



## Why Should You Consider a Voiceover Coach? by Marc Cashman

I've been teaching and coaching voiceover for almost thirteen years now, (and directing and producing V-O talent for thirty) and have had the opportunity to work with hundreds of voice actors at all different levels.

A lot of actors love the classroom/studio setting. They enjoy the camaraderie of the class, listening to others perform the same copy, getting ideas from their colleagues. They like the studio setting, and are energized by working with a real director and engineer in a professional V-O studio with a voiceover booth.

But recently I've been working with a number of students who, after studying with me in classes (or who've taken classes with other instructors), subsequently engaged me in one-on-one coaching. And most of them have told me that they've made much more progress in the one-on-one format.

Why? Well, a lot of actors have unconventional schedules—some work full or part-time jobs, some are on the road a lot, and many can't commit to four, six or eight consecutive weeks of classes. Some people need more than a few takes to perfect a read (and you don't have a lot of time in a class setting to do a lot of takes, given that there are at least eight people and three hours of class time). Others get nervous performing in front of a group (albeit a small one), and find the class "audience" a bit intimidating.

I'm finding that a lot of voice actors are more comfortable working one-on-one with a coach, without an audience or anyone else involved except the coach, concentrating on their strengths and weaknesses, using various exercises until they perfect their V-O skills. They find coaching more individualized and custom-tailored to their skills.

Recently, someone wrote me after seeing a promotional piece I sent out, asking, "Really? Do voice actors really need a coach? I thought after you get training, the rest of your skills are developed in the real world through experience."

It reminded me of an article I read in *The New Yorker* a couple of years ago (*Personal Best* by Atul Gawande, *The New Yorker*, October 3, 2011). In it, the author differentiates between teaching and coaching, saying coaching "...is different...where there's a presumption that, after a certain point, the student no longer needs instruction. You graduate. You're done. You can go the rest of the way yourself....This is how elite musicians are taught. Many teachers see their role as preparing students to make their way without them."

But many top-tier, veteran voice talent enlist the services of a coach just as much as people who are just starting out. What's the difference? "The concept of coaching is slippery," Gawande says. "Many coaches are not teachers, but they teach. They're not your boss...but they can be bossy. They don't even have to be good at what they're coaching. Mainly, they observe, they judge, they guide."

Athletes have coaches, singers have coaches, and some top musicians have coaches. Yitzhak Perlman is among them, as is Renee Fleming, the renowned operatic soprano. She refers to coaches as “our outside ears.” Fleming says, “I’ve always enjoyed the luxury of having a set of ‘outside ears.’” In my case, as a producer, they belong to the engineer I’m working with, and occasionally my client (the advertiser). Having an extra set of ears to be objective about a performance can be invaluable, not just to me, but to the talent.

When it comes to coaching (and teaching), I’ve always concentrated on the eight fundamental skills every professional voice actor needs to bring to every performance: Breathing, Timing, Eye-Brain-Mouth Coordination, Articulation, Consistency, Analysis and Interpretation, Acting and Listening/Taking Direction. It was therefore interesting to read in Gawande’s article that “Good coaches know how to break down performance into its individual components. In sports, coaches focus on mechanics, conditioning and strategy, and have ways to break each of those down, in turn.” In voiceover, I also focus on mechanics, conditioning and strategy, and break each of those down as well.

The author explains, “Elite performers, researchers say, must engage in ‘deliberate practice’—sustained, mindful efforts to develop the full range of abilities that success requires. You have to work at what you’re not good at. In theory, people can do this themselves. But most people do not know where to start or how to proceed.”

And that’s where coaches can be really helpful. “The coach provides the outside eyes and ears,” the author says, “...and makes you aware of where you’re falling short.”

My job as a teacher/coach is to find and point out a voice actor’s strengths and reinforce them, and determine their weaknesses or bad habits so we can mitigate or eliminate them. My other job is to give actors the tools they need to for the rest of their career, so they can consistently improve their performances, including the all-important one of self-direction. I can’t be with them physically in the booth, but hopefully I can be there mentally.

*Personal Best* sums it all up by pointing out that “...coaching done well may be the most effective intervention designed for human performance. Yet the allegiance of coaches is to the people they work with; their success depends on it. And the existence of a coach requires an acknowledgment that even expert practitioners have significant room for improvement.”

So if you’ve tried voice acting classes or seminars or workshops and feel that you’d like to try a different approach to V-O training, you might consider coaching. A lot of people I’ve worked with have benefited greatly, telling me that they learned more in one hour of coaching than they had from six weeks of classes (except for the ones who’ve taken *my* classes!). And now that there are so many V-O forums and V-O groups on Facebook, LinkedIn or related sites, you can ask your colleagues who they’ve worked with and who they recommend. Hopefully you’ll find a great V-O coach who can teach you new things and brings out the best in you.

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**MARC CASHMAN** is one of the few voice-acting instructors in the U.S. who is on “both sides of the glass”—as an award-winning Radio and TV commercial copywriter, producer and casting director, and as a working voice actor. Creative Director of Cashman Commercials, he creates, casts and produces copy and music advertising for radio and television clients such as Kroger, Charles Schwab, Quizno's, Pella Windows, Pabst Blue Ribbon and many others.

As a voice actor, he's been named one of the “Best Voices of the Year”—three times—by AudioFile Magazine. He's voiced hundreds of Radio and TV commercials, dubbed foreign films, narrated over 100 audiobooks, and created the voices of numerous animation and videogame characters.

In addition to his production schedule, he's an adjunct professor of voiceover at California Institute of the Arts and instructs voice-acting of all levels through his online and tele-coaching programs and his V-O classes, “The Cashman Cache of Voice-Acting Techniques” in Los Angeles, CA. He also produces V-O demos, writes a monthly online column, “Ask the VoiceCat” through NowCasting.com, as well as articles and podcasts through Voices.com and VoiceOverXtra.com.

Marc has been interviewed in trade magazines and newspapers and on numerous radio and television programs. He's been the Keynote Speaker and Master Class instructor at VOICE 2008, 2010 and 2012 (the only international convention for voice actors), and he'll be presenting again at VOICE 2014 in August. He can be contacted at 661-222-9300, [cashcomm@earthlink.net](mailto:cashcomm@earthlink.net) or through his website, [www.cashmancommercials.com](http://www.cashmancommercials.com).