Toronto Academy of Acting Offers Helpful Tips For Breaking In the Acting Industry

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It's All Who You Know: FOUR Helpful Tips For Building A Network And Breaking In The Film And Television Industry

Networking. Some people are good at it, some people cringe when they hear the word. Regardless, we all have to do it, and the closed loop nature of the film and television industry makes it especially important for us. To help out, here are a few practices I've found to be hugely effective in building a professional network:

1. Guild Events

In the film and television industry, there's a guild for everything. Whether you're an aspiring actor, writer, director, producer or camera operator, somewhere out there is a guild with an agreement that covers everything from base wages to what they have to feed you for lunch on set (seriously). Once you get in to a guild they will protect your rights and provide you with all kinds of sweet benefits, but the real networking potential to be found here is in their newsletters. Most guilds put out regular newsletters that contain things like industry news, what guild members are up to, and most importantly details on special guild events you can totally go to. You would

think that attending guild events is something you actually have to be a guild member to do, but that's not always the case. There are plenty of conferences and pub nights that are completely open to the public. You should also browse Facebook for guild pages and similar social groups that put on these events. And just because they are technically work functions doesn't mean they have to be boring. A little while back I went with a couple friends to a pub night for Toronto based screenwriters. We spent the whole night doing tequila shots and chatting with other writers about our favorite shows. So figure out when the next congregation of industry professionals is, bring a date and make an evening out of it!

2. Form Real Friendships With Your Peers

The emphasis here is on REAL friendships, not those fake "if we didn't work together I would never talk to you" friendships. This one seems very obvious, but I'm always surprised at how many people don't do it. The easiest way to make friends in your field is to start at school (assuming you're getting professional instruction, which you should be). It's as easy as socializing with your class mates, friending them on Facebook and going out for the occasional pint after class. When you do find work on a production, single out the people who look like they have their act together and make sure they walk off that set remembering your name. The key to this is to not think of your peers as names in your black book, but as people you take a genuine interest in. The second and equally crucial part of this process is the follow up. You MUST follow up. Even if it's just the odd coffee date or an email every now and then to ask how they're doing, you need to make sure you don't fall in to an "out of sight, out of mind" category. It's as simple as being kind and taking a sincere interest in the people you work with. You'll be amazed at what people will do for you when they know you'll readily return the favor.

3. Seek/Offer Professional Advice

A great way to strengthen the bonds in your network is to regularly ask your peers for their professional opinion. For example, as a screenwriter, I have a long list of people I can send scripts to or bounce ideas off of. The obvious benefit is those people give me great notes that make my scripts better, but the flip side is they send me their work. I love reading people's work because A) it's good practice and B) Knowing that people value my opinion makes me feel good about myself. If you can make one of your peers feel like that, I guarantee they will remember you for a long time. As an actor, you should regularly have your peers run lines with you. Even if you happen to be Sean Penn and don't really need help, present your character to an actor friend anyway to see if they're convinced. You'll be shocked at the amount of helpful tips people will give you on something you thought you had nailed down perfectly. Being humble and seeking advice is far more professional than proceeding forward as if you know everything, and most importantly it will cement you as a professional in people's minds. Be someone who is grounded and serious about making it in this industry, as opposed to someone who believes they're the next Johnny Depp.

4. Social Media

Social media is by far your most useful tool for maintaining a professional network. When you're competing for a job there's a definite chance your prospective employers will Google you. That's why it's important to not only have an online presence, but have a thorough and professional one. Start with Facebook: go on to your profile and either A) delete your drunk pictures or B) modify your privacy settings so strangers can't see them. Besides looking professional, you can use your Facebook to keep in touch with all those friends you made after reading tip #2. Next, Twitter: it helps to have a Twitter account in your name that you can use to promote how smart you are. No joke there, tweeting interesting anecdotes and links to articles make you look way smarter than if you tweet pictures of your food. As far as

professional networks are concerned, it helps to have profiles on LinkedIn, Branch Out, Mandy.com and Mediajobsearch.com. That last one is key as it has more industry job postings than any site I've ever been on. It's like a film and television industry Workopolis. Finally, when you make your profiles make sure to use your real name and a real picture. Besides the fact that that's how people will find you, nobody wants to hire somebody whose name is Killthebatman_87.

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