

# 5 FATAL MISTAKES THAT PROS NO LONGER MAKE



The **SHOW** ★★

The **BUSINESS** ★★★★★

The **CULTURE** ★★★★★

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# Making a living from your talent: where to start?

Too many artists, no matter how talented they are, give up because they can't figure out **how make a living from their talent**. The main reason people give up is that they lack the information they need about the **SHOW**, the **BUSINESS**, and the **CULTURE**. This is because there is nowhere to learn this information, unfortunately. Artists have to figure things out on their own, since everyone is out for themselves.

"THE SECRET OF PROS" is the perfect place to start learning how to resolve this problem. The blog will explain the **keys** and the **state of mind** needed by those who want to make a living in the entertainment industry.

## Why this guide?

This guide will give you dozens of tips to help you make a living with your talent, and will describe **5 fatal mistakes that pros no longer make!**

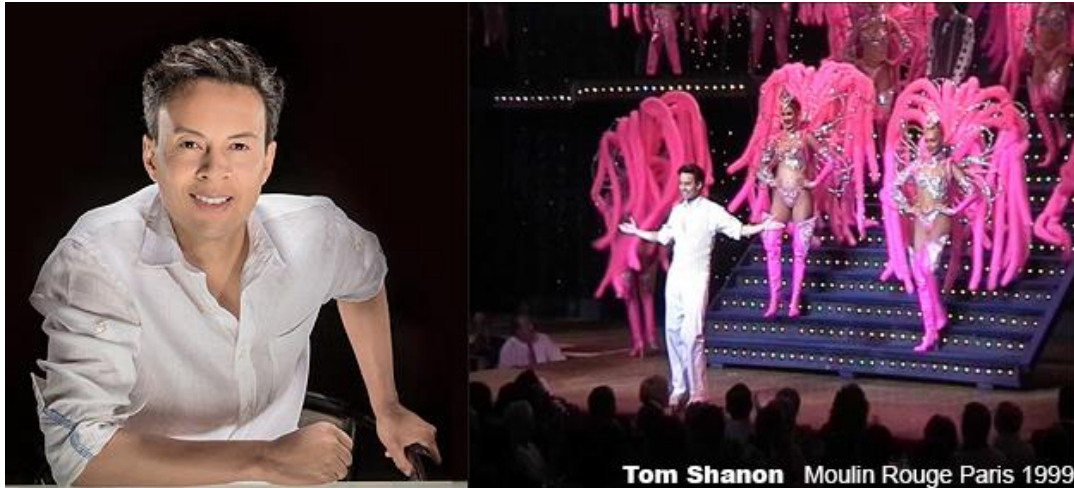
I'll go over these 5 mistakes in two separate chapters:

1. Successfully approaching a producer or talent agent
2. Getting a producer to extend your contract or re-hire you

*This guide will give you just a taste of what you'll need to know in order to make a living in the entertainment industry. I'll regularly publish other guides and articles about the **SHOW**, the **BUSINESS** and the **CULTURE**.*

*Stay up-to-date by following the social network ["THE SECRET OF PROS"](https://www.theseretofpros.com)*

# Who am I to guide you?



My name is **Tom Shanon**, and I come from a freestyle sport I learned on the streets. I fully understand your difficulty with this problem: "how can I make a living from my talent? "

I started with nothing and climbed my way up, step-by-step. I had to innovate, create, make my props, take risks, learn from my mistakes, practice, and perform the “show” as well as manage the “business”. I wanted to make a living doing what I loved, but my sport was still too unusual at the time. Show business was the solution! Okay, but how? When I started performing in 1992, I didn't know anything about show business, and I didn't even have the words to describe what I did! I knew I wanted to earn a living from my talent, but nobody believed in me, and even worse, there was nowhere for me to learn about the artistic profession. When you're at this stage, either you enjoy living dangerously, or you're oblivious! It was a very long and difficult process, but I persevered and was successful in the end. And I can now say that creating an act is the best way to make a living from your talent!

I developed my talent by experimenting as much as possible, and through trial and error I taught myself how to transform what looked like "nothing special" into a moneymaking show. And I ended up creating a wide variety of shows for myself and others. I had discovered ["the keys to a successful show!"](#)

In a clear and accessible way, I'll share what I've learned to help you **make a living from your talent.**

You can learn more about me here: [Tom Shanon](#)

# **SUCCESSFULLY APPROACHING A PRODUCER OR TALENT AGENT**



## **Introduction**

It's a never-ending quest for performing artists to make the right contacts. Thankfully, there are endless opportunities to meet people. But how should you talk about your talent with someone who could hire you? It's a difficult task: first of all, because you're talking about yourself; secondly, because what you do can only be seen or heard to be understood. This is even harder if your talent is unique. This complex challenge is very frustrating and often destabilizing. But there are certain mistakes you should never make, and among these, I'll describe the fatal mistakes that pros no longer make.

## The beginner's mistake

In show business, it's not unusual to come across someone who could hire you, such as a producer or a talent agent, and you have to jump at the chance to talk to them. The hard part is that you may only have a few seconds or a few minutes to speak, but that's no excuse for making a beginner's mistake.

When you present yourself, never say: **"I'm a professional"**. If you say this, you're making a big mistake. The person you're talking too will immediately understand that you're justifying yourself and that you're **inexperienced**. Imagine that you're sick and looking for a doctor, and the one you visit says to you, "I am a professional Doctor". Personally, I would get out of there as quickly as possible! It's exactly the same thing in your case. If you ever say that to a producer, they'll be very amused! 😊

➤ **MISTAKE # 1:** Saying, "I am a professional" is a fatal mistake pros no longer make!

## Why do inexperienced talent justify themselves?

Because they're just starting out in a very misunderstood field: "show business". Talent who are striving to become artists are generally misunderstood, it happens all the time. We know that people think show business isn't a real profession. Our educational system doesn't ever talk about the entertainment industry. However, we learn all about doctors, accountants, lawyers, factory workers, etc. - the "normal jobs" (I speak about France, the country where I live. I am curious to know how it is in your country). Most people think that performers don't have a "real" profession, since they're just having fun! Given this widespread misunderstanding, the trap for inexperienced talent is avoiding the temptation to loudly proclaim, **"I am a professional!"** to make themselves understood. But producers aren't "everyone", nor are talent agents. If they hear you say this, they'll immediately realize that you're inexperienced. So beware!



# The solutions

## The solution if you have less than 1 minute

Don't talk about yourself, just state your specialty and if necessary, mention your most important show engagement. Then hand out your business card or your e-mail and say: **"if you give me your card or e-mail I'll let you know where you can see me perform."** That way you'll have their contact information, and even if they don't come to see you perform, **you'll be able to send them your promotional materials and stay in touch.**

## The solution if you have less than 10 minutes

Present yourself briefly, state your specialty and mention your most important show engagement. Then, make sure you listen rather than talk. To do this, ask several questions about their artistic vision or their future projects. Letting someone talk has two advantages: first of all, you'll be able to determine whether their attitude towards you is open and positive; secondly, you'll definitely get some information about what they have in mind for their next projects. Next, end the conversation as you would if you had less than a minute. Give them your business card or e-mail and say: "if you give me your card or e-mail I'll let you know where you can see me perform." That way you have their contact information, and even if they don't come to see you perform, you'll be able to send them your promotional materials and stay in touch.

## The solution if you have more than 10 minutes

Beware of this potential trap! Even if you're a very good conversationalist, don't say too much, just the minimum. Instead, use one of my favorite sayings: **"To understand what an artist does, the best description in the world will never be as powerful as seeing them on stage!"** And even if you can give the best description in the world, talking too much could turn against you, because if you raise the bar too high you run the risk of disappointing them. **The element of surprise always has the strongest impact!**

➤ **MISTAKE # 2:** Talking too much is a fatal mistake pros no longer make!

## The video

Agents and producers would rather see an artist perform, even in a mediocre venue, than watch a beautiful video. But if it's not possible to invite them, send a video of a live performance in front of a real audience. Avoid videos with fake audiences and too much editing or special effects.

Be careful, there is another trap! Know who you're sending your video to. If it's a talent agency, **you should never include your contact information directly in the video** (not your address, not your telephone number, not your website, not your e-mail, or even your name). Agents are intermediaries; they earn a living because their client doesn't know you. So if you embed your contact information in the video, they'll never put you in their catalog. The solution is to write your contact information on a removable sticker, or include it in a letter. If you're sending your video via the Internet, then include your contact information in an e-mail. That way, you'll build a relationship of trust and your agent will know that you understand the industry. Remember this rule: **"their client must never be able to contact you directly"**. With a talent agency, if you don't follow this rule you're making a fatal mistake!

➤ **MISTAKE # 3:** Sending a talent agency a video with your contact information embedded in it is a fatal mistake pros no longer make!

You should always have **4 different videos** to give out according to the circumstances:

- A teaser of less than 1 minute, with your contact information
- Your entire show, with your contact information
- A teaser of less than 1 minute, without contact information
- Your entire show, without contact information

Here is the address book of people and companies in charge of hiring performers:

**MY BUSINESS**



## Q&A summary of the chapter "Successfully approaching a producer or talent agency"

- What mistake do beginners make? **Saying, "I'm a professional"**
- How should you talk about your talent? **Just say what your specialty is and talk about your most important show engagement, not yourself. Then invite the person to come see you perform!**
- What is the trap to avoid when talking about your talent? **Even if you're a very good conversationalist, the trap is talking too much!**
- Why do inexperienced artists make the mistake of justifying themselves? **Because they're starting out in a poorly understood profession!**
- Is giving out a video the best solution? **No, the best solution is first inviting the person to come see you perform!**
- What are the traps to avoid when providing a video? **You should never embed your contact information in a video for a talent agency!**
- What kind of content should the video have? You should have four versions:
  - **A teaser of less than 1 minute, with your contact information**
  - **Your entire show, with your contact information**
  - **A teaser of less than 1 minute, without contact information**
  - **Your entire show, without contact information**

## Chapter conclusion

My conclusion is just a single phrase and it's also one of my favorite sayings: **"To understand what an artist does, the best description in the world will never be as powerful as seeing them perform on stage."**

# GETTING A PRODUCER TO EXTEND YOUR CONTRACT OR RE-HIRE YOU



## Introduction

A performer has two priorities: first, working on the artistic aspects of their show; second, finding work. It's really challenging to find work, so getting a producer to extend your contract or re-hire you means saving publicity costs and time, and especially working more often.

A producer also benefits from extending an artist's contract or re-hiring them. They're already familiar with the quality of their work, and they save time because they no longer need to look for a performer. But the real reason, which beginner artists aren't aware of, is that producers invest in **"the absence of problems"**. Producers are busy trying to manage finances, marketing, security, scenography, laws, pay, finding talent, etc. They are constantly analyzing potential problems. As a result, they have developed a special ability: **their brains are programmed to eliminate problems!**

## A producer's top priority is the absence of problems!

The challenge of performing on stage is being "live." When you have a problem, you can't cut the image out as you can with a video. So you have to give **a good performance every time**; you have to be a reliable performer!

By "**reliable performer**", a producer means two things:

1. An artist who gives a good performance **every time**, without **visible mistakes**
2. An artist who **always** keeps their **promises** in terms of how they present themselves in their promotional materials

For a producer, a **reliable performer = absence of problems**.

Performing on stage takes courage and is a risk in itself. Yet an artist must succeed every time! If you're a singer and you promise a moving performance, then you must move your audience every time. If you're a comedian, you must make your audience laugh every day. If you perform a balancing act, you can never fall. **Unreliability is a problem**, and nothing disappoints a producer more than paying for unreliable talent. Being unreliable ruins your chances of having your contract extended or being re-hired, since **a producer's true priority is the absence of problems**.

## Being unreliable is a mistake pros no longer make!

How many shows can an artist do in a day? There's no limit, since it all depends on what's in your contract (see the contract template for artists). But 3 performances a day is already a lot, and very few artists agree to do more. There aren't many places where you can perform more often, except perhaps in amusement parks.

So let's do the math. If a contract has you working three times a day, six days a week, for several months or years, you could give more than 75 performances per month. Under the circumstances, your challenge isn't to be exceptional on a particular day, but to **be reliable for the duration of your contract**.

Please don't make the mistake of comparing yourself to extraordinary feats that generate buzz online (in most cases people don't show the times they messed up). **Your exploit is making sure that you give a good performance each and every day, in front of a live audience, and to make them believe that it is the best show of your life!**

- **MISTAKE # 4:** A producer's top priority is the absence of problems! Therefore being unreliable is a fatal mistake pros no longer make!

## **Earning a producer's trust**

Messing up your performance means making "**a visible mistake**" or "**not keeping the promise you made in your promotional materials**".

So how can you earn a producer's trust? First of all, you start by giving a flawless performance the first time they come to see you. Next, I've noticed that if you make more than about 2 mistakes in 100 performances, you're likely to lose the trust of the production that hired you, and this is true for all performers, whether you're an acrobat, a singer etc. (There aren't any statistics, these figures are based entirely on my own observations over the past several years).

## **The solution**

Now that you know what it means to "mess up" your act, is there a secret to being "**reliable**"? And if so, will the solution enhance or weaken your show? Here is the key to this problem:

- Stop pushing your technique to the limit and develop your stage presence instead. In other words, make sure your **technique is flawless** and **become a persona**.

In order to be reliable, you first have to stop taking technical risks. In any case, your audience will never know what you've taken out of your show. **The greatest added value would be transferring your energy into developing your persona.**

The further you push the limits of your technique, the greater the risk of making a mistake. If you're too focused on avoiding mistakes, you end up losing your connection to the audience. This makes it impossible to have a "stage presence". The entertainment industry wants artists, not technicians!

When I was young and inexperienced, I didn't understand this right away. When I first started, my shows were too technical. I fell victim the ["expert's syndrome"](#) (see the article on the topic on "THE SECRET OF PROS" blog). I made the mistake of presenting a purely technical exploit, so my performances ended up looking more like demonstrations than shows. Sure, I impressed people, but I was still a long way from being an artist.

So I decided to split my energy between my **T (technique)** and my **P (persona)**, and that changed everything. My act improved immensely! Today I no longer focus 100% on the T, but I make my audience think I do - that's the art of performance! For example, for some shows I do 80% T - 20% P. For others I do 40% T - 60% P. Some of my shows actually fluctuate throughout the performance. For example, I start out at 60% T - 40% P, then halfway through I shift to 5% T - 95% P, and then I end with 90% T - 10% P. It depends on the show; there are no rules. You need to **strike a balance between "minimizing the risk of technical mistakes" and "fully embodying your persona"**. It's up to each performer to figure out what works best for them. But you should **never do 100% T**, because you increase the risk of mistakes and your show will invariably resemble a demonstration... and producers don't like that!

No matter what, do everything you can to be reliable, because nothing is more stressful than knowing the production doubts your abilities. On the other hand, there is no better feeling than knowing that people trust you to perform well every time. This trust will help you relax and allow you to perform even better, creating a virtuous circle!

➤ **MISTAKE # 5:** Being too technical is a fatal mistake pros no longer make!



In summary, here are the benefits of applying this solution:

- You create a **"real act"**, not a demonstration
- You make fewer mistakes, **you're reliable**
- You're less stressed, your thoughts aren't elsewhere, **you're fully present**
- You can better **play your character**
- You gain confidence, **you create a virtuous circle**
- You were a technician, **now you can hope to become an artist**
- For a producer, a **reliable performer = absence of problems**
- **Being reliable means increasing your chances of having your contract extended or being re-hired**

I've also noticed, as have other colleagues with successful careers in the business, **"the more time passes, the more artists focus on performing their character"**. Why is that?

- Because the potential for technical progress is limited, while there is no limit to character development.
- Because interactions with the audience are more meaningful when you're playing a character rather than focusing on your technique.
- Because over time, the technique becomes ingrained, second nature, invisible and natural, like our mother tongue. **At this level, the purpose of technique is solely to serve your character!** It's at this point that spectators are under the illusion that the technique is easy.

**The technique should never be an end in itself, it should always serve your persona.** Good artists work as hard as they can to keep improving throughout their careers. Their experimentations with their act teach them one thing: their performances are always more effective with a well-developed persona than with advanced technique. And naturally their career is more successful as a result.



## Q&A summary for the chapter "Getting a producer to extend your contract or re-hire you"

- What is the top priority for producers? **The absence of problems!**
- What disappoints producers? **Unreliable performers!**
- How many shows can an artist perform per day in a month? **There are no limits, but 3 per day is often the maximum.**
- What does it mean to "mess up" your performance? **It means making "a visible mistake" or "not keeping the promise you made in your promotional materials."**
- How can I earn a producer's trust? **By avoiding mistakes, being a reliable performer.**
- How can I give the best possible performance? **Stop pushing your technique to the limit and develop your stage presence instead.**

## Chapter conclusion

A musician who has mastered their instrument, who can play anything perfectly, is still only a great musician. A musician whose instrument has just one function, to serve their persona, has become an artist!

In show business, dull people don't interest anyone. Having a persona is so important that without one you are just a boring technician demonstrating your expertise. But as soon as you have a persona, the audience sees you as an artist!

# **5 FATAL MISTAKES**

## **THAT PROS NO LONGER MAKE!**



### **Voilà, you've reached the end of this guide!**

I hope that you have learned lots of tricks that will save you time and help you make a living from your talent. Here is a reminder of the **5 fatal mistakes that pros no longer make!**

**MISTAKE # 1:** Saying, "I am a professional" is a fatal mistake pros no longer make!

**MISTAKE # 2:** Talking too much is a fatal mistake pros no longer make!

**MISTAKE # 3:** Sending a talent agency a video with your contact information embedded in it is a fatal mistake the pros no longer make!

**MISTAKE # 4:** A producer's top priority is the absence of problems! Therefore being unreliable is a fatal mistake pros no longer make!

**MISTAKE # 5:** Being too technical is a fatal mistake pros no longer make!

## Objective

There are of course other fatal mistakes pros no longer make. But my objective with this guide and these 5 mistakes is to give you a **solid foundation so you can get off to a good start**. I also want to help you understand some very important concepts before I take it to the next level. Click on the links to view:

1. my method ["THE KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL SHOW"](#)
2. the [ADDRESS BOOK](#) of people and companies in charge of hiring performers.

**Tom Shanon**

