

Why Authentic Performances Steal the Show

M So, saying yes is one of the most powerful, creative tools because what we do today will lead us to where we are tomorrow, of course. But if we say no to our ideas today, we don't have any ideas to work with tomorrow.

[Music playing]

A Welcome to *The Portfolio Life* with Jeff Goins. I'm your host, Andy Traub, and this is the show that helps you to pursue work that matters, make a difference with your art, and discover your true voice. Michael Port's work as an actor equipped him to find success in business and life. And in today's episode of *The Portfolio Life* he and Jeff discuss Michael's new book, *Steal the Show*



from speeches to job interviews to deal closing pitches, how to guarantee a standing ovation for all the performances in your life. If you need to up your performance in life and at work, then keep listening. Here's Michael Port and Jeff Goins.

[Music playing]

J Michael Port, welcome to the show.

M Thank you very much. Great to be here.

J So, you and I were talking about your new book which we will talk about in a minute, *Steal the Show*, and I was asking you just for some notes, wanted to make sure that as a good friend I talk about the things that you want to talk about. And I said, "Hey, just send me some stuff." And you were very helpful. You sent me some notes. But I said, "Hey, I just want to make you good," and you said, "But you could never look like an idiot." And I said, "Hang on a second. I never said idiot. You said idiot."

J/M [Laughing]

J So, anyway.

M I think I might have read it differently. Either you wrote it differently, or—

J I went back and edited it.

M I may have read it like, “I don’t want to look like an idiot.” And, so, I said, “Jeff, you could never look like an idiot. It’s not possible.”

J Now, hang on, I didn’t think that either until now [laughing].

M Well, there you go. Now you know.

J I thought, “Man, I’ll tell him this before I hit record.” Like, “No, no, no. Like everybody needs to hear this.”

M That’s really funny.

J You know, so you and I have been talking for a little while, and so honored to have you here, because I’ve been a fan of your work for a couple of years now, and we have to do a public shout out to David Molnar who turned me on to your stuff. And it’s been super helpful. But what I love about you, and about this new book, and about what you do for public speakers especially, is you’re not one of those hucksters like me who started a blog, and people started paying attention to you; and, then, all of a sudden people ask you to speak, and you don’t have any business standing up on stage delivering content to people. Or you’ve got to kind of catch up with that. I certainly had to do that where because I write there is some sort of delusional thinking that I know how to speak. And your background – and this is why I’m so grateful that you wrote this book, your back background is in public performance in a lot of different ways. And I think you are an expert in communication in way is that many people, including myself, would only dream of being. So, before we jump into all this great stuff that you’re going to share with us about how to communicate better whether you’re standing on stage, in a podcast interview on either side, and a job interview, or talking to your coworkers, we’re going to cover it all.

Before we get into that, let’s talk a little bit about your background, particularly as it pertains to communication, and presentation; and performance which is a word that I like to use a lot. How did all this get started?

M Well, my first career was as a stripper. And—

J Good, good. Glad we got that out there.

M Yeah, got that out. You know, although one night after bartending at 4:30 in the morning I left there. And like, “There’s got to be an easier way to make money.” And that’s the first thing that popped through my head. And I went, “Nah, I can’t do that. My mother would be very disappointed.”

J Well, you certainly have the body for it.

M Well, that’s very kind. It’s very kind. Photoshop helps for sure.

J [Laughing].

M Well, listen, I started as an actor. I have a Master’s of Fine Arts from the Graduate Action Program at NYU. And I spent three years training in performance there. And I had a modicum of

success. Which means, obviously, you know what I mean. But it means a bit of success. And even though I was on shows like *Sex in the City*, *Third Watch*, *All My Children*, *Law & Order*. I was in *The Pelican Brief*, *The Believer*, *Down to Earth*, and I did lots and lots of commercials, especially voiceovers. Voiceovers were my bread and butter. Companies like AT&T, Pizza Hut, Coors Beer, Braun, none of whom are sponsoring this show, unfortunately.

J [Sighing]. Yeah, we called them. We tried to get them.

M Yeah. So, that was what I did. But I got to tell you, honestly, I was too immature for the business of it. I wanted what I wanted when I wanted it. I wanted it to happen fast. I figured, you know, I've got this MFA from NYU, and I'm really good at this. And I'm commercially viable, etc. And it was just so slow. And I've never been accused of having any patience whatsoever.

So, I left the business prematurely for sure. And I went into business. And I, again, had a modicum of success over there. I worked my way up. And, then, I went out on my own. But the reason I think I did well in the corporate world is because I was a performer. I knew how to play the right role in any given situation. And Chapter 2 in the book is about playing the right role in any given situation, because we play roles all the time whether we realize it or not.

And, hopefully, we're playing authentic roles. But the roles we play often determine the quality of our life. Just like the actions we take determine the quality of our life. We play a role as parents. We play a role as a sibling. We play a role as a friend. We play a role as a teacher. We're playing roles all the time.

And, hopefully, we're playing authentic roles, because if we're not, then the roles we play are not well-received. But the greatest performers in the world are the most authentic performers in the world. That's why we love actors like Tom Hanks, and Meryl Streep, because they're honest. And what they're feeling when you see them perform is real. They are just putting themselves into an environment that allows them to play a character.

And, so, I'm not sure if I mentioned this earlier or not, but Lee Strasburg said, "An actor's job is to create reality and, then, express that reality." And that's what we do every single day in our life. And I think we should choose how we want to express ourselves and often self-expression comes from a deep sense of self-understanding. And if we have a good sense of our self, then we can comfortably move from one role to another very easily and steal the show when the spotlight is on us. Because there are so many high-stake situations that we'll be faced with if we want to do big things, and we need to know how to perform during those high-stake situations.

J So, help me understand this a little bit. I love what you're saying, but you and I are both acquainted with this obsession with transparency, authenticity. People love talking about this right now, especially because everybody is on the Internet. Everybody is kind of putting their best selves out there. And, yet, I know that the world doesn't need to see every aspect of myself. It doesn't need to see a false self, but at the same time, like it doesn't benefit the world to know everything about

me. It doesn't benefit anybody, sometimes even my wife to know every little thing about me. Now, we don't want to hide certain parts of ourselves, but I like what you're saying about this.

However, I'm concerned that somebody listening is just going, "I don't want to perform. I want to be my true self." And I think that – I was listening to a podcast, Seth Godin was interviewed by Brian Koppleman on *The Moment*, this fantastic interview where Seth says that we're never completely authentic, that we play these different roles, as you're saying Michael, but I think that you can get into this mode where you just show people what they want to see. And I know you're not about that, but how do you deal with that tension?

M It's a balance. Who was it? Was it Twain or Fitzgerald that said that we – and I paraphrase, the sign of an intelligent person is somebody who can hold two opposing thoughts in their head at the same time and still function?

J Yeah, that was me. I said that.

M Oh, excellent. I thought. I wasn't sure.

J [Laughing].

M But it's true. It's this idea, this balance between knowing how to show up fully and honestly, and knowing what to reveal and what not to reveal. And that's one of the ways that you play the right role is choosing what to reveal and what not to reveal. And the Internet wasn't designed, I don't think, to be a place where you air every single part of your backstory. It's just not necessary, and it often is detrimental.

Everything we do says something about us. The way that we behave says something about us. What we say says something about us. And I think we should decide how we want to be known. Now, here's the thing. From the inauthentic perspective, if you hide true parts of yourself that are significant, then I think you'll be found out eventually and/or you'll be so worried about being found out that you won't be able to express yourself fully. And the world will never see the best parts of yourself. So, that's on one side of the coin.

On the other side of the coin, if we share things that are so personal, so sensitive, or just all of our views, we can push people away, because it's too much. So, I'll give you an example of sharing something so that you're not hiding. You know, you made a joke earlier on that I'm fit. And I've been fit most of my life because I played sports, and I tried to take care of myself. But in my 30s I had a hard time with food where I started overeating. I think I had a lot of stress. And it really influenced the way I was choosing to eat. And, so, I got a little bit heavier. And it was embarrassing for me, because it wasn't part of how I saw myself. And it really started to interfere with my work and my life. But I hid it. I hid the fact that I was having trouble with my food. Now, I couldn't hide it physically. So, I stopped showing up as much. I didn't want to be on stage as much.

But when I started being open about the fact that this was really hard for me, and I was uncomfortable, and I was having a hard time controlling what I ate, then I started feeling a lot more

authentic. And as a result, I was able to connect with people in a more significant way, because most people hide something, or have had some challenge with something, and they would say, “I appreciate your honesty, and it speaks to me.” And that was very helpful. It was also helpful for me, because when something is a secret, then it just magnifies, multiplies in your own mind. It gets worse and worse and harder to deal with. So, on the not hiding something side, that was important to share.

But if you get a promotion, say, and you don’t feel that you’re worthy of the promotion, and you spend the first couple of weeks after you get this new promotion telling your whole staff, the whole team, everybody around you that you really don’t think you deserve this promotion, that’s not the kind of thing that I would suggest you share, because that could certainly be detrimental to your reputation in the organization. So, there are certain things we would want to keep to ourselves, and there are other things that may actually be helpful to share. And this is an art. This is not a science, you know, figuring out how you want to be known in the world and what to share and what not to share. Starts to become intuitive after a while if you pay attention to it.

[Music playing]

J Yeah, it is an art, but I love that you said when I was hiding this thing, when I didn’t want people to see that I was a little bit overweight, or not as – at my peak physical state, I was embarrassed about that, and I actually started physically hiding. I stopped showing up for things because I didn’t want people to see something that was the opposite of what I was projecting. And the solution to that was to just be honest about it. And, so, it seems to me that one potential solution if you’re worried about projecting a false self, or about hiding things, is to – if this is keeping you from showing up at the places in life where you need to be showing up, then talk about that thing.

M Yeah. And, look, I’m very clear *Steal the Show* that you don’t need to be an entertainer to be a performer.

J Um, I love that.

M Those two things are not the same.

J Yeah.

M And I think, hopefully, that empowers people. Because becoming a performer in life’s high-stake situations is not always a result of finding your voice. But it’s about letting it out and stripping away the false persona that we’ve built around ourselves so that we are more available. And that’s what great performers do, they don’t protect themselves the way that most folks do. So, they allow others to see into their soul, and into their heart. And if you’re willing to strip away some of these fat layers of persona that we wrap ourselves in, that we think are some sort of protective layer, but really they’re parchment like armor – if we are willing to strip away these layers, then we’re able to show the world the best parts of ourselves. And when we are performing, we want to amplify the best parts of ourselves. And that’s a trick that performers learn. I shouldn’t use the word *trick*, but that’s a technique that the performers learn. And I think most people can learn that same technique.

J You keep using the word *strip*. I feel like there's something that you want to – the joke at the beginning of the interview that maybe—

M Maybe it wasn't a joke.

J [Laughing].

M Maybe that's what I'm hiding.

J [Laughing].

M But thank God – thank God there was no YouTube or smart phones in those days.

J I love this. I love that you talk about performance in a positive light. Something that a lot of people don't know about me is, I have a little bit of a background in stage acting. And you do, too, right? Am I right about that?

M Well, yeah, my master's degree—

J Right.

M —yeah, is in theater. And, then, to make money as an actor you always want to be in TV and film.

J Right.

M That's how it works, you know?

J Yeah. So, thinking of delivering content as a performance, I never saw this disconnect between “being your authentic self,” quote, unquote, and performing. Because a performance is, you know Michael, when you're up on stage, you could be doing a show every night for six weeks, and every night is different. The audience reacts. They laugh differently at different jokes. And it's always a surprise. And doing it over, and over, and over again, it can become monotonous. But at the same time – and I've learned this about speaking recently – you can deliver the same speech over, and over, and over again to different audiences, and it's always different. It's a performance in the sense that, hopefully, you've worked on that, and perfected it as much as you can. But it's alive. It's a living thing that every time you share it with an audience, it's a little bit different.

M You see, I think this is one of the reasons that public speaking, performing, keynoting, etc., is often more intimidating to writers than writing.

J Right.

M Because when you write, you can control what you are putting on the paper. And you can't always control how people about it, but you can edit, and edit, and edit, and edit. Now, if you're rehearsing a speech, you can do as much editing as you want during that rehearsal. But the only thing that actually matters is what happens in the moment on stage. And you don't have as much control

over that. And that's where improvisation comes into play. That's where the ability to be in the moment, which is chapter 8 in the book, is so incredibly important. Learning how to be in the moment, not just on stage, but in many different situations: romantically, personally, as a parent, learning to live in what is often the discomfort of the moment allows you to be, of course, much more present and allows you to react and respond to what is actually happening. And that's when you perform better.

J So, let's talk about the yes, and. Because that's something you talk about in your book. And if anybody is familiar with improvisational comedy, or acting, you might be familiar with this. But talk about how never saying no, never hitting the backspace on a live performance, why that's so important. And you're probably this way, too, Michael, but I just – I see so, I mean, from preachers in church to public speakers at a conference, even musicians just abusing their time on stage talking about something in the most hard-to-follow, backwards kind of way. And it's just painful. And I am so critical of this even though it's something that I'm thing to grow in as well. Can you talk about that, especially in the context of how to avoid stepping up on stage and wasting the audience's time, which I think a lot of performers, even entertainers, and certain presenters, whatever that looks like, are guilty of?

M Sure. So, I say this to start. I don't think you can be – this is just my personal opinion, of course, like everything else I say – but I don't think you can be a critic and a performer. I think you can be one or the other.

J Interesting.

M I think that it would be very hard to be a blogger who is a chef who writes reviews of every restaurant in town and, then, goes in at night and tries to create unique dishes that take a lot of risks, etc. It probably could be done, but what I see often, especially performances, we feel we know what we like.

J Uh-huh (agreeing).

M And we feel like we know what we don't like. And, so, it is very easy for us to criticize what we see. But we don't necessarily know how somebody should change it, and we might not know how we can do better ourselves. But we think we can. You know who are often very dangerous is the people who are natural communicators.

J Yeah.

M Because they've had the gift of gab that has allowed them to wing it for so long. And they often stay average. But what I find is the people who don't think they have that natural gift of gab, they often get better, and better, and better over time even though you wouldn't think they would, but because they do the work. And they are very honest. They're not going up there to try to put on as show which would, then, create a pushing effect which is what performers often do. They push. They try to make moments happen. And that's very difficult. So, we don't want to do that. In terms of wasting time, I'll try not to waste any time here. You know, it's one of the things is what you're doing

all the time is you're trying to figure out a way to be relevant. That's what we do. I mean, that's marketing. That's business development. That's all of our work; we are trying to be relevant. And sometimes we're more relevant than others. But we do our best job to be as relevant as we can.

Sometimes we forget how to respect the audience's time, and we go too long. So, I gave a keynote speech for a company called Anytime Fitness. And there were a few thousand people in the audience. And the way they did it is, they had four of us – six of us rather – keynoting 20 minutes each to start. That's how they opened. And, then, we each did a speech later on. So, 20 minutes. That was the rule. And they set aside two hours for this, OK? So, they had the exact amount of time. Now, I think that was a little tight. But—

J Yeah.

M —nonetheless if professional speakers should be able to do their speeches in less than 20 minutes. So, mine was 19 minutes, 45 seconds, and I was the opener. Done. Why? Because it was well-rehearsed. I knew it was going to be 19 minutes and give or take 45 seconds. The person went after me, 35 minutes.

J Wow.

M The person after her, 32 minutes. The last speaker had to get cut.

J Wow.

M And, you know, the question is, does she think her material is more important than the others? I don't think so. I think you're trying so hard to reach the audience, but you're so unprepared that you keep stabbing at it. You keep trying to find it, and find better ways of saying it. And, so, when you're not prepared, that's when you're often all over the place. And that's why you often see speakers going too long is because they haven't prepared for the time at hand.

Now, so many people who are listening right now are writers. Now, I don't know about you. you're probably, you are a genius. And you're probably – I mean, true, you could probably write an entire book in a weekend, I'm sure. But I am a plodding writer. It takes me a while, because I am not like you. But it takes me about eight months to write a book. It takes me four months to conceive of the book before that and organize my ideas around it.

How many hours does one usually give to rehearsing a speech? Do they give eight months to it like they would a book? What's the difference? That's my question. Why does a book get more time than a speech? And if we want thousands of people to read the book, and we want thousands of people to be in the audience for the speech, why would the book get more time?

J Uh-huh (listening).

M And, so, I'm asking performers to dedicate more time to their rehearsal process. And, then, steal the show. I break down the actor's rehearsal process. There is a step-by-step process that actors use to rehearse. And anybody who is giving a speech no matter what kind of speech it is, no matter what size audience, can use the same rehearsal process to make sure that they're prepared when they walk on stage.

People ask, they say, "Michael, what's the best way to overcome stage fright?" And the first thing that they usually say is, "Should I use that thing where I think about my audience in their underwear?"

J Yeah [laughing].

M Which, of course, I think is probably the worst piece of advice you could ever get. Because if you go up there thinking about the audience in their underwear, clearly you're not thinking about your objective. And the first principle of performance is knowing exactly what you're there to do, what promise you're there to deliver on.

And, number two, I think if you're thinking about all of the people in their underwear, you are either going to get very excited—

J [Laughing]

M —or you're going to get more uncomfortable. So, I don't think it's going to help you reduce your anxiety. I think the best way to reduce anxiety is to be prepared.

J Agree.

M If you feel like you know what you're supposed to do when you walk up there, then you will not be as nervous. You might be nervous because you want to do a great job, that's normal. But you won't be as nervous.

J Yeah, I love that. And we were talking a bit ago, and you told me, that there was a time when you did not take this as seriously. Because I think somebody listening might go, "Well, that's great Michael. You're an actor. You've got all this experience. This is easy for you." And that may be true that maybe it came a little bit more naturally to you, or not. And I'll let you answer that. But I do know that there was a time when you were a little bit lazier about it, when you did wait until the last minute, because you could be pretty good that way.

And help me fill-in-the-blanks. When did you think, "Well, pretty good is not good enough, and I want to steal the show. I want to do my absolute best. I want to spend those eight months working on a talk." What forced you to start taking this more seriously?

M Sure. I started doing this kind of work in 2003. And, so, I used public speaking as a way to try to reach the people that I wanted to serve. And, you know, I had the gift of gab. And I was an actor. So, I knew exactly what to do when I was on stage. And, so, I just went out there, and I winged it. And I didn't work as hard on my material, meaning the development of the content as somebody else

would, because I could get away with being a little lighter on content, because I could entertain, and I could charm. That's when I started.

Then I started watching people perform. And I went, "You know, I see I'm doing the opposite of what they're doing. They're not working on the performance very much. They don't have much natural ability to perform, but they've got great content." I've got to improve my content. So, that is why I spent the next few years really focusing on developing content.

You know, then I became keynoter, and the books got successful. And I was a well-paid keynoter. But, then, about four or five years ago people started asking me if I would teach them the performance side of this. And I just started doing it for fun. It wasn't the primary focus of our business. And I just loved it so much. And I thought, "I can't believe I haven't been doing this for the last decade. I mean, this is what I was born to do. This is what I'm trained to do." I'm going into the recording studio tomorrow. And I often joke is, "The only thing I'm actually trained to do." All of the things, all of the marketing that I taught for years, all the business development that I learned on the streets, I learned it on the street. But this is what I was meant to do.

And, so, that's when I said, I have to start doing things on stage that go farther than I would ask my students to go. Because I'm going to ask my students to go farther than they've ever gone before. So, now, I have to do that much more. And that's really when it kicked in for me of what my responsibilities were as a teacher. But, then, also, I realized what my responsibilities were as a performer, not to be good enough, but to be as good as I possibly can be. I think it's the Marines that have that expression. They say, "You're never going to rise to the occasion. You'll fall back on your training."

J Yeah. Wow.

M And I think that's very true for performance of all kinds. You go, "I'm just going to be really in the right mindset. I'm going to get on the stage, and I'm just going to make it happen. I'm going to rise to the occasion." But often we just fall back on our training. And if we have training, you know, then we are pretty comfortable up there.

[Music playing]

J You think that, "I'm going to practice at this level. And, then, when I perform, when it's real, I'm going to do better." And maybe there's like those rare occasions when you actually do. But it's sort of like—

M Well, you may feel—

J Yeah.

M You may feel it, because the adrenal is so much higher.

J Yeah.

M But that doesn't necessarily mean that that's the case.

J I was thinking of there's a story in Greg McKeon's book, *Essentialism*, where he talks about buffer in your schedule where you stack one thing onto the next, onto the next, and you always leave at the last possible moment to get the next thing that you have to do, because 20 percent of the time you actually get there on time. You actually make the flight, or make the meeting, or make it home in time for dinner.

But, honestly, about 80 percent of the time that doesn't work. And as I've gotten more serious, especially about speaking, but even about coming prepared to do an interview – and you've done an excellent job with this one in spite of calling me an idiot, and talking about strippers [laughing].

M You know, you've got to make every podcast interview a little bit different.

J Yeah.

M I've never talked about stripping before.

J Yeah?

M This is special for you.

J Sure, sure.

M This is special for you—

J Sure.

M —Jeff.

J [Laughing].

M Only you. Only you.

J Yeah, you're right. You step up and you're adrenal is pumping. I remember the first time I did a talk, a local talk for free several years ago when I was starting to get into the blogging thing. Because, as you know, when you start writing people ask you to speak, because those are like the same thing [laughing]. They're not. And I was like, "I'll do this once. And if it goes well, I'll do it again." It was sort of been years since I'd done the stage acting. I did debates in college. So, I'd had some experience that I could fall back on. And the night before I was preparing my slides, and I stood, and I was full of adrenaline, and I entertained most of the time. I got people laughing which made me feel good, of course, and loosened me up. And it was long. It was like 90 minutes long. And it was like an hour-long slot. And I recorded it, because I thought, "This is going to be great." And I felt amazing about it. And people came up to me and thanked me. And it went well. And, so, I said, "Oh, I'm going to do more of this." And I ended up getting some speaking, coaching, and all of that. But I went back and watched the video months afterwards. And it was horrible. It was painful to watch. And, so,

you're right that we tend to – when the adrenaline is pumping, and you haven't prepared, and you haven't slept the night before, and you pounded three double espressos right before you go on stage. It feels different than it looks in front of people.

M It can. It certainly can. A couple of things came to mind. One, you asked me about saying yes before, and I want to make sure we come back to that. Remember one of the first rules, of course, is about any kind of content development is anytime we introduce an idea, we have to make sure we unpack it. Often you'll see speakers on stage they'll introduce a thought. Like, "There are three things for this," and then they'll talk about two, because they're not prepared. And they end up skipping one, or I'm going to mention this later, and then they don't mention it.

So, I want to make sure that we do hit that, because it's also an important topic. You mentioned the laughing which I think is interesting. Because speakers often get a lot of credit for making people laugh. And, often, the more you can make an audience laugh, the more you get paid. This is what we find in the world of professional speaking that people who are funny tend to do pretty well. Sometimes, however, if you focus on the humor, then the content may get lighter.

I'll give you an example. A friend of mine gave a speech, and one of the comment cards said, "I came here to learn about social media. If I wanted to laugh, I would have gone to a comedy club."

J Wow.

M And I thought about that. And I thought, "That's a really interesting comment." You could easily write it off and say, "Oh, well, she's uptight or something. She doesn't like to laugh." But it also made me think of this example. So, if you go to a math class, let's say your kid is in the fifth grade. And the kid's math teacher constantly makes them laugh. Like the kid loves – everybody loves this teacher. So, much fun. They don't learn a lot of math. Is that a strong teacher?

J No.

M Probably not. If you go to a comedy club, and you don't laugh at all, but you learn a new way to do the quadratic equation, was that a good comedian? Probably not. So, good and bad are very relative terms, of course, because we all have our preferences. And I stay away from saying I like or don't like something. I generally will think about do I resonate with that? Does it get me going, or does it not? That's how I think about it. Because somebody else it might really turn them on. Like, they may resonate with it.

So, when I think about the humor part of it, if you can come off stage and think you did a great job because you made people laugh, but what did they learn? What are they going to do afterwards? How does their life change? What's the call-to-action? What happens as a result of that speech? That's usually what's most important. And, so, sometimes this eager to seem like the most-popular might not be actually as effective as some of the other speakers who don't seem quite as popular, because they're not getting the big laughs. But they get people to take action and makes them kind of change which is a result of the promise of the speech.

Because when you look at your speech, think about your speech this way. Every speech is a big idea. Now, the big idea doesn't have to be different to make a difference. That's really important. Sometimes we're trying to find something so different than what everybody else has ever talked about that we end up in that paralysis of analysis just trying to find something. But our voice is what – is what speaks to the people we're meant to serve.

So, first, we have a big idea. Now, that big idea becomes the through line for the entire presentation. And the entire presentation is designed to deliver on a promise. So, what's the big idea of your presentation, and what's the promise of the presentation? And if you know what the big idea and the promise are, then you can get really clear on what the world looks like to the people in the room. And if you know what the world looks like to them, and you can demonstrate that you know what the world looks like to them, they may start to open up to you. And, then, you can demonstrate the consequences of not adopting this new-world view, or this big idea and going after this promise. And you can also demonstrate the rewards. Because if they can see those rewards, and they're afraid of those consequences, the negative side of things if they don't make a change. Well, then you can lead them somewhere.

Because when we're asking an audience to change something, and this is the first time they've been exposed to us, well, that's a big ask. That's a huge ask. And, so, audiences will work hard to poke holes in your theories if what you're offering is confrontational in any way or confronting in any way. I don't mean confrontational, but confronting in the sense that it pushes their buttons. Even if – even if it's something that they kind of think they sort of want. Like, "It would be really cool to be able to think that big." But it's confronting. It's maybe asking them to change the way they've seen themselves for 30 years, or the way they've seen the world for 30 years.

And, so, if you put holes into your argument, then they'll try to find them. So, go ahead and unpack something. Well, there's a hole. Yeah, OK. I don't have to listen to this speaker. Or if you use absolutes. So, for example, if you say, "Well, everybody does this." Or, "You have to do this." Or, "It's always this way." Those three things are categorically false, because all generalities are false including that one.

J [Laughing] Right.

M And, so, what we want to do is, we want to leave openings for people. That's different than holes. Openings allow people to walk through the net, the filter, that they often put up in front of themselves when new ideas are coming at them which is very different than holes.

J Uh-huh (agreeing).

M This way if I said, "Nobody likes ear-wax flavored ice cream." You might say, "Um, actually, I had a friend named Phoenix in school, and he used to pick his ears and eat it. I bet you as a grownup he might like earwax-flavored ice cream." Now, the likelihood is very low, but it's still categorically false, because you can't prove it.

J Poor Phoenix.

M I know. But if you say, “It seems like, I can’t imagine, that anybody would like earwax-flavored ice cream,” well, then, there’s leaving an opening for the possibility. And if you listen to speeches, you’ll often hear speakers saying, “You have to; you have to; you have to.” “You have to do this if you want this. You have to do this if you want to do this.” And it pops into my language a little bit, too, and I try to correct myself afterwards, because the audience doesn’t really have to do anything. And there are multiple ways to approach different outcomes. And the more open we are to the multiple ways, often the more we are accepted. And if we are accepted, then they’ll give us the opportunity to deliver on a promise to share our big idea.

And part of that is this philosophy, this principle of saying, “Yes, and.” Yes, and is a basic tenet of improv. For example, let’s say you and I are doing an improv scene together for an audience. And you run into the room, and you say, “Oh, my God, Michael, I just broke” – you don’t run. Let’s say, how about this? You limp into the room saying, “Michael, I just broke my leg. It’s so painful, and I can see the pain in your face.” And there’s tears welling up in your eyes. And I say, “No, you didn’t. Your leg looks fine.” It’s over. It’s done. I just said no. I shut the door.

But if I said, “Oh, my God, that’s terrible. But you know what, Jeff, your hair looks fantastic.” Well, now there’s somewhere to go, because you can say something like, “You know what? I was at the hair salon. I was getting my hair done. Do you like the new color?” And all of those smells that were so toxic that I passed out, fell off the chair, broke my leg.” And we can keep going on with this. So, we’re saying yes to each other.

Like I’ll never hire the devil’s advocate. I want people to find what needs to be improved in my work inside the company. But I don’t want somebody who keeps saying, “No, I want to be the devil’s advocate.” Here’s why that’s not going to work. We don’t like to be around those people generally. So, saying yes is one of the most powerful, creative tools. Because what we do today will lead us to where we are tomorrow, of course. But if we say no to our ideas today, we don’t have any ideas to work with tomorrow. So, with the rehearsal process, to the writing process, you’re an expert at the writing process. I’d love for you to speak to this. But when we’re creating content, if we say, “That’s not good. That’s not good.” Or, “That’s not good.” Or you try something in rehearsal and go, “That doesn’t work. It doesn’t work. That doesn’t work.” It keeps closing us down.

For example, in the Think People revolution speech, which is a very unusual speech. It’s more of a one-person show I would say. And even ends with a dance sequence where I bring in dancers in any city that I go to. And it’s super, super fun. There’s a part in it where I’m talking about getting comfortable with discomfort. If we want to do big things, it helps to get comfortable with discomfort. And I had this idea where maybe I’ll wear a pair of six-inch red high heel shoes. And I would show, “I’m very uncomfortable.” But I wouldn’t comment on it. I would just wear them during that part of the presentation and see if the audience could figure out why I’m wearing them.

And I started rehearsing with it. And, of course, it seemed like a crazy idea, just ridiculous idea. I started rehearsing with it, and it wasn’t really working, but I kept going with it, because I wanted to see where it would lead me. And it eventually led me to the right choice. But if I hadn’t

made that choice early, I probably wouldn't have found the right choice eventually. So, another principle that's in part two of the book is, choosing early and often. People are very attractive who make choices if they're strong choices.

But we don't always have to make the right choice, because making choices will get us closer to where we want to go. If we don't make any choices, once again, nothing happens. So, we choose early. We choose often. That makes us very attractive. It allows us to be creative. And these performance principles, that typically only the actors master, can be applied to all these different situations in our life. Certainly, public speaking in front of others but to, as I mentioned earlier, job interviews, sales pitches, negotiations, dates, etc.

[Music playing]

J Whenever I think of improv, especially the yes, and I think of that episode in the office where Michael Scott, who is obsessed with improv but is terrible at it, where he goes to an improv class, and he doesn't do this. I mean if you want to know what this doesn't look like Google – I'm sure it's on YouTube – Google Michael Scott improv, and he's got one trick which is this is a holdup, and that he's got a gun where somebody will come in and say, "Ah, you know, like I just brushed my teeth," or whatever. And he goes, "Well, this is a holdup." It's – he's completely changing the scene, and is abrupt. And, then, they tell him, "OK, Michael, you can't use the imaginary gun anymore." And, then, like they're asking – I can't remember exactly what happens, but they're asking this – one of the actors some question that he's supposed to say yes, and to, and he won't speak because Michael just walks over and just whispers in his hear. And they go, "What's going on? What's going on?" And he goes, "Well, he told me he's got a gun in his pocket."

J/M [Both laughing]

J It's like his one trick. But I think we all know people like that, right? Who don't do the yes, and. And they keep kind of pushing forward. And you see it – you certainly see it on stage. But I think you see it when you're working with somebody, and they're—

M I'll give you an example of that. I just had a retreat for some students. And they were all wonderful, wonderful students. And one of the guys, you know, I always give them feedback at the end about what I observe, and the way that they learn, and the way that they behave with each other. And, then, the others give each other feedback as well. It's pretty intense, but very powerful and helpful. And what I saw – what I observed in him was that when he would get a suggestion, he would ask a question. He would ask for help. And he would get the answer, but then he would explain why that wouldn't work, or he would spend so much time explaining that his views, and the choices that he's made in the past, that it ended up negating the new ideas that were coming at him. And it's a defense mechanism, I think, to a certain extent. Because what it does is, it helps us stay where we are. So, we don't move forward, because if we move forward and we don't succeed, then what does it say about us?

You see, this is, I think, something that happens a lot. And this is where performance comes in, too. Because if we really want something, if we really care about something, and we go after it,

and we don't get it, what does that say about us? And this is the performer's paradox. Because on one hand you want to kill it. You want to steal the show. You want to go out there, and you want to do big things in the world. But on the other hand, you have this conflicting intention which is not to fail, not to screw up, not to be embarrassed, not to feel bad. And those conflicting intentions will cancel each other out. So, those conflicting intentions of, "I'm going to make sure that I don't screw up, make sure nobody laughs at me, make sure I don't get rejected," those are going to get – they're in direct conflict with the risks you need to take which I go through extensively how to take the right risks, and how to manage risks as you're taking them so that you can do big things in the world. Because it's risky.

I mean every time you put out a new book, Jeff, you're taking a risk. Will my audience like this? I'm going out on a limb here. You're going to spend, I don't know how many years you spend on a particular book from conception, to writing, to promotion, etc. But it's risky. It is. When you left your job, I know it was risky for you. You didn't know what was going to happen, or where it was going to go. And you turned out pretty good. But you took risks. I mean that's what allowed you to do it.

J Yeah. Absolutely. So, I want to be respectful of your time. You've been more than gracious with our slot. I want to wrap up with this, because we talked a lot about speaking, but I want to be clear that if you're listening to this, this is not just about public speaking. This is about stealing the show in any aspect of life. And you've kind of teased out hints about this, Michael. I'm just been geeking out on the performance side of it, because it's so interesting to me. But to go back to the beginning where you started talking, we all play roles. And in different situations something else, something more, or something different is going to be required of us.

So, if I'm in a job interview something different is required of me to play that role well and, of course, not to do it disingenuously. I thought how you dressed that was great, as opposed to standing up on stage, or even having a conversation with my wife. These are all true roles that we play in our lives that require something else from us.

As you mentioned, I think there are a lot of people that are communicators that are listening to this, Michael. And it could be easy – I did this for a while, and I did this on stage for even longer. I'd say, "Well, I'm up here because I'm a writer. I'm not a speaker" which is sort of, you know, a way of saying, "This might suck, but it's OK, because it's not my craft."

M [Laughing]

J I've stopped saying that, because I think we are all performers in our own rights. And we can all get much, much better at delivering the content that the world needs whether you're a writer, or a mom, or both, or you clean carpets for a living. You're going to interact with people at some point. Help us understand, because you've done all this stuff. I mean one of the fun things for us to talk about on *The Portfolio Life* is how writers can be speakers; speakers can be writers. You can run a business. You can do all these different things, and still hang out with your family, still go for bicycle rides on the weekend. And creating this hodgepodge of activities that bring life to you and add value to the world, that's a good thing. And you exemplify that well.

So, for somebody who's stuck at the computer too long, or is stumbling through awkward conversations, how can we get better at this? What is one takeaway for how we can apply these principles? And, of course, the book goes into great detail about this, but could you just give us one takeaway for somebody goes, "Yeah, but" not "Yes, and," "Yeah, but you're an actor. Yeah, but you're a speaker, and I'm not that thing." Why is it so important for us to steal the show?

M So, for me, performance is much more about connecting than entertaining. So, I'm sure you've noticed I'm not doing any kind of song and dance here on this podcast. But as soon as I get off, I will be dancing all the way through the streets. We're just having a conversation, and we're trying to be as relevant as we can and connect with the audience. And there's nothing phony. There's very little hyperbole. And that is a kind of performance: allowing yourself to be in the moment, to be connected, to be real, to be honest, and care more about the results than approval. Because a performer who focuses on approval is going to live a pretty traumatic life, because you'll rarely get the kind of approval that makes you feel whole. That comes from the inside. It comes from achieving your objective. It comes from being able to do the things that you say you want to do. So, one of the chapters in Part 2 on *The Performance Principles* is having a clear objective, knowing what you want to achieve, and going after that, and not worrying about approval. Chapter 3 is about crushing your fears and silencing the critics. You know, there are two kinds of critics. There are critics out in the cheap seats who like to push other people down to lift themselves up. But, then, there are the critics in your head, those voices of judgment that need to be overthrown. And until we silence those voices of judgement, it's hard to silence those people in the cheap seats. We won't hear them when our voices of judgment are silenced. The other ones go away at that point, but we hear them very loudly when we are spending time criticizing or judging our self.

J Love that. Results over approval. Michael Port, you are an inspiring performer, genius connector, and masterful magician. I am so grateful to have you on the show.

M And don't forget, great stripper.

J [Laughing] I was – we're going to edit all that out. We use the bleeper. We didn't tell you that, but you got bleeped out a few times.

M Damn.

J [Laughing] Thank you so much, Michael. It's so, so grateful to have you, and love that you're finally sharing this part of your craft that I think the world needs and, I hope, many people take advantage of *Steal the Show*.

M It's really my pleasure. I never take these opportunities for granted. So, thank you. Thank you Jeff.

[Music playing]

A So, what did you learn in today's conversation between Michael and Jeff? Are you ready to learn how to steal the show? Well, let us know by finding this post on <http://GoinsWriter.com> and

leaving a comment there, or find Jeff on Twitter @JeffGoins. Make sure you use the hashtag #PortfolioLife. I'm Andy Traub, and on behalf of Jeff Goins, thanks for spending some time with us. Now, go build your portfolio.

[Music playing]

M From the inauthentic perspective, if you hide true parts of yourself that are significant, then I think you'll be found out eventually and/or you'll be so worried about being found out that you won't be able to express yourself fully. And the world will never see the best parts of yourself.

Resources

- [Steal the Show](#) by Michael Port
- [Seth Godin interview](#) with Brian Koppleman on [The Moment](#)
- [Essentialism](#) by Greg McKeown