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Film Actors On Confidence

by Douglas Eby

"Mustering up enough self-esteem to say, 'I want to be an actor,' was a big turning point." Julia Roberts

Many talented and creative people report feeling incompetent, inadequate and having low self esteem at times. But there are ways to shift those feelings and build self-confidence.

A number of film actors report they don't even watch their own movies. When you can be seen in close-ups on twenty-foot high theater screens, it may be especially hard not to criticize your appearance and performance, and supposed faults.

Many actors are gifted and talented people, who may be very self critical and highly reactive to criticism from others, such as teachers, other actors and critics.

Gifted and talented people may also be perfectionistic, and measure themselves against outstanding and accomplished professionals, such as other actors, perhaps forgetting those pros have refined their talents over many years.

But even accomplished actors can feel low self-esteem and insecurity.

Meryl Streep admits she has "varying degrees of confidence and self-loathing," and says she can have "perfectly horrible" days where she doubts her talent or ability to emotionally achieve what she wants in a certain scene.

She also admits fearing sometimes that she's "boring and they're going to find out that I don't know what I'm doing."

Kate Winslet has said that before going off to a movie shoot, she sometimes thinks, "I'm a fraud, and they're going to fire me... I'm fat; I'm ugly; I look like a whore!" [She laughs].

Bill Nighy has commented about feeling a "huge disparity" between what you might think of yourself and your work and how other people judge it, even positively - thinking they're "insane" for applauding your work, but realizing "you're sometimes quite good at what you do."

What About You?

So what can you do about building up your self-esteem and confidence as an actor?

One way is to pay more attention to the positive things people say about your performance, when it is authentic, and not paying so much attention to negative criticism. Or at least being careful to accept valid criticism only for what it is, and not exaggerate it.

Developing yourself as both a person and an actor, following your interests in art or sports or seeing friends, while also taking acting classes. Getting into commercials or community theater or any performance work can help feelings of low self-esteem.

It may help to seek out comments from a teacher or other actors about how you are working, instead of waiting for comments.

But building confidence may not be a matter of simply building up positive esteem or "getting rid" of low esteem feelings.

Will Smith admits he doubts himself every day. "What people believe is my self-confidence is actually my reaction to fear," he has said. "I've always had a horrible fear of not achieving."

But he has learned to use his self-doubt and fear of failure, as he says, to "flip that negative energy around and make it a challenge. I keep going because I doubt myself. It drives me to be better."

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