

Lessons From The Stage: Telling The Winning Story

Lesson #7: “Working With Intention: What’s The *Real* Story?”

In this seven part series I am sharing seven Lessons From The Stage designed to help you become a better communicator both in and out of the courtroom. As a trial lawyer you face multiple challenges, or “Obstacles” as I prefer to call them, in your cases as well as in your own personal lives. The first lesson (“The Power Of The Obstacle: Embracing The Conflict”) provided a framework to begin to appreciate and powerfully use Obstacles to your benefit both inside and outside of court. In lesson seven, I’ll be focusing on the value of intention, where you, the trial lawyer, have the powerful opportunity to discover what’s the *real* story you’re presenting to the jury.

What would the play of your life look like? Today?
Tomorrow? Twenty years from now? Or looking back on your

death bed, as your family and loved ones say goodbye to you? You have the ability to make your play, your life, an amazing one. You are both the co-author, the actor, and the watcher, all in one.

Beyond simply telling the “winning story” in the courtroom, the work in “Lessons From The Stage” is also about embracing our life challenges and working through them no matter who we are or what our challenges are in order for us to discover what it is we’re really doing on this “grand stage of life.” It’s about letting go of what you think is your story in order for a new story, a greater story, to emerge. And the tools of the theater are designed for that change to be more than possible for you.

Values and Beliefs

The doors to make your “stretch” possible

Life coach Anthony Robbins’ categorizes our life experience into these two main “value areas”: our “moving toward” and our “moving away from” values. The moving-toward values, or

“pleasure” values, are emotions like love, happiness, success, security, adventure. These are also known as ends values. It's important to make the distinction between means values, which are simply “vehicles” or “instruments,” and ends values, which drive all of our behaviors as human beings. The use of the monologue is the vehicle to achieving, or creating this “end value” in our life. Through story, character, dialogue, and intentional staging, the monologue “is the means” to achieve the end. The following list of words are what I refer to as “The Stretch Menu.” As you look through this “stretch menu,” ask yourself what are the words that you value the most. Is there one that resonates the most with you?

As you examine these words, not unlike an actor about to embody a role that may be totally foreign to his or her level of comfort, ask yourself what do you want? What do you *really* want? You may say I want money, but what you really want is security. You may say I want a great family, but what you really want is connection.

The work with the monologue allows you to discover what you really want or discover “the story behind the story.”

If you’re a writer, a poet, a novelist, playwright, or screenwriter, defining your “end values,” or “going beneath the surface of the story” is imperative in creating a character with depth and it’s no different with ourselves. It’s imperative we look beneath the surface. How much of your own life “has been on the surface?” Go deeper. Trust in the power of the monologue. What’s your stretch? (Notice they’re all verbs. Why? Because they’re action based.)

Stretch Menu

Compassion

Love

Trust

Patience

Adventurous

Letting Go Of Judgment

Humor

Service

Surrender

Faith

Playful

Spontaneous

Success

Intimate

Freedom

Humble

Courageous

Risk-Taking

Powerful

Awake

Trusting

Passionate

Comforting

Tolerant

How much do you, or can you “own” these words, on a scale of 1-5? In other words, how much can you make these words “your own?”

Can you add the words “I am...” to this word? Example: I am a loving man. I am a forgiving woman. Try it. No matter how real or unreal it may be, take note of these words and where they resonate in your body. Where’s the resistance you feel around these words? Do these words lift you up or drag you down? Do you feel excitement around these words or shame and regret? No matter what you’re feeling is perfectly fine. In fact, it’s more than fine, it’s necessary, because you’re about to use all that you’re experiencing

emotionally and physically around these words. Remember our goal here is to use everything for our growth into our new, powerful story. We're not here to control anything. We're dealing with the truth, however it decides to present itself.

As an exercise, look through this "stretch" menu and imagine their opposites. Every single one of these "stretches" had their origins in the opposites. The man or woman needing to "stretch" into humor may have lived a certain chapter of their life in a zero humor environment. The man or woman needing to stretch into love may have been in a loveless marriage where addiction and jealousy were the reigning champions. Would not the opposite be as vital in the telling of this new story? As painful as it may be, of course it would be. The crossroad is naturally built into the stretch. Seeing the opposite of these stretches is the beginning towards embracing the obstacle. In a sense, the creation of your monologue is the journey between a place where you didn't trust and a place where you do trust, or are willing to, trust. So just as it's important to define what you value the most, it's also important for you to

define for yourself what you value the *least*, or the areas of your life that will keep you from growing to your fullest potential, or quit “stretching into your stretch!”

If you’re having trouble defining the one stretch that would create immeasurable positive change for you in your life now, return to the opposite of your stretch. Theatre is about the balance of the opposites. A relationship is about the balance of opposites. Your life is about the balance of opposites.

Here’s some examples of the “opposites of the stretch,” or your “moving away-from values:”

Blame

Resentment

Judgment

Jealousy

Hatred

Self-Pity

Depression

Sadness

Boredom

Anxiety

Go through this list. Say the words out loud. Feel the words in your body, your storytelling instrument, and monitor where the feeling (stress or tension) is located.

In the stretch menu, are you able to order them in terms of the

ones that resonate the most with you?

Take your top ten. What resonates the most with you?

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

8)

9)

10)

In the “opposite menu” what are your top 10 emotions you want to move away from? What’s creating the greatest conflict?

1)

- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)
- 8)
- 9)
- 10)

Now go back to your stretch, your “moving towards values.” And feel the words in your body. Compare the two: the stretch and it’s opposite. What you’ll have is a balance of power within you, which is the heart of a great play, an Academy-Award winning movie, and your monologue. What you have is the ideal crossroad.

For the purposes of our work here, and for you to “step into your new stretch,” it’s important to recognize that the opposites of your stretch, your “moving away from values” are just as

important as your “moving towards values.” The idea in your work is to capture, or to honor, the journey of where you’ve been to where you are now. You’re going to use it all.

If you’re having trouble defining your current crossroad, take your top stretch (moving towards value) with your top opposite stretch (moving away from value).

Now you have a crossroad to work with.

The Stretch/Your Story/The Stretch/The Monologue/The Stretch

How Your Stretch Serves You

As an example of how your obstacle can serve you, if your

desire (stretch) is to want to be more of a humble person, or to experience more humility in your life, believe that you're getting the opportunity to achieve it right now. Every moment of your life. I believe what we think about, we create. You might call it the Law Of Attraction at work. The conflict, the opposition, allows us to experience “humble” more than we ever could imagine, if we listen to the “voice” of the experience.

Your crossroads are the blueprints to creating your “stretch.” And there will always be new obstacles to get you to the next place. We listen. And learn. And move onto the next great story. What are the obstacles to your freedom?

Your obstacles *are* your freedom.

Step One: Defining Your Stretch

*(*Note: throughout the course of Lessons From The Stage your stretch may change. Be flexible. What feels right to you now is*

good enough.)

I want to be _____

So that I can say, with full authority that I am a

_____ person. (or man, or woman, or human
being.)

**Step two: Write Your Story (creating the circumstances
for the stretch)**

You can write this anyway you want. It can be as basic as
“This is a story about a guy named Stan... Stan is having a
problem with his wife. He is in a passionless marriage. What does
Stan want? What does he really want? Stan wants passion. But
what he really wants is to not have to *expect* her to be passionate.

So what Stan wants is acceptance. Out of that comes unconditional love.”

Now you have a great opportunity to get into the guts of the story. Get into the conflict. What gets in the way of this unconditional love?

Or it can have a more “literary feel.” Example:

“It was a bright, cold winter morning. Stan was in the hotel room with his wife. It was an expensive hotel room. Stan brought candles because he knew the hotel room wouldn’t have any. His wife was reading in bed. Just reading. A romance novel. Stan wondered if he should make the move. Stan wondered if he didn’t make the move, would she ever make the move? Stan got angry. Jesus, this was supposed to be a romantic get away. And then, just at that point, the woman he’d been married to for over eight years, his wife, reached across the blankets and held his hand, and even though she was still reading her book, said, “I love you.” Was this

good enough? It had to be.”

Write the story in any way you feel comfortable. Write it as a short story, play, synopsis, poem, screenplay. If you're a dancer, choreograph it! You can discuss the characters anyway you want, but make them about you. ALL CHARACTERS ARE ALWAYS ABOUT YOU. What YOU'RE struggling with, what you desire. PERIOD.

But all roads lead to the monologue.

Step three: Write Your Monologue (turn the story into a monologue)

Keeping in mind the stretch (for the attendee who would write the monologue of Stan and his wife), Stan could say, “Honey, isn't this nice? Aren't these candles nice? Isn't this an *expensive* bedroom? I know we said we weren't gonna be talking about

money, honey, but the point is... sacrifice. I mean, we make sacrifices. Sacrifices. It's the price to pay for passion, right honey? Right. How's the book you're reading? Is it a good book, honey? Is it dripping with romance? (Beat) You can read anywhere! You can! And you do! And I do! But this room! This hotel! Jesus, we've been together for 8 years! 8 years! Where has the passion gone? Where is it? (beat) My hand? You want to hold my hand? Okay... okay... Okay."

Keep in mind that to reach your stretch, the character doesn't have to "accomplish" anything. You just have to feel the stretch working. The attendee "playing" Stan (as Stan) would no doubt feel a surge of powerful compassion and acceptance over the moment that trumps the need for lust from his wife. He may also discover in this moment (remember *show don't tell*) that he's entering a more mature phase of his relationship where it's not always about getting his rocks off. This, ultimately, may also be the key to ignite more passion in the relationship.

Trusting Your Stretch

Robert McKee, in his brilliant and informative book for the screenwriter, *Story*, wrote “A story may turn more than one cycle... What is the best possible thing to happen to my protagonist? How could that become the worst? How could that reverse again into the protagonist’s salvation? Or: What is the worst? How could that become the best? How could that lead the protagonist to damnation? We stretch toward the ‘bests’ and ‘worsts’ because story—when it is art—is not about the middle ground of human experience.”

From classic films like *Kramer Vs. Kramer* to *The Godfather Part II*, McKee proceeds to give examples of films where the worst situations turned out to be best possible thing for the protagonist and the best turned out to be the worst.

Such is our lives.

In order to live effectively within the change you’re seeking

to make in your life (your “stretch”) and to have it show up in every area of your life that will increase your “performance” in your personal and professional life, takes an enormous amount of trust. The bottom line is this: no matter what goals or dreams we define for ourselves, we often may not always know what is absolutely the best for us, even if we think we do. When we’re willing to do the courageous work to truly be breathing in our stretch, we’re taking an enormous leap of faith. An expression I love is “willing to be willing.” “Lessons From The Stage” is about letting go of old ideas (our old story/script) in order for a new story to emerge.

Ultimately, the same questions that a playwright, author, or screenwriter asks of his characters are what we need to ask *ourselves*: "What is the worst thing that could happen to my protagonist? How could that turn out to be the best thing that could happen to him?" and "What's the best thing that could happen to my protagonist? How could it be the worst thing?"

Exercise:

Define 5 areas of your life where the worst thing in your life turned out to be the best thing?

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

Define 5 areas of your life where the best thing in your life turned out to be the worst thing?

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

What ideas, lessons, details, or discoveries can you use from this exercise and integrate into your monologue?

What's Your Story?

Adapting Your Story To The Monologue

A helpful tool in discovering the story is to tell the story non-verbally. When you can tell a story without words, you're using your body, your storytelling instrument, to effectively communicate a story. The goal in the presentation of your monologue is achieve *embodied storytelling*.

Embodied storytelling is you telling your story both verbally and nonverbally through your body. This may include using movement, engaging your voice, and generally being open to feeling your story in your body. You want to be able to step out of your analytical mind and into your conscious body so you can connect to your intuition and innate trust in yourself and your deep knowing in the “stretch towards your stretch.” The soul of your

story centers not just on “what happened” on the outside of you (surface crossroads), but also on the transformations occurring within. This embodied work helps you both remember what happened and realize what is happening within you. This process speeds up the life change.

Going through the steps of the monologue non-verbally

Exercise #1: Find three non-verbal actions that best capture the essence of your “character’s” need/intention.

To accentuate the nonverbal details, write down the actions of the character as if it’s a screenplay.

Example: Stan PICKS UP wife’s dress, holds it against face

Stan COVERS FACE with hands.

Stan PUNCHES THE AIR slowly.

Exercise #2: Go through each action again, super slow. Reduce the speed, as if you're moving through tar. Discover each nuance of the action, moment to moment, until you've arrived at the concluding moment. Pay attention to your breathing. Pay attention to the tension in your body.

Exercise #3: Find three non-verbal actions that best capture the essence of your "character's" obstacle.

Write them down as if it's a screenplay.

Exercise #4: Find three non verbal actions that best capture the essence of your "character's" emotional journey/change.

Write them down as if it's a screenplay.

Example: Stan REACHES for his wife's foot. Looks at it.
Rubs it tenderly.

Stan COVERS FACE with hands. Fights to let
go of his hands over his face. Eventually lets go of his hands

over his face.

Stan gets out of chair. Angry. Breaths. Smiles.
Shrugs. Sits down in chair. Smiles genuinely.

Go through each action again, super slow. Reduce the speed.
Move through tar. Discover each nuance of the action, moment to
moment, until you've arrived at the concluding moment. Pay
attention to your breathing. Pay attention to the tension in your
body.

Lets go back to some questions now. It's ironic I'm
suggesting this, but never lose sight of your obstacle. In our effort
to change, it's amazingly easily to forget about it when we're
"acting." Go back to it now.

What is great about this obstacle?

What is useful to me about this obstacle?

What lessons can this obstacle reveal in my life?

If this obstacle were the key to achieving my “stretch” how would it operate? How would it be an agent for manifesting that powerful change?

Am I now, or willing to see, this obstacle as a gift in my life? On a scale of 1-5.

Take Aways

There are universal themes in every story. All I have to do is look a little deeper to discover what they are.

When I apply “intention” into a story, a greater story emerges.

There is always another story... underneath a story.

Currently, Jesse Wilson is sharing his communications effectiveness work with law firm Trenam Kemker in Tampa, Florida as they lead up to their opening day of trial in June. If you're looking to implement theater skills to tell "the winning story" and to work with Jesse Wilson and your firm in a future "Lessons From The Stage" coaching, consulting, workshop or intensive, please contact him at jessekwilson@gmail.com or visit his website at www.lftstage.com