

How to Be a Working Actor

THE STRAIGHT-TALKING SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR ACTORS WHO ARE DONE PLAYING SMALL

By Kristen Henry King



Prologue:

REINVENTING TO BE MORE YOU

It took me nearly a decade to become a consistently paid working actor—but it doesn't have to take you that long. I made the mistakes. I fell for the traps. I even unknowingly blocked opportunities that were literally waiting for me.

This guide isn't "the way," but it is a map made of real wins and real lessons. These are my successful actions, plus insight from friends and colleagues who are not only surviving the entertainment world post-2020, but thriving in it.

Take what works. Toss what doesn't. But whatever you do—don't sleep on your potential. There's more than enough room for all of us on the marquee. It's time to stop playing small and start taking up space.

Let's get after it.

Chapter 1:

TRAINING & PREPARATION STILL MATTER (EVEN POST-2020)

Yes, AI can deepfake your face, and influencers are snagging top-tier roles—but craft still counts. Even series regulars, blockbuster leads, and Marvel alums continue to train between jobs. The market is noisy, but **good work still cuts through.**

So ask yourself honestly: **How often are you actually working on acting?**

Sure, some people “make it” faster thanks to a killer TikTok following or being in the right place at the right time. But longevity in this game still hinges on one thing: **Are you actually good?**

If you're not in class, get in one. But make sure it's one that supports your imagination, not one that tears you down or makes you feel small. Class should be your gym—not your trauma.

Chapter 1: Training & Preparation Still Matter (Even Post-2020)

If you're broke (been there), here's what you can still do daily to sharpen your edge:

- **Watch TV & Film Critically** – Actor Mark O'Brien doesn't go to class. He watches 45 minutes of a movie every day from different genres, eras, and countries. He breaks it down—what worked, what didn't, and how the actor made him feel something.
- **Make It Personal** – Actress Georgina Reilly creates Spotify playlists for each role to tap into the character's emotional core. Her self-tapes are phenomenal—and she books because she feels.
- **Listen Like a VO Pro** – If you're a voice actor, consume ads, animated series, video games, and audiobooks daily. Study the tone, pacing, and personality embedded in the voice work.

The goal: Get so good they have to notice.

Because when that perfect role appears—and it will—you want to be so sharp, so prepared, and so uniquely you, they can't imagine casting anyone else.

Chapter 1: Training & Preparation Still Matter (Even Post-2020)



"Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity." — Seneca

Practical Assignments:

- Create a schedule with 1–2 hours of daily acting-related activity—in other words, actually PRODUCE art.
- Listen to one podcast a week that inspires you.
- Participate in something each week that feeds your creativity (e.g., a museum trip, painting, reading).
- Research casting directors, producers, and directors from shows you admire. Start tracking them.

Chapter 2:

SURROUND YOURSELF WITH DOERS

The moment I started surrounding myself with working actors, I picked up on the little nuances that made them stand out.

My acting class is a perfect example. It's not ranked by "level," and each student is on their own customized curriculum. That means I get to observe people booking series regulars and people just starting out—all in one class. It stretches me and inspires me.

Also: find your Tribe. A small group of artists you check in with weekly. You share wins. You admit where you dropped the ball. You track stats. You cheer for each other.

In 2018, I formed a group with four other women at different points in their careers. We called our weekly check-ins "Staff Meetings." We ran our acting lives like CEOs. We tracked auditions, callbacks, avails, bookings—plotted them on graphs. We shared what worked, what didn't, and how we'd do better.

Chapter 2: Surround Yourself with Doers

The success of that group led to me training several more accountability circles—and those people leveled up too.

To this day, I'm still in an accountability group. And I show up, because I'm not just doing it for me. Their success is my success. We celebrate together.

Also: Find a mentor. Someone you trust to give you battle plans and call you out when you're playing small. And once you level up, mentor someone else.



"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." — African Proverb

Practical Assignments:

- Find a weekly accountability partner or group.
- Seek out a mentor. Ask for a 15–30 minute check-in monthly.
- Help someone else—even if it's not acting-related.
- Create a spreadsheet and track: auditions, callbacks, avails, and bookings.

Chapter 3:

REMOVE WHAT DOESN'T SERVE YOUR GOAL

You're already going to get enough rejection from the industry—you don't need it from friends or family. And no, I'm not saying ditch your loved ones. But if someone consistently invalidates your career, it's time to address it.

This doesn't mean you fight. It means you have a real conversation.

Your dreams are not up for debate. Period.

In the same way, look at your own habits. What are you doing daily that drains you or distracts from your goals? What needs to be minimized—or deleted?



"You will never reach your destination if you stop and throw stones at every dog that barks." — Winston Churchill

Chapter 3: Remove What Doesn't Serve Your Goal

Practical Assignments:

- Identify one person whose negativity is hurting your progress. Plan a calm, respectful conversation.
- Audit your calendar. Remove one recurring task or habit that doesn't serve your goals.
- Commit to a week of no complaining. Just action.

Chapter 4:

BE A PROFESSIONAL

If you want to be a paid working actor, **start acting like one now.**

You may not get paid to audition—but before you send that tape, ask yourself: “Was this audition good enough to earn me \$25–45K per episode?” “Were those first 4 seconds strong enough for someone to keep watching?” If you’re bored watching it, surely they are too, so just reshoot it. No excuses.

Follow submission directions to the letter. I know sometimes it feels like you are trying to pass an aptitude test with these self-tape directions, but when you can follow them to the letter it indicates the type of person you are to work with. Be responsive and respectful to your team—especially assistants. Let’s not forget that the ASSISTANTS are the filters and gatekeepers, and they can decide your fate, just by the way you treated them. Make their job easier and they’ll fight for you.

It’s never too early to act like a pro:

- Take notes without ego.
- Show up on time.
- Thank everyone—from the sound tech to the PAs.

Chapter 4: Be a Professional



"Nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care." — Theodore Roosevelt

Practical Assignments:

- Watch a show and admire something about your least favorite character.
- Watch your favorite actor and steal one choice they made. Try it.
- Rewatch your latest self-tape. Would you pay for it? If not, redo it.

Chapter 5:

MAKE & MAINTAIN CONNECTIONS

I'm sure you've heard that saying, it's all about who you know. But I'll extend that even further:

People like to work with people they get along with.

So when you meet new people—whether it be on a set or somewhere else—be kind, use your manners, and when you make a connection, keep it.

There have been many instances where I met a makeup artist, a DP, or a casting assistant who had a much lower position when I met them—but now they're doing bigger and better things.

Stay in touch with everyone you meet on set. That casting assistant? Might be a showrunner soon. That PA? Could direct your next pilot.

Additionally, the same directors and casting directors who work on commercials often cast films, too! So keep your call sheets handy. Ask for permission to contact them, and when you do, make sure you're coming from a place of **service**.

Chapter 5:

MAKE & MAINTAIN CONNECTIONS

Don't ask for a job—offer value.

For example, I worked with a director who was writing a new film. Instead of asking to audition for the lead, I asked if he needed people to read the script and offer feedback. I loved the script, gave honest notes, and though I didn't get the role, I made a memorable connection that could serve future opportunities.

You can do the same with people you've worked with before or went to school with. Check in monthly or quarterly. Ask what they're working on and how you can help. When a door opens, offer your skills as an actor—or simply offer to read.

Relationships are not transactions. **Build them. Don't collect them.**

Chapter 5: Make & Maintain Connections



"If you take a sincere interest in others, they'll take a real interest in you. Build relationships, don't collect them." — Rebekah Radice

Practical Assignments:

- Go through your phone and make a list of industry contacts of everyone you worked with.
- create a list of warm, medium, and cold prospects.
- Reach out to those still working and reestablish a dialogue via email or phone. Ask how you can support their next steps.
- Offer something useful—not just a request.

Chapter 6:

CREATE

You've got to visually mock up what your life is gonna look like and start making steps to make your vision a reality. Because here's the thing—your ideas are always senior to the doubts you have in your head.

You don't need someone else's opinion on something they aren't doing themselves. So for the love of Pete, don't ask anyone else what they think of something YOU are doing. I guarantee SOMEONE is going to like you or what you're doing—so don't try to get feedback from someone who isn't even a buyer of what you're selling anyway.

If no one is going to give you a show, then make one for yourself. Completely immerse yourself in your own work. Create characters you could play and scenes you could be in. If you can, find a team of individuals willing to help you pull it off, produce it, and share it with the world.

And don't worry if it sucks. At least you got started, and it will be even better next time.

Chapter 6: Create

Actor Marcus Coloma says, “Always find a way to create as an actor—in class, with friends—find some way to act as much as possible.” I believe this is sound advice.

Just remember—there's not a single person that can prevent you from creating but YOU. So set your fear aside and do it already.



“Anything is possible, if you have enough nerve.” — J.K. Rowling

Practical Assignments:

- Write a concept for a show or movie that you would be perfect for.
- Write a 1–2 page scene from this project featuring you as the lead.
- Record the scene as best you can, cast all characters, and share it—thwarting any idea that it has to be “perfect” to be worthy.

Chapter 7:

PROMOTE YOURSELF

This one action alone is a roadblock for many actors. You see, there's a person in our industry who is supposed to do this, and it is not us. It's called the Publicist. Their job is to make you known. But until we can afford one, we've got to do this task ourselves—and do it shamelessly.

If you've got nothing to promote, then create something to promote. It could be signing with a new agent, being cast in a community theater production, or even just being the new kid on the block.

Still got nothing? Then make something. Comedic actress Chloe Fineman used to go around creating impressions and all-around wild characters. She would tag the celebrities she impersonated and post her content to Instagram. Soon, casting directors (and fans) took notice. Before long, she was auditioning for SNL—and the rest is history.

Chapter 7: Promote Yourself

We are in a world now where we have no excuse not to act. Most people have a smartphone.

Most people are on some form of social media. The world is literally your stage. You don't need an audition to be seen by a casting director—just share your talent. If you're good, your work will be shared, and it might land right in someone's DMs.

It's my personal opinion that every actor should have a YouTube channel or some sort of content outlet. Being known is valuable and viable. Your social media is an extension of your business card—so use it.

Just be mindful of how you promote. Share your good work non-invasively. Don't randomly message people a video link with no message or reason. That's spammy. Think of what you appreciate when people reach out—and do that.

The way you promote should come from a genuine place. Not everyone will be into what you're selling, and that's okay. You only want to work with people who truly get and like what you do.



"It's not who you know, it's who knows you." — Proverb

Chapter 7: Promote Yourself

Practical Assignments:

- Research casting directors in your market and follow them on social media.
- Interact with 1–2 of their posts (genuinely).
- Send a postcard or message about something recent you've done.
- Do the same for directors and writers of shows you admire or could see yourself in.

Chapter 8:

KNOW YOUR WORTH

Here's the truth: you offer something no one else does. No one has lived your exact life, had your exact experiences, or brings your exact energy into a room. That's your power. And that's why trying to "be like" someone else is a waste of time.

It's easy to fall into the trap of comparison—especially after a rejection. But hear me when I say: rejection isn't proof you're not good enough. It's just information. It's not your job to justify why someone else booked the role. It's your job to keep showing up with excellence and integrity.

Because this isn't over—unless you decide it is.

A strong way to reinforce your self-worth is by keeping a record of your wins. Not just the big ones, either. Celebrate the callbacks, the great self-tape, the compliment from that casting assistant. It all counts.

I love what my friends Mark O'Brien and Georgina Reilly do: they keep a "win jar." Every time something good happens—big or small—they write it down and stick it in the jar. At the end of the year, they read every slip aloud and reflect on all they've achieved. Then they set new goals. Beautiful, right?

Chapter 8: Know Your Worth

You've got to be your own biggest fan. Remind yourself of the value you bring—not just as an actor, but as a collaborator, a creator, and a professional. You're not just auditioning for roles. You're auditioning for relationships.

So act accordingly.



"One of the most common causes of failure is the habit of quitting when one is overtaken by temporary defeat." — Napoleon Hill

Practical Assignments:

- Write down every win you've had—no matter how small—and review the list weekly.
- Start your own "win jar" and commit to filling it throughout the year.
- Write a short pitch on why someone should hire or sign you. Emphasize what makes you different.
- Choose one limiting belief you've held about yourself as an actor and rewrite it in a way that empowers you.

Chapter 9:

OWN YOUR BRAND — BECAUSE NO ONE ELSE WILL

Here's the truth: your brand isn't some fluffy marketing thing only influencers and CEOs need to worry about. **It's your secret weapon** in a crowded, noisy industry where everyone's shouting for attention.

If you're thinking, "I'm an actor, not a marketer," then this chapter is especially for you. Because whether you like it or not, you are marketing yourself every time you show up for an audition, post online, or even walk into a room. The question is — **are you controlling the story, or letting someone else write it?**

Your Brand is Your Business Card.

Think of your brand as your business card on steroids. It's how people remember you. It's how casting directors picture you in roles before you even say a word. And it's the first thing people see — long before they meet you.

Chapter 9: Own Your Brand — Because No One Else Will

Branding done right isn't about pretending to be someone you're not.

It's about amplifying what makes you you — the real you, the raw you, the one with all the stories, scars, laughs, and fire.

If you try to fake it? It shows. And no one wants to work with a fraud.

What You're Probably Missing (Hint: It's Not Just A Headshot)

Most actors think branding is just their headshot or their Instagram feed. Nope. It's bigger and deeper than that. It's your vibe, your voice, your energy — your whole package.

And if you're not crystal clear on your “brand story,” you're leaving money, opportunities, and auditions on the table. Because casting directors don't just cast skills — they cast fit. They cast personality. They cast confidence.

It's A LOT, I know...

Chapter 9: Own Your Brand — Because No One Else Will

It's one thing to read something, and it's another to actually APPLY it. If you want to find out what your personal brand really is — and what might be silently sabotaging it — that's exactly what I help you uncover in the **YOUR BRANDING BLACK BOOK** workbook and my deeper, hands-on online course. But if you really need some hand holding you can always book a Strategic Branding Session with me. It is not what I—or anyone else—think you should be. This call is about 2 hours and completely and utterly tailored to you. I can't promise you will book something tomorrow but what I can promise you is PROGRESS, and you will come out the other end with a whole lot more confidence in yourself and how valuable you truly are.

Mindset determines persistence on a given track.

Here's What You Can Do Right Now:

- Get curious about how YOU show up. Not how you think you do, but how others see you. (Hint: Ask trusted friends or colleagues — but pick people who tell the truth, not just nice compliments.)
- Audit your social media and headshots. Do they match the story you want to tell? Or are you sending mixed signals?

Chapter 9: Own Your Brand — Because No One Else Will

- Start showing a little more of you in your posts and conversations. The real you. The one with the quirks, the opinions, the passions.

You control your story. You control your brand. And if you don't, someone else will.

So stop playing small and start owning it — with honesty, guts, and a little bit of mystery.

Practical:

Write down three words that really describe who you are on and off screen — no cliché BS. Use those to guide your next Instagram post, headshot refresh, or audition prep.

If you want help uncovering your blind spots and leveling up your brand?
You know where to find me.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I'm Kristen Henry King, an actress based out of Atlanta. I've called New York and LA home, and my journey has taken me from opera stages to musical theatre, then into film and television to parenthood and then back again.

I've worked on plenty of commercials and TV shows—enough to fill an IMDb page—but instead of listing all my credits here (you can easily find those online), I want to say thank you for being part of this book.

Your success matters to me. If you take something from this guide and it helps you land that role, book that agent, or simply feel more confident in your career, I want to hear about it. Sharing your wins makes all the hard work worth it.

Keep your eyes peeled for more ebooks coming your way—and until then, keep showing up, keep growing, and keep owning your story.

A handwritten signature in a cursive script that reads "Kristen".

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