

## EPIOSOSDE 004

Charlie Sandlan (00:02):

Hello, everybody. This is Charlie Sandlan. Before we get into the show, I want to throw out a hypothetical to you that perhaps maybe you can relate to, a defining moment that I think happens to every actor.

Charlie Sandlan (00:21):

It's this moment where you realize maybe after one year, maybe after five years, maybe after 10, of cobbling together some training and fooling around Los Angeles or New York City, there comes a moment when you realize, "I don't really know how to act. I've taken my monologue class, my on camera class, my scene study class, I've memorized a lot of lines, gotten a lot of notes from a lot of different acting teachers and I don't know how to act. I don't know what to do when I grab a script. I don't have a way of working."

Charlie Sandlan (01:03):

I guess what I want to talk about is what happens and what you do after that moment. What's the decision you make for yourself? We're going to talk about the importance of training yourself if you want to be a really serious, first rate actor. The show is called Creating Behavior. Put the phone in your pocket. We're going to start right now.

Charlie Sandlan (01:24):

Hello, my fellow daydreamers. My name is Charlie Sandlan and you are listening to episode four A Defining Moment. We'll get into that defining moment here in a second but I wanted to give you a little update about my life and I will tell you as of this recording we are still in Guatemala if you can believe it. We are in the middle of week eight.

Charlie Sandlan (02:10):

I guess the positive thing to report is that we now have a flight booked. We are getting ourselves back into New York City. We're

flying out of here on May 23rd. I have mixed feelings about this quite honestly. We have been down here now with Tricia's parents and they have a beautiful home and they have a nice wraparound garden and I'm able to put my feet in the grass every morning. There's rose bushes and flowers and butterflies and caterpillars and hummingbirds. I mean, if you're going to be quarantined there are many, many worse places than Tricia's parents' home. I've been very, very grateful to both of them. It's been really lovely being down here.

Charlie Sandlan (03:09):

In many respects, Tricia and I are dragging ourselves back to New York because we have to. We've got to take care of our dog and our cat, who I hope still remembers us. It's been breaking my heart not being able to see Wally and even the mean, evil cat Mia. Then going back to our apartment, which really compared to where we've been is going to feel like a shoebox.

Charlie Sandlan (03:38):

You know, just the day to day life of navigating in one of the dangerous parts of America right now. Yeah. There we go. I'm mixed about it but we're doing it. We've got to move forward and both of us have big decisions to make about our businesses and how we're going to move forward and where we're going to live. Our lease runs up at the end of July so we're going to be looking for an apartment probably, a cheaper place. All these things that are confronting not just me but all of you in various ways.

Charlie Sandlan (04:14):

But that being said, I think we can still talk about your acting career and talk about art and talk about artistry and today I'm focusing on this defining moment that I think every single actor has. It's just a question of how you respond to it.

Charlie Sandlan (04:37):

That is the moment when you realize that you really don't know how to act. Some people end up being okay with that. They say, "You know what? I don't care. I'm myself. I can memorize my

lines. I'm auditioning. I'm getting some work here and there" and you might not give a fuck. Right?

Charlie Sandlan (04:58):

The other side of that, the other possible answer is the answer that I'm interested in and this goes back to the very first episode when I just said to you at the top, "What's the vision of the type of actor you want to be?" I would think that all of you that are listening here, your aspirations aren't five lines on Law and Order. Right?

Charlie Sandlan (05:21):

You want to take on rich, complicated human beings. You want to be able to walk into a room, walk onto a set and be able to create organic, vivid, fully realized human behavior.

Charlie Sandlan (05:39):

The great work, the lead roles, the guest spots, the recurring roles, the major roles of Western theater, the Eugene O'Neill's and the Edward Albee's and the Susan Laurie Parks' and the Martin McDonagh's and the August Wilson's require a tremendous physical instrument. That means you have to be able to access your rage, your heartbreak, your joy, your silliness, your grief, your shame, your excitement, your silly side. You've got to be comfortable with conflict and you've got to be comfortable with intimacy. Right?

Charlie Sandlan (06:17):

I think ultimately you can break acting down essentially to two things, conflict or intimacy and you have to be able to function from both of those places inside of you, whether it's a heated argument or you're lying in bed with a lover or your wife, you have to be so open and so available to the other person. That takes an instrument that is really sensitive, really vulnerable and capable of being played upon and changed by another human being, which is what you want if you're serious about acting.

Charlie Sandlan (06:59):

The parts of yourself that you need to access, you really do spend most of your life repressing. I mean, we don't walk around life trying to function from our rage, from our shame, from our humiliation, right? Very powerful, powerful parts of the human experience. We do everything we can not to feel, which is I think the reason why we are drawn to actors, why we go to the theater and why we go to film and television is so that we can live vicariously through you.

Charlie Sandlan (07:34):

This really kind of just feeds into my own personal image of what an actor is. I think of actors as this vessel of life, this lung really that's able to walk onstage, be able to walk in front of a camera, and breathe in experience, process it and be able to express it in a very personal way over and over again from moment to moment to moment. That's not easy to do.

Charlie Sandlan (08:08):

Martha Graham, the mother of modern dance, right? One of the greatest artists certainly that our country has ever produced had a really famous quote, many really famous ones but one she said is that technique will set you free.

Charlie Sandlan (08:28):

This is what I think most actors don't appreciate and don't understand is that you need technique. It is essential to every single art form, a way of working. It is the one thing that will help guarantee consistency.

Charlie Sandlan (08:48):

Maybe you guys can relate to this. You've been in rehearsal, maybe you've been onstage, maybe you've been on set and this moment happens, this moment with another actor or actors where you were completely out of your head, you were in the moment, you were spontaneous, you were alive. You actually came to life in the imaginary world and you hear cut or you walk offstage and your fucking mind is blown. You're like, "Wow. That was a fucking drug, man. That felt incredible. I don't know what just happened. I

don't know how I did it but, God, that felt good. I want to do it again."

Charlie Sandlan (09:37):

You try to recreate that the next take or the next night and somehow it doesn't go the same way. You're not alive, you weren't in the moment. It just was like this moment that just, puff, came and gone. This moment of what it felt like to be a real actor.

Charlie Sandlan (09:59):

Now the hard thing is to take that moment and allow it to be just the way you work every single time. That's not easy. What's going to make that possible for you is knowing how to fucking work.

Plain and simple.

Charlie Sandlan (10:27):

See, because I think what you want as an actor is to never be bad, right? You want to be able to always walk into a room and consistently do good work and depending on what your talent level is sometimes you'll be really good, sometimes you might even be brilliant but you never want to be bad and that's what training will allow you to prevent.

Charlie Sandlan (10:47):

Well, it takes me to this next point. I'll start off by saying that this Picasso quote is brilliant and I love it and I'll talk about it. The quote is this, he said, "All children are artists. The problem is how to remain an artist once you've grown up."

Charlie Sandlan (11:09):

That shit is the truth. The artist in you, right now, is that two year old. It's that two year old who is open and curious and playful. You know, if you ever watch children, particularly, really small ones, they're so consumed with the present moment. Right? They're not worried about the past, they're not stressed out about the future. They're just all consumed about what's going on right now? Right here? They don't give a fuck. You know? They can make an ass out of themselves and it doesn't matter.

Charlie Sandlan (11:47):

There are a lot of things that happen to us as we grow up. Three big ones. We are parented, we are socialized, and we are educated. We are fucked up to varying degrees by all three of those. We're fucked up by our parents, we're fucked by society and the pressures that are put on us culturally and we're fucked up by our teachers to varying degrees.

Charlie Sandlan (12:13):

We learn over our life to build up these walls that we use to protect us, the shield that keeps us from being hurt, that allows us to be able to get through life and to stay employed and to have relationships and not end up in prison hopefully but it walls up that artist in you.

Charlie Sandlan (12:35):

I think if you want to be really good you have to be able to chisel away at all of those parts of yourself that keep you from being open, vulnerable, free, empathic and out of your head. There are a number of skills that you need in order to create the flawless illusion of life. Certainly, to be able to do it consistently take after take after take and night after night after night. Right?

Charlie Sandlan (13:07):

When we watch really good acting we are watching life unfold for the first time and that's really difficult to do. If I'm sitting with my therapist and I'm talking to her about the day my dad died and I'm talking to her about that morning I was in rehearsal for this very avant garde production of Macbeth that I was in and we were getting ready to do our final dress rehearsal and we were getting ready to move into the theater, we were opening in like a week and I talk about being on the phone with my mom and her holding the phone up to my dad and telling him that it's okay to go and that he's been a great father, just a very profound moment in my life.

Charlie Sandlan (13:58):

My therapist is not going to stop me and say, "You know, Charlie, can you go back? Let's go back a few moments to when your

mother puts the phone up to your father's ear and you're making this huge assumption that he can hear you and you're talking about letting him go, I think I want to see some emotion there. Can you just well up for me a little bit?

Charlie Sandlan (14:23):

I think as you're talking about it I think it makes you uncomfortable, I think maybe just swallow it right back down. You can take a few moments to compose yourself but can we just go back and can you tell me that again?" You know?

Charlie Sandlan (14:37):

I mean, my therapist isn't going to ask me that but a director could. A director will. You've got to be able to go back, take that adjustment and be able to make it work to be able to create the behavior that you need to for the moment. That takes skill.

Charlie Sandlan (14:56):

When I was a twentysomething actor moving to New York City in 1993 I didn't really understand that. I guess, for me, my defining moment was a very profound one. It's the moment when I realized that I did not know how to fucking act. It came to me after I went to MoMA for the first time.

Charlie Sandlan (15:24):

Now MoMA, the Museum of Modern Art, in midtown Manhattan is one of our country's great museums, one of the world's great museums, and I remember strolling into their abstract expressionist wing and it's the first time that I actually laid eyes on a de Kooning. If you don't know who Willem de Kooning is he's one of the great abstract expressionist painters, he was a contemporary of Pollock and Gorky.

Charlie Sandlan (15:51):

He's got an iconic painting and it was hanging there in the middle of this room and it's called Woman 1. I will link it up on the site so you guys can learn a little bit about de Kooning but it's this painting, it's huge, it's probably I don't know maybe six or seven feet tall, maybe four or five feet wide, and it's this painting of ... I



mean, it looks like a woman but it's not. Right? There's this ... You can tell that there's some breasts there but her face is kind of skeletal and the whole painting is these very just I would say violent, these violent strokes, these big, broad strokes that slash the painting.

Charlie Sandlan (16:33):

It's these really beautiful colors, yellows and oranges and greens and I just looked at it and I thought, "That is just so fucking cool. That's amazing" and it's considered one of the 20th Century's great American paintings.

Charlie Sandlan (16:49):

You know, I'm looking around this room and I see Robert Rauschenberg and one of his famous works where he took his bed, literally his entire bed, and he threw it up on the wall and he painted it. I'm talking about the frame, the mattress, the sheets, the pillows and he painted his bed and it's one of his most famous works and I thought, "Well, that's amazing."

Charlie Sandlan (17:12):

Then I look and I see this Pollock mural, this mural is probably, I don't know, 15 feet wide, 10 feet tall and it looks like somebody just went into the garage, took a paintbrush and just dripped 100 different colors of paint on this canvas and I just thought, "My God. I want to paint. I want to be a painter. I want to be an actor. I want to be a painter. I want to be able to do it all." You know?

Charlie Sandlan (17:37):

I go to the paint store and I spend hundreds of dollars that I didn't have on all of this stuff. I bought an easel, I bought a canvas, I bought these paints, brushes, I go to this kitchen store and I buy a spatula, I buy all these utensils, these different knives because I thought I'm going to paint now, I'm inspired by this.

Charlie Sandlan (17:59):

I was dating a woman at the time, she was an investment banker, and no interest in acting, wasn't part of her life at all. Clearly, the relationship did not work out but at the time I thought it was fun



and I come home with all this stuff and she's like, "What are you doing?" "I'm going to paint. I'm going to start painting now."

Charlie Sandlan (18:23):

You know, she rolls her eyes because she just thought I was crazy. I did. I setup my easel and I start painting. I start doing what I saw at MoMA. I'm taking these paints and I'm dripping it all over the canvas, I'm doing all these big slashing movements and I'm having a blast. I can tell you that. I was enjoying myself.

Charlie Sandlan (18:48):

You know, as I'm doing this my girlfriend at the time she says, "Well, why don't you before you do that why don't you just sit down and try to draw this chair? Why don't you just go down to some basic stuff?" I said, "Babe, come on. Don't interfere. I'm the artist in the relationship. Come on" and I rolled my eyes at her and I continued on and I finish and I step back and it was a piece of shit. It was awful. It didn't look like anything. It looked like somebody just puked on this canvas and I just thought to myself, "Huh, I'm doing what I saw at MoMA. I'm doing what Pollock did. He's dripping shit all over the canvas and de Kooning was just making these big strokes across the canvas."

Charlie Sandlan (19:38):

This light bulb went off for me and I have to say this was my defining moment, this was the moment ... This is now after being in New York for almost five years trolling around and trying to act. It's the moment where I realize I didn't know how to act. I certainly didn't know how to paint. I didn't put any time into learning how to do it, I didn't do anything about the art form, I didn't sit down and learn the very fundamental basics of drawing and painting. I just appreciate art. I just love it but I'm not a painter.

Charlie Sandlan (20:20):

When I read about de Kooning and I read his biography and I discovered how many years in his young life he spent in art school and drafting and learning how to draw and at a very basic level, when I read about how when he was young he would keep

kind of a ... He would put this wired kind of mannequin together where he took a pair of pants, jeans, and he put them up so it looked like half a torso because he would work every day on trying to draw that as realistically as he could.

Charlie Sandlan (21:02):

This was years before he became famous for all of his abstract art, his abstract expressionism. He put decades into his craft. That was the moment when I realized I don't really know how to act. I love acting and I certainly have taken some classes here and there and I have an appreciation for the art form but I don't have any craft, I don't have any technique.

Charlie Sandlan (21:27):

It was the moment where I realized I need to go back to school, I need to go and really learn how to master this art form. Now I am not saying that in order to be a really good actor you have to go to school. Okay? I don't want those of you who are successful or having a really great career emailing me and saying, "Well, fuck you, Charlie. I didn't go to school and I work all the time."

Charlie Sandlan (21:56):

I'm not saying that but you do have to train yourself and I knew that what I didn't want to be is pedestrian. I think that there are two types of actors. There's the actor ... If there's a part, there's the actor that always brings the part down to them. I call them meat and potato actors, meaning that no matter what the role, no matter what they're doing, they bring it down to their pedestrian behavior, their personality and they're the same in every role and you can go through a lot of celebrity, a lot of movie stars, that's what they are.

Charlie Sandlan (22:41):

They're not necessarily artists but they're beautiful, they've got great personalities, stick Julia Roberts in 20 films and you've got Julia Roberts. Now she does Julia Roberts really, really well. You can't fault her. She's a movie star. She's no Meryl Streep, she's no Toni Collette, she's not Tilda Swinton, she's no Viola Davis but

she's a good example of an actor that brings things down to themselves.

Charlie Sandlan (23:16):

Now what I'm interested in, the acting that really thrills me, the artists that I think are at the top of their game, if they're going to take on a part they bring themselves to the part. They step into the shoes of another human being. Now that's character acting, that's transformational acting, that's your ability to transform yourself into the shoes of another human being so that everything you do is a completely fully realized human being.

Charlie Sandlan (23:46):

That takes a tremendously developed physical instrument so there needs to be an obsessive quality to your life, an obsessiveness to want to master your instrument, to be facile, to be able to access every part of who you are because that is ultimately what you want to be able to do is to stand up and fully illuminate the human condition and all of its aspects.

Charlie Sandlan (24:30):

Having the confidence that every time you get a piece of material to be able to do the homework that you need to be able to do on it, right? All of the how you break down a script and the detailed script analysis work that you need to be able to do, right?

Charlie Sandlan (24:49):

Then to be able to walk into a room on set and be able to let your talent soar, to allow your instincts to operate, and you can't really do that unless you have a way of working. It's the same with athletes. I use athletes as analogies all the time. You look at professional athletes, I don't care what the sport is, they've been working on their craft their entire life, they've been obsessed with it and they work on those fundamentals over and over and over and over again like a baseball player in a batting cage every single day taking pitches, fielding ground balls, fielding pop ups so that when they get in the game they don't have to think, their instincts take over.

Charlie Sandlan (25:37):

It's no different with acting. You've got to work on your instrument so much, you've got to get that so embedded and ingrained in you that when you actually hear action or the curtain goes up you're able to rip, you're able to just improvise and allow your talent to be able to take over.

Charlie Sandlan (26:00):

Now, personally, I am very, very biased to the technique that was created by Sanford Meisner or the Meisner Technique because he developed a way of instilling in an actor all of the fundamentals.

Charlie Sandlan (26:14):

Now at the end of the day, it doesn't matter how you ingrain these fundamentals in you so that they're second nature but I will tell you this, you need to be able to be out of your head. Art is not intellectual. Acting is not intellectual. It comes from your heart, it comes from your torso, it comes from your guts.

Charlie Sandlan (26:37):

You need to be able to get out of your head. You need to be able to get the attention off of yourself, which is what most actors struggle with, the attention on themselves. They're worried about how they look, about how they sound, but fundamentally, you need to be able to get your attention off of yourself, onto the other person or onto what you're doing.

Charlie Sandlan (26:58):

You need to forge for yourself an inviolate sense of truth. Your actor's faith, your bullshit detector needs to be rock solid. You need to know how to listen. Most actors don't know how to listen. They wait for their cues. Like, "I don't care what you're saying. Just give me my cue so I can act."

Charlie Sandlan (27:19):

But really great acting, the bedrock of acting is your ability to listen. You need to, ultimately, be able to truthfully do under an imaginary circumstance.

Charlie Sandlan (27:32):

Add to that, accessibility to your emotional life, your rage, your heartbreak, your joy, your silliness, your grief, all of the things I talked about earlier today, all these parts of yourself that you spend most of your life trying not to access ... You know, the triumphs, the tragedies, the highs and the lows of our human existence.

Charlie Sandlan (27:56):

Most people are only going to experience those a handful of times in their entire life. Right? If you think about your own life and where you've been at your most humiliated, your most ashamed, your most enraged, your most heartbroken, your most overjoyed, I mean, those are searing moments in your life, right? They stay with you. They're embedded in your emotional memory. You'll remember those when you're 80.

Charlie Sandlan (28:29):

The actor has to be able to live through those eight shows a week, 25 takes on a set. I mean, you've got to have one hell of an instrument to be able to do that. That life needs to be coursing through a body that is, ultimately, free and open and pliable. Right? Most actors are incredibly tense. They strain. They're blocked up.

Charlie Sandlan (29:02):

You cannot have a full free expression and flow of emotion in a body that's locked up and tense and, in life, you can have as much tension as you want. Be as intense as you want. But if you want to be an actor, no one wants to watch that because I will tell you this, an audience will experience what the actors are experiencing and you know this if you've gone to the theater, if you're watching really poor acting on film or on television, if all you hear and see are tense actors you're just experiencing their tension.

Charlie Sandlan (29:37):

What moves you as an audience member is to be able to sit and live vicariously through those actors, which means they have to

be alive. You have to be in the presence of real human experience, not another person's tension. It's just going to make you uncomfortable.

Charlie Sandlan (29:56):

You know, there's so much work that goes into getting yourself ready to be able to do rich, complicated material and what happens is as an actor you might get lucky, you come to New York or you come to LA and maybe somebody opens a door for you and you end up with an agent or a manager who thinks you've got a great look, you're gorgeous or you're interesting, you're a real kind of character look, and they like you.

Charlie Sandlan (30:25):

They might start pitching you and they end up getting you into a room and all of a sudden you find yourself with three, four, five pages of material and you're expected to go into a room and be able to do something with that.

Charlie Sandlan (30:41):

A lot of actors just don't know how to do it and they go into these casting offices and they've got this big opportunity, right? You know, you've got this opportunity to make a good first impression to be able to go in there and do some really good work that they are going to remember.

Charlie Sandlan (30:56):

You go in there and you blow it because you don't have the skillset or even the ability to be able to approach this material with any kind of insight. After maybe a couple of months or a year of being sent out for some really good stuff and not booking or not getting called back or not being called in for other things, your agent drops you, your manager drops you, and you're like, "Fuck. I don't know how to act."

Charlie Sandlan (31:20):

Quite honestly, this is a fair number of the students that come to me, I can tell you that, that have gotten to a point in their careers and sometimes it's in their early twenties and sometimes they

don't realize this until their thirties, this defining moment when they realize they need to work and train themselves and it's not going to happen in a scene study class, it's not going to happen in a film technique class, and it's not going to happen in some monologue class where you're memorizing some fucking monologue, walking into a room, doing what you memorized, working out how you punched all those words and all the voice inflection and everything you wanted to try to do and get some horse shit notes from somebody who doesn't even know how to act themselves.

Charlie Sandlan (32:08):

This is why the state of American acting is in dire straits. I think that's going to be a topic of a future episode, the crisis of American acting. But for now, listen, I hope anything that I said today resonates with you. Hopefully, it gives you some things to think about as you move forward in your journey and you try to answer that question of the vision of the type of actor that you want to be.

Charlie Sandlan (32:32):

Before we wrap things up and call it a show, I am going to introduce a new segment and I'm going to call this new segment Important Films and Directors That Charlie Thinks You Should Know.

Charlie Sandlan (32:51):

Okay. Our first film recommendation, this is a film that I think is very important, a director that is groundbreaking, and we're going to talk about François Truffaut, a French director that was the epitome of what was coming out of the early '60s, the French New Wave.

Charlie Sandlan (33:12):

I want you to watch a film called Jules and Jim made in 1962. It was groundbreaking for many reasons. It influenced an entire generation of filmmakers. The things that he was doing in that film, the subject matter, the way he told the story had never been



done before. Let's watch it together and let's talk about it next week. That wraps up this segment of Important Films and Directors That Charlie Thinks You Should Know.

Charlie Sandlan (33:51):

Okay. I love this music. I don't know. It makes me feel good and I am trying to emulate the quality of the show. I want to wrap things up here. I'm done. I don't know about you but let's get the hell out of here, shall we?

Charlie Sandlan (34:07):

All right. I want to thank you for keeping that phone in your pocket and listening to everything I had to say. Subscribe, please, to this podcast on any of the platforms that you're listening to it. You can go to Creating Behavior Podcast dot com and access all of these episodes, all of the links to any of the art and artists that I have been mentioning, not just today but every episode.

Charlie Sandlan (34:34):

I want all of your questions. Please, I want to know what your thoughts are, I want to know what you'd like to talk about, what you'd like me to answer. You can email me,

Charlie@creatingbehaviorpodcast.com Thank you, Lawrence Trailer for the theme music. The song was Not Enough. You can find him at LawrenceTrailerMusic.com.

Charlie Sandlan (34:55):

Listen, everybody. We're still in trying times. I want to leave you with a little Brene Brown quote. I want you to be brave, be awkward, be kind and always go the distance with yourself, take yourself seriously, and don't ever, ever settle for your second best. My name is Charlie Sandlan. Peace.