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**PROGRAM MATERIALS**  
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## **Litigation Series: Session 5 Making Them Feel It: Sense Memory for Powerful Courtroom Stories**

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[www.celesq.com](http://www.celesq.com)

**5301 North Federal Highway, Suite 150, Boca Raton, FL 33487**  
**Phone 561-241-1919**

# Making Them Feel It: Sense Memory for Powerful Courtroom Stories



Michael DeBlis III

# A Favorite Quote



"Life will break you. Nobody can protect you from that, and being alone won't either, for solitude will also break you with its yearning. You have to love. You have to feel. It is the reason you are here on earth. You have to risk your heart. You are here to be swallowed up. And when it happens that you are broken, or betrayed, or left, or hurt, or death brushes too near, let yourself sit by an apple tree and listen to the apples falling all around you in heaps, wasting their sweetness. Tell yourself that you tasted as many as you could." ~Louise Erdrich



# Our Ancestors & The FIVE SENSES

To be captivating storytellers, we need to harness the power of the five senses when telling our client's story

The five senses are taste, touch, smell, sight, and hearing. This is how we take in and perceive the world around us.

Today, our senses are not as honed as that of our earlier ancestors.

After all, they were hunters and gatherers who had to learn how to survive extreme outdoor conditions with carnivorous predators lurking everywhere.

One false step and they could be the main entrée for a four-legged predator.

# Our Ancestors And

## The Five Senses

This presentation will give you two practical exercises for reconnecting with your five senses, resensitizing them, and then rediscovering the beauty of the world around you through a narrower and more focused lens. This will help you to tell your client's story with rich detail, clarity of thought, and "cliff-hanging" suspense in order to win the minds and hearts of the jury.



They had to be able to listen so intently that they could hear the rustling of leaves or the breaking of a twig as the sign that a saber tooth tiger was nearby and evacuate the camp site. They had to have stealth hunting skills and clear vision as they were eying up an antelope with their bow and arrow. If they expended too much energy on an unsuccessful hunt, they may not have enough energy left to go back out and hunt again. They had to have a strong sense of smell in order to distinguish between poisonous plants that would mean an untimely death and edible plants that offered essential nutrients.

Nothing provides greater insight into how difficult survival was back in our ancestor's day than the survival shows that have massive viewership today. Look no further than, "Naked and Afraid."

# The Dulling of the Senses

## Over time

In modern society, we have roofs over our heads and we don't have to hunt for our food.

Our homes keep out predators and we have merely to press a button on a thermostat in order to enjoy a climate controlled environment. We don't need the same heightened level of awareness as our ancestors in order to survive.



When we're hungry, we walk to the refrigerator and take out cold cuts and a loaf of bread to make a sandwich, or we get into our cars and drive to the supermarket, or we simply call our favorite restaurant to order "take out."

Moving this forward to modern times, when we need the answer to a perplexing question, we take out our phones and ask Siri instead of going to the library and researching it.

Who can forget the "old" way of legal research that pre dated WestLaw complete with "pocket parts" and "slip opinions?"

# Needs that drive us every day

- 1 Physiological needs (survival) air, shelter, water, food, sleep
- 2 Safety & Security
- 3 Social needs (friendship, family) Inclusion, love, validation
- 4 Self-esteem, confidence, achievement
- 5 Self-actualization, creativity, problem solving, authenticity, spontaneity





# Needs that drive us every day

- The first four things are wired inside us. ~~Self~~actualization, on the other hand, involves training and risk.
- We're designed to survive, not to create. As a philosopher once said, "No man can be wise on an empty stomach." One might think that in these contemporary times when our survival needs are more than met, that creativity would flourish. But strangely, we still suppress our creativity. Why? Because we are more concerned with success and failure. Fears of success and failure have become increasingly dominant today.
- Our bodies hold these stored truths.

If you want to impress the jury or the audience, it will quickly turn into a self esteem or friendship issue.

But if you want to work creatively, your message will resonate deep and wide just like those of the greatest orators of our time.



# Lee Strasberg's Quest to Enhance the senses of his acting students



Recognizing how vital the five senses were to full and embodied acting, yet how dull they had become in the actors of his day, the famous acting instructor Lee Strasberg realized that some rehabilitation was needed. He created exercises to enhance the five senses of his students.

- Lee Strasberg is considered to be the “father of method acting in America.” From the 1920s until his death in 1982, Strasberg “revolutionized the art of acting by having a profound influence on performance in American theater and film.”
- From his base in New York, Strasberg trained several generations of theater and film notables, including Dustin Hoffman, Montgomery Clift, James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, Paul Newman, Al Pacino, Robert De Niro … the list goes on and on.



Lee Strasberg devised many exercises to get his students back in touch with their five senses, none more transformative than “sense memory.” It is what we might call working from the “inside-out” which is vital for actors and storytellers alike. It is also the subject of much controversy largely because it is misunderstood.

For example, popular thinking regarding method acting is that a character has to inhabit the role in order to play it (insert Daniel Day-Lewis story here). I don’t know what that method is, but Strasberg’s Method is arguably the opposite. He isn’t suggesting that to play a murderer you have to murder someone. Instead, he is asking:

“Have you ever killed a fly?” It isn’t about living as the character to understand them; it’s about understanding yourself in order to relate to the character. It’s almost like you are giving them permission to enter your life rather than the other way around.



# Strasberg's Method

## In the Courtroom



In the same way, we can't literally "crawl into the hide" of our clients and see the world from their perspective or crawl into their shoes in order to understand them. But we can get a deeper understanding of ourselves in order to relate to our clients more.

When it comes to the human experience, you are always going to be your best resource. Things don't always look the way we think they will. If you watch someone tell a sad story, they often do it with a smile, a calmness. And when we achieve a dream, we don't always jump for joy. We are fed stories on social media about what our emotional lives should look like—what a happy relationship looks like, what anxiety looks like, what wellness looks like. I recently saw a woman slide down a wall crying accompanied by an emotive song. The caption said that she had just been abandoned by her husband. But this reaction was completely contrived, mimicked from what she had presumably seen in films. Audience and readers know when they are being fed leftovers. Strasberg's Method helps us connect to what something is or would actually be like, helping us to create original and yet entirely relatable stories.

It is for this reason that I believe that Strasberg's Method can be a powerful tool for unlocking authenticity in the courtroom.



# The Passing of the Torch

I had the good fortune of being taught method acting by Lola Cohen, who is one of a handful of people who Lee personally trained and who is still teaching the work today. Not only is Lola a highly sought after instructor who has taught around the world, but she is the author of a best selling book on the method and was designated a U.S. State Department Fulbright Scholar.

Lola is an adjunct faculty member at Brooklyn Law School where she teaches an enormously popular class called, "Relaxation, Concentration, & Communication Skills for Attorneys" to 3Ls.





# The Man Behind Method Acting

# Method Acting Foundation



Sense memory trains an artist's mind to recall specific items or sensations in order to trigger emotional responses.



To be sure, it's not about remembering an emotion—that is too abstract. Instead, it's about combing through your memory to find something that will trigger the emotion.



# Method Acting Foundation



It is designed to sharpen an actor's concentration, sensitivity, and mental discipline. It also opens up the imagination in a deep and profound way. This has far-reaching consequences.

## For example

Suppose that one morning nearly twelve years ago, as I was drinking a cup of Columbia-brewed coffee from my favorite coffee shop, my partner of ten years walked into the room and confessed that she was cheating on me with my best friend. The memory of that distinct cup of coffee will likely elicit a stronger response than that I was feeling, "groggy." And this is the aim of Sense Memory.

TRUST  
\*the\*  
PROCESS

The hard part is trusting the process when you are only on the first few steps of your journey.

# Sense Memory

## In the Courtroom



I rely upon this training exclusively to tell my client's story in court, especially when I am describing how the event was perceived by my client himself.

For example, in a self-defense case, the unprovoked beating that the def. got from the victim or in a personal injury case, the injuries sustained by the client, the hospitalization, the trauma of the event, the disabilities that prevent him from doing what he used to be able to do effortlessly, the dependence upon others to assist him in performing daily activities that he once took for granted, and how life will never be the same.



# Method Acting Foundation



The exercise that I am going to introduce you to will undoubtedly test your patience, and make you think, “What the hell does this have to do with anything?” I know because I’ve been there and asked myself the same question. But to use an old military adage, “Slow is smooth, smooth is fast.” By slowing down and focusing on fundamentals, the rest will eventually flow.

You just have to do it 10,000 times. As Bruce Lee said, “I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once, but I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times.”



# Sense Memory



"The senses hold the key to life and experience. Sense memory exercises train the actor to utilize all five sense and to respond as fully and vividly to imaginary objects on stage as he's capable of doing with real objects in life.

A lack of basic sense memory work often stops the actor from developing further, and therefore being able to deal with the variety of problems which the actor faces and the theater presents to us. With these exercises, it's not the physical sequence of the actions that we're after. That can become external, which leads to imitation. The exercises test concentration and response, and serve as a foundation for the actor's work." Lola Cohen, editor, *The Lee Strasberg Notes* (New York Routledge, 2010), 15

"If Relaxation is the foundation upon which rests the 'house of method,' then Sense Memory is the structure of the house. Without it, the house is a transparent frame sitting on a solid foundation."

"Sense Memory for Actors, [Theatre Group](http://www.theatргroup.com/Method/actor_sense_memory.html) [Available Online: [http://www.theatргroup.com/Method/actor\\_sense\\_memory.html](http://www.theatргroup.com/Method/actor_sense_memory.html) ]  
(Accessed 15 June 2024)

First, what is a sense memory? It's an acting technique where an actor recalls the physical sensations surrounding an experience to trigger truthful responses. Examples include the feel of sunlight, the feel of water from a shower head hitting your skin, or a personal item that has deep meaning to you.



Essentially, the actor tunes into the unconscious flow of thoughts, impulses, and emotions so that he can plug into his inner truth more. There is nothing inherently emotional about this, but if emotions do come up, that's fine. Acknowledge it and move on.

In her book, *The Method Acting Exercises Handbook*, author Lola Cohen stresses the importance of focusing your awareness on one sense at a time. This creates a thorough, detailed, patient sensory exploration, which may not feel normal to you but is crucial during training. The act of slowing down has the added benefit of cultivating graceful movements which lend themselves to actually feeling and not imitating life.

Remember, as storytellers, we cannot be focused on the end result. That's like dwelling on nothing more than winning the case before you've even stood up to make your opening statement. It's like chasing a unicorn; you'll never catch it. Instead, you must train your mind to focus on the process and believe it will take you where you need to go.

I have found myself in "zen-like" states of flow during some of these exercises like I've never felt before. But when I tried to recreate that experience, I continuously failed because I was pushing for my brain to do something that it had to come to in its own time.

# Primers before beginning the first exercise



I am going to introduce you to the first exercise called the “Breakfast Drink Exercise.” It is a foundational exercises for all of the exercises that follow. Here are a few pointers before starting.

As Lola states, “Before practicing a sense memory exercise, always do the relaxation exercise first and continue to check it throughout the exercise. When the exercise isn’t working, don’t change to a different one in midstream. If you get bored, tired, or frustrated during the exercise go back to relaxation for a few minutes then return to the exercise and remember, always focus on working slowly and specifically. We’re after the sensor reality, not the action of the muscles.”



# STRASBERG RELAXATION

## CHAIR WORK



I firmly believe that all the great teachers that came before us have a mythology all their own. Some are revered, some not so much. Lee Strasberg went a different direction than Sanford Meisner did with his teaching. I think his relaxation work, done in a chair, is one of his most useful exercises for actors and lawyers alike.

Relaxation is one of the unique and specific contributions that Strasberg made. This exercise is the heart and foundation of the method.

Until you can sit with the flow of your own thought impulses and emotions. Until you can recognize and surrender to the primary dramas which come alive when you are taking a creative risk. Until you can sit within your own body truthfully, you cannot take an imaginative and creative journey to storytelling in the courtroom.

Relaxation along with sense memory has a simple framework of movement and sound. So it requires no previous training to start to work with these techniques.



Once you have stopped running from your own dramas, when you sit and accept the central components of your humanity, you have the means to start exploring rich, detailed, and universal themes that may at first appear hidden within your client's story.

We store emotions in our body. Very simply, physical and mental stress get stored in the muscles as muscular tension. And as attorneys, it can seem as though we are carrying the weight of the “world” on our shoulders. After all, our clients are in crisis and look to us as their “knight in shining armor” to help them seek justice. Here’s the problem with tension. We use tension to control. And control is not a place from which we can create.

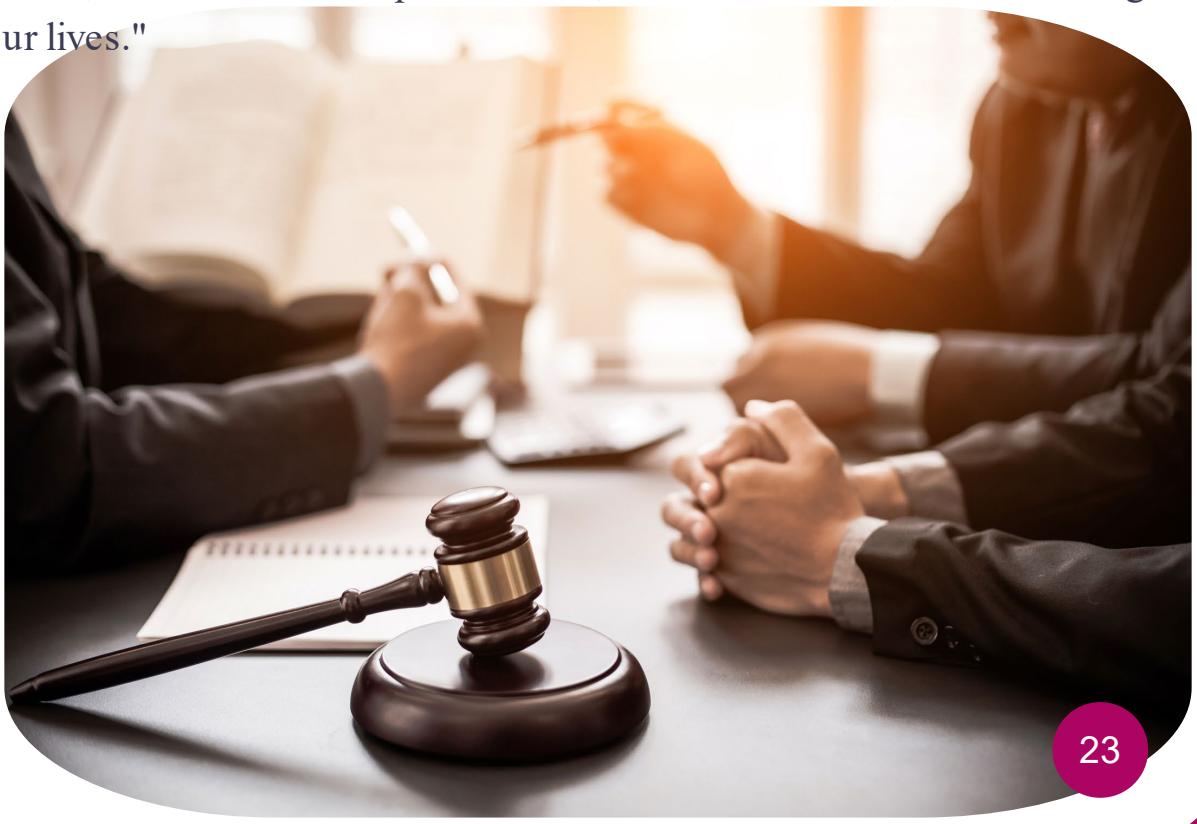


The following quote by bestselling author Prentiss Hemphill in her book,

**“What it takes to heal,”** explains how tension creeps into our bodies and how debilitating it can be if left untreated:



“Across our bodies, our muscles can tighten, pulling us in to protect or keeping us pushed out and defended against the world. These places can become anesthetized over time. Many clients I've worked with have had long-standing contractions in their chests, as I did, or in their jaws, their stomachs, or their shoulders, but their bodies no longer register the pain it takes to hold the contraction. The muscles and fascia around them adapt, and the body fossilizes this protective imprint. It's a remarkable example of how the body can learn and embody what it has practiced. If we don't feel the fear or threat has ended, we hold onto the posture and, hidden within us, it can sabotage our lives.”



Tension stifles feeling and creativity by interfering with the normal flow of the breath. It also murders the sound vibrations in your vocal cords from echoing off of the boney hollow regions inside your body. It may also put you in an anxious state where your mind begins to race, you stop listening, and you cannot focus long enough to give your full attention to another person.

One of the biggest challenges for actors and lawyers alike is how to release excessive muscle tension when all eyes are settled on you.



We hold muscular tension in our bodies in so many different areas. The jaw, mouth, neck, and lower back are the most common places where tension mounts up and capitalizes. So often we don't even realize that this tension exists.

Resonance is one of your most valuable speaking skills. It helps you amplify your voice and give it fullness and richness. Cultivating resonance encourages you to speak with your whole body. Like all good speaking skills, it helps you to engage yourself fully and communicate with your whole being. Relaxation is important because tension kills sound vibrations, like throwing a thick blanket over a cow bell.

Don't get me wrong. It is impossible to be completely devoid of tension. You'd be a jelly fish. However, the more tension you can release, the more you can tune in to what's alive inside you. Relaxation is just that: the flow of what's alive inside you. If you can relax, you may see things differently. You can be sad and relaxed just like you can be angry and relaxed.

These days we are resistant to listening to the depths of our being. But when you reach to the "actualizing aspect" of yourself without restricting what comes up, a treasure trove of thoughts and emotions are unlocked.



As your relationship to your thoughts and emotions grows and becomes less alien, you begin to take real authorship over your “instrument,” just like a professional musician takes authorship over the playing of a Stradivarius.



After all, it is very difficult to tell another person’s story if you cannot engage the narrative of your own story.

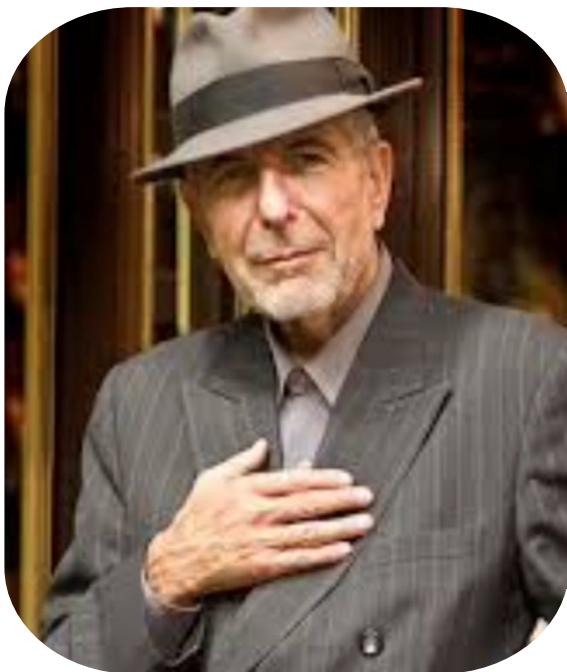
We relax to “shut up” and quiet the intellectual mind, where judgment lives. Only then can we find the narratives alive inside us. It’s not about filling it with emotion. Instead, it’s about living in it. You can always count on your body to produce natural emotions and impulses.

This is a gift to yourself. Indeed, we are seldom, if ever, given the space to be with our personal experiences.

This work has helped me to learn and to accept what is unique about me, even though it might be peculiar and idiosyncratic.

And as hard as this might be to imagine, it is those same flaws, imperfections, and idiosyncrasies that make each of us beautiful and are often what our family members find most endearing about us.





Canadian Songwriter,  
Leonard Cohen said it best:  
“Ring the bells that still can  
ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in.”

You've already seen many different shades of me from the old-fashioned expressions that I like to use (thanks to my grandparents) to my desire to be understood at the expense of the 80 other people on the call who got the point the first time I made it to my corky “geeking out” on all things Shakespeare to how quickly I can go from speaking about worldly things to pondering existential questions to the stories that I tell from the cases I've tried to demonstrate how this work can practically be applied.



Relaxation runs counter to everything we know about accomplishing a goal or something that has personal meaning to us in life. Look no further than slogans like, “No pain, no gain;” “Hard work pays off;” “Just do it;” “Keep your eye on the prize;” and “Winners never quit; quitters never win.” For example, we studied as hard as we could when we were in high school to earn high grades so that we could get into the college of our choice. Similarly, when we set our sight on law school, we “hunkered down” for weeks on end to prepare for the LSAT.



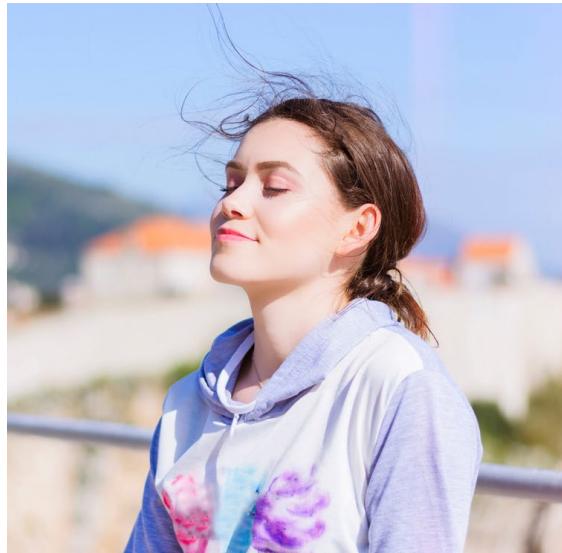
This theme sums up our life. We want something. So we put our heads down and pursue it relentlessly until we get it. For me, it was ice hockey when I was growing up. My life revolved around making the traveling hockey team every season so much so that ice hockey became a year-round sport. To this day, I can remember carrying my hockey bag through the terminal at Newark International Airport every July to board a “red-eye” flight to the Czech Republic.

From the time I was an adolescent, I'd spend one month there every summer training at an elite hockey camp to improve and to gain whatever edge I could over the eighty other kids who would be trying out for just seventeen spots in the fall.



Unlike most things in your life, relaxation is about surrendering and letting go. As the saying goes, there is “beauty in surrender.”

Make no doubt about it. The concentration part of this is both rigorous and demanding. But everything else is about giving up control, something that will feel very uncomfortable at first.



In many ways, this can be refreshing since our futures had been “mapped” out for us long before we were ever born by our parents. This might be the first time in your life when you can actually slow down and do something for yourself that you weren’t obligated to do but that you wanted to do and which had the added benefit of self-improvement.

Another important aspect of relaxation is that you are doing this for yourself and no one else. There is no prize or diploma waiting on the other side. In fact, even the best actors say that it’s a lifetime pursuit.





## CHAIR WORK

Sit in a chair with your arms to the side, feet on the floor, back supported by the chair. You should be comfortable.

Isolate one muscle group by putting your attention on it. I like to start with the right shoulder. Object of attention is on your right shoulder.

Stretch your shoulder by lifting your entire arm up. **ONLY STRETCH THE SHOULDER**, everything else should be relaxed in neutral... do not scrunch up your face or lift the other shoulder or shift in the chair while you stretch. Only stretch the one muscle group that is the focus of your attention.





After the stretch, drop the arm back down into the neutral “sitting in the chair” position.

Now with your attention, go back to that shoulder group of muscles and exercise your will to make them relax even further.... I use the phrase: “will it to release.”

Now go on to the left shoulder...

Then the right knee (lifting up the entire leg) or the right big toe...or the right thigh.... or the left....

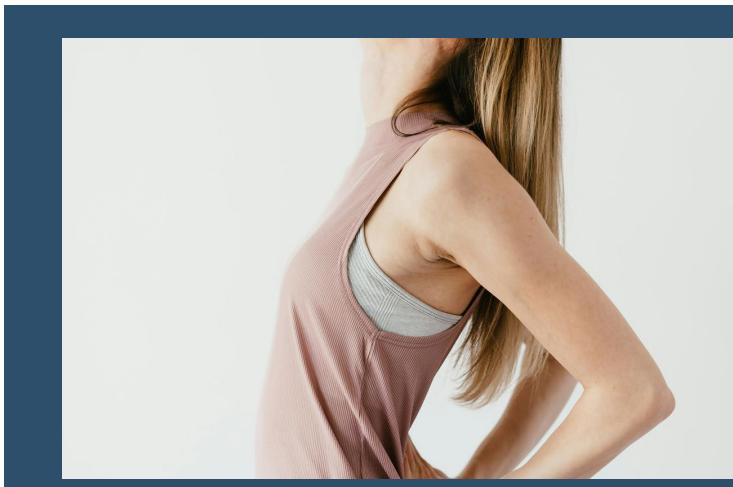
Explore muscle groups throughout the body with the same process:

Put your attention on that muscle

Stretch it physically

Drop it back to neutral

Will it to release.





Always work one at a time.... Not two shoulders, but one at a time.... the point is to relax the region and to learn to isolate control over the different tensions in your body... so you can begin to release your HABITUAL TENSIONS .... Should you choose to. If you are working on something like the jaw, which doesn't exist in a pair, work the entire jaw...

This is a stretch and release exercise. Don't get slow and meditative. You should either be moving or willing something to release.... Avoid sitting and thinking or feeling, but.....

If you do feel something emotional, lift your arms up at shoulder level like you are a scarecrow hanging .... Keep shoulders and elbows and wrists relaxed. Now breathe deep and release the feeling you are feeling on a low "huh" sound.... Don't "make" the sound but let it all out of you. Focus on the feeling of the emotion being released as the sound is released. I like to experience the sound and the feeling as the same thing.

If you do chair work for a while, you might get bored.... work through this... it is usually your resistance wanting you to stop before you start feeling your own vulnerability and emotions. Once you start releasing the muscles that are "holding" energy/tension, it is not unusual to trigger feeling. This is where you breathe into sound on a low resonated, "huh".





### Chair work and Breath

I like to inhale while I stretch the muscle and exhale as I will it to release.

This becomes really important when you are releasing emotional response into sound.

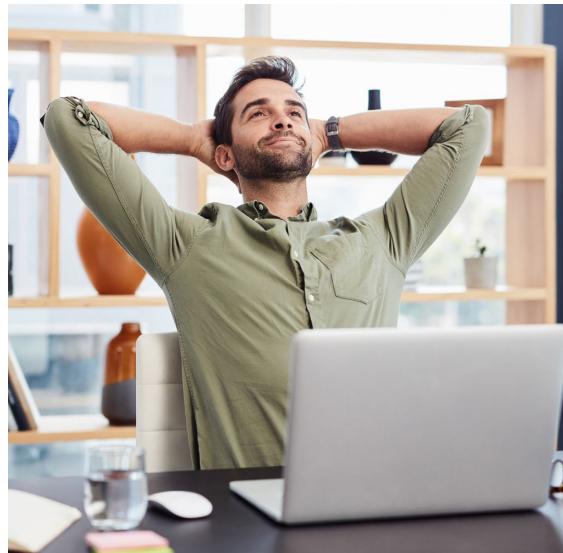
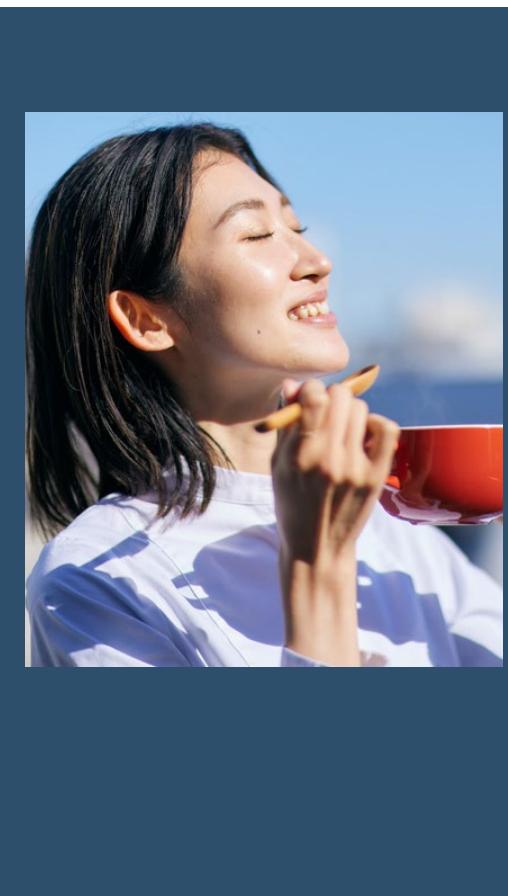
I also like that I am training myself to associate releasing emotional response on an exhale as I can use this when I release the text out of me.

Stay in and on breath support while you do chair work.

If relaxation was all that was necessary to be able to take the creative journey to telling the story, then sense memory would not be necessary. However, the primary craft of the unconscious is our ability to truly work from our thought impulses and emotions. It requires us to find a truthful connection that is more specifically in tune with the narrative alive in the story. To work truthfully, the storyteller must find approximate authentic truths of their own to start that journey.



It is not about finding similar events in our life. It is more specifically about unlocking the important themes and needs alive in the material, from objects or events which are rooted in our own personal history.



Personally, I've found that sense memory has an expansive power to bring alive complicated narratives by connecting with the fundamental truths that motivate any human being in their life.

Another important point is that sense memory is a simple and non-intellectual technique that when effectively practiced, can bring about a more organic and authentic connection in your work. In simple terms, the more your imagination comes alive truthfully, the more alive you become inside the story, and the more the story comes to life right before the jury's eyes!

# Primers before beginning the “Breakfast Drink” exercise



Your first drink of the day should have a taste, so I don't advocate using water. I myself use Earl Grey Tea.

Choosing a cup/mug: I went out and specifically bought an interesting mug for this exercise. It is engaging for touch and sight because it has hundreds of raised spots on the mug, giving me something to really focus on.

Always do it in the same room, with the same mug/cup and the same drink.

Start with 10 minutes and build up to 45, but remember repetition is more important than time.



# The "Breakfast Drink"



## Exercise

Ensuring that our bodies are stripped of tension, we sit on a comfortable chair with our cup, close our eyes, and focus. We feel the cup. We smell the liquid.

Focus on each of the senses individually as you drink it. Here are some suggestions for beginning your observations



# Sight



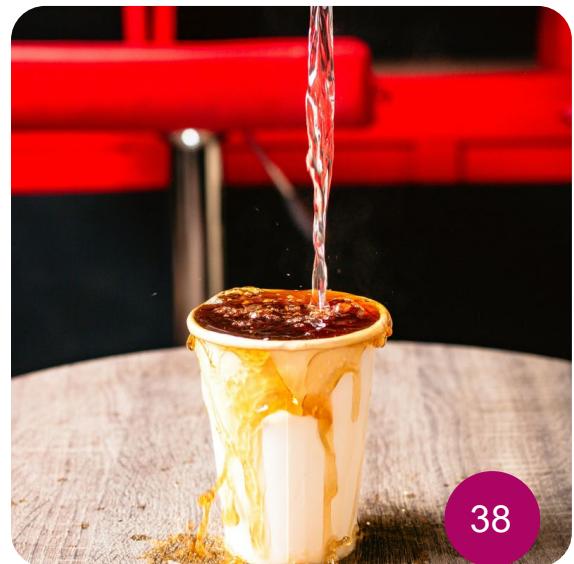
- What does your cup look like?
- What color is it?
- What color is the liquid?
- Is there steam coming from it?
- Are there bubbles? How many?
- Where in the cup?
- Is there anything settled at the bottom of your cup?
- Are there any imperfections in your cup?

One thing I found myself mesmerized by, was that every day the tea stains on my mug were different, and to me always looked like an abstract painting of a landscape. It was always different, even if I did everything the same. I'm sure there is a lesson or analogy there somewhere.



## Sound

- When you pick up or set down your cup, what sound does it make?
- What sound does the liquid make when swirled around in your cup?
- When you slurp or sip, how does the sound change?
- How do these sounds change as the amount of liquid in your cup goes down?
- When you swallow, follow the sound down to your stomach.
- When you swish your drink in your mouth what can you hear?



## Touch

- What is the temperature of the cup? Can you feel the heat or cold radiating from the cup?
- How heavy does the cup feel in your hand? How does this weight change over time?
- What does your cup feel like?
- Trace the shape with your fingers. Can you feel any imperfections in your cup?
- (For me, there is one dot that had an air bubble in it when it was baked so it has a sharp edge. I call that bubble my anchor point. It helps me visualize and place the rest of the mug in space.)
- What does it feel like when your lips first touch your cup?
- When you take a sip, how does it feel when it enters your mouth?
- How thick is the liquid?
- When you swish it around in your mouth, how does it feel?
- When you swallow, follow the liquid down to your stomach. Can you feel the heat or cold radiate through you?
- How does the temperature change during the time spent on the exercise?



## Taste

- Become intimately familiar with its flavors. What is it like at the beginning, middle, and end of each sip?
- Does the first sip and the last sip taste the same?



## Smell

- This one I have always had trouble with, because when I smell a familiar smell I am immediately transported back to an event/time/location. But to really sit down and try to think of/recreate a smell in my mind's eye seems to be damn near impossible. Unless, of course, it's as strong as that of a skunk, which seems to be the only thing that can stimulate my olfactory senses these days. I know you'll find blockages like this in your work because not everything works for everyone. My acting teacher always told us to strengthen our strengths, so if something works well for you, do that.



I read an incredible statistic that said that the human nose can detect 1 trillion odors.



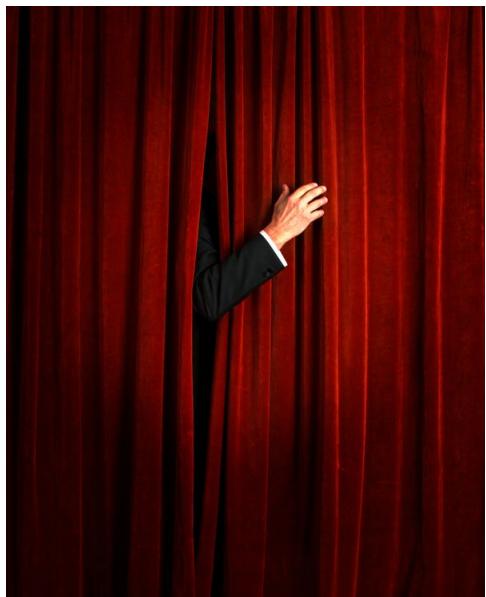
Now that you've really experienced your breakfast drink, it's time to shift from observing these sensations to trying to relive them, hence sense memory. Follow the whole process again, but this time with no cup or liquid. As Lola Cohen says, "Don't imitate what you did with the real object. Re-experience the sensations, not the physical imitation of remembered muscular behavior."

The challenge is to be present in the past. Our minds naturally change our memories over time, and so we have to fight against retrospect.



When you recall that cup of coffee, forget about everything that happened between the moment you were drinking it and the current one. Forget about the stressful journey you had traveling to work, or how upset you felt reading the news at lunch, otherwise you risk altering the memory of your coffee. Also, resist the temptation to judge your past self because he or she didn't have the information that you have now. You have to time travel. And remember the first rule of time travel? Don't change a thing.

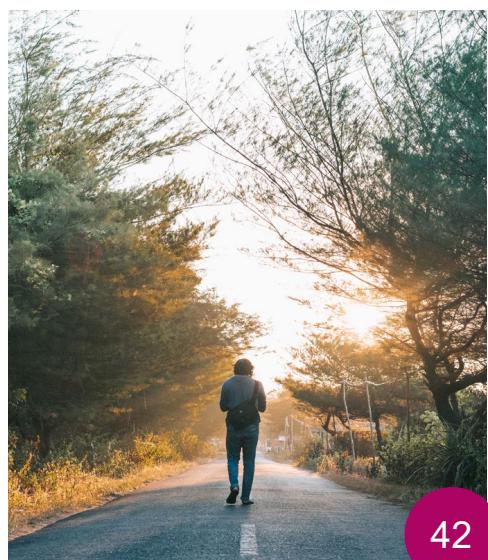
After doing this a few days, I was taught to add in a monologue. I did this monologue during both the actual drinking and also during the sense memory portion.



Remember when doing this without the actual liquid that each sip takes a long time. You may be tempted to race through, speed up, be doing something, but remember to take your time.

It may sound silly, but after doing this every morning, at some point I had a breakthrough where my lines flowed, and it felt so different, so natural. It was authentic.

If you do, be sure to heed the advice of Lola Cohen, “Don’t add words too soon to the exercises because we face the danger that the lines will become the major incentive, and that what the actor does will remain only illustrations of the lines. The lines should be part of the behavior of the character, not just an abstract set of words.”



# Unlocking Your Client's

Story Through the Five Senses



# Ernest Hemingway on Listening



“When people talk listen completely. Don’t be thinking what you’re going to say. Most people never listen. It’s a rare and profound gift to be fully present with someone, and yet, it’s something so few of us truly offer. Most people only ~~listen~~<sup>listen</sup>, their minds already formulating their next words, distracted by their own thoughts, or zoning out entirely.”



“Imagine how powerful it would be if we listened more deeply. If we made a commitment to being fully engaged, to hearing and understanding not just the words, but the emotions and intentions behind them.”

“Listening isn’t just about waiting for your turn to speak; it’s about absorbing what someone else is sharing and making them feel heard, valued, and understood. It’s about connecting on a level deeper than surface conversations, because when you truly listen, you open a door to empathy and genuine connection. And isn’t that what we’re all really longing for?”



## Ernest Hemingway on Observing

“Beyond listening, there is also the art of observing, of truly noticing the world around you. When you walk into a room, take a moment to soak in everything. Notice the details—the way the sunlight filters through the windows, the color of the walls, the expressions on people’s faces, the way someone is nervously tapping their foot or laughing with their eyes more than their mouth. Most of us rush through spaces, our minds preoccupied and our eyes barely registering what’s in front of us. But there’s magic in paying attention, in being mindful of the small details that make every moment unique.”

“Think of the room not just as a physical space, but as an experience. Every room has a mood, a feeling, an energy. It could be the coziness of a room filled with laughter, the tension of a space where a difficult conversation just took place, or the warmth of a place that holds beautiful memories.”

“The more we tune in to these subtle feelings, the more deeply we can understand our surroundings and the people in them. What gave you that feeling? Was it the way someone’s eyes lit up when they smiled? The scent of freshly brewed coffee that brought a sense of comfort? Or perhaps the distant echo of a song that stirred up a forgotten memory?”

## Ernest Hemingway on Observing and Emotional Awareness

“Being observant and emotionally aware in this way takes practice, but it also transforms the way you move through life. You become more sensitive, more attuned, more aware. You start to notice the way a friend’s voice softens when they’re talking about something they love, or the slight shift in someone’s tone when they’re hiding something. You begin to see and feel things that others miss entirely, and that awareness can lead to a richer, more connected experience of the world.”



“It’s a beautiful thing to be a person who listens with their heart, who observes deeply, and who feels fully. It means you’re not just drifting through life; you’re living it intentionally. You’re soaking in the fullness of each moment, aware of the beauty and complexity around you. It means you understand people better, because you’ve made the effort to see and hear them, to pick up on the nuances of their being. It means you can be the kind of person whose presence feels calming, because people know you’re truly there with them, not just waiting for your turn to talk or half-heartedly engaging.”



## Ernest Hemingway Closing Remarks

“So, when you’re in conversation, let go of the urge to plan your next statement. Take a breath, relax your mind, and give the person speaking your undivided attention. Let yourself be present, fully. When you walk into a room, slow down and really see it. Observe the details, feel the energy, notice the small things that make that moment unique. You’ll find that life becomes richer, fuller, and more meaningful when you learn to listen and observe completely. It’s not just about hearing words or seeing objects—it’s about feeling the fullness of everything around you. It’s about experiencing life, deeply and completely.”

# Benefits of Sense Memory

## for the lawyer



The Method will help breathe life into your writing by reminding you to “show” and not “tell.” How? By adding in sensory details.

There is an excellent episode of Buffy the Vampire Slayer when Buffy’s mother dies, and rather than us seeing Buffy fall apart, the camera focuses on the sensory details. A fly. Vomit on the carpet. Piercing sunlight. This is assisted by the directorial choice to use no music; to strip down the scene to what is happening in Buffy’s head in order to demonstrate that she isn’t processing her reality.

Our senses are powerful triggers. For example, smells conjure forgotten memories. People suffering with dementia can forget their own names but remember a melody. So, write down the details.



It's not revolutionary. Method acting is about working with our minds, not against them. Don't explain to the jury that your client is heartbroken, make them feel heartbroken for him.

Maya Angelou said: "people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."



If you are representing a client who was seriously injured in a personal injury action, Tell them what it felt like to have a broken leg with the bone sticking through the flesh. Tell them how excruciating the pain was. How John could not make it through the night without being heavily sedated. How he clenched his teeth so much that he grinded two teeth down down to the gums. Tell them how John was confined to a bed for two weeks with a solid cast extending up from his ankle to his genitals. How he couldn't walk for two weeks and how he had to use a bed pan to urinate and to defecate. Make the jury see it. Make the jury feel it. Make them understand. Make them care!



Using the senses as the way in, you will be able to gently lead your client through a re-creation of the event without invoking trauma and pain. The event might be one where your client used force against the victim in order to protect himself from an unprovoked attack. Or, it might be a car accident where your client suffered serious injuries and was rushed to the hospital in critical condition.

The idea is to slow the event down just like a film director would overcrank the camera in order to create timelessness for a moving scene. Achilling example of this is the tragic scene in “Manchester by the Sea” where one night after hosting a raucous party, an intoxicated Lee forgot to put the screen in front of the fireplace, leading to a house fire that killed his children.



You would then take the event, chop it into smaller “bite-sized” pieces, put it on a timeline, and take a “snapshot” in time of each piece. For each piece, you would ask the client what he was experiencing in that moment through his senses. In other words, “What did you smell?” “What did you see?”



In this way, the information gleaned will be richer, more vivid, and more detailed than simply asking the client, “What happened?” or “What was it like for you?” Don’t get me wrong. The latter is a beautiful question because it invokes an emotional response. Nonetheless, it is far too general and runs the risk of “skipping over” and/or “overlooking” those vital parts that are necessary for bringing the story to life in a way that will allow the jury to experience it viscerally. It will add heightened suspense, drama, and exquisite detail to the story.

This will make for an unforgettable story that the jury can relate to on a personal level.

# Improvisation



Improvisation is the next step. It is a central and important component of this technique. Most people would respond fruitfully to relaxation and sense memory alone.

However, having feelings does not make you a great storyteller. It simply confirms that you are a human being. The true craft and art of a storyteller are to translate feelings into action. To use your experiences to explore the story that lies at the heart of your client's case along with your unique interpretation of it. Therefore, as the storyteller, you must develop the intuitive and instinctual skills that are required within improvisation.



It is not a natural thing to publicly expose your private feelings. Therefore, improvisation challenges the natural instinct to internalize complex experiences.

Great storytelling is sustained with some important and great abilities. Greatest of all is the ability to be private in public. Not to be overwhelmed by public examination when you work creatively and at times sensitively within the story. It is this understandable fear of public examination that hinders many lawyers' work. It explains the common phenomenon of being extremely creative in our own private spaces such as our home, but when we walk into the courtroom and stand in front of the jury, everything clams up. "How come I could not do in the courtroom in front of the jury what I was able to do while rehearsing at home?"

Improvisation will train you to work in the most demanding of environments – the courtroom – and still be true to the sensitivities required to bring your client's story to life. If this ability is not truly developed, you will only be working from a fraction of what you are capable of.



That is why traditional training falls woefully short. It works with the concept of performance, which is a "presentation" of something. Strasberg's central focus was to train the storyteller to reveal the character from moment to moment organically rather than to "perform" them. Therefore, improvisation gives you the means to explore the story far more creatively.



# Voice Training



I cannot overstate the importance of voice training. Voice training is paramount in order to keep your voice full, healthy, and vibrant.

As a performer who is used to doing ten shows a week, I can honestly say that the demands placed on my voice during a trial far exceed those I've had to grapple with as a performer. During trial, it's not unusual for a lawyer to be up on their feet for five or six hours a day, five days a week, cross-examining witnesses and arguing evidential issues. Your voice needs to be ready to take on the demanding nature of the courtroom. Otherwise, it will not be there when you need it the most.



Also, because the sound of your voice conveys more meaning than the words themselves, your voice needs to support the content of your words and not undermine it. After all, we are storytellers and not mimes.



The biggest travesty in all this is that few, if any, lawyers have (and ever will) take a voice class.

Yet, for actors, voice work is so vital that even the best actors in the industry today continue to work on their voices by regularly taking voice classes.



# Practical Advice



Just as not everybody accepts you for who you are, your story may not resonate with all of the jurors. Even those actors who moved earth and heaven and will go down in the annals of history as the greatest of all time have been subject to scathing criticism. But you will reach some, they will reach you, you will both be understood, you will both be seen.

Careless about what others think. After all, it is out of your control and the reasons for it might have nothing to do with you in the first place. Instead, it might come from jealousy or insecurity or hurt. “Hurt people hurt people.” Therefore, accept it and move on.





## ● Sense Memory in Action ①

It's not about how real you are in front of the jury. It's about how human you are. The jury must feel the human being. Matthew McConaughey embodies this ideal in "A Time to Kill."



# Note About Psychotherapy

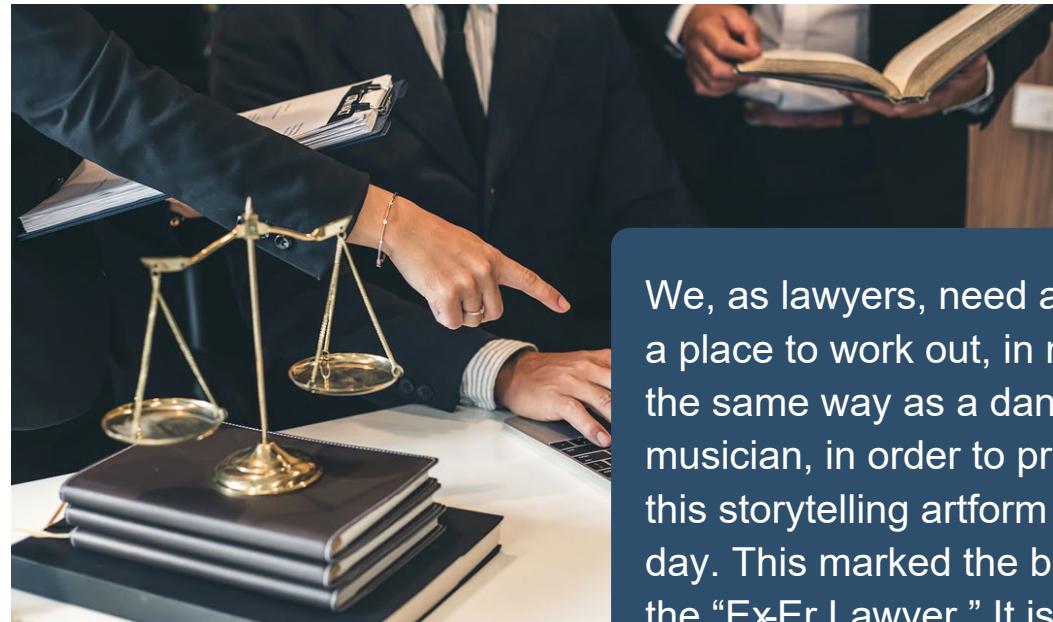
Some trial lawyer training programs make use of psychotherapy to unlock the client's story. While the courtroom is certainly an emotional place, I don't endorse its use primarily because I am not a licensed therapist and my job, as the attorney, is to obtain a favorable verdict for my client. In this way, the focus is on the client and not on me healing a personal "wound" from the past. In the same way, it is not my place to assist the client in identifying and changing troubling thought patterns and/or dangerous behaviors-to wit, what psychotherapists do.



As my instructors have said time and time again, while acting might be therapeutic, it is NOT therapy. However, sense memory work can release a lot of stuff that has been stored up over the years. To the extent that a client or the attorney himself might be in need of professional counseling, I would of course encourage them to seek it.



# Ex-Er Lawyer



We, as lawyers, need a “gym, a place to work out, in much the same way as a dancer or musician, in order to practice this storytelling artform every day. This marked the birth of the “Ex-Er Lawyer.” It is my signature class for lawyers.

“Ex-er” stands for Exercise. This class is a workout that keeps you extremely fit on every level as a lawyer, enabling you to deal with the strenuous demands of litigation.

The concept of EX-ER Actor is predicated upon the age-old adage, “practice makes perfect.” The class is structured on three basic elements: 1) Awareness, 2) Emotional Flexibility, and 3) Combination of Imagination and Skills through storytelling. You don't need to prepare anything. However, you do need to wear clothes that you can move around and sweat in.





This class is first and foremost about opening yourself up. Storytelling is an art and art is about “self-expression.” However, if the self isn’t there, how can you express?

The first pillar is “awareness,” not in a psychological sense of figuring yourself out, but instead in a sense of connecting to whatever is going on inside you and accepting who you are. As trial attorneys, it is our responsibility to our client to utilize our own humanity and pour it into the mold of the story that we are telling the jury.

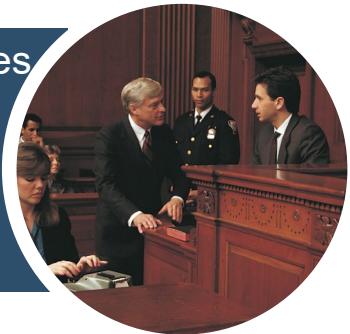


Inherent in this is the idea that you accept all of who you are and pour that into the life of the story. It's not about judging or figuring yourself out. Instead, it is about surrendering to the depth of where you are now and allowing you to be you. For this, you must tell yourself the whole truth. You are the only person you have to speak the truth to. This is the key to opening up your heart. And once you allow yourself to exist, you can channel all of your humanity into telling a rich and multi-layered story that will leave an unforgettable impression on the jury.



Alot of time, people don't get what this means. If I allow myself to be who I am, then my creativity and my talent have a free place to thrive in the moment-to-moment life of the story. If I can't accept who I am, then I don't have a reference point for how to pour myself into the life that's on the page.

If I don't have that reference point, it makes it difficult to refrain from manufacturing or controlling moments in the life of the story based on preconceived ideas of how it "should be."



For example, if I'm feeling a sense of exasperation, outrage, or indignation at an injustice that has reared its ugly head in the trial, but I tell myself that I must suppress my true feelings and not give over to them, then I am cutting off my emotional life because what I am really saying to myself is that I must conduct myself in accordance with a certain ideal. And the minute I say that, it cuts off any level of freedom or creativity.

Awareness is the opening salvo of the class. And it is very much a drill. It opens our Ex-Er Lawyer. What we forget about awareness is that if we keep it stuck in our heads, we cannot transform what we are aware of. Only through speaking it out loud do we get to give our awareness life. In our heads, we protect. We don't want to feel sad, we don't want to feel angry, and we don't want to hurt. Therefore, we have found clever and ingenious ways of changing what we are feeling in the blink of an eye to make us feel better.

Not voicing your thoughts is a recipe for disaster. Your head is a bad neighborhood. It is South Central Chicago circa 1986 complete with gangs and drugs. But giving it voice allows us to change it in a heartbeat. And when we change it, we go from denial to acceptance. The danger with denial is that when we deny what is going on inside us, what we are really saying is that what we are we cannot give to the story. Thus, the most human part of ourselves is left out of our storytelling. And because storytelling is the art of self-expression, an element of ourselves is lost in the process.



There is something profound about hearing other people's awareness because it allows you to feel a freedom and an acceptance just for yourself. And it also allows you to go, "Yes, this is true about me. And I'm not alone in feeling this way. Other people feel this way too. It is universal." Our stories must have a universal impact on the jury. By universal, every story across all cultures share one thing in common -- they embody one or more of the six emotions: love, hate, joy, sadness, power, and fear. These universal truths are the very essence of what it means to be human.





Sometimes we forget that in order for our stories to be memorable, they must leave a universal impact on the jury. At the same time, we must acknowledge that no two people seeing the same play or movie will leave with the same idea or impression of it, much less a character or a scene from within it. And this is a good thing, because the best movies and plays are thought-provoking and generate lively discussions and debates that are healthy for us as humans to have. The same is true with juries.

But here's the thing about the universal. If the personal isn't there, then the universal won't be there either. As James Joyce once said, "the specific is in the universal." Expanding on this idea, I would go even further to say that the personal is in the universal. Indeed, if you've made the story personal to you, you're allowing each juror to connect to it in their own way because they're seeing something or getting a transmission of something for which you have a deep emotional investment.





In what better way could we celebrate our universal humanity than by starting the class out with you? You being you. To not put any pressure on yourself that you have to be something or someone else; to not put any demand on yourself; to not feel forced into a place.

Awareness leads to acceptance. And through that acceptance, you'll lift who you are into your storytelling. By owning who you are and not denying anything, you give space for "you" to exist. And the moment that space is there, your creativity and your talent starts to shine through.

The minute you feel that level of freedom, you automatically get inspired in some way because you start saying to yourself, "Yes. I have a place inside these words, instead of these words have to be said like this." The latter is like being imprisoned by the words. The minute you put that restriction on yourself, you shrink who you are, you become results-oriented and therefore, limited with your choices.



The storyteller's best friend is choices, especially when there is an element of you built in them. Like the saying goes, "variety is the spice of life." Accelerate into choice!

As the storyteller of your client's story, you have the freedom to make choices. But if you leave yourself out, then those choices become contrived, two-dimensional, and not human.



Another thing to recognize is that it is hard for an audience to follow a "Johnnie one-note" delivery of a story. Transitions are essential. That's why the "chapter method" is so effective.

A natural byproduct of this is that you begin to work in harmony and partnership with your written words. Instead of being desperate to get it "right," you "engage with the page."

Finally, you cannot leave your body out of the awareness stage. After all, your body is the frontline of expression. When you commit to releasing whatever is going on inside you and speaking it out loud, your body will start to absorb it. And when that happens, your body will align with your emotional life such that the two will be in harmony with one another.



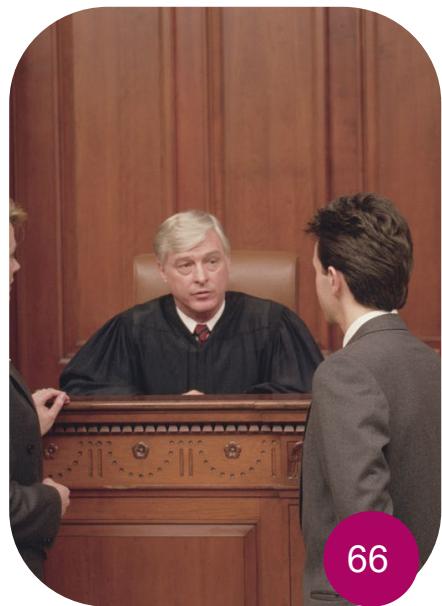


Give yourself permission to be a hot mess. Even Superman carried baggage in the form of serious abandonment issues when it came to his father. Take the risk to connect to who you are!

After you do an awareness, the next step is to get out of your head and into your body. This is the physical manifestation of storytelling. The group gathers around in a circle. The instructor plays music and calls on each participant one-by-one to enter the center of the circle and to move with the music.

Why music? There is a freedom with music. Indeed, music frees us up. There's a space when we listen to a song that allows us to not think but be. In other words, we lose ourselves in it. And that's what I am prioritizing.

Sometimes we forget, as storytellers, that our bodies are the front-line of expression and that they communicate more information to an audience than the words themselves. We are three-dimensional beings. As such, we seek real human behavior – just as if our bodies have been placed in the circumstances of the story reacting second-by-second to the near fatal car accident, as experienced by our client, that left him disabled.



This requires us to connect relationship to a physical representation. For example, there's a certain way a cop, a soldier, a doctor, and a lawyer physically show up. Thus, at this stage, we prioritize our bodies over our minds. As trial lawyers, we are artistic athletes – acrobats of the mind, body, and heart.

A trial is nothing short of grueling. You could be on your feet for up to six hours a day, five days a week cross-examining witness after witness and responding to objections and evidential issues that were not even on your radar screen before you woke up this morning. It is exhausting. Thus, you need to constantly regenerate energy to maintain peak performance and to stay at the top of your game. Working out and staying healthy are essential.

You want to allow this music to give you a freedom and a connection to getting out of your head and into your body. Those on the outside looking in are responsible for one thing and one thing only – to connect to the “character” who they see this person as. Step one is to take in the energy of the person who is in the middle. And step two is to then take it into your body and make it your own.



This trains you to see and trust your eyes that when you read something in your opening that was nothing more than the seed of a nascent thought, that you instinctually get a “hit” on it that allows you to develop that thought into a powerful point. In other words, out of what was seemingly nothing comes a bright idea. In a similar way, the more that you stay on the outside of the circle and invest in the character who you see in the center, the more you will learn to trust your creative instincts when you get to written material.

When people get into the center, you see all different emotions spring out of them from rage to anger to fear to lust to laughter to sadness to playfulness. If you stay committed while on the outside, let go of your ego, and drop into that “character” who you see in the center, parts of you that you never knew existed will emerge.



Broadly speaking, the more that you invest on the outside of the circle, the deeper you will trust your creative interpretation when you turn to your opening or closing. In this way, you begin to see something that is unique to you and you alone – to your eyes and to your creativity.



And this is why I think this is the “gateway class.” One person is experiencing something while everyone else in the group is experiencing something else each of which are valid and fundamental to their individual craft. In this exercise, there is an active freedom of interpretation like no other I have ever seen.

Of course, when it’s your turn to enter the circle, you may get nervous, hearing your inner critic judging yourself, and say to yourself, “I can’t dance and everyone is looking at me. I’m going to look stupid.” But the minute you start letting go, you start to feel this sense of freedom with your creativity, and you’ll feel your ego melt away. And the minute you start to feel your ego melt away, you’ll be able to inhabit this life that only your brain, your creativity, your heart, and your body are taking in and absorbing.



And what you start to realize is there's this sense when it comes to storytelling of being a little out of control. You don't want to grip and strangle the characters in your story. Instead, you want the character's life to be embodied and connected to you without you wrestling with it. It's a fine line to walk – how to let go and be “out of control” but in control at the same time.



Again, the more you invest in the moment-to-moment existence of what you see and the more freedom you give your body to fully express itself without any restrictions, the easier that it will be to get to this space.

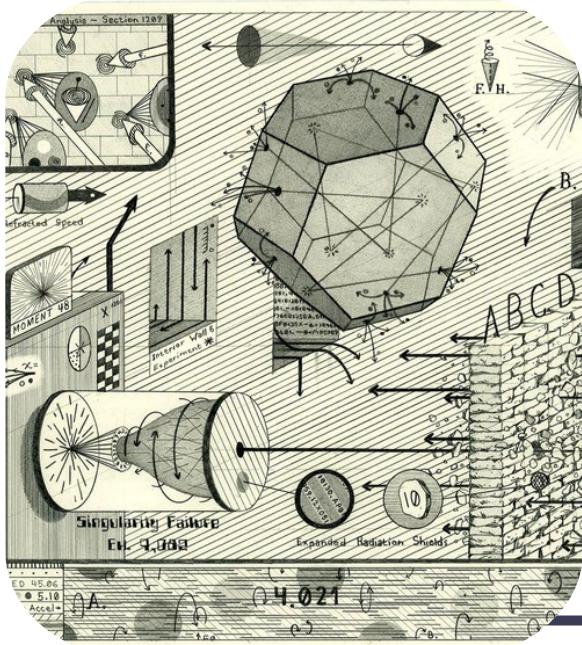
You'll notice that we haven't spoken about text in the sense of your opening or closing yet. There's a method behind the madness. It's not that I don't care about the words. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Instead, I wanted an exercise that would allow you to focus on you first, before you got caught up in the words of your speech.



Why? Because the minute you turn to your opening or your closing, you start to think, "I've got to memorize this bad boy. I better know it cold. I better say it the 'right' way. I better do this and I better do that."

Once you start to put those results on the written material, you disappear. And you disappear real quick because it's no longer about your creative interpretation. Instead, it's about what you "should" and "have" to do.





And the minute you “should,” you’re “shoulding” all over yourself literally. And it stinks because you’re sitting there saying, “Oh yeah. Well I’m supposed to say this word in this way” and any level of creativity goes out the door because now you’re doing engineering schematics.

Now you're trying to attune your voice and your body to what you think is right and art (storytelling) is not about right or wrong. There is no right or wrong in art. We forget that art is about our own interpretation of it. It is not about, “This is the way it has to be.”

If anyone said that about Hamlet, Hamlet would be the most boring examination of a spoiled little brat we had ever seen because everybody would be doing it the same way.



There's no way to free ourselves of judgment. But this work goes a long way towards accepting it and seeing how it can participate in the life that you are creating as a storyteller. And when it comes to storytelling, I think that accepting the judgment within ourselves is more useful than denying or getting stuck in it since we, as humans, are judging beings. We judge everything and everyone from perfect strangers, to friends, to clients, to our spouse, and to our family. No one in our life is immune, including ourselves.

And being a lawyer adds a whole new layer of judgement since examining documents with a suspicious and meticulous eye towards locating inaccuracies, mistakes, oversights, inconsistencies, falsehoods, disproportionate risk, and unfair bargaining practices are implicit in the job description, which inevitably puts us in a judgmental state of mind.



Because we start from a point of asking, “What’s wrong with this?” “What could go wrong with this?” “What are they trying to get over on my client?” our perspective on the proverbial cup of water will always be skewed in favor of it being “half empty” instead of “half full.” Believing nothing to be as black and white as it seems, we are perpetually skeptical. It’s as if we are seeing shadows in the dark.



Applying this to the courtroom, to attempt to eliminate judgment altogether would be to bypass an essential element of a witness's character, one that could establish a motive or be susceptible to impeachment on cross-examination.

The more that you accept the judgment, the less the ego feels like it's in control. The more that you fight the judgment or try to deny that it's actually happening, the more the ego starts to take control.



When rehearsing their opening or closing, most attorneys I dare say would just sit down at a desk feeling like they're doing homework, no different than when they were in law school. But we're not getting ready to sit for an exam. We're getting ready to deliver a speech where your presence is required.



If you take a second and speak out what you are aware of before you start to read your opening or closing, you're at least allowing "you" to show-up and allowing your instinct to react to the different shifts and changes that exist in the text itself.

In other words, if I say, “I’m aware that I’m tired,” “I’m aware that I’m afraid,” “I’m aware that I’m anxious,” then I start to allow “me” to be present so that when I read my text out loud, I’m going to make “discoveries.” If I don’t do this, then I run the risk that I will be looking for something – i.e., conflict, relationship etc. -- and that I will miss important details.

We must not forget that our opening and closing are not a passage from a history book, a precious poem, or instructions to set up a home entertainment system. They are speeches or information delivery systems.

Once you get aware, your imagination starts to create and visualize the material. It’s important that you stay in a vision of the material because that visualization can allow you to see the details of the story with incredible clarity.

If the car accident occurred at 7 AM on a winter morning in northern Michigan, that’s very different than if the accident occurred at 7 AM on a winter morning in New Jersey. How can you make the jury feel on a visceral level the severe weather conditions when they were not physically there to witness the accident and everyone is now seated inside a climate-controlled courtroom?



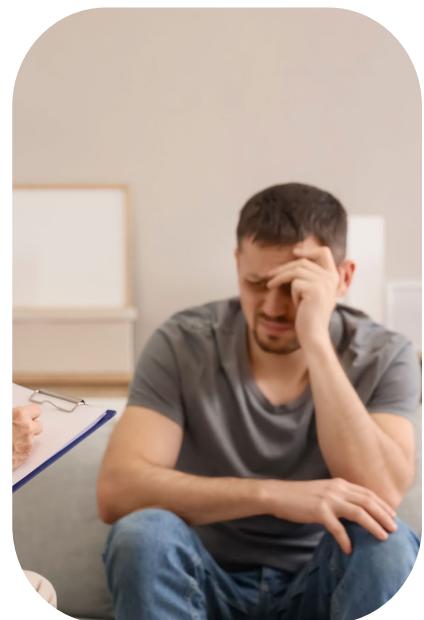


Those details always come from your imagination and that comes from you being specific with what's happening in the story. But in order for it to be that specific, you cannot be looking for just one or two things. Instead, you must go through your opening with a fine toothcomb like a forensic detective at a crime scene so that you don't overlook a transitional element or any other key part of the story. After all, missing a key part of the story could jeopardize its credibility to the jury and weaken your overall case.

A complete and full story with real depth and specificity is the most important thing.

I've represented many clients who were drug addicts and charged with possessory offenses. In doing so, I always ask what led them into their addiction in the first place. What things were they dealing with? Addiction is not just about I woke up one morning, tried cocaine, and have been addicted to it for the last ten years.

Instead, it's an inertia, a force that a person goes back to as a way of taking care of something else – not just compensating for something else but feeling something. The more that I, as the attorney, can start to get clear on how my client got to that place, the more that I can connect to it through myself.



I don't know what it is like to do crack, but I do know what that compulsion is like in terms of taking care of something very profound inside of me. The more that I accept who I am, the more that I can bridge that gap. The less that I accept that, the less that I will be able to relate to my client's plight and the more removed I will be from exposing the "addict" within myself and how the emotions behind addiction are universal truths that we all, as human beings, have experienced in some form or another. This humanizes the client in a way unlike any other.

Samuel Jackson did it stunningly in "Jungle Fever." I understood why he used drugs. That connection to his father and the feeling that he had disappointed him in such a profound way led him to become a "junkie."

The best performances on addiction always answer the question, "Why?" You've got to ask "why" and once you do, you have to remind yourself that that "why" is going to connect to some deeper part of you that might be shameful.



But if you're not willing to accept that part of you or if you don't think that exists inside you, then you're in real trouble because then you're just playing the drums. You're not crawling into the client's hide, as Gerry Spence coins it. Therefore, the jury won't come to an understanding in the sense of, "I would not have done what John did. But I can understand why he did it."



The second pillar is emotional flexibility, where the class is led through a sense memory exercise, such as the “breakfast drink exercise.”

Here, your only responsibility is to listen and to be guided.

The third pillar is to combine imagination and skills through storytelling. Here, each participant selects a piece of poetry, a short excerpt from a story, a folktale, a nursery rhyme or something of the like – whatever resonates with you – and memorizes the first ten lines and presents it to the class.



By “memorize,” I am not looking for you to be “word perfect.” More important than the words themselves is the life that you bring to the story. For this reason, you are welcome to “ad lib” so long as the last sentence is committed to memory.



More important than memorizing the text cold is your connection to it. For example, can you live inside the story as if you are a “fly on the wall” soaking up minute details and allowing your imagination free reign to interpret what you see and then from that place, share it with the group in an unabashed expression of self?

This is the essence of what I mean when I say, “You must bring yourself to the words.” And this is what wins trials.

To do so, you must first obtain a specific understanding of the story, itself. This is pick and shovel work as you must dig out whatever information is there. Second, you are encouraged to develop a personal connection with the people, places, and things inside this fictional world in such a way that it becomes internalized and engrained in your system. In this way, you will begin to develop strong opinions and points of view about different characters and elements of the story that will magically seep out during the telling of it leaving a unique and indelible interpretation that is yours and yours alone.





# Closing Remarks

Leonard Cohen said about art: “For me, art is the evidence of a life, and not the life itself. It’s the ashes of something that has burned very well...and sometimes we confuse ourselves, and we try to create the ashes, instead of the fire.” Life and art are intrinsically linked, there is no avoiding it. As the expression goes, “Art imitates life.” Irrespective of what story you are telling, you are always dealing with the human condition.

It’s about creating life from the ash of the fires and asking yourself what something is really like—or in the case of writing—what it’s like in words.

