

## Episode #026 (Transcript)

Charlie Sandlan (00:02):

Impediments, they come up all the time when you act. You get a script, you get a couple of pages for an audition and you go, "Fuck, I've got to be drunk." The character just did an eight ball. They're high on pcp, meth, heroin. They're smoking a doobie. They're high as a kite. Sometimes it's physical. I've got a hangover. I've got a migraine. I'm nauseous. I'm throwing up. I've got a bleeding ulcer. I've got irritable bowel syndrome. I broke my wrist. I've been stabbed. I've been shot in the leg. Someone just punched me in the face. Well, let's talk about that. What are some things that you can think about, ways to approach that kind of impediment work so that you can create something that is truly believable? And I've got some other things to talk about as well. It's a solo episode today, my friends, so put the phone back in your pocket, Creating Behavior starts now.

Charlie Sandlan (01:22):

Well, hello, my fellow daydreamers. Well, it didn't take Trish long to move beyond Mia. So two weeks ago, we put Mia The Evil Cat down, which was very sad, and...very sad. What other way can I say it other than that? It was sad. But she's found something else to put her attention to, Bernie. Bernie is a ladybug and somehow this ladybug found its way into our apartment onto our window sill where Trish discovered him. And of course, the logical thing to do would be to take the ladybug and put it on one of our plants and then try to find out how do you feed a ladybug? So Trish goes down the Google rabbit hole, Dear Google, and she comes back a few minutes later and says, "Okay, we've got to get a raisin. Do you have raisins?" So I go into the cabinet and I get a raisin. We soak the raisin. She goes into the refrigerator, she gets a couple of pieces of lettuce, small little, little pieces. I mean, it is a

ladybug, right? And places the raisin and the lettuce on the leaf of our fiddlehead fern.

Charlie Sandlan (02:51):

And I think Bernie shit his pants. I don't think he could believe his good fortune. He has spent the last 48 hours feasting like Henry the Eighth at a banquet. It's unbelievable. Now, I don't know, he's either going to eat himself to death or he's just going to have a nice long winter on our plant. But it has been a diversion, I'll tell you, every hour or so. "Did you check on Bernie? Is Bernie still there?" Thankfully, he is. So I will keep you posted on the Chronicles of Bernie the ladybug. I know you're going to be waiting with bated breath on that one. Listen, thank God we elected Joe Biden. Can we just say that? Thank fucking God. I know it's been a couple of weeks now. And we should have expected this response from the other half of the country, 72 million people that now think that this election is stolen, that it's a fraud.

Charlie Sandlan (03:55):

And it's really fucking unfortunate. And now it's having consequences, real consequences, when it comes to national security and getting the transition team, the presidential daily briefs, and everything that you need in order to maintain a stable government. But these people live in a fantasy world. What do you do when half the country is being fed a bunch of crap? And they're confronted with what they were confronted with when Barack Obama was President, and that is the fact that their whiteness is in danger. And it brings me to this passage. I'm almost finished with Caste by Isabel Wilkerson. This book is incredible. I know I've mentioned it before. You've got to get it if you want to have a real understanding of what race, what the caste system in this country is all about, and how it's been propped up and fed for the last 400 years.

Charlie Sandlan (05:10):

But this is what she says about 2016, and it applies to today. "In the pivotal election of 2016, whether consciously or not, the majority of whites voted for the candidate who made the most direct appeals to the characteristic most rewarded in the caste system. They went with the aspect of themselves that grants them the most power and status in the hierarchy. According to the New York Times exit polling of 24,537 respondents, 58% of White voters chose the Republican Donald Trump and only 37% went for the Democrat Hillary Clinton. Well, she won nearly three million more votes than Trump by the popular count. She attracted a smaller share of the white vote than any Democrat candidate other than Jimmy Carter in his failed bid for the reelection against Ronald Reagan in 1980."

Charlie Sandlan (06:05):

Well, I mean, that's a pretty revealing statistic. And what I find upsetting, what pisses me off now, is that we, we as Democrats, we are the ones that need to continue to extend our empathy. Well, we need to understand the other side. We need to put ourselves in their shoes, which is ironic, because that's what I do for a living. I try to teach people how to have more empathy, how to be able to step into the shoes of another human being. But in the real world, it gets more and more challenging when one side is extending empathy and understanding and kindness and decency and patience while the other side marches around with AK-47 strapped to their fat stomachs and waving their Trump flags and their MAGA hats and holding rallies all over the country spreading coronavirus. Well, it's difficult. But we have to do it. We have to continue to try to understand why 72 million people voted for racism, for mendacity, for lying, for just ripping children from their mothers and putting them in cages.

Charlie Sandlan (07:36):

And it's going to take many years, probably a decade or more, to try to understand why. I was listening to Bill Maher the other night. I love his show. I think he's one of the smartest people talking

politics and religion. I appreciate his atheism. And he said, "Listen, if Cracker Jacks were made of popcorn and shit and 72 million people decided to keep the shit and throw out the popcorn, I think the popcorn would want to know why." And at the end of the day, that's what we have to try to do. We have to try to understand why so many people want to keep eating shit. It's frustrating and it's upsetting and I think about it all the time. I wouldn't say I'm completely down the CNN, MSNBC wormhole like I was election week, but I can sit down and 45 minutes go by, I'm like, "Fuck, I've got to turn this off."

Charlie Sandlan (08:42):

I just keep wishing all of us the capacity for empathy and for understanding, and as artists, as creatives, we have to demand that of ourselves. We have to force ourselves to continue to be open-hearted, to continue to take in, to continue to find those sources of inspiration that can feed you, that can spark your creativity, that can keep you connected to the more beautiful aspects of our humanity. And I have a couple of people that I would like to share with you who have been doing that for me. One is the dancer David Toole. Now, I have to be honest, I didn't know who the fuck David Toole was until I read his obituary in the New York Times a few weeks ago. Now, David Toole was a dancer, but what is really fascinating about David Toole is the fact that he was a paraplegic. When he was a child, he had both of his legs amputated. He was born with a congenital condition called sacral agenesis.

Charlie Sandlan (10:05):

It's a disease where the lower portion of the spine that forms the joint with the hips, it doesn't develop correctly and so his legs were taken from him at 18 months old. And in his obituary, it was in the New York Times, he even says that he can remember back to three or four years old where he experienced the first of what I would assume would be just a slew of indignities, which I think if you are disabled that you can experience over the course of your

life, where he was lying naked on a table as these doctors were staring at him because he was a curiosity. And he said, "I have a vague memory of being stood on a platform being pointed at and talked about." He told the Times of London in 2012, "It made me feel like the Elephant Man." Well, he might have been physically different, he might have been really limited in terms of his physical body, but that did not stop him. It did not phase him as a kid.

Charlie Sandlan (11:18):

He was active. He was always moving and jumping around, and when he hit his 20s and 30s, he became a dancer. He got involved with a dance company in London called the Candoco Dance Company, and the Candoko Dance Company, they integrate disabled and non-disabled dancers. And he attended dance school and worked with them for seven years. And the one thing that I would like you guys to see is the opening ceremony of the 2012 Para Olympic Games. He was the featured dancer. You can go to YouTube and you can also find the link in the New York Times obituary. It's beautiful. It is a stunning piece of choreography. His strength is apparent. His big hands, his strong arms, but the grace with which he moved, the physical nuance, the eloquence of his physical body was absolutely stunning. And I defy you to watch that and not have the tears just streaming down your face. Watch it as open-hearted as you can...take in. And yeah I watch someone like David Toole, I learned about David Toole, and it helps to put things in perspective to me.

Charlie Sandlan (12:46):

It's like a slap in the face. It's a reality check where I'm able to say to myself, "You know what? Quit your fucking complaining. Yes, you've got things in your life that are bothering you and you've got your struggles, but man, it's not that. You're not contending with that." And for him to be dealt a blow like that and to be able to come out the other side and do something and contribute something of value into the world, to make people think, to make people feel, is just really, really special. There's another short film

that he was a part of, it's called The Cost of Living. You can also find a link to a clip from that in the obituary, and you can also buy the short film on Amazon. There's this really great scene where he's peeping his head through a window and he sees these dancers in class and he hops out of his wheelchair and he crawls into the dance hall. And there's some magical realism involved here, but he finds himself in this really intimate, lovely dance with one of the dancers there. And it's beautiful.

Charlie Sandlan (14:05):

So I recommend that. I think you'll find it inspiring. Now, the other person I'd like to talk about is Emily Harrington. Emily, she's 34 years old and she just set the record for climbing El Capitan, that 3000 foot high piece of granite rock in Yosemite. She climbed it in 21 hours, 13 minutes and 51 seconds. There are only a handful of people that have been able to accomplish that feat, to do it in under 24 hours. And why find this so thrilling is that, when she first tried to do it, when she first made her ascent up El Capitan, it took her six days. That's when she was first learning to free climb. And she just did it last week in under 24 hours. The strength, the commitment, the resilience, the stamina, and if you read about the account, she slipped and she fell a couple of times. She banged her head on the rock. There was blood streaming down her face, but she kept going. And she had this quote, this is what she kept saying to herself, "Slow is smooth. Smooth is fast."

Charlie Sandlan (15:34):

And it made me just think about acting and how effortless acting needs to be and how it needs to feel. And I tell all of my actors, "You're working too hard half the time," that it just requires a better sense of ease. And you read something like this, you see what someone has been able to accomplish. And it's amazing. I love it. It's a great story, and it makes me think about my students and all of you that either already have or are right now trying to learn something, trying to put something together for yourself. And for those of you that are actors, that could be training, trying to

learn how to create behavior for a living. And I know I watch it with my students, the frustration of failure, the rabbit hole that we all can go down when we start to really struggle, when we're really put up against something that we don't know or something that we're not good at.

Charlie Sandlan (16:47):

And there comes a point where you're presented with either two options. You can either quit, or you can work through it and know that I'm going to get on the other side of this at some point, that there is something about the struggle itself that is inspiring personally. And when I read something like this, I watch something like Emily accomplished, what she did, you're going to tell me that there weren't times where she wanted to quit or she didn't think it was possible, where she thought to herself, "What the fuck am I doing this for? This is just not worth it"? And then to battle through that and come on the other side, that's something to hold onto. It's something I think for all of us who struggle, in our own way, that's inspiration, man. That's what it's about.

Charlie Sandlan (17:45):

So all of you who find yourself struggling right now, if you're pursuing your professional career and you're like, "Fuck, it's not going anywhere. I'm waiting tables and bartending. I can't get an audition and I can't get an agent," listen, it's either you're going to quit, or you're going to work through it and you're going to figure out how to get on the other side of that. And my wish for you is, especially if this is a life hat you can't live without, if you're passionate about it, you've got to work through the struggle. So congratulations to Emily Harrington. And now one final nugget here for you guys. I know as actors and creatives, you're struggling, you're grinding it out, and you're just looking for that break. You're looking for that one opportunity where the stars align and somebody recognizes that you've got something to offer, you should read about the experience of Maria Bakalova.

Charlie Sandlan (18:48):

Now, Maria Bakalova, she's a Bulgarian actress. She plays Tutar, Borat's daughter in Sasha Baron Cohen's sequel. And the reason why I'm bringing this up is, because she got that part off of an open call. There's a great conversation with her in a feature article in the New York Times, and they asked her, "How did you come to be cast in the sequel?" She said, "I heard from a friend there was an open call for the lead role in a Hollywood movie. And I was like, 'That's not possible. We are Bulgarians. Nobody can actually see us in lead roles.' I sent out self tapes and then they called me for a screen test in London. But the project was so confidential. I was like, 'Is this actually a project? I was sure it was going to be a human trafficking situation.' I had no idea I was going to meet Sasha. It was a surprise."

Charlie Sandlan (19:43):

Now, there you go. An open fucking call. She puts herself on tape. She sends it out into the world and the next thing you know she's doing a major film, and not just a major film, but I mean, where you're pranking people, where you're putting yourself in awkward, somewhat dangerous situations. And listen, she made Rudy Giuliani look like a complete fucking douche bag, which isn't that hard. But that's amazing. And so let her be a source of inspiration of what's possible. Just keep putting yourself out there. Now, let's talk about impediments for a hot second, shall we? They come up all the time when you act, and you really want to be able to execute them with as much simplicity and clarity as you possibly can. So you have to understand how to begin to approach them. Whether you're doing drunk, whether you're doing cocaine or meth or pot, or you're dealing with pain, whether that is a migraine or a headache or a hangover, or cramps or a bleeding ulcer, or you've been shot or you've had your arm broken, or you've been punched in the face. How do you catch that?

Charlie Sandlan (21:08):

The biggest thing that will allow an audience to believe what it is they're watching, is for the cause and effect to be absolutely



flawless. Cause and effect is what will break the reality...if that is no good, meaning, this happens which causes this to happen. If I'm drunk and I bend over to pick up my car keys and it doesn't cause me to have some balance issue, if I'm just able to bend down and stand up and there's no consequence there, the cause and effect is off. If I'm working on a migraine and I turn my head quickly or a loud noise happens and I don't respond to it through the impediment, then the audience isn't going to believe you. I mean, how many times have you been watching something and you just see somebody who's had, let's say, their face bashed in. They've got a black eye, lips are busted, they're black and blue. The makeup team did a hell of a job making them look really beat up, and they're laughing and talking and doing their scene and there's just no indication that they've suffered any kind of trauma, I can't stand it.

Charlie Sandlan (22:26):

It just pisses me the fuck off when I watch it, and it ruins it for me. I'm like, "It's not believable." So cause and effect is very important. The way to approach impediments, physical pain or drugs, is to begin to get very specific about what it is you're working with. You have to be able to pin down the symptoms in a very specific way. You can't just generally suffer. That's no good. So let's say I'm working with a migraine and in the scene I have a debilitating migraine. Well, I'm going to want to do some research certainly to understand what that does to the body and what are some of the symptoms that are universal that anybody watching would recognize as a migraine. Well, I know that with migraines sensitivity to light can be really, really vivid. It can be very painful. Noise, any kind of noise, can be incredibly, excruciatingly painful.

Charlie Sandlan (23:44):

Now, the question is where is the pain? Where is the source of the migraine? Is it behind your right eye ball? Is it in that left temple? Is it above the ear? Is it on top of your skull pressing down on you? You've got to be very specific about where the pain

is. You can't just generally hold your head. You want to be specific. And then the question is, well, what happens with pain? Pain would be very surprising. That's the one thing that you have to catch when you're creating an impediment, a surprise, of the pain. And you know, when you're hurt, you've, I don't know, twisted your ankle and you're moving around and you think you're doing okay, you've found a way to handle it. And then your ankle moves maybe a millimeter or two in the wrong direction, and it feels like somebody just took a metal spike and stuck it right in your ankle, and it stops you in your tracks. It's a surprising bit of pain. That is a key component to working with impediments, catching the surprise of the pain and understanding that pain ebbs and flows.

Charlie Sandlan (25:14):

You can't just sit there on stage or sit in front of a camera and just suffer. That's not what acting is. Acting is doing. And so to catch the ebb and flow of pain, the surprise of the pain, I think about the way my mother would ask us, my sister and I, how we were feeling when we were sick as kids. It would always be on a scale from one to 10. "Oh, I don't feel good." "Well, what are you? Are you a zero or are you a 10? Do we need to take you to the hospital? Or what are you, a three, a four?" That was a way of gauging, and that's how I approach impediments. Sometimes the pain is a two, it's a little discomfoting. But then I do something or something happens and then that pain is an eight. And then when I talk about catching cause and effect, let's say you have a real sharp moment of pain where it's a seven or an eight.

Charlie Sandlan (26:11):

Maybe that migraine where you bend down and you move your head a little bit too quickly and it just feels like someone just took a sledgehammer to your skull. What happens? What needs to happen there? And this is cause and effect. I've got to react, I've got to respond, and I've got to recover from the pain. And that's what you have to catch. And the question is, what do you do when

you're trying to recover from a sharp moment of pain? You breathe, you try to calm yourself down, and you try to let it pass so that you can pursue what it is you've got to do. And there are things that we universally do when we're in pain. Sometimes to ease the pain of something, we might rock ourselves slightly. There's comfort in rocking ourselves back and forth. It can be soothing. And breathing is very, very important. And I don't know, with a migraine, does it help? Does it relieve the pain if I just massage right there, that area above the temple where it hurts?

Charlie Sandlan (27:32):

So catching the cause and effect, being able to recover from surprising pain, and making sure that there are different levels is important. And it is the same when you're working with drugs, whether that's drunk or high or heroin, there are universal symptoms. So if we just look at drunk, what are universal symptoms of drunk? Balance, certainly. Very relaxed and very fluid. You're not tense when you're drunk. Sometimes the speech can be a little slurred, which you'll have to catch. And the cause and effect. Unable to walk in a straight line. I bend over to pick up my keys and I lose my balance. But now here is the secret to drunk. And when I work with my students, what they have to get past, first off, is acting drunk. What you never want to do is act drunk. And if you think about this, those of you that are drinkers or have ever been drunk in life, no one goes around acting drunk.

Charlie Sandlan (28:53):

What you've got to try to do is act sober. And that's what we do when we drink. We are trying to act as sober, it's just that the drunk gets in the way. The volume of our voice, the aggressiveness, it's inhibiting drunk. So, how do you catch that? The thing that can help you when it comes to approaching these is to think in terms of actable metaphors. If you can start to concretize these symptoms specifically with actable metaphors, it gives you something to do. So if you're dealing with drunk, it could be that my head is like a bowling ball that I'm trying to keep it

balanced on the top of my shoulders. My arms and my legs are like pieces of yarn or wet spaghetti, wet noodles. I interviewed Rebecca Knox last week and she talked about her audition for Orange is the New Black when she was playing an oxy addict, Tina Swope, and she was talking about the metaphor that she used when she went in to audition.

Charlie Sandlan (30:11):

And she was imagining herself covered in honey. Now, if you just sit there right now and try to imagine that, of your whole body being covered in smooth, sweet honey now, it's going to change you. It's going to do something to you. It's going to change your behavior. And that's what you're looking for, actable metaphors. If I'm working on a part and I am playing someone who, let's say, has a bleeding ulcer in the scene that I have to contend with, and I try to isolate that pain, where is the hole in the lining of my stomach? Where is that exactly? Pinning that down, well, what's the pain like? Maybe you do some research and you listen to people talk, you interview people that have experienced it, and maybe you can come up with a really good metaphor. It's as if someone is putting a lit cigarette out on the lining of my stomach. Now, if you respond as if someone's doing that to you, you're going to create immediate behavior.

Charlie Sandlan (31:27):

So right now just try it. You're sitting there, give yourself a moment where you respond as if someone's doing that to you. And that might last maybe a second, maybe two seconds. And then after that happens, you've got to recover from it. So then take the next five or 10 seconds to recover from that pain. Now, you act that out. This is what you rehearse. This is what you work on. You go back and forth with these impediments until you are really executing them with real ease, real simplicity, and grace. The execution of it in the audition room, on the self tape, is not the time to work it out. You actually have to rehearse them. I would suggest going out onto the streets, going out in public, and just

practicing them, practicing you're drunk. How do I walk with the intention of going in a straight line? But yet I can't because I'm drunk. And so there's a slight curve. I'm a little off balanced. Work on it. Practice coming home.

Charlie Sandlan (32:35):

I used to come home late at night or after work and I would practice walking up the stairs to my apartment, opening up my door, taking my coat off, putting my keys away. Walk into a bar as if you've already had four drinks and see if you can get a bartender to say, "You know what? I think you've had one too many." You want to be able to improvise with the impediment. And then when you get into a scene and you've got to deal with them, then the text and the behavior for the scene runs through that impediment. But it does take work. It takes practice and you have got to get good at them so that when they do come up, you're not freaked out and looking like an amateur. Keep a library for yourself of performances that are particularly good. And I'm going to just give you a couple right now off the top of my head.

Charlie Sandlan (33:34):

I would watch Juliette Lewis in the first episode of, I Know This Much Is True. It's the HBO miniseries with Mark Ruffalo. She has a great drunk scene. She's a really good actor and she crushes the scene, and she's trashed. It's really good. If you have never watched The Wire, you guys are culturally bereft, for one thing. You've got to watch it because it is, I think, the best show that's ever been put on television. But the impediment work in that show is phenomenal. Drunk, really great drunk, with Dominic West and Wendell Pierce. They're drunk often throughout the life of that show. And one actor in particular, Andre Arroyo, he plays Bubbles, he's in all of the seasons. He's a meth addict and the work that he does on that is really fantastic. So I would recommend that show. Watch Sharon Stone in Casino. She's got some great coke and drunk scenes. Aaron Paul in Breaking Bad. And a really great

drug, probably one of the best drunks in cinema history, Dudley Moore. You've got to watch Arthur.

Charlie Sandlan (34:58):

Now, this is probably before many of you were even born, so you've got to go back into the 70s. But watch Dudley Moore. There's a particularly good scene in Arthur where I think he's walking up to his aunt and uncle there at a reception of some sort, and he's introducing Princess Gloria to his aunt and uncle. It's hilarious. He is an incredible drunk. You should watch that as well. And you know, listen, at the end of the day, you got to work on them. You've got to practice them. And the thing about really good actors, good actors are great observers. You've got to watch people. You walk down the street and you see somebody going through a heroin trip, stop, watch them, see what they're doing. Accumulate for yourself a catalog of memories and visual experiences that you can call upon. Watch someone walking down the street who's drunk coming out of a bar. Follow them for a block or two and see what they're doing. Try to take it on. Try to make it your own.

Charlie Sandlan (36:10):

But practice them. That's what I want you guys to do so that when you get an opportunity to work with an impediment in an audition or on set, you're not freaking the fuck out. Well, my fellow daydreamers, thank you for sticking around and keeping that phone in your pocket. Please stay tuned for next week's episode. My interview with my former student, Kiera Allen. She is starring opposite Sarah Paulson in a great two hander, the Hulu film, Run, which drops on November 20th. So check it out, please. You can follow the show wherever you get your podcasts. Review it on iTunes. That would be fantastic. I would really appreciate that. You can go to my website, <https://www.creatingbehaviorpodcast.com> for all the content and links. You can follow me on Instagram @creatingbehavior. You can follow my studio @maggieflaniganstudio Lawrence Trailer, thank

you for the song, my man. My friends, please, stay resilient. Play full out with yourself. Wear your God damn mask, and don't ever settle for your second best. My name is Charlie Sandlan. Peace.