

# Morris Chestnut: “I always try to get better. I still see acting coaches.”

[Terrific interview](#) with Hollywood veteran [Morris Chestnut](#). And speaking of chestnuts:

*Interviewer: Morris, you’ve had such a longstanding career in TV and in movies. What do you attribute that to? Some actors, you know, have a hard time sustaining their careers, but you’ve had such a long career. Why do you think that is?*

*Morris Chestnut: Wow, I think there are a number of different factors. I believe, for myself, a) I try to be a nice person. I come to work on time. I try to be prepared. But I think first and foremost, is I always try to get better. I still see acting coaches. I still go to acting classes. Even if I’m not in them, I go to watch them, because, I think as an actor, the more experiences we have, the more we need to be able to incorporate them in our work and use them for our work.*

*I know a lot of actors, once they get a movie or once they get a show, they think that, that’s it. They’ve made it, they don’t need a coach, they don’t need an acting class, they’re good, but I feel that **every actor can always continue to get better**. I mean, Tiger Woods, the best golfer in the world, he had a golfing swing coach. Michael Jordan had a coach. So, you know, I would say first and foremost, you’re just continuing to try to get better each day.*

So much wisdom in here.

Like that whole [always-trying-to-be-better](#) thing, which I wrote about in discussing Gary Marcus’ book *Guitar Zero*:

*The second prerequisite of expertise is what Ericsson calls “deliberate practice,” a constant sense of self-evaluation, of focusing on one’s weaknesses rather than simply fooling around and playing to one’s strengths. Studies show that practice aimed at remedying weaknesses is a better predictor of expertise than raw number of hours; playing for fun and repeating what you already know is not necessarily the same as efficiently reaching a new level. Most of the practice that most people do, most of the time, be it in the pursuit of learning the guitar or improving their golf game, yields almost no effect. Sooner or later, most learners reach a plateau, repeating what they already know rather than battling their weaknesses, at which point their progress becomes slow.*

Or take the whole [every-actor-can-always-continue-to-get-better](#) thing, which I have discussed in blogging about Josh Waitzkin’s remarkable book *The Art of Learning*:

*So one of the first important distinctions Waitzkin makes is between different theories of intelligence. We all have a theory of intelligence, that is, a picture of what our mind is and how it faces challenges. Here he is on the two types:*

*Children who are “entity theorists” – that is, kids who have been influenced by their parents and teachers to think in this manner – are prone to use language like “I am smart at this” and to attribute their success or failure to an ingrained and unalterable level of ability. They see their overall intelligence or skill level at a certain thing to be a fixed entity, a thing that cannot evolve. Incremental theorists, who have picked up a different modality of learning– let’s call them learning theorists – are more prone to describe their results with sentences like “I got it because I worked very hard for it” or “I should have tried harder.” A child with a learning theory of intelligence tends to sense that with hard work, difficult*

*material can be grasped – step by step, incrementally, the novice can become the master.*

*Waitzkin goes on to cite a study by developmental psychologists that beautifully illustrates the hold that these theories of intelligence has over the minds of learners:*

*a group of children was interviewed and then each child was noted as having either an entity or a learning theory of intelligence. All the children were then given a series of easy math problems, which they all solved correctly. Then, all the children were given some very hard problems to solve– problems that were too difficult for them. It was clear that the learning theorists were excited by the challenge, while the entity theorists were dismayed. Comments would range from “Oh boy, now I’m really gonna have to try hard” to “I’m not smart enough for this.” Everyone got those problems wrong– but evidently the experience of being challenged had very different effects. What is most interesting is the third phase of this experiment: all the children were once again given easy problems to solve. Nearly all of the learning theorists breezed right through the easy material, but the entity theorists had been too dispirited by the inability to solve the hard problems that many of them foundered through the easy stuff. Their self-confidence had been destroyed.*

Or the whole I-try-to-be-prepared thing.

*You never get a second chance to make a first impression.*

I think that was from a shampoo commercial in the eighties. But it’s undeniably true. And showing up prepared is the best hope any of us have for making a good first impression.

Thank you, Morris Chestnut. Very inspiring words.