

Why it Pays to Stay Professional in a Sometimes Unprofessional

Business by Rob Sciglimpaglia

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by [edgeadmin](#)

This past week, a lesson in how difficult it is to book a part in this business was reinforced for me. I also reminded myself that no matter how much you pine for revenge against an unfair, sometimes unprofessional business, revenge never pays off.

About 8 weeks ago, I auditioned for a commercial. It was apparent when I got to the audition that the client was conducting it on their own, because they handed me a pad of paper and asked me to answer five essay questions about the project. I thought it was odd, but I had a lot of knowledge on the subject, so I obliged. After that, I was called in for my "screen test." They must have liked what they saw, because after the hour audition, they called me back a couple of weeks later. Shortly after that, I get word that I was picked as one of three -- in the entire New York City area -- to be featured in this commercial. They asked me to keep a date free about 6 weeks out, and told me to round up a bunch of personal pictures of me, my family and co-workers, which they would need for the shoot.

A few weeks later, I get an email letting me know the shoot is still on. Now the director wants to know my hobbies. I give them my hobby information, and tell them I have been going through pictures for a couple of weeks. On the Tuesday prior to the Friday shoot, I send off an email asking for the final details, i.e., wardrobe, call time, location, etc. I get an email back a couple of hours later stating that the client has just met with the director, and the director has decided to cut the shoot in half and that they have selected someone else for the shoot, so they won't need my services after all.

At that moment, anger shot through my body, and I could have shot back a nasty email. But I thought better of it and just thanked the client for the opportunity, saying "maybe next time we can work together."

I asked myself, "Should I post something about this on my Facebook page? Should I call the Union and see if they violated any rules?" These thoughts were just a fleeting reaction and I did not do any of those things. Why? Because I am a professional. And any professional in the entertainment business understands that rejection is at the CORE of the business.

It did get me to thinking, though, about how little the acting profession, and actors, can be regarded by some in the business. I am also an attorney by trade, and I have NEVER had anyone treat me so "unprofessionally," not without at least expecting to reimburse me for my professional time. Why is it that actors are treated any differently than other similarly situated professionals? Perhaps it is because people who are not familiar with the business -- like these clients running their own casting -- think actors are "just having fun."

I find it ironic that when I talk to other industry pros (like agents, casting directors, directors and producers), the number one complaint I hear about actors is that they act "unprofessionally." Meaning that they are late for appointments or sometimes don't show up at all, they don't take their craft seriously by obtaining training, they don't have their marketing materials up to date (or no materials at all), etc., etc. Because I am not one of those actors, I never really thought about it before. This experience, though, got me thinking: What if actors act unprofessionally because they are treated unprofessionally? Is lack of professionalism ever acceptable? If I were not

also an attorney who learned how to act professionally, with a Professional Code of Ethics to follow, would I, too, act unprofessionally in the acting profession?

I told myself long ago when I started to pursue acting, that I would carry over all the same professional habits that I had learned practicing law, and that if I did that, I would always be OK. That is why I told the client “maybe next time we can work together” ... because as a professional, I know that as long as that bridge is not burned, the possibility of crossing it always exists; whereas if that bridge is burned, any opportunity is gone forever! In that respect, the voice over business is something like the island of Manhattan -- there are only so many bridges that lead in and out. So if you burn too many of them, you will soon trap yourself, with no means to expand your range or to get where you really want to be.

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Thank you, Rob. Great article and a terrific reminder that we all have to face unprofessionalism in voiceover as well as in other aspects of daily life. Countering unprofessionalism with grace is always a challenge but can lead to opportunity down the road...and speaks volumes of one's integrity.

In my other profession as a ceramics artist, I have maintained a policy of collecting a deposit for custom work prior to embarking on the project. Clients are often unaware of how much effort and skill goes into creating a unique, handmade item before the final piece emerges from the kiln. By collecting a deposit, my client has a financial stake in the work, alongside my investment of time, expertise, and materials; further, I can recoup some of my costs if the client decides to cancel the order prior to completion. This situation is not unlike voiceover in that often a great deal of preparation goes on behind the scenes before voicing the final product.

New to voiceover, I haven't found that this industry employs a similar general policy. Perhaps such a change would reduce the capriciousness to which actors are sometimes subject, particularly when the project is large or requires a good deal of advance preparation. I don't expect that those "in the business" would welcome such a change, but we as actors could do more to protect ourselves, our talent, and our time.

Comment submitted by ElizabethHarrisJuly 23, 2013

[feedback on Rob scigliompaglia's article](#)

Hi Rob, nice to read some constructive comments about the poor professional conduct of casting agencies and voiceover agencies. Wow! there seems to me to be a bunch of inconsiderate and rude production houses that feed on the dreams and empty bellies of voiceover actors in a highly competitive industry. Pay for audition web sites do nothing to help the situation, calling for up to 200 auditions for a single \$100 job , do I think a casting person is going to listen to all these auditions, the answer is NO!. The reason, they are busy striving to create new business for clients who want to spend minimum dollars for a maximum return on their advertising. Yes, your voiceover may have been considered by the production crew, but unless the client likes it, sorry, your hard work ends in the trash can. America has a huge pool of wonderful talent which produces a bi-product of rejection by casting agents. In my opinion, to survive in this industry you have to be impervious to rejection and also the dog eat dog attitude that is rampant in an industry that needs the courage to try out new talent and ideas. In this new age of texting and social media, communicating has never been easier, but wait, does it include voiceover work? Hmmm, can this current generation read , spell or even write? Where will our voiceover actors and talent come from in the future? Will scripts have to come from smart phones with text or computer generated voice capability? In my opinion it is time for the advertising and casting community off take off their blinkers and become creative leaders in a fearful market place that rejects change. Cheers, John D. Coutts

Comment submitted by aussie jackJuly 22, 2013

Rewarding though not always paying

Hello Rob, a big thank you from Berlin, Germany. Every now and then, pushed to the limits, balancing on that delicate edge between Buddha and Dirty Harry i find myself undecided. My accountant says: but they owe you (fill in 3 to 4 digit salary). I manage to invest especially the nasty experiences into future voice over projects. Some lessons are rather easy to learn like: what starts unprofessional is bound to end unprofessional (low budgets, scripts i don't want to comment on, daily shifted deadlines...). By protecting my business i protect my client - so i can still record that occasional retake free of charge, recommend colleagues, post production facilities etc if necessary or "localize" translations. I feel better at the end of the day and after 20+ years in the business i do believe a professional attitude eventually does pay off in your local currency as well ;-)

Comment submitted by germanvoiceoverservicesJuly 22, 2013

Double Standards Abound

Rob, it seems like others in the artistic professions are treated to the double standard. In addition to voice acting, I write creatively. To be professional, writers must submit respectful query letters asking agents and editors if they would like to read their stories. We invest a lot of time writing these letters, even short letters, because they serve as our first auditions. Often writers receive terse rejections to their queries scribbled on their original query letter itself or on a Post-It note affixed to their query letter. Why is it that a writer must take the time to be professional while an editor/agent has carte blanche to respond in such an unprofessional way? The argument is that agents/editors receive hundreds of queries and to respond to each would take too much time. As if writers don't write hundreds of queries! Would it be asking too much for editors/agents to develop a form letter that they can then customize for each rejection and/or acceptance? I wouldn't get any consideration for my work if I scribbled a query on a Post-It note and fired it off to an agent/editor. Similarly, anyone who asks an artist to put in the amount of effort you did for this voice gig should show a little respect. I hope they stumble across your article about it and respond accordingly...preferably with an apology. Better luck next time.

Comment submitted by LunariverJuly 22, 2013

Staying Professional

Thanks Rob:

I think it is hard sometimes to stay professional when your time is spent hoop jumping and "on your time" preparing. I've had instances when i rent a costume ,learn a script and submit a self-tape to not have the courtesy of the casting director to download and view the self-taping. It is unfortunate that there are those who blow off appointments giving others in the business a bad rep. Thanks for the insight and honest thoughts to stay ahead of all that./ Best Bill

Comment submitted by wfortier@wi.rr.comJuly 21, 2013