

Off to a Quick Start

At last we invite a protagonist to the stage. I sum up what I suppose his interest to be, and ask whether that's what he wants to work on. Here is a preliminary contract, open to revision later, with mutual consent between director and protagonist. Readily do-able contracts focus on relationships past, present and future, and with persons, living or dead.

When the protagonist speaks of feelings as if they were entities in their own right ("I have this anger in me...etc."), the director seeks to place them in their interpersonal context. Or if the protagonist focuses on some troublesome personal trait, he calls for examples of its occurrence.

The director wants to get the protagonist into action as soon as possible rather than risk having the protagonist talk away his warmup. Often the protagonist alludes to a situation which exemplifies what he's saying, at which the alert director says: **Let's see that.** But don't hang back waiting for that to happen. Take the initiative with: **What brought this issue up at this particular time? Let's see that.** Next come the context questions:

When is this? Today, yesterday, last week, last month? Morning, afternoon, evening or night?

Where is this? Near here, far away, outdoors, indoors?

Who's there with you? And who is he/she? Parent, child, friend, lover...etc.

Who in the group may represent he, she or it?

The possible auxiliary may hesitate at having no previous knowledge of the part to be played, so the director reassures them with **I'm going to interview the protagonist as if he were X.** Then I say to the protagonist,

Take a posture like X. How does X sit? Show us.

What is your name? I'm pleased to meet you.

Help us to see you. How old are you?

Are you tall or short? Fat or thin? What do you do?

How do you have fun?

What is your connection with the protagonist?

Do you know he/she is here at the hospital?

When I'm interviewing an absent family member (though the protagonist in the role reversed position), I'll learn whether this is a natural parent or child, a step-parent or child, or a foster-parent or child...etc. I may ask about connections with others in the family network, but I avoid asking for details about the relationship with the protagonist, for I intend getting at that in action. **I do not ask psychological questions, but focus on concrete, descriptive matters.** I am likely to ask whether all participants in a scene are present there from the beginning. Especially when the protagonist arrives from elsewhere, I back up the scene a bit to get his soliloquy on the way. With participants on stage I ask **Who speaks first?** If it's not the protagonist, I call for a **role reversal** with that person, to supply the necessary lines. And then I reverse back so that the protagonist may reply.

When a substitute auxiliary replies instead, I wait till I have the protagonist back into his own role before I reverse him once more into the second auxiliary's role to supply those lines. That calls for a lot of moving around, so I avoid having too many people on stage at the beginning, suggesting to the protagonist that he eliminate those who are not essential to the scene, or represent them with empty chairs for the time being. We should not let the scene get too complicated at the outset for the beginning protagonist. He has all those helpful psychodrama conventions to learn before he can fully function in role.

The meaning of the opening scene comes from the story of the protagonist's participation in previous scenes of his life. But which ones? We lack the psychoanalysts' leisure to explore them all. But fortunately the protagonist has a way of referring back to other instances of what he's up against. I wouldn't jump at the first clue he gives me, but remember it as I listen for a better or clearer one.

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