

The Professional Wrestler in the World of Sports-Entertainment

by Matt Murphy



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To those who dedicate their lives to a dream that's difficult for those who do not share the dream to understand, those who have tried and failed, and those still chasing the dream. I have seen no business more unfair to those who fall short or more rewarding to those whose dreams become realities.

Introduction

After four years of diligent work, Tony Willis finally created the perfect barbecue sauce. It was delicious, the perfect blend of ingredients and preparation and it left an aftertaste you'd hate to waste with a stick of gum after dinner.

Tony never felt so confident in his life. His sauce was better than anything on the shelves, so there was no way he was leaving Kansas City without a life-changing victory. He quit his job, emptied his savings account, and bought a plane ticket, a classy suit, a briefcase, and a plane ticket to Kansas City International, where he rented a luxury sedan and entered his creation into the Great American Barbecue contest. The grand prize, \$100,000 cash and licensing deal with a major condiment company, was waiting for him.

Tony imagined his sauce flying off the shelves in every grocery store in the world and how much \$100,000 would change his life.

There was no doubt among GAB attendees that Tony's sauce was the tastiest. Even his competitors were certain that Tony's sauce would best theirs when the judges announced the decision. When one of the judges stepped up to the podium, Tony straightened his tie. "The winner of the \$100,000 Great American Barbecue contest ... Elmer Billings," the judge announced. Tony went numb. He risked everything he had and didn't know why his

sauce wasn't chosen: Elmer's sauce tasted pancake syrup dumped in a jar of mustard.

Tony did his best to maintain his composure while Elmer posed with the winning sauce and an oversized \$100,000 check for *Condiments Illustrated*. Angus Larue, the sauce master for the leading condiment maker in the United States, tapped Tony on the shoulder. "Come with me for a minute," Angus said.

In a corner of the room, Angus sympathetically handed Tony a beer. "Listen, son," Angus began, "your sauce was outstanding. If this was a contest to decide whose sauce was the tastiest, you surely would have won, but your sauce didn't have a name or a slogan. For Chrissake, it was in a Mason jar. How do I sell that?"

"On its flavor!" Tony snapped. "I thought this contest was about quality barbecue sauce, not gimmicks."

"This contest was about *marketing*," Angus said. "We were looking for a sauce we can sell, and we found it in Elmer's sauce. His label has an American flag and fireworks on it. His slogan, *Make every day the Fourth of July*, man, that makes people think of barbecues and good times! I can sell that. You've gotta draw the customer's attention, make him buy it in the first place, or he'll never know how great your sauce is."

Tony seethed in his rental car on the way to the airport. *Damned idiot*, he thought of Angus. *He doesn't know what the hell he's talking about.*

After a couple of years, Tony gave up his dream of finding riches in the barbecue sauce industry. He sold his great recipe to an upstart burger joint and never made another jar of sauce again. Bitter, he boycotted condiments altogether.

For many professional wrestlers, this story may sound familiar. I've heard countless wrestlers tell me how much better they are than most of the guys in WWE today, and a few of them have actually been right. I've seen great workers who could do incredible things and had the right physique, but who never got a WWE contract for a variety of reasons. Some had attitude problems,

others got married and decided to leave the business, some just never got the exposure to be seen by anybody who could get them signed. In most of those cases, however, the wrestler was seen but did not catch the attention of somebody within WWE who said, “Wow! We could make some money off this guy.”

I remember WWE’s Tom Pritchard telling a group of guys about a wrestler named John Walters, an excellent worker best known for his time spent with Ring of Honor. “He’s very good,” Pritchard said. “I wish we could offer him a contract right now, but there isn’t a spot for him. John’s a great talent, but other than that there’s nothing about him that makes him different from anybody else.”

Too many guys don’t understand that there was only one Dean Malenko for a reason. Malenko was great, but there was only room in this business for one of him. Technically, maybe nobody was his equal, but a major company needs many different flavors to appeal to the masses. How successful would Baskin Robbins be if they only offered vanilla ice cream?

This book is for all the guys who are working in independent wrestling, trying to make it to WWE, and for those who plan to become professional wrestlers.

Best of luck!

Part One
The Opening Spot

I. Welcome to wrestling

A former instructor and now a mentor at the Harley Race Wrestling Academy, I could write an entire book about some of the goofy things I've seen and heard from aspiring wrestlers. From being asked, "How long do you have to train before you get to WWE?" to seeing a 110-pound kid sit up like the Undertaker after each bump, I've realized that this industry attracts its share of goofs.

For those who dream of becoming a wrestler, the first step is asking yourself *Why?* Is it because you were a dork in high school and you want to be the darling of your class reunion? If so, this probably isn't the business for you. Is it because you watch it on TV, subscribe to a newsletter, and can name every Ring of Honor World Champion in the title's history? A lot of people are like that; they're called "fans." I love St. Louis Cardinals baseball, but I know that I best benefit the team I love by watching their games on TV, buying a ticket to attend a game on occasion, and wearing their apparel as often as is acceptable for a grown man. A lot of wrestling hopefuls belong in the cheap seats.

Next, look into a mirror and ask, *Is there anybody making a living in the business that looks like me?* If your answer is *Don West* (the TNA color commentator), then maybe you should consider another end of the business to enter. Most of the people who try out for wrestling don't look anything like a wrestler, or an ath-

lete for that matter. I can't tell you how many times I've seen the "Athletic Background" section of the tryout application left blank.

What kind of shape are you in? Wrestling is a physical sport that requires excellent conditioning. You don't have to look like a bodybuilder to have a chance at stardom, but you do need to look like an athlete in very good shape. If you're not in shape when you enter a wrestling school then you'll lose a lot of valuable training time to conditioning while holding up the rest of the class.

There are exceptions to the rules. One of my closest friends, Trevor Murdoch, was one of them. Like me, he worked harder avoiding a gym than he would have worked lifting, but he worked his ass off inside the ring. Mick Foley looks like a truck driver, but he became a much bigger star in the business than anybody would have expected. Those are very, very rare occurrences. Don't bank on being the next exception.

Don't get me wrong. If you're a beer-bellied, 165-pound 53-year-old, there are still con men out there who will train you. If you have money, somebody will make time for you. But I don't know anybody willing to do that who knows enough to give you the tools to have a chance in this business.

Before jumping into this business with both feet, evaluate your financial situation. *I love the business, but I can't get enough money saved to begin training.* If you love this business and want to be a part of it, then get a job, or a second job, or change your spending habits. Nobody gets a free ride. If you can't show your dedication to this business by preparing yourself financially, then you don't have a chance. *Is it all about money?* Well, it's a business and people have to eat. Your instructor won't call his electric company and say, "I can't pay my bill because there's a new kid I'm training who doesn't have any money. He's a good kid, though."

If you've been honest with yourself and still think you have a chance at becoming a star in the business, start looking for a wrestling school. A good rule of thumb is if you have never heard of the guy running the school or of any of his students, don't go

there. If there is no tryout and the only requirement is money, stay away from that one, too.

Just a few days before I began training at the Harley Race Wrestling Academy, I was approached by an independent wrestler who tried selling me on his school. “How much is Harley charging you?” he asked me.

“Three thousand,” I told him.

The guy whistled and said, “Why pay three grand to be trained by Harley Race when you can be trained by me and my partner for half that?”

Even as young as naive as I was, I knew that it didn’t add up: I had never heard of him or his partner. I chose to pass on half-priced, half-assed training offer and recommend all of you do the same.

There are a handful of guys who have credibility and connections in this business. Maybe the two most important things to consider when making your wrestling-school choice are credibility and connections.

I made a wise decision and selected a credible wrestling school. Now it’s time for the tryout. This will usually consist of cardiovascular exercise and in-ring evaluation (likely just bumps and running the ropes, so resist the urge to offer to show the instructor the badass finishing move you’ve been practicing on your pillow) and, at the Harley Race Wrestling Academy, costs \$50. That’s a small investment in your dream.

First things first, don’t act like a tool. Be courteous and don’t act like a fan who won a backstage pass to a WWE show. Don’t ask wrestlers if they use blood capsules (they don’t), brag about your backyard heroics or about how many fights you’ve won, or act like you know any more about the business than the average fan. As a trainer, nothing was worse than listening to a tryout tell me who he thinks has the best workrate. Don’t do anything unless you’re instructed and don’t speak unless spoken to. It sounds harsh, but you don’t want to piss off the trainers before you even begin training, especially when they are the ones who decide

just how far to push you during your tryout.

As a general rule, I knew almost every person trying out would reach that point where he didn't think he could push himself any farther. What I looked for was how much heart he showed when he reached that point. Here is a tale of two tryouts. One kid who tried out was about 6'2" and 115 pounds and had no athletic ability at all. It didn't take long for him to reach his breaking point, but I'll be damned if he didn't struggle to his feet (the poor guy looked like a baby giraffe trying to stand for the first time) each time he fell. I couldn't pass him on the tryout because I didn't think it would be fair to take his money when I knew he would never make it through training, but I sure as hell admired his courage and would have passed him if I thought he had a chance in hell. Another tryout that day was a bodybuilder and former collegiate football player. Ten minutes into his tryout, he stumbled over to his duffel bag and said, "Sorry, guys, I just can't do it." On the street, he would have looked down at the baby giraffe kid, but inside the wrestling school that day, the skinny kid owned him.

Unlike most athletes, I have been a cigarette smoker since my early teens. I quickly figured that out the key to surviving cardiovascular exercise (and later on, long matches) was to control my breathing. Here's how I learned: when I did jumping jacks, I inhaled slowly through four jumping jacks and exhaled slowly through four of them, then repeated. I did the same with crunches, squats, and just about every other exercise. Within a week, I trained my body to control its own breathing without requiring any conscious thought and went from flat on the floor after ten minutes of cardio to making it the entire way through conditioning with little problem. It happened almost instantly.

If you have to vomit, do it in the appropriate place and then wash your mouth out and get back in line for cardio. It lets the trainers know that you're serious about training. A trainer's job in the tryout process is to weed out those who don't have the heart, the ability, or the respect for the business.

Remember that by trying out, you are not only auditioning

for a spot in a professional wrestling school, but you are trying to convince the trainer that you're worth the risk of his credibility. He knows that if you're likely to quit after three weeks and then market yourself as one of his students, the next guy who comes along with the trainer's name attached to him will suffer.

Once you've made it through your cardiovascular part of the tryout, it's time to step into the ring. Let me stress one point: if you are instructed to take a German suplex, power bomb, back-drop, etc., from somebody during your tryout, thank everybody for their time and *leave*. I'm dead serious. Wrestling is a dangerous profession, and any trainer who has such little regard for your safety is not somebody you want to trust with your physical well-being. The only bumps you should take during a tryout are back bumps and, depending on how you do with back bumps, maybe some front bumps (front flips to your back).

You may receive a brief introduction to hitting the ropes and locking up with an opponent, perhaps even learn a few holds. That should be about all you do during your tryout.

Now you've completed the tryout and it's time to have a sit-down with the trainer to discuss what's next. He's going to want to know what your schedule looks like (when you can train), whether you'll commute or relocate, and if you can pay in full or if payment arrangements will need to be made. I know I already said this, but please believe that this is a business and nobody is going to train you out of the goodness of his heart—I won't. Training you requires an enormous time commitment, and I won't spend a minute away from my family if I'm not getting paid for it. There is also building rent, equipment maintenance, insurance, etc., to consider. I've seen a lot of people dive into training with an empty wallet, and they don't last long.

You've passed the tryout, made a down payment, and enrolled into a professional wrestling school. Great job! Now pat yourself on the back and tighten the laces on your gym shoes, because you're in for one hell of a ride!

This one time ... at wrestling camp ...

During an open tryout in February of 2001, 22 guys and one lady showed up in hopes of getting accepted into our academy. Surprisingly, 15 of them passed and were offered enrollment. After the tryout, I pulled each hopeful into the office to discuss our decisions. Those who didn't pass mostly took it okay. Those who passed hid their pleasure well...except for Jason Ryburn.

Ryburn, a cornfed 280-pound firefighter from Kansas, was a long-shot to make it through the tryout, but his love for wrestling showed in his hard work during the tryout. When I told him he passed, a smile that would have put Santa Claus to shame spread across his face and he let out this strange sound that started with *Hot damn!* or something like that and ended with a sound that resembled a pig squeal. I'd never seen anybody so excited about passing a tryout.

At the time, I'd grown complacent in the ring. I didn't get excited as events drew near and I didn't feel any nervous anxiousness before my matches. Jason's love for the business was infectious. It reminded me how badly I wanted to become a wrestler when I was a kid and how lucky I was to be living my dream.

Of the 15 who passed the tryout, seven of them enrolled in the school, including a handful who went on to complete training. They became World League Wrestling alumni "Dangerous" Derek McQuinn, Dan-o-Mite, Wendy Rimmer, and Jason Ryburn, who had a stint with WLW as Turkey Creek Johnson.

II. Training

Before your first day of training, you need to get your duffel bag ready. Don't bring a pull-along suitcase to training because you'll look like a dork. Here are a few things you should be sure to have every day when you come into training: a small towel, deodorant, Gold Bond (it's just a good habit to begin now since not every building you wrestle in will have a shower), an extra T-shirt, knee pads, and gym shoes (not the ones you wear every day). Wear a pair of comfortable gym shorts and a T-shirt when you train. Never wear jeans or khakis during training; doing so will make you look dumb and can cause some nasty chaffing.

When you get to training, be sure to introduce yourself and offer a handshake to everybody. Now's not the time to be shy (just think, in months you will be wrestling in modified underwear in front of dozens, hundreds, or maybe even thousands of people) and never assume anybody is insignificant—greet everybody. I've seen new guys come in and act like I'm a wall decoration instead of the first graduate of the school and the man who trained the current trainer.

You're already familiar with the cardiovascular exercise because you did it during the tryout. Never question why you're doing exercises and another person is not. Maybe he's not a student and is no longer required to do certain things. Perhaps he's working through a knee injury and has been told not to do any

squats. The bottom line is just keep your mouth shut and worry about yourself. That's right, I said *keep your mouth shut*. The soft skills taught in corporate America are rare in professional wrestling. In this wrestling world where truth is hard to find, you'll grow to appreciate people who won't mince words with you. If it still bothers you then your skin might not be thick enough to be in this business.

During cardio, you may have trouble doing all the exercises. Maybe you can't do 200 Hindu squats when you first begin training. I would rather see you do 100 of them correctly and keep pushing as long as you can than to see you cheating your way through 200 of them. Another trainer might not agree, so find out his expectations and do your best to meet those.

After cardio, you will get into the ring and work on your front and back bumps. You learned during your tryout that a professional wrestling ring is made of wood and steel with a thin foam lining below the canvas. Bumps hurt—they always will—but with practice, they will hurt less. Don't hold your breath right before you hit the mat and don't forget to tuck your chin every time. The human brain is not built to be rattled around, but it happens if you don't keep your chin pressed against your chest when you take bumps.

The first few weeks of your training will probably consist mainly of cardiovascular exercise, learning bumps and running the ropes, though you might also receive an introduction to wrestling basics. Don't expect to be doing moonsaults right away.

Be patient when it comes to learning; not everybody will learn at the same pace. If a guy has a hard time learning to execute a front bump, it doesn't mean that he's never going to make it as a wrestler. I have always learned most things almost immediately, but I also peak quickly and sometimes watch people pass me by who once lagged behind. I was always attentive to everything going on around me when I was not the center of attention, which accelerated my learning. I listened to my trainers instruct others and watched the experienced guys do things.

The most important things to learn during training are safety and listening. You only get one body, so take care of it. Pay that same courtesy to the guy you are working with (wrestling). Never do anything to compromise your own safety or your opponent's. In ideal circumstances, you wouldn't be leading anybody in a match for at least a couple of years. If you can listen and execute, you can be led. If you can't learn to be led, you'd better think of another trade to pursue.

Paying dues to the business starts the day you enter the business, and it means more than just paying the tuition for training at your chosen wrestling school. It can include, but is not limited to, hanging up posters, selling tickets and concessions, working security at events, and setting up and taking down the ring.

Contrary to what a bush-league bully may think, paying dues does not consist of letting a veteran treat you like a bitch—making you pay for his dinner, fetch him an ice cream sandwich at three in the morning, or do his laundry. Some wrestlers try to take liberties on students and inexperienced wrestlers, and it's a bunch of crap. Within reason, you should grin and bear it when at events, training, or other wrestling-related times, but when you're away from the business, you're a grown man who should be treated with the same respect you give others. Expect and welcome a little good-natured ribbing (joking, pranks, etc.), but respect yourself as a human being and insist all others extend the same courtesy to you.

After one month, you should be comfortable with the two basic bumps and running the ropes. You ought to know how to lock up with an opponent and properly apply a few holds to the head and arm. If you are progressing well, maybe you've learned to apply those bumps while taking basic moves like a hip toss and a clothesline.

After a trainee gets his feet wet, different trainers use different methods to prepare a student for his first match. What follows is what I did to ensure that a student was ready to debut within six months of training.

By the end of the second month, I liked to lead the student through some short, basic matches. Mostly holds and reversals, a few spots using moves that are used during drills.

During the third month, I had three training focuses: *selling*, *visualizing*, and *executing*.

Bumps hurt, and I never had any desire to take one unless it meant something. *Selling*, or projecting pain or other emotions to the crowd, gives meaning to everything that is done inside the ring. This was my favorite thing to do inside the ring and seeing it done effectively is a thing of beauty. Making my opponent look good through effective selling was one of the reasons guys liked to work with me. Sell like it really hurts, but don't oversell. Fans can snuff that out. Sell *what* hurts, don't just sell the fact that you are taking punishment. A punch in the face should draw your hands toward your face. A choke should bring your hands toward the source of your pain—the rope, forearm, or hand that is constricting the oxygen to your lungs and the blood supply to your brain. In a hold, you should try to do what you would naturally do: alleviate the pain by resisting against the pressure. If somebody is twisting your arm clockwise, you should push counterclockwise to relieve the pressure. I was always eager to become good at selling, so I would often have somebody grab me in a hold legitimately so I would know how I naturally react in a real-life situation.

Believe it or not, spots (sequences of holds, moves, and/or events) are easier to call on the fly. Most wrestlers prefer to call everything before the match, leaving little room for spontaneity based on the crowd's needs at any given moment in a match. A wrestler is a salesman—he's selling himself and the story—and any great salesman will tell you that the key to sales is listening. A salesman listens to the needs of his clients (for you, the crowd) and caters to them based upon their needs. Besides, it's a pain in the ass trying to remember fifty things before I go to the ring. Calling on the fly can be done as long as both wrestlers are *visualizing* the spot in their minds as it is being called and then *executing* the spot they see in their mental image. With just about anything in life,

you multiply your odds of accomplishment if you visualize yourself succeeding.

By the beginning of the fourth month, my students were becoming comfortable following an experienced opponent inside the ring and were able to visualize and execute basic spots. They had a good foundation on which to build. That month, I would focus on the basic match structure and introduce them to wrestling psychology.

A wrestling match is not just an exhibition of moves and holds. The whole purpose is to use wrestling moves and holds in the right manner and at the appropriate time to generate the maximum crowd reaction while doing no more than needed to control and entertain the customers. It's live-action theater; storytelling using wrestling holds and moves instead of dialogue to tell the story. Like any good book or movie, there shouldn't be a bunch of holes in the story. Wrestling psychology is the art of in-ring storytelling while minimizing the holes in the story. If a guy is selling his leg throughout the match, he probably shouldn't be doing a 450 splash like his leg was in tiptop shape later on in the match. That kind of stuff falls under psychology, which I'll get into later on.

During the fifth month, I would start to work with the student on developing a gimmick. Once the character is developed, the student is just about ready to debut. Until then, he will follow a veteran through numerous short matches.

Drawing the line on ribbing

Ribbing is supposed to be fun. Though the target may not laugh about it until later, it should be good-natured, not mean-spirited. Defining the difference is really common sense. Here is one example of a very tasteless rib. Two wrestlers thought it would be funny to sneak into a student's house and urinate on his bed. It's unsanitary, vulgar, and in no way humorous to anybody with an adult's maturity level. The student was the target of a lot of ribs and he brought a lot of it on himself, but there is no way to justify what those two wrestlers did.

III. Creating a memorable character

As I said, a professional wrestler is a salesman. Not only does he try to sell his match's story, but he is also selling himself as a character. While not everybody has to have an outrageous gimmick, it is important to be unique. Until a wrestler is truly established at any level, his character needs to be described in a word or short phrase—cop, Indian, wizard, or superhero. Somebody watching WWE for the first time will remember “the teacher” a lot easier than “Matt Striker.”

I spoke with a friend a few weeks ago who is very good inside the ring, better than many guys in WWE. But I told him that he is a run-of-the-mill good worker with zero marketability, and there are 50 other unsigned American workers in the business who are probably his equal in the ring. He hasn't really done anything to set himself apart from the others, and until then I'd be very surprised to see him get signed.

An important part of any gimmick is that the wrestling gear complements the character. And I do mean *wrestling* gear. Tights, trunks, and/or a singlet, wrestling boots, and knee pads. Not jean shorts and a Nirvana T-shirt. Of course, there are Raven cases where a gimmick calls for clothing different from the standard wrestler's attire, but in general wrestlers should wear wrestling gear. There are numerous places to get gear (I recommend Highspots.com because they have sold gear to many guys I know and I

have yet to hear a complaint).

I also encourage the wrestler to develop his in-ring style to fit the character he's portraying. How serious would people take the Undertaker if his signature move was the Ho Train? It just doesn't fit him. Too many guys stop being their character the moment the bell rings, but that just reminds the people that it's just some dude in the ring making pretend. It drives me nuts to see somebody with a sinister gimmick who is scary and evil coming to the ring, then 20 seconds into the match he's complaining to the referee about a hair pull.

When it comes to creating characters, keep it simple but be different. Once your character is established, his complexities can gradually be revealed. A later chapter, "Connecting with the audience," will further discuss this. Don't make your initial character so complex that a person needs to read a 30-page bio to understand your character.

Like television characters, the development of a wrestling character does not need to be too complicated. You should be able to sum up a character with a few bullet points. Let's look at the lead characters from *Friends*:

Monica was a control freak obsessed with cleanliness. She used to be fat in high school, was always competitive and was a good cook.

Rachel, high-maintenance and often self-centered, was a spoiled girl who walked away from her chance at the easy life in pursuit of finding true happiness.

Phoebe was a quirky, ditzy, modern-day hippie, an environmentalist, and a bad singer. She's experienced everything.

Chandler, the jokester with a screwed-up family life, often ended up the butt of the jokes.

Ross was the neurotic paleontologist whose wife left him for another woman. All of his relationships ended in disaster.

Joey was the promiscuous failing actor, dumb as a box of rocks but had innocent charm.

These characters were developed like this when the show

debuted and, though they evolved, their original traits remained throughout the series. They stayed true to their original characters (even Phoebe, whose character was all over the place but always stayed true to her character's core).

The same could be said for wrestling characters like "Stone Cold" Steve Austin, the ass-kicking, beer-drinking redneck who didn't trust anybody. Babyface or heel, nearly all dealings with the "Texas Rattlesnake" ended in a stunner.

It is said that the best gimmicks are those which are an extension of oneself. I can see where that might be true to a certain degree, but I think that a wrestler often has a habit of taking only his good traits and using those for the character. Flaws are what makes each person an individual, and his redeeming qualities—or lack thereof—and choices he makes are what determine whether people love or hate him. Even superheroes are created with flaws.

I hate when heels tell me they cheat because they are not nice guys. That's lazy. I think that the fans need to be able to relate to both babyfaces and heels. It's the decisions the character makes which determines on which side of the fence he plays. One example of a character I thought was a well-developed heel was Stan Hansen. During his promos, he would talk about how he busted heads because he needed money to feed his fat wife and litter of children back home. People can understand that, because everybody understands the responsibilities of providing for a family. But the ruthless way he brutalized babyfaces who opposed him made him a villain.

Don't over-think it. A wrestler who, as a child, watched as his dad took the easy way out from under a mountain of debt, then lived on the streets until he met an elderly retired wrestler who taught him about wrestling and about life, then caught mono right before his first shot at a title, and was nursed back to health by an Indian medicine man, then ... that's too much.

The key to a good gimmick is marketability. When you come up with a character, try to picture merchandise opportunities, and ask these questions. *To which demographic will I appeal?*

Can I see my new gimmick on a lunchbox? When I'm selling pictures, does my character in the photo look like a fan's next-door neighbor, or is there something about me that catches the eye? Has the gimmick been done before on a national scale? If so, is it outdated or can I modernize it? If it hasn't been done before, why not (there's a reason The Pedophile hasn't been done before with any success, butthole)? Why will people care about it? Can I pull off the gimmick?

According to Tony Atlas, when a wrestler walked down the street thirty years ago, people said, "Either he's a wrestler or the circus is in town." That's not the case these days.

Don't use a rip-off gimmick. Back in late-1990s and early-2000s, there were countless guys doing the Doink the Clown gimmick. While a few fans knew that the man under the mask was not really Matt Borne, Steve Lombardi, Dusty Wolfe, or Ray Appollo (who all really were Doink in WWE), most fans thought the man beneath the makeup was the "real" Doink. This was garbage indie bull-crap, cheating customers, and that's bad business.

The Underfaker

During my rookie year, I did a show at a military base where a Honky Tonk Man versus The Undertaker main event was advertised. The promoter booked a few familiar names—The Honky Tonk Man, Samu, Brian Lee, and Tom Brandi—but Brandi donned the mask as The Patriot (Del Wilkes's character) and Brian Lee worked as The Undertaker. None of the guys were happy about Lee using the gimmick, including Lee himself, but the promoter argued that since Lee worked as the Fake Undertaker on a WWE pay-per-view, he was not falsely advertising (though he used a photo of Mark Calaway, the real Undertaker, on the poster). The fans smelled garbage the moment The Undertaker was announced and Lee came to the ring. The crowd of 2,500 booed the brief match and, to my knowledge, no other wrestling event has been sold to the Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri military base since that event in February 2000.

IV. Creativity

My favorite thing about wrestling is that the door is wide open for people who can use their knowledge and skills creatively and uniquely.

Some people are born creative and others have to work hard for it, but not every great wrestler is highly creative and not every creative wrestler is great. The key to creativity is to never fall in love with your own ideas: there's usually somebody with veto power who can completely crap on your idea or alter it beyond recognition. Even if you're the person with the final say in things, that doesn't mean that you should always push your ideas down fans' throats. If the fans crap on an idea, then even the promoter needs to be flexible if he hopes to be in business very long.

Be cautious of who hears your ideas before you have a chance to pitch them to those who matter. The person who says he isn't too crazy about the idea you just created for a new gimmick just might be the guy who shows up on TV using the gimmick.

Not all of your ideas will be good ones. Even the best creative minds find themselves throwing plenty of shit against the wall to see what will stick. Never be afraid to sound foolish—at least you're showing ambition.

Don't limit yourself to only thinking creatively for yourself. Always know what is happening around you and offer ideas for other wrestlers and for storylines that don't concern you. Some-

times it just takes removing yourself from the picture to get the wheels turning, and then you can focus on creating things for yourself.

Think outside the box. A good storyteller is abnormally observant of the world and people around him. Often, he will get a story idea from something he sees or experiences in his everyday life. As a wrestler, you should consider yourself a storyteller and should be constantly observing.

Inside the ring, I liked to handicap myself to force creativity. I would tell myself, “No reversing the Irish whip, clotheslines, stomps, or eye rakes this match.” Then I would follow those guidelines and have to be creative. Try it sometime.

Part Two

The Business

I. Professionalism

Conducting oneself in a professional manner when representing the wrestling industry is not optional. Rarely is professionalism praised; on the other hand, I've seen unprofessional behavior screw up careers.

One of the first things I told my students was to stay humble, always. Pro wrestling isn't like football, where arrogance is apparently a prerequisite for success at collegiate and pro levels. It's viewed as a lack of respect for the business in wrestling. I recently did a show with a guy who is a regular performer with a large independent promotion recently. He was unfriendly and unapproachable like he was better than the other guys, failing to extend the most fundamental courtesies like introducing himself. Though he is a decent worker, his detriment to the morale of the company's regulars is greater than the benefit of having him in their ring.

When traveling to an event, be sure to carpool when possible. Although you are not being paid to be at the event while you are a student, you still need to pitch in for gas. The best way to split gas cost fairly is for the driver to begin the trip on a full tank. At the end of the trip (and when necessary during the trip), the driver fills his tank. The cost of fuel is split between all parties in the vehicle.

Travel lightly. I was one of six wrestlers traveling in a

minivan one time and we were already cramped when we picked up the last person. He brought one full-sized suitcase, one smaller one, a duffel bag, a cooler, and his foul-mouthed five-year-old. That's very poor manners, as is it when all passengers sleep in a car while the driver fights to stay awake.

When you get to the venue (the building in which the event is held), greet everybody and offer a handshake. Introduce yourself to any strangers—you know the routine. Students, find out how you can make yourself useful and, while you should watch the event and learn what you can from it, your primary role is to accomplish the tasks to which you are assigned.

Wrestling is a business, and like every other business, it's about turning a profit. Don't be that guy who asks for a dozen complimentary tickets for your girlfriend, parents, and every obscure relative you can think to invite. It's usually okay to bring your significant other along once you've started wrestling, but otherwise any guests should buy a ticket.

Obviously, professionalism also applies when you become a wrestler. The correct term for wrestling against somebody is "working with" somebody. That means you and your opponent work together to have a good match. When discussing your match, let the veteran lead and then when he invites you to add ideas, don't be shy about giving your input. If he doesn't like your idea, there may be a good reason for it, so don't pout if it gets shot down. As you gain experience, putting matches together becomes more of a compromise.

During a match or during training, it's common to get hit—or to hit somebody—with a stiff shot. If it happens to you, stiff the person back and that should be the end of it. If you stiff somebody, expect it in return—it's nothing personal. There is rarely an excuse for a wrestler to come back to the locker room upset at the guy he worked with. When somebody would bring up a stiff shot that I gave him, I was not usually very happy about it. "That happened five minutes into a twelve-minute match," I would say. "You had seven minutes to give me a receipt, so why are we talking about

it now?” Mistakes happen during a match, and I never freaked out about them because they were usually easy to cover. The only time I would be unhappy about it is if my opponent was reckless—putting me in unnecessary danger—or if he didn’t listen well while I was leading.

Once in a blue moon, you may end up in a match with somebody who is unprofessional, clueless, or who simply wants to start a fight in the ring: you may be involved in a shoot at some point in your career. If you can handle the situation and keep the match together, do so. If you’re overmatched, do what you must to protect yourself. Should a promoter fault you for taking defensive measures, find work elsewhere.

When in the ring, don’t humiliate your opponent. A slap is acceptable if used properly, but be respectful. Don’t make your opponent look like a bitch, pull his trunks down, etc. If you’re stupid enough to do that and you get punched in the mouth, you don’t get to give a receipt. You stiffed your opponent first by disrespecting him.

After the match, thank your opponent and shake his hand, then ask if everything was okay. He should do the same. This is not the time to nit-pick, so the only time you should say much (especially until you have some experience) is if it is something major, like a person blowing up (losing his wind) during your comeback or being reckless in the ring.

While at the venue, be respectful at all times to everybody. The weird-looking lady with a mullet sitting at the foot of the bleachers while the ring is being set up just might be the nice woman who decides if the promotion gets to come back to the building. Keep your conversation clean. Give anybody who might want to hear about the fat girl you hooked up with two nights ago your cell phone number and tell the story at a more appropriate time.

Word-of-mouth is a powerful thing. If you stop at Subway before an event and act like a jerk to the guy in line behind you, he will tell a friend about the wrestler coming into his town and treating him badly. That friend will tell three friends who were think-

ing about buying tickets, and they might decide against taking their kids to see foul-mouthed jerks who come into their town and bully their friends and neighbors.

After the event, wrestlers get paid, typically cash in an envelope. When a wrestler is counting his money, leave him alone. Never ask what another person gets paid: it's none of your business and you might not want to know who is making what.

I know this section bounces around a lot, but here are a few other courtesies you should extend.

When a name (a famous wrestler) is brought it for an event, don't badger him. He might watch the matches as much as he can and give pointers to the wrestlers, but that is up to him. Don't fish for compliments. He doesn't want to answer questions like, *How did my suicide dive look?*

While you are a student, understand that no matter how much you think you know about the business, you shouldn't openly critique matches. Watch them and form your own opinions, but keep them to yourself. I personally liked getting feedback and fielding questions from students about my work because I liked knowing they were paying attention, I wanted them to learn, and it made me practice what I preached; however, some wrestlers see this as disrespect.

If you are wrestling and you've brought your own t-shirts, photos, etc., ask the promoter if you may sell them. Some promoters ask for a percentage of your merchandise sales. If you don't like his terms, don't sell your merchandise. Learn from it and make sure that you and the promoter agree on the terms before you take another booking with him. Some promoters also won't let you sell anything besides photos. It's a business, and he may want fans to buy promotion's T-shirts, not yours.

Bring your own change and expect to provide your own salesperson if you need somebody other than yourself to take money, make change, etc. Price your pictures the same as the other wrestlers' photos. Don't be that guy who undercuts everybody else.

Never, EVER, bring merchandise of anything or anybody other than yourself. The promoter and other wrestlers often depend upon their own merchandise sales to make money, and if you are selling John Cena action figures, fans will buy them and you'll look bush-league as hell. If for any reason you feel you need to sell wrestling merchandise other than your own, open an eBay store and do it there.

This should fall under the Common Sense category, but I've seen the wrestler who discourages fans from buying one wrestler's pictures in effort to sell his own. Even if he volunteered all of his free time to Habitat for Humanity, he's still a dick in this book.

Hygiene is also a form of professionalism. Every time a wrestler steps into the ring, his gear should be clean. That includes kneepads, and by washing, I don't mean Febreezing the hell out of things in lieu of laundering them. It's funny how a lot of wrestlers appear arrogant yet have so little self-respect that they step into the ring smelling like a jock strap. A little trick I learned is to use liquid fabric softener when washing gear. If you don't have a washer and dryer and can't make it to the laundromat, use the sink. Fill it with water, dump some detergent in it, and scrub your gear. A quick way to dry clothes is the wrap them in a towel, step on the towel several times, and drape the damp gear over the shower-curtain rod.

Also falling in the category of professionalism and hygiene is shaving. As a man, it's humbling the first time you take a razor to your legs, but the first time you get a hairy, sweaty leg in your mouth during a headscissors, you will understand. I was taught that the forearms, armpits, and legs should be shaved. A little pointer for first-time shavers: use an electric razor with its lowest attachment the first time and follow it with manual shaving.

Hygiene may seem petty, but I've had matches with some smelly guys, and it's hard to work a good match when your stomach is turning. It also makes a wrestler seem less special to the fans when they approach him for an autograph and he smells like

dirty butt and body odor.

Additionally, good hygiene can help prevent common ailments like ringworm and staph infection.

Professionalism is something that everybody should always maintain. If I'm promoting, I would book a lesser talented or more expensive wrestler over one who is superior in the ring or cheaper but unprofessional.

Naming Names

You can tell the difference between somebody who respects this business and somebody who is in it for the wrong reasons by the way he conducts himself. A lot of wrestlers have had a small taste of notoriety and think they are stars immune to extending the most fundamental courtesies to those "below" them, but you need look no farther than a guy like The Honky Tonk Man to be able to tell the difference between somebody who was a legitimate star and somebody who is a star only in his own eyes. The Honky Tonk Man was one of the top heels in WWE for several years and has stayed active, doing independent shows for the better part of the last decade or so. Every time I have met him, he has walked through the locker room and greeted everybody, from the promotion's top guys to the students. He doesn't have to act like a star because he is one. On the other hand, I've met guys who had short runs in also-ran promotions who act like the business wouldn't exist if not for them: they act like stars because they've never been stars.

When a "name" wrestler comes in to do a show, he has a responsibility to the business, the promotion, and the wrestlers to make himself as worthwhile as possible. He's probably making more money than every other person on payroll combined and, if he wrestles, he will probably not break much of a sweat in doing so. He deserves his payday because people buy tickets to see him, but a promoter should get his money's worth out of the wrestler.

A promoter will pay \$1,000 or more between booking fee, flight, hotel, and rental car to bring in an average name. On the

surface it appears that, in order to break even when paying \$1,000 to bring in a name, a promoter must see 100 fans buy a \$10 ticket who would not have attended without the name on the card. However, if done correctly, it is a long-term investment that will pay off long after the gate receipts from that event are counted. Before booking the name, the promoter should ask if the name will watch the matches and critique them to the wrestlers afterwards. Then the promoter should have a notebook and a couple of pencils ready for the name to take notes on each match. The improvement the promoter should see in his regular crew from the advice given by guys who have drawn money in the business will make the investment pay off in the long run.

II. Protecting the business

Before any wise-ass can make a joke, I'll beat him to the punch. Yes, I realize the irony of including a chapter about protecting the business in an expository book available for a fan to buy. In my defense, just about everybody in the business has publicly spoken candidly about it at some point. Those who damn me for it are hypocrites.

Wrestling is a funny business. In baseball, Chris Carpenter can try like hell to strike out Ryan Howard and then go out to dinner with him after the game: nobody will bat an eye. A fan won't say, "Hey, baseball is fake because I saw them eating together after the game." In UFC, two guys can train together and then fight against each other without needing to worry about people questioning the legitimacy of UFC. So why is it that, in pro wrestling, fans respond this way, especially if they know the outcomes of matches are predetermined? Because storylines project personal friction between characters to sell wrestling tickets.

Obviously, most fans with triple-digit IQs know wrestling is a work, but you shouldn't celebrate the fact or even discuss it with fans. Magic fans know that a magician doesn't make a rabbit supernaturally appear in the hat. If the magician says, "Here's how I do it" before his performance, do you think the fans will enjoy the show the same?

The fan who wants to know the inner workings of the busi-

ness has access to everything he will ever want to know. Outlets like *Wrestling Observer* and PWInsiderelite.com are outstanding resources for this kind of information. On the other hand, those fans don't represent the entire market. Many fans like being surprised and don't want to know the secrets, which is why we don't expose it openly. Some fans will buy this book (hopefully plenty of them), but it isn't the fan that doesn't want smartened up.

Wrestling still has to be *presented* as a shoot. Wouldn't it suck if a wrestler talked about working the crowd and selling the leg during his post-match interview?

In WWE, wrestlers were once fined heavily if a babyface and a heel rode together, especially if they were in the middle of a feud. I'm not sure if it is still that way. In independent wrestling, it's common to see babyfaces and heels riding together, mostly out of necessity, and I don't see much of a problem with it. However, I see a big problem with two feuding wrestlers hanging out before, during, or after the event in front of fans. Not meaning to sound sexist, but many woman wrestlers I've met have been the worst about this.

I really hate it when I see two wrestlers trying out spots for their match in the ring before the doors open. Usually, there are people in the building who are not a part of this business and who don't need to see wrestlers practicing moves. Even if it's just one person, he will tell three people, each of those people will tell three other people, and so on.

Harley Race preaches kayfabe. When Trevor Murdoch and I were closing out our rookie years, I was preparing to return from a knee injury and pitched the idea of turning heel, changing my nickname, and feuding with Trevor. Trevor and I were best friends, inseparable, and about to learn just how serious Harley was about kayfabe. Harley went with my idea, but then told us that we were no longer allowed to be seen in public together. That meant no going to the bar, chasing women, or Easter dinners at Country Kitchen together. We had to meet at our house late at night (since we didn't want the many WLW fans in the town we

lived to see us walking into each other's houses during normal Christian hours). Basically he grounded us from one another, but we had one hell of a hot feud that included Texas death matches, leather strap matches, and the first-ever WLW first-blood match.

Last summer, I finally realized that Harley worked us. Together, Trevor and I raised some hell and when one of us got heat with the WLW office, the other was usually involved in some way. Harley agreed to the feud in effort to try to force Trevor and I to behave ourselves in the name of kayfabe. He divided and conquered two of his best—and most immature—wrestlers. It's funny that it took me seven years to figure that out.

Do I smarten her up?

During an event years ago, I limped down a hallway after receiving medical attention for a foot injury when another wrestler asked me if the injury was serious. A girl I'd never met before in my life glared at me and sternly said, "Kayfabe!"

I later learned that her boyfriend was a wrestler—one trying to get work with WLW, for that matter. He ended up working for us, but not before I had a long talk with him about his girlfriend's remark.

There's nothing wrong with smartening up a girlfriend or a wife, so long as she knows the boundaries. Just from being around me for the last five years, my wife knows more about wrestling than some wrestlers. But she knows that, when around others, she does not discuss wrestling as anything other than a fan. If she has opinions, I don't mind her expressing them to me in private and I am glad to help her understand things—she deserves it because she makes sacrifices for this business—but I still won't let her tell a wrestler that he needs to work on selling more believably.

Here's a good rule of thumb: tell her what you feel you must, but make sure that she knows that under no circumstances may she abuse your trust by speaking about what she learns to anybody other than you in private.

III. Dollars and nonsense

The Internal Revenue Service is like state athletic commissions on steroids (we'll talk about commissions and steroids those later, too). Don't toy with them.

In 2003, I received a letter from the State of Missouri threatening to suspend my wrestling license if I did not prove that I filed taxes from 2000 through 2002. I was out of the business and didn't care, but it turned out that the joke was on me. After several demanding letters, the state commandeered my tax rebate check before it arrived in the mail. Instead of a tax return, I received a Notice of Debt Offset which claimed I owed more than \$8,000 in state taxes for the three-year period.

I called somebody at the state and was told that the tax owed was based on the average salary of every professional athlete who earned money in Missouri, including the St. Louis and Kansas City professional football and baseball teams and every WWE wrestler who was licensed in the state—and me and every other independent wrestler. I argued that classifying me with “Stone Cold” Steve Austin was like comparing a guy who did Civil War reenactments to Tom Hanks, but the state didn't care. I didn't heed their numerous warnings and I was held liable for the debt.

Since you are an independent contractor, you should treat your wrestling career as a small business. If you make more than \$600 (I think) from any company that keeps records, you should

receive a Form 10-99 and those earnings will be shown under Nonemployee Compensation. You will most likely lose money as an independent wrestler, but regardless you need to show this loss or profit.

You cannot file for a Refund Anticipation Loan (RAL) if you have a 10-99. I almost beat up an accountant in a wheelchair over this because he tried making me pay him not only his fees, but also the RAL application fee, even though he was a CPA and should have known this. He acted shady about it, and I really wanted to tear him apart. Hey, paraplegic or not, a con man is a con man and he tried to con me.

Keep receipts for everything and claim everything you can. My office was in my home last year, so I divided the square footage of my office by that of my entire house and determined that 25 percent of my home was used for business purposes; thus, I claimed 25 percent of rent paid as a business expense. I used my new computer mainly for business, so I claimed that, all pertinent software, and Internet service. Since part of my job was to be plugged into current wrestling storylines and happenings, I had to watch every wrestling program on cable television and pay-per-view, all tax deductions I claimed. Every meal, every hotel, every expense was documented. Even the dress clothing I wore for my on-air appearances as a play-by-play announcer was claimed.

You need to keep a mileage log, because that might be your biggest deduction of all. This should include an entry for traveling to the event and one for returning home from the event. Use a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet if you can and keep a copy on your computer. The first column should be the date. The next column is your beginning point, the town from which you departed. The third column is the town to which you traveled, fourth is the reason for your travel (i.e. Montana Championship Wrestling event), fifth is your beginning mileage, then your ending mileage is sixth. Subtract #5 from #6 to get column #7, your mileage.

I don't recommend keeping receipts for having promo pictures made, because then you may need to have record of every

one sold. I preferred to just leave those out altogether.

Understand that, due to the cash nature of this business, you might end up being more likely to be audited than Joe Average. Don't freak out, just keep solid records and file honestly. I know this may be hard; the majority of wrestlers I have met are both lazy and exaggerators. No offense meant—I was once one of you—but I don't know many in this business who would dispute the validity of that statement.

If you make it to WWE, hire somebody to do your taxes for you and file quarterly. WWE does not deduct taxes, so if you wait until the end of the year, you might end up with a tax obligation of \$50,000 or more.

I don't know if this was the right thing to do or not, but I never claimed money I made in Japan. It was taxed over there (although I didn't have to file taxes over there), so I felt I already fulfilled my tax obligations.

Like I said, you will most likely show a loss as an independent wrestler. It's crazy, to think that you have to work a regular job to support your wrestling habit. Imagine reuniting with a high-school friend for the first time since you began your wrestling journey. If you told him the whole truth about this business, he'd think you were out of your mind. *Okay, so you get the hell beaten out of you, have no health insurance, and lose money? Your chances of making it are one in 500? You're insane.*

IV. The supporting cast

It takes more than a group of underwear-clad goofs to make a wrestling event work. From referees to ticket-takers, there are many people working hard to make events run smoothly who don't get the tail that all professional wrestlers (except you) get.

The referee is the third member of the team inside the ring. A friend of mine, Brandon Schmitt, first inquired about becoming a referee about a year ago. "It's pretty simple," I told him. "Don't get in the way, don't botch the finish, and keep the counts consistent. Besides that, most of a referee's training comes from getting in there and learning from his mistakes." That's the best I can describe it. It's not that it's easy—far from it—but I think it's learned best with live-match experience. In addition, this makes a referee an almost immediate asset to a company, so he can earn his keep while learning.

We had a referee not too long ago who was a total tool. Not John Cone, who is an outstanding referee and a great guy who makes awesome doughnuts and worked for us before being signed by WWE, but a different guy. In fact, he was the polar opposite of John. Where John is a professional, slender, clean-cut guy, this referee was fat-skinny (you know, skinny except for his beer belly and bulbous ass), sloppy, and always looked like he had dropped a load in his pants. His droopy pants were symbolic, because he really was the shits in the ring. The worst thing about him was that

he was in horrible shape and refused to accept the fact that refereeing required good conditioning.

It's hard to notice a good referee, but a bad one can break a match. Last year, a referee (who is not one of our regulars) screwed up and handed the WLW title to the losing wrestler. The crowd was confused, as were both wrestlers, so this losing wrestler (I'm not going to name him) did the only thing he could think of ... he dropped the referee with a hard elbow to the jaw.

The referee is like the kicker in football. Sometimes the outcome of the game is on his shoulders. If he nails it, well, he was just doing what he was paid to do. If he shanks it, then he is fury's target. I really feel for referees, especially the good ones like John, who work their asses off and don't get the respect they deserve.

The ring announcer has a simple job. He introduces wrestlers and announces the winners. Sure, he may also need to welcome the crowd and let fans know who is at the autograph table during intermissions, but it's the easiest job of anybody in a performance role. He needs to look professional and be something of a stiff. He's not an emcee, but a ring announcer. He should project his voice with enthusiasm without trying to sound like Michael Buffer, speak clearly and not swallow the microphone. He may have a stopwatch at the ringside table and might occasionally be asked the elapsed time. Sorry to all ring announcers, but I've done it and I nailed it the first time.

Like the referee, the ring announcer is usually only noticed when he screws up. Here is my biggest pet peeve with announcers: introducing one wrestler with less enthusiasm than another. He's telling the fans that one wrestler is less important than another instead of letting the crowd decide. I also hate it when an announcer asks the crowd, "What did you think of that match?" This opens the door for a reaction he might not expect. Another one, a big one, is, "Lets hear it for so-and-so!" When I was wrestling, I would get really mad about that. I got my own reaction and didn't need a third hand in doing so.

Managers may be slowly filtered back into wrestling. I hope so. Remember all the managers in WWE in the 1980s? “Captain” Lou Albano, “Classy” Freddie Blassie, “Luscious” Johnny V, Bobby “the Brain” Heenan, Mr. Fuji, Jimmy Hart, and Slick, to name a handful? Now there are almost none, but that is still more than there were a few years ago. Managing is about finding your gimmick and your niche. Most babyface managers require breasts, because who wants to see some aging wrestler act as a cheerleader? Almost every good manager is a heel. He can manage one wrestler or have an entire stable. On the independent scene, I don’t think it’s necessary for a manager to be seen more than twice. Too much of a good thing is not a good thing, Alan Jackson.

To be a good manager, you will likely need to be exceptional on the mike. You should treat your role as if you receive a cut of your wrestlers’ paydays, so you will do whatever necessary to get him the winner’s pay. Like a tag team partner, your bodily mannerisms should reflect the way you are feeling when your wrestler is on top or taking a beating.

I always liked Jim Cornette as a manager because he wore a suit, didn’t look like a wrestler, got heat, was incredible on the mic, and looked like he was coming up with a new strategy when things didn’t go as he planned.

The manager can get physically involved, but I appreciate teasing it first. Let the manager creep toward the babyface, who is selling on the bottom rope. Let the crowd go nuts, the referee turns around just as the manager turns to the crowd, upset that they foiled his plans. Then fans feel like they can prevent wrongdoing, and when it is teased next time, they’re through the roof. When the manager finally does get involved, the wrestler should be careful not to oversell it. Sure, there have been some tough managers, but in the fans’ eyes, he’s still just a manager.

Valets are becoming less common as most Divas end up in the ring. If you aren’t stop-traffic hot or if you don’t have a great gimmick, you might not want to waste your time trying to become

a valet.

Security is an important part of the live wrestling event. There's always "that guy" in some crowd—the lifelong nobody who think he'll achieve immortality by whipping a wrestler. Sadly, those guys aren't usually dragged backstage for a good beating any more. The moment a fan touches a wrestler in a disrespectful or aggressive manner, he should be escorted from the building. Security also needs to keep its eyes open for kids wrestling on the floor or trying to get into the ring between matches, people trying to steal merchandise, and anything else that could be potentially dangerous or costly to the promotion.

I hope I didn't sound too hard on some of the supporting cast. It takes a lot more than just wrestlers to make a show run smoothly. It's just, like I said, sometimes the only times you notice some of them are when they screw up.

V. Watching tapes

When you watch wrestling videos, you're either watching yourself or somebody else. Duh. Let's look at how to get the most out of both.

Before I watched one of my own matches on video, I asked myself, *How did I feel about the match afterwards?* No matter what, that is the most important thing. If you're honest with yourself, you'll end up picking apart your match to a degree that you'll end up thinking think it sucked, so it's good to remember the feeling you had right after you worked the match.

I liked to watch my videos several times. The first time, I watched it for myself, as a fan. I didn't evaluate anything; I just wanted to see the story of the match and how we told it. The second time, I would begin picking it apart. I'd look for better ways I could bump, sell, feed, and interact with the crowd. I'd keep an eye out for anything that looked weak and any times where it was obvious I was calling a spot. The next time around, I would use the pause button a lot. I'd watch the match and, after everything we did, I would pause the video and try to think of five different ways we could have gone from Points A to B. If I had my opponent in a headlock (A) and he ended up with a hammerlock on me (B), I would think of five different ways to get from A to B. Maybe he reversed directly into the hammerlock in the match. Here are five different ways we could have done it:

1. He whips me into the ropes. I hit a tackle. He drops down and catches me coming off the ropes with an armdrag. We work up to our feet and he goes into the hammerlock.
2. He works for a top-wristlock. I reverse into a hammerlock and he reverses it.
3. I give him a headlock takeover. He gives me a headscissors, I kick out, and I feed into the hammerlock.
4. He reverses the headlock and switches over into the hammerlock.
5. He schoolboy rolls me out of the headlock. I charge him and he gives me a dropkick. He covers me for a one-count and then grabs an overhand wristlock. He goes into the hammerlock.

I cannot stress how important it is to be honest with yourself. I've seen the wrestler who has matches that are terrible, but when he watches himself on tape he can do nothing but sing his own praises. Chances are, you are not as good as you think—don't feel bad, I wasn't. It's good to feel good about what you do, but understand that wrestling is a constant learning process, and the wrestler who stops learning should stop wrestling and move onto life's next challenge.

When watching others on video, I also watched each match three times. The first time was for the story, the second time to evaluate, and the third time to watch, pause, and figure out different ways to get from A to B: I also think of ways I can incorporate some of the holds, moves, and spots into my own work.

I can't tell you who to watch because I don't know you or your look, style, or abilities. I can tell you who I watch: William Regal (mostly as "Lord" Steven Regal in WCW) for aggressive heat and mat work, Rick Steamboat for sympathetic selling while staying alive during the heat, Bobby Eaton for the subtleties of believable selling, Brian Pillman for looking believable on offense while working with a larger opponent, Curt Hennig for working as a strong heel who didn't look like he had to cheat, Barry Windham for babyface comeback fire that doesn't look cheesy, the Midnight

Express for tag team wrestling, and a ton of different guys for promos. Many notable wrestlers have told me that they watched Paul Orndorff's stuff when they first turned heel.

The Roddy Piper vs. Bret Hart Intercontinental Title match at *Wrestlemania VII* is my favorite match to watch. I loved the story. It began with a pre-taped promo, with Piper not taking Bret seriously because he still sees Bret as the little kid he once knew and Bret not very happy about Piper's jokes. The match was the classic babyface-versus-babyface match, with each man becoming increasingly aggressive as the match progressed. Each man pulled a fast one on the other, angering his the victim. In the end, a ref bump gave Piper the chance to take the low road: he was going to hit Hart with the timekeeper's bell. He showed internal conflict, the angel on one shoulder telling him, "Don't do it" (as were the thousands of fans) and the self-preserving devil on the other. He eventually chose to take the high road, tossed the bell aside, and seconds later had Hart in his finishing move, the sleeper hold. Hart kicked himself off the buckles and ended up pinning Piper while still caught in the sleeper. After the match, Piper snagged the belt from the referee and, after several heart-stopping seconds where I still sometimes think Piper will turn heel no matters how many times I watch it, he eventually helped Hart to his feet and fastened the belt around the new champion's waist.

Another match I strongly recommend is Steven Regal vs. Marcus Bagwell from *Clash of the Champions XXIII*. I don't have the DVD in my possession because my borrowing friend has little regard for my love of my wrestling video collection, so I can't give a narrative. I can only tell you that I loved the match, Regal is the man, and you should check it out.

You will find that different wrestlers are good for you to study at different times in your career. Watch all the video you can—it will only make you better—but don't limit yourself to just a few. If I was getting ready to wrestle the Harris Brothers in a tag match, I would watch the Midnight Express vs. the Road Warriors to see how two smaller wrestlers made themselves look like they

had a chance of hanging with two monsters.

It's great to watch and enjoy matches, even picking a few things out to use as your own, but don't just look at the move or spot that you like: try to understand how, when, and why it was used.

Watch tapes frequently. Don't let it cut into your gym or training time, but it's a vital part of the learning process.

VI. Booking 101

I won't pretend to be a longtime booker who knows the ins and outs like no other. I have, however, had a hand in the booking process for years alongside a man who booked several territories during his career, so I think I've learned enough to dedicate a chapter to it.

The most important tool in a booker's briefcase is a pencil. Pencils are used because of the unpredictability of the business. Injuries, no-shows, car trouble, and a host of other things can shoot a booker's plans to hell and create a need for the eraser.

The promoter and booker are often the same guy. Many promoters like to do it all themselves, and there isn't usually anything wrong with that—they pay the overhead. While I've been assisting booker Harley Race off-and-on for several years, he always had the final say because he signs the checks.

The first thing a booker needs to do is book talent for the event. This is where the "variety of flavors" that I reference throughout the book is most vital. If a booker has access to twelve incredible talents who all look and work similarly, he should probably only book one or two of them: he needs to balance the card. Let's use a six-match card for my example. I'll use WWE guys so everybody gets the point.

In my first match, I want two dependable wrestlers, a babyface and a heel who I know I can count on to deliver a good

opener with good crowd response. I'm going with Kofi Kingston vs. Chavo Guerrero, with Kofi going over.

Second, I want a decent match using a less-experienced wrestler who I can push at some point down the road. I also need a decent veteran to lead him through a good match. I'll put Mike Knox over Stevie Richards here.

Since I went with a slower-paced second match, I need to speed things up before we take an intermission. I want an upper-card wrestler defeating an inferior opponent: I think it's healthy to pull a main-eventer down the card sometimes to give him strong wins. I'll put MVP over on Jimmy Wang Yang in this match.

Coming out of the intermission, I need something to get fans' attention. They have stood in line to use the restroom, bought merchandise, and have been waiting patiently for the show to resume. This will be my gimmick match, a Divas contest between Mickie James and Victoria. Since my last two matches saw heels go over, I need Mickie, the babyface, to win this one.

Now we're coming into the home stretch of the night, but we need one more intermission before the main event, so I will put a tag team match in here so I can get some time out of it. It also needs to have a little star power since it is on next-to-last. I'll put Edge and Randy Orton against Matt and Jeff Hardy. A featured match next month will be Edge vs. Orton, I will have Edge cause Orton to get pinned. Edge will try to apologize, but Orton will hit the RKO and leave Edge lying in the ring.

Now it's time for the main event. This is the match everybody paid to see, so I really need to deliver. At the same time, I need to leave fans eager to buy tickets for next month's event. I will have Umaga vs. The Undertaker for the World Title, with a double-DQ finish. They will continue to brawl wildly until the locker rooms empty (except Edge, Orton, and the Divas) to break them up. The authority figure will come out and make the announcement that next month will be a rematch, but next time anything goes. It will be a no-DQ Last Man Standing match.

I think I've put together a decent card. There was some

good wrestling, some flying, some eye candy (not to mention both of those Divas can work), an interesting story in a heel team set to battle each other (though it's usually a bad idea because the fans have nobody to care about, these two are over enough to draw), and the drawing card, a gimmick match next month that relates directly to the finish of this main event. You usually want to leave something unresolved so you don't have to start from scratch next time.

The overuse of title changes waters down what should be memorable. If a fan attends ten events and sees one or two title changes, then it means something. I see little issue with bouncing around the lesser titles a bit, but the main title should be changed sparingly.

I've worked events where the promoter, booker, and hometown wrestler are all the same person. Instead of doing smart business, he usually wants to be a glory-hound and put himself over all the time. I would do it differently. Let's say tonight I'm running an event in my hometown: I'm the local celebrity and I win my match. The fans cheer—they love me the same as they did when the event began (nothing lost, nothing gained). But what if I lose? I wrestled Joe Smith and his rule-breaking friend, Harvey Jones, helped him cheat me out of hometown glory. However, I am going to get even when next month when I team with Marty Jannetty to face those cheating whatnots. Now I've lost little, because the fans see light at the end of the tunnel, and I'll get the rub from a name as I seek revenge during next month's event. Sadly, most hometown wrestlers/bookers/promoters are too caught up in the small-town love they receive to see the potential in this.

Money talks, and as the booker, you are usually given a budget to work with. Spend wisely. While it would be great to bring in five former WWE stars, it's probably not within your budget to do so. I have worked an event featuring many names, and though there were plenty of paying fans who watched the event, it was not profitable because it was overbooked. Imagine being a promoter who sees 1,000 people sitting in the crowd and knows he will still lose money.

Innovative, captivating finishes are a booker's best friend. You want to be sure that, no matter what, you don't make fans feel like they've wasted their time or money, even if their favorite doesn't win. Gone are the days of *We're out of time! Tune in next week to find out the winner!* It may have gotten over in the old days, but not today. A good finish is easy to understand whether you are sitting in the crowd or watching on television. There should be at least one creative finish on each show.

My favorite finish of all time was the end of an Arn Anderson vs. Alex Wright match in WCW. Anderson ducked a clothesline and drew back for a punch, Wright ducked, Anderson stopped, under-hooked Wright's head, and hit a DDT for the pin. Since Anderson was a seasoned veteran and Wright was a rookie, it made sense for Anderson to bait Wright into the finisher. It was simple but effective as hell.

A tag-team finish I really liked was during *Clash of the Champions XVIII* in a match pitting Marcus Bagwell and Brian Pillman against Terry Taylor and Tracey Smothers. During the hot tag, a four-way broke out and Pillman was thrown over the top rope to the floor, where he landed on his feet. Taylor and Smothers whipped Bagwell into the ropes and went for a double-backdrop, but Bagwell hit a sunset flip on Taylor. When Smothers popped up, he saw that Taylor was fighting to avoid going down to the sunset flip. Smothers grabbed Taylor's arm to prevent Bagwell from bringing Taylor down. Pillman slid in the ring and dropkicked Smothers in the back, causing Taylor to propel Smothers out of the ring. Momentum took Taylor to the mat, where he was pinned by Bagwell's sunset flip. It takes a lot of words to describe it, but it came off really smooth: I about wore out my rewind button when I first watched it.

The best bookers I've seen have had great foresight. Having the special guest, Tony Atlas, knock out the heel champion, who screwed the babyface challenger and the fans by taking the low road, will get a big pop; however, good bookers understand that after the event is over, Atlas goes home and the regular mem-

bers of the roster are left fighting for a title held by a man who was dropped with an aged legend's single punch.

Another great trait of a great booker is his ability to see the big picture. Maybe he wants to switch two titles during the same event. One of those titles is the focal point of the company, and the great booker can see that showing the fans a title change before the big title switch will cheapen the one that matters most.

Of course, great angles (or storylines or programs) make great bookers. An angle usually consists of an opposition that the babyface must overcome to achieve his goal. A great angle is one in which the fans make an emotional investment in—one they can relate to. Joe Wrestler's partner turns against him (they've all been betrayed by somebody in the past). Joe is heartbroken because they were like brothers (they've all felt the agony that a lost relationship brings). Joe's ex-partner challenges him but Joe backs down (they've all experienced a moment of that raises questions about their courage). Finally, Joe's partner crosses the line and Joe says, "Enough is enough. I will fight you" (they've all had their fill and either stood up for themselves or, more likely, wished they had). Now those fans, who can relate to Joe's situation, are going to pay money to see him get revenge on his former partner (and those who have wronged them). Fans want to live vicariously through their heroes, so easy-to-relate-to scenarios really get them to make an emotional, and ultimately a financial, investment in the angle.

Booking backwards

Some great bookers like to work backwards. I'm going to use *Wrestlemania* for my example. Before I begin, note that this was written a couple months before C.M. Punk pinned Edge to win the World Heavyweight Title.

I want a heel C.M. Punk to defeat Triple-H for the WWE Title in the main event. It's a tough sell, because Punk may not have that kind of star power yet, but I need to find a way to get him over as a *Wrestlemania* headliner between now and then.

I see the finished product: confetti showers C.M. Punk as he hoists the WWE Championship above his head while fans boo like crazy. Now I need to book backwards. The pay-per-view (which is a pain in the ass to type, so it is now PPV) before *Wrestlemania* is *No Way Out*. I definitely need Punk to overcome his greatest obstacle here. Before that, in reverse order, is *Royal Rumble*, *Armageddon*, *Survivor Series*, *Cyber Sunday*, *No Mercy*, *Unforgiven*, *Summerslam*, *The Great American Bash*, and *Night of Champions*.

As I am writing this, I have ten PPVs to make C.M. Punk a heel who will draw as a *Wrestlemania* headliner. I know that I need to give him the *Wrestlemania* push, but before I do that I have to set his sights on the WWE Title. Before that, I need to give him a win over a babyface who is a former WWE Champion. Before I even do that, I will need to turn him heel. Before he turns, I will need to plant the seeds for his heel turn. Before I plant those seeds, I need to give him some babyface momentum so his heel turn will mean the most. Call Guinness—I have just set the world record for most times using “before” in a paragraph. Now that I’ve gone in reverse, I’ll lay things out in chronological order.

First, he will win the U.S. Title in a three-way match against MVP and Matt Hardy at *Night of Champions*. I need MVP in the match to protect Punk from being booed against Hardy, whose popularity may be greater than Punk’s.

Next, I need him to be a good guy and gladly give Hardy a one-on-one rematch at *The Great American Bash*, since Punk is a fighting champion and can sympathize with the babyface ex-champ who lost a title even though he wasn’t pinned. They work a respectable match until Hardy takes a nasty spill to the floor. Punk could just take the count-out win and keep his title, but he’s a babyface, so he rolls out and helps Hardy back into the ring. Out of nowhere, Hardy hits the Twist of Fate to regain the title and goes back to selling his floor bump. Punk is visibly upset, but he lets the crowd talk him into begrudgingly helps Hardy to his feet after the match. This foreshadowing plants a seed for the heel turn

because taking the high road bit him in the ass.

I move Punk to *Raw*, probably in a draft, and put him in a feud with Chris Jericho (who should be a heel by that time) that spans two PPVs, *Summerslam* and *Unforgiven*, with Jericho winning the first bout and Punk winning the last.

I need to push Punk as an upper-card babyface, so he becomes involved in a feud with Randy Orton. This feud brings us to *No Mercy*, where he shows he's almost in Orton's league in a losing effort.

Punk isn't be satisfied with the loss. He wants one more match with Orton on *Raw*, which ends with JBL running in just as Punk is about to hit the Go To Sleep on Orton and surely get the win. Orton and JBL double-team Punk until Triple-H makes the save, setting the table for my *Cyber Sunday* main event, Punk and Triple-H against Orton and JBL. Main-eventing him on a secondary PPV is the safe route and, while it may not spike the buyrate, is elevates him to main-event status.

Triple-H can barely stand after winning a brutal main-event match against John Cena in the main event of *Survivor Series*. Punk appears on the stage, his eyes shifting between a battered Triple-H and the Money in the Bank briefcase. Punk slowly descends the ramp, but decides against cashing in for an easy WWE Championship victory because he's a babyface who is going to take the high road; he doesn't want to become WWE Champion like this. I also subtly create a little bit of a buzz for the possibility of Shawn Michaels vs. Triple-H at *Wrestlemania* at around this time.

The night after *Survivor Series*, Punk loses his Money in the Bank briefcase in a match. Now he's really screwed himself. He could have just gone out to the ring the night before, laid across Triple-H, and became WWE Champ, but now he doesn't even have the voucher to claim a title shot.

After a great pep talk from Shawn Michaels, Punk grins and bears it for now. When Michaels gets involved in a spat with Carlito and Santino Marella, he enlists the help of a happy-to-oblige Punk—or so it seems. During their tag match, Punk turns

against Michaels, leading to their showdown at *Armageddon*. I do a 30-minute time-limit draw to show that Punk is a big-leaguer.

In the next few weeks, I would create a huge buzz for Michaels vs. Triple-H at *Wrestlemania*, maybe with both of them stating that they would love to do it.

Punk earns the WWE Title shot by surprisingly winning the *Royal Rumble*, last eliminating Michaels. Punk gets to challenge for either the WWE or World Title at *Wrestlemania*.

Both Michaels and Triple-H want to square off at *Wrestlemania*. Triple-H says he dreams of stealing the show at *Wrestlemania* with Shawn Michaels and pleads with Punk to step aside, but Punk has a better idea. He will take on Michaels in a 60-minute Iron Man match at *No Way Out*. If Punk wins, then he wrestles Triple-H at *Wrestlemania*. If Punk loses, then Michaels gets his *Wrestlemania* match with Triple-H, but Punk can challenge for the WWE Championship at any time afterwards. I usually don't like following through on previous stipulations, but given the WWE history of the *Royal Rumble* winner not challenging for a title in a one-on-one match at *Wrestlemania*, we'll go with it. With no falls for either man and five minutes remaining in the match, Triple-H comes to ringside and cheers Michaels. Inside 15 seconds left in the match, Punk ducks Sweet Chin Music and hits the Go To Sleep to get the first and deciding fall just before time expires. Punk retains his claim to the title shot.

During the next several weeks before *Wrestlemania*, Punk gets wins over former WWE Champions to give him a big push leading into his main-event match.

Now that *Wrestlemania* is here, we've built C.M. Punk as a main-event heel. His win over Michaels in the Iron Man match is what really makes him a star, but he also has wins over several other WWE Champions to make the fans buy him as a legitimate contender worth paying to see. He wins the WWE Title from Triple-H at *Wrestlemania*.

I follow this with Punk dropping the WWE Title to Michaels in a three-way also including Triple-H at *Backlash* and

failing to regain it at the next PPV. Then I'd do a slow-build angle leading to Michaels vs. Triple-H at *Summerslam*. So Punk's main-event status wasn't tarnished, I'd make him the first pick of the 2009 Draft, sending him to *Smackdown* as a top-level heel.

State athletic commissions

This applies to everybody working in this business: if you're in a state governed by an athletic commission, don't screw with them. Do everything by the book. If you are required to be licensed, get it early. Promoters, don't be that guy who books twelve wrestlers to work an event that gets shut down because you didn't get an event license. Wrestlers, don't be the one who drives nine hours to work an event, didn't get his physical and, thus, isn't allowed to get licensed, doesn't get to work the event, and doesn't get paid. If you do that, don't expect another call from that promoter.

Don't screw with the commission. If you pull a shenanigan in Georgia and the state suspends your license, it can and likely will affect your licensing status in other commissioned states. If the promoter is screwing with the commission, a wrestler's license may also be affected if the promoter's license is suspended. Wrestlers, make sure you're working with reputable promotions who do things by the book.

When promoting an event, don't count on a sellout crowd to fulfill your financial obligations. There are a ton of variables that can make or break an event, and when your event flops, your debts are still your responsibility. It is not a wrestler's job to sell tickets, it's yours, and you should have cash on hand to pay the wrestlers even if your event ends up with an attendance of zero.

I have heard venues state many times that they were burned by a promotion in the past and no longer want to have anything to do with wrestling. Either the promotion left their building half-demolished, the check for renting the building bounced, or the beneficiary of a fund-raiser didn't get its money. If you promote, book, wrestle, referee, manage, or do anything else that classifies

as “working” in professional wrestling, you have a responsibility to the business. If you can’t do good business, get the hell out of it.

Promotion Wars

The days of territories are gone, so there is no reason for an independent promoter to tell a wrestler he can’t work for another promotion. Unless said promoter is paying the wrestler a salary and has him under contract, he has no say in where that wrestler works and it should not affect the promoter’s decision on whether to continue booking the wrestler.

In Missouri and just about every other state, it seems that promotions are at each other’s throats. It’s ridiculous and I’ve seen it get stupid. During WLW’s first year, guys from a small indy group showed up at one of our events. They bought front-row tickets and heckled us the entire time. If there was a blown spot, they would say, “You blew that spot.” Harley spoke to them during our first intermission, and they were dead quiet the rest of the show. I’m guessing he didn’t invite them to one of his famous barbecues.

The problem with promotion wars is that there is no reason at all for them. If you present a solid product then you should have nothing to worry about.

VII. Writing and producing wrestling television

Like the evolution of professional wrestling into sports entertainment, the televised product has evolved as well.

Wrestling television is rarely profitable on the surface. Its purpose is to drive fans to the live events by developing wrestlers and matches they'll pay to see. Most TV stations want money for the time slot, with the promotion responsible for selling ads and retaining all or part of the proceeds. We were fortunate to work out a deal where the station filmed the footage, aired our program, and sold advertisements for the program on their own. It worked well because we had a one-hour commercial for our events every week and they sold out on the advertising time allotted for the program quickly enough to motivate them to replay the program the next morning, creating 28 new advertising spaces.

It's been said many times that fans are talked into arenas: I agree. Sure, you might sell a few tickets to fans who want to see a technical wrestling clinic between The Silent Assassin and The Mute, but it's the promos that put the most asses in seats. Wrestlers need to be able to deliver a solid promo, and should be practicing at home in front of a mirror or camcorder regularly. Promos were once ad-libbed: the only instructions were bullet points, at most. Now, nearly every TV promo is scripted. I prefer to give our wrestlers bullet points and let them have a little room for creativity and spontaneity. As long as they get the assigned points

across and hit their mark on time, I don't care, but I produce a small program that is only seen by a couple thousand viewers. You need a balance of promo styles—the insane, the I'm-just-glad-to-be-here rookie babyface, the strategist, the yeller, the quiet, the funny. If every wrestler screams, it really loses its effect.

When conducting interviews, I like to do a quick summary of whatever controversy surrounds the wrestler, then I let him comment on it. I ask him about his upcoming match, maybe about his strategy, then pass it to him. I then wrap up the interview and send the program to a commercial break.

A wrestler should never take the microphone from the announcer. Imagine how little the fans would have respected Gordon Solie had he been pushed around by wrestlers. The announcer should lend an aura of class to the program, and bullying him has a negative effect on his credibility.

As a rule of thumb, I didn't talk about things in front of a live audience that they wouldn't get to see. If I needed a promo for something that the live audience would see that night, then it would be an in-ring interview. If not, then I would do a backstage promo. We travel around a lot, and most of our towns don't get our program on TV. That raises the question, *Which is more important, the live crowd or the TV viewers?* I believe the live crowd is most important, because people watching on TV who can feel the crowd's excitement are more likely to buy a ticket to feel that same live thrill. There are times when you must sacrifice the concerns of the live crowd for the benefit of the TV product, and vice-versa, when those two audiences are not one in the same.

When your live event and television program occur on the same night in a town, air a replay instead of a new program that night. Why punish the ticket-buying fan by making him miss a new week of the TV program in order to see the event live? If you air a replay, then you've given the fans nothing to miss on TV.

I recently got approval to create and sell a WLW newsletter at events. I always worried that a live crowd outside our coverage area couldn't follow our storylines, so I think that selling a news-

letter, where I can get over our angles and give the fans a better idea of what's happening and who the wrestlers are, which should improve the live element of our events.

You need to have your program timed out. I used a segment-by-segment spreadsheet, but I am pushing now to switch to a bullet-pointed television script. The following is an example of what my spreadsheet looked like:

Start	Segment	Description	End	Remain
0:00	0:15	VTR-Intro	0:15	59:45
1:15	1:15	VTR-Dinn T. vs. Branden	1:30	58:30
1:30	0:30	Matt-Welcome (PT)	2:00	58:00
2:00	2:00	BREAK 1	4:00	56:00
4:00	8:00	Darin vs. Derek	12:00	48:00
12:00	2:00	BREAK 2	14:00	46:00
14:00	1:00	Branden promo (PT)(BS)	15:00	45:00
15:00	6:00	Wade vs. Marc (1 of 2)	21:00	39:00
21:00	2:00	BREAK 3	23:00	37:00
23:00	4:00	Wade vs. Marc (2 of 2)	27:00	33:00
27:00	0:30	Dinn T. warm-up (PT)(BS)	27:30	32:30
27:30	2:00	BREAK 4	29:30	30:30
29:30	1:00	VTR-Rankings	30:30	29:30
30:30	0:30	VTR-Upcoming Events	31:00	29:00
31:00	2:00	BREAK 5	33:00	27:00
33:00	22:00	Dinn T. vs. Branden	55:00	5:00
55:00	2:00	BREAK 6	57:00	3:00
57:00	1:00	Matt-Wrap-up (POST)	58:00	2:00
58:00	2:00	BREAK 7	60:00	END

Let's break down this one-hour program. Our primary TV station allows us 46 minutes for this program, which airs at 10:30 on Saturday nights and replayed at 11:00 on Sunday mornings. The 14 additional minutes are broken into seven two-minute commercial breaks (two four-minute and two three-minute breaks would be ideal), with the final break between the end of our program and the program that followed it.

This particular program is not timed like I prefer due to the frequent commercial breaks during the first half. Notice how I have taken five of my seven breaks at the 33:00 mark. This is because I wanted the fans to understand the importance of the

main event, a match so big that we wouldn't dare interrupt it with a commercial break. I used a VTR (video tape recorded) package summarizing the story between the main-event wrestlers to open the show. I also added a pre-taped (PT) backstage (BS) promo by Branden (Tatum) and a 30-second PT-BS video showing Dinn T. (Moore) getting psyched up for the match. I used PT instead of VTR to remind myself that we don't have that footage in the bag—that it needed to be taped before the event begins. I wanted viewers to really get excited for the main event, a match that will settle a brutal feud between former partners, so this program ends with closure instead of a cliff-hanger. It is the end of a chapter in both mens' careers. I also don't take attention away from the build of this match, so I didn't have anybody else cut a promo for this program. I previewed next week in the wrap-up, but I really wanted this match to make fans think that this was something they were very lucky to get on free television.

Though I don't like to do it, I put a commercial break in the Wade (Chism) vs. Marc (Godeker) match. This gives me a safety net, in case the show runs long. Since Marc is going over, I cut to break early-on during his heat. I came back two minutes before Wade's comeback, so they see Marc on top briefly, but it appears that Wade controlled most of the match until Marc snuck in a quick rollup for the pin.

I like to do intro and wrap-up segments in our program, where I welcome and thank the viewers, comment on anything significant during the hour, and preview this and next week's programs.

Match times include introductions and the outshot (the last thing in a segment the fans see before we move to a commercial break or the next segment), so an eight-minute match, in reality, is probably only six minutes of in-ring action.

Prior to the introduction, I fade in to the ring announcer before he begins to speak. I need him to stand still and look at the camera for two seconds so I don't come in to a shot of him letting out a deep breath or sucking candy out of his teeth.

We do a two-camera shoot, with one hard camera and one on the floor. We try to position the seats so that most of the crowd is in the hard camera shot, giving the impression that we have a full house whether we really do or not. The floor cameraman films mostly at an angle, working from one of the corners closest to the hard camera toward the crowd.

When entrances are filmed, I want the floor camera getting most of it. When the hard camera pans toward the entrance, it often showcases empty seating, which looks worse on camera than in person. The floor cameraman stands at the ring post nearest the entrance with the top of the wrestler's head at the upper one-third line of the screen (so I'm not covering his face when I add the graphics later).

I like to have crowd shots, but at appropriate times. I actually took over editing because our first program showed crowd shots during hope spots; not shots of them clapping while the babyface is summoning support, but when the babyface was fighting back, so viewers missed that part of the story. I just think it takes people who know wrestling—or at least watch wrestling a lot on TV—to edit it.

Here are a few random things I've learned since we began doing TV.

A wrestler not involved in the match should not be seen on camera. This means he should not be in view of a camera while watching a match, returning from the concession stand, or playing with his kids. At one of our events, a wrestler sat in the bleachers in the dead-center of the hard camera shot during the entire program. At the same event, another wrestler was seen near the entrance several times holding her child.

If the entrance is accessible to fans, security needs to make sure that kids aren't running in the wrestler's path to the ring. First, it is a safety liability. Second, it makes for a bad shot when a wrestler almost trips over a kid running in front of him.

Make sure the hard camera is set up in a place where fans aren't sitting. Tape off the hard-camera side of the bleachers if that

is where you're set up; if not, your camera will shake every time somebody takes a step.

Here comes a bunch of technical crap, so feel free to skim until the last paragraph of the chapter if you aren't interested in this facet of wrestling TV. I have included prices so you can get a general idea of cost, but keep in mind that you will still need cords, tapes, surge protectors, chargers, microphones, etc.

Use at least 3CCD (three-chip) cameras. We use a Sony DSR-250 (\$4,000) for the hard camera and a Sony PD-170 (\$2,500) for our floor camera (I also like the in-ring element that the use of a monopod gives us with the PD-170). Panasonic makes a 3CCD camera that costs in the \$400 range, much less expensive than what we use.

Be sure to white balance all cameras on the same surface. It looks bad when you cut from a hard camera shot showing a clear, snow-white wall to a floor camera that shows the same wall in an off-white color.

Keep extra batteries (\$50 for PD-170 and \$150 for DSR-250) and make sure everything is charged beforehand. Ditto for tapes. Be sure you know how much tape is in the cameras so you don't run out mid-match. Switch as needed between matches and don't be afraid to hold up the ring announcer a minute while changing tapes.

Test everything in advance: do mic checks for the ring announcer as well as the commentators, including while ring entrance music is playing and play the entrance music before the show to make sure none of the songs skip.

Do not use copyrighted music if you are broadcasting on television or selling DVDs of the footage. Find CDs with copy-right-free music.

Make sure the announcer and the guy playing entrance music both have instructions. Post a copy of wrestler instructions in the locker room.

I use Final Cut Express (\$300) for editing on my MacBook (\$1,100 not including the three-year Apple Care Protection Plan

for \$250). I capture the footage from a Sony DSR-11 tape deck (\$2,200) through a Canopus ADVC110 (\$200) and to my computer. I don't recommend using your camera to play back the tapes unless you have to: doing so adds unnecessary wear to the camera heads. Final Cut Express comes packaged with LiveType (for graphics) and Soundtrack (to create music).

When I capture the footage, it is saved onto an external hard drive (\$150 for 500 gigabytes). I keep the original footage until I have completed the project. Once I have the footage saved, I sync up the two camera shots and begin editing. I start by adjusting the audio to make sure it is in stereo and not mono and I turn down the floor camera's audio to -14dB to catch some of the noise without letting viewers hear spots called in the ring or the woman in Row Four coughing up a lung. I lock the audio tracks and start cutting away.

When cutting wrestling from one camera to the next, I try to do this just before impact on bumps and punches because it takes the eyes a few milliseconds to adjust from one shot to the next, giving the impression of greater impact and crisper delivery. I also keep an eye out for things like lips moving and daylight between the arm and the chin on a reverse-chinlock.

After I finish cutting the footage, I add Fade In/Fade Out transitions to the beginning and end of each segment and all graphics before rendering. I watch the footage to make sure it is exactly how I want it and then export the footage to a self-contained Quick Time movie file. As a self-contained file, it stores all footage and graphics in itself, so I can delete the large original footage files when I am finished.

I use iDVD to burn the projects to DVD.

I'll wrap up the television chapter with this: don't screw your viewers over. The *We're out of time! Tune in next week to find out ...* gimmick doesn't work these days: it makes fans feel cheated. They watched the whole program to find out what would happen in the big match, and then you stuck it to them and asked them to come back next week for more shafting. Bad business.

VIII. Visibility equals opportunity

Your wrestling school likely has either its own promotion or a promotion which frequently books its wrestlers. That will probably be your home promotion, at least as long as you are affiliated with the school. I encourage every wrestler to get out and work elsewhere as well. Doing so makes you seen by a lot more people and gives you a chance to work with different people.

You will need to put together a promo package, consisting of a photo, a resumé, and a promotional tape or DVD. I will first tell you how to put together packages to send to independent promoters and then to WWE. The WWE instruction is firsthand knowledge that came directly from a conversation with somebody who can hire you, so pay close attention to it.

The Independent Promo Package

The photo should be a quality photograph of yourself in gear. Keep in mind that this photo may be scanned to place on a poster. There should be no date and time markers on the photo, especially since this is likely the same photo you sell to fans at events. It just looks bush-league and makes fans think they're getting a cheap copy. This is a wrestling photo, not a senior photo, so don't take it in your back yard or at the local swimming pool.

The resumé should be printed from a computer, not handwritten. If you don't have access to a computer at home, go to

the local library. The header of your resumé should contain the following: your real name, your address (not your gimmick hometown and, for the love of all things sacred, not “Parts Unknown”), your phone number, email address, and website centered. Below the header, the first line justified left should be your gimmick name or nickname. Next should be your height and weight. Then put the place or persons with whom you trained—don’t put the name of somebody whose short seminar you attended. After that, put your number of years’ experience. Let the promoter know the different places you’ve worked; begin with the largest promotion and work your way down. Follow that with any titles you’ve held in pro wrestling. “Most Hated Wrestler of the Year” in Garfield Street Pro Wrestling is not a title—I’m talking about championships. List any notable people in the business with whom you’ve worked, including national names as well as wrestlers who work or have worked with the promoter who will receive your promo package.

The promotional tape really should be a DVD these days. It’s just so much more convenient to play a DVD and many people no longer have a VCR. Include two matches in their entirety. Never clip a match, because the promoter may think you messed up badly and are trying to hide it. A good rule of thumb is to include one match that you win and another that you lose. If possible, try to show yourself both as a babyface and as a heel. Do not include matches you have worked for WWE if you were there as enhancement talent except for the unlikely scenario that it wasn’t a squash. I also suggest adding a one- to two-minute promo.

Mail the package everywhere you want to work.

The WWE Package

Include two high-quality photographs printed on photo paper. Look like a wrestler: if you don’t know how to pose then go to wwe.com, look at the wrestlers’ posed photos, and imitate.

The WWE resumé should not be a resumé; instead, it should be a Microsoft Power Point presentation. The layout should be professional but subtle—I recommend a simple border.

On the cover page, include your real name (36-point font), your work name on the next line in parentheses (32-point font), and your physical address, phone number, and email address on separate lines in text no smaller than 24-point font. On this page, your name should be at the center of the page with everything else moving toward the bottom of the page. Every other page should have a title header (i.e., Bio, Experience, etc.) near the top of the page and below the border.

The Table of Contents is your second page. This will allow Talent Relations to quickly access any information they may need.

Beginning with the third page, add page numbers and use bullet points. Be brief. The third page should be your bio (height, weight, age, hometown, training, years' experience). Other pages should be: Gimmick (if it stands out), Promotions, Titles Held, Notable Opponents, and References.

Your promotional video will require the biggest financial and time investments. I recommend using a Slimline DVD case (the thin one shaped like a regular DVD case, not a CD case) because it is more portable. The DVD cover insert should be a piece of photo paper trimmed (use a paper-cutter) with a photo and your real name, work name, physical address, phone number, and email address on it. Include the same text information on the spine. The back of the insert should read like a resumé. Burn your matches onto a printable DVD with your photo, real name, work name, and phone number. The disc should have a menu (that also includes your real and work names and phone number), a promo, and up to two matches.

Priority Mail this package to:

Mr. John Laurinaitis
Senior Vice President, Talent Relations
World Wrestling Entertainment
1241 East Main Street
Stanford, CT 06902

You've marketed yourself to promoters and now your

phone is ringing. Dealing with promoters, you will learn that they come in all shapes and sizes and with all kinds of different personalities. The best you can hope for is to find a straight-shooter that won't screw you over.

For the first few years, just get booked: work everywhere you can as often as you can. Godspeed if you can get a good payday, but know that promoters are taking a risk on green guys and probably won't want to pay them much. Just never work for free (a good promoter would never ask it of you). A difficult thing to do is ask for more money when you are worth it. I have no real advice on this other than to expect to lose some bookings every time you raise your booking fee.

Most promoters I've met have been good, but there are also shady people running promotions. Make them shoot straight with you. Don't expect anything less than a commitment from them. Know with whom you will be working, how much you are being paid, the promoter's policy on merchandise sales, and if transportation costs, hotels, etc., are being covered.

Some promoters like to spin "around the corner" tales. *I can only pay you five bucks for this show, but I have a sold show around the corner and I'll be able to pay you well on that one* is bullshit. If you need \$50, then get the \$50 commitment from him.

If a promoter screws you on pay, never work for him again and spread the word to everybody you know. Protect the other wrestlers from shady promoters. Even if your pay is one dollar short this time, the next time it could be your entire payday. You'd hate to get stranded because of being screwed over by a promoter.

If the promoter tells you right before the event begins that he can't pay you, don't work. You don't owe it to anybody to work for free.

Keep in mind that, while your regular fee may be \$150 (and you'd better be damn good to charge that), there may be times where it benefits you to charge less. If a promoter confirms eight bookings for you, consider cutting him a deal. If a promoter offers you \$225 to wrestle two shows in one weekend for him, try

to get the promoter to pay for a hotel room on top of the \$225, but settle for just the \$225 even if you can't get a hotel room included. There were a few times that I worked cheaper for a promoter because he was also booking one of my students.

How much should you charge? I don't know. I was Harley Race's first graduate, did a few shots for WWE, and made some trips to Japan, and I charged \$100 if the event was more than 200 miles from home, \$75 if it wasn't. If I could get a student booked on a show close to home and could get him \$25, I would drop my price from \$75 to \$50 if necessary to get one of my guys some experience. If I was booked to work with somebody better than me, I saw it as an opportunity to learn a lot and I might also drop my price.

A promoter may ask you to do some extra things for him. If he asks you to do a call-in interview to a radio station to plug the event, do it. What is it really costing you but a few minutes of your time? If he tells you that he expects you to sell 20 tickets to earn your payday, politely decline the booking. That's crap, and it's disappointing that some promoters do that. It's your job to wrestle, not peddle tickets.

Make sure you keep a date book or a calendar. Don't double-book yourself because you will probably have to no-show or cancel one of the bookings. Word travels fast, and no-showing will screw your career up quickly.

What if I've sent my promo packages and my phone still isn't ringing? Place a follow-up call once or twice to each promotion and if you don't get a booking after that, send promo packages out to the next batch of promotions. Don't be a nuisance to a promoter by blowing up his phone. There are promoters out there who *will* book you.

Part Three

The Match

I. Believability

Wrestling fans know it's a work, at least those who no longer believe in Santa Claus; however, they pay to have their disbelief suspended. They *want* to believe. There are several things a wrestler can do to project things more legitimately than the business is presented to fans these days.

The first step to giving believability is *not* throwing stiff shots. Wrestling is a work—you are selling *imaginary* pain as legitimate. What if I wrestled for WWE and I had a chance to work with you? If you throw stiff forearm shots to my head during the match, I'd think, *I have to wrestle four nights every week, and I don't want to put my body through working with this guy again.* When the Talent Relations rep sees potential in you and asks me what I thought about working with you, I'm going to tell him that you're too stiff and you might not get a job because of it. It's nothing personal, but I have a family to feed and I wouldn't want you around to put that at risk. Many guys these days don't understand the long-term effects involved with taking shots to the skull and too many wrestlers rattle each others' brains with striking blows. Besides, a good worked shot looks better than a real one.

The referee is the ultimate authority inside the ring, and you should work accordingly. One of the best things WWE has done for the business in recent years is give authority back to the officials. They set the industry standard, and in this case we should

all follow suit. If you don't break a choke in the ropes or a double-team before the five-count, it should be a disqualification. If you don't kick out before the three-count, you lose whether it was the planned finish or not. During a tag team match, each team can break up one pin attempt and after that they are disqualified for interference. Do your part to work *with* the referee. When he wants to check you for foreign objects, you can debate for a few seconds with him, but let him check you. Don't excessively break rules in front of him. If you're not the legal babyface and you are distracting him while the heels double-team, make sure they are finished before you let him return his attention to the action inside the ring.

Another thing that adds legitimacy is emphasis on the rankings. It makes things seem so much more real when each match affects the wrestlers' positions in the Top Ten. It shows the fans what the wrestlers gain or lose based on the match result, which adds believability to wrestling.

Ask the average old-school guy how he feels about comedy in wrestling and he will tell you there is no place for it. I don't completely agree, but I do believe that it should be done carefully. In order for comedy to work, it must be funny: most wrestling comedy I see isn't funny. Comedy is usually done at the expense of believability, so do it in moderation and make it count.

I recently watched a Kevin Sullivan DVD from Kayfabe Commentaries where he recalled his favorite inter-gender match of all time. The match began, the man punched the woman, and she was knocked out. The end. I couldn't agree more with Sullivan. Though Awesome Kong could probably beat the hell out of the average man, the general public still doesn't believe that a woman can beat a man in a fight, so a man selling in an inter-gender match damages the believability of wrestling.

Little things like effective selling make people wonder if you are really hurt. When they see you at the convenience store after the match and you are selling the same knee you sold during your match, they might buy the sell. Things like this add believability to the business.

To be believable, you have to believe what you are saying, even if only while you are performing. I've seen wrestlers cut promos where I can tell they are just pretending, and it is annoying and in no way believable. The most believable heel I ever seen was Terry Funk. I always thought he really was out of his mind and still don't know if he really was.

II. Putting a match together

There was a time that few things involving a match were discussed beforehand: the wrestlers just went out there and worked. Much of this was out of necessity, as the babyfaces and heels may have had separate locker rooms and entrances, leaving no way to communicate before meeting in the ring. I also think a big reason their matches were not planned in advance was because wrestlers liked to feel out the crowd and then decide what they needed to do as the match progressed.

These days, most wrestlers have every move, every hold, and every breath planned before they make their entrances. As stated earlier, great salesmen are great listeners. Additionally, when a public speaker who has every word memorized forgets a word, it throws off his whole speech—I've seen it and I've done it. The speaker struggles to find the word, then has to try to get back on track without losing his audience. The same applies with wrestlers. If they have a scripted match, any deviation from that script causes chaos. The best thing to do is to have a vague outline of the match in your head—what direction you want to go if it works out that way—and fill in the spaces between.

Let's say you have this big spot-fest planned in the locker room. Your first physical action in the match is a simple lock-up, headlock, and headlock takeover: the crowd erupts. Why in the hell would you go through with the spot-fest? The crowd is al-

ready with you for simple wrestling, so there is no need to punish your body with big bumps or burn out the crowd with too many high spots.

Here is another example of why it is important not to script your matches: injuries. During a match my rookie year in which I was pushed into the position of leading an even greener rookie, I stuck to my training and didn't talk out the match, save the come-back and finish. We were told to go twelve minutes, but three minutes into the match, I spiked my foot on a backflip from the top rope (working barefoot, mind you), leaving my foot hyperextended and two toes dislocated. I had to structure the rest of the match to protect myself from further injury. Had we planned our match in advance, everything would have fallen apart. Instead, we had a decent match and I didn't irritate my injuries.

One of the biggest thrills of my career occurred during my first year, when I had a chance to work with one of my favorites, "Beautiful" Bobby Eaton. Before the match, I asked him what he wanted to do in the match. "I want you to keep your mouth shut and your ears opened," he responded. Lesson learned.

There has to be a leader and a follower in a match. I had some really good matches with Trevor (I'm not trying to drop his name, but understand we grew up in the business together and have worked together many times more than I've worked with anybody else, so he is a big part of my wrestling memory), but I always called the match. It wasn't because I was better than him, but because it's what worked for us. I was the heel, which is who should lead a match in most cases. If Trevor thought he needed a hope spot, he would let me know and I would call one if he didn't already have something in mind. If I drew a blank on something, I would tell him and he would take over.

Calling a match, you should look like you aren't talking to your opponent. Some wrestlers prefer to call a spot or move while in a hold, which is usually okay if there is motion to distract from the moving lips. If I was on top, I worked the hold and the follower moved his hands and arms. I also liked calling during a spot. If

the babyface was selling for me while I clamped down on a reverse chinlock, I might call a spot where he fights up to his feet, gives me a shot or two, and I would tell him to give me a belly-to-back suplex. While in the air, I would tell him to charge me and that I would move. After taking the bump, I would feed to the corner and sell to my feet while he summoned the energy to charge me for a big shoulder-block in the corner. I would move, he would hit the turnbuckles and sell while I regained control of the match.

Cut out unnecessary words while calling. Here's a simple spot: John has a headlock on Bill. Bill shoots John into the ropes and John hits Bill with a tackle. John hits the ropes and Bill drops down. When John comes off the opposite rope, Bill attempts a hip-toss, but John blocks it and misses a clothesline. Bill gives John a schoolboy roll-up for a one-count. Bill comes up to his feet and is clotheslined down to the mat by John. John is calling the match, so here is how he should call it. John has the headlock on Bill. He wrenches the headlock and pulls Bill closer to an upright position while working the hold (he doesn't lean over to Bill to call the spot—he brings Bill to him). *Tackle, drop-down, I block hip-toss, you duck clothesline, schoolboy me.* John continues to work the headlock while calling, the motion and Bill's selling distracting people from the fact that John is calling a spot. They execute the spot, and when John is rolled up, *Watch the clothesline.* John kicks out, comes up to his feet, and clotheslines Bill. I've heard people call the first part of the spot many different ways, some too wordy like, *You shoot me off, I will come off the ropes and tackle you. You bump. I will hit the ropes, you drop down and try to give me a hip-toss. I will block it and throw a clothesline. You duck the clothesline and roll me up with a schoolboy. I will kick out and you feed up into a clothesline.*

Calling in the ring is easy if you visualize the spot. You should have an imaginary television in your head, broadcasting the future event (the spot) in your mind. Bill is doing that, so when John calls the spot, everything plays out in Bill's mind. He knows that he needs to shoot John into the ropes because they are in a

standing headlock position. He also sees that, since he bumps off the tackle, it will be him dropping down when John hits the ropes again. It sounds obvious, but the first time you see two wrestlers' testicles collide because each thought he was supposed to be the one doing a leap-frog, you'll understand how visualization can prevent problems like that.

When you do put together a match, it is all about give-and-take. Don't be selfish: your opponent needs to look good as well, and don't sacrifice the greater good of the match because there is a move you really want to make sure you hit.

Before an event in 2002, I was approached by four men—my partner and manager and our two opponents that night—who all wanted to open the match with the babyfaces circling the ring and cornering our manager. We (my partner and I) would both hit planchas on the babyfaces. The two men who came up with the spot beamed and waited for my reaction, but their expressions changed when I bluntly said, “No.”

“Why not?” one of the idea's creators fumed. “It's a hot way to start the match.”

“Because we haven't been to this town before,” I said, “so nobody knows who is the babyface and heel. These fans don't know the whole story behind our feud. To them, the two biggest men in the match are about to attack a poor, defenseless manager and then the two smaller guys do these nice moves over the top rope. Who do you think they'll cheer?”

It made sense to two of the men, but the creators tried arguing the point and I wasn't budging. We didn't do the spot to open the match, and the two who argued it were mad about it. To be diplomatic, I put in the spot after we had a chance to establish the babyface and heel teams and gave our manager a chance to try to interfere.

There will be times when even the best wrestlers have mental lapses and want to do something that doesn't fit. Don't be shy about questioning it. One wrestler I know does this effectively by objecting with a question. For the aforementioned spot, he would

have asked, “Do you think the fans will cheer the heels if that happens? The planchas look nice and the manager has done nothing to instigate the babyfaces, so do you think we could do this as some other point in the match?” I always feared misunderstanding or mixed messages, so I was always more blunt and, for that reason, I often had to be the bad guy in certain situations.

Maybe you’re putting together the match and you feel like you’re not getting enough offense to look strong. You should address this issue. Just make sure you know your place on the card. If you’re working as enhancement talent (once known as a jobber) for WWE, that is not the place to bring it up because your job is to get squashed.

III. The structure of a match

The Basics

Learn the basic match structure before you try to deviate from it. It pains me to see guys who don't know anything about how to work a basic match. It's like watching two guys play Raw vs. Smackdown on PlayStation—just a series of moves with no reason.

Here is the structure of your basic match: *shine*, *heat*, *comeback*, and *finish*.

Before a match begins, the wrestlers must obviously enter the ring. Music typically plays during the entrance, and it should be chosen wisely. Make sure it isn't obscene and that it matches your character. If you walk slowly to the ring, then “Push It” by Static-X isn't the best one to choose (I was guilty of that when I turned heel). The entrance is usually when fans are educated on which wrestler to cheer and which to boo in the match.

The babyface should *shine* early, giving the fans a reason to support him when the going gets tough. The heel stops the shine—often with an underhanded tactic—and begins his *heat*, the part of the match where he has the advantage of the babyface. The babyface exploits a mistake, hitting a move on the heel to give himself some recuperative time. This leads into the *comeback*, which is the babyface's chance to give the heel his comeuppance. Out of the comeback, the heel cuts off the babyface and they go directly into the *finish* before the crowd catches its breath from the comeback.

That's your run-of-the-mill singles match.

It is important for neither the babyface nor heel to "die" during the match, so it is important to show that each wrestler still has some fight left in him.

During the *shine*, the heel tries to counter the babyface's offense, but the babyface is one step ahead of the heel. The shine doesn't consist of the babyface strictly kicking the heel's ass for the first half of the match. There should be short cutoffs by the heel, then a spot to put the babyface back in control.

During the *heat*, the fans must have hope that the babyface will come back and win the match, so it is important to give the babyface hope spots (moves or sequences of moves where the babyface tries to regain the advantage). Hope spots should not end with the babyface in control with a hold for more than a quick moment before being cut off. The heel cuts off the babyface hope spot and goes back into his heat. A babyface shouldn't be afraid to throw some shots while selling the heat—it shows the crowd he's still alive without overusing hope spots.

The *comeback* is a late-match offensive burst from the babyface: his second wind. This is no place for wrestling holds. During the comeback, the heel should bump and feed the babyface. As a babyface, one of my biggest annoyances was when the heel didn't feed me for my comeback. I was always there for every move and I sold my butt off for the heel during the heat, so I expected the same from him when it was time for me to come back. As a heel, my biggest annoyance was a babyface forgetting his own comeback. While a babyface shouldn't Superman up, forgetting the ass-kicking he's taken throughout the match, the comeback is the fourth-quarter adrenaline rush a defensive back would get on an under-thrown pass. It can be hard for those without a background in competitive sports to grasp this. Be careful to remember what you're selling and register it between moves, showing you're hurt but game for the fight. If you've been selling the back and you body slam your opponent, sell the back with one hand and pump your fist or challenge your opponent to get up with the other.

It's important to know that a comeback is all about momentum. Covering your opponent too early kills that momentum, so make sure you don't cover the heel too soon. A little tip for the heel: if the babyface covers you too soon, kick out, feed to a corner, and call a spot to continue the comeback as he gives you a couple shots. This keeps the action going and the crowd up.

The comeback ends with a cutoff before the *finish*. It can be as simple as the babyface missing a splash in the corner. Usually, wrestlers like to go into some false-finishes before the actual finish, and we will go into those later. For now I will just say that too many false-finishes during one show often leaves the crowd flat for them when they matter.

In the basic match, the finish comes straight out of the cutoff: the babyface makes his comeback, misses a splash in the corner and feeds into a spine-buster for the pin.

That's your basic match.

The Story

Not every match must tell a different or complex story. Until you are completely comfortable and successful with a basic good-versus-evil match, don't stray too far away from it. Once you have the basics down, you can start deviating from the basics a bit and start telling a different story in your match. As with most scenarios in wrestling that require thought, be creative but don't over-think. Keep the story simple so the fans can understand it.

Here's one simple story I loved, told in the ring by two late WWE stars, The Big Boss Man and Crash Holly: Holly, the small babyface doing the "super heavyweight" gimmick, was determined to body slam Boss Man, the monster heel. They started the match with Holly trying to slam Boss Man twice, but both times Boss Man pie-faced Holly and shoved him to the mat. Holly changed his strategy, using his quickness to gain a short advantage until he again tried unsuccessfully to slam Boss Man, which led into the heat. Holly tried a fourth time during a hope spot, but could not do it. Finally, during his comeback, Holly got Boss Man up for a slam

and the Savvis Center in St. Louis went nuts. This was a match taped for *Sunday Night Heat*, but that one move got a bigger pop than just about everything done during *Raw* that night. The entire story was built around one move: when they delivered, the crowd erupted.

It usually requires doing television or regular events at the same arena to establish your finishing move, but once you have it over as the definitive end of the match, it can really help you tell your story. C.M. Punk has the Go To Sleep over as his finisher and, because he protects it by not using it as a false-finish: people know that when he hits it, the only thing left is the referee's three-count. That makes it easy for him to tell that side of the story—he wants to hit his finisher so he can win the match—and he can attempt it a few of times during the match before hitting it.

The Hierarchy

There is a pecking order when it comes to your responsibilities in wrestling. This applies to match structure, professionalism, and just about everything else.

Your first loyalty should be to *professional wrestling*. Obviously, the business is why we're all here. For example, you shouldn't expose the business by no-selling a finishing move to get a big rise out of the crowd. It might get you over and get a big pop, but what does it say about our business when you're dancing around seconds after taking a power bomb?

Of course, the *fans* feed our business and deserve your second-most loyalty. I'm not saying you have to kiss babies if you're a heel, but you should strive to do your part in making the fan want to continue being a fan. A fan is not a mark and should not be referred to as such, but he is a paying customer that deserves your respect and gratitude for supporting the business. As a heel, it's good to interact with them to get heat, but there's no need to take deep digs at people like making fun of the mentally challenged kid sitting with his parents.

Third, you should be loyal to the *promotion* for which you

are booked. Don't do anything that is going to damage their business, like throwing a chair through a window. The promoter will have to pay for it and may never get to run an event in that building again.

Your fourth loyalty should lie with the *event* on which you are booked. Do your part to make the event successful. If you are in the opening match, don't do everything under the sun so that no match can follow you. If the crowd burns out and the show goes downhill after your match, that's selfish.

Your fifth-most loyalty should be to the *other workers*, especially the guy with whom you're working. That means it's more important for you to labor to make your opponent look good than to make sure you hit all of your big moves during the match.

Last, and least, you should remain loyal to *yourself*. As you should be able to gather by now, selfishness has no place in wrestling.

Finishes and false-finishes

What is the purpose of false-finishes? To make the crowd gasp when a wrestler unexpectedly kicks out of a pin. False-finishes should be used sparingly. You will do few things in the ring that suck as badly as a crowd yawning on a false-finish. Here are some pointers that will help avoid this reaction from the crowd.

First, a false-finish needs to have the appearance of a finish, preferably something fans have seen used as a finish in the past. A cross-body off the top rope by the babyface with the heel rolling through and pulling the tights is a great false-finish because fans have seen a babyface beaten with this cheating tactic countless times. Shawn Michaels getting to the ropes to break John Cena's STF is a good false-finish for the same reason. A near-fall off a vertical suplex, which hasn't ended a match in twenty years, is not an effective false-finish.

A false-finish must be sold by both wrestlers as a finish to be effective. Following a brainbuster with a half-assed cover means nothing. Hook your opponent's leg, really get his weight up

on his shoulders, and make it look like you mean to win to effectively sell a false-finish.

Next, false-finishes need to be used while keeping things credible. Four consecutive false-finishes off a tombstone, a power bomb, and two 450 splashes leave a crowd flat. It stooges big finishers off as not really hurting and leaves the crowd tired of going *Ooh* and *Ah*.

False-finishes need to be used sparingly because it's better to have a crowd pop big for them every time than to have the reaction taper. My rule of thumb is two false-finishes per event. Yes, I'm ultra-conservative with them. That means that two times during an event may the fans see a two-and-three-quarters count. I usually reserve them for the featured matches, unless I am using them to get a story over. If I am looking to elevate a wrestler who needs to lose to a higher-ranked opponent, I might use a false-finish to put him over: *So-and-so lost, but it took two exploder suplexes to put him away*—that will set him apart from the other guys who have been pinned after just one exploder.

There is a simple psychology to kicking out of a pin attempt. A wrestler who has only taken a hip-toss and body slam in a match should not stay down for a two-count. The counts should progress from instant no-counts to one-counts to two-counts. This tells the fans just how much punishment you've endured throughout the match.

An old-school mentality on finishes that I don't particularly like is that a heel must cheat to win, a smaller wrestler must use a surprise finish, submitting kills a wrestler, things like that. I'd rather see a babyface lose most of the time to a heel's finishing move, using a screw-job finish occasionally to really rile the people up, than to require a foot on the ropes or pulled tights every time a babyface doesn't win. I don't mind seeing a smaller wrestler use a surprise finish, like a sunset flip, to get the pin most of the time, but I also don't mind seeing his finishing move defeat a larger wrestler on occasion, within reason. I do like the "surprise" element of roll-up finishes because it gets over quickness, elusive-

ness, etc. I disagree with the submission-equals-career-death logic because Ultimate Fighting Championship star Chuck Liddell can tap out to a kimura—even when applied by an inferior opponent—and be just as big a star the following day as he was the day before. People understand that he needs to live to fight another day.

Of course, most of the old-school guys I disagree with will use the *How much money has Matt Murphy ever drawn?* cop-out loved so dearly by those left behind by the changing times. They resent the evolution of the business and don't understand that fans don't buy just any bullshit any more, so they try to discredit anybody who never worked the territories. Hell, half the guys using this cop-out were curtain-jerkers most of their careers and claim to have "sold out" events they opened. Don't let bitter traditionalists stand between you and progress.

The "surprise" finish is a finish that comes out of nowhere at an unexpected time. It usually happens with a roll-up, but it can also be a sudden finishing move like Randy Orton's RKO that can be very effective, the finisher that can be hit from anywhere. When the finish is a roll-up or anything else that should not leave the beaten man selling pain, the winner should roll out of the ring. This leaves the loser wondering what the hell happened but eliminates any necessity for post-match contact between the wrestlers.

Don't sell every finisher like a knockout. Sell the move's intended effect. If something ends in you being kned in the face, like the Go To Sleep, it can be sold like a knockout; on the other hand, the spear should knock your wind, not your lights, out. I like it when a guy takes a spear and lies in the fetal position, clutching his abdomen and gasping for air, before his opponent hooks him for the pin.

When you beat your opponent, make him look strong by making a strong cover. Don't lay a boot across his chest. After you've won, you do nothing but bury him by beating him some more after the match. Remember, you are only as strong as the guy you're beating. If he looks like a wimp, then you don't look as good. If you've beaten somebody who you've made look like a

million bucks, then you look like two million for beating him.

Bulldog, frog splash, one, two, three, damn it!

I worked a six-man match in 2001 where one of my partners was pinned after a flying bulldog by one opponent and a frog splash by another. Immediately after the three-count, he rolled to his knees and slapped the mat like he'd just been pinned with a roll-up. It was like he was thinking, *Damn it! You sneaky devil!* To understate things, I was not happy with him. I rolled into the ring and told him to sell, thinking he might gradually begin selling the pain of one or both finishers. Instead, he bellied out on the mat like he was knocked out.

Tag team matches

My favorite kind of match as a kid was the tag-team match. I love the team-wrestling mentality, that two mid-carders that were a regular tag team could beat two superstars because of their chemistry and teamwork. Sadly, it has suffered a quiet death in recent years. A duo established as the best tag team in the business will be cast aside and lose the titles to two stars with whom the men with the pencils want to pair together briefly to begin, advance, or add a twist to a storyline.

The structure of a tag team match is different because it consists of four or more wrestlers. The babyface tag team uses teamwork to gain the early advantage. They use frequent tags to control the match. Usually with an underhanded tactic, the heels take the advantage, cutting the ring in half (keeping the babyface who is taking the heat close to their corner) and drawing in the illegal babyface, distracting the referee and allowing the heels to double-team illegally. The babyface gets several hope spots, always trying to get to his corner. When the babyface finally tags his partner, this is called the "hot tag." This is the equivalent of the comeback in a singles match. One or both of the heels feed the babyface until he makes a cover. The illegal heel breaks up the pin attempt, drawing in the other babyface (the one who took the heat)

for a four-way brawl. The babyfaces end up on top, one wrestler from each side spills out of the ring, and the legal wrestlers go into the finish. If the babyfaces are going over (winning), then the finish happens right away. If the heels are winning, then the referee may be attempting to order the illegal babyface back into his corner while the heels cheat or use their double-team finish to secure their victory.

That's your standard tag team match. Once you have it perfected, you can deviate from it.

The illegal babyface should not be drawn into the ring too much. The fans will eventually get mad at him for not keeping his cool and for causing his partner an even worse beating.

Respect the referee's authority and the fans' intelligence. It sucks to see the referee miss the babyface tag and order the fresh babyface out of the ring while the heels switch illegally behind his back and he allows it. This gets heat on the referee, not the heels, and heat on the referee doesn't draw money. I was guilty of this at times when I worked but it's easier to see the light when you're not standing beneath it.

Though some veterans insist that the only legal tag is hand-to-hand, it's generally accepted that anything above the waist can be tagged by the outside man. If you make an illegal tag and the referee does not let it slide, listen to his instructions. If he says to get out of the ring, do it. Work into a situation where you can be tagged in. *Never* short-arm your partner when he isn't supposed to make the tag. The fans see through this and it kills every ounce of heat you've built.

When on the outside of the ring, sell for your partner. You are his voice to the fans: when he takes a big bump, register it, when he is fighting for the tag, be on your toes and eager to get in. If you don't look like what is happening inside the ring affects you, why would it affect the fans?

Remember that this is a tag team match, not two singles matches. There should be numerous tags, and except when one babyface is taking the heat, there is no reason for one wrestler to be

in the ring for five consecutive minutes.

Don't overdo things like the double-down. While dramatic, it loses its effect when a double-clothesline precedes the hot tag every time a fan watches a tag match.

You have to know how to work a tag match because you will be in them at times. However, I don't suggest planning a future as a tag team wrestler for two reasons. First, you're almost certain to fail if you hope to become a successful tag team wrestler in WWE in this era. Second, you're screwing yourself out of bookings once your run at the top is over because you mean little without your partner—you're part of a package deal. If you had a chance to go see Ronnie Dunn in concert, would you? Probably not, but if you're a country music fan, you'd pay to see him with Kix Brooks as Brooks & Dunn.

Title matches

The structure of a title match is different from a basic match. I'll use WLW as my example in explaining why.

Right now, "Dangerous" Derek McQuinn is our champion. There are maybe four guys on our regular roster who can be put in the challenger's role and look like they have a chance of leaving the arena with his title. Nobody wants to see a title match when they know the challenger has no chance, so we're limited to just those four opponents. You could argue that we could bring in a name to challenge for the title, but I think it trivializes our Top Ten rankings to have an outsider come in and jump over all contenders to get a title shot without earning it by beating anybody ranked.

If we need Derek to carry the belt for at least one year, that means that we need to have thirteen weeks of mileage out of each challenger before the next challenger moves into the top-contender's spot. Otherwise, we'll have to recycle challengers.

Superstar Steve is a babyface and Derek's first challenger. What happens if, three weeks into the angle, Derek squashes Steve or if Steve just doesn't look like he could have won the belt? He doesn't matter as the challenger again. The championship match

draws based on the fans' belief that the babyface challenger can win the belt at any time and he just needs the stars to align right for it to happen. So if Derek squashes Steve, we have to figure out how to filter Steve out of the title picture and make up the extra ten weeks' worth of TV out of the next three title angles.

As a champion, your job is to build stars, wrestlers capable of drawing at the top of the card based on the credibility you've given them by making them look strong in your previous bouts.

Fans pay to see the babyface pursuit of the title, not the babyface defending the title. Because of this, I believe the heel should be champion 90 percent of the time and I refer to title-match structure with a heel champion.

Training and working under an eight-time former NWA World Heavyweight Champion, I learned a lot about what it meant to carry that title thirty years ago. It was the biggest prize in wrestling and Harley defended the championship in each NWA territory against a star in that promotion. He showed the fans that his opponent was a big star who would have become World Champion if time wouldn't have expired or if something else beyond that star's control wouldn't have occurred. That star became a superstar who drew money for the territory and sold out arenas the next time Harley came to town to defend the World Title.

The heel champion should let the challenger have 60 percent or more of the match. The challenger will come inches from winning the title, only to have the rug pulled from beneath his feet. The challenger should make frequent strong covers and the champion should kick out as if to say, *Holy shit! This man is trying to take away the most meaningful thing in my life!*

Know your role

The two most important matches on the card are the opener and the main event. The opener sets the tempo for the evening, while the main event determines what kind of taste is left in the mouths of the fans.

I have some pet peeves relating to opening matches. The

first is when two babyfaces open the show against one another. To me, the event should begin with a simple, classic good-versus-evil match with the crowd responding accordingly. I don't like to see anything other than a definitive finish to the opener. I loathe the run-in during the first match: if a match needs one to set the table for a match later in the card, it should be booked as the second match. However, if the winner of the opening match is challenging for a title in the main event, let him hit his finisher in the opener so it can be the focal point of the title match (*If he hits the brain-buster, he will win the title*). Last, I hate a spot-fest to open the show. There is a time and place for the matches with dives, multiple high-spots, and breath-taking maneuvers, but the first match on the card is not it. A good wrestling show offers a variety of flavors, but a person has a hard time enjoying a plain old ice cream cone when he's already had a cherry-topped waffle-cone sundae.

As I said earlier about false-finishes, I like to limit them to a couple per event and like to save them for featured matches. If there has not been a *one, two, ooh!* moment before the title-match main event, the crowd is going to really bite on those false-finishes.

The wrestlers should hear finishes and other instructions as a group during a single gathering. Some wrestlers don't watch the other matches, so they end up using the same move that ended Match Two as nothing special in Match Four. Don't hesitate to tell other wrestlers that you're thinking about doing something and make sure nobody else isn't also planning to do it.

The main event, obviously, is the last thing a fan in attendance sees. It often determines whether those fans buy tickets the next time you come to town. If the show ends with the fans getting the shaft in any way, they probably won't come next time. If it ends with them eager for the next event, they will not only buy a ticket, but might even bring along a ticket-buying friend or two. That's not saying that you shouldn't end with a cliffhanger or a *To Be Continued* ... storyline, but it has to be done wisely.

When you are instructed to be a babyface or a heel, it's your job to work accordingly. A heel who receives a standing ova-

tion at the end of his match didn't do his job. Both wrestlers have to work together in the match to establish babyface and heel as well. In the six-man match I spoke about earlier (when the wrestler didn't sell after being pinned by the flying bulldog/frog splash combo), one of the babyfaces was working against me, not with me. I tried to get some cheap heat by lying to referee John Cone, claiming that the bigger, stronger opposing wrestler pulled my hair when he bumped me for the first time. Cone asked him if he pulled my hair and he nodded, then slapped himself on the wrist. I was really pissed off: not only did he kill the heat for what I was doing, but he also told the referee, *Yes, I cheated. What are you going to do about it?*

The problem with babyfaces and heels these days is that everybody wants to be cool. I never did. When I was a heel, I wanted heat. I didn't want a fan to say, "Man, that's a badass logo on his tights. I want that tattooed on my forehead." Most of all, I didn't want to sell pictures. I wanted to work my ass off to get the babyface over so I could get my real payoff, seeing him sell a ton of pictures at the merchandise table.

On the subject of pictures, the last time in my career that I worked as a babyface, I did something that, sadly, most guys wouldn't even consider. I worked with a guy who was getting paid the same as me and who worked his ass off to get me over. I sold 23 pictures at \$5 each, grossing \$115. It cost me \$1 per photo to have them made, so I netted \$92 from picture sales. That wasn't my money; it belonged to me and the guy with whom I worked. I pulled him off to the side and thanked him again for the match and for his hard work, then handed him \$46—one half of the profits from my picture sales. If you are a babyface and you haven't done this, you should give it some serious thought. Wrestling is a team sport, and you should share the wealth with the guy you're working with.

In a just world, heels would be paid more than babyfaces. The heel's job is to get babyfaces over, moving babyface merchandise in the process. It bugs me that almost everybody in wrestling

wants to be a babyface because it is more profitable, but it would be different if the babyface shared the wealth. If John Cena, working a program with Umaga, earns \$50,000 in merchandise royalties for that period, then he should give Umaga a generous monetary gift. Unfortunately, it's a flawed system that leaves the heel on the short end of the pay scale in the long run.

Regardless of your desire to work as one or the other, do what is asked of you by the promoter or booker. If you are asked to work as a heel and you are unsatisfied with the fact that you will not profit from merchandise sales but your babyface opponent will, then ask for more money before accepting the booking and tell him the reason. Again, just know that for every extra dime you ask for, you increase the risk of losing out on that booking.

Gimmick matches

During my feud with Trevor Murdoch, we wrestled in a host of gimmick matches. That was the problem: we *wrestled*. We were supposed to hate each other and have all kinds of heat between us, but we started a first-blood match with a tackle, drop-down, hip-toss. The most important thing to get over in a gimmick match is the gimmick. If you really hate somebody, will you try to put him in a hammerlock or punch a hole through his face?

Anticipation is key to gimmick matches. A cage match doesn't call for blood in the first two minutes. Tease running your opponent's head into the cage, then have him cut you off before you can execute it. Get the crowd excited to see it before you give them their payoff and remember: you always have to deliver the payoff in the gimmick match. If people pay to see a cage match but they see a technical wrestling contest with a cage limiting their view, they won't likely pay to see the next one.

The hair-versus-hair match is the most important to deliver. If the losing wrestler runs away before getting his hair cut, the promotion—not the wrestler—gets the heat for cheating fans out of their money.

Japanese vs. American structure

Japanese and American wrestling are very different. Many American fans, mostly Internet fans and tape traders, like the Japanese style. I'm not saying either is superior to be fair, but here are some of the differences.

False-finishes in a Japanese match are commonplace. They believe that a losing wrestler looks strong if he hits a few big moves and kicks out of a few big moves before being pinned. In America, the crowd grows tired of the *One, Two, Ooh!* near-fall.

Babyfaces and heels are rare in Japan. The biggest heel heat I witnessed was when Jushin Liger and other junior-heavyweights from New Japan Pro Wrestling came after the Pro-Wrestling NOAH juniors. Japanese fans care more about each wrestler's fighting spirit than they do about good-versus-evil.

The structure of the tag team match is the biggest difference I noticed. Unlike in America, where the wrestler taking the heat is usually not the one being pinned, that is usually the case in Japan. They feel that he is the wrestler who has taken the most punishment, making him the most prone to being pinned. I don't disagree, but it's not seen that way over here when the babyfaces lose.

Much of the match in Japan is called in the back. A body slam is still called a body slam, and it isn't hard to understand what you're doing in the match.

I don't know what it's like for guys wrestling for other Japanese promotions, but wrestling for Pro-Wrestling NOAH made me a semi-celebrity in Japan. I wasn't a megastar like Brad Pitt, but I may have had the star power of the janitor from *Scrubs*. Seriously, many people recognized me and wanted autographs and pictures, even away from the arena. That means that a lot of eyes will be on you, so consider that every time you go out in public.

Here are some more things to remember:

Keep a low-profile when you're over there. I was liked by most of the Japanese, but I think I rubbed some of them the wrong way because I drank and chased women too much.

Even though the money doesn't look like the U.S. dollar to which we've grown accustomed, it is still real money. If you receive a \$200 draw (payment advance) and spend it, that means you will have \$200 less when you are paid the lump sum at the end of the tour. I treated it like Monopoly money and returned home with about half of what I was to be paid because I took too many draws and spent like an idiot.

Wrestling in Japan can be a great experience, so make the most of it. Ask if you can get in the ring before the shows while the young boys (dojo students and non-veteran wrestlers) are training. Participate and learn what they are doing. Try to pick up on some of the Japanese language. Learning it fluently may be the difference between one tour and a long career in Japan. The Japanese appreciate efforts to embrace their culture.

III. Psychology

Psychology is the most debated, most criticized, and most valuable part of a wrestler's abilities. Nobody in wrestling has ever had perfect psychology. I didn't. Ric Flair didn't, nor did Harley Race, Triple-H, Dusty Rhodes, Lou Thesz, Hulk Hogan, or Bill Mulkey.

Wrestling psychology is the art of performing as if the competition were legitimate without holes in the story being told: it's making everything you do make sense. Even the greatest match in the history of wrestling had holes in it, but probably small ones that don't stand out to the untrained eye. Just about everything you do in the ring—including the way you bump, sell, work the crowd, structure a match, and execute spots—lies under the umbrella of psychology.

The basics of wrestling psychology are simple (and I'll get to those in a moment), but beyond those basics it becomes like looking at a picture of Jessica Biel nude—if you scrutinize it long enough, you're bound to find an imperfection. My attention to detail makes me a nit-picker by nature, but I've learned that if a match gets over, serves its purpose, and has no gaping holes in the story, then it's best to just leave it alone. Take Rick Steamboat vs. Randy Savage at *Wrestlemania III*, for instance. The storyline was that Savage crushed Steamboat's larynx months before. I think that the rigors of his first wrestling match since the injury would

cause muscle contractions in the throat during strained breathing that would cause Steamboat difficulties. Why didn't Steamboat sell the fact that he was having trouble breathing? It's because Rick Steamboat didn't consider that there would be some idiot dissecting every aspect of the match twenty years later. It's also because it didn't matter then and it doesn't matter now: the match is still regarded by many as one of the best ever. I personally don't think a match with a botched finish and the most oversold ref bump in wrestling history could be considered "the greatest" but it was definitely very good.

The key to good psychology is to leave as few holes in your story as possible. I recently watched an episode of *TNA Impact* that provided many examples of bad psychology, which I will cover in a few moments.

When watching your videos, ask questions about the things you do, such as *Why did I ram my left shoulder into his gut when I've spent the past ten minutes selling that arm? How am I still strong enough to reverse a whip into the ropes five seconds after nearly being pinned by a power bomb? If he outweighs me by 100 pounds, why am I bodyslamming him like we're the same size?*

This is the basic story wrestlers try to tell: a wrestler competes for the winner's pay, hoping the result will favorably affect his ranking so that he moves a step closer to achieving his main goal of becoming the champion. He studies tapes of his opponent, identifying the opponent's strengths and weakness while developing a strategy on how he is going to achieve victory. He tries to impose his will during the match and makes adjustments (goes back to the drawing board) based on the results of the attempted execution of his game plan. It's one thing that attracts me to watching the Ultimate Fighting Championship—those fighters and announcers get over the strategy far better than wrestling does.

When I wrestled, I always enjoyed the match on television while it happened: I visualized every spot in my head before it happened and imagined Gorilla Monsoon and Jesse Ventura's voices calling my match. They told my story and explained strategy—it

really made my psychology better.

Fans watching a match should be able to identify each wrestler's strategy. A wrestler should be trying to use his advantages while protecting himself from his weaknesses being exposed. When it comes off as it should and the announcers get it over, it is a real thing of beauty to watch.

The TNA Impact recap

This section is not meant to take shots at TNA. I am merely using this to explain many of the holes in the stories they tell and the ineffective way they use their television product. I wish TNA the best and hope they succeed because American wrestling is dull with only one game in town. It is also not intended to fault any wrestler or other personality: I don't know who came up with some of the stuff.

Segment One

Booker T and Team 3D were in the ring to begin the show. Brother Ray said that Kurt Angle was "in Hollywood working on his next project." Nobody watching believed for a second that Angle was really in Hollywood. This exemplifies the terrible attitude that fans are stupid marks that will buy anything.

Brother Ray said that in this business, Team 3D and Booker T. are considered "bad guys." However, he said, A.J. Styles is the bad guy because he screwed Karen Angle while the Angle children slept in the next room. Not only is this unnecessary exploitation of children, it also justifies the heels' actions of beating down Styles the previous week. Of course, this was not the case, as the heels were just lying, which is cheap-heat bullshit that doesn't belong on TV. Fans should think that heels *believe* what they're saying and not just pretending.

Booker T. began to talk without acknowledging anything Brother Ray just said. If Booker T. didn't care about it, then why was he out there with Team 3D instead of doing a promo on his own? Booker began by referring to himself as "Royal-T," so I

guess getting over his new nickname was the most important thing he had to say.

Booker complained about the locker room smelling like rodent piss, apparently because he needed to remind us that TNA is inferior to WWE and they can't provide sanitary conditions for their performers (and not in the charming way the old ECW presented themselves).

Brother Devon started to say something about LAX, which cued their music and entrance video. I have a big problem with the way this is produced. A wrestling TV program is about action and reaction, but we lost Devon's reaction because it went straight to the entrance video instead of showing what was happening live.

I don't care for the TNA entrance videos. They consist too much of the wrestlers doing their entrances, so it's hard to tell what is plugged-in video from what we are seeing happen at the event.

Later in the segment, Christian's music video interrupted. Seven seconds after his music began, announcer Mike Tenay said, "Wait a minute!" The moment that he should have been surprised had passed long before he reacted. It sounded like the line was fed to him from the production truck.

Christian said to Booker, "What the hell have you been smoking, Bob Marley?" I guess drugs references in a business with serious drug issues is supposed to be humorous. Booker responded by bug-eyeing, a reaction he uses often but I've never seen a person do in real-life when irate. Booker stomped around like a five-year-old kid throwing a hissy fit. In order to achieve believability, you have to react in a manner in which fans believe. This just looks like making pretend and insults fans' intelligence.

Samoa Joe's video played to interrupt Christian. Joe's promo was the only believable thing in the segment.

Joe and the babyfaces charged the ring and the heels bailed out. A.J. Styles came from the heel entrance and gave the heels chair shots that didn't look too devastating, so that was his revenge for being left in a pool of his own blood the week before.

Segment Two: The Rock & Rave Infection (w/ Christy Hemme)
vs. Sonjay Dutt & Jay Lethal (w/ SoCal Val and Ace Young)

The program was at the 25:00 mark before the bell rang to begin the first match.

The referee didn't seem to care about wrestlers breaking rules in front of him.

Ace Young, from *American Idol*, tripped Lance Hoyt to lead to the pin, but the camera missed what move was done to pin Hoyt. Post-match, Hoyt was outside the ring, less than ten feet away from Young. Although the semi-celebrity cost him the match, Hoyt did nothing to try to get revenge because *Wrestling is a work and that is the spot we planned for the finish and I'm not really mad at him.*

Young had a surprise for Jay Lethal and SoCal Val and he told them to look at the screen. His new video "Addicted" music video, featuring Lethal and Val, played. How was this a surprise when they were in the damned video? *Hey, I have a big surprise for you. You know when we filmed you two making out with sheets blowing in the wind? Yeah, that wasn't for YouTube. We actually did it for a music video. Surpriiiiise!*

When the video ended, the cameras were on Mike Tenay and Don West because Lethal and Val's reaction to their "big" surprise didn't matter.

Segment Three

Lauren interviewed Angelina Love and Velvet Sky. Lauren was brown-bagged by the heels and, rather than remove the bag from her head, she stumbled away blindly. Honestly, it happened.

Love said, "Don't hate our beautiful looks, hate the game." This made no sense. "Don't hate the player, hate the game" works, but you can't just randomly take a catchphrase, change around a few words that change its meaning to nothing at all, and expect it to make sense.

Love said that Roxxi Leveaux makes her want to barf and the only time she wants to barf is when she needs to get below 95

pounds. Is bulimia is funny and not a serious disorder that kills girls? I spoke with a friend about this and he thought it was funny. Maybe I'm getting oversensitive in my old age, but I thought it was disgusting and stupid and the kind of thing that makes viewers want to change the channel.

Segment Four

Jim Cornette and Jeremy Borash talked backstage. Cornette was freaking out because Awesome Kong beat up a fan last week and Borash was to blame.

Borash showed Cornette the ratings for that segment (because an announcer would have that information in his pocket and the boss figure would not know the ratings). Cornette changed his tune and said to keep it between them before doing an aside, both looking at the camera awkwardly. It was a bit funny at the expense of believability.

Booker T. and Team 3D entered Cornette's office, not selling the chair shots they took in the opening segment at all. I assume this was pre-taped and nobody thought to tell them that they were taking chair shots in a segment that would air before.

Booker complained again about the locker room smelling like rodent piss, in case any viewers had the misfortune of missing it the first time he said it. Cornette told Booker that if it's good enough for everybody else, then it's good enough for him (confirming that the locker room indeed smelled like rodent piss).

Booker T. kicked Cornette out of his office because that's how things work in real life. If you are upset with your boss, you kick him out of his own office.

Segment Five

In the ring, Cornette talked about the *Slammiversary* lineup. He said that he was heading to his office, and that he knew there was a monitor back there, so he expected Booker T. and Team 3D to be gone when he got there. Nobody in the universe thought this was the end of his promo.

Kevin Nash came out to the ring with Cornette. Nash said that TNA security couldn't contain the crowd at a Jonas Brothers concert (so if you feel like jumping the railing at a TNA event and attacking performers, feel free to do so).

Nash said that Booker and 3D were playing rock, paper, scissors over who got to take a dump on Cornette's desk. Nash has gray hair and is pushing 50 — why was he talking like an immature 15-year-old boy?

Nash offered to rid Cornette's office of the heels if he could be the enforcer for the King of the Mountain match at *Slammiversary*. Cornette asked why Nash wanted to be involved, to which Nash replied that he thought the people should have to pay to see his answer. Cornette agreed.

Nash told Cornette he would do it, but Cornette had to ask him nicely. This was seriously awful stuff.

Segment Six

Abyss was in a padded room, so I guess he was committed. They did a voice-over with Abyss talking. Talk about killing the mystique of a character.

Abyss said he is no longer a threat to himself; even suicide is not taboo in TNA.

Segment Seven

Kong and Raesha Saed entered the ring. A fan that would get into the ring and face her would get \$25,000.

After a commercial break, a fan was in the ring. Her name was Lita Bates or something.

It was then called a \$25,000 fan challenge. So did she have to *beat* Kong to get the money? They really suck at getting gimmick matches over because I don't think even they understand them.

Bates was all about getting in the match, but when the bell rang she was running scared. I could understand this if Kong knocked her on her ass first, but why do the 180 without a reason

for the change of heart?

The action spilled to the floor. The referee, one of the Hebners, got out of the ring with them because I guess TNA only does count-outs when they're convenient.

This was a complete squash. Kong is very good as a monster heel, much like Vader when he first came to WCW and destroyed people.

Segment Eight

In Cornette's office, Booker T. and Team 3D were hanging out. Nash came in and the heels didn't know why he was there, even though Cornette just said that there is a monitor back there.

The dry-erase board said, "Booker's Office—No Poo-Putts allowed." I don't know what a Poo-Putt is: maybe there an eight-year-old kid on the Creative Team.

After Nash wielded a baseball bat, the heels left.

Segment Nine: Rhyno vs. James Storm

A video package showing the history between Rhyno and James Storm was interrupted by Rhyno and Storm brawling backstage. This led to a commercial break.

Back from commercial, the fighting spilled into the Impact Zone. Storm hit Rhyno with an opened bottle of water. The problem with things like this is that people at home can try this themselves and know that it doesn't hurt much.

Storm's nickname is "the Tennessee Cowboy." I'm trying to understand how a hoop earring in each ear complements the gimmick.

After less than five minutes since the last commercial, it was time for another break.

Rhyno was selling on the outside like he was unconscious. For some reason, Storm threw him back into the ring instead of taking the count-out win to advance to the King of the Mountain match. Rhyno quickly hit the gore on Storm for the win. Storm did a back-flip bump off the finisher. While I appreciate his cre-

ativity, backflipping off the gore doesn't make it look stronger.

Segment Ten

Jeremy Borash interviewed A.J. Styles and Karen Angle. A.J. said that he has something to say, but he wanted to do it in the ring.

Kurt Angle was shown backstage, to the surprise of everybody who thought he really was in Hollywood.

Karen Angle entered the ring. A.J. Styles' music played, but he didn't enter.

Backstage, Kurt Angle was beating the hell out of Styles. I have a hard time buying an Olympic wrestling gold medalist punching and throwing around a man who is supposedly doing his wife instead of breaking bones with shoot holds, but maybe I'm being picky. It does matter that he used a European uppercut in a "fight."

Kurt entered the Impact Zone, got into the ring, and screamed at Karen. Karen slapped him and cowered as Kurt appeared ready to do her harm. No-selling the ass-beating he just took, Styles ran in and beat on Angle.

Team 3D, Booker T., and Tomko (who should not have been involved after losing to a finishing move minutes before, although he still sold it) ran in and it was Styles getting the beat-down from five men. Christian tried to make the save but got whipped, too. That was the end of the show. There was no Samoa Joe, no LAX, no Rhyno making the save even though they were all involved in the opening segment. I guess they didn't care and neither should the fans.

Closing thoughts

There were only five matches in two hours. That leaves too much time to fill with bullshit.

TNA is too dependent on stars built in WWE. Booker T. and Team 3D were in four different segments.

The TV product is too fast-faced with poor program timing.

TNA has too many screwball characters and storylines. This doesn't put asses in seats or sell pay-per-views.

Overall, the program is tasteless and caters to the lowest common denominator of society. In this two hours alone, they directly or indirectly touched on adultery with children in the next room, suicide, bulimia, grown men pooping on a desk, and domestic abuse.

All television programs take a measure of creative license and we have to suspend disbelief to a certain extent. On TV, crime dramas unfold and are solved over the course of a one-hour program before another huge case opens for the detective the following week. I can accept that although it doesn't happen that way in real life. However, *Impact* had ridiculous storylines and segments with numerous of holes in them.

TNA has a great pool of talent and should be a quality product. If they presented fans with a wrestling-based alternative to the current WWE product, I really think they could find success. Instead, we get what looks like Vince Russo taking control of *WCW Saturday Night* while making a poor effort to re-create the WWE Attitude era. Comparing it to WWE is like comparing Arena Football League to the National Football League.

But what do I know? I never drew a dime in the business.

V. The truth about chain wrestling

Before I get started in this short chapter, please consider this: you probably won't see a hammerlock used twice on WWE television this year. I don't know how important it will be to know holds and reversals in five years, but I'm going to talk about them anyway.

Odds are, when I use the term "chain wrestling," you simply see a sequence of holds and reversals: that's incorrect. Most wrestlers treat chain wrestling like a demonstration of all the holds and reversals they can imagine; really, chain wrestling is simply what you use to link Point A to Point B. It's what you do to get from the headlock to the hammerlock.

The secret to chain wrestling is omitting wasted motion. A few weeks ago, I watched a very good wrestler grab a headlock, then reverse into a hammerlock before going directly back into the headlock. You have to trim the fat and what he did was nothing more than fat. He made several motions that took him from Point A back to Point A, exhibiting his knowledge of what he believed to be chain wrestling very ineffectively.

A good chain wrestler is able to go from Point A to Point B several different ways. If he uses a top-wristlock to counter a headlock and try to gain control of the left arm, then he will be able to use another method to attempt to take control of his opponent's arm the next time around.

It drives me nuts to see a wrestler use holds for no reason other than to catch his breath before going into the next spot. If a wrestler has been working on his opponent's head for the better part of five minutes, then he probably shouldn't waste energy working an armbar for 20 seconds.

Most people use the term "rest hold," which I also dislike. When you are working a hold, it is okay to catch your breath; however, it's called "working" a hold, meaning you should still *work*. When you stop making the crowd believe that the hold hurts and the person caught in it is trying to fight out, the crowd stops caring and it becomes a waste of time.

Holds and reversals can be pretty and don't have to be boring if you learn to use them effectively and without wasted motion. Take the time to execute them properly—smooth looks faster than it really is.

I already mentioned this, but I often asked another wrestler to grab a snug hold on me before I tried to reverse it. That allowed me to know if the reversal would legitimately work in real life. Don't be afraid to do this. It will help prevent you from not knowing how to sell, use, or properly reverse a hold.

As with everything, safety is the most important thing to consider when executing a hold. Be snug enough to make it look legit, but don't tear off a guy's arm. Daylight exposes a hold as being worked. When a fan can see daylight in between a wrestler's arm and his opponent's chin on a reverse chinlock, he can see that the hold is either a choke, which should be broken by the referee, or it is not being applied with any force.

I personally hope there is a place for holds and reversals in wrestling's future. Done right, they can be as exciting to watch as high spots.

VI. Working the crowd

Working the crowd is manipulating them to react in the manner you intend; it's being a puppeteer.

When you watch *Raw* on Monday nights, you don't usually see wrestlers acknowledging the crowd a lot during their matches. It sucks, but it's the evolution of the televised product. Two wrestlers given six minutes for a singles match have that amount of time to enter the ring, get over, and give the production crew the outshot needed to go on to the next segment. They're working for the TV viewers, not the live audience.

House shows are different and about ten times as fun to watch live. Fans get the rare opportunity to feel up close and personal with the WWE Superstars, who interact with the crowd much more without the cameras rolling. Independent shows give those fans an even better chance to interact with the wrestlers.

Before I get too far into working the crowd, let me explain the difference between heat and cheap heat. Heat causes fans to buy tickets. Cheap heat doesn't. Heat is caused more by storyline and action, while cheap heat usually involves making fun of a local sports team or the bald guy in Row Three. There is a time and place for cheap heat—I used it myself when the situation was right—but it garners an emotion that passes quickly.

Back in the day, wrestlers really knew how to get legit heat. Many were stabbed, their cars set ablaze, and put in other danger-

ous situations because they were so damn good at it. That kind of heat is rare today, but true heat can still be achieved, hopefully on a safer but equally profitable level. You just have to know your audience.

Listening is the most important part of communication. The real master of working the crowd is the wrestler who listens to the audience and caters to the needs of the fans based upon what he hears.

Ring of Honor fans are very similar to the old ECW fans. They are more informed and more passionate than just about any other type of wrestling fan in the world. In exchange, they have certain expectations from the promotion and they have drawn lines within which they expect ROH to color. I would try to use their passion for the ROH business to my advantage if I was the booker.

I think one of the greatest things ROH could do to build some serious heat is to put their World Title on Chris Masters. As insane as it sounds, hear me out. Masters is a jacked-up monster who represents everything that ROH fans hate: he's everything that Bryan Danielson isn't. I think those fans would be so disgusted by Masters coming in, unannounced, and winning their World Title that they would pay to see Danielson take the title from him. In winning the title, Danielson would not only take their title off somebody they truly hate, but he would also get a measure of revenge for them against a wrestling world that largely turned its back on them as it evolved into sports-entertainment. I believe this would be real heat that would result in strong ticket sales, though I could be wrong. It might be the kind of heat you never want, the "stop consuming" heat. That's the kind of heat that leaves fans feeling so disgusted, offended, or cheated that they decide to stop watching or attending. It's the kind of heat the infamous Katie Vick necrophilia storyline created with many now-former WWE fans.

Cheap heat gets you by and might even make fans hate you, but it doesn't sell tickets. Sure, there might be a fan here and there who will buy a ticket just to heckle their least-favorite wrestler, but

those fans don't attend in masses.

When working the crowd, it is important not to break character. If you're a satanic beast, you probably shouldn't be making fun of the bucktoothed guy in the first row. You also have to believe what you're saying, or at least appear to. It pisses me off to no end when Wrestler A shoots Wrestler B into the corner and says, "I've got him now" before his opponent dodges the attack. People see through that crap. I also can't stand seeing people with bad physiques posing like Lex Luger because the fans know that the wrestler is just pretending.

I'm not much of a fan of the walk-and-talk style. While interacting with the crowd is important, it should not be the focal point of the match. People pay to see wrestling, and if they wanted to listen to somebody insult them for two hours, they would be in the boss's office at work.

I once worked a match with a Southern wrestler who I respect a lot. He spent so much time stalling and jawing with the fans that they didn't care about him or his impressive credentials as an international star by the time we got to the action.

Now let's do a 180 and look at those who do the extreme opposite, who don't even acknowledge the crowd at all. I think there should be no more than one of them in a promotion, but there is a place for them. The Undertaker would be less impressive if he was slapping hands on the way to the ring. I see too many wrestlers taking that approach these days, like they are mixed-martial arts guys coming to the ring for a fight. If fans want to see MMA then they will watch MMA. It should come as no surprise that those MMA-type wrestlers receive little interest from WWE.

Working the crowd helps to generate the maximum response for the holds and moves executed inside the ring. Those who learn how to work the crowd get the most mileage out of their work and their careers have the longest lifespan because they don't need to do a double-springboard 450 splash through flaming tables to get over.

VII. Wrestling on TV

Working with cameras rolling requires some instruction. We do a two-camera shoot—one hard (stationery) camera and one floor camera—so I will base everything I say on a two-camera shoot.

Rule number one: don't screw with the equipment. Never touch a camera or slam a microphone. The equipment used in our two-camera shoot costs more than \$10,000, and that's a fortune to an independent promotion.

During your entrance, you should make yourself visible to the man holding the floor camera, since he is probably the one filming your entrance. Let him get a good shot of your face for the benefit of the viewers. During tag team matches, both members of a team should be walking side-by-side and close enough together that the floor camera can get both wrestlers in the same shot. Neither wrestler should lag behind the other. If you have a championship belt, remove it and hoist it while you face the hard camera. Do not walk between the ring announcer and the hard camera and don't take five minutes to complete your entrance. With a few exceptions, an entrance should last no longer than one minute from your introduction to the end of your entrance.

Work towards the hard camera when possible. While the floor camera will get some shots and miss others, the hard camera is usually a safe shot that doesn't miss the action. Since the major-

ity of fans at small shows will be on the opposite side of the hard camera, it might feel awkward at first working away from the fans.

The cameras pick up everything, so it is important not to whiff on shots and not to let yourself be seen communicating with your opponent. When you are in a hold and somebody is calling something to you, move your hands as if to try to push against the pressure or find a reversal to draw the viewer's eyes from the moving lips to the moving hands.

You must remember that when viewers are seeing you week after week, they start to pick up on things. Don't become predictable. As a fan, I always wondered why in the hell anybody would ever try to power-bomb Billy Kidman, because I knew that every time they tried he would counter into a face-buster. If wrestling was a shoot, his opponents would have him scouted and would know not to try to power-bomb him.

Television is a more pressured environment than house shows. Many wrestlers stress out for fear of not hitting the time mark given for their match. Unless it is live TV, a match can be clipped if it goes too long. I personally hated my match being clipped: it felt like tearing pages out of a book and still expecting people to understand and enjoy the story. However, going too long is far better than your match going short. As a producer, it's a nightmare to deal with the program running short on time, because I have nothing to fill the time. I will need an extra match if I am short, which means two wrestlers are going to have to be ready to go without the time to discuss a match, or I'll have to create a video package to fill the shortage. Be sure to communicate with the referee and make sure you know where you're at on time throughout the match. He will quietly ask the timekeeper or ring announcer and relay the time to you.

While TV adds pressure, it also gives wrestlers an added outlet for their creativity. A decent announcer can identify the story being told inside the ring and get it over with the viewers, meaning you are able to go many different directions in your matches.

You will likely be asked to cut promos for television. This should serve as at least one of three purposes: to plug an event, to get your character over, or to add fuel to the fire of an angle.

During last year's annual Harley Race/Pro-Wrestling NOAH camp in Eldon, Missouri, I led the wrestlers through the delivery of promos. I gave each wrestler a scenario and he would cut a promo based on it. One scenario was, *You're debuting on Smackdown tonight against Matt Hardy. I need a one-minute promo to air before your match.* Unfortunately, promos aren't taught in many wrestling schools and have to be learned by doing.

The wrestler is debuting, which means we need to know who he is and what he's about. Next, we know that he is wrestling Matt Hardy. He needs to put Hardy over as a talented wrestler in some way, shape, or form: calling Hardy a "nobody" does nothing to benefit either wrestler. Get your opponent over, but then tell the fans that you're going to bring the fight to him in your character's own unique way.

While cutting a promo, a wrestler should not sound like he's chatting with his brother on the phone. He can be cold and calm in an ominous way, excited, or angry. He should also not look like he's auditioning for Zeus's stunt-double in *No Holds Barred*. Movement should be subtle and back-and-forth, not side-to-side, to ensure that the camera doesn't lose the wrestler.

You may also be asked to sit with the play-by-play announcer and provide color commentary. The whole point in doing commentary is not to get yourself over, but to talk about the match in the ring—the strategy, the story, your experiences wrestling those in the ring—and the angle, if any, you are a part of. It's good to use commentary to get over a feud you're in, but don't let that dominate the conversation. Let the play-by-play announcer feed you and lead the conversation in the direction he needs it to go. Don't do play-by-play while providing commentary—that is the play-by-play announcer's job—and don't talk over him. It sounds awful when you hear people talking at the same time on TV. Finally, do not bury other wrestlers during commentary. I recently had

a wrestler bury the entire roster other than himself while providing color commentary, and when he finished I asked him why any viewer would buy a ticket to see a group of wrestlers who suck. “I was just being a heel,” he said, but it doesn’t get heat and it’s bad business to put yourself over at the expense of everybody else.

If you are interested in doing play-by-play, here is the best advice I can give you: don’t abuse your viewers’ trust by lying to them or insulting them with extreme exaggerations. Don’t say that a wrestler is 40 feet in the air when he is only six feet from the mat. Don’t say that one guy was kicked in the mouth by a dropkick when he obviously took the impact in the chest. Don’t use *He may have broken him in half* too much because after so many times, the fan becomes numb to hearing about a wrestler being halved without seeing it. Use your voice (don’t try to sound like Michael Buffer, because it’s hard to understand), project it clearly, punch keywords, keep a steady pace except during the most dramatic moments, and be enthusiastic.

Television on the indie scene usually requires taping more than one week of television programming at a single event. The first time I did television, I was instructed to always bring two sets of gear so, if I had to work twice, it would give the impression that the viewers were seeing me in two different weeks. I hated that, as some of those viewers may have been at the event and could remember otherwise. In announcing, I hated to refer to the two tapings as separate weeks and eventually lobbied, successfully, against it.

Remember, the television cameras pick up *everything* — audio and visual. A whiffed punch can be hard to edit out, as can a wrestler calling a spot too loudly.

Despite the extra labor required to be a part of a television program, it’s the best kind of exposure and gives wrestlers a chance to learn to be a part of angles that fans can follow, so it’s definitely worth the trouble.

Somebody get out there!

The first television taping WLW ever did was in 2002 for PAX TV in St. Louis. Harley originally had me penciled in to lose to our champion, “Drill Instructor” Dennis McHawes, in the first taping, which I would have been fine with except the second taping featured me in a six-man tag match against McHawes, Trevor Murdoch, and former NHL star Tony Twist, a legendary ass-kicker. The story was that I was doing interviews for radio and TV stations in St. Louis where I would knock Twist and say that hockey players are nothing more than fighting figure skaters. “When I step into the ring with him, I *will* drop him with a right to the jaw,” I promised. Because Twist and I built interest and had people talking about the match, I didn’t want the TV viewers or the live audience to see me until that match. Because he was our champion, McHawes needed a strong win on our first taping and I didn’t want to cheapen the pop Twist would get when he hit me with his haymaker. I instead recommended a Derek McQuinn, my prized student, who I thought was believable enough to look like a threat to the champion and who wouldn’t be hurt by losing, since he was good enough as a rookie to receive a shot at the title.

I was stretching in the locker room during the first taping when referee Skippy Johnson burst through the door, frantic. He told me that the main-event match for the first taping went short and that he needed a short match from “anybody.” I thought quickly and decided that it wouldn’t hurt to get a strong win first, so I told Skippy to send somebody to the ring to put me over as I was running down the hallway.

I stood in the ring and waited for my opponent, who turned out to be another one of my students, Josh Besore. I called the opening spot to the referee as he was checking me for foreign objects, and he relayed the spot to Besore. I called everything on the fly, we had a so-so match, and I went over to look like a legitimate threat to Twist. I wanted to win by knockout to establish that I had a heavy right hand, but that’s just not something you do on a Harley Race show without his consent.

Off-topic but important to note, I did drop Twist to the mat with a punch in the match because I thought it was important, as a heel, to make good on my promise and not just talk trash. Of course, it didn't knock him out and he eventually knocked me out with a two-punch combo. He didn't pin me, though: no way in hell was I going to let a hockey player pin me inside a wrestling ring. Trevor dropped an elbow on me, which I could later put over as the blow that put me away, and covered me for the pin.

VIII. When things don't go as planned

Many things can throw a wrench into your match. This is one of the many reasons I don't like everything being called in the back. Blown spots, ropes breaking, injuries, and even fan run-ins can derail a planned match.

If you blow a spot in your match, cover it the best you can. If you're the heel and it's in the middle of the babyface shine, cut him off and call a simple spot that puts him back on top. Trevor and I used to practice blowing spots at the Academy so we could learn to cover them effectively. I'd call a spot, mess it up on purpose, and make him cover it. Then we'd switch roles.

If a rope breaks, don't panic: it happens. Be safe and continue with your match. If the whole damn ring collapses, do the same unless instructed to do otherwise.

If your opponent gets injured, find out his status (use the referee if you need to) and, if possible, finish the match without risking further injury. If it is a serious injury or any type of injury to the head, neck, or back, it's a good idea to end things there. The fans can be demanding, but no reasonable person would expect a wrestler who has just been spiked on his head to get up and finish. There's no sense in risking permanent injury just to finish a match.

You never know the motives of a fan interfering in a match. He may intend only to get some attention from the other fans, but he might also intend to stab you. Any time a fan gets involved out-

side the ring, get your ass in the ring immediately. Assume that his intentions are to cause you and/or your opponent harm. Don't send him an invitation, but if the fan comes into the ring, both wrestlers and the referee should kick the shit out of him until security can rescue him. Don't resume your match until the fan is no longer a threat and you are sure that no other fans are thinking about getting involved. Deal with the consequences later, but you have to protect yourself and let other fans know that getting into the ring is off-limits and carries severe consequences. Some state commissions have specific rules pertaining to fan interference: educate yourself to those rules.

A promoter needs to instruct his security team on how to handle these situations. If a wrestler is thrown out of the ring and a fan kicks him, then the fan should be ejected without question or hesitation. The same should apply if a fan spits on a wrestler, throws contraband into the ring or at a wrestler, or does anything else to disrupt the show or put talent in danger.

Part Four

The Go-Home

I. The sound of silence

When it comes to steroids, there has long been just silence, almost a void in conversations, like the kind of awkward silence a group of guys would get if you asked them if they thought Lindsey Lohan had great boobs at age 16.

Times are changing, and if you are on steroids, get off of them. WWE tests wrestlers for drugs before signing them to contracts and throughout their tenure with the company; thus, the look of a pro wrestler is evolving. One of the best things about mixed-martial arts is that it's teaching the public that a 185-pound fighter is tougher than the average 250-pound ticket-buyer: the wrestling business should take note. Even if not, the wrestler's physique is going to begin to look more athletic than 'roid-ripped.

Wrestling is making a positive change, and you must change with it.

As for other drugs, anything illegal except marijuana will get you suspended in WWE. Even a positive test for weed is a \$1,000 fine. This is no longer the business that welcomes hard drugs, and thank God for that. This business has buried too many of its own at young ages to let that continue.

As a guy who is a fan foremost, it's been heartbreaking to watch so many of my heroes die young. While some of those deaths were not the result of drugs, most of them directly or indirectly have been. Many more will follow because the things

they've done in the past cannot be undone. The small consolation we have is knowing that changes are being made and the hope that casualties from this generation and generations that follow should be fewer than those we have dealt with from the generations that preceded us.

One thing that will always be a problem is prescription pain medication. Wrestling is damaging to the body and results in pain ranging from minor to debilitating. I have taken pain killers and honestly don't recall anything killing pain any more than over-the-counter medication.

Pain and injuries are going to occur, but taking good care of yourself can minimize the effects and reduce your need for medication. It begins with dedication in the gym. Don't forget to stretch before and after each match and don't take stupid bumps. Make sure major injuries are completely healed before returning to in-ring action.

II. Being booked for WWE

Congratulations, you've just been booked for your first WWE event. This probably occurred either through a promoter or a wrestler upon whom they call regularly to provide enhancement talent (or jobbers, or extras) when they are nearby.

You're almost certainly booked for an event that will be televised—it's doubtful that they will ever book you for a house show. You're not booked to wrestle, just to show up: you get your \$250 whether they have a spot somewhere for you or not. That spot, if it exists, may be to wrestle, dress up like a cop, or be a fan in the crowd. You really never know. The first time I did a show for WWE, I got to work a match (as did five others), but they also booked ten extras to sit in a strip club to get beaten up during an APA/Right to Censor brawl. That's a rough way to make \$250, eh? *Look at some strippers and take a punch.* On second thought, I guess it would depend on who was giving you the punch.

Don't act like a fan who won a backstage pass. Don't speak unless spoken to, interrupt a conversation between people to introduce yourself, stare at Mickie James for more than four seconds (it's hard not to, but control yourself), or ask for autographs.

I guess things have changed now, but in my day we shared locker rooms with the WWE Superstars. During our first WWE booking, Superstar Steve and I shared a locker room with Triple-H, Kurt Angle, Al Snow, Chris Jericho, William Regal, Chris Benoit,

Rikishi, X-Pac, Grandmaster Sexay, and a few others. Now they have an “extras” locker room, where local talent gets dressed.

Backstage, there is a lot going on. Just stay out of the way. You will be instructed on everything you need to do.

Be the first one geared up and ready to go. I was given this advice by Kevin Kelly, a longtime WWE announcer and Talent Relations rep, and surely enough, an injury opened a spot for me (the only enhancement guy geared up) to get squashed by Justin Credible in his first televised WWE match since his Aldo Montoya days.

Understand that you are probably the only person in the building thinking about you getting a contract. Honestly, they probably aren’t even taking much, if any, of a look at you. Trevor went there nine times before being signed. He was signed to a developmental deal because one wrestler noticed he was doing some stretches learned in Japan and that wrestler asked John Laurinaitis to watch him. Trevor sold his ass off during his enhancement match and they just happened to be looking for a strong-working cowboy-type at the time. The stars aligned just right: he never set foot in a developmental territory and was a World Tag Team Champion three months after doing the enhancement match.

Be ready for a match, but don’t be devastated if it doesn’t happen. Who knows? You may catch their eye and the stars might align just right for you as well.

III. Connecting with your audience

The thing that separates the stars from the also-rans of professional wrestling is the ability to generate an emotional reaction from the audience. Whether they love you or hate you, they have to feel something more than indifference to buy a ticket to see you.

While editing a recent television taping, I watched a perfect contrast of entrances during a match between two inexperienced babyfaces. I hate this type of match—two green guys in a match with no leader and, to complicate things, both babyfaces—but the crowd was 100 percent behind one of them and didn't care about the other. It began with their entrances. Wrestler One came to the ring fired up, glad to be there, ready to do battle. Enter Wrestler Two, calm and expressionless, as excited as a man folding laundry. Which wrestler do you think the crowd sided with?

An obvious necessity in connecting with an audience is your own emotion. You have to act like you care. If you enter the ring like Wrestler Two, how does that crowd feel about paying to see you? *He doesn't seem excited for the match or grateful that I paid my hard-earned money to watch him perform.*

Professional wrestling is too black-and-white these days. The babyfaces don't have enough flaws, indecision, or temptation to take the low road. The heels are shallow and predictable, cheating because they don't like to play by the rules. The good are all good and the bad are all bad, and that's not real.

One of the most complex characters I have known in real life was my grandfather. He would be a heel in wrestling because he was insensitive, abrasive, judgmental, and close-minded. The unfiltered transfer of his thoughts to words hurt people. He also worked harder than anybody, expected hard work from his subordinates, and the things he believed were believed with more conviction than imaginable. He worked as a supervisor for the state highway department and farmed his own and his parents' land.

Christmas Day, 1993, we waited until late at night to celebrate because he worked from five in the morning until after seven in the evening, plowing and salting highways during a snowstorm despite it being a holiday. He watched the ten-o'clock news on Christmas Eve, seeing the meteorologist's White—and icy—Christmas prediction, and was at work the minute the first drop of precipitation hit the ground. Sure, he could have waited a while, woke us up, and rushed us through gift exchange, but he took the responsibility to allow Christmas travelers safe passage so seriously that his family—and his entire crew's families—spent Christmas Day keeping the roads safe. I won't mince words: my grandpa could be a heel, but he had some respectable qualities. That's how I view heels: they're normal guys with unique traits that make them individuals and a flaw which makes them unlikeable. For my grandpa, his flaw was his social ineptitude.

In creating an emotional connection with the audience, the two greatest I've seen in my generation were Mr. McMahon and Mick Foley.

Mr. McMahon is my pick as a heel because he is the power-hungry, demeaning boss that many people in real life deal with every day. People want to see their boss punched in the mouth and humiliated, but because they can't, they lived vicariously through "Stone Cold" Steve Austin as it happened to Mr. McMahon.

Mick Foley was the Dusty Rhodes of the '90s, a common man doing what he could to earn a living because he has little mouths to feed at home. Like Dusty, he didn't fit the physical mold of a champion pro wrestler, but had incredible charisma and

promo skills to complement an ability to make the crowd feel like they were a big part of his life. The argument can be made that Mick Foley became a legend by taking insane bumps and enduring more pain than a wrestler ever should. I believe those things made Mick Foley a star, but it was his ability to connect with an audience that made him a legend. Best of all, his promos didn't sound like wrestling promos.

How can I connect with an audience? I varies from one wrestler to the next and one fan to the next. It doesn't happen overnight. I recently had a discussion with a wrestler who just wanted to be real with the fans. I told him that, with few exception, the fans have to care about him as a character before he can expect them to care about him as a person. Shawn Michaels had to establish himself as "the Heartbreak Kid" before he was able to become the Shawn Michaels we see on TV today.

Since odds are you're not in WWE right now, you can try out many different things. Creatively, I've always had to throw lots of shit against the wall to see what sticks. Luckily for me, I also have creative diarrhea at times.

Though this has changed since I now have a family, I was once always thinking wrestling. I observed the world and the people in it, tried to figure out what makes people tick and, usually, how it could tie into wrestling. Here's an example.

At Wal-Mart, I almost collided with an inattentive woman, who gave me the stink eye and went about her day. I thought, *She is a heel. She probably married her high-school sweetheart, and they had love but no money. Eventually, she caught him banging her best friend and left him. While working a second job as a waitress to make ends meet, she met a well-off older man and, though she was repulsed by him, she wanted the easy life. He loved her, and as a testament to it, he didn't require a prenuptial agreement. She got his fortune when she divorced him and now uses her wealth as justification for rudeness to those of us whose shoes she would still be walking in if she hadn't gone spread-eagle for a rich guy.* I condensed that to think of a gimmick for a female wrestler.

The Million-Dollar Diva, a wealthy bitch who married for money and took her husband to the cleaners.

Like most guys, I am disgusted by the way the legal system favors money-grubbing whores. I wish bad things upon those types of people. To see a diva who represents that would sicken me enough that I'd pay to see her get the crap kicked out of her.

She would connect with me as a fan because she would strike a chord with me.

IV. Backyard wrestling

I said in the first chapter or two that a wrestling student should not brag of his backyard heroics during training. I once looked down on guys trying out who had backyard experience, because I found most of them refused to accept that they had no clue about wrestling. Now I also see it as an opportunity to take somebody who has the desire to wrestle and see if they have the passion and dedication to make it professionally.

When the backyarder breaks his neck doing what people go through intensive training to learn, his parents go after the obvious target: professional wrestling. Forget that most of us discourage it vehemently, they need somebody to blame for irresponsible parenting.

There have been backyarders to find success in pro wrestling: Mick Foley, the Hardy Boys, Matt Murphy ... yep, even me. I did it when I was 18, a year before finding a wrestling school. However, backyarders never jump straight from their trampolines to professional success. It takes quality instruction from those who know the business to succeed.

If you are a backyard wrestler, please stop. Try out for a wrestling school. I know you're not all taking bumps through flaming tables, but even a simple vertical suplex can injure an untrained body.

Those in the business need to be wary of associating with

backyard groups. It can really screw you to have your name tied to a backyard organization, so it's best to just stay clear of them completely.

V. Burning bridges

In my first book, *The Story of a Nobody and the Pursuit to Become a Somebody*, I wrote about burning bridges. That wasn't meant to be a book plug—if you want to read all about my life and career and sexcapades, check it out. You'll be a member of an elite group: one of the very few who bought it. Anyway, I wrote in it that those who burn bridges are often left standing in the ashes where that bridge once stood, meaning that they often return, needing to cross a bridge that has been burned.

Very few people in professional wrestling ever step away from the business without a burned bridge: it's the nature of the beast and things happen, but you should do what you can to avoid this as much as possible.

It begins with a respect for the wrestling industry. Though it's an ego-driven profession, nobody is bigger than the business. Respect for the business and for those working in it, along with professional conduct, carries a lot of weight.

There comes a time when a wrestler feels his time with a promotion has run its course: it's business. That doesn't give the wrestler license to shit on the doorstep on his way out. There may be a time when he's knocking at that door again, and he can be certain that the pile of shit will be waiting for him.

Stay humble. It's natural to have an ego, but I am living proof that things can all end in an instant.

Remember, you can learn something from every experience, every wrestler, every fan, and every promoter. You are subject everybody's critique, so listen to it, no matter who it's from. Never answer a criticism from a peer or a superior with, *I know*. If you knew then you wouldn't have done it wrong. If you still insist you knew, then accept that you screwed up and deserve to be reminded. Once the problem is identified, fix it. Don't make excuses. Few things are as annoying as a wrestler, or any human being, who makes excuses for failure.

Unless you have a bona fide emergency or serious injury, do not miss bookings. You're only as good as your word, and missing a booking calls question to the validity of your word. I did this one time, for some idiot promoter who I worked with once before and thought his promotion was the shits (it was really bad). I should have just declined the second booking; instead, I cancelled and took a week-long vacation to visit my family. Though I knew I'd never want to work with him again, it could have really damaged my name with promoters in that area. I still regret doing that.

Remember, loose lips sink ships. Wrestlers, as a whole, have a hard time keeping secrets. There's a phrase that goes: *Telephone, telegram, tell a wrestler*. If somebody asks you to keep your mouth closed about something, pay him the courtesy of doing so. I've seen many bridges burned by people who abused somebody's trust.

If you feel you must bash a wrestler or promoter, you'd better know your audience first. You could be talking about somebody's best friend, traveling partner, trainer, etc. Word travels fast, and the person you're backstabbing might end up on your caller ID even before you finish slamming him. The best way to handle this is just not to be a backstabber. Deal with people like a man and expect the same courtesy from others.

Because of my job, I often have to speak up in the office about wrestlers. One former wrestler (and a friend of mine) was on the verge of getting our title, but I observed that he was losing his heart for the business and knew he was a flight risk, so I pleaded

my case against him. Surely enough, he left the business within two months. I will say two things about the job I do: I always put the needs of the business before my personal feelings and I never say anything about anybody—in the office or otherwise—that I won't say to his face. I suggest everybody behave this way. You might not always win popularity contests, but at least you will be respected.

VI. The Internet

The Internet has undoubtedly changed the wrestling industry. Gone are the days when promoters could get away with phantom title switches and airing television tapings out of order. As wrestling evolved from carnival tents, its way of doing business also should have. Unfortunately, the carny sentiment still exists, but one of the good things the Internet has done for wrestling is making it more difficult for those working in the business to operate like carnies.

The Internet has become a great resource for promoters and wrestlers to network and market themselves. It has also given fans an outlet to follow the business in an unprecedented way.

Like anything, there is also a negative side to the Internet. It provides a forum for anybody to speak their minds anonymously. They can commit libel, plagiarism, and say whatever the hell they want without consequence. Don't let yourself get caught up in what's being said on a message board. Anybody cowardly enough to post things without attaching his name to it is not somebody whose opinion matters.

Wrestlers should not use message boards to talk trash on other wrestlers or promoters. If a wrestler has a problem with somebody, he should be a man and address it personally. Wrestlers should stay off message boards, for the most part. If a fan congratulates a wrestler on the birth of his child, a simple *Thank*

You is okay, but you should have a very good reason for posting on a wrestling message board. It creates too much of a connection between a wrestler and a fan. When a fan looks at a wrestler the same as himself then that wrestler is no longer a star in the fan's eyes—he becomes the fan's next-door neighbor.

Something I'm seeing more of is wrestler blogs. It's cool that people have an outlet to express themselves, but keep in mind that fans can also read most of these. Your rant about your girlfriend cheating on you with your best friend and breaking your heart is not something you should let fans read.

The Internet has bred a new type of wrestling fan. Some call them "smart marks," but I still refuse to call ticket-buyers "marks." They have become more informed, more critical, and harder to please. You will likely find reviews on your matches on the Internet at some point during your career. Read them—even fans might point out something that you can benefit from—but don't beat yourself up over them. Understand that there is nothing in this world that everybody likes. Some people can be brutal in their reviews, but it's nothing more than opinion. Unfortunately, sometimes those opinions shape the opinions of others, but don't resent those people. By performing, you are subject to criticism like any other entertainer. I never got a lot of love from people reviewing my matches on the Internet, but I took solace in knowing that 90 percent of the wrestlers I worked with respected me because I got over with the live crowd, worked hard for them, bumped and sold well, had good timing, and didn't blow spots.

VII. Sharing your wealth of knowledge

I loved training wrestlers. To me, developing a wrestler from infancy to success at any level is more rewarding than any of my own in-ring accomplishments.

It's important to know that not every good wrestler makes a good teacher and not mediocre wrestler makes a mediocre teacher. Look at some of the top trainers around: Larry Sharpe, Les Thatcher, Jesse Hernandez, and Ron Hutchison were never huge stars in the sport. That's not saying that any one of them was not a good wrestler, but they have created stars bigger than they became themselves.

Training aspiring wrestlers is an awesome responsibility. Every person who steps through the doors of a wrestling school has a dream of wrestling success. He is trusting you with his dream. Unfortunately, not everybody is cut out to be a wrestler. You might find yourself in a situation where you are in need of money and looking at a tryout who has zero chance at being an asset to this business as a wrestler, pen-in-hand and ready to write a check out to you. You have to have enough respect for this business to turn him away.

Training is something that should be done out of love for the sport and a desire to see it survive by feeding it new, well-trained talent. It takes time, patience, and a genuine investment in the trainee. I will be the first to admit that I was not a veteran

when I became the lead instructor at the Harley Race Wrestling Academy. Guided by Harley, I learned with my students, but I took the role seriously, sometimes training nine hours each day: I became a very good trainer. The only things I expected from my students were attention, effort, and hunger. I expected their attention while I was speaking, a 100-percent effort every time they came to train, and a hunger to succeed.

I learned quickly that you can't deal with everybody the same. Some needed a fire lit under their asses, others needed nurtured like frail baby rabbits. Damn, I really just wrote that. Also, a trainer can't just teach everybody to work like the trainer would work. He has to imagine what he would need to do to get over and do well if he was each individual trainee. A big man needs to be taught differently than a cruiserweight.

Like just about any profession, business and personal relationships must be kept separate. When I began training Derek McQuinn, we quickly became friends. I told him the first time we drank beer together that we could hang out and have all the fun the world had to offer together, but when we were in a wrestling environment, it was all secondary to business needs. I had a responsibility to him, to Harley, and to wrestling to train him well, and I couldn't do that and be his friend when it was time for training.

There is one thing I can't stomach about training: somebody who doesn't know what the hell he is doing training a student. Even when I began training students, I remembered everything from my own training and echoed the voice of then-lead instructor, Derek Stone, until I found my own voice. There are guys who have no clue how to work a match—some of them only have a few matches under their belts—but have such little regard for the business that they will blindly lead the blind.

Confidence is vital to the development of wrestlers. When training students, there is a time and a place to be critical. You can nit-pick anything, but sometimes it's best to consider the big picture rather than each pixel of the photo. If one of your students has only been wrestling for a few months and you watch him make

it through a solid match but could see him stomp on a punch, save that battle for another day. He made it through a solid match, so let him feel good about it. You want your students to be the best they can be, but leave them hungry to learn more, anxious for the next time they have the pleasure of stepping into the ring.

If you train students, do it for the benefit of the business, not for the money. Your goal should be to produce excellent workers with the tools to survive and succeed in this business.

VIII. Taking it home

Here are a few more tips before I wrap this up:

Don't stomp when you punch. People know that fist hitting flesh doesn't make a slamming noise like a wrestler slammed to the mat does.

Always be honest with yourself. I've seen too many wrestlers who can't get over themselves long enough to see the things they need to improve upon.

Spots should be used to help tell your story. Don't fall in love with a spot and throw off your whole story just to get it in your match.

Always protest a babyface turn that occurs because heels reject you. After Randy Orton won his first World Title, he and Chris Benoit had a very good rematch. His Evolution partners beat down Benoit and celebrated with Orton before attacking him. Orton became a babyface because he was rejected as a heel. Why should fans care about a dickhead who would still be a dickhead if the other dickheads hadn't turned their backs on him? On the contrary, if he would've saved Benoit from the beat-down because of his newfound respect for him and for the World Title, that would have been an effective turn. He would've turned because he chose to do the right thing, not because the other heels rejected him.

Professional wrestling is a brotherhood. Look out for one another and always be respectful, considerate, and helpful to others. The camaraderie you'll experience in the wrestling business is

like no other friendship with a large group of people you will ever find, and it's what many former wrestlers miss the most about the business.

Learn everything you can about the history of this business. It offers a fascinating history with characters and stories unlike anything else. The person who said, "There's no business like show business" obviously never met professional wrestling.

Buy books and audiobooks on goal-setting and achievement. I recommend *The Success Principles: How to Get from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be* by Jack Canfield. It provides outstanding guidance and I wish I would have read it when I was wrestling. Play the audiobooks during road trips and work commutes and listen to them many times over.

Evaluate yourself honestly and set goals. *What are my strengths and weaknesses? What do I need to do to be ready if I ever get the call from WWE?* Close your eyes and picture the life you want, then write it down. Determine what you will have to make the dream a reality. Set small, attainable goals daily that will feed the monster that is your dream.

You're ready to become a star. Fame and fortune and ring rats hotter than your high-school prom queen are almost within your reach, right? I wish I could tell you that's the case, but in reality you're more likely looking at a few years or more of poverty and hooking up with an ugly girl after shows because she'll cook you dinner and let you stay at her apartment, since what you lose in pride is less valuable than the cost of a hotel room. I'm not advocating that route, but it's a road many wrestlers travel.

Never lose sight of your dreams. Chances are, you're in this business with dreams of going all the way to the top. Work hard every day to move a step closer to making your dream a reality. Write yourself a note or make a sign that reads:

What have I done today to become great?

