

THE MASCOT ACTING TECHNIQUE **(for performers of all stripes)**

You've seen them. They shuffle aimlessly through the crowd, shaking hands while trying to avoid adolescents who want to harass them. They are mediocre mascots. They are handed a cheap, smelly costume, are given little direction, and don't really know how to promote the organization they represent.

But a mascot is more than a cheap costume. It's the most visible representative of a corporate entity. It creates instant memories. And because mascots have been utilized by thousands of teams, schools and companies for over 50 years, an unspoken standard has been established by a scrutinizing body of consumers as to whether the mascot is effective or not.

So, how do you make your mascot character stand out in a crowd of cheap suits?

THE ROAD MAP TO MASCOT SUCCESS!

- A good looking and moving costume
- A skilled and entertaining performer
- A supportive and creative environment

COSTUMES 101

So you've just been selected to be a mascot. CONGRATULATIONS!

Here are a few basics most mascots share so you won't burn out the first time you give this craft a try...

PREPARATION:

If you have access to the costume prior to the event, try it on and practice! Figure out how the costume is put on, sometimes there are instructions.

DO NOT LET ANYONE SEE YOU CHANGE!!!

Part of the beauty of this craft is the mystery of the actor. Before your event seek out a clean private room where you can change and store your clothes, keys and wallet. You should be able to retreat there in the case of a possible emergency!!

MAINTENANCE TIPS:

Check the mascot costume over for wear and tear after each use. Are all zippers working? Are any seams coming apart?...or other holes starting to show? How does the head look? By keeping up to date on repairs, you will keep your mascot costume in prime condition for a long time.

CAUTION: Do not wear mascot heads in the presence of fire, smoke, while driving a vehicle or using dangerous equipment. Your vision and hearing will be impaired!

MASCOT ACTING 101: THE ELEMENTS

The most important thing to remember when you're first starting out as a mascot is that your human identity will be set aside. Therefore you have the opportunity to act as something or someone you're not. This is not a suggestion for causing trouble, but it is a chance for you to portray an ideal character, devoid of faults. Remember that every act, even small, will be watched by every eye, whether you realize it or not. Make sure your act doesn't get you in trouble!!!

The FIVE E's of Mascotting:

Entrance: Set your mark, whether it's at a football game or a store opening, with a big entrance. Let people know that you've arrived in style. Huge flags, confetti showers, series of flips, or setting off a noisemaker grabs attention. If your budget or environment doesn't lend itself to that consider banging on the door you enter before opening it. Stomping on the floor, or letting your shoes rap hard and loud against the tiles. Wave your arms. Most of all, grab that attention!

Exaggeration: You're in a huge costume, wearing huge feet, a huge head, and needing a huge ego to fill out the costume. You need to double or even triple the actions you would normally do so your costume doesn't hide what you're doing. Walking is usually suggested as a march, try not to drag your feet, but pick them up off the ground. A smooth wobble, a jump in your step, a fluid angry prowl, or even a child-like bounce adds character to your steps. If you're waving to thousands make sure the guy in the upper row can see you. Use your whole body.

Emotion: Think about how emotional sporting events can get. Practice a number of emotions- happy, sad, angry, scared, excited in front of a mirror with your head on. Learn where the facial features of your costume are and use them the way a human (or animal) would. Once you've gotten down some emotions using your head and arms try and use the rest of your body as well. Shivering, slow motion, trudging feet, tantrums, kowtowing, jumping up and down, skipping and elation are great emotions to try. And remembering that the costume will hide a lot of your gestures, make sure you exaggerate!

Elevation: Mascots are expected to be larger than life. But the person making them animated should remember that differences in elevation will be more effective than one who uses slight variations in elevation. Rocket science? No. This is what it means: to get higher elevation, try some things on your toes. Peer down at children. Jump. Climb on something (sturdy, of course.) To get lower elevation, slide. Kneel. Lay down. Lunge. Fall unexpectedly. If you keep in mind that you are doing a little of both it will add to your animation.

Energy: Mascots aren't expected to run out of gas before they're done. If you're starting out **DON'T GO CRAZY**. Pace yourself. If you do run out of breath and you can't get to the changing room, move to a chair or a bench and use your arms to keep your motions going while you catch your breath. Don't feel like you have to be Daffy Duck (high-strung) throughout the game. Remember, Bugs Bunny got credit for keeping cool and he had the last laugh!

MOST OF ALL: Treat people with respect. You can't win everyone over, and you should never expect to. Remember everyone has a different reason for being at a store, a game or a promotion. Sometimes respectfully walking away makes a bigger impression on a "non fan" than pressing the issue. The more respect you give the more respect you get back.



ON AUDITIONS AND TRYOUTS

First: Do some research. Find out what the old mascots did, and copy some of their best schtick. Try and talk to some of the cheerleaders. See if there is anything they know the cheerleading coach liked to see the mascot do. While you're at it, see if any cheerleaders might be willing to tell you what kinds of cheerleading partner stunts they've seen mascots do. Even a small stunt can be impressive.

Create a video resume, even if it's you in a rented costume, dancing in your living room. The more teams can see what you can do the better your chances are of promotion.

Try and wear a suit or professional looking clothes. Even if they say dress casual, try and be as formal as possible without going too far.

Mascot Tryout Checklist!!!

- costume (if you are expected to bring one)
- change of clothes
- sweatband
- water
- resume (if necessary)
- video resume (if necessary)
- props you want to use
- audio tape or CD of your tryout skit (if necessary)
- sneakers

SKITS:

When choosing a skit, try to stay true to the personality of the character.

Some teams frown on violence, so make sure your skit follows the correct "rating" for your team.

Practice the whole stunt before your tryout, preferably in front of a mirror, or use a video camera to judge your performance. Practice makes perfect! Practice in front of a mirror how you would respond to different situations, like "your team is losing bad" or "you've just scared a child", etc.

The skits more often effective are those that compact a number of music clips together, showing diversity in flavor, speed, emotions, etc. Mix 15-30 seconds of song clips that you can perform from. Show lots of energy and positive gestures.

Usually if there is a large group of people trying out they will have you do a choreographed dance. If you mess up then KEEP MOVING. Even though you are not in costume, make large movements, facial expressions. If you have to do a kick do it with authority! Pretend as if the people that you are trying out for don't see you and you are in a costume. Plus, try and do the dance that they make you do. You may find it odd that they are making you do a dance, but they just want to see how you move and if you are shy or not

An audition process will often consist of:

1. An elevator (when two guys lift you up from your feet)
2. Short informal interview (5 min) with judges
3. 1-2 minute skit
4. Crazy tumbling
5. Sample performance (7 minutes in costume)
6. Quick Improv.

Make sure you are physically fit to do the job. if you get that down you will be set.

Keep it real...Real FUNNY"

Just to give it simply and briefly, the people are wanting someone with LOADS of energy, a creative imagination, spirit, improvisational, athletic, ability to create and appropriately use props, responsibility to uphold values and image, ability to work well with others, affection for children, toleration for totally bizarre situations and activities, care for others' property, ability to withstand high temperatures for long periods of time, charisma and little to complain about, and... did I mention LOADS of energy? "

HEALTH TIPS FOR MASCOTS

If you have the desire to be a long-term mascot you will learn to tolerate the heat longer as you perform more and more. Your body will build up a tolerance for the heat by reacting the natural cooling process. Research and learn what is best for your body with your doctor and/or trainer.

Two factors will always remain the same:

1. You're wearing a costume that heats your body in an unnatural state.
2. Your body is going to want to cool itself down in a natural fashion.

You can only absorb about a quart of water every hour fifteen minutes...and you can sweat in a suit faster than that. so hydrate starting three days before. Drink little sips all day spread out throughout the day. Urine should be lemonade in color. Try some frozen ice packs....and most importantly pace your recovery

Research shows that diluted Gatorade is best. The straight out of the bottle stuff takes longer than water to assimilate, but you really do need the extra stuff. As for bulking up on potassium, you can't. A good part of the cramping you might feel the day after a hot appearance is partially the loss of potassium from your muscles. (you can't put it in your muscles before you deplete it) Try potatoes (chips have potassium and the salt you need too) and bananas to replenish.

When long weekends in costume come around, 'Carbo-load' on pasta's and breads half of the week. And drink alot!!! (of water)

Wheat Thins are filling, but they aren't very heavy so you don't feel like throwing up after five minutes in the suit.

TROUBLE SHOOTING FOR MASCOTS IN TOUGH PERFORMANCE SITUATIONS

What to Do:

1. Getting clobbered by kids: Walk away. Tell a cheerleader or a responsible adult. Preparation: Know who to go to before the event starts, and the permissible actions you can take in this matter.

What Not To Do: Don't retaliate, "eye for an eye" or make threats you can't back up (like "I'll bite your fucking head off"). Keep your cool!

What to Do:

2. You get injured during performance: Conservatively walk away. Go to your changing room and assess the damage. Inform your contact person as to what happened.

What Not to Do: Don't stay in the area and continue to perform!

What to Do:

3. When you encounter a scared child: Pull your actions in. Make slow, slight movements so that the child feels less threatened. If the child continues to cry walk away. No child is worth terrifying just to preserve your score. In time that child might remember your acceding move.

What Not to Do: Don't push a child to stop crying. Don't sneak up on toddlers. Don't tower over a frightened child.

What to Do:

4. Picking up children: Careful! Let the parents put the child in your arms and take them out of your arms. If it's an older child you can hug them and pick them up halfway, and set them down gently. Also, when you hug, watch where your hands go. Sometimes big fingered paws reach out to places you don't mean to reach!

What Not to Do: Don't grab a child harshly, swing him/her around, and do your best to check for bandages or scars. (I had an incident once where I sat a kid on my lap who had third-degree burns underneath his shirt. Better safe than sorry!)

What to Do:

5. Hugging/Touching Children: When dealing with children, always use "the head and back" rule. When interacting with them, you mess up their hair, pat on the head, etc. For hugging it is on the back, above the belt."

What Not to Do: Don't let your hand stray to any part of a child (or anyone else) that could be interpreted as unacceptable. Many mascots have lost their jobs due to "straying hands", and with costumes that have long fingers, and can't always be controlled well!!!

If you have to work without an escort you should scope out areas before you put on the costume for safe spots.

Be careful about grabbing the kids by the hand or something, especially in this lawsuit happy day and age.



PHYSICAL STUNTS:

One mascot, while rappelling during practice, fell 100' and broke both of his legs. He lost his job for a year, recovered and found out his replacement became a *permanent* replacement. Then there was this guy, a CBA mascot, had a spotter for his rappel practice (who holds onto the rope and is supposed to break your fall). When he lost the rope the spotter ran for cover (not that I blame him). I know the guy broke his legs, too I'm not sure what else happened. And as far as trampoline acts go the NJ Nets mascot has two broken wrists from when he was an acrobat. Rocky from the Nuggets broke his tailbone a few years ago on Opening Night- during practice. He missed a big portion of the season- and he was lucky they didn't find a replacement for him. Think about as you're pondering physical stunts.

THINGS TO DO IN THE CROWD:

A few hints from the professionals:

While squeezing through a row of people in their seats, towards the end I grab my behind like someone pinched it, and then point accusing fingers.

Motion for a kid to throw popcorn in my mouth, then act like he nailed me in the eye. When someone actually gets popcorn in my mouth, I act all proud, then clutch my throat like I'm choking, I point to my back like I need the Heimlich, and then someone will grab me from behind and start Heimliching me, and when they're done, I act all flirtily with them and kiss them like it was all a big scam just to get them to grab me.

I'll make people laugh, then suddenly I'll stop and stare at one of the people laughing at me. I'll act out "Are you laughing at ME? No, are you laughing at ME??" then I'll get all furious and stomp off.

Pat your heart. point "you" "me" and "please". Usually you'll get a negative response. Get on your knees and beg. If that still gets a negative response gesture "drive" "eat". Still no? Okay, check their left hand. Is there a wedding ring? put your hand over their hand and gently tug at the ring, like you are going to pull it off. All the while keep pointing "me" "you". Check to see if they are mad. If they are walk away sulking. If they are laughing laugh with them and give them a hug.

Sit next to a female...young or old. Tap your mouth with one hand (yawn), stretch with the other arm. When you are done stretching, rest your arm on their shoulder (the old movie theater stunt).

See a great seat? Take off the shoe of the person sitting there. Throw it far enough away that the person has to work to retrieve it. Jump in the person's seat and refuse to move.

When I'm just plain tired and need a break, I'll just collapse on the ground for a few minutes, twitch, and then start giving myself CPR/chest compressions to revive myself.

PROPS:

Best place to find props is actually at flea markets. No sense in paying premium dollar for something you're only going to use once. Now if you know you can use something more than once, definitely try and get something sturdy. You don't want it falling apart when you use it the second time!

The best props can definitely be found at local magic and costume shops. They usually stock oversize goodies and funny gags. Get to know the dealers and let them know who you are and they will probably hook you up as well. Ask them if they have some catalogs that you can sort through for more ideas.

I've been finding some great, inexpensive stuff at the local "Big Lots" and Dollar Stores. They've had giant sized plastic candy canes, and wreath bows that are just about the right size for a mascot-sized tie. Also, I found a great blinking "Rudolph" nose that should bring a lot of laughs for only \$1.

Theatre Effects has a nice confetti cannon kit for \$80. It has a pocket rocket, which uses a CO2 cannon and you can fill the cannon with water, powder, streamers, confetti, even ping pong balls!

Get a kid's sized fishing pole with a wild wig attached to it. This is great for reeling down onto bald heads from up above, also funny to "cast" it onto someone's lap from behind them. Always gets a good rise.

Or Thought Cloud. It's just a 'cloud' like you see coming out of cartoon characters heads in comics. I suppose if you wanted to make one you could just use white styrofoam board and black letters. You hold it up to peoples heads giving the impression that they're

'thinking' your message. It's good to use in small groups and intimate locations. Not as a large crowd attractor.

Visit the local auto parts store and buy a battery filler with the large rubber bulb. Attach plastic tubing to the end of filler tube. Make sure it fits tight. Now, fill the bulb with baby powder. This is used to make like smoke is coming out your ears.

A pair of white gloves with the fingers cut off... Cue any Michael Jackson song.

I always liked the elastic string on the soccer ball trick - makes it come back to ya. And if you practice it right with another player you can have them kick the ball away from you and have it come right back in your sensitive area..... yeah, it actually works.

Also, I've been finding that good spontaneous crowd interaction is as entertaining as doing planned out skits.

FINALLY – SOME CAREER THOUGHTS FROM A FORMER MASCOT.

I learned to entertain people the hard way...inside a twenty pound furry suit on a 100-degree day.

I've stuffed myself inside a make believe moose, a buck-toothed horse, a dancing Tasmanian devil, a dinosaur, a big orange blob, a six-foot-five barrel-chested slugger and a giant tabby with a foam jetpack strapped to its back.

This takes a person with the ability to put aside all dignity and self-respect for at least a couple of hours.

You must realize that as long as you're in the furry suit, you are a living cartoon character. If Wile E. Coyote can get up after being run over by a Mack truck...so can you.

This furry suit had eyeholes that allowed for nothing but tunnel vision.

My job was to dance the Macarena...for over two hours. I roamed the stands dancing the Macarena with anyone that would join in.

One boiling afternoon my tail got yanked off by a rather aggressive group of 10-year olds. Another time, my moose head fell off while performing a somersault.

The art of goofiness in a furry suit is quite simple. Just leave all your inhibitions with your regular clothes. Give hugs to as many fans that will accept them. Be prepared with two or three sets of t-shirts, shorts and socks since you'll easily sweat through your clothes. Don't become overwhelmed by the furry suit's lingering odor. Most importantly

don't talk and never, ever take your mask off in front of a child. You don't want to traumatize a six-year old.

These are important rules as we go through our careers. The truth is that every single employee, at some point during his or her career, will have the opportunity to strap on the furry suit. Just enjoy it. Remember that only infants and toddlers are allowed to run around the house naked. And only mascots are allowed to run around a like a chicken with its head cut off.



SOME LAST TIPS FROM THE PROS:

Try to meet another mascot, connect with a member of the current mascot community who can help you meet others, show you the business, and let you know of any new opportunities. Many jobs are filled by word of mouth.

Be patient and continue to build your skills. Listen to the older guys as much as you can. Also keep your expectations realistic. A lot of young guys go come in looking for the world. Finding a job is a slow process.

Don't complain about your current situation. People want to see you making the best of what you have.

Be persistent. Never give up on your dream. Always work on your skills and keep up on your training. You also need to be aware of what you do well. For example, if you don't have trampoline skills, you may want to work on that...

Focus on being an entertainer first. Always seek out more knowledge, pick everyone's brains for how they approach things. Listen to others. Training is also critical. Maintain your body year-round. Be organized with your props and tools.

Understand that at this level it is a business. It's a serious business and you need to be organized and professional. Prepare a couple months before it starts, since some ideas take months to get together. Keep up your conditioning and always focus on the creative process.

Physical fitness is crucial, so stay on top your training. In the costume, be your character. Build and define who your character is, how they would react to situations and be able to define who you are in a sentence or two.

Once you define who you are, writing skits and performing will be easier and more effective.

Know what kind of audience you are performing for. It is a big game? A Parade? A casual meet & greet?

The primary thing to remember, Mascots DON'T TALK! Practice movement with your chaperone. Get feedback. While practicing, figure out your hand signals, as mentioned in Performer Safety.

The Performer with a new mascot has to define the personality of that mascot. Once this is done, then the job of operation becomes a lot easier as each gesture and reaction of the mascot will then have a reason. This is what separates a mascot from a person in a costume. What is your mascot's personality? Are you tough? Are you a jokester? Are you shy? What sort of an image are you expected to portrait? The more you know your mascot's character and your audience, the more fun you'll have. As you learn how people react to your actions, you can develop a character that really "speaks". Remember that you represent your company or school while in costume. Mind your behavior.

One of the best ways to develop a mascot's personality is lots of practice, both at non critical events and in front of a mirror, in full costume. Operating a mascot is a very physical occupation. All gestures need to be larger than life to communicate to large crowds. Arm and hand gestures are very important, don't leave them out.

"Here I am" wave: Use to get attention of large audiences. Use your whole arm with large sweeping gestures. Stretch out your hand and fingers. Make yourself as big as you can get.

"I'm a little shy": Use for relating to small, shy children. Open and close your hand in a child-like wave. Shy and giggling body language and games like peek-a-boo will make you more approachable.

"Thumbs Up": Works great with pre-teens and teenagers. This lets you acknowledge the person in a fun and positive manner.

"High Five": is a great way to greet a teenager or an adult. Most teenagers find a hug or a handshake too -- UN-cool! A high five allows them to be a part of the fun while still remaining "Cool".

React to your surroundings! Cover your eyes and shake your head when the opposing team scores. Be the life of the party. Joke around, flirt, dance, make your presence known, but always be respectful.

DO NOT remove, for any reason, any part of your costume in public. Nobody should see you getting into or out of your costume. Never, Ever, take your head off in public!

***note: this super acting technique was created by a team of expert mascot advisers, from postings readily available online. All rights revert to the originators, and thanks for the inspiration. - K. Cho*