

Los Angeles

UPWARD MOMENTUM

By Bruce B. Morris

Ross Reports gets up to speed with Garry Purdy and Mike Baldrige of



November of 2006 saw the arrival in Los Angeles of Momentum Talent and Literary Agency. Garry Purdy, who heads the agency, brings a wide range of experience to the table when it comes to representing talent.

Like many agents, Garry started out as an actor after getting his BA from UC Irvine. While in LA pursuing “the dream,” Garry started interning at several companies including publicity firms, casting offices and talent agencies before eventually becoming an assistant agent and then very quickly moving to the head of new talent. He then went on to take over the commercial and print department at the Beverly Hecht Agency for several years. It was there at Beverly Hecht that Garry met and started working with Mike Baldrige.

Mike comes from a technology and finance background, having worked at companies such as IBM and Bank of America, where he was Senior Vice President in Technology and Operations. Mike eventually decided to “chuck it all” and make a go for the entertainment industry.

Both view their time at Beverly Hecht as an incredible experience that prepared them well for starting Momentum. *Ross Reports* recently had the opportunity to talk with both of them and find out their goals for cultivating new talent and what they have to offer their clients.

Ross Reports: What is the philosophy of Momentum Talent and Literary Agency?

Garry Purdy: Work twice as hard, be twice as good, and be twice as nice.

Mike Baldrige: When you start a new agency, you are completely dependent on your relationships with casting to survive. Your submissions have to be twice as spot on, twice as good, and you have to be twice as nice on the phone. Because they better enjoy talking to you or they just won't.

RR: How do you find new performers? Do you attend showcases in search of new clients?

Purdy: Most new theatrical clients tend to come through industry referrals (managers and casting) although we also find new theatrical and commercial talent online, through showcases and through submissions. We have a lot of managers and casting directors asking us to please meet with talent they believe in and we try (as best our schedule will allow) to see as many of these referrals as we can.

Baldridge: Especially with casting and the high level managers, it just makes good business sense to meet with the clients they believe in. If the meeting results in a good match and we feel we can get the referred client out, then you have the added bonus of the good will established between the agency and the casting office or the high level manager (who may have other high profile clients to refer and this has happened many, many times).

RR: What areas does the agency specialize in?

Purdy: We represent everyone from Emmy and Golden Globe winners to “up and coming” development clients. Of course it’s just one less challenge when new clients have significant credits on their resumes, but there are often times when we’ll see that special talent that has so much potential, we’ll take the chance. These “start from scratch” clients tend to require a lot of work. But many times, we’ve seen these young actors that don’t have anything on their resumes get unbelievable opportunities (we just had this happen on a three picture test deal with DreamWorks and Paramount).

Baldridge: It’s a crazy balance, because you have to have your series regulars and your award-winning resumes to be taken seriously in the business. However, the irony is: the kid from Idaho on your roster with nothing on his resume can just as easily pop because he happens to have the right look. During the last pilot season, after Momentum was in business for only one month, we had 39 series regular opportunities (many, many thanks to casting for this), some of which went all the way to network test. If you look at the way those were distributed, a large percentage went to complete unknowns who just had that “IT” factor. But the reality is: they wouldn’t have gotten the opportunity to get in front of casting, the producers, the studio and the network, if the agency wasn’t also known for having its series regular, Emmy and Golden Globe winning

resumes. Those strong resumes are a large part of why the packages get opened (that and the agency’s personal relationships with casting, etc.)

Purdy: Kids are more straightforward with much less emphasis on the resume. You just need great kids with the right look. We are especially focused on continuing to build our youth department and over 18 to play younger in all ethnicities. We are also known for our “very attractive” 19-29 category and the business still seems fairly forgiving resume-wise to this group. But even with these great looking young adults, you have to start leaning on the agency’s credibility in the absence of a strong resume. With clients in the 30+ age bracket, unless you’re looking at some serious guest stars credits, it can sometimes require nothing short of “divine intervention” plus some serious horse power behind the agency to get an audition (but we see miracles every day).

RR: When you receive a headshot/resume from an actor, what do you look for?

Purdy: Someone who stands out, is unique, different, not like everyone else out there. It has to be someone who grabs our attention, not someone that can get lost in the crowd. If a client and the agency decide to work together, we want to know that they are going to grab the casting directors’ attention. Having said that, we can love your headshot, but what really “seals the deal” for us is the client’s demo reel, especially the online demo reels that have become such a critical part of the business. When we see your reel, we know in the first 30 seconds, much like casting does, if we see that “magic” or if the potential for that magic is there. I can’t emphasize enough how important having very strong, very specific 60-second online demo segments is. Within your demos, don’t mix your comedy with your drama; don’t mix your thug with your business guy. If you confuse your buyer by mixing types, you’re going to lose the job, more than get yourself a job.

These days, you'll be way ahead of the game if you have type specific online headshots combined with type specific 60-second online demo segments. You have to understand that casting is looking at 36 tiny pictures on a computer screen these days. They just don't have the time to be as imaginative any more, plus the pictures are fairly small on the screen. The headshot has to "scream" blue collar, the picture has to "scream" executive, etc. and you best have a type specific online demo segment to back it up. It's that winning combination that will knock down those casting doors.

Baldridge: For me, a lot of the time, it comes down to: is the person defined? Do I look at the person and know exactly who they are and what to do with them. In our experience, a very difficult category is the boy next door or the girl next door. Because the definition of that type is "you don't stand out!" So how can you get a client to stand out when the definition of their type is "you don't stand out?" It's much easier from a marketing perspective to either have a character person, or a very leading person. When clients are "in the middle," that's when you have to advise. You have to make a choice, and you can't split the difference. In the beginning of a career, it's much easier to sell a definite character or a definite leading type.

Purdy: Or you can be someone like David Schwimmer, where he's good looking with a lot of the guy next door qualities, but he's so talented nobody cares (this is the rare case).

RR: What other qualities, besides talent, do you look at in order to take on a client?

Purdy: When we meet new talent, they can have the look, they can have the

resume, but if the personality is missing, if they're not that great human being you want to work with, forget it! They can get more talented, they can even get more attractive, but success in this business tends to magnify a person's personality, so you have to start from a great place. You also have to ask yourself: are they genuine, and would producers and directors want to work with them. If we think they're genuine and want to work with them, then *other* people in the business are going to want to work with them as well. You also have to ask, does an actor have a sense of who they are and are they comfortable with it. Especially with development clients, more often than not, an actor will get cast for playing who he or she is.

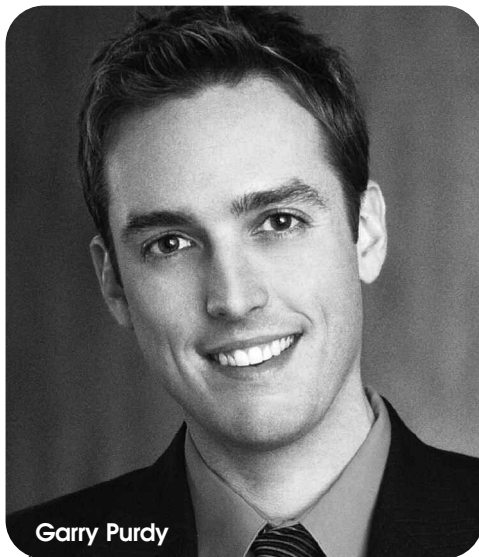
RR: If you meet with an actor and feel that they could be more marketable with some changes, would you help them through the transformation or make strong recommendations?

**"IF A CLIENT AND THE AGENCY DECIDE TO WORK TOGETHER, WE WANT TO KNOW THAT THEY ARE GOING TO GRAB THE CASTING DIRECTORS' ATTENTION."
—GARRY PURDY**

Purdy: Yes, as much as sometimes they don't want to hear it. A lot of people have an idea about what their look is, or what they think works for them, and sometimes we think it's different. We'll make suggestions as to how we believe we can market the actor better. Sometimes it will be as simple as a wardrobe or a hairstyle change or how they carry themselves.

Baldridge: This subject gets particularly sensitive with actresses. Specifically actresses that may have had a great career and now are entering their 30's or 40's, because longevity in this business is *not* retaining one's youth. Longevity is reinventing yourself continually. That's where we really have to work with clients sometimes, especially the bigger resume clients that worked a lot in their 20's, and now are struggling in their 30's, because they still perceive themselves in the younger roles. Again, you're most likely going to book *who you are*. If you are the geek tech guy, let's not try to take a headshot of you as the slick, stock trader. We've had many "outside the world of reality" conversations with perspective clients that may be a definite character geek-type and they'll say "my last agent doesn't get me. I'm clearly leading, and they keep submitting me for nerd types." Literally, it happens. That's when you have to sit the client down and make them really look at who they are, and make sure their marketing materials match how they're going to be perceived the minute they walk into a room. It's a trap to believe you *have* to be glamorous, that you *have* to be leading, that you *have* to be the Marlboro man. Sometimes the most successful clients are the opposite of that. I tell people: take the flaws, take the big nose, the big ears – whatever it is, the thing you fear most, the thing you most dread about yourself and exploit it. That's what *you* bring to the table. If you've got a big nose, don't take a headshot that hides it. Take a headshot that shows *that* big nose. If you've got big ears, don't cover them with your hair in the headshot. Let's see *those* big ears. Capitalize on what you've got. *You* are the most interesting and unique thing you bring to the business. Don't hide what may be your biggest asset and get lost in the melting pot by trying to be like everybody else.

RR: How often should a performer change his or her headshot?



Garry Purdy

Purdy: When starting out, especially commercially, if the pictures aren't working (and we usually know within the first three weeks how casting is responding to a picture), you need to keep changing it up until you get "the shot" that does work. It's also becoming more and more critical to have a variety of looks up online that are, as we've said, type specific. The bottom line is *you can't argue with casting*. They either respond to your picture or they don't. So you *must* get the shot that captures their attention over the other pictures on the screen they're looking at. The pictures *must* always look like you. People age differently and whenever your picture no longer accurately represents you, you're not doing anybody any favors by hanging on to outdated headshots. In between, it's also not a bad idea to try a shoot here and there to change things up a bit, throw some new pictures into the mix, or perhaps experiment with a new look or type (always check with your agent and manager first for direction/ input on this).

RR: What are some of the common mistakes you see actors make when auditioning?

Purdy: They don't relax and enjoy the process. They need to learn to like it, even love it and then everyone in the room will love them. Also, when given material to read for an agency, actors need to constantly try to find different levels to play. After we've watched the same scene many times, it can get boring (just like for casting) when we see only one emotional note being played, such as just being "angry". We want to see some range.

Baldrige: Remember, again just like casting, we *want* you to be good. We *want* you to be great. We want to stop looking for that perfect actor to fill the spot on the roster, so come in knowing that we're on your side and *own* the room without *overpowering* the room. And a special note for theatre trained actors: give us the close up not the performance to reach the back of the theatre. We're sitting a few feet from you and we want to see what the camera will see that close, subtle but brilliant performances that are real in every moment.

RR: Are there things that actors should avoid that might make you not want to represent them?

Purdy: When an actor comes in after having other representation sometimes they'll speak negatively about their experience with the other agency. It's never attractive to hear that negativity. We want to hear about the *positive* things that are happening in your career. That's the biggest one for me. Also actors sometimes come in for a meeting and they've brought their girlfriend, boyfriend or a group of friends with them. If you're under 18, of course it's fine to come in with a parent, but over 18, we need to see that you can handle the process on your own (just like an audition). Also, sometimes actors will come in and try too hard to be interesting, and usually that doesn't work. We have a saying, "try to be more *interested* in the conversation than interesting." In other words, if you're truly engaged and "in the moment" with the conversation, the rest will take care of itself.



Mike Baldrige

But don't get me wrong; you should still take ownership of the meeting, and keep it positive and moving along.

Baldrige: There's a fundamental test when perspective clients walk out of the office: do you have more or less energy than when they walked in? With most actors, you could talk to them all day long, because they have such great energy and you're actually revived after they leave the room. But some can literally exhaust you during the process, and you can rest assured that casting is going to have the same reaction. Keep the conversation moving *back and forth* between you and the agents so that everyone is learning about each other in the process and be sensitive to when it feels like the meeting is coming to an end. On the prior representation subject: even if you've had a bad experience there is always a positive way to phrase that: 'I was with so-and-so agency. I appreciated all the effort they put into my career, but the combination just wasn't working, and so I think it's time to make a change.' That's a positive way to look back on it. Very few clients have a real idea of how much work goes on behind the scenes at the agency each and every day for their

career. If we have a client that we're having difficulty getting out with their current headshots, etc., we'll send them a submission report to let them know how we've been handling their coverage and what we think needs to change. Sometimes this has brought the client literally to tears when they've seen the hundreds of submissions that have been made on their behalf. Most clients have no idea the amount of daily energy it takes to keep their career going, whether or not casting is responding to their current marketing materials (headshots, demos, etc.)

RR: What are some factors that contribute to a breakdown in communication between an actor and an agent, and how do you avoid that?

Baldrige: It's never usually what you say; it's how you say it. So, for example, a great way for a development client to phrase the, "I want to get out more" phone call is: "Hey, I just wanted to kick around some ideas about what I can do to help, whether that's workshops, interning for casting, going to charity events, whatever." That frames the whole discussion in a much more positive light, than when a development client calls to say: "I didn't get out last week, what's the problem?" *We know* you didn't get out last week. *We know* exactly when you got out and when you didn't. With development clients, it takes a *village* of people and their efforts to get a career started. It's so much work, but it can also be the most rewarding when you get someone to that next level.

Purdy: Another thing clients have to understand from the beginning; this business is not fair. It expects everything from you. It expects you to be available 24/7. It

expects you to have a job, and feed yourself, and then it expects you to be available at all times for auditions. One thing that significantly contributes to the breakdown in the agent-client relationship is not being available for an audition or asking for a reschedule because you have some non-industry-related conflict, such as, "I have to go to work". Look, we get it, we know you have to feed yourself, but you *have* to be available during audition windows. Another killer is when a client doesn't book out to let us know when they're not available. If we call you for an audition today and you're in Florida and we didn't know about it – that's not good. Even when you book out, I guarantee, that will be the week Ron Howard is going to want to see you for a role in his film. It's happened so many times, I can't tell you. In other words, fair or not, you have to always be available, and you have to make your acting career your first priority. That's why you are here.

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—MIKE BALDRIDGE

RR: If an actor isn't getting enough work from his representation, how can they get out of the arrangement, especially if they are signed?

Purdy: I think you start by asking yourself if you feel that you and the agent have really gone over everything, have tried different types, looks and approaches, have you provided the agent with all of the necessary tools to promote your career (headshots,

demo reels, relationships through workshops, etc.)? If that's the case and the team still can't get anything going, I don't think most agents would have a problem letting the client out of a contract. Sometimes the connection is just not there or the energy is just not right and you don't want to hold anybody back from a possibility of better success.

RR: What can an agent do for a performer that might prevent them from getting typecast?

Purdy: If a development client is working, there's nothing wrong with getting typecast.

Baldrige: That's right. Don't be afraid to be typecast in the beginning. Initially your goal *should* be to get typecast. Get known all over town as that glasses guy who does the techie roles, as the martial arts, butt-kicking Russian adventuress, as the blue blood woman who speaks in proper English. Then, when you have established yourself by excelling in these specific roles (that probably won't be too far off of who you are as a person in real life), you'll have the validation (and the experience) to be considered for broader characters. Until then, the biggest disservice you can do to yourself is not being defined, not being instantly recognizable as a type, and not being at casting's fingertips with them knowing exactly what to do with you. Casting, producers, etc. will be far more willing to give you a chance on a role that's a stretch from your personality and type once they've seen your proven track record of success. Especially with the development roster, typecast away!

RR: What is your submission policy?

Purdy: Our primary way of receiving submissions is through industry referral, but, we know how tough it is out there – so get your picture and resume in front of us however you can – through the mail, drop-off, e-mail, we try and look at everything. Just remember, especially if you're going to

try and drop-off to “read the room”. If things are going a hundred miles an hour we're probably only going to have time to say a very quick “Hi” and “Thank you” for the drop off. You have to strike that balance between persistence and over doing it. We've seen so many different ways that actors have approached the agency. Sometimes they'll send something truly clever with their headshot, an eye-catching card of some kind, etc. But remember, first and foremost for development clients, it still comes down to a great headshot, a great demo reel or a great read in the office (plus hopefully at least a few credits on the resume).

RR: What are some of the success stories in finding new talent?

Purdy: We have a couple but I know one in particular. My sister and I were at a grocery store when I noticed this huge, seven-foot tall guy, and thought “Wow, that's something unique”. I was telling my sister, and she said, “Well, give him a card.” She grabbed a card from me and gave it to him. So the next week he called me, and said he was reading an agency book, and wanted to get an agent. He came in, we talked, and since then he's gotten into the unions, he's booked a film, shot a couple of commercials — one opposite Shaquille O'Neal, and he's rocking and rolling.

Baldrige: I think, in terms of new talent, some really exciting clients have come to us through management referrals. Typically what happens when you're [a] new [agency], a manager will start by placing a few of their development or mid-level people with you. There's no stronger vote of confidence than when that same manager then comes back and places their twenty guest star resumes and their three time series regular clients with us. We now have managers who are bringing clients to us that already have deals in place and we couldn't ask for anything more generous than that. A great new talent story came through just such a manager. We already had two of this manager's larger resume

clients and he asked us to please look after one of his newer development clients. We all really liked her, but without much on her resume, we were definitely taking her out of respect for this manager. Well who would have thought that *she* (the development client) would be the one who wound up getting the three-picture test deal from DreamWorks and Paramount! That's what keeps this business so interesting every day; you just never know what's going to happen for which client next. As a side note on the managers we work with; we really pride ourselves on being part of a team. We include the managers in just about every conversation and discussion and we present a united front to the client. This teamwork with our management companies has resulted in some incredible referrals to the agency. We're very excited about this pilot season because of the level of resumes on the roster. Literally in the last three weeks alone we've picked up a three-time series regular and a two-time series regular. It's exciting to go into pilot season with that kind of horsepower.

RR: What is the best way to succeed in the entertainment business?

Purdy: Never give up. Never give up. Never give up. No matter who tells you that you can't, won't, shouldn't, do it anyway. So many actors working today have been out of work for 10 or 15 years – and they never gave up. In the meantime, you have to find a way to be happy. Whatever that is. You have to find your happiness until you make it. We have an actress that waited on a casting director today. The actress has a naturally great personality, but, *she was also happy*. As a result, the caster brought her in for an audition. This was because the actress is in a great place mentally and emotionally while she's moving forward towards her goal every day. You know Olympic athletes? They don't win gold medals over night. It takes a lot of discipline and hard work. Always stay focused. Keep your eye on the goal.

Baldrige: Another thing we tell our clients: you have to love *the hunt*, not the reward in the beginning. Get up every morning and ask yourself: how am I going to move my career forward today? How am I going to make another connection in this industry? What workshop am I going to do this week? In other words, love the *process*. If you love auditioning, if you love figuring out how you're going to open that next door, you will wake up every morning feeling satisfied whether or not you booked that week. If you place all of your attention on the reward and "Why don't I have it yet!" you're not going to enjoy this business very much. Of course, you have to keep your eye on the end game, you have to keep your goal in mind, but a lot of times the decision as to whether or not you get booked is outside of your control. But your ability to get in the room over another actor who is not as proactive, your ability to do an outstanding job in the audition over another actor that didn't take the time to get coached, *that is* within your control. The other thing is you have to give yourself permission to succeed. If you can't see yourself 70 feet across up on that screen, if you can't see yourself as a series regular, it's going to be hard for those series of events to line up for you. When someone comes into the agency, you can tell who has given themselves permission to be there, who has given themselves permission to be successful, who has given themselves permission to be a client, and who values what they bring to the table. Casting senses it immediately. It's not that you go into a room being obnoxious or cocky, but you go in knowing that you *belong*. You *belong* in that room. You *belong* at that audition. You *belong* at that agency. And that, is such a refreshing thing to see. **RR**

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