

Zoom and Doom; An Online Audition Goes Awry

By Tristram Shapeero

You probably don't know who I am, but you're likely familiar with my story. An actor, Lukas Gage, posted a clip on social media taken from a Zoom casting he and I had been a part of back in August. During it, an unmuted director makes reference to tiny apartments and 'these poor people,' referring to actors. The quick-witted Gage responds that he knows his apartment is 'shitty' and that is why he needs this job so he could get a better one.

Since Gage posted the video it has had millions of views and he has received support from all corners of the acting world and from many of his fans. Initially the director was not identified, although there was much speculation about who it was, which ultimately proved correct.

Despite what is probably wise advice: to say the least possible and let this pass, I have decided to come forward, take responsibility, make the apology Mr. Gage deserves, and offer some background for my unacceptable and insensitive remarks. I am Tristram Shapeero, a 20-year veteran television director, half in the UK, and the second half here in the US.

First and foremost I offer Mr. Gage a sincere and unvarnished apology for my offensive words, my unprofessional behavior during the audition and for not giving him the focus and attention he deserved. My job is to evaluate performers against the part I am trying to cast. Lukas deserved better.

This Zoom audition took place in August, after four months of lockdown. A number of my co-workers were also on the auditions which happened over several days. It was emotional to see actors work so hard to win the few parts available and we were deeply moved by the passion of these young people under the extraordinary circumstances.

I was using the word 'poor' in the sense of deserving sympathy, as opposed to any economic judgment. My words were being spoken from a genuine place of appreciation for what the actors were having to endure, stuck in confined spaces, finding it within themselves to give a role-winning performance under these conditions.

As I say on the video, I'm mortified about what happened. While I can't put the proverbial toothpaste back in the tube, I move forward from this incident a more empathetic man; a more focused director and I promise, an even better partner to actors from the audition process to the final cut.

With humility and gratitude,

Tristram Shapeero