision of the characters and the show before having people get up to read -- listen closely and try to give them what they seem to want to see. If they don’t do this, you still don’t have to go into it blind. There’s nothing wrong with asking, “How do you see this character?” or “How do you want this scene to be played?” If you get an answer like, “Well, I’m really just interested in seeing what *you* can do with the character,” it may be because the director has no idea of what he or she wants, in which case it’s a crap shoot all around anyway (personally, this kind of response sets off alarm bells with me -- I’m leery of directors who can’t or won’t give me a clear idea of what they want).

In small theater groups where people have worked together often, the first actors to read may be a good indication of what the director wants. He or she may call on “tried and true” folks that would do well in the parts; the director may want to start out with readings that are fairly close to his or her vision and knows that these people can deliver. Occasionally, one of these folks may even be ringers: they’re not seriously auditioning, but the director may have asked them to stop in to get the auditions off to a good start and to give the real contenders a better idea of what’s wanted. Don’t be discouraged if you seem to be sunk before you’ve even made it out of the gate! Instead, listen and learn.

As the audition progresses, watch the other actors and be open to other interpretations. Don’t just try to copy what someone else does -- that usually comes off as a poor imitation. But do try to learn from what they seem to be doing right. Above all, listen for any direction the director gives in the course of the audition, both to you and to other actors, and think about how that might apply to your interpretation.

Reason #2: Someone else was better prepared at auditions

Some directors prefer to see cold readings and will not hand out copies of the script ahead of time. Others want to see something prepared, either from the show you're auditioning for or from something else. Cold or not, there may be someone who gets up there and knocks everyone's socks off with a performance-quality reading. The actor giving the more polished performance has an advantage. In the case of a cold reading, he's shown that he's already got a good grasp of the part and will pick up new ideas quickly; with a prepared reading, he's shown that he's enthusiastic about the show and is serious about wanting the part and working hard at it. A director can't help but be impressed by someone who's put that much work into a role even before being cast.

How to better your odds: Obtain a copy of the script. You may also be able to get a copy at the library. As you read the script, take note of the opening scene and other key scenes that the director is likely to want to see in auditions. Practice those -- perform it aloud, not in your head! Play an **objective** (remember objectives are **verbs**. I want to **IMPRESS** her or I want to **SEDUCE** him, etc.). Choose something—even if you are not sure what is “correct.” The fact that you are playing an objective will help you to stand out. You will be **acting**. As you prepare for the audition, try different objectives to see what works best. If you can get someone to rehearse with you, that's even better. Do the same for a monologue if the director has specified that he or she wants to see a prepared reading from something else. If the director wants cold readings, arrive at auditions a little early -- you may be able to get a copy of the script before things get underway. Check out the opening scene and try to determine which other scenes are likely to be played. Read along as others audition for parts that you'd also like to try for.

Reason #3: Another actor was physically better suited for the part

Some of the physical requirements for a part may be age, height, weight, coloring, hair length or style, and presence or absence of facial hair, to mention a few. If the part requires someone to lift and carry another actor off stage, obviously the director is going to cast someone physically capable of doing that. And while much can be accomplished with makeup, if someone comes in with all the necessary physical characteristics of a part as natural attributes, he or she will be one step closer to a part than someone who requires heavy makeup to pull it off.

How to better your odds: Read the script ahead of time and think about which parts you are physically right for. Be honest! The female lead may be a killer of a role that you'd give your eye teeth for, but if she's supposed to be a 28-year-old beauty queen, and you are 15 years too old for the part and have a weight problem to boot, it may be a bit much to hope for it, no matter how incredible your acting is. Likewise, if you're a guy with a ponytail and you're auditioning for a period piece like *Private Lives*, your hair will present a problem if you're not willing to cut it. By all means let the director know if there are any minor changes you'd be willing to make, such as growing a mustache, wearing a wig or dyeing your hair, but don't go overboard. For all

practical purposes, what you bring into auditions is what the director will see and remember, so the best choice is to go out for parts that you're already suited for.

Reason #4: The director wanted a certain “mix” of physical characteristics among the cast

Directors often juggle actors in and out of parts at auditions as they attempt to arrive at an interesting but believable mix. Different heights, weights, and coloring can make the show not only more visually interesting, but can also help the audience follow the plot: if two actors are physically very similar, audience members may actually get confused about who's who! Likewise, if there is supposed to be a family resemblance among the characters, the director will try to cast people who look like they could actually be related. If the director has only one actress who could logically play the daughter, and has a choice between you and another actor for the father, you may not get cast if you look ten years younger than the actress the director has no choice but to use. You lost out on the part not because of anything you did or didn't do, but simply because you wouldn't work playing opposite that actress.

How to better your odds: Short of making sure that you're absolutely the only actor who's physically right for a certain part at auditions, there's not much you can do about this one, other than to give it your very best shot and remember that not getting cast for this reason happens to everyone sooner or later. This one is beyond your control.

Reason #5: The director was unable to get you to deliver what he or she wanted to see

Directors sometimes try to give you direction as you're auditioning. Take this as a compliment! The director is working on two levels here - he or she has seen something in you that works, but would like to see if you can change what you're doing to better fit his or her idea of the character. He or she is probably also checking to see how well you take direction in an effort to determine how easy you are to work with. If you get direction and then go on to do the scene exactly the way you did it before, you flunked the test.

How to better your odds: When the director asks you to change your interpretation, do it! Listen carefully and ask questions, if necessary, to make sure you've got the idea he or she is working for. This applies even if you're asked to do something totally off the wall, like play a death scene as if it were written by Neil Simon. The director is not necessarily telling you that your interpretation is wrong, he or she just wants to see what you can do and if you are flexible enough to work with easily.

Reason #6: You're an unknown quantity

You gave a really strong reading and are physically perfect for the part, so how come you lost out to someone who wasn't as good, but seems to get cast all the time anyway? Is it because the theater group is just too cliquish and unwilling to accept new faces? Maybe, but there may also be another explanation: the director knows what the other actor can deliver and doesn't have a

clue as to what you can do in the long term. He or she just doesn't know you, your work habits, your ability to get along with others, or your sense of commitment to the show and to the theater group. Just about every director with any experience can cite instances of taking a chance on someone new and having it blow up in their faces, leading to that common lament, "But they were so *wonderful* at auditions!" If the show is a challenge for director and cast alike, taking on a new actor, particularly one that hasn't had much stage experience, may be more than the director feels like handling. He or she instead opts to go with "tried and true."

How to better your odds: The problem is that nobody knows you, so change that by getting involved in some way other than acting. Volunteer for behind-the-scenes jobs: holding book and working stage crew are particularly good ways to get to know the cast and the director, and to let them get to know you. If you are given responsibilities and carry them out well, you'll become known as a team player and a hard worker -- two characteristics that directors value in actors as well as in crew members. Directors talk to each other, and a favorable recommendation from the director of one show may make the next director willing to take a harder look at you. Make yourself indispensable and fun to be with, and folks will be actively trying to cast you because they like having you around! On the flip side, if your only interest is acting, you'll probably continue to get the cold shoulder -- many theaters are usually too short-handed to keep handing out plum roles to people who are interested in taking a bow but give nothing back to the organization.

Reason #7: You have difficulty remembering lines

OK, so maybe there was one show where you really had a lot of other things going on in your life and you gave the part short shrift. Or maybe memorizing lines is just not as easy as it used to be, or it's never been really easy, but you manage to muddle through somehow. Whatever the scenario, the fact remains that for one or more shows, you had trouble with the lines. Rarely is this problem somebody else's fault, even though actors with line difficulties sometimes try to lay the blame elsewhere ("Well, she was supposed to be standing *next to* the couch, not in front of it! She threw me off!"). If you can't remember the lines, you'll have difficulty developing your character, and everyone on stage with you will be very, very nervous -- not exactly a situation conducive to turning in a great performance. Directors will do *anything* to avoid casting actors with line difficulties.

How to better your odds: If your line problems were the result of a temporary aberration, and you can go into auditions with the part half-memorized and deliver a bang-up reading, fantastic. If not, and if your line problems are just a fact of life, take it slow. Audition for smaller roles that you know you can handle, and try to get a grasp on your technique: your problem may very well stem from how you memorize. Some tips:

Highlight your lines in your script in one color, and use a different color to highlight your cues. (I remember one actor who had a terrible time with lines -- and then I was told that his script had only a tiny pencil mark next to the first word of each of his lines. No wonder he couldn't memorize them - he couldn't even see which ones were his!)

If you learn better by listening, make two tape recordings, reading from the script: one of your cues, followed by your lines, and another of only your cues, with appropriate time left after each for you to say your line. Work with the tape as often as you can (a lot of folks work with it while they drive, especially if they have a long commute), at first listening and talking along with the cue and line tape, then using just the cue tape. Check back over the script periodically to make sure you're not paraphrasing.

If you're a more visual learner, run through the script by covering the page with a piece of paper and lowering it down the page until you come to a highlighted cue line, then try to say the line that follows that cue. Repeat until you get it right.

Some people like to make flash cards - use index cards, and write the cue on the front and the line on the back. (Make sure you indicate who's supposed to be giving the cue.)

Work with a partner who will read your cues and let you deliver the responses. In the early stages, ask them to correct and prompt you; later on, tell them to let you hang for a while until you're really sure you can't get it without help.

Be willing to put in a lot of hard work on lines, but if you find yourself getting worn out and frustrated, back off for a day or two. Put the script down, then tackle it again when you're more relaxed.

Reason #8: You have a reputation for being difficult to work with

If every director you've ever worked with was an idiot, if in every show there's someone you just can't get along with, or if the green room magically empties when you walk in, you need to do some serious thinking about how you interact with others. Producing a play is a **team** effort, and if one member of the team is consistently not part of the program, that person will not be asked to play again.

How to better your odds: The best policy is not to earn the reputation in the first place. You can do this first of all by remembering that what the director wants is paramount. Don't argue about blocking or interpretation, especially in front of other cast members. If you disagree with what you're being told, do it anyway, and then talk to the director privately afterwards. If you lose the argument, do what the director wants, and don't gripe about it. The same goes for the stage manager and any member of the crew.

Don't ever badmouth the show or the other actors. Don't point out others' mistakes, particularly those that have no effect on you personally: that's the director's job. If another actor consistently makes a mistake that affects you and the director doesn't catch it, let the director know privately afterwards so he or she can correct it.

Be courteous of others when you're not on stage. Keep your voice down in rehearsal, and don't engage people in lengthy conversations that might make someone miss a cue. Don't hang out in the wings just because you like to watch the show - you're an obstacle to the stage crew. During performance, don't run your mouth constantly (or worse yet, sing) in the green room, and don't feel the need to keep everyone else entertained. Many actors like to keep things low-key and quiet after the curtain goes up so they can concentrate on the task at hand or maybe study lines. Just because you, as the murder victim, are done for the evening doesn't mean that it's time for everyone else to relax, too.

Reason #9: You are perceived as unreliable

So you're late once in a while, or have to miss rehearsals because you've got a lot going on and inevitably there are scheduling conflicts. No big deal, right? Wrong! Being consistently late wastes everyone's time and makes you look less than serious about the show. Missing rehearsals can throw off the entire schedule, especially if you have an important part. Do it often enough, and directors are going to cast someone who has a better grasp of exactly how short the rehearsal period is.

How to better your odds: If rehearsals start at 7:30, be there at 7:20. If you have a night class every Tuesday, let the director know at auditions so he or she can plan accordingly (and don't take it too hard if that conflict puts you out of the running for a part). If you must unexpectedly miss a rehearsal, let the director know as soon as possible. Above all, do not *ever* drop out of a show without an extremely good reason. If you must drop out, tell the director by phone (talk to him or her, don't just leave a message on the answering machine) or in person, ASAP, and be prepared to tell him or her why you have to leave. If you leave one director in the lurch, not only will that director never cast you again, but no one else will, either.

Reason #10: You only made one night of auditions and not the callbacks.

Directors may spread auditions out over two or even several nights because they have a lot of people to see and a lot to accomplish. Part of what they're doing is seeing who works well with whom. If you show up for only one night of auditions and are not able to come to the callbacks, not only will you have only one shot at the part, but you won't see everybody who auditions, and you may miss the opportunity to read opposite someone who's a shoo-in for a part. Without you there to try out with that person at callbacks, the director can only make a guess as to what kind of chemistry the two of you might have had. In fact, you might be kind of hard to remember by that time! If you miss callbacks, don't be surprised if someone who gave a really lousy reading

gets the part -- that person may have just had an off night when you were there, and then delivered the audition of a lifetime during the callbacks the next evening.

How to better your odds: Show up for your initial audition and the callbacks. Also, prepare to stay until the end. If you can only make one night and not the callbacks, try to make it the last night, but be aware that some directors look askance at someone who couldn't be bothered to be there for callbacks. Before callbacks take place, the director has already started making some decisions and will be trying to put together a cast that gels. If you're not there, you may be forgotten.