

Heather Coombs

Equity

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## Can you tell us a bit about your career to date?

I always knew I was going to be an actor, even as a kid. I went to Oxford Uni & then Drama Studio, London, followed by the world of theatre, rep & panto. After a few years I started to get BBC TV comedy work as well & am especially proud of 'People Like Us' from this time. When I first had my two girls I started to do more VoiceOver, corporate video & role play work which kept me busy before, and then alongside, returning to theatre, TV & film.

My most recent work has included 'Call the Midwife', 'Silent Witness', 'Hanna' and James Graham's Brexit: The Uncivil War'. Before lockdown in 2020, I filmed a horror short 'Upstairs' for Phillip Trow and 'The Nevers' for Joss Whedon, an HBO drama in 10 parts that will be released in 2021. During 2020 another short, "Crashing', has been doing well at Film Festivals - most recently getting a Special Mention in the Best International Short category at the prestigious Foyle Film Festival in Ireland. I also did a Christmas ad - so different to be on set in a Covid world.

When we locked down in March 20, like many others, I initially panicked and thought that work would never be the same again. I needed to regroup. I decided to adapt a monologue I had been going to perform in the theatre into a 35-minute film. This was an adaptation of 'Troll' by Annie Fox, which we worked on together and had to cut substantially in order to work onscreen.

I spent most of lockdown in 2020 filming and editing this project and have just started sending it out to casting directors as a calling card or statement of intent. I'm also going to enter it into film festivals. In 2021, I started working on new audio work with a lovely actress friend in Chicago via the internet and have just been cast in another TV

What do you like most about your work? I love the people and the variety of acting. In fact, I love everything about what I do. I have never wanted to do anything else. It's just a joy to create a role, with the support of a company. I love telling stories in an interesting way. I particularly like naturalistic productions whether comedy or drama and love improv.

## What are the biggest challenges of maintaining a freelance career?

The most difficult thing is dealing with the ups and downs and maintaining your enthusiasm through the tough times. It can be so hard not to take it personally even though I know it's not the case.

It's also a compromise when you have to take work because you need the money when it's not something you really want to do. Money or kudos is not always enough. You have to keep a clear head so you don't say yes to something you really don't want to do, and end up missing out on a role that makes your heart sing.

## Have you added new skills to your portfolio over time?

Last summer I added vision and sound editing, including creating psychological sound and playing with room sound, rumbles, burps and birdsong. Also, I've been polishing up my French as well as improving my selftaping setup, for which the FEU Training workshop, 'Mobile Video Kickstarter', has been invaluable.

## What is the biggest challenge of learning the skills that you need?

It can be hard finding good advice and to get really specific and useful feedback. It can also be a challenge to stay grounded so you can keep working on something achievable,

> when the overall vision is sometimes too overwhelming. I am a creative and have to be business-like in order

# >>Snapshot

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to find new opportunities to be creative. It's good to get creative about how I get those opportunities.

## What FEU Training courses have you attended?

- · Get Noticed
- · Get Hired
- Boost your Creativity webinar
- Dealing with Setbacks
- How to Drive Traffic to your Website
- How to Run a Crowdfunding Campaign
- Negotiation Skills
- Realistic Optimism
- Tools for Goal Setting.

## What are the most important things that you've learned?

When I first found FEU Training some years ago, through my co-op agency Inspiration Management, it really helped me through a rough patch when I needed some direction to support me. It gave me ideas for things to do when I needed to take some practical steps.

I first attended workshops on CV writing and Interview skills, which helped me streamline how I presented myself. I started being much more selective about what I included. The workshops drilled down on how to be even more precise in writing letters and emails.

Recently, I used the social media skills I learned from FEU Training when I created the trailer for 'Troll', which, when shared on Twitter @CoombsHeather has had to date. around 8500 impressions and almost 2,500 views. This is the largest response I have ever got, as I personally only have around 700 followers. So all the tips and advice from the workshops worked to spread the word!

On the goal setting workshop, I stayed in touch with my 'goal buddy' and when I got a great part in 'Brexit: The Uncivil War' (getting a good part in a noteworthy drama had been on my goal list), my goal buddy got in touch and congratulated me - such great camaraderie.

I like that I can go back and look at the notes from workshops, redo exercises and remind myself about what I have learned. I always feel like me, the professional me, when I attend FEU Training workshops, as they offer grounded and practical advice presented by fellow creative freelance tutors.

Workshops are always about what you can do, not what you can't and more importantly, how to do it. I like the focus on the business side where things like crowd funding

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and creating a podcast are demystified and presented in a very accessible way.

## What has encouraged you to attend FEU training sessions?

The workshop titles grab my interest. There is always something to learn, always some great topics to tap into. I've never been to an FEU Training workshop and not learned something useful to take away.

I like the continuity of the team and the tutors. It's such a great networking opportunity and it's brilliant that it brings the four participating unions together so that you meet people who work outside your genre. I made contact with someone on a recent workshop that I'm following up regarding my film 'Troll'.

In a recent online workshop, I was in a breakout room with a writer and musician, which felt so connected and creative. It makes you realise how much we all have in common

It would be tragic if this stopped, the thought makes me feel very sad as we need it now more than ever.

## Do you know any other organisation that offers business skills courses for creative? No.

