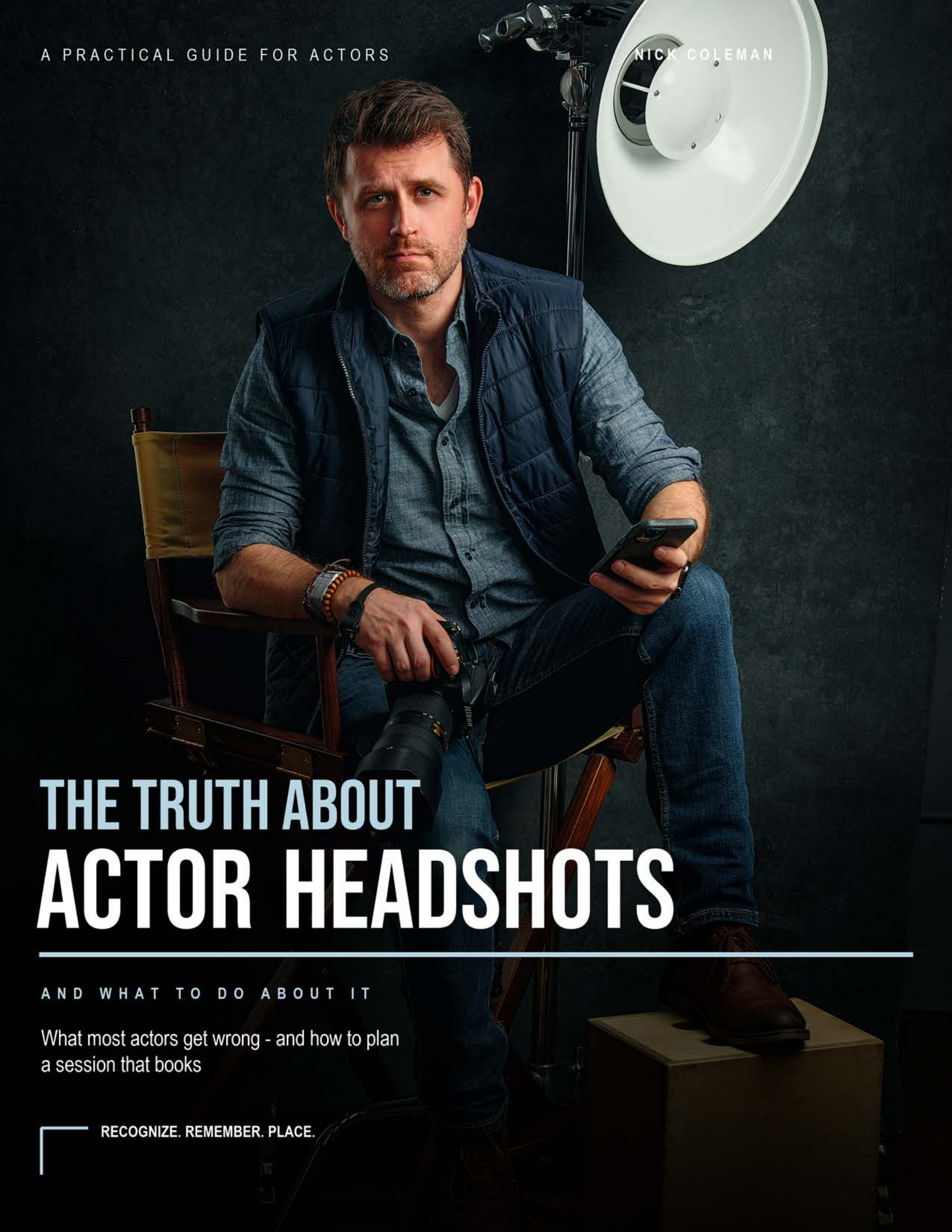




A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR ACTORS

NICK COLEMAN

THE TRUTH ABOUT ACTOR HEADSHOTS

AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

What most actors get wrong - and how to plan
a session that books

RECOGNIZE. REMEMBER. PLACE.

I'M A HEADSHOT PHOTOGRAPHER. HERE'S THE DIRTY LITTLE SECRET.

**YOUR
HEADSHOTS
DON'T
MATTER
NEARLY AS
MUCH AS
YOU THINK
THEY DO.**

There. I said it.

Actors spend an enormous amount of time thinking about the finished product. What should I wear? How many looks do I need? Should I smile? What kind of background is popular? Which photographer creates the most cinematic images?

Those questions aren't completely irrelevant. But they skip the most important question:

Why do you need headshots in the first place?

Most actors assume a headshot's job is to grab a casting director's attention and convince them to bring in a total stranger.

Sometimes that is its job - but much less often than you might think.

Casting rarely begins by opening a submission site and searching thousands of unfamiliar faces for inspiration. It begins with relationships, recommendations, trusted representatives, previous auditions, workshops, performances, and actors casting already knows.

By the time your headshot enters the process, casting often isn't asking, Who is this person? They're asking:

- Do I know this person?
- What do I remember about them?
- Could that person be right for this role?

**YOUR HEADSHOT'S FIRST JOB ISN'T TO IMPRESS THEM.
IT'S TO HELP THEM RECOGNIZE YOU. REMEMBER YOU. PLACE YOU.**

THE HEADSHOT COMES LATER THAN YOU THINK

When casting receives a script, they begin identifying actors who might be right for each role. But they usually don't begin with a giant grid of headshots. They begin with people.

01

FIRST

ACTORS CASTING ALREADY HAS IN MIND

Casting may contact particular actors or their representatives, or ask trusted agents and managers for recommendations. At this point, casting is working from memory, experience, and professional relationships. A headshot may not be needed at all.

02

NEXT

ACTORS CASTING MAY ALREADY KNOW

Representatives submit clients through services such as Breakdown Services or Casting Networks, and may send direct pitches. Now the headshots appear - but casting is often scanning for actors they have auditioned, taught, met, seen perform, or heard about from someone they trust. The photograph triggers recognition: Oh, right. I know them.

03

FINALLY

ACTORS CASTING DOESN'T KNOW YET

Only after casting has considered the obvious choices, trusted recommendations, familiar actors, and people they may have overlooked does the search truly open to unfamiliar faces. By then, many of the audition opportunities may already be gone.

THE VERSION MOST ACTORS IMAGINE DOES HAPPEN.
BUT LONG BEFORE YOUR HEADSHOT NEEDS TO ATTRACT A STRANGER,
IT MAY NEED TO REMIND SOMEONE WHO ALREADY KNOWS YOU.

YOUR HEADSHOT IS RARELY VIEWED LIKE A PORTRAIT

Casting usually encounters your photograph as one small decision inside a crowded field of faces.

CASTING SUBMISSIONS / ROLE: SENIOR ASSOCIATE



MAYA CHEN
REPRESENTED | NYC



MARCUS REED
REPRESENTED | NYC



ELLEN VALE
REPRESENTED | NYC



RAFAEL ORTIZ
REPRESENTED | NYC



DEV PATEL
REPRESENTED | NYC



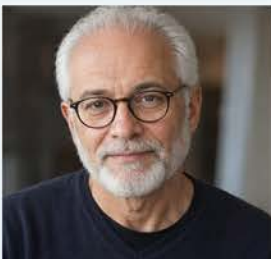
RILEY QUINN
REPRESENTED | NYC



JONAH PARK
REPRESENTED | NYC



NIA BROOKS
REPRESENTED | NYC



ARTHUR LEVY
REPRESENTED | NYC



LENA MORENO
REPRESENTED | NYC



CALEB JONES
REPRESENTED | NYC



SARA HART
REPRESENTED | NYC

4 ACROSS

The images are small, repeated, and competing for attention.

MORE THAN A FACE

Names, representatives, reels, notes, and pitches all share the same view.

VERY LITTLE TIME

Casting is scanning for possibilities, not studying every photograph as a work of art.

RECOGNITION FIRST

A distant, outdated, generic, or emotionally inconsistent image can prevent recognition before photographic quality matters.

PRIVACY NOTE / The actors shown are fictional and are not actual submissions. Breakdown Services does not permit sharing its backend; this is an illustrative representation only.

YOUR HEADSHOT IS NOT BEING VIEWED AS
AN ISOLATED WORK OF ART.

IT IS ONE SMALL, FAST-MOVING DECISION
INSIDE A CROWDED FIELD OF FACES.

RECOGNIZE ME. REMEMBER ME. PLACE ME.

An effective headshot helps casting complete three connected decisions quickly.

01

RECOGNIZE YOU



CURRENT APPEARANCE / CLEAR FEATURES

The first question is simple: Is that the actor I know? Your face, hair, apparent age, and defining features should reasonably match the person who will submit a tape or enter the room. If casting has to work to identify you, the photograph has already created friction.

02

REMEMBER YOU



Facial recognition is only the beginning. Casting also remembers the experience of you: the energy you brought into the room, the qualities they noticed, and how you made them feel. Does the person in the photograph match that emotional memory?

03

PLACE YOU



Finally, casting needs to connect that remembered person to the role at hand. Does this headshot support the submission, or does it ask casting to mentally redesign you before they can see the possibility? Casting has imagination. What they may not have is time.

THIS IS THE ACTOR I KNOW.

THIS IS HOW I REMEMBER THEM.

AND I CAN SEE THAT PERSON IN THIS ROLE.

WHEN SOMETHING FEELS OFF

A casting director may never consciously name the mismatch. They may simply hesitate - and in a crowded grid, hesitation is easy to skip.

01

THE EMOTIONAL MEMORY DOESN'T MATCH



**INTENSE. FORCEFUL.
A LITTLE DANGEROUS.**

VS.

**SWEET. GENTLE.
HARMLESS.**

Casting may recognize Tim's features while failing to connect the photograph with the person they remember. Something simply feels off.

02

THE PROFESSIONAL WORLD DOESN'T MATCH

ROLE BREAKDOWN

SUCCESSFUL LITIGATOR AT A POWERFUL BIG-LAW FIRM

Could Tim play the lawyer? Absolutely. But this particular headshot asks casting to translate him into a completely different professional world before deciding whether he belongs there.

THE PHOTOGRAPH MAKES THE DECISION HARDER.



A MISMATCH CREATES A QUESTION.

AN EFFECTIVE HEADSHOT ANSWERS ONE.

THE PROMISE HAS TO HOLD

Once a headshot earns the audition, it becomes the first link in a chain. Every stage that follows should feel like it belongs to the same actor.



THE CONTINUITY TEST

**DOES THE PERSON WHO SHOWS UP
MATCH THE PERSON THE HEADSHOT PROMISED?**

WHY IT MATTERS

Casting selected the person represented by the photograph. The producer or director may not know Tim at all - and they may see the headshot before they see the tape.

If the image promises authority but the audition feels tentative, or if his appearance has changed enough to create doubt, the promise breaks.

A WORKING HEADSHOT IS:

- ✓ RECOGNIZABLE
- ✓ CURRENT
- ✓ EMOTIONALLY TRUTHFUL
- ✓ RIGHT FOR THE SUBMISSION
- ✓ CONSISTENT WITH WHO SHOWS UP

**THE GOAL ISN'T TO FREEZE YOURSELF IN ONE PHOTOGRAPH.
IT'S TO MAKE EVERY STAGE FEEL LIKE THE SAME PERSON.**

WHAT DOES CASTING REMEMBER ABOUT YOU?

Casting doesn't remember only your height, hair, resume, wardrobe, or individual choices in a scene. They remember the experience of you.

THIS IS YOUR

EMOTIONAL TYPE

The recurring set of human qualities people perceive in you across different roles - and the emotional promise you make before you speak.

WARM

GUARDED

AUTHORITATIVE

MISCHIEVOUS

VULNERABLE

UNPREDICTABLE

REASSURING

QUIETLY DANGEROUS

WHAT IT ISN'T

- ⊗ A character you put on for a headshot.
- ⊗ Your entire personality.
- ⊗ A box defining the only roles you can play.

WHAT IT IS

- ✓ A recognizable emotional signature.
- ✓ A through-line that travels from role to role.
- ✓ Part of what casting expects - and remembers.

THE CHARACTER CHANGES.

SOME OF THE ACTOR REMAINS.

Every role has different circumstances, relationships, objectives, behavior, wardrobe, and status. You may amplify one quality or conceal another, but some part of the same recognizable human being travels from character to character.

THAT RECURRING EMOTIONAL SIGNATURE IS WHAT CASTING REMEMBERS -
AND WHAT YOUR HEADSHOTS NEED TO HELP THEM RECOGNIZE.

THE CHARACTER IS THE SAME. THE PROMISE IS DIFFERENT.

The writing, wardrobe, direction, and world of a production shape the role. But each actor also brings qualities that follow them from character to character.

JAMES BOND

SAME TUXEDO. DIFFERENT MAN INSIDE IT.

PIERCE BROSNAN

POLISHED CHARMING WITTY SOCIALLY AT EASE

His Bond can enter an elegant room and seem completely at home. That polish, charm, and composure recur in many of Brosnan's other roles.

VS

DANIEL CRAIG

INTENSE CONTAINED PHYSICALLY DANGEROUS HARD TO FOOL

Craig's Bond wears the same tuxedo, but violence never feels far away. Even as Benoit Blanc, he retains intelligence, scrutiny, and confidence.

CATWOMAN

SAME SELINA KYLE. THREE DISTINCT EMOTIONAL PROMISES.

MICHELLE PFEIFFER

VOLATILE WOUNDED THEATRICAL

UNPREDICTABLE

A heightened, fractured presence. Her version feels capable of changing direction without warning.

ANNE HATHAWAY

POLISHED INTELLIGENT PLAYFUL

SOCIALLY AGILE

A controlled operator who can shift identities smoothly and stay one step ahead of the room.

ZOE KRAVITZ

GUARDED GROUNDED WATCHFUL

QUIETLY DANGEROUS

A contained, observant presence. She reveals little, but suggests that much more is happening underneath.

THE CHARACTER CHANGES. SOME OF THE ACTOR REMAINS.

Emotional Type doesn't decide the only character you can play. It influences the version of that character audiences naturally expect you to be.

THE COSTUME TELLS US THIS IS BOND OR CATWOMAN.

THE ACTOR TELLS US WHICH ONE WE'RE ABOUT TO MEET.

A LAWYER ISN'T A TYPE

Traditional labels mix occupations, age groups, status, wardrobe, appearance, and story function. They may suggest where you fit. They don't explain why you would be compelling once you get there.

THE OLD SHORTCUTS

LEADING MAN GIRL NEXT DOOR YOUNG MOM BEST FRIEND COP LAWYER VILLAIN GEEK BLUE COLLAR SOCIALITE

ONE PROFESSION. SIX EMOTIONAL PROMISES.

A LAWYER WHO IS...

01 WARM + REASSURING

The advocate who makes a frightened client feel safe.

02 BRILLIANT + SOCIALLY AWKWARD

The mind in the room that outruns its social instincts.

03 POLISHED + CALCULATING

The operator who understands every lever of power.

04 AGGRESSIVE + INTIMIDATING

The litigator who turns pressure into a weapon.

05 IDEALISTIC + INEXPERIENCED

The young attorney whose principles arrive before strategy.

06 EXHAUSTED + MORALLY UNSHAKABLE

The person barely holding together, but refusing to bend.

TRADITIONAL TYPE ASKS

**WHERE DO YOU
LOOK LIKE YOU BELONG?**

EMOTIONAL TYPE ASKS

**WHAT DO WE EXPECT
TO EXPERIENCE FROM YOU?**

THE PRACTICAL DETAILS STILL MATTER.

Age, physicality, identity, professional world, and wardrobe still affect how casting sees a role. Emotional Type doesn't erase those considerations. It gives them specificity.

THE SUIT COMMUNICATES THE PROFESSION.

THE ACTOR COMMUNICATES THE STORY.

START WITH THE PERSON CASTING NEEDS TO REMEMBER

Before choosing wardrobe, background, lighting, or the number of looks, step back and ask what the photographs need to accomplish. You don't need to solve your entire Emotional Type here. Begin with better questions.

01 WHAT DO PEOPLE CONSISTENTLY EXPERIENCE IN ME?

Think beyond appearance and occupation. What qualities repeatedly show up in the way directors, teachers, colleagues, casting professionals, and audiences respond to you?

NOTES

02 HOW MIGHT CASTING ALREADY REMEMBER ME?

When people have called you back, cast you, or responded strongly to your work, what version of you were they responding to?

NOTES

03 WHERE DOES THAT PERSON BELONG?

Which roles, relationships, professional worlds, or story situations benefit from those qualities?

NOTES

04 WHAT DO MY CURRENT HEADSHOTS COMMUNICATE?

Do they reflect the person who will submit the tape or enter the room?
Do they support the roles for which they are being used?

NOTES

05 WHAT IS MISSING - OR MISLEADING?

Are your photographs hiding an important quality, exaggerating one that isn't really you, or asking casting to imagine too much?

NOTES

THE GOAL ISN'T A DIFFERENT IDENTITY FOR EVERY ROLE.
CREATE SEVERAL TRUTHFUL, STRATEGIC WAYS FOR CASTING TO
RECOGNIZE THE SAME ACTOR.

SAME ACTOR. FOUR DIFFERENT WORLDS.

Now let's give Tim four useful headshots without turning him into four different people.

TIM'S EMOTIONAL TYPE

Steady, capable, and quietly intelligent - self-possessed under pressure, emotionally reserved, difficult to rattle, and more comfortable solving a problem than revealing how it affects him.

OPTIMAL: SAME EMOTIONAL TYPE, DIFFERENT WORLDS



GRITTY URBAN

WORKING CLASS / POSSIBLY CRIMINAL



SUBURBAN

THERAPIST / TEACHER



RURAL

CONSTRUCTION / FARMER



WHITE COLLAR

PROFESSIONAL / AUTHORITY

SUB-OPTIMAL: POLISHED, BUT POINTING THE WRONG WAY



SMILING / CHARMING / APPROACHABLE / BRIGHT COLOR / T-SHIRT - FOUR VARIATIONS OF THE SAME MISMATCH

THE DIFFERENCE

In the top row, wardrobe, background, light, shadow, color, and contrast change the role world while Tim remains steady, contained, and quietly intelligent. In the bottom row, the photographs are attractive - but they repeatedly promise someone smiling, charming, and openly approachable.

One set expands where casting can place him. The other obscures the person casting needs to remember.

CHANGE THE WORLD, NOT THE PERSON.

THE BEST VARIETY STILL FEELS LIKE THE SAME ACTOR.

FIND THE RIGHT PHOTOGRAPHER FOR THE JOB

Once you understand what your headshots need to communicate, you can make a much more useful decision about who should photograph them. There are two good ways to choose.

01 CHOOSE A STYLE THAT ALREADY FITS

Some photographers have a recognizable visual voice. If their work already feels warm, polished, intense, playful, restrained, cinematic, approachable, or psychologically complex in the way you need, they may be a natural fit.

THE QUESTION:

DOES THE FEELING OF THEIR WORK SUPPORT THE FEELING PEOPLE SHOULD GET FROM ME?

02 CHOOSE SOMEONE WHO CAN BUILD WHAT YOU NEED

A flexible photographer identifies the emotional purpose of each image, then shapes the visual language around it.

- LIGHT
- SHADOW
- ENVIRONMENT
- COLOR
- CONTRAST
- CAMERA DISTANCE
- WARDROBE
- BODY LANGUAGE
- EXPRESSION

THE ELEMENTS HAVE NO UNIVERSAL MEANING.

Soft light isn't automatically authentic. A dark background isn't automatically dramatic. Bright color isn't automatically commercial. Their value depends on what they help the audience perceive in you.

DON'T ASK

WHO TAKES THE COOLEST HEADSHOTS?

ASK

**WHO UNDERSTANDS WHAT THESE PHOTOGRAPHS
NEED TO COMMUNICATE - AND CAN SHOW ME?**

The photographer's job is not to apply an attractive style or reproduce what is currently popular. It is to make intentional choices that reveal and support the Emotional Type casting needs to recognize.

**THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S JOB ISN'T TO APPLY A TREND.
IT'S TO MAKE INTENTIONAL CHOICES THAT HELP CASTING
RECOGNIZE YOUR EMOTIONAL TYPE.**

YOUR NEXT STEP

DISCOVER YOUR EMOTIONAL TYPE

Your headshots need to help casting recognize you, remember you accurately, and place you in the right roles. The difficult part is seeing yourself from the outside.

I'VE CREATED A FREE TOOL TO HELP YOU IDENTIFY YOUR EMOTIONAL TYPE.

It gives you a place to slow down, look at the evidence, and investigate the qualities people consistently experience in you.

THIS IS NOT A ONE-PROMPT ANSWER GENERATOR.

It works through an interactive conversation that you guide. You decide what to explore. You bring real examples. You consider how other people have responded to you. And you correct anything that doesn't feel supported by your experience.

YOU BRING THE REAL EXAMPLES

YOU GUIDE THE CONVERSATION

YOU DECIDE WHAT HOLDS UP

The tool doesn't invent your Emotional Type for you. It helps you notice recurring qualities, compare intention with perception, connect those qualities to characters, and decide what your next headshot session may need to reveal.

The result isn't a box or a permanent list of roles you're allowed to play. It's a more useful place to begin.

DISCOVER MY EMOTIONAL TYPE ->

COLEMANPHOTOGRAPHIX.COM/ACTOR-HEADSHOTS-NYC/EMOTIONAL-TYPE