
BREAKING INTO SHOWBIZ



But first a little intro to explain this chapter

Hello! And thanks for being an overachiever like I am and reading this extra chapter. It's going to sound a bit different than *Long Legs and Tall Tales* (if you've jumped into that one yet). Want to know the super secret why? No? Then skip to the next paragraph. Yes? Here's why: *Long Legs and Tall Tales* was originally written as a funny how-to-ish book for aspiring performers called *How to Succeed in Show Business Without Really Trying*. In it I spilled the secrets to my success and the lessons I learned over the years and the rules I created and followed, most of which were silly survival skills that no one really talked about like what to do when your pants fall down while performing, where to find coffee brewing backstage and how to coerce the brew meister into sharing a cup, how to tan (or not) if you need to look presentable in a G-string (as if one ever looks presentable in a G). You know, important stuff like that (yes, it really was crucial info that I cared about at the time). But when I shared it with my savvy screenwriting sister, she remarked, "I like the anecdotes the best." So I scrapped the how-to format and forged ahead into storytelling memoir-style, which I absolutely love. And yet, I still get a kick out of the original book, especially since it focuses on YOU and YOUR DREAMS. So if you want to get a glimpse into the mind of a much younger and sassier me who developed some controversial opinions and showbiz survival techniques she wanted to share, keep on reading. Some are fantastic and you absolutely should follow them. Some are ridiculous and you should never follow them. Some are just....well, you decide.

To be or not to be in showbiz? That is the question.

What would make anyone want to be an entertainer in the first place? I am convinced that the people who are successful and survive in show biz were actually born to be on stage. There is truly no way they can live and be happy unless they satisfy that passion to express themselves and display their talents to others. Dancing and singing and acting (or juggling and swallowing fire while riding a 15-foot-high unicycle) are as essential to their well being as food and water.

Aspiring entertainers absolutely must have a ferocious innate hunger and thirst to perform, because the competition is so fierce, the obstacles and challenges so great, and the level of talent tremendous. Everyone is a triple threat (proficient in dance, singing, and acting) these days. Anyone with a weak sense of purpose will be bowled over like a Rockette in the “Parade of the Wooden Soldiers” fall (a famous and dangerous trick performed by the Rockettes dressed as wooden soldiers in which the first soldier falls backwards into the line of soldiers causing a domino effect knocking everyone down to the ground).

If you have to debate whether or not you are right for show business or show business is right for you, go out immediately and get a real 9-to-5 job with a regular paycheck, benefits, and a pension. The decision to perform is not a logical, reality-based decision. It comes from the heart, from fantasy, from insanity, from dreams, from passion, from a burning desire to be on stage. The need to be on stage is like a chronic affliction (thespianitis?).

If you are really meant to be an entertainer, you won't be able to stay away from show business if you try. You may get frustrated after a few too many rejections and try something else, but, like a boomerang, you'll keep coming back to the stage somehow, some way. You'll be pulled like a magnet to a refrigerator. You may fall off the refrigerator if the door is slammed hard enough, but that magnetic pull will always be there.

If you have a passion for the arts and are destined to be on stage, don't waste your time fighting it and trying everything else instead. Commit to making it happen and never waver or look back. Go full speed ahead. Don't make lists in your head about all the pitfalls of being a performer. Don't dwell on how unrealistic it is that you will actually be able to make a decent living as a dancer. Don't try to think of more stable and practical things you could do for a living. Don't even think you'll be content getting your MBA and working for Proctor and Gamble finding ways to make Pampers more profitable. Don't continually complain, “Why oh why couldn't I have been satisfied being a CPA? It would have made my life so much easier and financially stable. I got an A+ in my college accounting class, for goodness sakes!” I wasted years in graduate school, working retail and various uninspiring jobs while I tried to talk myself out of performing. If only I had used that time instead to take voice, dance, and acting classes or to sing on a cruise ship or do anything related to my career. I'd be that much more skilled and would have had that many more performing experiences. Don't



fight the desire to perform. You can't win. You'll either die bitter and regretful for not giving it a shot or live knowing that your place in the world is to entertain others. If you've got the light, let it shine!

I'm not saying that at some point you may not decide to change careers (especially if you are nearing 40, your biological clock is ticking, you didn't know banks offered savings accounts, and you still think you can move back with Mom and Dad if you don't get your big break). I'm saying that if performing is truly in your blood, then you will only be miserable for the rest of your life if you don't at least give it a try. You've been given a gift. Use it!

What if I love performing more than chocolate, more than a full-body massage from Tom Cruise, more than life itself but question my abilities?

If you've been bitten by the showbiz bug, don't stew about how Whitney Houston had more talent in her big toe than you'll ever have in a lifetime, and don't let anyone tell you that you are not good enough. Unless you are Whitney Houston or Mikhail Baryshnikov or Savion Glover, there will always be someone better than you are. Make up for what you lack in talent with hard work, passion, tenacity, and a good attitude. Don't be clueless and not correct your perpetually sickled feet, sharp singing, or habit of raising your eyebrows and saying "um" throughout your monologue. Get the proper training, fix bad habits, and be the best that you can be. Remember, the most talented people aren't always the most successful. Take Madonna for instance. She's admitted that she may not be the best dancer or the best singer in the world, but her drive, creativity, chameleon-like changing looks, and shocking artistry offer high entertainment value. What about British rock singer-songwriter Rod Stewart? He's no Andrea Bocelli, but he has a distinctive, interesting vocal quality, plus charisma and stage presence (and fascinating hair). And he's one of the best-selling musical artists of all time. Likewise, I've got friends with more passion for the arts than extreme innate talent, but they bust their behinds training to get where they need to be, and they are terrific entertainers. They may not have the natural ability that others have, but they do have that special spark that makes them riveting to watch. They are unique. And so are you.

passion \ˈpash-n\ 1 suffering 2 the state or capacity of being acted on by external agents or forces 3 the emotions as distinguished from reason, intense, driving or overmastering feeling 4 a strong liking for or devotion to some activity, object, or concept

What if I love entertainment but am afraid to try it?

Once you decide what it is you are passionate about, don't be afraid to try it. Don't be afraid to follow your dreams. Don't think about what you have to lose, think about what you have to gain. When I was just old enough to drive a car, I had a cutesy Hallmark key chain with a mouse frolicking among the flowers that read, "Life is too short to be taken seriously." I really needed to remind

myself of that as I tend to take everything too seriously. Taking that a step further, I feel like life is too short to be wasted on activities and people that don't make you happy. The older I get, the quicker time seems to fly and I find myself approaching middle age. When I'm 80 (if I'm lucky enough to be

**“Try not.
Do.
Or do not.
There is no try.”**

—YODA

alive and healthy at 80), what will I wish I had done with my life? Will I have regrets of missed opportunities? What passions, talents, curiosities, and adventures will I wish I would have taken advantage of? Music, dance, and entertainment have been a great source of joy, emotion, inspiration, and passion since I was very young. Nothing seems to light up my world like performing. What stops a lot of people from attempting to realize their dreams? FEAR! Fear of failure. Fear of the unknown. If you try to become a professional entertainer, you may fail (at first) or fall flat on your face. But, then again, you may succeed. If you never try, you'll definitely never succeed. Or, better

yet, as the great Yoda from *Star Wars* wisely said, “Try not. Do. Or do not. There is no try.” Just DO IT.

There is probably a good chance that you should go into showbiz if you answer “true” to any of the following statements:

- You'll absolutely keel over and die if you can't act on stage.
- You'll die unfulfilled and regretful if you don't perform.
- You'll hate yourself and eat potato chips and chocolate until you weigh 300 pounds due to self-loathing from never having the guts to be a dancer/singer/actor.
- Any other job seems like pure torture.
- You burn with envy whenever you see a show, because you are not up there, too.
- You don't care what anyone (including your parents) says, you will make it!

Definitely don't go into showbiz if:

- Your mother spent a fortune on your lessons and wants you to be a star.
- Someone can talk you out of it. (You don't want it badly enough to make it anyway.)
- You only want to do it to make a lot of money. (You've got a better chance of winning your fortune on the craps table in Vegas. Then again....someone's gotta win. It may as well be you!)
- You can't think of anything better to do and it seems like fun. (Actually, I tried dancing professionally because I couldn't think of anything better to do and it seemed like fun, but you will probably need a lot more reason and motivation than that to survive in the long run. The competition is just too fierce and the hardships are too great. You've gotta need that performance high like you need Starbucks to survive.)

- You can't handle:

- Rejection
- Unemployment
- Embarrassing yourself in front of thousands of people
- Getting notes/criticism
- Coworkers and strangers seeing you in various stages of undress
- Looking ridiculous
- Watching your weight/staying in shape
- Staying healthy/taking care of yourself
- Being poor on occasion (or on many occasions)
- Not knowing where your next paycheck is coming from
- Auditioning
- Continually hustling for work
- Last minute changes
- Performing with confidence when underrehearsed
- Picking up choreography or music or lines quickly
- Competing with friends
- Taking direction and corrections
- People more talented, prettier, skinnier than you
- Working holidays, nights, weekends

BREAKING INTO SHOWBIZ

Suppose you woke up tomorrow, drove to the office, poured yourself a cup of coffee, sat down at your desk, and said to yourself, "I'd rather be dancing!" In theory, it would actually be quite simple for you to give it a shot. That's basically how I started. Kind of on a whim. Unlike Hollywood where you needed to know the right people and obtain an agent who knows the right people just to find out about auditions, in the theater all you had to do was head to your local newsstand (if you lived in NYC) and pick up a copy of *Backstage* (or *Backstage West* for you Los Angelenos). Turn to the audition section and pick the ones you wanted to go to and show up. (Well, that was the way back in the 1980's and 1990's when I was auditioning. Nowadays, in the 21st century, there are probably mostly online sources.) Joe Schmo off the street could at least get into most auditions (except union calls) and be seen without so much as knowing a soul in showbiz. Granted, if you couldn't tell your left foot from your right, couldn't sing on pitch, or couldn't act to save your soul, you'd be in for some big time embarrassment (think about the really bad *American Idol* auditions) and probably some icy stares from other auditioners and even, perhaps, rude comments from the casting crew. But, hey, you could give it a try.

If you decide you want to become a professional dancer, my number one suggestion to you is to learn how to sing. (Ha! Is that like saying, "If you decide to become a professional football player,

my number one suggestion to you is to learn how to play basketball?" Seems to make no sense!) And really you might as well learn to act while you're at it. You'll have so many more job opportunities if you can be a triple threat. (And all the kids are these days.) Singers always seem to get paid more. And trust me when I say there will come a time when you would kill to step touch and sing 1000 shows than do round-off back handsprings and jump splits 1000 times. (Gymnastics can get you the gig, but make sure you really want to do back handsprings every night for a year on a rocking cruise ship before you admit you tumble.) I shudder to think of the roles I could have played and the money I could have made had I put as much emphasis on vocal training and acting as I did on dance. So if any of you are dancers aspiring to be professional entertainers, drop this book chapter immediately, go out and find a voice teacher, and learn to sing.

If you wanted to break into the television and film scene, well, that could be a little more complicated than infiltrating the theatre world. (At least it was when I was pounding the pavement in the 1990s.) You needed a good agent who knew directors and could pull for you. You needed an agent, because they had the *breakdowns* (audition notices). (Again, there are now online opportunities to submit yourself for roles. Super cool!) You needed an agent who actually knew you and sent you out for parts you had a chance at getting, not one who sent you out for anything and everything and wasted your precious time when you could have been rollerblading on Venice beach instead. Like the time I was sent out for a shampoo commercial. I spent an entire day driving and sitting in a waiting room full of long-locked lovelies and then having my measly mop glimpsed at for 2 seconds. For a gal who spent a good chunk of life bemoaning bad hair days, I should have known I didn't have the goods. My medium-length, indistinctive, lackluster tresses had no business being in a hair-featured commercial. I didn't possess a magnificent mane I could sexily swish from side to side. I wasn't qualified to make sudsing my hair in the shower appear orgasmic. Please. I wanted to kick myself and my agent for wasting my time sending me to an audition for which I was completely ill-suited. (Absolutely do NOT kick anyone. Both you and your agent are nice, hard-working people invested in your success.) But your agent really should know you are the Disney Cinderella type and not a weather-beaten, coke-addicted hooker type. In any case, you needed an agent who could actually find your headshots, not an agent with more actors than people in China. You couldn't find out about most auditions without an agent and practically no-one worth seeing would see you unless you were represented by an agent. Sometimes the agents submitted your picture for auditions first, the client screened out the people that looked interesting, and then you were called in. You often had to audition for agents as they were already so bursting to the brim they only wanted to take super-duper starlets. If you were super-duper, but they already had an entire file cabinet full of stellar Cinderellas, you still may not have gotten accepted. Some agents made you sign a year's contract, so you were stuck with them for the next 365 days, even if, like a bad boyfriend, they never called you.

Let's say you found and got accepted by a good agent. Hooray! You then had to get into the union (if you were not already). Trying to get your SAG (Screen Actors Guild) card could be a quest of epic proportions. Basically, you had to be in the union to get a union job, so how did you get in? (Which came first, the chicken or the egg? It was a catch-22 of sorts and too complicated for me to want to

explain the options here.) It could take years just to get into the union (if you ever did) so you could be considered for good jobs and make any money. Often, actors couldn't afford the fee to join (upwards of a few thousand dollars). Or the money you were required to spend on the initiation fee was everything you made on the gig itself. And then you had to keep paying yearly dues even if you never worked again. Consequently, the privilege of joining the union comprised not only this financial commitment but also a commitment to yourself to continually score union gigs in the future. I was one of the lucky ducks who got my SAG card without even trying. While I was in Detroit with the Rockettes for several months doing the *Radio City Christmas Spectacular* I signed up with a couple local talent agencies. I, along with a few of my friends, landed a Michigan Lottery commercial! I Taft-Hartleyed that gig, meaning a Congressional Act allowed me to be hired as a non-union actor as long as my employer proved there were no union actors available that were better for the part. The commercial was so successful, they called us all back in the next year for another ad. It was then that I joined SAG. Didn't make much money on the gig once I paid my fee and dues, but I reveled in being a card-carrying SAG member! I loved to flash that laminated beauty to anyone willing to look. Writing "SAG" on my resume made me feel so proud and professional. Plus I got a little SAG pin to wear on my lapel and also a pen that lit up so I could write down all my notes when in the dark theatre.

How to get gigs

audition\o-'dish-en\ a trial performance to appraise an entertainer's merits

Auditioning can be pure torture and if you can't handle it, you can't handle showbiz. It's a fine opportunity to make a fool of yourself in front of people. You never know exactly what to expect, how great the competition will be, if your brain and muscles will be cooperating, if you'll forget the words to your song, or if you'll have to sit in the hallway all day while your muscles get cold waiting your turn to shine. It's a crapshoot—you may end up looking and/or sounding like crap and, for one brief moment of insanity, wishing someone would shoot you. You never quite know what you'll be asked to do, and it's very difficult to leave once those studio doors have been shut and the room goes quiet. It's kind of like leaving your own wedding in the middle of the nuptial vows. My agent sent me to an audition once that ended up being hip-hop (I could hop, but hip was beyond me.), and I actually excused myself when there was an appropriate break. What an awkward and uncomfortable situation.

I was lucky enough to have worked quite a lot and, therefore, to have auditioned very little. Some actor friends of mine would do upwards of 10 auditions a week! They were probably quite relaxed and good at auditioning while my auditions were so few and far between that I was pretty stressed every time. Who wants to stand in front of a whole table full of people critiquing you? At least if it's a singer's call, you can prepare a song ahead of time that suits you and showcases only your strong points. At a dance call, you have no idea what they are going to make you do, so you have to be prepared for practically anything. I pretty much hated auditioning and only went to the calls that I really thought I was suited for. Okay, I auditioned for Prince's (or the Artist Formerly Known as

Prince) American Music Awards appearance and also the Hubbard Street Dance company, but only to say I did it. I knew I wasn't good enough for either at the time. At the Prince audition in LA, I got kicked in the middle finger by a fierce female in a black lace teddy and combat boots. I was so ill-suited for that gig that I deserved that broken finger (a finger I used a lot on the 405 freeway) for squeezing myself into that room packed like sardines with bonafide hip-hop divas. (Rumor had it that the young lady who gave me the boot had been a dancer in Madonna's tour and was propositioned by the Material Girl herself, but you can't believe rumors. Still, I actually felt kind of honored and special having been kicked by someone who may have been propositioned by someone who is extremely famous. And that just doesn't happen to everybody.)

I learned pretty quickly that the standard audition attire in NYC (solid color leotard, tan tights, and beige character shoes) was NOT the garb of choice in LA. The hip and trendy dancers in LA wore sexy workout tops, shorty boy shorts, and combat boots. All in a dazzling array of colors. Bonus points if you sported a crop top that exposed your six-pack abs and pierced belly button jewel. Tattoos were a plus as well. Hair was best done up in a do-rag (bandana tied Aunt Jemima style). New Yorkers are from Venus. Los Angelenos are from Mars. (Los Angelenos also call each other "honey" and do that fake air kiss on the cheek when they meet and greet.)

Once you are known in the business, directors and choreographers and even fellow performers often call you to be in their shows, and you are part of the elite club that gets to skip the whole miserable audition process. But until you make a name for yourself, you'll have to be a fantastic auditioner to land the gig. (If you don't make a name for yourself as a legit dancer, you can create a new name for yourself as an "exotic" dancer by putting together your first pet's name with the name of the first street you lived on. Mine was "Fluffy Katherine" and my friend's was "Pepper Cherry." My dancing gal pals and I used to joke about that, but I truly don't recommend going that route.) It's disheartening when you are the only one at the audition that isn't greeted by name and smooched by the director, but one day you, too, may be the lucky one who has paid her dues and is friends with the casting crew.

If you have ever had to go to job interviews, you know they can be nerve-wracking. You have to sell yourself, look professional, win over the interviewer, make yourself look and sound knowledgeable, skilled, and useful. You have to impress them. Try going to 10 job interviews a week (for several months) where a group of people critique your body in a bathing suit while you spin around in circles, leap through the air, and jump up and down all with a smile on your face.

Commercial auditions are the worst, as far as I'm concerned. You really set yourself up to look ridiculous. You always end up pantomiming. Like for some car commercial, they'll set up two folding chairs to represent the car and you have to pretend it's there and look in the invisible windows and marvel over this make-believe automobile. What if you were going to an interview for a construction job and they said, "We don't have the actual bulldozer. Just pretend it's here and show us how you would drive it." So you pretend to be sitting in a bulldozer moving levers and shifting gears and pushing dirt around the room with a look of confidence and competence, but you just look like a terrible Marcel Marceau impersonator. Landing a commercial is like winning the lottery. A million

actors are called in for one role as a dancing M&M. How do you pretend to be a giant candy-coated chocolate morsel with its groove on when you aren't wearing a costume? Do they really need to audition for the part? Is it that complicated? Couldn't we at least have been given a garbage bag with eye-holes cut out to put over our heads to simulate the sugary shell? You get maybe 20 seconds to slate your name and strut your stuff and you are out. That's the good part; the auditions are so quick (well, at least they were for this chick who rarely landed one). So you call in sick to your day job, get all dressed up, drive an hour and a half to the audition and get mere moments to prove that your portrayal of a boogieing M&M will sell the most sweets. And they always seem to call you the same day as the audition or the day before if you are really lucky. Do TV people not plan anything ahead of time? Does some marketing exec at Mars Candy Company exclaim, "I just had a brilliant idea for a commercial! Dancing M&Ms! Get me some dancers in 2 hours and we must film it tomorrow!" ???

What I'm thinking as I walk into auditions

"Look at all these people! Oh, great. Everyone is dressed in black workout shorts and crop tops and I'm in a purple leotard with tan tights! I look like a giant grape. Do I know anyone? I am the oldest one here. Everyone looks ethnic and hip and trendy. I look like Barbie. But maybe that's a good thing, because I'll stand out as being different and maybe they need one Barbie doll. Where do I sign in? What are they going to make us do? I hope to God I don't embarrass myself. I hope I can pick up the choreography and not stand there frozen like a deer in headlights. Will I be warmed up enough? It's really cold in here. I hope my bra doesn't show. I'm having a bad hair day. Everyone else has these cute hairdos and I have my hair plastered into a ponytail. I wish I were 5 pounds thinner. I wonder when we have to sing. I hope they don't make me sing the entire song. I hope my voice doesn't crack. I feel a little sore throat coming on. I shouldn't have had milk for breakfast. My stomach feels upset. There's the musical director I worked with in Wizard of Oz. I liked him a lot. I should say hello. Wonder if he remembers me. I can't wait for this to be over. I hope we are not going to be here all day. I wonder when the callbacks are. I would be GREAT for this show! God, I hope I get it! If I don't, I'm going to have to get a real job, because I'm down to my last \$496.00 in the bank."

How do I become a fantastic auditioner?

Learn to fake it. (Fake it till you make it or fake it till you break it, whichever comes first.) This skill is invaluable at auditions as well as in shows when you may have last minute changes. If you didn't pick up all the choreography at an audition before your group was called to dance, do the parts you know and fake the rest with confidence and an unwavering smile. At least the director will know that you can fake it onstage if you mess up. You'd be surprised at how many mistakes an audience can miss simply because if you don't show it in your face, they think you must be doing the choreography as planned. Don't look frustrated or confused or terrified or ticked off if you goof. Keep performing with your face and your mistakes won't be as visible or horrible.

Get the proper training and never stop training so you can be prepared for whatever they throw your way. Go to class, go to class, and go to class some more. Keep your instrument tuned or a bad

note is bound to squeak out. Keep your technique solid and fresh. Don't come in as rusty as an old nail in a puddle. Use it or you will lose it. In particular, learn to do a double pirouette flawlessly and maintain it. I auditioned for *Cats* after not taking class in months and months. First thing you do: a double pirouette. I could tell they really liked me (I must have fit the fur of the cat they needed to replace.) They let me try that pirouette over and over, and I just fell over and over. It was so ridiculous that I couldn't even believe I blew the audition over a simple double pirouette. Like Napoleon Dynamite, I kept thinking to myself, "Idiot!" Lesson: there is no excuse for losing an audition over a measly two turns.

Turn a negative into a positive. You'll hear lots of criticism over time in this business. Learn to separate the good advice from the bull doo-doo. Then if it's not bull doo-doo, do something about it. I had a dancer friend that auditioned only to get the humiliating feedback, "You might want to use your lunch money to buy voice lessons." How rude. But instead of just going home to cry into her beer, that's what she did and landed job as a singer on a cruise ship. Take the "I'll show you who can sing!" attitude instead of wallowing in self pity and admitting defeat. Have a thick skin for rejection, but be wise and clear-headed enough to examine the criticism to see if they have a point.

Time is of the essence at an audition. The casting people are renting the studio by the hour and time is money. They may have only reserved a certain block of time and then they have to be outta there for the next class to come in. They have a lot to accomplish in their allotted few hours. You are expected to pick up choreography very quickly and perform it with style. If you are one of the first groups to perform, you really need to be on your toes. You need to get that choreography into your body ASAP. My trick to doing that is to mark the dance (or trickiest section of the dance) over and over to get it into muscle memory (you can do it at warp speed 10 times in a few seconds). Repetition is the key to feeling comfortable with the choreography. You want your muscles to know where to go so you can concentrate on performing with stage presence. The casting crew needs to know you can pick up and perform choreo quickly, because at rehearsals, you'll have to do just that. You can't be an "if-I-had-time-I-could-get-it" dancer, because you don't have time. Rehearsal time is as short as it can possibly be, because, again, time is money. They want skilled performers who can put up a show in 10 days and perform it blindfolded.

My advice on singing if you are primarily a dancer: Learn 16 bars of an uptempo musical theatre song that is easy enough for you to sing. Learn it inside and out, upside and down so you can sing it naked in front of the President without flinching if you had to. And sing out, Louise! Sing with confidence, gusto, and personality. And be able to sing it no matter if the pianist murders it beyond recognition. I survived about 10 years with the same 16 bars. I knew it so well, I could practice singing it on the way to a last minute audition and be fine. Of course, if you can swing it, learn lots of songs appropriate for different shows and learn to sing them flawlessly. But if your singing is weak, a solid 16 bars is the ticket. At least it was for me. Only once was I asked to sing an entire verse of a song. (Of course, that's why I was always in the ensemble and never had lead roles. But I was happy! And I made a living doing what I loved.)

Get to the audition early enough so that you don't feel rushed. Leave enough time to prepare, relax, and breathe but not so much time that you get bored, overstretched, or freaked out analyzing the competition. Don't let the competition psych you out. The prettiest, skinniest, most confident acting girls (or guys) stretching their legs over their heads aren't necessarily the best dancers. I've started breaking out into cold sweats watching some dancers warm up. They look so intimidating that my confidence shrivels up like a willy in ice water. I go into the audition and find out they aren't all that. Focus on yourself.

Whatever you do, don't dance in the first group. Your audition number is assigned to you based on when you signed in. If you were an early bird (numbers 1 through 5 or so), you will be dancing first. This makes you a fowl in a foul situation, because you have to pick up the choreography quicker than everyone else does. A few extra seconds or minutes to practice can mean life or death at an audition. Also, the first few groups set the standard for judging. The judges don't really know how high to mark you based on the abilities of the group. They will probably mark you a little too low to leave room for really spectacular performers and then realize the rest of the group is at about the same level. But by the end, they've forgotten how good you were and your marks don't really tell the whole story. The only good thing about going first is that you get it over with first. The casting people may even joke about how you got the raw end of the deal by being in the first group. This is another reason you don't want to get to the audition too early. Or at least wait for more chicks to sign in before you do.

Don't dance with anyone a lot better than you or you will be invisible. If you are the best in your group, you may be seen as better than you really are. If you are really good but get stuck with the super diva, they will only see her, and you will be forgotten even though you would have made the callback had you been in another group. The only way to avoid this problem is to make sure you don't sign in next to anyone you know is amazing or to rub your lucky fortune crystal and pray to the theatre gods before you audition. I did both.

Find a favorite leotard and stick with it. Pick something classic in a color that makes you stand out and look good, and make sure you feel comfortable in it. Whatever you wear to the initial audition, wear to the callback so they remember that fabulous girl in the purple leotard. Again, I survived a good eight years with my lucky purple audition leo. (Even when the elastic started to disintegrate, I just didn't want to let it go!) And if you find out about an audition last minute, you don't have to fret about what to wear. Pick an outfit for which you won't have to keep adjusting your bra that's slipping out or yanking your leo down to cover your rear end. Pick something that makes you feel like a diva so you can dance like one.

Exude confidence and stage presence. You are going to have to pick up a combination very quickly and perform it like you've been doing it for years. And God forbid your group should have to dance first. You probably won't do the combo perfectly, so make up for flaws with charm and charisma. Fake it till you make it! Act like you are really performing on stage. Have fun. It'll show. That's what an audience wants to see and so does the director.

Your headshot should look like you. You want to be able to be recognized from your photo so a director looking over his pile of headshots will remember you from the audition when he sees your smiling image. For TV and film, you often have to send in a headshot/resume and from that they choose who gets to audition. But in the theatre, you generally go to the audition and leave the headshot so they can remember you when deciding whom to call back. "Oh yeah, I remember that girl. Loved her. Purple leotard, right? What's her name? Kristi Davis." If you want to make yourself look like someone else, go to Glamour Shots at the mall, tease your hair and do something outrageous for your boyfriend. When I lived in LA and got my proofs back for my new headshots, I burst out crying, "These look exactly like me!" I wanted them to look somehow different and more glamorous. For headshots, you want to be the best YOU you can be with all your unique qualities. No one can be a better Britney Spears or Michael Jackson than Britney and Michael. Be yourself in all your glory. It's okay to look like a nice and nearly normal version of you.

Don't be overweight unless you are auditioning for an appropriate character part. There aren't currently many shows interested in heavier dancers (although there really should be and maybe I will create one as soon as I'm done writing this chapter). Unfortunately, in most cases, ya chews, ya lose (the job).

Keep your days free so you can be available for auditions and callbacks. If you work a day job, you may not be free to get to the audition. How are you going to get the job? I mostly kept my days free by being unemployed. Scary!

If the show has tapping in it, bring tap shoes. Don't try to fake your lack of tap skills and knowledge by bringing only character shoes. The choreographer is smart enough to realize you haven't a clue when she asks you to *paradiddle* and *flap* and you tickle her twice then wave your arms like a flying bird.

You will always be competing with your friends. It stinks like skunk funk when one of you gets the job and the other one doesn't, but that's the way the cookie crumbles. It's hard not to be jealous when you get cut and your friend gets the gig. And when you score a show and your amigo gets axed, your victory dance isn't quite as exuberant. But you can't both be right for all the same shows all of the time. Rest assured, you will find a venue in which to showcase your talents (even if that means creating a venue for yourself). In the meantime, congratulate your friend on her success and start looking for something else. Some auditions are like a reunion of all the pals you've worked with in the past. As much as it's a blast catching up with them, you still have that sinking feeling that you have to compete with them for the cookies. It's a bittersweet situation.

Some people are really into the whole audition process and research the choreographer, director, musical director, and assistant choreographer. They pole all their showbiz friends to find out anything they can about the casting people and what they will be looking for and asking auditioners to do. They try to learn the choreography ahead of time (for, say, a standard Broadway show like *A Chorus Line*) from people that have done the show before. (I actually did that and it definitely gave me a leg up. And legs that were moving in the right direction.) Seems like quite a smart approach,

but I never got into all the showbiz gossip and competition. It spoiled the fun for me. I just wanted to show up and do my best.

presence\ˈprezˈn(t)s\ a quality of poise and effectiveness that enables a performer to achieve a close relationship with its audience

What is the casting crew thinking?

So there is a table at the front of the studio by the mirrors and seated at it is the casting crew that will decide your fate. They will watch you, listen to you, and critique you. They will think, “She’s 5 pounds overweight but still pretty, has good ballet technique, and needs some work on her singing. She has a bad habit of flicking her head. Can we get rid of that?”

Put yourself in their shoes. If you can, get involved in a show where YOU can be the casting director. You’ll have a much better perspective on what they are thinking. First of all, directors and choreographers want a good turn-out at the audition and they want you to do WELL. Think about it...if you were casting a show, would you want only 7 people to choose from? Would you want people to give a really bad audition? Would you want to see a lot of dancers flubbing up the choreography, falling on their tushes, tumbling out of turns? (Maybe just for a bit of light comedy to break up the day but otherwise NO.) Would you want to see and hear nervous, sweaty singers with no breath support and cracking voices forget the words to their songs and end up all flustered? Of course not. You want a lot of talented people all perfect for the show so that you can choose anyone and your show would be fantastic. Bad performers=bad show. The casting crew really is rooting for you to do your best. If the show is challenging and they only have 10 days to teach it before it opens, they need to challenge you at the audition to see who is up for the challenge. But they aren’t trying to make you fail. They just need to know they have someone who can handle the rigors of the job. If they like you, think you look the part, have talent but are just having a bad day, they’ll probably invite you to a callback even if you had a less than impressive audition. They want you to do your best. They are on your side (unless you are one of those Joe Schmoes off the street with no training—see page 5).

Watch yourself on video if at all possible. Get a copy of a performance or set up a camera in your living room and perform the audition piece. You may be surprised at what you see. I thought I was dancing with strong arm movements, but, after seeing myself on video, I realized I looked like I had floppy Raggedy Ann arms. The number didn’t call for limp, cooked spaghetti noodles. The casting crew may see flaws you didn’t realize you have. Sometimes you’ll get a note at an audition so they can see if you can correct that bad habit immediately.

Remember that casting directors don’t always make the best decisions. Case in point: One darling gal I worked with goofed up something EVERY single show and got very upset and flustered at herself, which made her even more nervous and likely to botch up the next time. (The one thing you could say for her was that she was consistent.) Perhaps she was not the perfect match for that

particular production. (Yet she was absolutely rock-solid fabulous as a lead character in another show.)

Most of the time I got cut, I never did find out who was hired in the end. So it can be hard to know what they were looking for, why you were released, what the others had that you didn't have, and what it is that you need to work on to get the gig next time. I've never really gotten feedback from an audition as to why I didn't get the job. Actors seem to over analyze why they didn't land an audition. They take getting "cut" personally, as a failure. Sometimes the reason you didn't get the job has little or nothing to do with anything you could have controlled. Sometimes you don't have a realistic perspective on your qualities and talents.

To help you solve the mystery of why you didn't get the job, here is a list of possible reasons:

- You were typed out. Like when you are dating and you say, "He's not my type." You simply weren't the type they were looking for. For instance, you may be a 5'2" girl in 3 inch character shoes, but they asked for ladies 5'8" and taller (in stocking feet). Gong! You're out. (Yes, they are smart enough to know the high heels trick.) You may be a 98-pound, marshmallow white hipster, but they need a Puerto Rican body-builder. Gong! Sayonara. No amount of talent would have gotten you the job. Sometimes you really aren't sure what type they are looking for. Don't sweat it. Being typed out is the least painful way to lose an audition, because it's not your fault.
- The director worked with the other auditioners before and adored them. Gong! You're out.
- You had a few too many dates with Doritos and doughnuts. Too chubby. Gong!
- You couldn't sing or dance or act to save your doggone soul. Gong!
- You had no stage presence and were concentrating so hard on the double pirouette, leap to the ground, butt spin, arch up, jazz hands combination that you bit your lip the whole time and furrowed your brow instead of smiling radiantly. Gong!
- The show was already cast, but the union required that an audition be held anyway. Gong!
- You were good, but the others your type were better. Dang! Gong!
- When you previously worked with this same director, you were always late and had a snarky attitude. Gong!
- You couldn't do a double pirouette. Shame! Double gong!
- You didn't fit the Big Bird costume of the performer that needed to be replaced in the *Sesame Street Live* show. Now who feels like Oscar the Grouch? Gong!
- You danced in a group with the most talented girl there and, consequently, they never saw you. You were simply invisible that day. Gong!

- A mosquito landed on the nose of the casting director while you were dancing, and she was distracted. She didn't have any recollection of your dazzling performance when it came time to choose whom to call back. Stung! Gong!
- They heard you crabbing in the hall about how you hate cruise ship jobs but need the money. Gong! That ship is sailing without you.

What to do and NOT to do when waiting for the next gig

The time in between jobs can be tense and taxing. It's terrifying when you don't know where your next paycheck is coming from or what your next job will be. But you can't let yourself get out of auditioning shape for one minute. The time when you are not working needs to be considered part of your job. Your time off is just as important as time on, for it's the time when you need to be honing your talents, learning new skills, and perfecting your craft. It is also the time when you market yourself, network, and update your pictures, postcards, business cards, and resumes. On the flip side, here is a non-comprehensive list of what NOT to do when not working:

- Open your gob and shovel in an entire pint of Ben & Jerry's Chunky Monkey while watching *Bridget Jones's Diary*. (On second thought, I do love that ice cream and I do adore that movie. Maybe you can get away with doing it once. But only once. All things in moderation, right?)
- Wallow in self pity.
- Ponder all the other stable careers you could still attain by age 40 if you start college again in 3 weeks.
- Putz around in your pajamas all day waiting for a director to call you with your dream job.
- Go to the mall "just to look" and put \$500 on your credit card. I went shopping on a dangerous day in Vegas once. I had just returned to work in my Rockette show at the Flamingo Hilton and had a colicky 3-month old baby, and I was stress shopping. A sales person could have sold me anything that day. My plan was to buy only antibacterial hand lotion at the Bath and Body Shop. The sales lady asked me if I knew about their special on stress-reduction products—only \$15 for my choice of 3! "Yes, I absolutely must have the eucalyptus exfoliating bath salts to loofah off the stress and dead skin. And the peppermint temple spray for my headaches. And the aroma therapy candle. Thank God you told me about this sale, or I would have ended up in a hospital with a nervous breakdown." I also bought \$100 worth of make-up and new, oddly-named, trendy nail polish colors which did actually make me very happy (as happy as a deep dark purple nail polish called "Midnight Martini Madness" can make a person).
- Pick all your zits. You'll be tempted. It's fun, free entertainment. But that will be the day your agent calls you in for a Crest toothpaste commercial with a close-up of your pearly whites, and all they notice is flaming red, erupting Mount Vesuvius on your chin. (Of course, if you get called for a Clearasil acne-fighting commercial, your little crimson friend may lang you the gig.)

How to keep working and getting gigs

Once you land a job or two, if you do well and make friends (not enemies), you'll open doors to many other opportunities. When I first set foot in New York to attempt to be a professional dancer, my college friend Jenny got me an audition with her modern dance company. I was accepted and the choreographer got me an audition with a party entertainment company she worked for. I got that job, too. Years later when I moved to LA, I got a call from that same entertainment company, because they had opened a West Coast office and discovered I was in California. (Thanks, Jenny!) While working for them out there, I danced with an Italian adonis who booked a job choreographing for Playboy's Girls of Rock & Roll. He got me an interview with the executive producer of the production. And to continue the job progression, the artistic producer of the Playboy show asked me to audition for her cruise ship show. I got that gig, and that led to several other jobs including a chance to dance in Miami for President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hilary Rodham Clinton! This all goes to show that if you prove yourself to be skilled, responsible, reliable, friendly, and easy to work with, directors and choreographers will hire you over and over. They know they can trust you and know what you are capable of. If you play your cards right, one job begets another. More importantly, if you make friends and make the right moves, you may end up shaking your tail feathers for the President of the United States!

The world of entertainment is quite small. Word gets around if you are a nightmare and half to work with. The way to break into showbiz is to be a fantastic auditioner. The way to keep getting jobs is to prove yourself and make friends. Show up on time. Don't complain. Have a good attitude. Be consistent and reliable. Don't be a horse's heinie (unless you're hired to be one). Don't make excuses and argue about your notes from the director, choreographer, stage manager, or dance captain. Just pull out your notebook and special light-up SAG pen and say, "Yes. Thank you. I can do that. I will make those changes, no problemo." Write them down and follow through. Get the job done. Be professional. Be nice. And while you're at it, have a heckuva good time. That's why you wanted to break into showbiz in the first place.