

# Acting Lessons: "Let's Not Bicker and Argue About Who Killed Who" Level: 1-5

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Being involved with a play (whether you're in the cast, the crew, or both) can be a joyous experience, or it can be a nightmare. I've been in enough plays to know that, in every play, there is going to be some kind of drama...and I'm not talking about the stuff happening on the stage. Sometimes it's small...sometimes BIG. It all depends on the cast.

Naturally, when you spend such a large amount of time with people, even if you're close friends with them, there will be some grated nerves. This is unavoidable because shows, while being loads of fun, are a lot of hard work. And, this working tension spreads through a small cast like wildfire. But, remember; only *you* can prevent tension fires. Get past it. Get through it. It's over. It's done. Don't sweat the little things.

Let me give you an example of some needless tension that was added to a cast. We were already in the run of a show (I won't tell you which), and the show was running pretty well. Tech was running smoothly, and the audiences were enjoying it. Well, following a vocal warm up before a performance, the musical director wanted to fix a harmony in one of the songs. One or two people were moved to a different note for better blend. It sounded better. Everything was right with the world, right?...WRONG! Soon after the session, while we were going to our respective changing areas for costuming and makeup, I saw one of the cast members crying. When asked what was wrong, she said that she had finally gotten a note that she liked to sing, and now they've moved her off of it.

If anyone out there knows why someone (a *college student*, by the way) would cry over something so petty, please tell me. If I'm not mistaken, the job of any cast member, no matter how big or small the part, is to make the show the best it can possibly be. And, if that involves moving *one note*, then for the sake of all that is good and pure, MOVE THE STINKIN' NOTE! If a line gets cut, so be it. If it's your only line, be the best mute chorus member there is. Whatever makes the show better, let it be done. Listen to the authoritative figures, and do what they say.

Along that same line, don't let there be a struggle for power. The director has the final word on what happens (or doesn't)...period. If you feel like what you're doing is stupid (which sometimes happens), explain to the director that you feel a little awkward doing it. [Notice that I didn't say to tell the director that it was stupid or that you felt stupid doing it. You've got to stay on the director's good side, else you might not get nearly as good part (if you are cast at all) in the next bundle of shows.]

Never back-talk the director (or any other authoritative figure, for that matter). The crew members are your best friends. They have the power to "accidentally" drop things on you, leave you in the dark, not bring a particular set piece out, etc. So, be nice to the crew.

On that note, be nice to everyone, no matter how much you don't like them. You don't have to like them. You don't have to like anyone in a show. Most shows are voluntary, anyway. You don't have to be there if you don't want. There is no sense in you putting unneeded stress on yourself or the rest of the cast and crew if you don't want to be in a show. You *can* say, "No," when a part is offered.

When you're already deep in the rehearsals of a show and there's no turning back, you've got to get through it. Be the peacekeeper. When tension comes your

way, do all you can to ignore its existence and get on with the show. Shows are temporary. "This too shall pass." If you don't have an enjoyable experience doing a show or you're not particularly fond of the cast members, find another theatre with people you *do* like.

I have fun in every show that I do. I've played everything from third baseball player on the right to the title character, and I have a blast every time. Be happy with the part you've been given. I'm just happy that they give me the opportunity to be on stage at all.

Like I said earlier, there was unavoidable tension in every one of the shows, but they were still fun. Tension and bad moods surge through a cast, but happiness and ease have to slowly overcome those obstacles. I like to help it along by making the most of the situation I'm given. That feeling of goodness will spread to the other cast members if they'll overlook all of the stressful stuff.

Now, you're going to come in contact with those who have egos so big, you wonder at how they were able to fit it into the theatre. These people put tension in the theatre for kicks. What do you do in these situations? Put up a tension blocker; have a good attitude and sense of well being that you are doing your job.

That reminds me...DO YOUR JOB. When I said that theatre was hard work, I didn't mean for everybody else *but you*. You've got to give all of the effort you've got. Put in the time. Learn your lines, songs, and dances as quickly as possible. Work your tail off early on so that when opening night is close at hand, you've got no worries about your performance. You've known your stuff for a while, and now you get to play with it, trying different things, a few subtleties here and there that might make your performance better. The director will tell you if he/she doesn't like it. What it all boils down to is the more you work, the better off you'll be.

Back to the people with mountainous egos...DON'T BE ONE OF THEM. Unless it's a one-man show, productions are a collective effort. It's the collective effort that makes the performance good or bad. If there is one fantastic actor in a show, and everyone else is dreadful, the audience is going to pick up on it. In other words, one person does not make the show. So, deflate your ego a bit and be a team player. If there is tension between you and the other actors, the audience will be able to pick up on that as well.

Be happy with the part you're given. If you don't like your part (i.e. you think it's too small to suite your *enormous talent*, you wanted to play one of the other parts, etc.) deflate your ego a bit and "play the stew" out of what you're given. If you're faithful with what you're given, much will be added unto you. In other words, stop complaining and have fun with what you do, and you might get something better down the road.

In closing, remember that this is the entertainment industry, and that we're here to entertain. This is not a talent show. There is no first, second, and third place. Just do the job and have fun. If you're not having fun, choose a different hobby/career; this one isn't for you.

*By the way, in case you didn't catch it, the title is a reference to Monty Python and the Holy Grail, which is a movie of continuous silliness. You can find it in most movie rental places. And, it's one of those movies that's more fun to quote than it is to watch, but you've got to watch it to quote it. So, go watch it.*

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