

THE TWELVE GUIDEPOSTS: TIPS FOR COLD READING AT CALLBACKS

From *Audition* by Michael Shurtleff

When you are called back for a second audition after the cattle call, you will often have to perform a “cold read.” This is where the actor is given “sides” (pages from the script) and asked to act them. There is often very little time to prepare—often as little as 5-10 minutes, so Michael Shurtleff developed what he calls “The Twelve Guideposts” to help an actor create a dynamic, motivated character quickly. Below are summaries of each of The Twelve Guideposts along with quotes from Shurtleff’s book.

1 . RELATIONSHIP

What is my relationship to the other characters? How do I *feel* about the other characters? “It is the relationship of need and love that makes the audience believe.”

2 . CONFLICT

What are you fighting for? “An actor must make the most active choice (about what you are fighting for) possible for every scene.” “Conflict creates drama.”

“Maximum conflict is what you should be looking for. Who is interfering with your getting what you are fighting for? Do battle with her, fight her, woo her, charm her, revile her. Find as many ways as you can to go about getting what you are fighting for. The more ways you find, the more interesting your performance will be.”

3 . THE MOMENT BEFORE

Something always precedes what you are doing. Decide what has just happened. What events in the character’s life led up to this moment. *Be specific!*

4 . HUMOR

“Humor is not being funny. It is the coin of exchange between human beings that makes it possible for us to get through the day. Humor exists in the humorless. . . There is humor in every scene.”

5 . OPPOSITES

“Whatever you decide is your motivation in the scene, the opposite of that is also true and should be in it. . . . Consistency is the heart of dull acting.” “The more *extreme* the opposites the actor chooses for a scene, the more everything in between is likely to occur instinctively, naturally, without the actor having to consider these choices.”

6 . DISCOVERIES

“Every scene is filled with discoveries, things that happen for the first time. No matter how many times it has happened in the past, there is something new about this experience, this moment. . . . The more discoveries you make in a scene—the less you rely on ‘we do this everyday’—the more interesting your scene will be.” Ask yourself—what is new?

7. COMMUNICATION AND COMPETITION

Communication

“. . . to have (your feelings, thoughts, subtext) existing secretly inside of you isn't dramatic or active until you *need* to have it felt by the other character. . . . Communication is a circle, not a one-way street. . . . What you send out you must get back." "Ask yourself: Am I sending out and getting back feelings, or am I just talking?"

"Communication is based on the need to be heard by your partner and the hope that what he hears from you will make a *difference* in his relationship with you. Communication is the desire to change the person to whom you are communicating."

Competition

"All dramatic relationships are competitive."

"Competition is healthy."

"There are two points of view with which an actor should imbue every scene:

1. I am right and you are wrong.
2. You should change from being the way you are to be what I think you should be.

"An actor must compete or die."

8. IMPORTANCE

Nothing humdrum or everyday. "Plays are written about the most important moments in people's lives." "(Importance) means emotionally important to you."

9. FIND THE EVENTS

What happens? What are the events? A change can be an event—in fact, it is the strongest kind of event.

10. PLACE

How do you *feel* about where you are?

11. GAME PLAYING AND ROLE PLAYING

These are not insincere behaviors. "When we play games, it is for real: when we take on different roles, it is sincere conduct, for it is a *way of dealing with reality*, not of avoiding it." "It helps an actor to ask himself in each scene: What is the game I am playing in this situation? What role do I assume in order to best play this game? The answer depends on the circumstance: what people want from you, what you want from them, what you are offering, and what you expect. Ask what the stakes are, what you are playing for."

12. MYSTERY AND SECRET

"After you've done all the eleven guideposts in your preparation for your audition/part, then add to it what you *don't* know."