

Casting Director Exercise For Executives  
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I currently volunteer in an after school program and mentor two bright twelfth graders who are busily biting their nails hoping to get into the colleges they applied to. Prior, in preparing their essays, they were nervous, unsure, as most kids are at that critical time when they have to “go public” and speak about themselves to others who don’t know them.

Where do you begin? How do you compete with so many other students?

So, I began to share with them a word that I coined in my family years ago: “specials.” The word emerged when my own two daughters were dealing with similar issues to help them find what was unique and “special” about them.

As I continued working with my student, I said, “What are your specials?”

A blank stare.

I said, “Specials are those things that make you YOU. They are yours only. No one has them in the way you do and no one can take them away.”

Still a blank.

It’s not easy to talk about yourself to another person, especially if it sounds like bragging! So, instead, I asked her to become my casting director.

“If you were a casting director and I was to fill the role of you for a month, what talents, skills, personality traits, likes and dislikes, abilities would someone like me have to have if I were to take your role? What would they have to be able to manage, tolerate, and understand? What would they have to have as strengths, in other words, what would be the ‘specials’ I would have to have?”

“Oh,” she said with delicious energy, you need to ....” I watched and listened to the list she easily made. She began to tell me that I would have to “be intelligent, be patient, persistent, act a bit shy (humble), take initiative, have a good work ethic, do community service and be a very hardworking student.”

I listened attentively and wrote all of her answers on a sheet of paper. I then read them back to her, “So, I have to have or be intelligent, patient, persistent, humble, be a self starter, work hard with a good work ethic and offer community service!”

She was rapt with fascination as she listened to her own words. She was surprised, almost amazed, to hear the words coming from me. It seemed that once she stepped into the role of casting director and thought, instead, about someone else doing all that she does, she was able to see herself more clearly.

Finally, I asked her to read them back to me, out loud, in a very specific way.

“Please read each quality out loud to me, and put together a full sentence that starts with, “I am...,” or “I can...” or “I know...” or “I have...””

She began, "I am intelligent. I am very patient. I have persistence., I have initiative...."

Now, I know you must be imagining what she looked like and how she felt: empowered, self aware and self-appreciative and amazed that these groupings of skills were indeed her "specials."

Her smile was a mile long.

So, now, how do you think that question might help you get out of yourself and recover and rediscover your "specials?"

Think about it, ask yourself the same question, "If someone had to be me ( that's you dear reader) for a month, what skills, knowledge, experience, personality, would that person have to have, know, manage, tolerate? What skills would your understudy have to have? What attributes must they possess in order to succeed as you have?

Then, make a list of words that come to you but don't forget the best part. Read it out loud to yourself as full sentences, as my student did, and see how that makes you feel when you honor your "specials."

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