

The  
*Don't Do It*  
List

**By Kay Bess**

**Trust and Be Brave**  
**Voiceover: Coaching. Mentorship**



## ***Don't Be In A Hurry***

One of the best things about being a voice actor is that we are not “judged” by our appearance, but rather by our talent and how we sound on mic. We might be 65 years old and sound like we’re 14. We might be 25 and possess the “voice of God.” So, assuming we possess the necessary talent, there is no expiration date on our career. We’re not “running out of time.” A common mistake many voice actors make is rushing into their careers. It’s all too easy to set up a corner, buy a mic, connect to the internet, and call yourself a voice actor. But even if you land a booking or two with such a hasty set up, you’ll find it unsustainable. What’s truly necessary is coaching, lots and lots of practice, and patience. Which leads me to my next “don’t do it” tip.

Everybody's got an opinion about demos. Especially demo producers. The worst ones will tell you they can give you a "coaching/demo package" and get your business off the ground quickly. The best ones will give you a far more worthy opinion to consider: Don't Make a Demo Too Soon. Demos are among the most expensive tools of the trade. The consensus among every single reputable coach, agent, and demo producer I know is that one should NEVER rush to make a demo. If you are just starting out and are putting together Pay-2-Play profiles, it is perfectly acceptable to record snippets of copy to place on the site. Once you gain some experience and record some actual jobs, you can begin to place snippets of those. Please see [V123pros.com](http://V123pros.com) for deeper advice on this. Only after at least a couple of years of experience, training and working, should you begin to think about making a demo. Be wary of demo producers who offer to make your demo after 4, 6 or 8 coaching sessions. No reputable coach would make such an offer.

## ***Don't Make A Demo Too Soon***



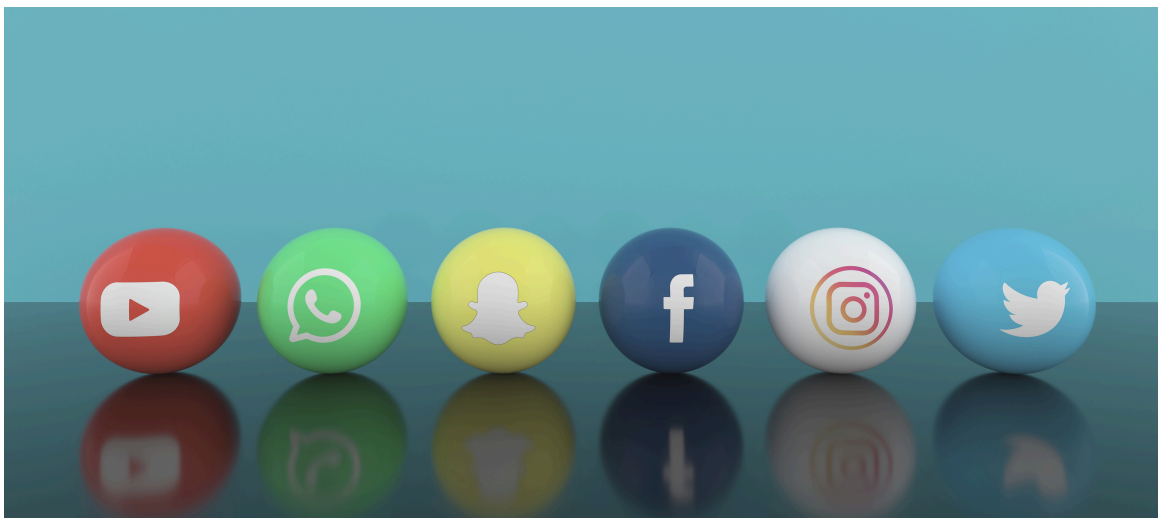


## ***Don't Approach Agents for Representation Before Your Ducks Are In A Row***

This is another one under the heading of “Don't Be In A Hurry.” You only get one shot at making a first impression, and when it comes to seeking representation, that one shot matters. Seeking an agent is one of the primary reasons to have an excellent demo, and if you rush into making one, the agents you're seeking will know it. They are so savvy, so seasoned, it's impossible to fool them. And it's very hard to impress them. You want to be steadily booking work on your own, show remarkable potential by way of stand-up comedy, a legit on-camera or stage acting career, or be referred by an industry insider before you approach an agency for representation. It's as black and white as that. The good news is, it's entirely possible to have a thriving voiceover career without an agent. But you're going to have to put in the work. There's no shortcut to a successful career. Don't let anyone tell you there is.

It's very tempting to post your voiceover work on social media, but there are a couple of pitfalls in doing so. First, posting your work is NOT a marketing strategy. It will NOT garner work. Your potential clients are busy writing, producing, and creating. They're not spending their days scrolling through Facebook looking for voice talent. When they are ready to cast, they'll put out notices on P2P sites, hire casting directors, or contact agents. Are there exceptions? Yes. But they are very, VERY rare. Needle-in-a-haystack rare. Lottery-winner rare. Second, by constantly posting your work, you cause people to tune out and eventually scroll by your posts. It's wearying. Kind of the opposite effect you're after, right? Of course, when a special booking comes along and you want your family and friends to celebrate with you, by all means, post away. There's nothing wrong with taking pride in what you do. But remember: Posting your work on social media is NOT a marketing strategy.

## ***Don't Post Your Work on Social Media***



## ***Don't Be A Humble-Bragger***

This is a hard one, I understand. We have an innate need to be seen and acknowledged and validated. And most of us have the good sense not to straight-up brag. We know it's unbecoming. And so, in an effort to keep our egos in check, we inadvertently succumb to the "humble brag." We use some piece of not-so-subtle subterfuge to make it appear we are not really bragging. Except, we are. My favorite illustration of this is "Oh silly me! I'm so embarrassed! The darn strap on my shoe broke while I was walking the red carpet at the Oscars!" See what I mean? You're not really connecting to the "commoners." It's not really about the embarrassment of a broken shoe strap. It's that **YOU ARE AT THE OSCARS!!**

The need for validation and recognition is best satisfied by the people who love you – like, really love you. Because people on social media **DON'T** love you. They really don't. And for people who don't love you, and even those who sort of like you, the humble brag gets really old, really fast. The humble brag tends to engender not admiration, but contempt. Which is the exact opposite of what we intend. My favorite remedy? Practice singing the praises of others on social media. It's quite a lovely thing to do. You get to post **AND** you get to encourage and praise someone else. Brag to your family, your spouse, your kids, your close friends in the privacy of your life. Brag about others in public.

Legendary, Emmy-winning animation voice actor Rob Paulsen said it best. An Emmy and seven bucks will get you a latte. Awards don't book jobs. Great auditions do. Solid work begets work. Great client relationships beget work. Not awards. Of course, it's nice to be recognized by your peers and it's nice for us to acknowledge great work in our field. Just keep your expectations in check. There are great things about winning awards and award shows themselves can be great fun and quite unifying. It is, indeed, an honor to be nominated. But you'll be disappointed if you think work is going to start rolling in just because you've got a statue on the shelf of your studio. Keep getting better. Keep doing good work. Keep cultivating that relationship with your client. That's the true path to success.

***Don't Be Fooled Into Thinking Awards  
Will Get You Work***





## ***When It Comes To Rates, Don't Be A Bottom Dweller***

Those voice actors who've been on the job for a few decades understand the value voiceover brings to a project. We know our worth, and our compensation expectations are, for the most part, realistic and fair. We know that clients are not just paying for our time, they are paying for our talent and our expertise. It is patently untrue that anyone can do voiceover, so don't let anyone try to convince you otherwise in an attempt to drive your fees into the ground.

For those who've come to voiceover from other, less gratifying and/or lower-paying careers, a low rate in voiceover can seem like a high rate by comparison. If you think "hey I'll read this :30 second thing for \$50! That's twice as much as I made per hour in my last job!" then you need to educate yourself. You are doing yourself and the industry a great disservice by offering and accepting such rates. Please check union rates at [SAG-AFTRA](#) and non-union rates with the [GVAA Rate Guide](#).

Know. Your. Worth.

For the vast majority of voice actors, it takes quite a while to cultivate a career. But the all-too-prevalent myth is that all you need is a quiet space, a decent microphone, and an internet connection and you'll be good to go! Nothing could be further from the truth. You need training. You need experience and you need practice. Competition is fierce and there are hundreds if not thousands of us competing across the country for the same jobs. If you're only auditioning a few times per week, it's likely going to take you YEARS before you MIGHT book one. Assuming you possess the talent, voiceover is largely a numbers game. The more you audition, the greater your chances of booking. It's as simple as that. And yet... it's also more complex. The point is, avail yourself of as many auditions as you possibly can before you make any assessment of your success. If you submit a thousand auditions in a year and book five or six, you're doing better than 95% of voice actors out there. Do the math on that and keep things in perspective.

If you submit a thousand auditions in a year and book nothing, you're not even shortlisted or put on availability for a job, it's time to reevaluate. You may need more training. You may have developed some bad habits. You may need to up your technical game. Or you may need to try another profession. As I mentioned above, voiceover is not for everyone. But all is not lost. Perhaps you fit into this business as a different kind of provider. Voice actors need the expertise of others – audio techs, engineers, editors, website designers, agents, casting directors... If you love the business but are having zero luck booking, think about other ways in which you might be a part of the wonderful world of voiceover.

PS: Auditioning a thousand times a year is equivalent to roughly 20 auditions per week. Most successful voice actors submit far more. If you're not auditioning 20 times per week, that's a worthy goal in and of itself.

***Don't Quit Too Soon and Don't Hang On Too Long***



## ***Don't Badmouth Anyone. EVER***

I shouldn't have to say this. But I must. It's a terrible idea to talk smack about anyone in any business in which you might find yourself. And, while it seems everyone and their dog does voiceover these days, the world of voiceover is very small and you WILL cross paths again with anyone you badmouth. The casting director you spoke ill of will end up head of the commercial department at the agency you've been eyeing for representation. That much disliked agent you gossiped about and thought you left behind, will be hired at the agency you just signed with. The writer whose words you criticized, will be promoted to program director at the station you hoped would bring you on as their primary voice, but won't because your reputation for having a bad attitude preceded you. Hold your tongue. Keep your opinions to yourself. Find something positive to say, or don't say anything at all. You'll keep your bridges intact and you'll have no regrets as you develop a reputation for the quality work you do, rather than for being a negative, small-minded complainer.

In my coaching business, I encourage every voice actor to pursue and to live a well-rounded life. This includes getting married, having children, traveling, cultivating hobbies, and being of service. Ultimately our job as voice actors, whether we work in animation, commercial, narration, promo, or audiobooks, is to convey with authenticity the human experience. And we can't convey it unless we fully participate in life. A full life will include not just fabulous highs and overwhelming joy, but consternation, frustration, loss, sorrow, grief, and suffering. Every single human experience informs our work, and the richer our lives, the better we'll be at our job. Bookings come and go. The job you thought would make or break your career, won't. There will always be more opportunity for work, but there will only be one first day of school for your son, one high school championship game for your daughter, one chance to be with your child as she gives birth to your grandchild, one opportunity to pay your respects for a friend you lost too soon. Some sunsets are just too glorious to miss, as well. Be present in your life. Live it, while you have it. Voiceover can wait.

## ***Don't Forget To Have A Life***





*Thank You!*

I send occasional emails regarding workshops and classes, and sometimes a bit of inspiration. If you're interested in being on my mailing list, please join me at [trustandbebrave.com](http://trustandbebrave.com).

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