

Lessons From The Stage: Telling The Winning Story

Lesson #6: “The Power Of The Present”

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past by saying “this is what happened...”, there will always be an
emotional barrier and a disconnect.
The present tense, as opposed to the past tense, is much more powerful.
In theatre, characters do not describe what they’re doing. They do it.
It’s in the moment.
Discovering the emotion of the story can only happen in the moment,
and the moment is now....*

In this seven part series I am sharing seven Lessons From The Stage designed to help you become a much better communicator both in and out of the courtroom. As a trial lawyer you face multiple challenges, or “Obstacles” as I call them, in your cases as well as in your own personal lives. The first lesson “The Power Of The Obstacle: Embracing The Conflict” provided a framework to begin to appreciate and powerfully use Obstacles to your benefit both inside and outside of court. In this next lesson from the stage, we will focus on the Power Of The Present.

Recently, I worked with a group of trial lawyers at the Voir Dire Conference in gorgeous Aspen, CO, where, for three days, the attendees got to experience first hand why this acting tool is so valuable in helping them “tell the winning story.”

Lets take a look at what gives a monologue its power. First off, it's impossible to hide in a monologue. Beyond the fact that it's just you on stage delivering the goods, the monologue, as with all theater, operates entirely in the present tense. What you discover, what changes, is *happening right now*. The present tense, as opposed to the past tense in a monologue, is much more effective. This does not omit characters sharing a story from the past, as in a living history monologue bringing, say, Edgar Allen Poe to life. The magic is to make that story immediate, however, alive and brimming with emotion, by linking it into the present moment. The present is happening right now, instantly... The present will always trump the energy of the past. Screenwriters take note: the event is always *now*... *This is happening to me right now*. This moment is

all there is. Eckart Tolle, the influential spiritual teacher, talks about this at length. In fact, his very book is on this core idea: “The Power Of Now.” The Power of Now is the power of theater. The theater would not be the theater if it didn’t operate out of the now. Even in the past, it’s present. It’s not a movie. We’re experiencing this collectively in this entire moment.

In the monologue, we're interested in seeing how the past has an immediate emotional, psychological, and perhaps physical effect on you NOW. If an event happened in the past, and you keep it strictly in the past and just say “this is what happened to me...” there will always be an emotional barrier and a disconnect from the energy that we want to experience now. Now is the only time. In working with the monologue, try to go from “It was...” to “It is...” Even if the memory or real life experience took place hundreds of years ago. This is another major difference between a story, a confessional, and a monologue. A monologue is happening in the now. Here. In the moment. That's theater. There are no second acts. There is only now. Moment to moment.

The difference between showing a story and telling a story

The reasons why monologues operate in the present tense (what is happening to the character right now) is this is what creates the drama rather than strictly narrative-driven writing. A monologue in which your character facing a major obstacle will be infinitely more compelling than a monologue in which you (your character) just stands there up on stage telling a story without any real personal connection to the subject at hand. We, the audience, want to see how you're immediately *dealing* with something. Often, it's not even so much about getting to the ending. It's about the middle. The journey. The stretch. This is the heart of drama. This is seeing the value in the obstacle. And using it. The obstacle has a definite voice. You, the storyteller/performer/trial lawyer/actor, are letting the voice say what it needs to say. That's powerful.

In theatre, in a scene or a monologue, characters usually do not describe what they're doing. They do it. It's in the moment. This is the fundamental difference between **telling** and **showing**.

In making a major life change why write or work on a monologue instead of a story?

It's impossible to not deliver or write a great monologue without a change occurring (physically or emotionally) within the performer/storyteller. This is one of the main differences between telling a story. Although it can be very helpful to tell “the story of your life” to objectivity your life experience, a story can often lack the immediacy and the emotional depth that the monologue is designed to deliver. It's hard for transformation to occur when you're simply “confessing” a story. “Lessons From The Stage” is not about confessing anything. If you want to confess something, go see a Priest! Here is where you're *changing* something. It's about stepping into a new role. It's about making a change in your

life and your authenticity in the courtroom. It's not about "acting" or even storytelling, although you may find that you're acting like the best of them and telling the greatest story of your life in the kind of language that feels perfect to use. It's about "doing." The age-old picture of the therapist comes to mind where the therapist tells the patient, "Your dad is the chair. Talk to dad. Tell him how you feel. Tell him what you want." Clichéd example, but all clichés have elements of the universal truths within them. A good therapist gets the patient to act in the now. That's where any change is possible. The therapist is not a time traveler. Neither is the director. Neither are you. The monologue is designed to get you to transform in the moment. It's the vehicle to get there. You're not here doing this strange theater work just to talk about what's happened in your life. The sole purpose of the monologue is to instill an effective and powerful change in every participant's life and to keep going deeper into that story. You're setting the stage for a lifetime of mental and emotionally conditioning. You're "living within your stretch." As you delve into the artistry of your

new story, it's important to not lose sight of that.

Here are the basic components that makes a Monologue a Monologue:

- *Text presented by a single “character”

- *Uses the first person

- *Must reveal something (the character's inner thoughts, desire to change something, a secret, a story or the answer to a question)

- *Character (person who is speaking) must go through a change

The steps of performing a monologue successfully can be boiled down into these **4 essential steps**:

1) Who are you talking to?

2) What do you want?

3) What is getting in the way of what you want?

4) What changes along the way of the emotional journey?

Helpful tip:

*Discovering the emotion of the story can only happen in the moment. And that moment is *now*.