

*Add Oomph to Your Stories*  
*By Bringing the Characters Alive*



*A Basic Workshop For Speakers  
on Character Development with*  
**Vinny Verelli**

**The Goomba Guru of Negativity Management®**

**SpeakerNet News**

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## **BUILDING CHARACTER – HANDOUT**

### **WHY DO CHARACTERS?**

- A character is the quickest way to an audience's heart and mind.

People don't remember what you say they remember what you do. The more things you can do the better chance you have of really having an impact on your audience.

- It allows you to say things that you normally wouldn't say.
- **It's fun to do.** They're fun for you and will therefore be fun for your audience.

### **THE 3 STEPS TO BUILDING CHARACTERS ARE:**

Constructing the physical,  
Developing the verbal and  
Shaping the emotional state of mind.

You can do physical without verbal and verbal without physical. But to be good you need the right emotional makeup.

### **PHYSICAL:**

Sometimes all you have to do is pause and...

Strike a pose,  
Cop an attitude.  
Give a look.

A dramatic or comic pause colors the moment that just came or is about to come. And in that moment there is an emotional connection with the audience and no voice is necessary.

**Don't underestimate the power of doing nothing.**

### **HOMEWORK**

#### **WORK WITH THE FACE:**

The face has 44 muscles – but it's said you can create over 5,000 expressions. Train these muscles by watching yourself in a mirror. Discover what you can do. Raise one eyebrow smile in varying degrees.

### **WORK WITH THE BODY:**

You can create a simple character by presenting simple character traits.

### **HOMEWORK:**

Name a “type” of person then breakdown the physical attributes that make up his or her character.

### **THINGS TO DO.**

Study old comedies. Also watch the screwball comedies of today and TV sit-coms. They all have some sort of signature look or feel.

Look for the broad action or gesture. We want the character to come across quickly, so subtlety is not important.

(see note on “catch phrases” later in this handout)

### **RESOURCES.**

The Mime Book by Claude Kipnis

Mime Spoken Here : The Performer's Portable Workshop by Tony Montanaro  
both available at Amazon

### **LAST NOTE ON PHYSICAL.**

Work on the physical first. If you come up with the vocal quality of the character and then come up with a physical you may find that you aren't able to do the voice any more.

### **VERBAL**

A dramatic change in the inflection of your voice adds character to your presentation. Find a voice you can do to build on top of a physical thing you can do. A Character begins to emerge.

You can use a “real” person as a starting point for your voice, but I don't recommend doing impressions unless you're really good.

### **HOMEWORK**

Take one of your stories and add some character voices to it. Every time there is a different person give that person a different vocal quality. Or get a joke book.

Read the jokes out loud giving everyone who speaks a different voice. **AND TAPE IT!**

### **DOING ACCENTS**

Regional accents – If you live in an area of the country that has a recognizable accent you need to be able to do that accent.

### **RESOURCES:**

Cartoons. The voices used in cartoons are usually over the top exaggerations of types, caricatures of the originals. They are perfect for doing humor

### **ACCENT TAPES.**

<http://www.dialectaccentspecialists.com/index.htm> David Allen Stern  
Stern is not the best at doing accents himself, but his method is very good.

<http://www.dialectresource.com/> Gillian Lane-Plescia

**Accents: A Manual For Actors** Author: Blumenfeld, comes with a CD.

### **EMOTIONAL**

The internal dialogue that is going on in your head that makes you say the things you say.

A person with the same physical attitude and accent can come up with countless readings of the same line. The line is the same the purpose is the same, but how you deliver the line is the emotional slant.

Any character you create regardless of how absurd or weird still as elements of you in that character. Let's face it, you created it and your own experiences are the building blocks. You may be influenced by films and by watching others but the emotional integrity comes from you.

### **HOMEWORK:**

How many times in a movie have you seen a character practicing how they plan to say something? "Hello, it's a pleasure to meet you." Play with this old gag and find the one reading that your character would do.

**Same words, but a different attitude, which generates a different emotional response.**

## **ADDITIONAL WORK**

**THE ALTER EGO.** Usually a short vignette where you would take on the persona of another person to make a point – maybe it's a bad point. Remember a character allows you to say something that you would otherwise never say.

## **CATCH PHRASES**

A single look or an expression that tells you who the character is. Here are some web links to sites with catch phrases, phrases used by a person or fictional character that have entered into the public usage and exemplify a notion, class, or quality.

[http://www.tvacres.com/catch\\_a.htm](http://www.tvacres.com/catch_a.htm)

<http://www.answers.com/topic/list-of-catch-phrases>

## **WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

Take an improv class. It's amazing how freeing it is. It will allow you to do silly things in a "safe" environment.

Watch Cartoons. Cartoon characters are over the top. They exaggerate speech and movement. Great for working on accents.

Listen to good speakers over and over again.

Watch movies that have a character type that you want to do. Imitate then separate.

## **WORK WITH OTHER PEOPLE**

## ***Creating a Character*** **Syllabus From An Acting Class**

### **Things we need to know:**

Age

Sex

History

Any disabilities

Their emotional status right now

Who are they talking to?

Where have they just come from?

Where are they going next?

What is their physical build, how does it affect their walk and how they carry themselves?

What is their voice like? (also think age here)

What makes them happy, sad, fearful, angry?

What is their favorite, color, food, car? Anything that you have a favorite of this person needs that also

## The Secret is Out

*Vinny Verelli is actually Jon Schwartz*



With his degree in Marketing Jon Schwartz decided there's no business like show business, and has been performing professionally for over 35 years!

He has toured prisons with a production of Samuel Becket's *Waiting For Godot* and has performed mime at Carnegie Hall. Jon also worked with Tennessee Williams in the world premiere production of *Tiger Tail* and worked on ships as cruise director and entertainer.

For the past 18 years Jon and his wife, former Broadway performer, Ginny King has been producing shows for the event business in Atlanta. Jon has written, produced and directed fourteen interactive mysteries that have been produced at over 350 corporate events.

Jon has played many characters in his career, but Vinny Verelli is the only character that has written a book, *Motivate This*.

In February of 2004 Jon, as Vinny Verelli, won the NSA Comedy Idol Competition in St. Louis and recently won the Toastmaster's State of Georgia Humor and Table Topics competition. In December Vinny was the closing keynote speaker at the 2007 CAPS (Canadian Association of Professional Speakers) convention in Halifax.