

ACTORS' THINK TANK NOTES

Guest: Neill Hartley <http://www.neillhartley.com>

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Neill Hartley -- Neill Hartley is professional actor, director and educator. He has principal roles in *The Sixth Sense*, *First Freedom* (PBS documentary) and can be seen as the Secretary of the Treasury in seasons two, three and four of the Netflix series *House of Cards*. For over seven years, Neill has been seen on QVC as a spokesperson for two national companies. He works regularly in industrial and voice over projects, and has appeared in regional and national commercials for PA Lottery, PA Tourism, Auto Lenders, Benari Jewelers and TaxSlayer.com.

Neill has appeared with many regional theater companies including The Arden, InterAct, and the Philadelphia Shakespeare Festival. He shared a "Best Ensemble" Philadelphia Barrymore Award for *Batboy, The Musical* for 1812 Productions. Neill is also the artistic director of Acting Without Boundaries, a theater company for young adults with physical disabilities.

Neill is also an assistant professor of voice and speech at The University of the Arts in Philadelphia, and has acted as a speech/dialect coach for several professional theatre productions. He holds an MFA in Acting from Temple University.

Neill's comments from the Actors' Think Tank are as follows.

If your photo/headshot is up to date, don't put your age or range on your resume. Let the casting director do that. Don't limit yourself.

To the question, "Tell us about yourself," he says he plays the saxophone or his son plays ultimate frisbee. What would interest them about you? Brevity is important.

The first 30 seconds to make an impression break out like this:

3 seconds for the headshot

3 seconds for the resume

10-15 seconds about you

Neill has many areas of expertise but says he will always be an actor first. He tries to have his fingers in many pots. You never know where the next job will come from.

The stage is his first love. In theatre, film and TV, the techniques are the same. Honesty and truth are key. The camera never lies. You can't hide. It reads your thoughts --- so have thoughts!

Know the background about your character. Delver into it. Even the simplest script.

As a professional, it is important to hit your mark. Be lit well. Be sure you are in the right place when the light hits. Positive energy.

Keep putting things out there. It will happen when you least expect it. Be open. Be ready to do many things. Neill booked a series of commercials when Lizette, the daughter of his next door neighbor, grew up to be a producer.

Keep generating work! The universe picks up on it. If you do nothing, nothing happens. Put out positive work, positivity will come back to you.

Integrity and honesty are critical. He has turned down a 3-day lucrative job because he already had committed to a \$135/day job. Keep your word 100%. Later booked his first national commercial without an audition with the people he turned down.

Neill told the story of an actor being extremely pushy with a casting director and after he left his resume, this mild-mannered lady tore up his resume.

During Covid, Neill realized 'nothing is happening,' so he started doing things like filming himself, upgraded his sound and lighting, learned zoom, created a zoom recording for all his clients saying 'I can do this for you!'

Neill told the story of Serena Williams. She weight trains every morning. She plays tennis 3-4 hours every day. She has a routine she does every day. The question came up, 'is that what you really have to do?' Her response, 'How good to you want to be?'

Do something every day. Find new material on camera monologue in advance of an important audition. Make a reel. Watch movies. Listen a lot. Take classes. Keep learning. He used to make cold calls to every agency in Philly. Know every in house casting person at pharmaceutical company.

Neill has become very good at selling Neill Hartley. Have some structure in your day. The person who cares most about your career is you. You are the product, the entity people buy.

Neill keeps track of every dollar he has every made. Every person he has met. Every audition he has ever done. Notes about every person he has every met on set. EVERYTHING!!

Kathy Wickline took a risk recommending him for a role without an audition because he was a good risk based on past performance and professionalism.

Neill has learned much about acting from being a director. Keep in mind casting directors need actors. They want actors to do well. An audition is never a waste of time. Two to three years later it could come back to you.

Agents vs Managers. You need a good one, but you can't wait for them to get you work. Agents can get you in the door. Be wary of exclusives. Be wary of a manager who wants 15% of everything you earn (ie. Neill already had a QVC job in place prior to getting a manager. Manager wanted 15% of the QVC job. Neill walked away.) Neill called his agent, Greer Lange, every Monday morning for 5 years. That was how they agreed would be best way for the relationship to work.

Neill does coaching. He admits he is addicted to acting.

It's not working when you are having fun. Find the joy in it. He has a friend who is an executive at Bank of America who says, "I'm envious of you!"

There is nothing better than nailing a scene. It's like a drug. The highs can be high!!!! The residual check is this much????????!!!!

If you want to move into production, learn as much as you can from every job on the set. The lighting, framing in the camera, background, etc. Work in a casting office as an intern.

We have pursue work to fulfill the soul. There is also a time to say no. What do you need to get paid? Start high and being willing to negotiate. Neill proudly says, "I make my living as an actor!"

