

GO TO LA or STAY: Busting the LA MYTH

**Count your Texas Blessings!
To stay or LA?
Dreaming of LA? WAIT!
Busting the Running to LA Myth**

By Lisa Dalton

It is such a delight for me to share this perspective for the O, so fortunate actors in Texas!

Many of you are bemoaning your lives here, feeling a bit victimized by the apparent limits of opportunity here in your home state. Before you go running of to the Mecca of LaLa Land, perhaps you might plum the depths of opportunity in your backyard.

Having lived in NY for 12 years, Los Angeles for 18, and Texas for 4, I am excited to discover how many opportunities there are in this region for work, training, and resume development. When those opportunities are combined with quality of life conditions, those of you pining for Hollywood might arrive at a very different conclusion. Bottom line, where will you be most satisfied?

To know for sure where it is best for you to be, an honest look inward can help. Asking your self some very specific questions, not unlike those we ask about our characters, is a great way to start. Be brutally honest with your answers.

What do you want from your life? 100% of your income from an Acting Career, a Spouse/Family, Security of Income, Great Weather, Breathable Air, A house, fame, good health, stability?

In Stanislavsky, ôs terms: What is your overall objective? And what are your smaller objectives for the beats of your life: relationships, career, health, achievement, financial, spiritual, hobbies and interests? What is the order of importance of this list? Another way to ask it, crude though it maybe, is, îwhen lying on your death bed, who/how do you want to have been in this life?

I ask these questions because I coached hundreds of actors who were wonderfully talented. A few shot to the top with their great type and the skill to back it up. Some of them did all that a dedicated actor can to move ahead and did, after many years of struggle. Those who didn't achieve the apparent goal of , not having to work any other job, often thought they were failing at achieving their objectives and were living in lonely frustration with plummeting self-esteem, terrified of leaving the city and being stamped an eternal failure. They over partied; they were constantly paying off debts, always having broken hearts, moving from place to place, unable to focus on their careers and some were deeply homesick, missing their loved ones. I believe many of those actors were actually succeeding at what was a higher priority for them selves, unconscious though it may have been.

If you are aware of what is truly most important to you, you might be happier, healthier and more successful. You might redefine success to include the life you are currently living.

SO to bust a few myths about Los Angeles as a better place for actors to live:

- 99% of the people who move there to act find themselves working in some kind of another job, to pay the bills, just like here.
- Those bills are much higher there than here.
- Most of those actors left their families and best friends behind, and many cannot afford to visit them.

Finding an apartment is much more costly (\$2000/mo. for a two bedroom apt. in Hollywood) and selecting a reliable honest roommate is a huge challenge. The competition for , support, jobs is almost as intense as for acting jobs. Most of those support jobs have no developing future. A big Catch 22 exists in needing to be available to go on auditions 3-5 days a week, leaving you having to work nights, making you unavailable to keep cultivating your craft on stage. So you will need to take daytime acting classes at \$200-400 a month. Count your 2 outside rehearsals weekly for about 10 hours of energy and travel.

The idea of driving to Austin, Oklahoma or Shreveport may seem exhausting and costly, but when you go, your odds of getting cast as so much higher than an actor in Los Angeles. In fact, your odds of getting an audition in a big film are fantastic compared to LA even if there are 5 films a year in the area. Often, the size of the role is larger than , ôstarter, ô roles in Los Angeles. Your investment of finances and time can be much less to get more opportunity, here, ôs why.

Most LA actors are unrepresented or under-represented and get less than a dozen auditions for , paying, jobs a year, despite the incredible number of productions going on at any given moment. As many as 3000 submissions are made for a one line part. Many actors have agents and managers who double submit, costing the actor 25% of what they do earn and twice as many pictures and resumes. After taxes and commissions, less than 50% goes to the actor. To avoid having to process 3000 submissions for the small roles, many Casting Directors audition only actors they have met through paid casting director workshops. Like it or not, fair or not, those CD, ôs simply don, ôt have the time, staff and space, for example, to handle 21,000 submissions for 7 smaller roles. Attending CD workshops is not a substitute for your regular acting class, so subtract those fees, time and travel from your life too. Also add your mailings to the several hundred CD, ôs you try to meet, because they are meeting thousands of actors yearly.

Those actors, who do audition regularly, such as a working commercial actor, may I go on 3-5 auditions weekly. Each one requires about 4 hours of time-to prep, travel, wait, meet, and travel. That adds up to 12-20 hours weekly and a lot of gas in that bumper-to-bumper smoggy traffic. If they book 4 commercials annually they are in the upper echelon of working commercial actors. Commercial income has plummeted since the early 90, ôs so the numbers of spots that generate more than \$8000 are miniscule. The cost of maintaining a web presence, often 2 headshots for each of those auditions, the wardrobe and gas at \$.50-.75 more a gallon than here wipes out another huge chunk of your income and energy. Spend that amount of time in this region cultivating relationships with the commercial producers and you will be more likely to land a nice union commercial gig. And in case you think Union is not necessary-believe me, if you want to be a professional actor at any time in your life, you will need to be union. Joining in Texas is much more economical than in Los Angeles.

For TV and Film, actors in Los Angeles used to have a , 'Day Rate, ' or , 'Quote, ' which was gradually increased with experience so that the mid range actor was sometimes able to command double or triple the union minimum. Salary compression in the last decade has virtually eliminated over scale negotiation, bringing the day rate to the same as here. This compression has left even the more recognizable names short of income and thus more available for the smaller roles that used to be your best , 'break out, ' opportunity.

More and more production is leaving Los Angeles as many states offer film incentives. With increasing costs for transportation, producers will be looking for more local actors.

For less than the time and cost an LA actor spends attending Casting Director workshops, you could be an active member in the TXMPA. It is the perfect way to meet the producers, directors, agents and casting directors who are working with TXMPA too.

All careers are based on relationships. Let, 's face it. If you have the chance to do the hiring, aren, 't you going to hire folks you can trust to do the job? And wouldn, 't you trust an actor who has worked beside you to strengthen the local film industry more quickly than a stranger, if all else were equal?

The advent of digitalization allows for much higher quality low budget independent and student films where you can develop experience and collect film clips. In Los Angeles the competition for these is as great as for the paying gigs. Take some time to explore the area film departments and independent producers to promote your self. Get a union agreement so that you have workmen, 's compensation should anything go awry.

Los Angeles is said to have more theaters than any city in the world. There are lots of opportunities to perform. The average audience size is 8. Yes, 08. Often the casts are larger than the audiences. Additionally, many of the actors are simply there to showcase themselves, leaving the quality of the work in sad disarray. Few skillful directors are there to guide them and the numbers of paid theatre opportunities for the average actor are much better here. Additionally, the quality of many of the community theatres here is outstanding. There is a kind of commitment to the show that far surpasses the average LA non-paying production. So, see theater, support your fellow actors, do theater, as much as you can. Find a great acting class or create your own actors practice group.

The producers will hire local talent if they can trust the talent to do the job. Look to support anything that helps you be a better actor and helps others know the depth of the acting pool around you.

If you are truly clear on your goals, and going to Los Angeles is for you, make sure you have your union memberships-they are much less costly here than LA. The health and pension benefits are harder and harder to earn as an actor these days and are only possible in union work. Have a 2-3 minute demo of your on camera work that looks like broadcast quality. Have a long list of good play credits in good theatres and about six months living expenses (\$10,000), a five year business plan, including how you are going to support yourself, pay for your training and promotional needs, and surround yourself with a great emotional support system.

I cannot overstate this last point. Many actors develop such a need to financially support themselves that they have no energy to pursue their careers. Others cannot find meaningful relationships because the environment is so transient. Before you leave your families and friends, your affordable homes, your rich theater life, and your small pond, be sure you have the heart and stamina. A professional actor is no longer determined by a paycheck. A professional actor is determined by your commitment to

enduring excellence. If you want, you can define a successful acting career as one where you live near family, with a stable income, performing community theatre to appreciative audiences with earnest colleagues, act in independent films and get the occasional on-camera opportunity opposite a big star. You could live in better housing, easier commuting, cheaper gas, with more athletic, cultural and community events in closer friendship and rack up more , úreal, ù credits right in your own backyard as well as retirement and health benefits.

In summary, I repeat: Be clear on your true objectives for your life as a whole. There are many great and famous (not necessarily the same) actors who are not happy. They have severely stressful and insecure lives with few enduring friendships and terribly uncertain futures. If Los Angeles is for you, knowing what you are willing to sacrifice can assist you in staying focused, calm and joyful about pursuing the art you love. Wherever you are, if you cultivate your love of acting, people will want to work with you and be your audience.