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Ask the Real Question and Know Where You Stand

by Dallas Travers, CEC

In every relationship, you must be mindful of how you create your own roadblocks simply by being unclear about what you want.

Recently, my client Brad secured a meeting with a reputable talent manager. Brad was excited to take the meeting because this manager seemed to be the perfect fit for him. The meeting went beautifully. Brad was charming and at ease. He asked great questions. The manager liked his demo reel and expressed confidence in his future as an actor. After over an hour of talking, getting to know each other, and having a great time, things suddenly got a little weird.

You see, as the meeting ended, Brad assumed that if this manager had interest in representing him, she would tell him so. It makes sense, right? Brad's assumption prevented him from asking the real question, so the meeting slowly pattered to a stop. He left feeling unsure about whether the manager wanted to work with him and unclear about how to follow up after the meeting. Assumptions don't work. They often lead to confusion and uncertainty, so beware of when those little buggers pop up. Instead, ask the real question.

So, what's the real question? In Brad's case, it's "Would you like to be my manager?" Or at least, "What's the next step for us?" By asking the real question, you'll get a real answer and the next steps will be clear to you. If you have an agent who's not getting you auditions, don't call them and ask how things are going. They might tell you that they celebrated their son's birthday over the weekend, which was a lot of fun, so all in all things are going really well. You asked, they answered. What can you expect? If you want to know why you aren't getting calls, ask them. Perhaps you could say, "When do you expect that I might start auditioning?" "What steps do I need to take to get some auditions?" or "So how do you think things are going with my career?"

If you sent your headshot and demo reel to a producer you met, don't ask them if they got it. Don't even ask them if they watched it. They might answer yes to both questions, and then what? Sure, you want to confirm that they received your package and that they had a chance to watch it, but those are not the

real questions. Here, the real question might be, "Can you give me feedback on my materials?" Or "Do you have a project I might be right for?"

Ask the real question. Not for their sake, but for yours. Ask the real question and get the real answer. The real answer provides real information to help you move forward. Sure by asking the real question, you risk rejection, but at least then you'll know that you've been rejected and you can move on. Asking the easy or safe questions just leaves you in limbo. Don't assume or beat around the proverbial bush. It doesn't work and it makes you feel kinda crazy.

Back to our friend, Brad. He decided to call this manager and ask her the real question. It went something like this:

Brad:

Hi Jane. Thanks again for the meeting last week. I really connected to what you said about marketing. I'm already using the advice you gave me.

Manager:

Great Brad. I enjoyed the meeting as well. What can I do for you?

Brad:

Jane, I am calling to find out if you'd like to represent me.

Manager:

Well Brad, I usually call actors back for a second meeting prior to signing them. You are on my short list and I plan on making my decision at the end of the month.

Brad:

Thanks. If I don't hear from you in the next few weeks then, may I call to follow up?

Manager:

Sure, but I imagine you'll hear from me soon.

Brad:

I hope so, but if not I'll call you on July 1st. Thanks again for the meeting and I look forward to speaking again soon.

This story has a great ending. After asking the real question, Brad knew exactly how he would follow up with this manager. He sent her a thank you card and marked his calendar to give her a call on July 1st. She beat him to the punch, though and called him in for a second meeting where they agreed to work together.

Brad's manager would have called him regardless of whether or not he asked the real question, but Brad didn't know that. By being clear and asking the real question, he armed himself with real information that allowed him to follow up appropriately. The real question kept him from playing the guessing game and wondering about what to do next.

Where in your career can you be ask the real question? How can you use this tool to gain more clarity and momentum in your everyday life?

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