

## 3 THINGS DEFINE OUR EMOTIONAL LIFE

There are three things that mean anything to any person. The three parts of the emotional CORE can be posed as a question:

- 1 - Who is the one person you love most in your life?
- 2 - What do you want most out of this life?
- 3 - What is the one thing you know is true in this life?

**(1) Who do you love most?** What is the major relationship in your life? Who affects you most? Fills you the most? Who is that one person that stars in your imagination and in your hopes and dreams? Who will you be thinking of if a gun is put to your head?

Choose ONE person. This can be a hard question. For a child, it can feel shameful to have to choose one parent, or between a parent and a partner. For a parent, to choose one child can be an overwhelmingly difficult, seemingly impossible question to ask. This doesn't mean you don't love the others, love them fully. But there is always ONE person who continuously appears when we start to explore the extremes of the emotional landscape.

Make certain it's LOVE and not CONVENIENCE. Sometimes I hear people answer the question of what they love about that person with self-oriented love. "I love my husband because he listens to me." "I love my wife because she supports me." "Because he is always there for me. Makes meals for me. Drives me to class." This isn't love, but a conditional relationship full of need, obligation, and expectation. Her husband isn't the love of her life - her husband is her support team and servant. The question is if you didn't exist but could still somehow watch them what do you love most about them. What do you love about them that has no bearing on or connection to you? If you are a ghost, dead and gone, why would they be the most amazing person you love anyway?

The answer to "Who is the one person you love most in your life?" is never "MYSELF" or "ME". Emotionality is about energy in outward motion. Love orients outward, not inward...and anyone acting from, emotionally preparing from "me" will inward-orient their energy and start to implode their energy...triggering shame, and internalizing focus and initiating insecurity.

**(2) What do you want most out of your life?** This is your life objective. Your goal, your plan, your life intention. This isn't a "dream", but your concrete path...the journey you are setting out on. It's the reason you wake up in the mornings.

Some people take this very literally as if it's a vocational goal: to be a major actor. But dig deeply, very deeply into yourself, and search out what really makes you tick. What is really the drive underneath that urges you forward towards some destination.

Why do you want to become a major actor? When asking that question to a student once, the answer finally became so specific, so real: his mother is a catholic who has never travelled outside of the Canadian Prairies and is now wheel-chair bound...and if he were a major actor, travelling around the world and being remunerated for his art, he would carry his mother across the threshold of Jesus' tomb in Nazareth. That's what he wants.

"To wake up next to a man, my husband, holding me".

"To see my father holding his grandchild, my child, on his knee".

"To have a Native Canadian street kid come up to me and tell me I inspired him to go back to school".

You can approach the question "what do I want?" from a different angle: where do I want to be in five, ten, fifteen years? I want to sit on the deck of my house overlooking the beach, a house that emanates light and laughter, hearing my son and his love as they revel in this joy called life. That's what I want.

Be specific. Be precise. To précis down the answer is not to dilute the meaning, but distill the meaning into a rich, full, and brief statement. Once you've done that...the odds are that it will happen. Because now you know what you are working towards. When you know what you want, it can happen. And you will make it happen. If you don't know what you want...how can anything happen?

Be specific. Know who you love, and what you want.

**(3): What is the one thing you know is true in this life?** What do you believe in? What is your guiding principle? Your core value? Your personal credo? What is the number one absolute guiding truth in your life?

This is your belief, your personal narrative, your absolute truth. Your personal credo. It's the main idea that defines all of your actions and all of your thoughts. And whatever your personal core belief system is...it's yours. If yours is that God is listening, or Love is everything, or Hard work pays off...whatever your core belief is...it is yours. Mine is: life is joy.

And from that, all other beliefs are derived: Life is short. Live your own personal narrative. My son is the joy of my life.

From where does this value, principle, or belief derive? Where in your upbringing, experience, and education did your value system originate? From your parents beautiful and inspiring love? Or from the negativity and fear that was enforced on you? Or from friends, lovers, travel, school...where from?

Take your personal credo and flip it into a negative statement. You get something very powerful. It's your DEMAND STATEMENT.

If my credo is: life is joy...then the demand statement might be: Don't waste your precious time. Or maybe: Stop following silly rules that shut off your personal joy. Or: You have no right to step on other people's joy.

The statement is exceptionally useful tool into your character. Ask yourself: what is my character's major principal or Credo? What is my character's personal belief or bias? The answer to that question helps solidify the CORE of your character.

My character believes that love is pain (Frankie from FRANKIE AND JOHNNY)  
Her DEMAND STATEMENT then is: "Don't love me! It hurts too much!"

My character believes that to connect is everything (Johnny from FRANKIE AND JOHNNY)  
His DEMAND STATEMENT is: "Stop pushing me away!"

## **What is the one thing that you are most afraid of?**

This is also known as your CORE SHAME...or Personal Negative Bias. What are you now afraid about yourself? What holds you back?

You can find the answer to CORE SHAME by asking: Why will your life objective NEVER come true for you? What is wrong, broken, flawed with you that will keep your objective from ever happening?

## PROCESS OF MEMORIZATION:

**Step (1):** Memorization is a focus exercise. The ego will try and sneak in and distract, dissuade, or depress the actor away from the absorption of the words. Shut out all voices and all distractions.

Most people have a hard time memorizing because their brains get in the way, and they lose focus on the work. They get the same feeling as when you are reading a book and realize, though you've been turning the pages, you haven't really paid attention to what is written for the last few minutes. Actors need to get efficient and focus in on the memorizing.

Particularly useful is to memorize while performing a physical activity which keeps the left brain busy: walking, doing the dishes, stacking chairs, cleaning the house...these simple activities keep the mind busy so the brain can get to work.

When working with a scene partner, or a line coach, do some physical activity to help distract the brain and allow the words to be seeded inside. For example, walking up and down the street together. Stacking chairs. Playing paddy cake. My favourite memorization activity is: you and your partner get into a parked car, one in the drivers seat, one in the passenger seat. Start running the dialogue. Open the doors get out of the car while continuing the dialogue. Close the doors. Walk past each other crossing each other at the front of the car. Open the doors, sort in the car, close the doors. Always running the dialogue. Open the doors, get out, close the doors. Pass each other behind the car. Open the doors, get in, close the doors, always running the dialogue...and on and on. This takes out all possible line readings because the dialogue is randomly being thrown over the hood of a car or intimately inside the car. Most importantly, it drives the dialogue deep into the actor because of the physical activity.

**Step (2):** To attempt to memorize an entire piece will overwhelm the actor. The ego will balk: "I can't learn all that" and shut down the focus needed to absorb the dialogue. No one can memorize all of Hamlet. It's simply too daunting. An actor only memorizes small portions of Hamlet, one at a time...and then puts it all together on the first run through where "lo and behold!" They know all go Hamlet. Memorize in small sections. Memorization is a focus exercise...it's "being in the moment". Focus only on one moment at a time.

Follow the patters in the text: the three patterns. The fact that the scene breaks into three acts, the act into three sub-acts, the sub-act into three major units, the major unit into three units, etcetera, is a great tool to memorization. Memorize only one little section at a time. For monologues and large sentences...break the section or sentence down into it's natural three pattern and memorize the architecture of the line.

Memorize part C of Act I first...then part B of Act I...then part A of Act I. Then move onto Act II and continue the process. Memorize in small sections, out of sequence, and take a break between sections. Take time to work out any scientific, legal, or technical talk.

**Step (3):** Take out the pauses. Pauses are earned in performance based on the story.

**Step (4):** Memorize SLOWLY! Actors have this counter-productive notion about memorizing quickly. Any dancer will tell you that to get the choreography into the body, a dancer needs to slow down the steps. Musicians slow down the music to way below tempo to learn the notes. If someone is learning mechanics, boxing, how to drive a stick shift car, they always learn slowly and then later get up to speed.

An "Italian run" (racing through the lines) does nothing but seer in the mistakes, memorizing the hiccups, and learning nothing. Instead of an "Italian" do a "Caribbean run": slow down the rhythmic tempo, beating out the syllables with taps to the chest. You do this to get all the syllables in your head. If you are working with your scene partner or a coach, you have the partner also beat out the syllables and be sure that all the pauses are removed and that there are no pauses between each other's cues.

It can feel ridiculous, but it's vital: if there is a moment on set, on stage, or in an audition when the actor goes up, forgets dialogue, or even for a moment thinks about remembering dialogue, that actor **LOSES THE AUDIENCE**. Even if the audience can't see the mistake, even if it's just for a moment that the actor has a hiccup in the dialogue, the energy of the actor shoots inward and the connection is lost.

So in the "Caribbean run", if there is a moment when the actor stalls, fails to continue the slow rhythmic beating is where the **HICCUP** occurs in the memorization. That hiccup is where there is a crack in the actor's knowledge of the scene...and under the heat of the camera or in front of the audience, that crack will turn into the Grand Canyon. And the **EGO/INSECURITY** of the actor will flood in, making the actor think...making the character disappear. An internalized thinking actor equals a shut down audience. That hiccup is where you lost the audience...and the job.

So the actor's job is to go through the dialogue very slowly and when there is a hiccup...go back and iron out that wrinkle, or suturing the gap, by running that section **EVEN SLOWER** over and over again, and then gradually bringing it back to the exercise tempo.

**Step (5):** THEN and only then, bring the words up to real-life speed.

What the actor is doing is removing any possibility of the actor's insecurity showing up...that's why the actor needs to have the dialogue seeded inside their soul and know the lines absolutely cold. Otherwise the art of forgetting, needing to forget the dialogue, forgetting that the actor knows any of the coming words can't happen. The character has no idea what they are going to say and the words pour out accidentally. Spontaneously. Exactly as written.

## PRINCIPALS OF MEMORIZATION:

**Step (1):** Memorization is an absolute necessity...but one of the simplest parts of acting. You can't act without being "off-book" – but being off book isn't acting. Many actors put way too much effort into the memorization of the work so that they FEEL like they have a disciplined work ethic, when in fact they need to get a memorization technique that's simple and efficient so that they can invest in the real work of scene analysis, emotional analysis, and character development.

**Step (2):** Many actors "memorize to remember"...to say the words they need to say on cue. But of course, in the real world, people don't know what they are saying until they've said it. In real life, people surprise themselves with what they are saying, they speak spontaneously, the words tumble out faster than the person has time to formulate words. And so, actors need to "memorize to forget"...to have the words so deeply seared inside, that the dialogue comes out as spontaneous, even surprising the actor. An actor needs to know the lines so well that words will fall out of our mouths, spontaneously, which happens to be exactly what the writer wrote.

**Step (3):** Lines must be memorized without melody, without inflection, and without any kind of line reading...or else the "accidental spontaneity of life" won't happen. That means: actors cannot memorize with intention. Only flat syllables. The actor needs to BE PATIENT! They'll get the chance to say the lines with meaning once they have done all the homework.

If an actor has a pre-meditated idea of how the line should sound, if they have made a "choice" on the melody (and that includes playing a line flat and down-turned) before the line has ever been played with the action to the fellow actor from the realizations and decisions based on the CORE and the ARC and the EMOTIONAL truth and all the rest of your analysis...that is called a LINE READING.

A line reading is a pre-cognitive idea of what the line should sound like, which means the actor will get stuck inside a pre-set melody not born of the moment, meaning the actor is checked out, meaning the actor will be inside their head and so shut down and unavailable to the audience.

Take your name. The syllables of your name are imprinted inside you, seared into your subconscious, each syllable without any inflection. That's how you memorized your name when you were two years-old. You memorized syllables: MA - THYEW - HA - RI - SON. We memorized sounds, not meaning. Now, when a casting director at an audition asks you your name, you say it...spontaneously, not having memorized a line reading on how you are going to say it. When a policeman with his gun drawn demands your name, you say it...very differently. Your name will be said in the moment with intention...you just memorize your name.

Dialogue needs to be memorized the same way, flat and meaningless: to - be - or - not - to - be - that - is - the - ques - tion - whe - ther - tis - no - bler - in - the - mind...

Here's a scene to memorize from "The Town". Doug is convincing Claire to take him back, even though he knows he betrayed her and victimized her, and that he will prove his love by fighting for her when he gets back from this one last bank heist.

The monologue seems daunting, it's a lot of words on a page. The actor needs to memorize flat, with no inflection, but memorize in patterns of three.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Claire looks at him with something between loss and disappointment.

DOUG

You have no reason to believe me.  
I wouldn't blame you for hating me.  
All I can do is tell you the truth.  
I'm leaving here. I have to do one  
last thing. That's it. No excuses.  
I got myself in and I have to get  
myself out. Even though I don't deserve  
it, I hope there's still a shot that  
I can be with you. When I'm done I'll  
come find you. I will never hurt you,  
I'll never lie to you and if I lose you  
I'll regret it everyday for the rest of  
my life -- in Lewisberg or anywhere else.

So, the actor sees the words, panics, and the insecurity takes over...shutting down the ability to focus. Don't memorize the dialogue. Memorize one thing at a time.

Let's break it into it's three patterns:

ACT I

- (1) You have - no reason - to believe me.
  - (2) I wouldn't - blame you - for hating me.
  - (3) All I can do - is tell you - the truth.
- 

ACT II

- (1) I'm - leaving - here.
  - (2) I have to - do - one last thing.
  - (3) A: That's it.  
B: No excuses.  
C: I got myself in - and I have to - get myself out.
- 

ACT III

- (1) A: Even though I don't deserve it /  
B: I hope there's still a shot /  
C: that I can be with you.
- (2) When I'm done - I'll come - find you.
- (3) A: I will never hurt you,  
B: I'll never lie to you  
C: and if I lose you /  
I'll regret it - every day - for the rest of my life /  
in Lewisberg - or - anywhere else.

Memorize each section...one at a time. Repeating that one section over and over. Slowly and without melody.

"If I lose you, if I lose you, if I lose you"

Then:

"I'll regret it...every day...for the rest of my life, I'll regret it...every day...for the rest of my life, I'll regret it...every day...for the rest of my life"

Then:

"In Lewisberg...or...anywhere else, In Lewisberg...or...anywhere else, In Lewisberg...or...anywhere else"

Then:

"If I lose you, I'll regret it every day for the rest of my life, in Lewisberg or anywhere else."

Then bring up to tempo. Then move on to the next section. Then, and only then, try to put it all together.

Invest as much time as possible in the rehearsal, in preparation, getting the words seeded inside, so that when the actor surrenders to the scene, the words come naturally. Do not memorize half-heartedly and suffer later. In the moment of the acting of the scene, the words will come because the actor is being affected by the other actor according to story.

In this way, an actor NEVER memorizes their cues. They should never memorize the other actor's lines. A character never knows what the other person is going to say. A "cue" is not a word that indicates when an actor should speak. A "cue" is a trigger, an action, a motivation from the other actor that causes the actor to respond. The other actor's action will cause a counter-action. If all the 99% work has been done, the actor will be "cued" by the story. And if they have memorized correctly, flat and meaningless, the words will come that are attached.

CAUTION: some actors think that they are memorizing flat when in fact they are memorizing down-turned endings of sentences. They drop their melody in cascades at the end of each line. They've memorized these downward inflections, and when it comes time to perform the scene, the actor can't get the melodies out of their head. Because they've memorized a melody. And the fact is that a prejudiced line reading that will drive the actor away from character.

In the real world, a down-turned ending is a way to clip a conversation, and shut another person down. Certainly people do this to each other, once in awhile, but most of the time people are playing a plethora of other possible actions which will result in all sorts of possible melodies.

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Now...there is a misconception out there that a director ought to be an “actor’s director”...meaning that the director knows how to talk the language of the actor and speak in out terminology. That’s not the director’s job! The director doesn’t need to understand exactly the processes an actor goes through...that’s the actor’s job! A director is “the audience’s representative on set.” The director is busy making sure that the audience will get what they need to be moved by the story: composition of camera shots, thinking of the edit, set, wardrobe, all the elements of making the project...and at all times, concerned about how the audience will be emotionally and intellectually affected by the story at any moment. By definition, the director is working for results.

If the director talks in audience-like results – “angrier”, “bigger”, “more energy” – that’s absolutely fine! That’s their job. And the actor’s job is to go back to the process...back to the 99%...and figure out how to deliver that note.

In other words, the actor’s job is to translate the director’s notes.

THE FIVE STEPS in taking a note, on set, in an audition, in a stage rehearsal is this:

- (1) Listen to the note
- (2) Repeat the note
- (3) Translate the note
- (4) Practice the note
- (5) Surrender to the note

**STEP (1):** seems pretty obvious. Listen to the note. That said, many actors don’t. The actors are nervous, insecure, vectored-in, their instruments are feed-backing...and make it about themselves, automatically interpreting notes as negative feedback or critique, instead of collaboration between peers trying to make a project. So the actor tries to please in order to be validated...by bobbing their heads up and down saying “yes, un-huh, yes, right, yes...” etcetera...to make it look like they are listening, when in fact they are not. In every casting room I have been in across North America, that habit is universally known as “the bobble-headed-actor”.

Listen to the note!

How does an actor know they’ve listened to the note? Repeat it!

**Step (2):** is repeat the note OUT LOUD. If the director says: "I think she's more angry"...the actor says: "okay! So she's more angry in this scene." By repeating the note out loud, the actor has forced themselves to actually listen. One can not repeat something one didn't listen to in the first place.

Also, by repeating the note out loud, the actor gives the director a chance to hear their note. Often the director will correct themselves, and find a more specific way to say that note, leading the actor and director into a dialogue about the work itself.

The actor now needs to take that note, which is most probably a result-oriented, audience like note, and translate it into somethingactable.

**Step (3):** is translating the note OUT LOUD. By translating the note, the actor is able to move the note from a result to a process. A doing. A verb. And again, by doing so out loud, the director can hear their note translated and be working with the actor.

DIRECTOR: I think she's more angry throughout this scene.

ACTOR: Okay...more angry.

DIRECTOR: Well, angry, yes. She's deeply offended.

ACTOR: Right...so really smash into him for hurting her. Really  
decapitate him his offence?

DIRECTOR: Yes! That's good. Decapitate him!

Now, having translated the note into an active doing, the actor must practice it.

**Step (4):** is practicing the note as soon as possible. An actor needs to practice the note, to get it into the body, mind, and heart...because an actor needs to surrender and doesn't want to be thinking of the note as they're acting. So practice, for the director. Run some dialogue with the new action. Let the director agree and sign off on the result.

Any dancer, musician, pilot, surgeon, or any other professional will tell you to practice the adjustments you've learned before putting them into action.

If an actor hasn't practiced a note, when the camera is rolling, the actor will be thinking of the note. An actor who is thinking, isn't in character. Which is the opposite of surrender.

**Step (5):** is surrendering to the note. Let it go. Don't think about it. If the translated action is specific, and it was practiced, it will happen. The art of forgetting. A character isn't thinking about notes. A character is living their life.

When a director in rehearsal or on set gives you a note, and the director says that they would like to adjust your work in a certain way, and seeing as acting is the art form of life, then clearly the note must be about one of the three aspects of life.

- Is that a story note? Meaning does that note have to do with narrative, objectives, relationships, or story in any way?
- Or, is it an emotional note? Does the director see a different emotional preparation or want to cap the emotions more?
- Or is it a focal note. Does the director want the character more or less connected to the other?

Now the director steps away, and the actor surrenders to the scene, and the audience is moved by story...

...and the magic happens.