

# Flylady and David Mamet agree

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How, and how much do you need to rehearse to be at your best? All of the work and advice on this site, and for monologues and acting in general, is useless if you don't rehearse enough, or if you rehearse ineffectively.

Sir Anthony Hopkins, I've heard, runs his lines 200 times before he shoots a movie scene. I thought this might have been exaggerated. But Mary Steenburgen, who was in the movie *Nixon* with Anthony Hopkins, confirmed this when she taught a guest class for Atlantic Acting School students a few years ago. Mary said she tried it too – ticking off the number of reps at the top of her script – and that even at 100 times she had to admit she still was not completely solid on her lines.

Watch some of Anthony Hopkins' acting and I think you will agree his method works for him. He practices the lines to the point that they are simply a part of him. There is no more distinction between the actor and the words – he *is* what he has to say, and it comes out of him as effortlessly as if he were actually that character. You will also notice that he does not embellish or push when he acts.

There are so many actors who say they really want to work, but who do not back this up with the simple, doable repetition and drilling that will make their best acting possible – on stage, and at auditions. They are no different than any of us who have made resolutions only to neglect the actions that will fulfill them.

Marla Cilley's (a.k.a. the Flylady) writings and website [Flylady.net](http://Flylady.net) helped me understand this syndrome as it relates to caring for and organizing one's home and life, and because her principles are so beautifully universal, they can just as easily be applied to being an actor or any kind of artist. See [Why Flylady is great for actors](#) on this site.

Flylady, and her own mentors Pam Young and Peggy Jones, describe a homemaker trapped in this syndrome as a SHE: a Sidetracked Home Executive. You know, the kind of personality who starts the day with huge ambitions and creative plans to get everything done; starts one thing, thinks of another, gets involved in that, thinks of another, and so through the day, so that sometimes the house is even messier at the end of the day because more was started and nothing was finished. Sound familiar?

Flylady helped me understand that SHE's are highly creative personalities who always see a better vision and a better way. This is wonderful. However, often

this creativity comes with perfectionism, which prevents them from completing daily tasks (“Why start when I know I am not going to accomplish everything today?”), or fear of boredom (“I can’t bear to chain my creative spirit down by doing something as tedious as laundry!”). She also knows that SHE’s will often be *too* creative each time about a chore and get fixated on it (like suddenly taking on an entire reorganization of the kitchen instead of just wiping the counter). Sound familiar? Again, at the end of the day, the basics have not been done. The SHE is exhausted and not truly creatively fulfilled, and goes to bed with a sense of being way behind and having no reward in sight (enter irritability, depression, sometimes even addictions).

My management of daily and creative life has benefited enormously from using Flylady’s principles for the last few years, and I regularly recommend them to friends and to actors I work with. As I became familiar with her system, I thought it was just hilarious when I realized how much Flylady’s home care principles echoed what we Atlantic Theater Company founders were taught in college acting classes in the 1980’s by our teacher David Mamet. Our reading list included a chapter called “Habit” from *The Principles of Psychology* by William James, which was about how human beings create good and bad habits that eventually control the quality of their lives. Mamet was making a point identical to Flylady’s insistence on routines: make into an unwavering habit each quality you want in your acting on a consistent basis – such as analyzing the scene for a specific objective, learning lines well enough, speaking up, and playing the truth of the moment no matter what – even if you are uncomfortable, or scared that you will be bad or boring. These habits, over time, can create powerful acting. The reverse is also true: bad or inconsistent habits will hurt the quality of what you have to offer your audience. We also learned a philosophy and set of practices with which to work in the theater as individuals and as a group. This created a structure that has lasted far longer than any of us – including Mamet and our other incredible teacher, actor William H. Macy – could have imagined. Our Off-Broadway **theater company** and **acting school** have passed their 20 year anniversaries and are going stronger than ever.

Here are short lists of the rather amazing parallels between what both Mamet and Flylady have to recommend. Mamet’s words are from my class notes of years ago.

<b>Flylady says</b>	<b>Mamet says</b>
Create – and automate – simple routines for your mornings and evenings and workdays that support you in leading the kind of life you want to live.	Make the difficult easy, the easy habitual, and the habitual beautiful
Take babysteps when creating new routines.	Be correct in the small things and you will be correct in the large things

Take regular breaks in the day and in the week.	Give yourself an inviolate day off each week. Doing so will benefit your work, not doing so will hurt your work.
Learn to recognize -- and resist -- the voice of perfectionism.	You know that little voice that says you're a fraud and you don't know how to play the scene? Tell that little voice to shut the f*** up.
Talk to yourself positively.	Give <i>yourself</i> the praise – don't wait for others to do it.
Housework imperfectly done still blesses you and your family.	Don't wait to become a perfect person: If you aren't going to be a mover and shaker in the American theater, who is?
You are never behind, just jump in where you are.	If not now, when?
You can do this: no whining allowed.	Stop making excuses: our willingness to rely on luck is why we have not done as well as we could. Good actors love to practice.

I believe both Mamet and Flylady would agree that if you don't have helpful habits and routines, you don't have the support you need to build a fulfilling life and career. Creating these practices takes time, so the best investment you can make in your acting, especially early on, is the creation of small, manageable habits, one step at a time.

We all know that trying to do too much all at once (perfectionism) only leads to crashing and burning. It is the willingness to do smaller, perhaps less exciting things regularly that can create both the craft and the force of personality that could become an Anthony Hopkins.

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