



*The Working Actor*  
**Paying (and Paying and Paying)**

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By Jackie Apodaca

**DEAR JACKIE:**

I am a student film producer dealing with an uncomfortable situation. One of the actors we cast in our project got a speeding ticket on the way to the audition for our film. We ended up casting him, and now he wants us to pay the ticket.

We don't have a very large budget and really don't have the money to do what he's asking. I have told him this, but he's persistent. I don't want to be unprofessional, but it's just that every dollar counts. Should we pay his ticket?

-- Student Filmmaker  
via the Internet

DEAR STUDENT:

I am trying to imagine myself showing up for a professional union job on a well-funded project and demanding that the producer pay the parking ticket I got at callbacks. I can see it now: raised eyebrows, a slow backing away -- as I'm now deemed totally crazy -- and a laughing refusal. This actor is being either grossly self-important or completely silly. Probably both. Tell him you can't honor his request and move on.

DEAR JACKIE:

My daughter auditioned for an acting academy in [New Jersey](#) last year. She saw the ad on a kids' television channel, and I called and got her an appointment. I was surprised to see so many children and parents lining up for the audition, which was held at a hotel ballroom. We were asked to bring head and body shots of the children. They were interviewed to see how badly they wanted to be on TV and were given lines for a sample commercial to read in front of the camera.

I called on the designated date to find out if my daughter got a callback, and she did. To confirm her participation, she is supposed to take one of the acting workshops, which cost a minimum of \$1,950 and go up to \$7,500 for 10 weeks of one- or two-hour classes. The fee must be paid up front, and I was told that the classes would not start for months. I asked if there was a payment installment plan, but they said no.

I love my daughter, and at the age of 11 she has been taking musical theatre classes and has a fantastic voice, like Lea Salonga. I'm willing to support her if this school is legitimate. Do you know about this acting school?

-- New Jersey Mom  
via the Internet

DEAR NEW:

I am not going to reveal the name of this particular school, both to avoid the delicate legal maneuvers that would need to accompany my answer and because the school is not unique in its tactics. But is this school legitimate? Hell no.

How do I know? The money! Acting classes just don't cost that much. Well, okay, if it's daily private lessons with Howard Fine or Larry Moss, fine, go for it. Otherwise, save your money. As far as I could tell from the school's website, we're talking about a weekly class -- so your daughter would get a whopping 10 sessions for her \$1,950 to \$7,500. At two hours per session, that's \$97.50 per hour for the bargain class and \$750 per hour for the deluxe edition. For that kind of money, they'd better fly you back in time to study with Stanislavsky himself. Of course, I'm taking your word on the prices, as the website doesn't disclose them. My research tells me the company reveals the price tag only after you've "auditioned" and gotten the hard sell.

Can you hold on a few minutes while I take a shower? I feel dirty just talking about this. It doesn't help that my anger is making me break into a cold sweat.

If you want to support your daughter and her burgeoning talent, research established private singing instructors, licensed children's talent agencies, and respected children's acting classes. You should be able to find them in New Jersey, but if not, you have the cream of the crop in neighboring New York City. Use your money for train fare and take your daughter to classes that have earned their reputations over many years. Investigate anything that sparks your interest --go over the details with a fine-toothed comb --before you commit your resources and your daughter's time.

Here are two helpful links to get you started. A resource for parents of child performers: [The Biz Parentz Foundation](#) and the child and teen actors forum on the Back Stage message boards: [Backstage Forum](#).

I understand that you love your daughter and want to provide her with any advantage you can, but never let anyone prey on those feelings. Far better for her to watch you say no to suspicious offerings than for her to learn to take a chance on peddlers of fame.

DEAR JACKIE:

**Can you recommend an authentic casting director workshop in Los Angeles? I'm a little skeptical about paying to land a role, but I'm reconsidering.**

**-- Ade**

via the Internet

DEAR ADE:

I can't specify a workshop, because the value of any class depends almost entirely on its teacher. Many workshop companies hire instructors of varying quality. Some casting directors make great teachers, others flounder, and many workshop instructors are not casting directors at all but assistants and assistants of assistants. Yes, some companies do have better reputations than others -- a quick survey of your workshop-going friends can help you compile that list --but even the most troubling companies can land great teachers once in a while.

I too am skeptical of what can amount to a paid audition. I realize that many actors swear by them, but the paid CD workshop is a relatively new development in the acting world -- one I wish hadn't taken hold. But hold it has taken, so if you feel you must, hold your nose and dive in. But keep your eyes open and don't give up your honest-to-goodness weekly acting class.