

If I were to start my acting career over again, I would do the following:

Artistic Goals

I would get clear about the kind of work I would like to pursue, and the kind of artist I want to be. This will help me eliminate the opportunities that don't fit in with my goals.

Headshots

I would get myself the best headshots available. This is an investment in starting my business and I would want it to reflect my professionalism and preparedness to enter the field. I would acknowledge that my headshot is the only information the casting community has about me in the beginning and that I have to be ahead of the pack and distinguish myself from the others.

Directors/Casting directors

In addition to having a list of the roles I would like to play in the next Five Years, I would have a list of directors I would like to work with. I would write to them introducing myself and talking about why I admire their work. This will help me learn to express myself in particular detail when I write to ask for auditions for particular roles I'm passionate about.

Agents and Managers

I would fully research the client lists of an agency or management company that I interview with. It helps them understand I am serious, and invested in their company. It also helps me understand their taste, and how they will be perceived within the business.

Unions

I would acknowledge that despite some conventional wisdom, joining the unions is not a priority. I would know that I could do a number of jobs in TV Film and Theater without joining the union. I would know that building relationships is more important than the hollow shell of "the union seal of approval". What's most important is that I'm developing my relationships to my career and feeding my artistic self.

Type

I would ask friends and colleagues how they see me. What roles I would be right for, both in dramatic and classical literature and which archetypes I represent.

I would ask people who don't know me yet, how they see me as this will help me understand what my first impressions are.

I would have contemporary monologues that reflect who I am as a person and an artist.

Television

I would get a list of all the television shows shot in New York. I would watch them to see if they use a large number of actors each week, or if they have a set cast. I would identify the shows I might be cast in.

Having done that, I would start a campaign to get to know those casting directors by going to One on One productions and paying to meet them. This is part of managing my career myself. I would take notes on each casting director so I understand what their preferences are when auditioning for them.

Theater

I would ask friends which theater companies in New York are doing the kind of work I'm interested in. I would visit those companies and introduce myself their artistic directors. I might write them to express my interest in their work. I might volunteer to help out because I want to be around their kind of aesthetic.

I would find a list of theater companies that hire non-union actors to supplement their professional companies. These are opportunities for me to work alongside actors who have established themselves. These are mentors I can learn from and who can help guide me to the next step in my professional development.

Theater Shakespeare

I would get the Theatrical Index and Season Overview to see what productions are coming up in the following season. I would be aware of those shows and start campaigning for those roles

I would accept that classical plays like Shakespeare require a theater company to hire many more actors than a contemporary play, and that the competition for these jobs is significantly lower than a modern small cast play. I could begin working here, build relationships and hopefully work with the director/theater company on a modern play in the future.

Social life

I would build my social life around the kinds of artists I want to work with, and go to places and events where I can be exposed to those sorts of people.

Wardrobe

I would have appropriate clothing for auditions, including a suit for professional characters. I would buy clothing that is camera appropriate. I would have at least one audition outfit. In choosing my audition wardrobe, I will dress like I am going on an important date. Not too formal, but meant to impress and something that makes me feel great about myself.

I would own shoes that are leather soled, which help ground me in an audition room, and last longer than rubber-soled shoes. Boots are good for men for classical theater auditions.

If I were a woman, I would have heels that make my legs look great.

After being a member a union, I would use the Actors Fund shoe program to buy myself a pair of shoes every year. They reimburse 50% up to 100.00.

I would find a place to help me with my hair. If I have long hair, I would find a place to have my hair blown out for professional characters, and walk into an audition room looking my best.

If I need help with make up, I will get it. Men too. I will understand that make up for the camera is different than make up for civilians. Sephora sells HD ready makeup.

Housing

I would find housing that is affordable to reduce the stress on my finances. I would go to workshops at the Actors Fund to find appropriate housing for me. If you don't know about 20/80 buildings in NYC, you should look into it.

Training

I would continue training because I want to maintain my skills and surround myself with other artists. I would accept that being around others with similar goals can only give me more information about what I want to accomplish. I will also learn what kinds of preparation are required to get hired.

Nutrition

I will treat my body like a machine and eat appropriately. I will learn how the American diet is filled with sugar and that the body can only process a certain amount of sugar per hour. I will find a balanced diet so I have the energy to do my job.

Exercise

I would be disciplined about exercise knowing I am in a very cosmetic field, but more importantly that exercise can reduce stress and help me manage and help increase my stamina.

Finances

I would understand that if I saved 25.00 per month, starting at age 20, by age 60 I would have 66,000. If I wait until age 40 to start, I would only have 13,000.

Having money in the bank will give me security, allow me to feel less desperate when I walk into an audition room, and increase my personal self worth.

Most importantly, I would learn to ask for help and acknowledge that no one in this field has success without a lot of help from many sources. I probably know someone, or someone who knows someone who can help me. I will give back to others when I have the chance.

Banking

The Actors Federal Credit Union offers low cost banking. They can help you get a credit card even if you're unemployed. They offer low interest rates for car and home loans. Their ATM cards work at virtually every McDonalds in the city.

If you work out of town a lot, then your best bet is Bank of America since they have more branches nationally.

Unemployment

If your last job was an acting job, you are eligible for unemployment which can help in transitioning to your next job. Generally you would be eligible for \$405 per week for six months. You can work part time to make this last up to one year.

Tax Deductions

As I build my business, the IRS allows me to take a loss for a couple of years before they call my work a hobby. Every book, CD, DVD, online subscription, theater or movie ticket, transportation seeking work, equipment for business, is tax deductible.

Vita

There are volunteers who help with Actor Tax Preparation until I can afford to pay for an accountant.

Therapy or Spirituality or Yoga

This is vital to emotional equilibrium and allows me to explore my humanity, which is the essence of my work. Many therapists work on a sliding scale. It's important to find a great therapist and this can take time.

Video Camera

I would buy an inexpensive video camera, or iPhone with video capability and practice putting myself on tape.

Going to the Theater

I would join the following groups for discounted tickets to the leading theater companies in New York.

Lintix at Lincoln Center, Hiptix at Roundabout, 30 and Under at Playwrights, 30 for 30 at Rattlestick, 20.00 tickets an hour before curtain at the Public, 20.00 Sundays at NYTW, Dollar Sunday Matinees at Soho Rep.

Readings

I would attend as many readings as possible to get to know the community. Tuesday Nites @9 at Naked Angels, Lark Play Development and Young Blood at Ensemble Studio Theater are good places to start. For musicals I would look into ASCAP and BMI musical workshops.

Volunteering

I would suggest going to 52nd Street Project to volunteer. This is an amazing organization and I have never heard a bad word about it. Plays are developed here with young writers and the team of volunteers is extraordinary. Please don't bother to donate time here if you think you're going to use it for your own benefit. They can smell it coming a mile away!

Al Hirschfeld Clinic

I would use the Actors Fund free Clinic on 57th street and 10th Ave until I had health insurance of my own. There are volunteer doctors there who help artists without health insurance. They also offer free Flu shots.

Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts

Ditto if you have a legal problem.

ABC Diversity Showcase

Once a year, ABC pays to have actors of color do scenes for industry professionals. It's highly competitive but free for the actors. It has opened many doors for many actors.