

Hunter Phoenix: “Celebrate! And promote, promote, promote!”

By Edward Sylvan, CEO and Founder of Sycamore Entertainment Group

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As a part of our series about Inspirational Women In Hollywood, I had the distinct pleasure of interviewing Hunter Phoenix. She is an NYC and London trained actress whose career spans 2 decades. She has worked extensively in commercial print across Europe, co-hosted for HGTV, performed live with Second City in Toronto, and in 2019 jumped into stand-up comedy in Hollywood.

This was at a time and in a place where that just wasn't done. There was a lot of prejudice and discrimination because of it, and pretty extreme financial hardship. We also moved around a lot—a new school pretty much every year. That was my normal and I didn't really think anything of it at the time, but in retrospect it's where and how I developed rather exceptional people skills. It was important to be able to fit and and read people very quickly. This is something is incredibly useful, especially as an actress, and I'm grateful for it to this day.

Thank you so much for doing this with us! Our readers would love to get to know you a bit better. Can you tell us the story of how you grew up?

The early years were tough. I grew up in a small town in Canada with a mom who was only a teenager when she had me and single parent.

Can you share a story with us about what brought you to this specific career path?

I was a natural actor and story teller from as early as I can remember. I loved to create other worlds and share incredible stories with people! Lol! The stories being factual wasn't really my primary concern. When you move a lot as a kid, you're always having to make new friends. Being able to entertain people was always something I loved doing.

Can you tell us the most interesting story that happened to you since you began your career?

Wow... I'm not really sure about the most interesting thing. I've been stuck alone at a resort in Cyprus during a hurricane with no one speaking English because the film crew couldn't get in due to the weather, negotiated with Tarantulas in the Dominican Republic, (FYI I'm not afraid of little house spiders any more!) attended the Cannes Film Festival, where I got my first tattoo, have rubbed shoulders with A-List celebrities and sat front and center at the Grammy Awards. Whenever I wonder if my life thus far has been worthwhile and well-spent, I reflect on some of those experiences and just think "Wow... what a wild ride!"

Can you share a story about the funniest mistakes you made when you were first starting? Can you tell us what lesson you learned from that?

I can't think of any "funny" mistakes; the film industry is too high stakes for people to take it jokingly. Mistakes are generally frowned upon, and I think I made every mistake in the book and even invented a few new ones.



For someone who didn't grow up in California, or even in the United States, living in LA, working in Hollywood, auditioning at Paramount Studios and even shopping on Rodeo Dr. were all just a dream. Now, this small town girl calls the coveted 90210 zip code home. Remembering what it's like to have "Hollywood dreams", in March of 2020 she launched MyActorGuide.com to help new actors break into the business and find their own way to Hollywood. What started as a small blog quickly grew into a full-blown information site for new actors consistently attracting 10,000 visitors / month and growing. "I love California, but more importantly, I love acting and this business. I'm so grateful to be living my own 'Hollywood dream'" Phoenix says, "and it feels amazing to finally be at a point in my career where I can really give back and support others in making their dreams come true."

At the time I started acting, everyone talked about “the craft” and nothing about the business. When I decided that I was going to act professionally, as an actual way to make a living, I had no idea what I was doing. In fact, it was like that for years. I was studying and training in New York, Toronto and London, with some of the top acting coaches in the world, and I was still struggling with a career and the business side of things. There was so much incredible training as an actor, but literally no one was talking about the crucial aspects to actually building a career in the industry.

I was so confused and overwhelmed by trying to figure out what to do, and trying things that didn't work, or worse yet, backfired, that many times I felt like giving up. This is why when the pandemic hit and the industry closed down, I finally decided to start a website dedicated to helping new actors and those who want to enter the biz, My Actor Guide. I really got serious about the site last April, and in a very short time it was attracting 5,000–6,000 visitors per month. Now it's about 10,000 visits per month consistently, and that's just with me working on it in my free time. The site is at the point where it has become a business unto itself—obviously it struck a chord, and I can only see that growing. I am passionate about paying it forward and helping other people so they can sidestep so many of the painful, expensive and time consuming mistakes that I made.

None of us are able to achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story about that?

There are a couple of women who come to mind who I'm really grateful for over the course of my life and my career. The first one is my 12th grade teacher, Mrs. Sylvia Fox. She was my biggest fan! She was a huge advocate for me, as well as my first true mentor. I deeply admired and respected her and she was instrumental in me choosing a career in the arts.

The second was one of the first casting directors I studied with and worked with, Karen Hazzard. She taught me how to be honest with myself, about myself and my acting. She demonstrated how to be objective without any self-judgement or negativity that often comes with this type of critique.

Both of these women really took me under their wing and guided me. I am forever grateful.

You have been blessed with great success in a career path that can be challenging. Do you have any words of advice for others who may want to embark on this career path, but seem daunted by the prospect of failure?

1. Stay positive. So many times it's easy to feel like you are 'creating into a void' in this business, especially now, when we are all so isolated, the industry is only partially operational, and even then only in stops and starts. Find a way to connect with others in the business, to stay creative and stay motivated. One of my favorite quotes is from early success guru Zig Ziglar, “Motivation doesn't last, neither does bathing. That's why they are both recommended daily.”

2. Stay consistent. This goes hand in hand with motivation and even beyond “don't give up”.

So true! “It takes a village...” as the saying goes.

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Staying consistent is about getting up and doing all that stuff you don't feel like doing.... daily. Maybe it's self-promotion, or vocal exercises or reaching out to collaborators. Keep at it and stay steady.

3. Realize that nobody knows anything. I came across an article in inc.com by Carmine Gallo about Netflix co-founder Marc Randolph, who came out with a book a year or so ago: "Randolph has three words of advice for any entrepreneur whose idea is met with skepticism: Nobody knows anything." Actors face a disproportionate amount of criticism.... about their performance, abilities, career choice, hair color or just about anything else. The bottom line is no one is the expert on You except You. No two career paths are the same and there is no guaranteed roadmaps for success in this industry.

"Randolph closes his book with a quote by Nolan Bushnell, the co-founder of Atari. Bushnell once said, "Everyone who has taken a shower has had an idea. But it's the people who get out of the shower, towel off, and do something about it that make the difference." Testing an idea will teach you more in one day than spending a year thinking about it."

What drives you to get up everyday and work in TV and Film?

What drives me is the desire to create and the passion for the work! I love creating and collaborating and acting is an avenue to give people permission to explore themselves, their thoughts, feelings emotions, impulses and intuitions, no matter how ugly, or wonderful they are. Acting is communicating with people in a way that changes their emotional state, and / or their awareness, and that changes the fabric of the universe.....that's pretty cool, and that's what gets me out of bed every day!

What change do you want to see in the industry going forward?

The #metoo movement and focus on diversity is long overdue. I think it's time we started seeing a broader representation of people and their stories, whether that be race, gender or sexual orientation. And there needs to be a safe way for people to speak out when there is a problem. Maybe we are finally coming to a time where we are ready to start treating each other with unequivocal respect. Ultimately, I think it's what many of us want, freedom to express, create, be seen and heard and safe at the same time.

You have such impressive work. What are some of the most interesting or exciting projects you are working on now? Where do you see yourself heading from here?

2020 drastically changed the landscape in the film and television industry. Projects that could shoot dwindled down to next to nothing, and many casting directors have been open about the hardships involved with being off work for 5-6 months straight. Having said that, there is a

comedy pilot that I have been fortunate enough to be involved in. We shot mid 2019 and it finally saw the light of day end of that year. The writer is a fabulously talented stand-up comedienne Carissa Gallo, and her husband and producing partner, Fred Gallo is the director. Both veterans of the film and television industry they have crafted a fun and wonderful piece of work that has now been seen at around 25 film festivals and has won 8 awards. This is really exciting! Fingers crossed that it finds a home at one of the big networks!

I'm auditioning every week, so that's always a good sign. Moving forward, this year I really have my sights set on more network productions. As always, we'll see how the year shapes up... especially as the industry is still grappling with the pandemic.



We are very interested in looking at diversity in the entertainment industry. Can you share three reasons with our readers about why you think it's important to have diversity represented in film and television? How can that potentially affect our culture and our youth growing up today?

Diversity is important in any industry simply because life is diverse! It's really that simple. We all like to see a reflection of ourselves; it affirms our life choices and our very existence. But my life, and most of our lives I think, are filled with people of different ages, races, nationalities and experiences. It's what makes it beautiful and interesting. How boring would it be if everyone looked and talked the same? To not have that reflected on screen is just ridiculous.

There's a lot less glamour than you imagine. Be prepared to work crazy hard.

Another huge misconception of this industry is that it's all red carpets, galas, evening gowns and champagne. Nothing could be further from the truth! There weeks and months of working and pitching, trying to book a job or get a project off the ground. Long hours on set, many times overnight and into the early hours of the morning... When you really don't feel like being awake! And the competition is crazy! If black tie events is what you're looking for, become an investment banker, make tons of money and donate to charities and the arts so you get invited to the events. Lol! Being a working artist is probably the slowest path there.

What are your 5 things you wish someone had told you when you first started and why. Please share a story or example for each.

1. This is a process, not an event. Think in terms of 5, 10 and 20 years ahead.

We're conditioned to believe, especially in this industry, that there is one big, lucky break. I know a lot of working actors, people who pay their mortgages and car payments and raise a family exclusively working in the film and television industry... with no "big break". Just getting up and doing the work everyday. This is it. This is the reality for the majority of the people in the biz. It's making a living. It's life. And it's a process, not an event. Lol! I always say, "I wish it was an event! Then we could have balloons!"

That brings me to the next point....

2. There's a lot less glamour than you imagine. Be prepared to work crazy hard.

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3. You. Are. Enough. Exactly the way you are.

Oh my gosh.... This is an industry that can bruise



your ego and shatter your self-esteem, and at some point, for most people, it usually does. You are constantly being told that you don't have enough training, enough experience, you have too much training, and not the right experience. I have been told that my hair is too light and too dark, too long and too short, all in the same week. And you are always the wrong age for something! Now, when people start with, "You are too.....", my response is, "For what?!" If they like you and want to hire you, esthetics can be altered and scripts changed. If not, and I'm "too" something, I start to question the person's motives for verbalizing that pretty quickly.

4. Celebrate! And promote, promote, promote!

This goes with the 'big break' theory.... You may never get a big break, so why not have some fun along the way! Celebrate everything.... Every small win, every victory. Because if you don't, who will? There is no year end review, no pat on the back, so be your own cheer squad! And for the sake of your career PROMOTE! It doesn't matter if you've won awards and are doing amazing work if no one knows about it. "If a tree falls in the forest....?" "If an actor acts with no audience...?" Celebrating and promoting are two things that I really regret not doing more of over the years. I think my career would have been different, and if not, I'd at least have had a lot more fun!

5. It's not a straight line or a steady upward climb

There is no clear path in the entertainment industry; no two artists are alike and no two career paths the same. That is the nature of art, creating. Creative careers are also highly subjective. It's not like a more traditional career where there tends to be a defined hierarchy, steps and trajectory. Being at the top of your game, is no guarantee that you'll be there tomorrow. But the same applies to rock bottom.

Can you share with our readers any self care routines, practices or treatments that you do to help your body, mind or heart to thrive? Please share a story for each one if you can.

Self care is especially important right now. We are all under so much stress. This is something I've tried to prioritize since the beginning of the pandemic, and usually successfully.

For months I made sure that I got out and walked everyday, just around the neighborhood, with a mask on, but to get some fresh air and see other people in real life, even from a distance. A nod and a wave from a neighbor across the street goes a long way when we are so isolated these days. BONUS: I also made a point to walk at least 1.5 miles, and more if time allowed and I felt inspired to do so. My average was about 3 miles per day, and when looking at my fitness app at the end of the month, seeing that I walked almost 100 miles that month was crazy cool! This has been a huge help to keep my body moving and to foster even just a bit of normalcy and human connection.

Can you please give us your favorite "Life Lesson Quote"? Can you share how that was relevant to you in your life?

I am such a quote junkie, and one of my favorites

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is actually from the movie, Godfather III, near the end of the movie. It's where Michael Corleone (Al Pacino) is addressing his (illegitimate) nephew Vince, (Andy Garcia) who is in love with Michael's daughter Mary, played by Sophia Coppola. Michael tells Vince that he can be part of the family only if he gives up Mary, stating. "This is the price you pay for the life you choose." I absolutely love this quote and it's one I live by. It gets me through some tough days, remembering that I have choice. We all have choice. And ALL choices have a price or consequences. The price for flat abs is usually an early morning workout or giving up sweets and carbs. Equally, the price for indulging in favorite food might mean having a little bit of a belly, or having to work out twice per day. Every career decision, every life choice has a price.



You are a person of huge influence. If you could inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be?

I would love for there to be some kind of mandatory career planning courses added to school curriculum at a high school, and then again college level. Too many people, myself included, graduate high school and even college or university without any idea of how to grow a career, beginning with the immediate to the decades that lie ahead. There is little to no basic understanding of options, variable career paths, and the additional skills, often business training or interpersonal skills, one will have to acquire to make the career vision a reality. Even basic skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, time management, interviews, personal responsibility and respect have proven to be highly effective and useful across multiple careers and areas of life.

Is there a person in the world whom you would love to have lunch with, and why? Maybe we can tag them and see what happens!

Dominique Sachse is a news anchor in Houston as well as content creator on YouTube. She is very open about beauty needs and routines for women over 50, which has traditionally been a taboo subject in the film and television industry. I really admire what she's done and what she's doing and she's currently one of my biggest inspirations. I'd love to sit down with her, virtually or in person.

Are you on social media? How can our readers follow you online?

Love to connect on social!

Instagram: [@hunterphoenix.tv](https://www.instagram.com/hunterphoenix.tv)

Facebook Page: [HunterPhoenix.tv](https://www.facebook.com/HunterPhoenix.tv)

Twitter: [@Hunter_Phoenix](https://twitter.com/Hunter_Phoenix)

This was so informative, thank you so much! We wish you continued success!

