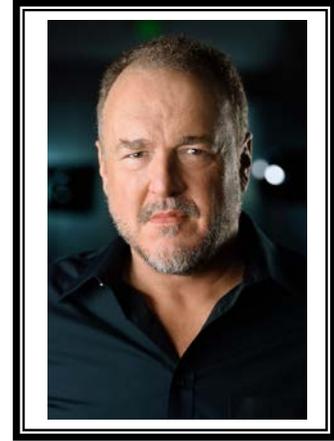


# BRENT SEXTON INTERVIEW

## ACTOR

May 20, 2017

Brent Sexton is an L.A. based actor with over 75 television and films credits. He has been a series regular on such shows as *The Killing*, , *Ironside*, *Life*, *Bosch*, *Complications*, *Deadwood* and a guest star on many well-known shows including *CSI Cyber*, *Designated Survivor*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *The Mentalist*, *Lie to Me*, *Becker* and many others. Films include *The Belko Experiment*, *Radio*, *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* and *Flight Plan*. Currently he is filming *Unsolved*, a true crime series based on the murder investigations of Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls.



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Steve Taft: In college, students are introduced to a specific method or methods regarding acting. What is your personal approach or process to creating a character?

Brent Sexton: It's an amalgamation of what I studied and learned over the years, and keep learning. The most valuable, for me, came from studying the unconscious mind. I did read Declan Donnellan's book *The Actor and the Target* a couple years ago and liked it a lot. The word "acting" is limiting to me, in that I feel it indicates "performing" more than "relating". It sucks when you're in a scene relating to the other actor and they're so wrapped up in "acting" they can't connect with you emotionally. As for creating character, I think about behavior and would specify "relating" even further as "thinking & feeling". I like doing the detective work, spending a lot of time with the script and discovering how the thinking and feeling of the characters manifests outwardly as behavior.

ST: In terms of acting technique, what's the major difference between theatre, television and/or film?

BS: Generally speaking, I'd say scale of expression. Stage requires a big expression that can be read by the back row. On camera, a simple eye movement expresses volumes.

ST: What's the particular difference in working on a television show (as a guest actor) opposed to when you are in a series or a film where there is more time to step into the shoes of and develop a character?

BS: I think you answered your own question [laughs]. You get more time to develop a character, or at least the behavior. However, character arises from conflict and that is the writer's job, but keep in mind that the character is ultimately made in the editing room. I've had a couple experiences where I made specific choices to create an arc for the character only to have them changed in the editing room or even cut out of the episode, which ultimately left the character with no arc at all. I heard an actor once say they got bruises from the cutting room floor. It's out

of your hands at that point, which is really frustrating when you're crafting. Do the work anyway but keep your expectations realistic.

ST: Most theatre graduates don't have a "reel" and many young actors want to get an agent ASAP if they are headed to the L.A. market. Assuming a student is talented, what should they have prepared for an agent should they have an opportunity to get an appointment?

BS: Talented or not, an agent wants a reel before they even meet you. If you don't have one, spend the money to make a good one. Make it look like it came from TV or from a film. One comedy reel and one dramatic reel, keep both under two minutes.

ST: What suggestions do you have for the student that is pursuing a career as an actor and faces constant rejection?

BS: I suggest they wake the fuck up [*laughs*]. Have they ever heard of someone pursuing an acting career that faced constant acceptance? Welcome to the world going 'round [*laughs*]. First, realize there are a million reasons why you didn't get the part. It's not personal, and your self worth is not determined by anything outside of you. If you have that in place and still get rejected, then it's time for product improvement. That means you. You must change. Running a successful business is less about the business and more about personal growth. Change what you are doing. Get copious feedback on your efforts. Take classes. Get into a group that performs every week to keep your chops up. Make prepping the audition the thing that gives you the juice and release the attachment of having the job. Leave it all in the room then let it go and receive. If it shows up, great. If it doesn't, great. You still feel good either way.

ST: Describe the ideal Director that you like to work with and his/her personal qualities and approach to a television or film project?

BS: Someone who communicates effectively and is receptive of every actor's input.

ST: What kind of director drives you crazy and why? And how do you manage working with a director that is frustrating you?

BS: A director who doesn't direct. I remember shooting a dinner scene with about 8 people. After one take the director walked up to the table, emphatically pointed at three of the actors and said, "You, you and you were false." Then he turned around and walked away. And I thought, "fuck you", ya know? Do your job. Communicate. Direct them specifically where the opportunity for more truth was on that last take. Tell them what you want them to do, not what you don't want them to do. It helps if the actor can learn how to ask those types of questions. Then they get a specific to work toward rather than just pulling something out of their ass and hoping they got it right.

ST: Whether working in theatre, television or film, what personal qualities might a casting director or director being looking for in an actor beyond their talent?

BS: I say don't expect them to expect anything from you beyond your talent. This is a professional arrangement, not a personal one. They'll get a sense of your vibe, whether you are relaxed or needy, and that's enough. Be nice but do not overly engage with them. You are not

there to make friends or bullshit with them. You are there to wow them with your energy in the audition and then get the hell out.

ST: What suggestions do you have for an actor that is type-cast and wants to break the perception people typically have of that actor.

BS: Again, welcome to the world going 'round. This is the business you chose. I will say there are some amazing casting directors that do use their imagination rather than their deduction when considering you for a role. Generally, most typecast; it's easier for them especially in episodic television, which moves at a fast pace. This is the way the river flows so change your actions accordingly. Set a boundary. Get your agent in line seeking out different roles, and say "No" to auditions that perpetuate the type. Otherwise, you are only reinforcing the image in their mind of the thing that you say you don't want to do. Find a scene that shows you in a different type, something with impact. Film it and put it on your reel. Or self-tape an audition for a current role being cast that's against your type and have your agent send it out. If nothing else it will plant a seed, a different image in the casting director's mind that they can now draw on when they think of you.

ST: Finally, what isn't taught in theatre programs that students really need to know before entering the real world?

BS: Show business has two functions that require attention. I think most theatre programs neglect the business side but *you* are responsible for both, no one else. Take business and marketing classes along with your theatre classes. Also, take everything you read in interviews with a grain of salt. Never let someone else's experience in life dictate what your experience will be like. Create what you want in your mind and take action toward it. Now, forget everything I just said and go kick some ass.

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