



## L E S S O N

# 6

## GOTE

### A Basic Method

The foundations of an actor's approach have been set out in the previous lessons; admittedly, there's a good deal to keep in mind at one time.

GOTE is an easy-to-remember acronym that stands for and brings together the four basic principles. GOTE, therefore, represents a basic method for approaching an acting assignment. The letters individually stand for

Goal

Other

Tactics

Expectation

Let us go over these terms with an eye to their interdependence and mutual relationship.

*Goal* is the character's principal quest, which the actor assumes: everything on stage must be seen, first and foremost, as a character pursuing a goal. Elsewhere the word may be called *victory*, *objective*, *want*, *intention*, *action*, or *purpose*, and these words may also suffice, when they refer to the same thing.

In brief, the actor becomes the character primarily by pursuing; as vigorously as possible, the character's goal. Moreover, the goal should be

something quite specific and outgoing: not just "I want to find self-fulfillment," but "I want to be King of Denmark" or "I want to marry Romeo."

The *other* is the person (or persons) with whom, for whom, or from whom you seek your goal. There is *always* an other in acting; no goal can be achieved simply by yourself. Thus Hamlet cannot simply say, "I want to be King of Denmark," and have a crown appear above his head; nor can Juliet say, "I want to be happily married," and then happily marry. Not in good theatre, anyway. In drama, all the victories must be hard-earned and must be earned through interpersonal struggle. There are simply no good plays about characters learning the multiplication table or developing a personal philosophy without an interpersonal struggle.

The other in a scene, therefore, is what makes achieving goals difficult. Often the other is your chief *obstacle*: another "O" word. The struggle to overcome obstacles—particularly when those obstacles are other persons, and other persons' pursuit of *their* goals—creates much of the dynamics of acting, the work of acting. The struggle to overcome obstacles on stage should make you sweat.

So, in acting, the goals that are worth pursuing must be achievable only with the compliance or defeat of other characters. To the extent that these other characters are sympathetic, your character may be seen as inspirational. To the extent that the other characters are obstacles, your character may be seen as heroic. To the extent that the other characters are complex, your character may be seen as profound. The nature of your actions—and of your acting—will be determined by your confrontation with the other who stands between you and your goal.

Putting together the confrontation of goal and other, you will ask of every given scene or exercise:

1. What is my goal?
2. Who is/are the other person(s) who affect my gaining it?
  - a. How can they help me?
  - b. How can they hurt me?
  - c. How are they my obstacle?
3. How can I demand/induce/encourage their help?
4. How can I overcome the obstacle they pose?
5. What should be my tactics?

*Tactics* are the character's means of trying to achieve goals; they are what gives acting its "guts."

Tactics—and trying to achieve goals through them—make acting "real" for the actors and make actors indistinguishable from characters, at least

from the audience's point of view. That is to say: Jane trying to get Jim to fall in love with her is absolutely indistinguishable from Juliet trying to get Romeo to fall in love with her, when Jane is playing Juliet and Jim is playing Romeo. The lines are Shakespeare's, but the tactics are your own; tactics will come out of your life experience, not out of the script.

As we saw in Lesson 4, tactics can be divided between those that threaten and those that induce; they can be divided also into extreme tactics and a broad middle range of subtler tactics. A good actor will be able to move fluidly and purposefully from tactic to tactic in pursuit of victory. Tactical strength and tactical versatility are what make acting, by turns, forceful, seductive, visceral, and dramatic. Actors work all their lives on expanding and developing their tactical range.

Expectation, the last word on the list, gives tone, spring, and excitement to the dramatic pursuit of goals and quest for victory. It also lends every dramatic action at least a touch of enthusiasm, which can prove deliciously infectious. Too often actors choose to pursue goals in an academic way, as perhaps may be implied by the overly clinical word *objective*. It is not that your character just "wants" or "desires" something; people have all sorts of petty wants and desires that are rarely worth dramatizing. Look at any fine play, and the chances are that the author created characters who not only desire goals but crave them. Characters who are excited and enthusiastic about their eventual success; characters who, deep in their hearts, are sure (even mistakenly sure) that they will win in the end. *Expectation*, *excitement*, *enthusiasm*, and even *energy* are "E" words that make a memory package: They define characters who have not only wants, but passions. You are playing one of those characters. The victory you seek is not just an ordinary whim; it is the prime goal of your life, and it is within your reach if you try hard enough. Go for it! NOW!

## "Get Your Character's GOTE"

These "first six lessons"\* have outlined a method of approaching any role. Approaching the role does not necessarily mean performing the role to everybody's satisfaction—much less to the demands of this highly regarded art—but it is the starting point for professional and beginner alike. Before a role may be played, it must be approached: It must be understood and

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\* *The First Six Lessons* is the subtitle of Richard Boleslavski's justly famous book, *Acting* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1933).

created in *acting* terms. What makes the character not just an invention of the playwright, but a living, breathing, feeling, caring, *acting* person? Characters act. In order to play a character, you must play the character's actions—and in order to play that character brilliantly, you must create those actions in vivid detail and with believable intensity.

Getting your character's GOTE, which means creating those actions in the context of goals, obstacles, tactics, and expectations, is the key to putting yourself into the role and to approaching the character with the full resources of your acting instrument (your voice and body) and your personal history, intelligence, and emotional resourcefulness.

How do you get your character's GOTE? Studying the script is, of course, the first step. But using your imagination is the more important second step—more important in that most of the “answers” aren't answers at all, but creations. For most of the GOTE, aspects are only *implied* by the script—and determining which implications are the correct ones is a highly subjective and imaginative task. Study gives the main lines of a character's desires, but imagination fleshes them out. Indeed, that is one of the particular characteristics of drama, which, unlike narrative fiction, creates action only through spoken words and physical movement, not through thought revelations or extended third-person descriptions, except in rare cases.

Often the play is silent about matters crucial to the character. What does Hamlet really want from Ophelia? What are Cordelia's feelings and desires toward King Lear? The actor's *choices*—governed but not restricted by the actor's research—will determine the character's behavior.