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Rich Hinz Archives

October 1, 2010

Wiggling and Walking Funny

Rich Hinz's POV: Washington

So, let's say you're an actor who happens to have a disability. You're classified as a [PWD](#) and you bring your disability into the room with you on every audition, every callback, every rehearsal, every day of booked work. It's a part of who you are and it's a part of how you're cast. It can't *not* be. Do you see that as an obstacle or as something that makes you an "interesting way to go" in casting choices? The rules of the game are the same in terms of being the most talented, most prepared, most castable actor you can be, going in. And the rest may not be up to you. So, how do you cope with that? Working actor [Rich Hinz](#) has some ideas.

Wiggling and Walking Funny



We all have things we'd like change about ourselves. Some things we can change and some things we can't. What do we do with the unchangeable? In reading the many sources of advice for actors, self-analysis or self-evaluation is always part of the discussion. It's important for actors to look at who they are and how their personal traits and mannerisms can be incorporated into a character. The changeable traits an actor can work to get rid of or hide when necessary, but we're stuck

with the unchangeable. These unchangeable traits can be seen as obstacles or as assets when creating a character.

All actors are unique. As an actor with [cerebral palsy](#) I have traits and mannerisms that stand out. To put it in simple terms, I wiggle and I walk funny.

As a result, any character I play will also possess these character traits. It's up to the actor to use everything available to create an interesting and real character. Parts of ourselves will always come through in the characters we play particularly the unchangeable. Not only can these unchangeable traits be used as part of a character, they *should* be used as part of a character. Any character I play will wiggle and walk funny to some degree. That's just how it is.

I can degrade or change my walk and, to some degree, improve it. Or I can exaggerate or change my movement and give my character a physicality that's completely different from my own. The simple fact is certain parts of me will always be there. This leaves me with two choices going into an audition. I can either ignore my physical traits and hope the casting director doesn't notice or I can use them to create an interesting character with depth and dimension.

I've tried the first option. It doesn't work. I might as well try to not be six feet tall. It's a much better and a vastly more interesting acting choice to use what I have rather than trying to hide the unhideable. It is the unique qualities that set us apart.

Success comes from creating interesting believable characters using our individual experiences and unique physical characteristics as a starting point.

Do unchangeable things keep an actor from booking? It'd be stupid to say they didn't. If we want to list reasons actors don't book we'd be here all day but these unchangeable things can also bring about opportunities that might not otherwise be there. Unique traits bring unique opportunities. When casting is looking for an actor who wiggles and walks funny I will likely get the call. As it happens, it's because of my cerebral palsy that I have been called in by a number of casting directors both in the Pacific Northwest and Los Angeles for parts that needed an actor with a disability. These are opportunities I wouldn't have had if I didn't possess traits that are uniquely mine.

Bookings aside, getting into the room is huge. The more an actor auditions, the better they get at it and the more comfortable they get when in the room. Having the chance to show casting and decision-makers what you have to offer is at worst a priceless educational experience and at best a booked acting gig. Every chance to audition is golden. The challenge is to use what you have to control the things that can be controlled and to "be good and [don't suck](#)."

Creating real and interesting characters is one thing. Getting casting, producers, and directors to see these characters as viable casting choices is another. Because I happen to have cerebral palsy, when casting calls me in to audition it's usually as "another choice" or "another way to go"

for the directors and producers. Of course I like to think it's also because I have talent. Of the dozens of characters I've played, mostly on stage, only one was written as having a disability. Still it's hard to sell yourself to casting and others when you have traits and mannerisms they've never even considered as part of the character they're casting.

While that's true, it's impossible to sell yourself to casting and others if you ignore your obvious characteristics instead of using them. As I have heard many times, "[if the part is yours it's yours](#)." If it's not, there's nothing you can do about it.

For a lot of folks, success is measured by whether or not the actor gets the part but the statistics on this would be enough to drive anyone away from acting. I've heard lots of bloggers, casting directors, and others say that an actor might get cast one out of every one hundred times they audition. For me, being an actor living in the Pacific Northwest, and given my physical characteristics, one hundred auditions seems an almost unattainable number in the near future. Success, in addition to booking the job, is also giving a good audition, getting a callback, and getting called in repeatedly by the same casting director. That success only happens when I use everything available to me in the room.

Going into an audition, it's the actor's job to give the best audition possible. A good actor uses all the skills, traits, and characteristics available to them to audition successfully. Asking questions like, "Was my nose too big?" or, "Did I wiggle too much?" all fall under Ms. Gillespie's category of "[Actor Mind Taffy](#)." Trying to second-guess casting and, by extension, directors and producers is futile. The actor's job is to give the best audition possible. Trying to hide the unhideable is a prescription for failure. Use what you have to your advantage. Make those traits part of the character. The only alternatives are to ignore who you are (which will always result in failure), or to not audition at all (which is just stupid).

For me, that inevitably includes wiggling and walking funny.

Wow, this is awesome stuff, Rich. I'm always inspired when I bring in an actor with a disability for a role not written that way and watch the faces of the decision-makers as they begin to consider the different layers that casting choice could add to their project. Perhaps they never thought about it, but once a talented actor is in the room--especially one who brings things to the role that are, "Well heck, why not!?" in nature--they do begin to open their minds a bit, and as a casting director, I feel really great when I see that happen. I love your philosophy about the worst-case-scenario on any audition being that you've had a chance to show what you can offer, and treating your work as [a gift](#). Love it! Keep offering that gift while being your [authentic](#) self. That goes for all actors! And all people, really.

About Rich Hinz

[Rich Hinz](#) is an actor living in the Pacific Northwest who has been working in industrial projects, independent films, commercial voiceover, and theatre for the past 25 years. He holds a masters degree in theatre from Central Washington University and has worked with theatre companies from various states and on tour including Barter Theatre, the state theatre of Virginia. Rich also has cerebral palsy, a condition

manifested in a unique walk and muscular tremors. These physical traits add depth to the roles he plays and result in truly unique and entertaining characters. He has played many roles that are not typically given to a person with a disability. To be cast in these roles speaks to his professionalism and ability as an actor. In addition to acting, Rich has also spoken at regional and national conferences and is an accomplished painter whose work can be found in private collections throughout the Pacific Northwest. More information can be found at www.richhinz.com or you can find [Rich on Twitter](#).

Got a request for a POV to cover in a future edition of **The Actors Voice--POV**? Shoot an email to me at showfaxbon@gmail.com.

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October 15, 2011

Authentic Casting: Easy as A-B-C... Er... P-W-D

Rich Hinz's POV: Washington

[Rich Hinz](#) has shared [his POV before](#). It's not an accident that both contributions have taken place during [National Disability Employment Awareness Month](#). He's a savvy actor; he knows this business. He also knows that an actor's craft is enhanced by an actor's uniqueness, not limited by it. One of the coolest things Rich shares with the acting community as a whole is a spotlight on more open casting. It's something everyone should consider.

Authentic Casting: Easy as A-B-C... Er... P-W-D



I love [Google Alerts](#). You can set a Google Alert for any set of keywords you're interested in and when a new page, posting, or other content appears on the "interwebs," Google sends you an email. In addition to getting one-time hits for information, these individual bits and pieces can be viewed as a collection and, over time, reveal patterns on a specific topic. Such is the case for my alert set to look for "disabled actor."

Postings on disabled actors are not numerous by any stretch of the imagination. Even so, they can run the gamut from praising the performance of an actor with a disability to criticizing a production's

choice to cast a non-disabled actor as a character with a disability. While neither is an everyday occurrence, the latter is by far more prevalent in the world of Google Alerts. What has been made clear by the majority of these postings is that misconceptions about casting **People With Disabilities** and rationalizations for not casting **PWDs** abound.

Like any stereotype or misperception about anyone, the root of the problem is in taking a specific trait and applying it to everyone in a particular group. Those in a position to hire an actor may be reluctant to cast a wheelchair user citing the concern that they won't have the stamina to work a twelve-hour shoot. Some may be reluctant to hire a blind actor for a role with that particular characteristic for fear the actor will be stumbling around the set all day. A show may not hire an actor with cerebral palsy for a character with the same condition because they're worried about a perceived liability. Or the production may not cast an actor with a disability citing the inability to find a qualified actor with a certain condition. All of these reasons (and the multitude of others) for not casting actors with disabilities are products of misconceptions and generalized stereotypes.

A wheelchair user has the stamina to work in a wheelchair for twelve hours a day out of necessity. A blind individual navigates new surroundings on a daily basis. These traits aren't liabilities to a production, they're assets. Acting is about creating authentic believable characters that are interesting and that people want to watch. What could bring more authenticity to a role than it being played by an actor who shares certain traits with the character being portrayed? Every production should strive for the realness and authenticity casting an actor with a disability can bring to their production.

While the misconceptions listed above are common in discussions surrounding casting actors with disabilities, by far the most prevalent discussions have centered around the viewpoint that this profession is called "acting." That an actor can play any part--including a character with a disability. Indeed, it is common for able-bodied actors to win awards for portraying characters with disabilities. But they're arguing the wrong point. Able-bodied actors can play characters with disabilities, though I would still suggest that an actor with the condition will bring something to the role because of their personal connection to the character. What is missing from the conversation is the idea that a character need not be written with a disability for the role to be played effectively by an actor with a disability.

Many PWDs get a little unnerved at seeing an able-bodied actor playing a character with a disability, including me. From my perspective, it's not about casting a non-disabled actor as a disabled character, it's about virtually eliminating people with disabilities from the casting pool. If an actor with cerebral palsy goes in to audition for a character who is not written as having the condition, the reaction by most involved is to comment, "He can act but the character isn't disabled." In essence, a disabled actor is seen as only being able to play a character who is written with a disability, thus limiting their possibilities for casting immensely. Casting able-bodied actors as disabled characters effectively removes PWDs from being cast at all.

When discussing the casting (or not casting) of an actor with a disability, the conversation invariably leads to the idea that a talented enough actor with the specific disability couldn't be found. This one has got to be my least favorite (not that I have favorites) and may be the most prevalent comment I read on the subject. There are talented actors with disabilities out there. If they can't be found, I'd say you're looking in the wrong places.

I know because I am one. And if there's one there's bound to be more. In fact I know there's more. I've met them. All of the columns, articles, and blogs I have read on casting tell the same story. Booking a role is about acting ability, but it is also about being right for the part. If it were just about acting skills, we could make a list, rank actors by ability, and just cast the actor with the best ranking that was available. Booking a skilled actor who is also a PWD gives you the best of both worlds.

So many in the industry seem to focus in on reasons to not cast a PWD and most of those reasons seem to be based on stereotypes and misconceptions. Rather than focusing on reasons *not to cast* a PWD, let's focus on reasons *to cast* an actor with a disability. Casting an actor with disability immediately brings depth and interest to character. The storyline of the character need not be about the disability to cast an actor with a disability. By casting a PWD in a role--either written as having a disability or not--that character takes on added depth and dimension that can only enrich and enhance a project. Why wouldn't **ANY** production want this?

I am such a fan of keeping up with data on all the players in the industry--especially those who offer the greatest opportunity for direct lines to projects in which you could be cast. Sure, not everyone is going to be open to the most "daring" casting choices out there, but that doesn't mean that there aren't folks who live for bringing the best actor--period--in front of the buyers, and that's where that [show bible](#) (via [Google Alerts](#)) comes into play. Targeting the buyers most likely to celebrate your uniqueness--whatever that may be--is smart use of your actor marketing power! Thanks, Rich, for another great POV!

About Rich Hinz

[Rich Hinz](#) is an actor living in the Pacific Northwest who has been working in industrial projects, independent films, commercial voiceover, and theatre for the past 25 years. Most recently, Rich had the honor of working with Portland playwright Bobby Ryan, workshoping his new play. Rich holds a masters degree in theatre from Central Washington University and has worked with theatre companies from various states and on tour including Barter Theatre, the state theatre of Virginia. Rich also has cerebral palsy, a condition manifested in a unique walk and muscular tremors. These physical traits add depth to the roles he plays and result in truly unique and entertaining characters. In addition to acting, Rich has also spoken at regional and national conferences and is an accomplished painter whose work can be found in private collections throughout the Pacific Northwest. More information can be found at www.richhinz.com or you can find [Rich on Twitter](#).

[Bonnie Gillespie](#) is living her dreams by helping others figure out how to live theirs. Got some feedback, or maybe you'd like to be a future contributor to **The Actors**

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