Exploring the Desired Qualities of Performers

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Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

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Abstract

The goal of this thesis is to bring the entertainment industry better prepared performers. An invaluable tool for the actor is the talent agent, someone who will not only submit actors for roles and auditions not readily available to the public, but also negotiate contracts to ensure the safety and security of the actors. Because an agent's income is only 10% of what his/her actors make, it is necessary that agents represent actors that they believe will consistently get work. However, beyond that, it is not widely known the specific qualities agents desire in the talent they represent. Through a survey sent to several talent agents across the United States, who represent performers in various mediums, the skills desired in performers by talent agents are explored and discussed.

Introduction

After graduating from a university or conservatory, an actor's main concern is usually finding work. Furthermore, to get the connections needed to be submitted for a number of roles, actors must find representation either in the form of a manager or agent. Although managers help an actor develop his/her "package" (headshot, resume, demo-reel, and audition material), they cannot negotiate contracts and rarely do they submit for roles. A talent agent, one who can negotiate contracts and submit an actor for roles, is essential for actors and thus will be the focus of this thesis. It is important to note that when speaking of a talent agent or talent agencies in the context of this paper, the term is limited to one who represents talent who perform in the following fields: musical theatre, straight theatre, film, television, commercials, print, and modeling. Additionally, as a common theme in the different vocations mentioned above is acting, the terms actor and performer will be used interchangeably throughout this paper. Few studies have been conducted indicating what specific abilities talent agents are looking for in those they choose to represent. Consequently, the goal of this thesis is to explore through a survey what type of skills and attributes talent agents look for in such performers, as well as what may be a hindrance to representation or employment.

An important step to becoming successful in Hollywood or Broadway is finding a talent agent. Although some try to go it alone and represent themselves, industry professionals advise securing representation to have someone with connections promoting the actors, finding auditions for them, and negotiating their contracts. But obtaining representation is not always easy, and it is necessary to remember that agents make their money from those whom they represent; moreover, they only make 10% of

that actor's income. Thus, it is important that they choose to represent an actor who will most likely always get cast.

An obvious element involved in the casting and subsequent success of an actor is talent. There are some who simply have a natural propensity for acting, and while there are exceptions to the rule, these individuals will most likely have a greater opportunity for success. However, talent is not the only factor considered. In every resource about auditioning for either a role or representation, there is always a common theme: hard work. Producers, directors, writers, and agents are all looking for proficient actors who will work hard at honing their skills and growing in their craft. In the book, *Theater Careers: A Realistic Guide,* the authors offer this advice:

> You must have the necessary talent to have a meaningful career in most theater fields, but success as a theater professional requires *more* than talent. It requires an adventurous spirit, perseverance, resilience, hard work, the ability to live with ambiguity and accept failure, great social skills, training, and *luck*. (Donahue and Patterson, 2012, p. 4)

Furthermore, Paul Gleason and Gavin Levy, authors of *Acting for Love and Money*, continually stress the idea of an open attitude and a willingness to work hard. Lastly, Aligned Stars Agency, a talent agency in Atlanta, Georgia, describes that they are looking for actors "with outstanding technique and unmatched professionalism." Accordingly, though natural ability plays a role in getting represented and subsequently getting cast, it is the marriage of talent with professionalism and hard work that generally catches the eye of agents and casting directors.

Therefore, this thesis seeks to understand what skills a talent agent looks for in potential clients. Additionally, it would like to explore how a performer's adherence to various religions influences casting and representation. However, no matter what role religion plays in this business, if one is not talented, hard-working, reliable, and amiable, there is little chance for success.

Method

In order to gather data from which to answer this assertion, surveys will be sent to a representative sample of the talent agencies in the United States. Because many agencies do not list an email address on their website, a multi-mode study is the best course of action, as I wanted the option to send a web survey sent by email as well as a paper survey sent by regular mail. According to Mick Couper (2008), the author of *Designing Effective Web Surveys*, the best type of web survey to use when doing a multi-mode study is a Scrolling Survey Design (p. 9). In this survey design, "the entire questionnaire is contained in a single HTML form [an interactive web page]" (Couper, 2008, p. 8). There are cons to this type of method, such as the "scrolling may require greater dexterity and hand-eye coordination" and the answers to the questions may be lost if the "submit" button is never pressed (Couper, 2008, pp. 10-11). However, the pros such as, this is the best design for a multi-mode study, the length of the survey may be quickly assessed, questions may be answered in any order the respondent desires, and "this approach is relatively easy to program," far outweigh the cons (Couper, 2008, pp. 9-10). The keys to making this survey effective are making sure those contacted for the survey are a representative sample, asking few questions, and asking easy questions (Blasius & Metzler, 2013).

Designing of the survey consisted of developing the correct questions to ask as well as the best format in which the questions and choices should be. First, according to Couper, radio boxes and check boxes are among the most frequently used question formats (2008, p. 42). Thus, all of the questions were designed to be either multiple choice or multiple answer, with a few ranking questions. Secondly, to understand what clients are skills and attributes talent agents are looking for in potential clients, I wanted to ask specific questions about training and casting. Third, I wanted to develop a list of performer's skills to use as a reference for the survey questions. The skills and attributes agreed upon by myself and the thesis committee were

- Acting

- Singing

- Dancing

- Easy to Work With

- Stage/On-Camera Presence

- Likable Personality

- Commitment

- Takes Directions Well

- Attractive

In the asking of questions about skills, I decided to include qualities of value in an actor, singer, or dancer so we could understand specifically what talent agencies were looking for in each. The questions on religious beliefs were easier to develop. I decided these questions would ask which beliefs helped and which beliefs hindered the client in securing representation or employment. Lastly, because I wanted the option of sending an

anonymous survey, I decided to include some demographic questions to gather a better understanding of where this agency was located and what talent they represented.

The second step in sending out the survey was to collect the contact information for multiple talent agencies. However, the talent agents' opinions that I desired most were those from the bigger cities where there are more theater and film opportunities, and thus, better representation. With this in mind, I learned the cities with the most theater opportunities were New York and Chicago, and the cities with the most film and television opportunities were Los Angeles, New York, and Atlanta. Although to a lesser degree, the other cities that had theater, film, and television opportunities were Sacramento, San Francisco, Houston, Austin, Dallas, Orlando, and Miami. Lastly, as I am based in Virginia, I decided to include some talent agencies no more than three hours away from me in Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. Therefore, using the SAG-AFTRA (Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists) website and Google, I acquired the names of over 300 talent agencies. Because I did not have a budget from which to draw to individually mail the survey to each agency and because having an online-only survey gathers results faster, I decided to send the survey via email. Using Google and Facebook, I looked up each agency to obtain its email address; however, not every talent agency had an email address by which to reach them; in fact, some of the more respected and well-known agencies did not even have websites, only the physical address on the SAG-AFTRA website. Others, however, had multiple emails from which to choose. In those instances, I would include every email unless it connected me with someone from finances or someone who represented children, as this thesis is more interested in an agency's dealings with teens and adults. At the conclusion

of my talent agency search and email gathering, I was left with 260 emails. Once I had developed an email list and knew to whom I would be sending out my survey, I revised my earlier survey draft to include print/modeling as an area of representation other than specifically theatre, film, and television to see how the answers given by agents representing models would differ from the answers of other agents. Lastly, I changed my title from "Exploring the Desired Qualities of a Performer" to "Exploring the Desired Qualities of Talent" so as not to exclude print/modelling talent. After four drafts of my survey, I finally settled on the survey I desired to send out.

After the survey had been developed, I decided to use SurveyMonkey to send it to my email list of Talent Agencies. SurveyMonkey, which was recommended to me by the Liberty University Marketing Department, is a user-friendly website that enables the user to create his/her own survey, enables him/her to send it to recipients in a number of different ways, and helps the user analyze the results. SurveyMonkey gave me several different question design options, allowing me to ask my questions how I had intended: multiple choice, multiple answer, and ranking. Furthermore, it enabled me to send the survey either from the website or my own personal email, as well as track who had answered, who had declined, and who had not opened the survey. Moreover, I was able to create a color scheme and theme for the survey and send a custom Thank You message to anyone who completed it. In order to ensure that more people would complete my survey, I allowed every question to be optional meaning that there was no question that had to be answered in order for the survey to be submitted; therefore, anyone who felt uncomfortable answering a question did not have to answer it in order to submit the completed survey, and SurveyMonkey allowed me to do this.

After finalizing the twenty-one question survey, I sent it out through SurveyMonkey to two hundred sixty recipients. Over the next two weeks, I collected only eight responses. Although this is small, I was genuinely expecting less. Before I sent out the survey, I called my acting manager and asked for her advice. She mentioned that talent agencies get thousands of emails, if not more, everyday from people looking to hire clients, or talent wanting desiring to be represented; thus, most agents would probably delete the survey. Examining the survey responses, I noticed that even fewer than the eight respondents had answered any of the questions dealing with religion, causing me to conclude that the questions asking about religion would either be answered by few people or would hinder people from taking the survey at all. Third, according to Couper, studies indicate that survey recipients are more likely to take shorter surveys because these surveys take up little of their time (2008, p. 298). Lastly, the survey sent out through SurveyMonkey was a very impersonal looking email from the SurveyMonkey website, which from experience, is much easier to delete than an email from a person. Therefore, although I had gained more responses than originally expected, I was not satisfied. I made the decision to send a revised survey out again to everyone excluding the eight respondents, so as to increase the number of respondents.

To cure both the hindrance of the religion questions and the length of the survey, I removed all ten of the questions that asked the recipients about the religious beliefs of their clients. Then, to make my survey more personal to each of the recipients, I decided to send the survey from my own personal email account, using the link provided by SurveyMonkey. The revised survey was sent out to the remaining 252 recipients, and in one night, eleven talent agents had responded. At the closing of the survey, I still only

have nineteen respondents; therefore, none of my data will be conclusive. The revision

did help me achieve what I had intended on achieving: an increased number of

respondents. However, the consistent lack of respondents lead me to agree with my

manager that few talent agents have the time to take a survey. That being said, nineteen

respondents is still more than I expected I would receive when I endeavored to send this

survey; furthermore, I will still attempt to analyze the results with which the respondents

have provided me.

   In the remaining pages of my thesis, I plan on relaying the results of my thesis,

collected for me by SurveyMonkey. This I will do for each question, excluding the

questions dealing with religion from the first survey. Further, because of the lack of

respondents, I will mostly analyze the data through descriptive analysis and attempt to

locate the similarities and differences between those who did respond to the survey and

those who did not. Lastly, I will discuss what this information means for talent such as

actors, singers, dancers, and models from all backgrounds seeking to secure

representation, and detail what further research needs to be done on this topic.

Results

In the following pages, I will relay the results of each survey question. The comma

between the two numbers will separate the number of people who answered the first

survey and the number of people who answered the second survey.

**Question 1: Do you represent clients who work in theater, film/television, or
print/modelling? Click all that apply.**

Film/Television	Print/Modeling	Theater
19	14	13

Question 2: Please rank from 1-3 the importance of the abilities below, where 1 is the most important and 3 is the least.

Category	1	2	3
Act	18	0	0
Sing	1	6	5
Dance	0	8	10

Question 3: What three qualities do you most value in an actor/actress?

Category	Natural Onstage/On Camera	Commitment	Emotional Range	Looks	Technique	Comedic Timing	Range of Characters	Age Range
Response	16	14	8	7	7	7	4	1

Question 4: What three qualities do you most value in a singer?

Category	Pitch	Uniqueness	Expressiveness	Technique	Vocal Range	Tone	Musicality	Style Range
Response	12	9	6	6	6	5	5	4

Question 5: What three qualities do you most value in a dancer?

Category	Technique	Expressiveness	Quick Study	Precision	Style Range	Musicality	Flexibility
Response	13	9	7	5	4	4	1

Question 6: Please rank from 1-6 the importance of personality attributes, where 1 is the most important and 6 is the least.

Category	1	2	3	4	5	6
Stage/On Camera Presence	4, 4	3, 3	0, 3	0, 1	0, 0	0, 0
Commitment	3, 4	3, 1	2, 1	0, 0	0, 3	0, 1
Easy to Work With	1, 1	0, 2	4, 2	2, 4	1, 1	0, 0
Attractive	0, 0	0, 0	0, 2	0, 0	1, 1	6, 7
Takes Direction	0, 0	2, 3	2, 1	2, 4	2, 1	0, 1
Likeable Personality	0, 2	0, 2	0, 1	3, 0	3, 3	1, 0

Question 7: What would you consider the three most important methods for assessing the attributes in a potential client?

Category	Reel	Interview	Headshot	Audition	Resume	L.O.R.
Response	15	15	12	9	7	0

Question 8: Please rank from 1-4 the types of training you most value in your performer, where 1 is the most valued and 4 is the least.

Category	1	2	3	4
Professional Experience	8, 9	0, 1	0, 1	0, 0
Non-Professional Experience	0, 0	1, 3	0, 1	7, 6
Performing-Arts School Training	0, 1	5, 6	3, 2	0, 1
University Training/Performance Degree	0, 1	2, 0	5, 6	1, 3

Question 9: In which area of the United States do most of your clients work? Please check all that apply.

Category	West	Southeast	Northeast	Mid-West	Mid-Atlantic
Response	11	10	5	1	1

Question 10: Please select your gender.

Category	Female	Male	Rather not Say
Response	15	3	1

Question 11: Please select your age range.

Category	Under 20	20-40	40-60	Over 60	Rather not Say
Response	0		11	3	2

These next questions were asked only on the first survey before the religion questions

were removed. Here are the results:

Question	Aware of Beliefs	Help Client with Employer	Hinder Client with Employer	Help Representation	Hinder Representation
Yes	5	2	0	0	0
No	3	3	5	5	6

In response to what religion the clients embraced, the respondents answered with:

Category	Atheism	Buddhism	Catholicism	Evangelical Christianity	Hinduism	Islam	Judaism	Other
Response	1	3	3	2	0	3	3	1

The only religions that two respondents said helped their clients in view of a potential

employer were Islam and Other (which was specified by the respondent as Mormonism).

Discussion

In these next pages, I will analyze the results of each question. According to

Driscoll and Brizee writing for the Purdue Owl on "Conducting Primary Research,"

analysis is, "a type of primary research that involves finding and interpreting patterns in

data, classifying those patterns, and generalizing the results" (2010). This is precisely

what will be done with the data collected from the respondents for every question.

Because the questions on both surveys were exactly the same, excluding the fact that the

religion questions did not appear in the second survey, for the purpose of the analysis I

have combined the answers to the two surveys as if the answers all belonged to the same

survey. Therefore, I will discuss not only the results of the questions; but furthermore,

how the talent agents of different genders and age ranges, as well as the agencies of different mediums and in different regions responded differently. However, the reader should be aware that the answers chosen by the respondents of this survey in no way claim to reflect the views of the all talent agents in the United States. Instead, these responses reflect a pattern in the respondents and can give one a starting point for further research and inquiry.

Question 1: Do you represent clients who work in theater, film/television, or print/modelling? Click all that apply.

All of the respondents answered that they represent clients who work in film/television, whatever else their specialty may be. Therefore, in terms of our analysis, by medium, we will focus our attention on agents who represent clients working Theater or Print/Modeling. Although, one more respondent represented Print/Modeling than Theater, it was split almost evenly between the two other mediums.

Film/Television	Print/Modeling	Theater
19	14	13

A large majority of the respondents were women, while a little under 16% of the respondents were men and one respondent opted not to give a gender; thus, the results are a little skewed. Furthermore, the largest number of respondents came from talent agents between the ages of 40 and 60 years old. The trend in the data showed that most of the respondents between these ages represent clients who work in all three fields.

Category	Under 20	20-40	40-60	Over 60	Rather not Say
Response	0		11	3	2

Lastly, the majority of the respondents had agency locations in either the West or Southeast, with a small portion of the respondents located in the Northeast. The agencies located in these three more popular regions showed that the trend was representation of all three fields; moreover, Theater was represented least.

Category	West	Southeast	Northeast	Mid-West	Mid-Atlantic
Response	11	10	5	1	1

Question 2: Please rank from 1-3 the importance of the abilities below, where 1 is the most important and 3 is the least.

This question asked the respondents to mark which was more important: acting, singing, or dancing. All but one said that acting was the most important; thus, I will now turn my attention to what each said was the second most important. More of the respondents asserted that singing was second to acting than dancing, and this trend continued amongst the female respondents, the respondents between the ages of 20 and 60, the respondents with agency locations in the West. However, the agents located in the Southeast or Northeast both considered dancing to be more important than singing; albeit, not by much. Moreover, examining the answers given by those who represented either theater or Print/Modeling, it was split close to evenly. About half said singing was the second most important and around the other half answered dancing.

Category	1	2	3
Act	18	0	0
Sing	1	6	5
Dance	0	8	10

Question 3: What three qualities do you most value in an actor/actress?

For this question, I gave the respondents eight options to choose from: Natural Onstage/On Camera, Commitment, Emotional Range, Technique, Physical Looks/Characteristics, Comedic Timing, Range of Characters, and Age Range. However, for the purpose of this analysis, I will examine only the three options (and more on occasion if there is a tie) that were selected by the most respondents. Out of all the respondents, the three most agreed upon qualities valued in an actor were Naturalness Onstage/In Front of Camera, Commitment, and Emotional Range. These were again the three qualities selected by the female respondents (the male respondents replaced Emotional Range with Comedic Timing and Physical Looks/Characteristics) and those between the ages of 40 and 60.

Female	40-60	Male
1.Natural OS/OC	1.Natural OS/OC	1.Natural OS/OC
2.Commitment	2.Commitment	2.Commitment
3.Emotional Range	3.Emotional Range	3.Comedic Timing, Physical Looks

Technique replaced Emotional Range in the answers by the respondents between the ages of 20 and 40 years old, those located in the Southeast, those representing Print/Modeling, and those representing Theater (although Physical Looks/Characteristics were tied with Technique in this group).

20-40	Southeast	Print/Modeling	Theater
1.Natural OS/OC	1.Natural OS/OC	1.Natural OS/OC	1.Natural OS/OC
2.Commitment	2.Commitment	2.Commitment	2.Commitment
3.Technique	3.Technique	3.Technique	3.Technique, Physical Looks

Furthermore, the respondents with agency locations in the West and Northeast mentioned the same top three (Natural Onstage/On Camera, Commitment, and Emotional Range); however, in the answers of those in the west, Physical Looks/Characteristics were tied with Commitment and Emotional Range, while those in the Northeast had Emotional Range tied with Technique, Comedic Timing, and Range of Characters.

West	Northeast
1.Natural OS/OC	1.Natural OS/OC
2.Commitment, Emotional Range, Physical Looks	2.Commitment
	3.Emotional Range, Technique, Comedic Timing, Range of Characters

Further analysis shows that the term 'commitment' may be in reference to many things such as one's commitment to a project, a deadline, or a character. Although

aspiring actors strive for a natural quality onstage and in front of the camera, a bigger and more vulnerable emotional range, and a polished technique, commitment is a quality that can be chosen and controlled. Though it may be helpful to know that agencies really value the quality of Commitment in an actor, it is unfortunate that this term has many definitions and may be taken to mean something entirely different by each respondent. This may be due to a weakness in the survey or simply to a lack of better word options.

Nevertheless, one thing I found very interesting in my examination, which may indeed be due to the lack of responses given to me on my survey, was the fact that more agencies representing Theater than those representing Print/Modeling said that Physical Looks/Characteristics were highly valued. Although I am no expert in modeling, I would assume that Physical Looks would play a major part in the decision to represent a modeling client. However, as several of those agencies represented more than simply Print/Modeling clients, it is understandable that fewer of them would not consider Physical Looks/Characteristics one of the top three qualities valued in an actor.

Question 4: What three qualities do you most value in a singer?

As this question is similar to the previous one, I will be examining this one in the same way. Again, I gave the respondents eight options to choose from: Pitch, Uniqueness, Vocal Range, Expressiveness, Technique, Musicality, Tone, and Style Range. Nevertheless, I will be examining the top three selected options. The three most valued qualities in a singer were agreed to be Pitch, Uniqueness, and Expressiveness/Technique/Vocal Range. At least three of these five responses were chosen by both female and male respondents, those between the ages of 20-40,

respondents with agency locations in the Northeast, and the respondents who represented

clients working in Print/Modeling.

Female/Male	20-40	Northeast	Print/Modeling
1.Pitch	1.Pitch	1.Pitch	1.Pitch
2.Uniqueness	2.Uniqueness	2.Uniqueness	2.Uniqueness
3.Expressiveness, Technique, or Vocal Range	3.Expressiveness, Technique, or Vocal Range	3.Expressiveness, Technique, or Vocal Range	3.Expressiveness, Technique, or Vocal Range

The one quality that was not ranked as one of the top three most valued quality that

continued to show up in the answers of the different groups of respondents was Tone.

Tone was selected to be one of the three most valued qualities of a singer by respondents

over the age of 60 (Style Range was also included as one of the top three in this group),

those with agency locations in the West or Southeast, and those who represented clients

working in Theater. Moreover, it should be mentioned that out of the respondents

between the ages of 40 and 60 (which was the majority age of the respondents), one of

the three most valued qualities of a singer was believed to be Musicality.

40-60	Over 60	West/Southeast	Theater
Musicality was also selected	Tone and Style Ranger were also selected.	Tone was also selected.	Tone was also selected.

Finally, I want to examine the three qualities chosen by the respondents who said that singing was second to acting, for their opinion may be of greater value be as they regard singing to be more important than dancing. In this group, the three most important qualities of a singer were considered to be Uniqueness, Pitch, Vocal Range, and Expressiveness. These findings are consistent with the answers of all of the respondents whose only difference was the addition of Technique in the top three.

It should be noted in this analysis that the term, 'musicality' may involve similar disparities of connotation as 'commitment' did in the previous question. Again, this may be the fault of the survey/survey designer or the ambiguity of the jargon used by artists in this industry. In this case, it is best to use Webster's definition of musicality, which may be the most clear and concise: "sensitivity to, knowledge of, or talent for music; still, it should be held to lightly, as each respondent may have had his/her own definition.

Question 5: What three qualities do you most value in a dancer?

The fifth question on my survey is very similar to the previous two, the only difference being it asks about qualities of dancers. Therefore, I will be using the same method to analyze the responses. The respondents were given seven options to choose from in response to this question: Technique, Expressiveness, Quick Study, Precision, Style Range, Musicality, and Flexibility. The three most valued qualities in a dancer were discovered by this survey to be Technique, Expressiveness, and Quick Study. This was again the trend regarding female respondents, those between the ages of 20 and 60 (those in the 40-60 age range also mentioned Style Range), those whose agency had a location in the Southeast, and those who represent clients working in Print/Modeling.

20-40/Over 60	40-60	Southeast	Print/Modeling
1.Technique 2.Expressiveness 3.Quick Study	1.Technique 2.Expressiveness 3.Quick Study, Style Range	1.Technique 2.Expressiveness 3.Quick Study	1.Technique 2.Expressiveness 3.Quick Study

Musicality and Precision were two other qualities considered to be among the three most valued qualities of a dancer by several different groups of respondents. The male respondents replaced Expressiveness and Quick Study with Musicality (and Style Range) and the respondents over the age of 60 replaced Quick Study with Musicality and Precision, and so too did the respondents in the West replace Quick Study with simply Precision. Furthermore, Musicality and Precision were added to the three trending qualities by the respondents with agency locations in the Northeast. And the respondents whose agencies represented clients working in Theater added Precision to the trending qualities.

Male	Over 60	West	Northeast	Theater
1.Technique 2.Musicality 3.Style Range	1.Technique 2.Expressiveness 3.Musicality, Precision	1.Technique 2.Exp. 3.Precision	1.Technique 2.Exp. 3.Quick Study, Musicality, Precision	1.Technique 2.Exp. 3.Quick Study, Precision

Conclusively, I will again examine the qualities of a dancer considered to be the three most valued by the respondents who regarded dancing as the second most important performer's skill. Unfortunately, one of these respondents did not answer this question. Nevertheless, out of those who did, the findings were consistent with the answers of all respondents, as Technique, Expressiveness, and Quick Study were considered the three most valued qualities of a dancer; however, in the answers of these respondents, Expressiveness and Quick Study were tied with Musicality and Precision as one of the top three qualities.

Question 6: Please rank from 1-6 the importance of personality attributes, where 1 is the most important and 6 is the least.

This question asked the respondents to list in order of greatest importance to least importance the following six personality attributes: Stage/On Camera Presence, Commitment, Easy to Work With, Likeable Personality, Takes Direction, and Attractive. For the purpose of my analysis, I will examine what each group of respondents replied with regarding the most important (what they ranked as number one), the second most important (what they ranked as number two), and the least important (what they ranked as number 6). The two personality attributes chosen by the majority to be the most important were Stage/On Camera Presence and Commitment. The two qualities chosen most by the respondents as the second most important attribute were again, Stage/On Camera Presence and Takes Direction. Finally, Attractive was selected by the majority as the least important personality attribute. These findings were fairly consistent with the answers given by the female respondents, the respondents between the ages of 20 and 40 (although Takes Direction was not mentioned as the second most important quality),

those between ages 40 and 60, those with agency locations in the West (although

Stage/On Camera Presence was not mentioned as the second most important quality),

Southeast, or Northeast, and the respondents who represented clients working in

Print/Modeling or Theater.

20-40	40-60	West	SE/NE	Print/Modeling, Theater
Most: S/OC Presence, Commitment	Most: S/OC Presence, Commitment	Most: S/OC Presence, Commitment	Most: S/OC Presence, Commitment	Most: S/OC Presence, Commitment
Second: S/OC Presence	Second: S/OC Presence, Takes Direction	Second: Takes Direction	Second: S/OC Presence, Takes Direction	Second: S/OC Presence, Takes Direction
Least: Attractive	Least: Attractive	Least: Attractive	Least: Attractive	Least: Attractive

In fact, the only answers that differed from the trending results were by minority groups.

For example, both the respondents over 60 and respondent whose agency had a location

in the Mid-Atlantic considered Commitment to be the most important, Likeable

Personality to be the second most important, and Takes Direction to be the least

important. But again, these groups were so small that their answers are almost negligible.

**Question 7: What would you consider the three most important methods for
assessing the attributes in a potential client?**

This question is similar to questions three through five; therefore, I will be

examining the results of this question in a similar way. There were six options given to

the respondents in answer to this question: Reel, In-Person Interview, Headshot,

Audition, Resume, Letter of Recommendation. Nevertheless, I will only be discussing the

top three chosen by each group. The three most important methods for assessing

attributes in a potential client were found to be Reel/In-Person Interview, Headshot, and

Audition. At least three of these four methods were chosen to be the three best by both

male and female respondents, those in every age group given, excluding the Rather not

Say category, those with agency locations in the West, Southeast, or Northeast, and those

whose represented clients working in either Print/Modeling or Theater.

Male/Female	Every Age Group	West/SE/NE	Print/Modeling and Theater
1.Reel/In-Person Interview	1.Reel/In-Person Interview	1.Reel/In-Person Interview	1.Reel/In-Person Interview
2.Headshot	2.Headshot	2.Headshot	2.Headshot
3.Audition	3.Audition	3.Audition	3.Audition

Again, similar to question six, the only respondents who answered differently were those

in minority groups. For example, the respondents who opted not to give a gender

answered with Reel, Headshot, and Resume (instead of In-Person Interview or Audition),

and the one respondent whose agency was located in the Mid-West considered In-Person

Interview, Audition, and Resume (instead of Reel or Headshot) to be the three best

methods. Moreover, no respondent marked Letter of Recommendation as one of the three

best methods.

Rather Not Say Gender	Mid-West
1.Reel	1.In-Person Interview
2.Headshot	2.Audition
3.Resume	3.Resume

Question 8: Please rank from 1-4 the types of training you most value in your performer, where 1 is the most valued and 4 is the least.

Question eight was asked in a similar fashion to question six, so I will be analyzing the responses likewise. The respondents were given four options to rank: Professional Experience, Non-Professional Experience, University/Theater Degree, and Performing-Arts School. As there were only four options, I will only be examining the choices selected as the most valuable and those selected as the least valuable. Professional experience was considered by all but two to be the most valuable type of training for a performer. On the other hand, Non-Professional experience was believed by the majority to be the least important training. This was the continuing trend among both the female and the male respondents, the respondents in the 20-40 age group, those over 60 years of age, respondents with agency locations in the West, and those who represent clients working in the Print/Modeling industry.

Female/Male	20-40/Over 60	West	Print/Modeling
Most: Professional	Most: Professional	Most: Professional	Most: Professional
Least: Non-Prof	Least: Non-Prof	Least: Non-Prof	Least: Non-Prof

While all groups agreed that Professional experience was the most valuable training a performer could receive, there were a few groups differed from the majority on what type of training they believed the was the least valuable, including those falling under the 40-60 age category, which again, was the majority age range of the survey respondents. There were some respondents between the ages of 40-60, some with agency locations in the Southeast or Northeast, and some who represent clients working in Theater that believed that both Non-Professional and University/Theater Degree to be the least valuable types of training for a performer. Although, this may be disconcerting from performers who went to University specifically for degrees in Theater or other art forms, it is helpful to remember that this answer option includes all different kinds of University degrees.

40-60	Southeast/Northeast	Theater
Most: Professional	Most: Professional	Most: Professional
Least: Non-Professional and Degree	Least: Non-Professional and Degree	Least: Non-Professional and Degree

Finally, possible reasons the first survey recipients did not answer many of the questions on religion should be discussed. First, and most likely, the respondents may not have known or desired to know their clients' religious beliefs. Second, they may have known the religious beliefs of their clients, but not how those beliefs affected casting. Third, they may have been offended by the asking of these questions. And lastly, they may have grown tired of taking the survey and opted out of the last ten questions. These

options should all be taken into consideration when noting the lack of responses to the

religion questions.

Conclusion

On the onset, the purpose of this thesis was to explore through a survey the

specific skills a talent agent seeks in potential clients; furthermore, it was the intent of the

survey to discover the effects being a Christian actor may have on finding representation.

In order to expand the number of recipients, talent agents who represented

Print/Modeling clients were added to the list of agents receiving the survey. Thus, a

survey was sent to over 260 talent agents representing a myriad of clients working in

Film, Television, Print, Modeling, and Theater. However, as few recipients responded to

the survey and an even fewer number answered the questions pertaining to religion, the

survey was edited to only include the questions asking about skills and personality

attributes of a performer. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis was altered slightly.

Although the limited answers to the religion questions remain and those can be analyzed,

it is now the purpose of this project to simply understand what skills a client should

possess in order to be desired by talent agents.

The data gathered from the survey created for the purposes above can be

summarized in this way: First of all, it should be noted that the majority of the

respondents identified as females between the ages of 40 and 60 years old. Furthermore,

the vast majority of the agencies the respondents belonged to were located in the West

and Southeast. Lastly, every agency involved in the taking of the survey responded that it

represented clients who work in Film/Television, with an almost equal number adding

that it represents clients who work in either Print/Modeling or Theater. This should be

kept in mind when assessing the data, as the results are assuredly skewed. Acting was

selected as the most important of the abilities over singing and dancing by almost all of

the respondents. According to the survey, the top three qualities sought after in an actor

were Naturalness Onstage/In Front of Camera, Commitment, and Emotional Range.

Pitch, Uniqueness, and a tie between Expressiveness/Technique, and Vocal Range were

the chosen three most important qualities looked for in a singer. The three selected

qualities most desired in a dancer are Technique, Expressiveness, and Quick Study.

Furthermore, two of the most important personality attributes elected by the respondents

were Stage/On Camera Presence and Commitment, and the three best way to assess the

attributes were either Reel or In-Person Interview, Headshot, and Audition. Finally,

professional experience was almost entirely viewed as the most important training a

performer could receive.

      As acting was selected as the most important ability to possess as a performer,

any person interested in performing as a profession, seeking representation from a talent

agent should develop and perfect this skill. Of course, as acting defined by Webster's

Dictionary is "the art or practice of representing a character on a stage or before

cameras," and it is impossible to know a human being, other than oneself (although in

most cases, one does not even fully know oneself), acting as with many other forms of art

may never be perfected in this lifetime. However, in light of the data, deeper knowledge

and understanding of the craft should be pursued. Furthermore, as the most valuable

qualities in an actor were believed by the respondents to be Naturalness Onstage/In Front

of Camera, Commitment, and Emotional Range, these areas specifically should be

addressed by a performer. The two qualities, Naturalness Onstage/In Front of Camera and

Emotional Range appear to be rather self-explanatory. And although these skills may come more naturally to some performers, they are skills and can be improved upon by practice and technique. However, Commitment is one quality that may need clarification. By an actor's definition (and specifically this actor), Commitment means giving complete loyalty or all one's effort to the chosen action or delivery performed. Although, the respondents may have taken commitment to mean, as again Webster defines it, "a promise to be loyal to someone or something," both kinds of commitment should be practiced by all performers. As was already mentioned, the lack of clarity on commitment's meaning doubtless had an influence on the recipients' responses, and 'Commitment' may not have been chosen as one of the most valued qualities in an actor had the word been clearly defined. In hindsight, perhaps it would have been more beneficial to modify the word with 'commitment to character/acting choices' or even use a completely different word/phrase, though no solution easily comes to mind. Nevertheless, it is still valuable to recognize that in this industry, loyalty to a person and/or an acting choice will more often than not be commended rather than condemned.

Furthermore, if singing or dancing are either strengths one believes to have or abilities that need more work, the answers provided by the respondents can help one to hone in on what specific qualities to perfect or improve. In terms of singing, pitch, technique, vocal range, and expressiveness are skills that can be practiced and improved upon with daily warm-ups and exercises. Unfortunately, uniqueness is less of a skill that can be developed and more of a quality specific to each person. However, because each person is different, each voice is different and thus, every voice is unique in some way. Moreover, it is wise to focus only on the things that one can control and improve.

Regarding dancing, technique, expressiveness, and being a quick study are also things that can be gained by consistent practice and training. Lastly, two personality attributes were considered the most important by talent agents. The first is Stage/On Camera Presence, which makes sense as performers with that quality will get cast more frequently than those who have poor presence on stage or on camera. The second most valued attribute is commitment. This commitment almost assuredly means loyalty to a person or project. Thus, it is important for any performer to work on cultivating these two skills as these are the most desirable in potential clients.

Finally, when performers submit to talent agencies for representation, usually a headshot, resume, and reel is required. However, it is interesting to note that the talent agents who responded to my survey mentioned that they believe a reel, an In-Person Interview, a headshot, and an audition are the best ways to assess a potential client's attributes. Unfortunately, most talent do not get to audition or have an interview with an agent at the beginning. Before one can get to that step, he/she must be selected by an agent from his/her headshot, resume, and reel. Nevertheless, a reel and a headshot were the other two selected and these are submitted at the beginning. Therefore, it is very important that one's headshot be professional, eye-catching, and an accurate representation of the performer. Further, one's reel should be professional and including only the best possible clips to help sell the performer. Not only that, but professional experience was considered the best training for performers. Thus, looking for and booking professional acting, singing, dancing, and modeling jobs without an agent can make one more of a commodity. Although talent agents are generally needed to

successfully break into the entertainment industry, a performer should be proactive in finding jobs for himself/herself. A talent agent is not responsible for one's career.

　　　　In conclusion, as a very small number of agents responded to my survey, it is important that further research be conducted. Not only should those interested continue to pursue further and more complete answers to the questions on my survey, but research on client-agent relationships and the qualities that casting directors desire in performers should also be conducted. Because performing is not a science, little research has been done to help those wanting a career in this field. However, if performers can continue to ask the right questions of those that can help them in their career, steps to prepare performance students for the business of the entertainment industry can be taken, hopefully allowing more the opportunity for success. Still, armed with the little data collected through this survey, I can now go out into the professional world of acting with a better knowledge of the types of skills, training, and personality attributes talent agents look for in potential clients. Furthermore, it is my hope that not only my own theater department, but those of other schools can use the research I have done to prepare their students for the business of acting because that is just as important as the craft itself.

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Appendix A

First Survey Sent

1. Do you represent clients who work in theater, film/television, or print/modelling? Click all that apply.

☐ Theater

☐ Film/Television

☐ Print/Modelling

2. Please rank from 1-3 the importance of the abilities below, where 1 is the most important and 3 is the least.

	1	2	3
Act	○	○	○
Sing	○	○	○
Dance	○	○	○

3. What three qualities do you most value in an actor/actress?

☐ Natural Onstage / In Front of Camera

☐ Emotional Range

☐ Range of Characters

☐ Comedic Timing

☐ Commitment

☐ Physical Looks / Characteristics

☐ Age Range

☐ Technique

4. What three qualities do you most value in a singer?

- [ ] Tone
- [ ] Pitch
- [ ] Uniqueness
- [ ] Vocal Range
- [ ] Technique
- [ ] Expressiveness
- [ ] Style Range
- [ ] Musicality

5. What three qualities do you most value in a dancer?

- [ ] Technique
- [ ] Flexibility
- [ ] Precision
- [ ] Quick study
- [ ] Expressiveness
- [ ] Style Range
- [ ] Musicality

6. Please rank from 1-6 the importance of personality attributes, where 1 is the most important and 6 is the least.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Easy to work with	○	○	○	○	○	○
Stage / On-Camera Presence	○	○	○	○	○	○
Likable Personality	○	○	○	○	○	○
Attractive	○	○	○	○	○	○
Commitment	○	○	○	○	○	○
Takes Direction	○	○	○	○	○	○

7. What would you consider the three most important methods for assessing the attributes in a potential client?

☐ Headshot

☐ Resume

☐ Reel

☐ In-person Interview

☐ Letter of Recommendation

☐ Audition

8. Please rank from 1-4 the types of training you most value in your performer, where 1 is the most valued and 4 is the least.

	1	2	3	4
Professional Experience	◯	◯	◯	◯
University Training / Performance Degree	◯	◯	◯	◯
Performing-Arts School Training	◯	◯	◯	◯
Non-Professional Experience	◯	◯	◯	◯

9. In which area of the United States do most of your clients work? Please check all that apply.

☐ Northeast

☐ Southeast

☐ Mid-Atlantic

☐ Mid-West

☐ West

10. Please select your gender.

◯ Male

◯ Female

◯ Rather not say

11. Please select your age range.

○ Under 20

○ 20-40

○ 40-60

○ Over 60

○ Rather not say

Appendix B

Final Survey

1. Do you represent clients who work in theater, film/television, or print/modelling? Click all that apply.

☐ Theater

☐ Film/Television

☐ Print/Modelling

2. What three qualities do you most value in an actor/actress?

☐ Natural Onstage / In Front of Camera

☐ Emotional Range

☐ Range of Characters

☐ Comedic Timing

☐ Commitment

☐ Physical Looks / Characteristics

☐ Age Range

☐ Technique

3. Please rank from 1-3 the importance of the abilities below, where 1 is the most important and 3 is the least.

	1	2	3
Act	○	○	○
Sing	○	○	○
Dance	○	○	○

4. What three qualities do you most value in a singer?

☐ Tone

☐ Pitch

☐ Uniqueness

☐ Vocal Range

☐ Technique

☐ Expressiveness

☐ Style Range

☐ Musicality

5. What three qualities do you most value in a dancer?

☐ Technique

☐ Flexibility

☐ Precision

☐ Quick study

☐ Expressiveness

☐ Style Range

☐ Musicality

6. Please rank from 1-6 the importance of personality attributes, where 1 is the most important and 6 is the least.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Easy to work with	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Stage / On-Camera Presence	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Likable Personality	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Attractive	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Commitment	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Takes Direction	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

7. What would you consider the three most important methods for assessing the attributes in a potential client?

☐ Headshot

☐ Resume

☐ Reel

☐ In-person Interview

☐ Letter of Recommendation

☐ Audition

8. Please rank from 1-4 the types of training you most value in your performer, where 1 is the most valued and 4 is the least.

	1	2	3	4
Professional Experience	○	○	○	○
University Training / Performance Degree	○	○	○	○
Performing-Arts School Training	○	○	○	○
Non-Professional Experience	○	○	○	○

9. Are you aware of the religious beliefs of any of your current or former clients? If no, please skip to question 19.

○ Yes

○ No

10. If yes, which of the following beliefs did your clients embrace?

☐ Atheism

☐ Buddhism

☐ Catholicism

☐ Evangelical Christianity

☐ Hinduism

☐ Islam

☐ Judaism

☐ Other

11. In your opinion, did a client's adherence to any to these faiths *help* that client in the view of a potential employer?

◯ Yes

◯ No

12. If so, which one or ones?

☐ Atheism

☐ Buddhism

☐ Catholicism

☐ Evangelical Christianity

☐ Hinduism

☐ Islam

☐ Judaism

☐ Other

[   ]

13. In your opinion, did a client's adherence to any to these faiths *hinder* that client in the view of a potential employer?

◯ Yes

◯ No

14. If so, which one or ones?

☐ Atheism

☐ Buddhism

☐ Catholicism

☐ Evangelical Christianity

☐ Hinduism

☐ Islam

☐ Judaism

☐ Other

[   ]

15. In your opinion, did a client's adherence to any to these faiths *help* you in your efforts at representation?

○ Yes

○ No

16. If so, which one or ones?

☐ Atheism

☐ Buddhism

☐ Catholicism

☐ Evangelical Christianity

☐ Hinduism

☐ Islam

☐ Judaism

☐ Other

[   ]

17. In your opinion, did a client's adherence to any to these faiths *hinder* you in your efforts at representation?

○ Yes

○ No

18. If so, which one or ones?

☐ Atheism

☐ Buddhism

☐ Catholicism

☐ Evangelical Christianity

☐ Hinduism

☐ Islam

☐ Judaism

☐ Other

[   ]

19. In which area of the United States do most of your clients work? Please check all that apply.

☐ Northeast

☐ Southeast

☐ Mid-Atlantic

☐ Mid-West

☐ West

20. Please select your gender.

○ Male

○ Female

○ Rather not say

21. Please select your age range.

○ Under 20

○ 20-40

○ 40-60

○ Over 60

○ Rather not say