

Session Nine

The Activity, Continued

OK, everyone have their activity? We will now go to the next step in building the exercise. Here's how it goes:

- Partner A is in their room and they are doing the activity.
- Partner B goes out. (Partner B, when you go out, take some time out there so that your partner has time to get involved with their activity.
- Then I want Partner B, to come to the door and knock three times, each time in a different way.
- Partner A, you are doing the activity and as you hear the knocks, I want you to describe the knocks out loud to yourself, what the knock "says" to you.
- Partner B, on the third knock, as you knock, open the door and come in. (For the time being, as we use three knocks in the exercise, the door is "not locked". Got that?)
- Immediately, either one of you will begin repetition.

For example:

My partners first knock is a loud and rapid four thuds on my door. I might say to myself (out loud), *"That was an angry knock."* Her second knocks are very soft taps. I might say, *"How gentle."* Her third knock is slow and careful and as she opens the door slowly I say to her, *"You're hesitant,"* which leads us right into repetition. (Of course, depending on the

moment, she might begin the repetition as she enters, working-off what she gets from me.) See what we're doing here? You are working-off of the knock. This isn't mysterious, what it is about is that everything has meaning to you and you must work off of it, be available to it. You see, when you have the activity, the exercise starts the moment you enter your room to accomplish this incredibly difficult task. You are not waiting to do some great repetition with your partner! You don't even know that anyone is coming over! Remember? If the door should open, what do you do? You work-off of everything that is dished up to you.

Look, if you have the only set of keys to your car and you are inside your home eating dinner and suddenly you hear the car's engine start, you are going to have some very specific response to that. And if, as you are running toward the door, you hear the tires squealing on the pavement, well, you are going to have a specific response to that. And when you open the door and see that it is actually your neighbor's car being stolen, you will have another very specific response to that, and so on.

If you really watch and listen, you will see many actors only act when they are talking. When they are not talking, they are waiting for their next opportunity to do some more great talking. But acting is not about picking up the cues, we must continually be in response to what is happening. What makes us say the lines are our impulses to respond, and these come from our availability to everything that is coming our way!

**To the Observer: Make sure the person with the activity does not give up doing it to have casual conversation with their partner or to play the good hostess or for any other reason unless something that they get from their partner makes them give up the activity. If they are giving up the*

activity for no good reason, you can say “Don’t give up what you must accomplish,” or “Don’t drop the activity.” The exercise can be longer now, a good ten minutes or so. When you decide to stop the exercise depends on what is happening with the partners who are working.

Go ahead now, do some work, each person doing one exercise as the partner inside with the activity and one time outside, coming to the door. As before, do not end the exercise until the Observer tells you it’s over. Then read on.

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Let’s talk now about the next step in building the activity and get very clear on what your homework will be for Session Ten. To do that, I have a question for you and I want you to write down three possible solutions. Taking the activity that you brought in with you today, *out of your imagination*, what might be a *simple and specific* reason you are in your room doing this very difficult task?

In your notebook, I want you all to write down three different possible reasons for your activity. Simple and specific! Do that now and then read on.

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The activity holds within it the essential elements you will put to use in every acting demand you are asked to realize! As you create the activity, there are key questions you must ask yourself over and over again. You will begin to learn how to talk to yourself as an actor. You will expand and deepen your actor’s imagination.

To help you along this path, with each new step we take in “building the exercise”, I will give you an invented example

of an exercise in the format of a “conversation” between myself and the “students” who just “worked.” (Each “conversation” will be a *new pair* of invented students.) Listen especially to the questions that I ask, as they will lead you toward a way of speaking to yourself *as an actor*. Let’s get to the next step in the work with the following example:
Conversation In Preparation For Your Next Exercise
EXERCISE

- One person has an activity that is simple and specific.
- The other person comes to the door, knocks three times and enters.

1) To the student with the activity:

Larry: What was the activity?

Student: I was trying to make an origami bird.

Larry: Was it any origami bird?

Student: No, it was an origami eagle.

Larry: Great! That’s specific. Not any bird, an eagle. And what is that other piece of paper you have with you.

Student: These are the directions on how to make an origami eagle.

Larry: Good, that was very difficult for you to do.

Student: Yeah, I’ve never done origami before!

Larry: Also, you weren’t doing an eagle from your head, you were doing that specific eagle on the instruction page. That way you really know when you have accomplished what you are setting out to do. Now, what was the simple and specific imaginary reason that got you to stay at home and make this origami eagle today?

Student: There is a competition.

Larry: OK, there’s an origami competition. So, why are you entering it?

Student: Just to win the respect of my friends.

Larry: First of all, take out the word “just”, it’s never to “just” do anything! You know, that reason sounds complex to me and general. How do you really know when you’ve got the “respect of your friends” and which friends? This is your first time giving the activity a reason, so let’s work it through together. Let’s get very simple here. Why else might you be entering?

Student: There’s a prize.

Larry: Good, what is it.

Student: A lot of money.

Larry: That would be nice but you know what, a “lot of money” is general. Even if it were ten thousand dollars, it’s still general. Ten thousand would also be nice but until you know specifically what you *absolutely* have to have the money for, it is general. Let’s stay away from money for the moment, we’ll talk more about it some other time. Let’s get real simple. How about this prize, what would you just love to win in a contest today? What would really turn you on?

Student: A new car.

Larry: Yeah? What car?

Student: A Toyota.

Larry: What Toyota is your dream car? I mean you’re the one making up the prize, why not make it fantastic!

Student: The Toyota pickup.

Larry: Ahh, a Toyota pickup!

Student: Four-wheel drive!

Larry: What color?

Student: RED!

Larry: A red, four-wheel drive, Toyota pickup. That’s simple and specific. Isn’t it now more important to you that you get the eagle perfect and win the contest? Also, isn’t it more specific to say a red Toyota, four-wheel drive pickup than to say “to win a new car?”

Student: Yeah.

Larry: Specific to whom?

Student: To me.

Larry: That's right and that's what counts. OK, let's practice some more. Out of your imagination, what is another possible simple and specific reason for making the origami eagle. Student: I'm going to give it as a gift.

Larry: That's a good start. Who are you going to give it to?

Student: A friend...I know, that's general—make it more specific... no, not a friend, to my mother.

Larry: Does your mother like origami? Or eagles?

Student: Well, she's not really into origami or eagles, but she goes wild over anything that I make myself, by hand. Like last year for her birthday, I made her this little stained glass box and she went nuts! When I was in elementary school, every wall in our old house was covered with my drawings.

Larry: Great! Now that's a reason that turns you on. As you talked, your eyes were glowing. So again, the reason is?

Student: I'm making an origami eagle to give to my mother as a gift.

Larry: That's a simple reason and for you, extremely specific! Terrific! Getting back to today's exercise, I want to say something about your working-off of your partner. Were you at all aware that she was absolutely fascinated with the origami that you were doing?

Student: I did notice that she was watching me with these warm eagle eyes of hers. *(he laughs)* Larry: Why do you laugh?

Student: Because I just said "eagle eyes" and, you know, I was making an origami eagle. It's just so cool that I would describe her with that phrase, I guess there's something with me and eagles...

Larry: So you were aware of her behavior. Listen, you must work from that awareness. What might you have said to her?

Student: I could have told her that she was really attentive.

Larry: Right, or even, “You’ve got those eagle eyes on me!”

You see? How did you feel to be watched in that way?

Student: A little self-conscious but, ummm, mostly I liked it, I don’t know...

Larry: Yes, you do know. Take your time...

Student: Well actually, I felt so appreciated.

Larry: You felt appreciated! Isn’t that great? Listen, our emotions have no reason, they are not “reasonable,” they just are. “Why does this little thing make me feel so much?” There are no “little things”. Who knows why some things impact us in tremendous ways. Of course we could spend years getting to the root of each reaction—that is not the process we are involved in here. In our work together, you never have to explain or figure out why you feel a certain way, you simply feel that way. We must *embrace* exactly what is happening, work from it and not try to make it more or less than it is.

Student: This is embarrassing, but at one point I really wanted to give her a hug.

Larry: Then, in that moment, what must you do?

Student: Give her a hug?

Larry: *Why not?* Let your impulses lead you, as you begin to let go of “The Internal Censor” you will discover a whole new world available to you in this work.

2) To the student who came to the door:

Larry: You know, there was a lovely shift in your work today. Very relaxed and unforced. You took in your partner fully and you simply worked-off what he gave to you. You didn’t try to find the things to work-off and you didn’t push to make something happen. You accepted and were available to what was happening. I must tell you, that simplicity and honesty, the way you really listened to him, was magnificent to witness. I mean that! How often do we sit through plays and keep hoping there will be just

one authentic moment, one moment of living human contact. But don't get me started on that. What was your experience today, how did it feel for you?

Student: This was a first for me. This felt so different. Up until now, I have been so frustrated. Like I was never gonna get it! Every time I would leave here or finish working with my partner between sessions, I would get very depressed. I started to think that I was inept and that I should give it all up.

Larry: And you kept doing the work.

Student: Yes.... I did. And this time it wasn't so hard, it was actually fun!

Larry: Good, from today's experience you learned something of lasting value. And who did it? You did! Look, I can only lead you in a certain direction but it was your commitment and hard work that made today's breakthrough possible for you. Of course, the danger now is in trying to have today's exercise when you do your next exercise.

Keep up the work everyone, see you next time.

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So you see, in the sessions ahead, you are going to get deeply in touch with what *really means something to you*. That's what you work from as an actor, always. The process of the activities is exciting work and tremendously rigorous. Be ruthless with yourself and the payoff will be great! (That means, DO YOUR HOMEWORK!) Now I want you to go back and look at your three reasons for your own activity and see how you did in the areas of simplicity and specificity. Then if needed, rework your reasons until you feel satisfied that they are as simple and specific as you can get them. When you've got it, write down in a one sentence statement, the activity and why you are doing it. (Just as in the "Student's

final statement in the Example: I'm making an origami eagle to give to my mother as a gift.") Remember, because of this reason, you would be driven to accomplish this task.

One other thing. The activity you brought in today may have been, in a way (like the balancing of the stick we did) mostly a game. Maybe yours was something like pitching pennies into a bottle, or tossing playing cards into a hat, or spinning a basketball on a finger. These are all fine for today but you know, they are like bar games and other than to win a bet, pretty hard to really justify. (We'll talk more about this in the homework assignment...) Go back into your notebook now and do what you can with today's activity and then come back and read on.

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HOMEWORK

For Session Ten, you must have an activity that is physically difficult to do, the more difficult to do the better. There must be a simple and specific reason that you are doing it and it must be a genuine task (not a bar game!). You must always bring with you whatever you need to complete that genuine task.

So what is a genuine task? Simply, it's something you would really do for the reason you've given yourself to do it. This does not mean something that you would *normally do*.

For example:

You may hate to draw pictures and so you never do it, BUT TODAY is your little sister's birthday and she loves two things—Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* and puzzles. So, you bring with you a set of colored markers, the videotape of

Beauty and the Beast (it has a great picture on the cover) and one of those precut puzzle cards that you can write or draw on and then take apart for someone else to put together. Your activity is to *draw a picture of Beauty and the Beast on the puzzle card to give as a birthday card to your little sister.* (The videotape will be the gift!) So you see, in the normal course of events, you would never spend your time drawing a picture of *Beauty and the Beast*, BUT TODAY you are excited to do so because you can just imagine how happy your sister will be when she puts the pieces of the puzzle card together. Got that?

Good, now get to work! And keep up the repetition between Sessions, as often as you can. (Not with activities. You do those at your group meetings.) See you at Session Ten!

Oh, the power of working well, the feeling of power that races through your veins and heart! Oh, the deep content of sitting in the creative climate! In that warmth there is no longing, no yearning, no loneliness or unhappiness. One functions and the self is forgotten, although it is the self most alive and quivering. It is joy, no other word.

—Clifford Odets
from *The Time Is Ripe*,
The 1940 Journal of Clifford Odets

Session Ten

Building The Exercise

Ready to work? Good, everyone has their activity, yes? Again, the activity must be physically difficult and must have a simple and specific reason that you are doing it. Let's get into the exercises.

The exercise today is set up in the same way as we did it in Session Nine. Before we begin, let's review:

- Partner A is in their room with the activity and Partner B is coming to the door.

Note to Partner A: when you go into your room, sit for a few moments and review, in your mind, what your activity is and why you are doing it. Then, GET TO WORK!

Note to Partner B: remember to give your Partner a good couple of minutes to get involved in the activity before you come to the door.

- Partner B will knock three times in different ways.
- Partner A will describe the knocks out loud.
- On the third knock, Partner B will enter and repetition begins. Off you go!

Also, let me bring back into your awareness two keys to the work:

I. *"Don't do anything unless something makes you do it."*

II. *"The quality of your acting depends on how fully you do what you are doing."*

So, do you have a good reason to do the activity you brought in today?

THEN DO IT!

REALLY DO IT AND GET IT DONE!

DO IT BECAUSE *YOU KNOW WHY!*

And don't give it up unless something makes you do something else!

Whatever you are doing, do it fully!

**To the Observer: A friend once described to me what he thought made an effective football coach. He talked about a professional quarterback who, in a very intense championship game, was throwing a lot of passes but not getting the ball to the receivers. A timeout was called and the quarterback walked to the sideline and was approached by the coach. My friend said that the quarterback never took his eyes off the field and remained silent, listening intently, as the coach said only a very few quiet words. The quarterback then walked back onto the field and play soon resumed. In the first play back, the quarterback completed a pass and in rapid-fire succession, he completed pass after pass, quickly moving his team toward the goal line. The coach was able to "see" something from where he was that the quarterback wasn't seeing. With his brief words, the coach was able to help the quarterback be more available to what was happening on the field.*

More and more now, your job is to be continuously working-off, (from where you are sitting), both of the partners who

are in the exercise. You must actually become the “third partner.” When necessary, you must jump in and: 1) coach the partner with the activity to Really Do It and not give it up unless something Really Makes Them give it up, and 2) help bring the partners into closer, moment-to-moment contact and a greater availability to “what’s happening” by pointing out moments they are missing or responses they are not expressing.

Very important here, you must keep the partners in the repetition. They will often, at this point, stop doing it just because that seems “more natural” to them. THIS ISN’T NATURAL! It’s an exercise and you must help them stay in there with each other by yelling in, “DON’T DROP THE REPETITION!” or simply, “REPEAT!” The repetition simply must become habitual. You help them now, OK? Of course, ultimately, I don’t care if, in the exercise, neither partner says a word for ten minutes—WHEN SOMETHING MAKES THAT HAPPEN! You are both absolutely silent—not because YOU WANT TO BE but because YOU HAVE TO BE, BECAUSE OF WHAT YOU JUST GOT FROM YOUR PARTNER AND WHAT THAT DID TO YOU! LOOK, IT IS NOT ABOUT THE WORDS AND IT IS NOT ABOUT THIS REPETITION BUSINESS OR ANYTHING TO DO WITH TECHNIQUE—IT IS ABOUT TWO HUMAN BEINGS FULLY AVAILABLE TO EACH OTHER, RIGHT NOW! Is that confusing, when I have just told you not to drop the repetition? It’s like a big mental maze, isn’t it. That’s OK, hang in there...

...and listen, now that I told you all that, don’t try to do it, right? ...Remember?... Simply keep doing the things you are learning to do and at some point, it will all do you!

After each exercise, I want the person with the activity to tell the group what they were doing and why. Then, as a group, led by the Observer, I want you to discuss:

1) Did the person with the activity make a consistent and real attempt to accomplish it?

2) Was the activity physically difficult and could it have been set up in a way that would have made it more difficult, yet not impossible?

3) Was the activity set up in such a way that the person doing it knew specifically what they had to accomplish and when it would actually be complete?

4) Was the reason for doing the activity simple and specific? Could it have been more specific?

OK, get to work. Have each person do one exercise as the person in the room with the activity and one as the person coming to the door. This means that everyone will get to do their activity today. After each exercise, have the discussion I have just outlined in the Observer notes. Then read on.

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From now on, at each Session after the group has completed doing the exercises and having the discussions, I want you all to take some time to write in your journals. Write about your own experience in doing the exercise, responses to how your activity worked for you, what you got out of the discussion that followed your exercise and what you learned from witnessing and discussing the other exercises in your group.

Also, I want you to know that I am available to assist you in your process. You will find information in my biography at the beginning of the book on how to reach me with your questions.

So, go ahead now and take whatever time you need to write in your journals and when the whole group has finished, read on.

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We must move forward now and add the next element in building the exercise. The exercise you prepare for our next meeting, Session Eleven, will have all the components we have worked on so far, with one addition: The reason for doing the activity is now A LITTLE MORE IMPORTANT.

Now before I get into today's sample exercise, take out your journals again and write down two different ways the reason you had for your activity today would be a little more important. Then read on.

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So the activity must be physically difficult, the more difficult the better. And the reason you give yourself to do the activity is specific and, rather than simple, is now a *little more important*. (...And the reason comes from where? From your imagination!)

Conversation In Preparation For Your Next Exercise

THE EXERCISE

- One person has an activity that is "a little more important."
- The other person comes to the door and knocks.

1) To the student with the activity:

Larry: What was the activity?

Student: Cleaning and polishing this pair of shoes.

Larry: Why?

Student: Because I borrowed them from my best friend. They're her favorite shoes and I got them kind of dirty and I have to return them to her.

Larry: This thing you say you had to do—polishing the shoes—well, you never really did that. Look at the shoes, are they ready to give back to your friend?

Student: No, not really. They're still pretty dirty.

Larry: You know, when you first began the exercise, before you let your partner in, it was very clear that cleaning the shoes had some meaning for you. Is your best friend really important to you?

Student: Yes, very.

Larry: How do you think she would react if she saw her shoes in this condition?

Student: She'd be very disappointed in me, being so careless with them. She's meticulous with her clothes. I'd feel awful that I let her down.

Larry: By the way, are those shoes actually your friends favorite shoes?

Student: No, I took a pair of her old shoes that she said I could do whatever I want with and in my own mind, I made up that these were her favorite pair.

Larry: FANTASTIC! That's using your actor's imagination! And how did they actually get dirty?

Student: I walked around in a sandbox at the park so I could use them for this activity.

Larry: Good. And I love that you went the extra length and used a pair of her shoes rather than just any shoes, that's great! We'll talk more about that in a future session.

Student: But boy is she ever a neatness nut, that's for real! Is that OK, I mean, that's not using my imagination.

Larry: Not only is it OK, it's absolutely right on. Your girlfriend *is* really important to you, she has real meaning

to you and you really know something about her fastidious nature. Very good, that gives you something real to work from, that makes you actually want to fix the mess you made. Then you don't have to pretend to want to do this (and wow us with some clever acting). YOU DO WANT TO DO THIS! You see?

Student: Yeah, I think I do. When I was in the sandbox, I don't know, just thinking about the shoes... maybe it's silly, they're just a pair of shoes but I felt like I was, in some way, ruining our relationship—you know, the trust—I mean, we've known each other since we were ten... well I really started to get upset...

Larry: I like very much what I'm hearing. I will get very specific about this, "the element of truth," in Session Eleven. And, did you really borrow and mess up your best friend's *favorite shoes*? No, you made that up out of your imagination. You created that reason out of your imagination based on an element of truth, which is its importance to you. In this case, how you feel about your friend. Terrific! Hold on to that one! I do want to get back to the other aspect of how the exercise just went, that you never did what you had to do, you never really cleaned the shoes. There are two main issues here. First, as soon as your partner came in, you gave up what you were doing. You played the good hostess, (the nice routine) when what you really wanted to do was clean the shoes. Even though I yelled in "*Get Done What You Have To Get Done, Because You Know Why!*," you never really did it.

Student: That's true, I felt awkward when he came in, just letting him stand there, you know, just ignoring him while I did the shoes. And you know Larry, I also felt afraid that if I put all of my attention on my activity, I would not be available to my partner. That I would not be able to work-off of him.

Larry: That's a wonderful awareness! You just raised the unanswered question we introduced back in Session Seven, when we began work on the activities: "How do I do my activity fully and also work-off my partner fully?"

Oh boy, this is a great question! You see the exercise is: "*I must do this (my activity) but then there's this (my partner).*" There is an inherent conflict here, isn't there. Two things are pulling at me at the same time. And as the exercise continues to grow, those two pulls will become quite intense!

"*How do I do This (the activity) when there's This (my partner).*" The answer is: "YOU MUST! AND OFF YOU GO!" Do you hear that? "YOU MUST AND OFF YOU GO!" Off you go into the rollercoaster of moment-to-moment working-off where anything is possible. You might be thinking that I haven't really answered the question. The only worthwhile answer will come when you have the experience in the exercise of fully leaving yourself alone—when you are no longer trying to be available, you are available!

I can tell you that what you ended up doing here was half doing the activity and half working-off of your partner, *so both suffered*. What must you be doing?

Student: Whatever I do, do it fully.

Larry: Right, 100 percent, and that means if you have to get something done, get it done and don't do anything else unless something really makes you do something else. And if your partner makes you do something else, do that 100 percent—until something makes you do something else.

Look, let me interject something here. When you are on stage, what do you look at? How do you know where to place your focus? WHAT GARBAGE! FOCUS, SHMOCUS! If you're worried about what to be looking at, where to be focusing, you're out of the ballgame. But do you know how many actors worry about this or what to do with

their hands, and so on? When you are leaving yourself alone, your eyes look at what grabs their attention, your hands do exactly what they must. If you were walking down the street with your girlfriend and a man comes up to you, raises a large wood stick and begins to thrust it rapidly toward your face, I bet that your hands would respond immediately and appropriately. I also bet, in that moment, that you'd be much more interested in keeping your face in one piece than in impressing your girlfriend!

So, I said two issues. The second is that the reason you gave yourself to do the activity was not yet a *"little more important."* It's really still at the "simple" reason stage. Now it must be a little more important, specifically. Let's say your friend needed the shoes back because she's going out on a very important date tonight—This guy might be "THE ONE"—and she wants to wear these shoes with her new dress. Now, isn't it a little more important that you get the shoes back into great shape before she picks them up? And isn't it more specific than "You just have to return them to her?" Yes it is. And, who knows it's a little more important? *YOU DO!* Also, the actual physical difficulty of the activity itself wasn't set up specifically enough. Can you see that?

Student: Well, I guess it wasn't all that physically difficult. I mean, it was mostly just getting all the sand out of them and polishing up the outside.

Larry: Right, it was generally getting them cleaned up. Can you think of a way to make the same basic activity more difficult to do.

Student: Well, hmmm... what if I got some paint on one of the shoes?

Larry: Now you're talking! Even if it's one good spot of paint, now it's much more difficult to get that shoe looking like new and now, you've really got to work at it. And isn't it more specific to clean off this one large spot of paint than to just "clean up a pair of dirty shoes?"

Student: Yes and that also gives me a bigger challenge.

Larry: As you set up the activity, you must keep asking yourself the important questions: "Can I make this more Specific?" "Can I Make It More Physically Difficult?" Ask until you are satisfied that you have taken it as far as you can.

2) To student who came to door:

Larry: I want to ask you about something and I believe this is crucially important for your own process of growing through this work we are doing together here. Are you aware that from the time your partner opened the door until the moment I stopped the exercise, you were smiling.

Student: Well, I'm not aware it was constant, no.

Larry: I'm telling you that it was. The smile never left your face. The main thing is that you really didn't find anything funny. Actually, after a short while of being in the room, what I got out here, is that you became quite bored. Is that true?

Student: Well, when she sat down with those shoes, I felt like there really was no reason for me to be here, I mean I just wasn't interested in what she was doing.

Larry: That's OK, but that wasn't OK with you.

Student: I thought I should be encouraging.

Larry: The Magic Word! You *thought*, thinking! You know, your thinking will continually get you into trouble. If you are thinking, where is your attention?

Student: ...On myself?

Larry: Exactly! And where must it be?

Student: On my partner.

Larry: Right. So you and your partner had a lot in common here, a common ailment, you were both "putting up with each other," in other words, playing Mr. and Mrs. Nice Guy.

Student: Is there something wrong with being nice to her?

Larry: Nothing is ever wrong when that's what's happening!

If it is true, that you really want to be nice, be so nice that you make her feel like a million bucks! Great! But it wasn't, you were bored to tears and it was painful for you to sit there and have such an empty conversation.

Student: That's true. So I really should have expressed that.

Larry: Well, what could you have said to her?

Student: I guess I could have said, "This doesn't interest me," or "You are boring me"...God, that's direct!

Larry: You just shocked yourself, didn't you. That's very new and uncomfortable for you. YES IT IS DIRECT! You don't know yet that that is really OK. I'm telling you that not only is it OK, and I've said this before, it is a gift to your partner and to yourself. You get to be the full expression of who you truly are in this moment, to LIVE FULLY RIGHT NOW! (And getting out of your own way, is living!) Your partner now knows exactly where you stand and she has something REAL to respond to! Astounding! What we are talking about here is absolutely awesome, I promise you, it is awesome.

What I'm pointing you to is "the we, we don't know." Most of our lives we live in "the we, we know." We have made all these decisions about ourselves—what we believe in, how we should behave, what we can handle, and so on. Thus we operate in "the we, we know" and we are in control. But acting, at least the kind of acting we are interested in here, demands a giving up of that control, a turning ourselves over and allowing a possibility to discover "the we, we don't know." If you asked Mrs. Smith, who weighs 112 pounds, as she is walking along Maple Street with her son Billy if she can lift a car, she ("the she, she knows") would laugh and say, "Don't be silly, of course not." Then suddenly you hear a blasting of horns and a tremendous screech and there is Billy, under the tire of a pickup truck. In that

moment, Mrs. Smith discovers herself lifting the truck off of Billy's chest, she discovers "the she, she didn't know."

I'll say one last thing about this for now. You know, we live our lives as if "we know" and I am telling you, we don't know. As much as we would like to think that we do, WE JUST DON'T KNOW. You stand waiting in line at the cafeteria thinking, "Corned beef on rye... yummmmmm, corned beef on rye... I gotta have a corned beef on rye... Oh boy! Corned beef on rye..." Suddenly it's your turn, the lady says "Whatta ya have!" and out of your mouth comes, "Tuna on whole wheat."

Now, I really shouldn't assume anything here, I should ask first. Do you want to work more authentically even though it may be very uncomfortable for you? Is that what you really want for yourself in your work?

Student: Yes. It does feel scary but I really do want that.

Larry: Great, then let go of the forced smile. It's in the way of where you want to be in your work. Now that you are aware of it, you can do that. It will be a relief, I promise you. Risk saying what you really want to say and see where that takes you. You know what? Your partner can handle it. And take out those pauses of thought from your repetition. This will help you in two ways—in staying in contact with your partner and in leaving yourself alone.

Thank you both for your work today!

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HOMEWORK

For next time, everyone bring in an activity that is physically difficult to do—Specifically!—and has a reason that is a "little more important" to you—Specifically!

Look folks, the key is in *being specific*, it is always the way in. It's the only way in. Everything in your set up of the exercise, must be specific. Anything left general will result in general acting. So, just like we had all over the walls at the Neighborhood Playhouse, put up a big signs over your desk, your bed, on your refrigerator, in the bathroom—"BE SPECIFIC!"

As for repetition, this is the last time I'm going to say this, keep on practicing it whenever you can, throughout all of our sessions together. Be well my friends, see you at Session Eleven!

Surely all art is the result of having been in danger, of having gone through an experience all the way to the end, to where no one can go any further.

—Rainer Maria Rilke

Session Eleven

In The Extreme

Let's go. In a moment we'll get into the exercises you have prepared for today. To review, the elements in the exercise as it is set up right now are: One person is in the room and one person is coming to the door. The partner in the room has an activity that is physically difficult and has a reason to do it that is "a little more important."

As of today, we will no longer be using the "three knocks and enter" ingredient of the exercise. So that's over, right? Beginning today and from now on, we return to *the door is always locked* (review "coming to the door" in Session Six.) So the person who comes to the door simply comes to the door and knocks. The person in the room will respond to the knock however they do and off you go. That's that, simple, right?

Once again, everyone will do two exercises. One as the person in the room with the activity and one coming to the door.

**To the Observer: One comment. Now that the person in the room will be opening the door, be attentive to if that partner gets stuck in "casual conversation" at the door when what they want to do and need to do is "GET DONE WHAT THEY HAVE TO GET DONE, BECAUSE THEY KNOW WHY!" And of course, that's what you can say when that happens. Help them give up the nice act and complete what they know they must accomplish, the activity.*

And to repeat from our last session, (I will not review these questions in this way after today) after each exercise, I want the person with the activity to tell the group what they were doing and why. Then, as a group, again—led by the Observer—I want you to discuss:

- 1) How was the working-off? Were there any specific moments that either partner didn't work-off or respond to?
- 2) Did the person with the activity make a consistent and real attempt to accomplish it?
- 3) Was the activity physically difficult and could it have been set up in a way that would have made it more difficult, yet not impossible?
- 4) Was the activity set up in such a way that the person doing it knew specifically what they had to accomplish and when it would actually be complete?
- 5) Was the reason for doing the activity specific and "a little more important?" Did it have real meaning to the person doing it. Could it have been more specific?

Finally, after all of the work and the discussions, take the time you need to write all of your thoughts, feelings, and experiences of today's Session in your journal. Please do not skip over this important part of the process.

OK, ready? Good, get to work! After the exercises, the discussions and the journal work, read on.

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FOR OUR NEXT SESSION

In the last Session, I promised you that I would get more specific about this thing called the “*element of truth*” in the reasons for your activities. I will now address that as well as other essential aspects of the activity. We must also move forward and add some new elements to the building of the exercise.

So we have gone from an activity that had no reason, to one with a simple and specific reason, to one that was a little more important. For the next Session and from now on, the activity is set up *in the extreme*. It must be “extremely meaningful.” Extremely meaningful to whom? Yes, to you.

The activity must be set up in the extreme. It is no longer “a little more important,” it is now VERY IMPORTANT! It is VITAL! CRUCIAL! URGENT! THAT YOU GET IT DONE! What we are doing here is raising the stakes. The stakes must be very high and there must be no way out except by completing this most difficult thing that you have come home to do.

So, the reason might be that:

“If I can accomplish this, get this done right now, the outcome would be _____!”

Or, “What has just happened is _____!”

Or, “What I have just found out is _____!”

Those blanks must be filled in with words such as: “The Greatest!” “The Most Exciting!” “The Best In My Life!” “The Most Exhilarating!” “The Most Joyous!” “The Most Wonderful!” And so on.

If we say to ourselves:

"If I do not accomplish this, right now, the outcome would be _____!"

Or, "What has just happened is _____!"

Or, "What I have just found out is _____!"

Those blanks must be filled in with words such as: "The Worst!" "The Most Horrendous!" "The Most Dreadful!" "Catastrophic!" "The Most Devastating!" "The Most Terrifying!" "The Most Humiliating!" And so forth.

How you talk to yourself is vital:

It is not, "kind of nice." It is,
"THE MOST FABULOUS AND FANTASTIC!"

It is not, "pretty lousy."
It is, "THE MOST DISASTROUS!"

Do you see the difference? I do mean in the extreme! So, how do we get there? We must begin to develop a specific way of fantasizing, of daydreaming. A deepening of our "actor's imagination." But you know, usually, most of us only permit ourselves to go so far in our fantasies and no further. When we get to the place where it becomes, "Too terrible to imagine!" or "Too fantastic to hope for!" we do not continue. *Now, we must!* We must go on into where it is dangerous to tread, we must go that far. We must allow ourselves to fantasize without inhibition, to imagine the unimaginable, think the unthinkable. Listen, you know you are on to something with your reason for the activity when it gets uncomfortable to even think about. And this doesn't only apply when you are thinking in the direction of "dire" consequences. It might be as uncomfortable for you to imagine how thrilling it would be to have a "dream of a life come true!" Which ever direction you take it, you must

make the activity as extremely meaningful as you can. Specifically! Specifically!

Let me give you an example:

Let's say that Sharon is doing the activity. Her activity is embroidering a very specific butterfly design, one that has had special meaning to her daughter, onto the daughter's favorite sweater. The reason she is doing this is because she wants her daughter, who has just been killed by a hit-and-run driver, to wear it when she is buried today.

Now look, this is uncomfortable. I know it is, I'm sitting here at this computer and I am shaking. It is horrifying to imagine and if you are a parent, I know you know. You may say, now that's going too far, I don't want to go that far, and I am telling you that you must. I'm not saying to use that reason, those circumstances may have no meaning for you. I am telling you that whatever reasons you do come up with, they must be that extreme.

This brings us back to the "element of truth" which is the activity's importance to you. In Sharon's case, the element of truth is her relationship with her daughter. It's the bottom line. This is something she really knows. It lives in her and is absolute. And this is what fuels Sharon's activity. And as Sharon begins to fully accept the imaginary circumstance, what she "really knows" is what makes her hands tremble so violently that it is nearly impossible to do the needlework. Sharon is also very wise in helping herself deepen the reality of this exercise by using one of her daughter's actual favorite sweaters and deciding to embroider a butterfly, which her daughter loves. The imaginary part of her setup was that her daughter was killed by a hit-and-run driver and that the funeral is later today.

Let me show you how Sharon could have used the same basic setup, with just a few changes, to go in a very different direction with this activity:

She is still doing the butterfly needlework but now, the daughter, has spent the last three weeks in the hospital after being struck by a hit-and-run driver (one of the weeks in a coma). The daughter has had a miraculous recovery and Sharon will be bringing her home today. Sharon is preparing the sweater as a wonderful surprise for her daughter to wear on the trip home.

I'll tell you something else. Out of the meaning Sharon's daughter has to her, this very specific "element of truth," she can create from it an endless variety of imaginary circumstances, of extremely meaningful activities. Listen, when you have hooked into something that is so powerful and vital to you, YOU'VE STRUCK GOLD! So as you struggle to create the activity, you are mining for gold, gold that is rich in personal meaning. And hey, how many gold mines do you really need?

The activity is a product of your imagination based on an element of truth, which is its importance to you.

You may have noticed that I said Sharon "accepted" the imaginary circumstance. I did not say that she "believed" them, acting is not believing (Does the actor playing Hamlet "believe" he is talking to the ghost of his father?) it is accepting. It is fully accepting the imaginary circumstances and living them out as if they are true. That's Actor's Faith, THAT'S ACTING! And the way in is:

- 1) The activity must be physically difficult, the more difficult the better.

2) The activity must be extremely meaningful. To whom? To You!

3) In every aspect, BE SPECIFIC! Anything left general, will result in general acting.

As in the “Sharon” example, something I have found true for myself and very useful for the students I have taught, is that the reasons you create for the activities, the “imaginary circumstances,” will work on you with greater potency, will find deeper roots, if they are not about yourself but are mainly about or specifically include someone else. Someone who has great meaning to you.

Here is the setup for your next exercise which you will bring into Session Twelve. One person is in the room with the activity. Again, the activity is physically difficult and now extremely meaningful. The other person is coming to the door—with one addition:

The person coming to the door now must have a simple and specific reason that brings them to the door.

Let’s talk about this. Up until now, as the person coming to the door, you had no idea what was bringing you there. All you knew was that I had told you to come to the door and knock. Now you do know why you are coming. It is a simple and specific reason that gets you to come and knock on the door, right now. Remember, simple and specific. Let’s say you are coming to borrow a cup of sugar. That’s simple and specific. An important question is, now that you have this reason, what do you do about it? Your partner opens the door and you’ve come to borrow a cup of sugar, what do you do about that? Take a moment to write down your answer in your notebook and then read on.

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If you said “Try to get the sugar,” “Ask for it,” or any other form of “Play my objective,” well listen, that’s not what this exercise is about. Remember this one, “Don’t do anything unless something makes you do it?” So, now that you know why you are coming, what do you do about it? Don’t do anything about it, KNOW IT! Know it and see what happens. Work-off your partner and see where that takes you. (Sandy told us, “It’s not about what you show, it’s about what you know!”)

That you came to get a cup of sugar may never come up. I mean, who knows what you will be entering into when that door opens? Your partner may be in the middle of a seance and about to get some crucial advice for his new magic act from Houdini. Do you think you would interrupt that for some lousy sugar? Of course, it is also possible that as the door opens, your partner might pull you into the room, push you up against the wall, shake you and scream, “WHY ARE YOU HERE BUGGING ME!!” Well the appropriate response might be, “TO GET SOME SUGAR, PAL!!”

What I am telling you is, now you know what brings you to the door. It is simple and specific. Unless something makes you, don’t do anything about it, *Know It*.

Conversation In Preparation For Your Next Exercise

EXERCISE

- One person has an activity that is extremely meaningful.
- The other person has a simple and specific reason that brings her or him to the door.

1) To the student with the activity:

Larry: What was the activity?

Student: I got fired, so I was filling out an application for a new waiter job and to get the job, I have to hand the application back in by five o'clock today.

Larry: So why is it so important to get this job today?

Student: Oh, it's really important for me to have this job because, uh, two reasons. One, I'm about three thousand dollars in debt, I've got about two hundred dollars in the bank and, uh, the rent's due on the fifteenth and my girlfriend has no work right now. So, and she's the one that I owe the money to, so on top of all that, she loaned me all of her savings for me to study at the University and I have no money to pay her back or pay the rent and she hasn't the money either so it's extremely important that I get this job.

Larry: Yeah? Why?

Student: Why? (*He laughs...*) If I don't have this job, I don't have a place to live and I can't even honor my debt to her.

Larry: So... she'll be upset...

Student: She'll be upset and it will put our relationship under even more stress.

Larry: Why won't you have a place to live?

Student: Well, my landlord doesn't exactly take kindly to us not paying our rent.

Larry: So...

Student: So we'll be out on the street and there's a good chance he's gonna be extremely pissed off.

Larry: Will you be out on the street or do you have other places...

Student: Well, we're new in this town and I've established no real close friendships.

Larry: So you might have to move back and live with a relative or...

Student: Well actually I hadn't even considered what the options would be, I'm just thinking about this job, that's my only option.

Larry: No, it's not your only option. I mean there are options. Rather than be on the street, there are probably some other people—relatives, friends somewhere that might take you in.

Student: Yeah, yeah there are other people I guess but...

Larry: Or is it possible that, knowing your situation was desperate, a relative or a friend might lend you a couple of months rent until you got back on your feet?

Student: Yeah, uh well, that would be possible but...

Larry: No, no buts, is it POSSIBLE, that's what I'm asking, is it possible?

Student: No it's not possible seeing as they wouldn't even loan me the money for the class I'm taking, let alone my living expenses...

Larry: What I'm asking is, honestly, if you called up your best friend or closest relative and said, "We are going to be on the street in two days!" is there a possibility that somebody would send you the rent money?

Student: ...It's possible, yeah.

Larry: It's possible. OK. I'm leading to something. IT'S POSSIBLE! And at this point, your reason for the activity (which wasn't really physically difficult) was general and not really in the extreme. First, and I may have said this before, the problem with using money to drive your activity is, unless you make it very specific, money is general. I don't care if you are winning a million dollars, money on its own doesn't mean anything. Yes, I know you had to pay the rent and the loan but listen, we all have to pay the rent. It's tough but we do it. Those reasons, though important to everyday survival, are pedestrian, do you see? They are ordinary and not tied to our fantasy life. They do not spring out of our greatest dreams and desires, our inner world of "wish fulfillment!"

or from our most horrific fears of dreaded consequences! The other main thing is, and the reason I kept pushing you with the “is it possible” thing, is that when you are building the reason for the activity, you want to paint yourself into a corner. You must put yourself in a situation where there is no way out. There is no way out! There is no possibility except by doing this impossibly difficult thing you have come home to do, right now! It must be, “I MUST DO THIS RIGHT NOW BECAUSE I HAVE NO OTHER OPTIONS!” It must be that extreme.

Student: Well I thought about this element of truth thing and for the most part, the entire circumstances I used, are true.

Larry: You got fired and you’re looking for a job?

Student: Well, this is a real job application for a real job and there is a real deadline, and I really am in debt and the subject of getting fired just came up at my job and so there’s a lot of truth to this...

Larry: Theatre is not an imitation of life, it demands a greater truth. The same with this exercise, it is not an imitation of your life.

Student: What about this “element of truth” thing?

Larry: Doing your taxes is important and is a difficult task. If you brought in your taxes as the activity today and today is April 14th, it is certainly urgent that you get them done but it is not a good activity. It is not yet a product of your actor’s imagination, it is merely a chore dictated by the reality of your life. Do not confuse that with “the element of truth.” Let’s take another look at your activity. Let’s take one part of the reason you gave which is that you have this girlfriend. You took all of her savings and because of you, you may both lose your apartment. Now maybe she has a lot of meaning to you. Does she?

Student: Oh yeah.

Larry: OK, so there’s the part that you might really want to get into. Your girlfriend has great meaning to you and

you are letting her down in a big way, well that's the element of truth. Say you begin there, "I took all of her savings and spent it on myself," and you continue fantasizing, "We don't have health insurance and she just found out that she needs this very crucial surgical procedure. The doctor said that he will not report anything until we are on an insurance plan but he said make it fast because she must take care of this. If we quickly get married and I get the job, I'll have a health insurance plan for the two of us, so I JUST GOTTA GET THIS JOB, TODAY!" That's a quick idea for you, but now we have an element of truth, which is her real meaning to you, "I love this woman, I took all of her money, what the hell am I doing!"

Student: Yeah, right, this is good.

Larry: So then out of your imagination, well you take it from there, but it now becomes truly urgent and very meaningful because her life is on the line and there is no way out, "We just have to get the insurance, there is nobody who can give us that kind of money, there could be complications, who knows what!" Now, the money becomes specific. Now, it's not about the money, it's that you see the woman you love standing in front of you, she's deathly ill and you've only made her life more difficult. Uncomfortable to think about?

Student: Oh, extremely uncomfortable!

Larry: That's when you know you are on to something. Now, because the activity didn't have any real meaning to you, it became easy to give up—which is why you never completed the application. How far did you get on it?

Student: Uh, not very far...

Larry: If it had meant something to you, you would have done it with an unrelenting commitment. And when it was finished, you would have shot out of here like lightning, running off to that restaurant, making sure that you got the job. As it was, you gave your partner most of

your attention (and there was nothing very pressing in her behavior to make you do that).

Student: Yeah, I see that now. And, I do see, well, as you talked about my girlfriend getting ill, I mean, I do feel very guilty about taking all of her savings to use for my classes. The truth is, she sacrificed a lot to help me out. She even gave up something, well, she put on hold something she had been waiting a long time to do with her money. I mean it was a dream of hers, I feel really lousy about it... *(He begins to cry.)*

Larry: *(There's a long pause.)* Now listen, you must work from this place of deeper meaning within yourself, it has to be that personal. As you talked, you discovered the source of some great activities. Hey, what if, out of some wonderful surprise event in your life, you were suddenly able to give to her the very thing she put on hold when she allowed you to pursue your studies. How would that make you feel?

Student: Fantastic. That doesn't even describe it, uh, joyous, triumphant, Yeah, triumphant!

Larry: Well, there's another direction to take yourself. Now create a physically difficult activity that you will be compelled to do out of that extremely meaningful reason.

Student: It is so hard coming up with the activity part, I mean, the reason is so difficult and then making the two work together and being very specific, I..., well I'm having a tough time—this is hard.

Larry: It Is Hard! Do you think it would be of any value if it was a breeze to do? It is rigorous work and it never gets easy and it is always uncomfortable. That's theatre. That's theatre when you are after the real thing. You know, there is a price to pay, if you want the real thing there is a very high personal cost — but you know what? The rewards are great!

You know, I used this term before, "wish fulfillment." That's a great place to start when fantasizing about your

activities. Let's say that you know that your girlfriend loves calligraphy and though you have never done it before, you are learning to use a calligraphy pen. You are preparing to inscribe one of her favorite poems on the inside of a card in the most beautiful penmanship. At the end of the poem you are going to add, as if it were part of the poem, your own words of love and your "Triumphant news" that you are giving back to her, her "life's dream!" The one she had put on hold, because of you.

Listen, the possibilities are infinite. You must really get into the world of your imagination, of wish fulfillment, in the extreme. And you must ask yourself and grapple with the main question, "What really means something, TO ME!"

2) To the student who came to the door:

Larry: What brought you to your partner's door today?

Student: I wanted to borrow his car to go grocery shopping.

Larry: Good, simple, and specific. Also, your working-off was fine. He was extremely casual and relaxed with you and you responded to that just fine.

Student: There didn't seem like there was very much to do so I sat down and enjoyed his company.

Larry: There's really not much to say. You took what you got and didn't try to make it anything else. That's great, keep going in that direction. You wanna go buy your groceries now?

Student: Well, if class is over...

Larry: Class dismissed!

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SOME NOTES

I want to give you a few important pointers on activities and exercises before we wrap up Session Eleven.

1) Do real things and be who you actually are.

Set up the activity so that you are able to do real things. So that you are not pretending to do it, you are actually doing it. If you cannot figure out how to do your activity with real things, then it is not a good activity.

This is different than using an object and giving it a specific meaning out of your imagination. You can get an old plate from the Salvation Army store, break it into a hundred pieces and say that it was precious to your mother because it had belonged to her grandmother. When you begin to put the plate back together and as you accept the imaginary circumstances, the plate will become personally meaningful to you.

But if your activity was to announce over the air waves, during your radio show, a secret coded message to save your son who is being held by kidnappers... First of all, the exercise is always in your room and you are always who you are. Don't pretend to be a radio personality with a pretend microphone talking to a pretend radio audience.

Or this famous exercise:

Student: You see Larry, in this exercise I am a cowboy and it is vital that I perfect my lasso tricks for the upcoming rodeo!

Larry: Why are you suddenly talking with that funny accent and walking like John Wayne?

Student: Well I'm a cowboy and it is vital that...

Larry: Where are you from?

Student: Hoboken, New Jersey...

Larry: Are you really a cowboy?

Student: Well, no, but I always wanted to be one and...

Larry: Great, then set it up so that YOU are practicing the lasso tricks so that YOU get to be “Cowboy for a day!!” in Hoboken’s first annual “City Slicker’s Rodeo.”

This also applies to who your partner is to you. You know exactly what you know about your partner and their relationship to you is whatever it actually is—no more and no less. So if you are working with Sally, a good friend, when you open the door and it’s Sally, who is she to you? Right, she is your good friend Sally. Simple, right?

One last thing, when you set up a reason about or including someone else, it must be based on what is true for you about that person, *today*. For example, if your activity is making an invitation to send to family members for a special 80th birthday party for your grandfather and what is true is that your grandfather is no longer living, then this is not a workable set-up for the exercise. But if you chose that activity, you probably have deep feelings for your grandfather, so set it up in another way. You could be doing the same activity but now you are inviting all the family members to a very special event you are hosting, celebrating your grandfather’s life. Asking everyone to bring and share their wonderful memories about him!

2) Do not do illegal or personally harmful things.

I’m not going to tell you how to live your life but I am going to tell you something about a life in the theatre. We never drink real alcohol on stage so don’t do it in the exercise. (And since we don’t pretend, well you can see that “getting drunk” is not a good activity.) It is illegal to do drugs—they have no place in our work and they have no place in the theatre. The theatre, as well as any place that you are doing “the work,” is a *sacred space*, please treat it as such.

Also, please don't do activities that could seriously harm your partner or yourself. So no getting ready for the big knife throwing event tonight, OK? Or practicing for the practical section of the "body piercing" board exams?

This reminds me of another important point. The exercise can become quite explosive. Of course, you do not want to censor yourself and I do not want to inhibit you in any way—*AND*—it is important *never to harm your partner*.

Now there is nothing wrong with some real physicality between the two of you but please grab his shoulders instead of yanking on his hair. And if your partner makes you so mad that you want to kick in his face, kick the couch instead. If you want to throw him across the room, throw a chair instead. You see, you must be fully expressive and you must not harm your partner! I have seen partners hurt each other very badly in acting exercises, you must get that **THIS IS NOT OK**.

Of course, accidents may happen but you must have, *at all times*, a little voice in the back of your head that knows how far to go and when to redirect your energy so that your partner and you are safe. Please, this is crucial! There are actors without that little voice, I call them "oblivious actors." There is just no excuse to say, "Well, I was just so 'into it' that I broke his arm." I will not work with an oblivious actor and I hope you won't either. Enough said.

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HOMEWORK

Get to work and prepare your exercise for Session Twelve. To review:

- One person has a physically difficult activity that is extremely meaningful and in every nook and cranny—SPECIFIC!
- The other person has a simple and specific reason that brings him or her to the door.
- Also, at this point, I want each set of partners (whether your group has three people or twenty-three) to do only one exercise at each meeting.

This means that I am asking you to have two work meetings for each of the remaining Sessions in the book.

At the first work meeting for the Session, one person in each partnership has the activity and one comes to the door. At the next work meeting, the partners switch and you have a totally new exercise set up with all of the elements we are currently working with. Got that? Only then do you move on to the next Session in the workbook.

By the way, do you remember when we first began activities and you were balancing the stick? If you think back, you will recall that I said to, “Do it as if your life depends on it!” Remember? Well at the time, that was completely general, wasn’t it. “What does he mean like my life depends on it, I’m just balancing this stupid stick!” There really was no reason in the world to do it as if your life depended on it. NOW THERE IS, AND YOU MUST KNOW WHY. SPECIFICALLY! Now, get to work. See you next time.

***T**heatre is a safe place to do the unsafe things that need to be done. When it’s not a safe place, it’s abusive to actors and audiences alike. When its safety is used to protect cowards masquerading as heroes, it’s a boring travesty. An actor who is truly heroic reveals the divine that passes through him, that aspect of himself that he does not own*

and cannot control. The control and the artistry of the heroic actor is in service to his soul.

We live in an era of enormous cynicism. Do not be fooled.

Don't act for money. You'll start to feel dead and bitter.

Don't act for glory. You'll start to feel dead, fat and fearful.

We live in an era of enormous cynicism. Do not be fooled.

You can't avoid the pitfalls. There are lies you must tell. But experience the lie. See it as something dead and unconnected you clutch. And let it go.

Act from the depth of your feeling imagination. Act for celebration, for search, for grieving, for worship, to express that desolate sensation of wandering through the howling wilderness. Don't worry about Art. Do these things and it will be Art.

—From the “Authors Note” to *The Big Funk*
by John Patrick Shanley

Session Twelve

Taking It Personally

In the remaining Sessions, I will not be guiding you through the “work” portion of your meeting. I trust that by now, as a group, you have developed a way of being with each other and of working with each other. I know that you will do the exercises, the discussions, and the journal work. At that point, you may proceed into the preparations for your next meeting.

So gather around gang, come on, get those hands into the middle of the circle. Are you all up for this one, huh? Come on, I can't hear you! I said ARE YOU UP FOR THIS ONE!! That's better! Now I want you to get in there and do the work! And listen to these words from your coach who loves ya!:

If you have the impulse to do something, DO IT!

If you have the impulse to say something, SAY IT!

Do not hold anything back!

Should you take what your partner says and does personally?

Did you hear the question? Should you take it personally? What's that? I can't hear you!

“Well, I don't have to take it personally, I mean she really didn't mean to...”

BALONEY!! SHE DID MEAN IT SO IT IS PERSONAL! IT'S ALL PERSONAL! YOU MUST TAKE IT PERSONALLY!

OK! And you there, yeah, you with the activity. Fight for your life and get it done, right? Right! AND WORK-OFF EACH OTHER! OK, That's it, give it your all, play your hearts out and have a great time! OK, READYYYYYYYY...WORK!!!! (Excuse my humor but we must stay lighthearted. Making it all too self-important will create another constriction of our acting instrument. So work now and then read on.)

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As I told you in Session Eleven, you will repeat today's exercise before moving forward into the assignment for Session Thirteen. After this work, you may read on.

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FOR OUR NEXT SESSION

We will be adding two elements to the exercise that you will prepare for SessionThirteen. For the person with the activity, I now want you to add "Urgency." Urgency is a specific time limit. You only have "this much time, specifically" to complete the activity. Up until now the activity was generally urgent, you knew you had to get it done right away. *Now it must be specifically urgent.*

How do you determine the amount of time you should give yourself? Decide what you think a reasonable amount of time would be to do the activity and then cut it down so that it becomes extremely difficult! Of course, do not make it impossible, that would defeat the purpose here. For example: If the activity is putting together a 1000 piece

puzzle, you wouldn't want to say that you have only thirty seconds to complete it. That would give you nothing to really fight for. But if you thought it would normally take two hours to do, you might decide that you only have forty-five minutes to get it done.

One important note. The activity must still be extremely physically difficult on its own. You cannot rely only on the urgency to make it a challenge. Teamed up with the physical difficulty, the specific time limit now makes the activity even More Difficult! And that's exactly what you want to do for yourself, make it more difficult!

The other element we are adding is for the person coming to the door. Last time, you came with a simple and specific reason. Now, it must be "a little more important." Not extreme, *a little more important*. So, last time, you came to borrow the car to go grocery shopping. Great, that was simple and specific. Now, it's a little more important. So now, you are coming to borrow the car to go grocery shopping because "This very special guy is coming over for dinner tonight and he loves spaghetti with spaghetti sauce and I'm all out!" Now going grocery shopping is a little more important to you. It's not extremely important, I mean if worse came to worse, he'd probably settle for your meat-loaf and potatoes. But you would sure love to serve him that spaghetti!

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Conversation In Preparation For Your Next Exercise

EXERCISE

- One person has an activity which is physically difficult, that is extremely meaningful, and which has a specific

urgency.

- The other person has a reason that is a little more important which brings him or her to the door.

1) To the student with the activity:

Larry: What was the activity?

Student: I'm building a model house out of toothpicks.

Larry: Why?

Student: My wife went to our doctor this morning before going to work because she thought she was ill. She's been in meetings so I haven't been able to reach her on the phone. So I called the doctors office to see what happened because my wife didn't call me to tell let me know what the doctor said. The nurse got on the phone and said, "Congratulations!" and then told me that my wife is pregnant.

Larry: Clearly, that was extremely meaningful for you.

Student: Something surprising and amazing happened to me when I was coming up with this activity. I was thinking about my wife and that she has been talking a lot about how empty she feels inside, well, about not having a child. And that her whole life is her job and that she doesn't even feel connected to it anymore, except in getting the paycheck every week. And I'm the one who keeps saying to her that there is no way we are ready, either financially or emotionally, to have a baby. That we need more time to be alone, just her and I, and that we need to get more solid on our feet... Anyway, I woke up in the middle of the night the other night, so I went into the living room and started to fantasize about this whole thing and I kept seeing how sad her eyes have gotten, like a deadness in them. That really hurt... Then I started to think about having a baby together, about saying to her, "Yes honey, I want to do this with you and I want you to be happy again." And then I saw her eyes come to life,

they were bright and alive, like they were when we first met and that made me feel so terrific. I got so caught up in the fantasy, I wanted to scream! I mean, I just kept seeing her eyes alive again and I thought, well, I would do anything in the world to have them look like that.

Larry: Fantastic! You are really making the process your own and in a powerful way. Also, by fantasizing so freely you were led to something very important to you. That you discovered the look in your wife's eyes and their deep meaning to you, now THAT'S SPECIFIC! Do you all see that? And thank you for sharing with us so personally and so honestly, it helps all of us go further in our own work. Now, how did that look in her eyes, that "element of truth," lead you to the toothpick house?

Student: Well, we had this old joke that someday we would have a baby and a dog and we would buy a piece of land in the mountains and build a log cabin there. That we would be a log cabin couple with a log cabin baby and live a log cabin life. So, I'm making a model of our log cabin life with toothpicks and I'm going to surprise her with it. I'm going to mount it on this *(He pulls out a big sheet of cardboard.)* and draw pictures of mountains around the house, with little streams, you know.

Larry: Great. And tell me, what are the smaller objects you made, the ones you put inside the house—will you show them to us?

Student: *(He takes four small objects out of the model house, also made from the toothpicks and holds each one up for us to see)* This is my wife, this one is me, this is a dog and this one is a crib for the baby. There's also this one that I haven't finished yet, it's the baby.

Larry: This is great work! It was also urgent for you to do and you worked on it with a passionate fervor. I also like that you held on to the reality of that time limit. I even saw you checking your watch every so often.

Student: I set up the urgency so that I was going to bring the log cabin to my wife's office and leave it on her desk for her to discover when she comes back from lunch. I know she gets back to work at 1:15 and it takes me twenty minutes to get to her office. That gave me only an hour to finish the whole project. I don't know if this other part is okay but I decided that I was going to hide in her supplies closet, which is right across from her desk and when she picks up the "log cabin baby," I'm going to jump out and take a photo of her with my camera.

Larry: Why wouldn't that be okay?

Student: I thought it might be getting too carried away, making some kind of complex plotline.

Larry: Listen, it's only an empty plotline when it has no meaning to you. It has to *turn you on to do*. It has to live in your gut and in your heart. It must possess you, because it means that much. Which this whole activity does, in a big way for you. So it's not just okay, it's terrific. By the way, where is the camera?

Student: *(He reaches into a bag and takes out a polaroid.)*
Right here.

Larry: Good. Does it have film in it?

Student: Yes, I put some in when I was preparing all the things I needed for the activity.

Larry: Now that's the reality of doing! Now I'm really getting excited! Let me tell you all something. He could have made his life a lot easier if he had decided that because the camera really wouldn't have to come out during the exercise, he just wouldn't bring one. None of us in class would have known, right? And that's what most actors do on the stage. And I do mean most so-called professional, working actors! They don't pay the price, they don't go all the way. They come from an attitude of "Why bother, the audience won't know anyway" and that's why most theatre today is an empty vacuum.

That your classmate here did bring the camera and that he did load it with film, now that's working like AN ACTOR! That's going all the way! And he doesn't do it for us, he does it for himself, for the deepening of his own experience of living out the imaginary circumstances "as if" they are true.

And by the way, I want you all to hear this, isn't it possible that today his wife just might take the afternoon off? *Is it possible?* Isn't it possible that his wife might walk in the door right as the toothpick cabin is just about finished? It's possible, right? Well now, he can pull out that camera and take the photo of her right here in the living room. You see? Fantastic, absolutely fantastic! (Know what else is fantastic? Do you remember what he did when he heard the knock? He hid the whole log cabin activity, he put it all away before he answered the door! "Maybe she lost her keys!" Now that's living truthfully in the imaginary circumstances. That's living, not just doing an exercise.) Now, is it okay if we use your camera to take a snapshot?

Student: Sure.

Larry: Bonnie, quick, take a picture of your Partner so he can show his wife that glowing face of his from this exercise he just did. (*Bonnie takes the camera and shoots a picture of her Partner, who is now ecstatic.*) You know, your work with your Partner was also the best it has been for you. You were continually in response to her and you were going fully with where you were being taken. You really turned yourself over to both the activity and to your partner, I bet that felt great!

Student: Yeah, this whole thing was a gas!

Larry: You know, that activity is still living in you, isn't it. When the activity really takes root, it's hard to just drop, we can't, it lives in us for a while. That's working for real.

Student: You know, I want to go home and have a baby right now!

Larry: Better get your wife to take the afternoon off!

2) To the student who came to the door:

Larry: What brought you to the door?

Student: I really needed a thesaurus so that I could finish writing this article I've been writing that I just found out had a real good chance of being published.

Larry: Very nice. What is the article about?

Student: It's a kind of personal diary of living with food allergies.

Larry: And who's thinking of publishing it?

Student: *The New York Times*.

Larry: Hey, good for you! Let me tell you something, your work today was quite beautiful. That reason had a specific meaning to you and it lived in you in a way that was out of your control. And the best part of all is that, once you came into the room, whatever was happening, you were able to go with it instantly and fully. You were truly living in the present, in a moment-to-moment responsiveness with your Partner. In order to highlight what I'm talking about, I want to point out a few specific moments.

When your Partner opened the door, we saw a huge smile on your face and your arms raised triumphantly in the air. Now the immediate connection between the two of you and what you both had going on, resulted in your partner lifting you off the ground, swinging you around and screaming. You suddenly found yourself screaming and laughing and dancing with him. What an absolutely fabulous moment for both of you!

Student: Yeah, that totally took me by surprise. It was great!

Larry: You then spent quite a long time in awe of his beautiful cabin creation as you became both his cheerleader and his ally as he struggled to get the job accomplished.

Student: I was really fascinated by the way he was working so delicately and precisely.

Larry: And then, at a certain point, the reason that brought you here, erupted back into your consciousness. Listen, you learned something crucial today. When you make the reason strong, you don't need to hold on to the meaning, it holds on to you!

Student: Yeah, I really forgot all about my article for a while, and the thesaurus. I was so into what he was doing.

Larry: But then you began to get very uncomfortable just standing around watching him. He worked-off that very nicely, he said, "You need something, don't you?"

Student: I wanted to still be happy for him but when I realized that I gotta get back to my writing, I just didn't want to waste any more time. I even got angry that I was wasting time.

Larry: Right. And when he kept saying, "Then get what you need already! Get what you need!" You yelled, "I need a thesaurus!! You got one???" That was right on, you said that because your partner made you say that. When he yelled back at you, "No, I don't," you yelled "DAMN!" and you ran out of the room.

Student: Well, when he said that he didn't have one, I knew that I better go to the store or something. Go somewhere else and get one.

Larry: Absolutely! There was no reason to stay, so go! Listen, all of you, don't ever stick around just to do some more repetition or just to keep the exercise going. If something really makes you want to leave, go. Then when you go, see what that does to you and work from that.

Student: When I got outside the room I was afraid that I had abandoned him in the exercise.

Larry: Hey, you gave him a great moment! When you left and slammed the door, he threw a toothpick at you and yelled, "Too bad, Toots!"

Student: *(She roars in laughter.)* “Toots?”

Larry: We all had the same reaction. Great work you two.
Thanks!

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HOMEWORK

So it’s back to work and setting up your next exercise.

- One person has an activity which is physically difficult, that is extremely meaningful, and which has a specific urgency.
- The other person has a reason that is a little more important which brings him or her to the door.

Got it? Good, see you at our next meeting.

*Y*our attempts to answer the question, “What must I do?” may lead you to embrace and study both philosophy and technique; to learn to meditate and to learn to act, so that your personality and your work become one, and you fulfill your true purpose, your highest purpose, as a member of the theater.

—David Mamet
from *Writing in Restaurants*