

Every one has that innate and natural fear that we discussed in the section on emotionality. That fear causes people to want to hide, shut down, check out...and place their vectors inwards as a way to disconnect from others. The feeling is that if we connect to another, then we will become opened up, like that 100% vacuum. If we are opened up, we are vulnerable to attack. If we are vulnerable to attack, our deepest fear – that gun to our chest, that negative personal bias, that voice in our head – will be given ammunition and kill us...again why we shut down, cap, and push against our emotions.

One very powerful way that we push down our vulnerability, is by CHECKING OUT.

Check out mechanisms come in all shapes and sizes:

- refusing to make eye contact
- pausing to “think before speaking”
- regretting the past
- worrying about the future
- constant apologizing
- minimizing of self (“I’m just...”)
- creating conflict when there is none
- deflecting and avoiding topics

These are just some of the many ways actors can check out.

Actors who take a pause before they repeat the other’s sound and movement (or noun) tend to be people who are afraid of connection. Connection feels like conflict or judgement to them. It feels daunting to have someone look right at you and hurl all of their focal energy at you. This energy can implode the self-conscious person whose insecurities are triggered by the vulnerability of being really looked at.

Actor’s who take a pause before their addition of a sound and movement (or noun) tend to be actors who are afraid of failure. The person who wants to “get it right”. The person who worries that others will think less of them if they don’t achieve something. The perfectionist. (My favourite response by an actor to my questioning if she thought she was a perfectionist, was: “I’m working on it!”)

Actors who skip the partner’s sound and movement (or noun) and go right to theirs tend to be people who are anxious of the future. Worried about what’s coming next. They hide their vulnerability, fear, and insecurity of connection through pushing to the next moment, overriding their partner.

Also...

Actor's who repeat the partner's sound and movement (or noun) from two moments ago tend to be people who are caught in the past, regretting what has happened.

Actor's who repeat the same sound and movement (or noun) over and over again tend to be people who minimize themselves and try to hide behind a lack of imaginations...when we in fact all have full and ripe imaginations just waiting to be released.

One of the most prevalent and powerful check out mechanisms is generalizing.

FIRST PERSON sees SECOND PERSON enter the room. Second Person has clearly been crying and is in a bad state.

FIRST PERSON
Hi. How are you?

SECOND PERSON
Good. How are you?

FIRST PERSON
Good.

And they go on with their day.

To generalize is to check out. The more specific you are, the more checked in you are. The more checked in you are, as in the more vectored-out you are, the less you are thinking. The better your accidental and spontaneous results. Although it may seem counterintuitive:

the more specific you are, the less you have to think

In the SOUND AND MOVEMENT and NOUN EXERCISES, a major way to check out is to get general. Making a soft, weak, hardly perceptible sound and a vague, hard to follow gesture...is a way to hide. It is self-involved and designed to make the person creating the sound and movement check-out, and feel bad about themselves, giving in to the natural insecurity in them. But worse, that sound and movement are basically impossible for the other to repeat. The self-inverted, general, weak sound and movement causes the other actor to go into their head because they have nothing real to hang on to.

In other words, succumbing to generalism and avoiding specificity in order to check out FORCES the other to check out. The actor's JOB is to make the OTHER check in.

The actor's job is to make the other actor brilliant

A general whawha sound and limp movement of the arms puts the other actor in their head. But something like cutting with scissors yelling "clip clip", twirling a finger and whistling, flapping of the wings with a "Squawk!" is easy to respond to, and makes the partner vectored-out...which makes it easier for the first actor to be vectored-out. And then all sorts of fun possibilities are available to happen...and after a while, accidentally, your imagination is released, and that brilliant Robin Williams moment happens, and the class laughs or cries...either way, connect. The more specific you are, the more you release your imagination.

When the exercise works, when the actors have the discipline to repeat each others movements accurately, and repeat the other as the they are still doing their sound and movement or niuns, when they are specific and connected and only thinking of the other...

The actors help each other to lose themselves in each other. If I am repeating their sounds instantly and then instantly giving a new sound which they have to repeat instantly, there is no time for my partner to worry about, think about, or frankly even realize what they responded as their sound and movement. They are far too busy repeating mine accurately and precisely.

And if my partner is repeating accurately and precisely, repeating my sound and movement as I do it and adding theirs as soon as they can there is no time for me to w to worry about, think of, or even realize what sounds and movements I am making. Which means we have become 100% outward focussed.

Actors apologize for their responses. Actors have a tendency to scrunch their face, roll their eyes, sigh, grimace, and even sometimes swear to themselves for having a “stupid” response. Some actors will even stop the entire exercise to actually say: “I’m sorry”.

First of all, if the exercise is tight and moving at the speed of life, there can not possibly be enough time for an actor to comment on their own work.

Secondly...the exercise is about not being self-conscious...in other words: NO RESPONSE IS WRONG. As long as it is in flow and deeply connected to the other. As actors work at the exercise, they will warm up to it and improve the connection...it will eventually click and become a clear, articulate, focussed exercise. At first, actors will struggle to get the exercise “up and on its feet”. To comment on the work and apologize for responses is to sabotage the exercise and check out, insuring that the exercise will NEVER get on its feet.

So, at first words come out garbled, words repeat, words come out in French, words aren’t strictly nouns...KEEP GOING. There’s no time to worry about what happened, and no time to worry about what is going to happen next...there’s only time to worry about what is happening in the NOW.

Actors sigh before they repeat or respond. A sigh is a dissipation of excess energy that otherwise should be going into the partner. The sigh is both an indicator that the actor isn’t actually connected AND the natural outlet for the energy that should be connected.

Actors eyes flicker all around. Looking away, searching for the new word, is a way to check out and not be connected to the partner.

Actors breaking because of an emotional response. To laugh and giggle at the funny and possibly inappropriate words flying by is a way to shut down the exercise. It’s a subtle way of checking out.

Actors censoring themselves: don’t worry about appropriate, polite, or proper. To self-censor is to shut down. The words that fly out of your mouth at times can be the most vulgar words ever known, sexual, morally reprehensible, terms of racism...almost anything...none of them mean anything out of context. The actor isn’t putting meaning behind these words...they are just words. And after a lifetime of listening to rap music, watching movies, and following the news...there are many, many words in your brain that in context are offensive and unacceptable. In this arena, nothing can be taboo, or the actor will begin to censor themselves.

Conversely, some actors make real connection and have any number of surprising emotional responses. To stop because of feelings of rage, or because of tears...is to check out. To stop the exercise to hug the other because they are having an emotional response is to check out. To stop the exercise to congratulate the other actor on a good response is to check out. In other words: KEEP GOING.

And so, the actor’s responsibility to their partner is to refuse to let them shut down. refuse to let them check out. Refuse to let them apologize or stop or create distraction. The actor’s pledge is to ensure that the other actor never drops focus.

The actor’s pledge is to help the other actor to KEEP GOING.

Actors who repeat the same words over and over. Getting “caught in a loop” is an indication that the actors imaginations aren’t flowing...because the actors aren’t deeply immersed in the other. Sharpen up the accuracy and precision. Listen to the other. Accidentally respond.

STEP (3): the recognition is that it's between them.

As the actors relax into the exercise, the intense concentration on the other's face will relax. The exercise actually pulls away from each actor studying the other, and the point of focus pulls to the centre...the place between them...the focal point at exactly half way between the actors. And the "event" is no longer the intensive "reading" of the other person, but the fully inhabited recognition of the passing connections between them. It's a collaborative interaction of focus that brings the actors truly vectored-out.

Now the exercise flies in an infinite number of possibilities. The actors are on a ride together and have no control... the exercise has taken them away. Actors sit on one letter for minutes or pass through the alphabet in seconds, repeat the same letters simultaneously, and have emotional reactions: laughing, crying, succumbing to vulnerability, holding each other up.

The moments are the duration of the letter: sometimes spoken once, in a quick "M"...sometimes elongated for minutes in a continual "N"...

The event is what is taking place between them. Neither created it. Neither is destroying it. They flow with the passing events from moment to moment.

When this occurs, this exercise can become one of the most fascinating, most moving exercises to experience. I have seen countless versions of this exercise that have brought a class to a standstill, left the room in the "you could hear a pin drop" mode, left the class audience breathless...and have elicited tears, and/or bursts of laughter from us.

And that is two adults SAYING THE ALPHABET. From here...from this connection, imagine adding character action, objective, relationship, emotional preparation, structure, and dialogue. How extraordinary the acting would be.

The A/B/C EXERCISE STEPS:

STEP (1): remove the possibility of “creating moments”.

Two actors face off at a comfortable distance apart. One says the letter “A”. The other repeats the letter “A”. Repeat back and forth for 3 repetitions. Ensure that the actors remain deadpan throughout. That a falsified or arbitrary emotional response, a pushing of an artificial “meaning”, does NOT occur. That the actors are not allowing agendas to creep into their work. No anger, or laughing, or any prejudiced response is laid on top of the exercise. Just the simple back and forth meaningless repetition of the letter “A”.

STEP (2): change to the next letter when the partner changes.

The two actors throw the letter “A” back and forth UNTIL SOMETHING CHANGES in their partner. When there is a shift in the other’s behaviour, a change in their demeanour, a difference in their attitude, the actor noticing that changes to the next letter in the alphabet. The actors continue repeating “B” until one of them recognizes change and switches to the next letter. Never stop repeating the letters. To pause and study is to push vectors back inwards. Letters are constantly being spoken.

To miss recognizing that the other has changed, has switched, and so continue on the same letter despite the other’s behaviour change, is to “Destroy moments”. To continue with “A” “A” “A” “A” “A”...without noticing that your partner has acquired a confused demeanour is to have lost ability to recognize the other. To destroy moments is to fall behind the speed of life. Is to bore an audience.

The actors should be recognizing shifts in their partners, focussing on their partners...which brings them out of their own heads, and away from focussing on themselves. However, this remains an exercise about the actor and how well they can read the other...which is still self-oriented work. This isn’t quite moment to moment work yet. Not until...

As always, the two actors face off in neutral position. As in the SOUND AND MOVEMENT or NOUNS, the actors repeat and respond instantaneously... accurately and precisely. However, instead of sounds or words, now the exercise is to throw back and forth observations of the other's behaviour.

The first actor immediately assesses the other actor's actions, their behaviour, what they are doing to them and vocalizes it. The second actor repeats immediately, AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, in the speed-of-life, with no fore-thought or prejudice.

The repetition is an instant agreement with the statement (I am...) or disagreement with the statement (I am not...). No time to think. No time to self-reflect or get self-conscious.

ACTOR A

You are laser drilling into me.

ACTOR B

I am drilling into you - you are backing away.

ACTOR A

I'm not backing away, you are pushing too much.

ACTOR B

I'm not pushing too much, you're not letting me in.

ACTOR A

You are right, I'm not letting you in. You are helping me.

ACTOR B

I am helping you. You are inviting me in.

THE STEPS OF THE VECTOR EXERCISE:

STEP (1): Two actors face off. Actor A turns their back to Actor B. Actor A “empties out”...meaning they let go of any prejudice or preconceived notions, forgetting anything they have seen or any expectations they may have. The check-out tendency is to have a prepared idea of what will be said, which defeats the exercise entirely. Actor A instantly says something that comes from what they see in front of them **IN THAT MOMENT**. This is why the actor “empties out” beforehand.

The other tendency is to turn and study the other person...thinking, intellectualizing, reflecting on the other person's possible behaviour. The actor must discipline themselves to speak instantaneously, without thought.

STEP (2): Actor B **INSTANTLY**, without hesitation, echoes back the statement Actor A said, agreeing or disagreeing, in first person. Actor B then reads the vectors coming at them and makes a new statement...

STEP (3): Actor A **INSTANTLY** echoes back the new statement from Actor B, then instantly adds their new read of Actor B...

EXAMPLE:

ACTOR A

You are worrying about what I am going to say.

ACTOR B

I am worrying about what you are going to say.
And you are soothing my worries.

ACTOR A

I am soothing your worries.
And you are walking down the road with me now.

ACTOR A

I am walking down the road with you now.
You are encouraging me.

ACTOR B

I am encouraging you.
You are inspiring me, too!

ACTOR A

I'm inspiring you...!?! Wow! I AM inspiring you!

Never be worried about being right or wrong, just let the moment accidentally fall out of your mouth, speaking before thinking. You may be corrected by the other, but if you are speaking from your gut, you are never wrong. The other actor may not agree...but it's the behaviour that you are getting. So it can not be "wrong". And if the actor disagrees, they will say so.

And if you think they are deflecting or disagreeing as a way to avoid what you can plainly see...then that's the next reading.

This exercise can quickly dissolve into self-involvement and inward-vectored acting. Assessing and labelling behaviour can throw the "fist back up in the face" quickly...the need to add a behaviour reading can throw the reader into a need to "get it right", "be smart", or "not make a mistake".

All the check-out mechanisms of the other exercises apply here. Eye flickering, sighing, pausing, apologizing, head nodding, etcetera. A major check-out mechanism in this exercise is to treat behaviour as result instead action.

Notice that in the examples of the exercise, the actors are only speaking in actions...what the other is doing. Their behaviour. Behaviour is action...it's what the one is doing to the other or doing to themselves.

It's not their feelings ("You are angry").

It's not their physiological responses ("Your face is red").

It's their action ("You are attacking me.")

To say: "You are giggling"; "You are insecure"; "You think you are always right"....are all result-oriented adjective talk.

To say: "You are cheering me up"; "You are hiding yourself behind your shyness"; "You're pushing your opinions down my throat"...is to talk in action. In verbs. In life.

As soon as actors turn this exercise into result, they push the other into their heads. They force the other's vectors inwards. Makes them think about themselves. It turns into a battle of who can stay outward despite the best efforts of the other to make them think about themselves.

People BEHAVE through action to each other. They act and counter-act each other's vectors and in so doing pull each other out. When people are actually communicating in a heightened state working towards an objective... and desire connection...they don't say: "you are angry". They respond against emotional behaviour: "Stop ripping into me". Or they jump right to the next point: "You are making it my fault."

If each actor is driving the other into their heads, talking in resultant feelings, manipulating the other...they only possible end result is CONFLICT. It becomes one actor against the other.

However, throughout the SOUNDS, A/B/Cs, and NOUNS...we have never spoken of conflict. Only of compassion. Of actors aiding each other to get out of their heads, to get connected and help the partner get their vectors out. In fact, as we've said:

It's the actor's responsibility to make the other actor great.

Precision in response, full connection, no dissipated energy...these will lock out the negativity and lock in the connection.