

Actors' Think Tank
Thursday, 1/20/22
Niel Bech - Speech and Teleprompter Instructor

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The guest on Actors Think Tank Thursday, 1/20/22, was Niel Bech, Owner of DPM Speech Services.

Slates were done by Actors' Think Tank (ATT) members starting at 3:32 p.m.

(0:13) – Niel Bech stated that he is a minister and public speaker, as well as, an actor. Presentations are bigger than life. The spoken word is powerful. Bech spelled out the word H-O-U-S-E, stating that each member visualizes something different when hearing the letters. Bech said words are deceptively powerful, as abstract letters put pictures in one's head, which contributes to the power of public speaking.

(0:14) – Bech emphasized that because one is using a teleprompter does not excuse them from being prepared, stating that a teleprompter “is not a tele-excuse.” An exercise was done with several members of Actors Think Tank reading as from a teleprompter. Bech stated that part of the work of a teleprompter is having words that work. Written words, per Bech, are different than spoken words. Words on the teleprompter should be written for the listener.

(0:22) - Bech complimented several of the Actors Think Tank members (ATT) who read, specifically those who kept pace with the teleprompter and started strong.

(0:22) – Bech stated that the teleprompter operator and software are equally important. Although there are various makes and manufacturers of teleprompters, Bech stated that Teleprompter Pro is good non-professional software, however, he uses Telescript West.

(0:24) – Bech stated that earprompters should not be used in film because the source of knowledge is behind the eyes. Teleprompter reading must be exact due to regulations (legal). Bech stated that actors must learn to hear how they say words versus how you hear them.

(0:27) – Bech stated that hardware needed includes: the teleprompter and monitor. He explained various types of monitors to include: downscreen, which goes to the opposite side of the stage away from the monitor; monitors on poles; presidential monitors which have 70% reflective glass image and the camera mount. Bech said that white letters on a black background work best.

(0:30) – Bech stated that cameramen do not like camera mounts. 15 inch monitors are recommended for camera work. Monitors wider than 15 inches cause the eyes to move and readers should blink their eyes, tilt their heads and move, so that they look natural

(0:32) - The font Bech prefers is Verdana, as it is proportionate versus aerial which is too square. He stated that the teleprompter can center the text, however, he prefers left justification. For a 15 inch monitor the font should be 70 point and words on the monitor should flow.

(0:34) – Bech explained to Rich Henkels that actors can communicate with the teleprompter operator, with permission from the director, if they need to rehearse, need the teleprompter adjusted or to formulate how to deliver the copy. Bech said the teleprompter operator wants the actor to look good as well.

(0:37) – Bech said successful actors will talk to the directors before they speak with the teleprompter operator, which he likes, as well as, actors who call the teleprompter operator by name. He said he will sometimes ad-lib to get the actor back on script, as words are the message, not the picture. Directors allow Bech the freedom to change words, sentence structure, etc.

(0:40) – Bech stated that actors should have the courage to ask for what they need, but should do it with humility, not as a know it all. He said attitude is key. Actors should not be intimidated.

(0:43) – Bech said there is a big market for actors using teleprompters such as training videos and spokespersons for corporations. Everything requires telling a story, so find a way to tell the story. Bech said it is easier to tell a story if it is written. The teleprompter sets the actor free to act.

(0:47) – Bech said he has been told by actors that to them he is like a dancer guiding them. A Teleprompter Operator is different than a P.A. because It is the teleprompter operators career. Bech prides himself in being able to arrange lines to help the actor better perform. He has worked for celebrities, such as the late Alex Triebek and numerous presidents.

(0:48) – Actors Think Tank members asked Bech questions:

- Shelley Brietling asked how to charge clients. Bech said he was not sure, but do not compromise the acting rate. Bech made enough money in 11 days to rebuild his bathroom.
- (0:52) – Shelby Hightower asked how to handle words that have two pronunciations, like “data.” Bech suggested asking on set which pronunciation is acceptable. For medical jargon there is search and replace software, as well as, software for phoenetic spelling.
- (0:54) – Paul Blumenthal asked about teleprompter pacing. Bech stated the teleprompter should accompany the pace of the speaker. He said he can do various spacing on the teleprompter for emphasis. Bech tries to rehearse with the speaker. He said one second of adjustment on the teleprompter can save a half hour.

(0:55) – Justine Reiss asked about voiceover actors using teleprompters. Bech stated that one should listen to himself by recording a phrase and playing it back as voice is not visual. This will get the voice stronger for presentation on camera. Bech said you cannot adjust unless you listen to yourself. He said it’s about getting the mechanics down. He gave the analogy of a concert pianist knowing how to read music, yet they still practice.

(0:59) – Mariel McIntosh asked how speech impediments are corrected and Bech said he works with them where they are. He says everyone has a radio voice; you have to use what you have. i.e. the unusual speech pattern of President Barak Obama.

(1:01) – Bech said a common problem with public speakers is not speaking from the diaphragm, which causes them to sound squeaky rather than with depth.

(1:03) – Henkels asked about spacing on home teleprompters. Bech said it is hard to do. He said he doesn't like voice activated things and that he uses Teleprompter Pro when preaching, as he can control the speed. Words should not fly off the screen or be behind. A good teleprompter operator is the key to a good delivery.

Henkels told Bech he would be getting the takeaways from the group and complimented him for already posting the picture of himself with the Actors Think Tank mug.

Respectfully submitted by,

Rosalyn (Roz) Jamal

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