

# Be A Great Straight Man

By Will Hines

The “straight man” is the voice of reason. It’s the person (woman or man, despite the probably soon-to-be-insanely-dated term straight ‘man’) who is confused by the unusual thing in the scene. He doesn’t agree that the weird thing is the way to go because is a voice of reason!

Someone says to you “Honey, we’ve talked about how our marriage is getting a little, well, stagnant. So starting this evening, in order to spice things up, I am going to hunt you.”

And you say “I do not want to be hunted, sweetheart. That’s dangerous!”

Aha! You are taking the “straight man” role. You’re pushing back against the funny idea in order to call attention to how weird it is. That’s called “framing” the unusual thing or else “calling it out.”

**PROBLEM:** if straight men get too forceful or dominant or fussy they can ruin a scene.

Luckily for you I am the greatest straight man on the face of the planet. For real. It’s my jam. I’m not as charismatic or as clever or as fun as almost anyone I’ve been on stage with. But there is no one — NO ONE - who can stare a silly idea in the face with as much delightful befuddlement as yours truly. I crush it as the straight man.

So here’s how to be a good one.

**Be Curious:** The straight man should always want to know more. “Why do you want to hunt me?” And if the other person is stuck for a reason, you have enough empathy to suggest one. “Sweetheart, is this because the guys at work say you’re not manly enough?”

**Be Almost Convinced:** The funniest posture for a straight man is to sit right on the brink of being convinced. No matter how insane the idea, you are almost ready to give it a shot. Better than a hard “NO” is a careful “I don’t THINK so....” I did a two-person improv team with a friend who like me was often a straight man in scenes and we called ourselves “The Furrowed Brows” because that was such a common expression when dealing with an insane idea.

**Point Out The Funniest Dumb Consequences:** Writers and

analytical people make great straight men because they quickly see the funniest consequences of a funny idea. The ones that are true, but that we the audience have not yet considered. In response to the above "I'm going to hunt you" you could say "You don't want to do that, you would be such a terrible widower." Or "And you'll clean up my body? I doubt it." Or "You couldn't defend yourself against a murder charge, you're a terrible liar."

**Challenge Them:** This is a more aggressive version of the previous tip: you challenge the silliness of the idea. "You want to murder me? Then what will do you when you're charged? Won't you be lonely?" Gauge the responses. If the other person isn't coming up with great reasons, back off. In fact, let's make that a tip on its own.

**If You're Ever "Winning," Back Off:** Generally speaking, if the voices of reason win, the scene feels smug and boring. We don't want you to "win" the scene. We just want you to explore and challenge the idea to get more fun out of it. So be ready to take your foot off the brakes and let the other person get their way in order for the scene to continue.

One of three basic tones you want to strike as a straight man:

**Be As Dry As Toast:** Just adopt a reasonable, moderate tone and engage the insanity with a disarming voice of reason, OR

**Have Just A Small Stick Up Your Rear:** Be perturbed, prissy and put off by the crazy person. OR

**Be Insanely Freaked Out:** Be completely taken apart by the craziness! Scream! This is the nuttiest idea you have ever heard of! This will ruin everything!

Regardless of your tone, you will STILL be ALMOST CONVINCED, you will still be CURIOUS, you will REMAIN ENGAGED and CHANGEABLE. Being a good straight man is so much fun. Get good at it and enjoy it.

<http://improvnonsense.tumblr.com/post/136900718516/be-a-great-straight-man>