

Pick it up before each tournament and try to read it again “for the first time.” You’ll be surprised at what you find.

— Dr. James M. Brandon

We sometimes switch roles. We often alter blocking. Sometimes we add vocal music in the intro. We do many dramatic exercises to help discover the characters and make them fuller during the season.

— David Scheidecker

Experiment casting each scene as a different movie genre: mystery, sci-fi, farce, musical, and so forth. Finding new hidden meaning will reveal a wealth of new life to a piece.

— Michael Graupmann

We try to expand their thinking — think outside the box; try new things with delivery and blocking.

— Jaye Morrison

Never settle into your performance so much that it doesn’t change — even if you’re winning! Often judges will see you more than once in a season. We love to find that even the best scenes have progressed and improved. Look for new moments each time you rehearse or perform. Watch for what your scene partner is giving you and ensure that you are returning the favor!

— Dan Foss

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We would like to thank those who kindly offered their helpful advice. In the pages that follow, we hope you find a scene that sets your soul ablaze — that you simply *must* do. Be sure to check out the other books in our Forensics Series. Good luck in all competitions and remember—have *fun*!

Barbara Lhota and Janet B. Milstein

SHIPSHAPE

Renee, twenty-seven, has brought herself to the ShipShape Weight Loss Program because she gained a lot of weight after bearing her first child several years back. The problem is that Renee hates restrictive programs. Karl, the coach of the local ShipShape Program, is doing his occasional heart-to-hearts with current weigh-ins to see how they are faring with the daily Stack-O-Snack cards. Renee, being a longtime poker fan, has made some major alterations to the rules of the program. She waits impatiently to be weighed in, with a mountainous chip on her shoulder, when Karl finally approaches, waving her weekly logbook.

CHARACTERS

Renee: 27, overweight member of ShipShape Weight Loss Program

Karl: late 20s, the coach of the local ShipShape Program

SETTING

ShipShape Weight Loss Center

TIME

The present

RENEE: (*Impatiently looking at her watch.*) Jeez, this line was long today, huh? I was supposed to pick up my kid half an hour ago.

KARL: Every few weeks us coaches like to really talk to people. Get a feel for how well one is following the ShipShape Program. We do it right while we weigh in. I’m Karl.

RENEE: Well, Karl, I sucked this week at ShipShake . . . Shape. Thinking about my thighs shakin’ not shapin’. Here’s my log. (*Handing him her logbook.*) I’m just here to see how fat I am and get out of here quick.

KARL: (*Wagging finger.*) Uh, uh, uh. We're all weight-endowed, hoping to be weight-reduced. We don't use the F-word.

RENEE: That depends on what that scale says, doesn't it? And I'm not talking the F-A-T word if you know what I mean, Karl.

KARL: I'm glad to see you have a little sense of humor. Now, what did you have a problem with this week?

RENEE: Eating. Now, my car's at a meter. Can I . . . (*Starts to step on scale.*)

KARL: (*Blocks the scale.*) No, no, no. Now, let's slow down. Let's breathe. (*Looking at her.*) Breathe.

RENEE: I don't want to.

KARL: Why not?

RENEE: I've been doing it naturally for years. I have it down to a science.

KARL: Now, come on, we don't need to rush everywhere. It just gets us all worked up.

RENEE: No, it's the *lack* of rushing that gets me worked up. The ticketing of the car that gets me really, really worked up.

KARL: OK, I hear your frustration. And I understand. I've been through this. I have. The first couple of weeks, it's hard to understand the program fully. It's hard to change old habits.

RENEE: Oh God! (*Sighs.*) Now you have me sighing . . . breathing. Are you happy? Can I step on the scale now or what?

KARL: Before you step on the scale, it's good, it's healthy to talk about things here a little bit . . . uh . . . (*Looking for the name tag.*) Where's your name tag?

RENEE: I'm not staying for the meeting.

KARL: Not staying for the meeting? (*To others around.*) Do you hear this? She's not staying for the meeting. (*To Renee.*) As you can see, frowns abound at that.

RENEE: Well, turn the mob against me, why don't you? I can't stay for the meeting, OK? My two-year-old daughter is wreaking havoc on my sister's new couch right this second.

KARL: Yes, but these fat grams are wreaking havoc on your

ShipShape Spirit. Stealing your soul every second of your life. Which is more important — your sister's stupid couch or your soul?

RENEE: My sister's couch is not stupid. It's not even a couch. It's like a, like a sofa. And it's absolutely gorgeous! And uninsured!

KARL: And what about your soul?

RENEE: Well, I was baptized and confirmed. I know I use a lot of profanity and only show up to church on major holidays. But still, I'd like to think I'm semicovered.

KARL: What's your name?

RENEE: Renee.

KARL: (*Elongating it.*) Renee. That's a beautiful name.

RENEE: Cut the crap. Get to the point.

KARL: How did you do dealing our Stack-O-Snack cards this week?

RENEE: Stacking was fine. Real good. It was the snacking that got a little out of hand.

KARL: So did you stay within your allotted cards per day?

RENEE: Uh . . . more or less.

KARL: More or less? Can you elaborate on that?

RENEE: I just drew a couple of extra cards.

KARL: Extra cards? But, but you can't draw extra cards. Renee, you're only allotted eleven cards per day.

RENEE: I know but that's so odd. Eleven is so odd. I thought I'd go with a nice even twelve instead.

KARL: But that's not the program.

RENEE: Well, la-de-da. There's no room to be flexible?

KARL: Well, you'll gain that way.

RENEE: Oh come on. It was just one card. One measly, green-vegetable-crud card.

KARL: (*Relieved.*) OK. Well . . . I'm glad it was a vegetable card at least.

RENEE: Yeah. Except that I didn't use it for vegetables.

KARL: What?!

RENEE: I hate vegetables. That's why I had to make green wild.

KARL: Wild?
RENEE: I had to.
KARL: You can't suddenly make a card wild. Green is supposed to be a green leafy vegetable.
RENEE: Yeah. But that's so limiting.
KARL: It's supposed to be, Renee!
RENEE: I said wild! Wild. It didn't mean you *couldn't* have a green leafy vegetable.
KARL: So did you?
RENEE: No! Would you? Given the choice? *(Beat.)* Wait, the chocolate cake had vegetable oil in it. That counts. That's how they make vegetable oil, isn't it? With green leafy vegetables?
KARL: This is a scientific program, Renee. It's scientifically designed for weight loss. You receive eleven cards. A perfect, color-coded mix of each of the four basic food groups.
RENEE: Yeah. That's why I wanted to shake it up a bit.
KARL: Shake it up? We don't shake it up.
RENEE: That's painfully obvious, hon.
KARL: Well, that's how you do it. The same group of cards every day.
RENEE: So who always wants to be dealt the same hand day after day? Boorrring. Some days you want to win. Some days you don't mind . . . winning more.
KARL: Renee. This is not a winning game.
RENEE: That's not what your commercials say, is it?
KARL: I mean, it's a winning game but not like you're describing.
RENEE: I know. I just played a lot of cards when I was a kid. Actually, I had a little gambling issue. That's probably why I discarded a few.
KARL: Discarded? No! You can't discard. Discarding is not part of the program.
RENEE: Jeez, you're uptight. Haven't you ever played Five Card Draw? You know, you discard a few cards you don't like, and pick up the same number as you discarded.

KARL: That's cheating!
RENEE: No it's not! It's how you play the game.
KARL: But you won't have a perfect mix of the four food groups.
RENEE: Picky, picky! This way you could get a better hand. A dairy flush! A carb full-house.
KARL: I don't think you grasp the program, Renee. You only pick additional cards — one to two cards — if you've completed twenty-five minutes of activity.
RENEE: I did. I went to the laundromat.
KARL: *Rigorous* activity.
RENEE: You haven't seen my laundromat. This elderly woman tried to steal my dryer. She strangled me with her wet nylons. I had to wrestle her to the ground. I earned those two cards.
KARL: I don't think you're taking this seriously enough, Renee. Do you really want to lose weight?
RENEE: Yes. But I think the card concept gets me competitive. I want to have a great hand.
KARL: Wouldn't ya rather have a great bod? Huh?! *(She frowns.)* Besides, you're not playing against anybody.
RENEE: Well, how fun is that? No wonder I think the Ship-Shape Program sucks. Maybe we should be playing against each other. Ever think of that, huh? Make it like a real game.
KARL: Oh yeah, sure, then we can just go crazy and play War, or Go Fish. *(Getting frustrated.)* Trading in all our cards every which way with each other so that we have no nutritional value whatsoever and become big honking lard-balls. Is that what you want?!

RENEE: Wow. You're angry.
KARL: No, I'm not. I'm fine. I'm good. I'm Karl.
RENEE: Yes, you're also pissed. This program makes you really tense, doesn't it?
KARL: No, I love it. I love it. I really love it. I've lost sixty pounds on it. This is what I think the problem is, Renee. You see, I've isolated this to a card problem here. I think

playing cards isn't a good concept for you to think about.
Let's use a shopping concept.

RENEE: Oh great. I love shopping. I'm a shop-a-holic.

KARL: You are given a salary of eleven cards per day. No more.
No less. Each time you use a card, you purchase food. Once
the cards—in other words, the money—are gone. No more
food.

RENEE: What about credit?

KARL: There is no credit.

RENEE: How about a loan? Say I borrow twenty percent of
tomorrow's cards for today?

KARL: There is no credit.

RENEE: Well, how un-American is that? How can you work
the system?

KARL: You don't. You commit to the program as is. You just
try it for this week and see what results it yields.

RENEE: All right.

KARL: All right?

RENEE: Yeah. I'll do what you say. I'll do the eleven-card thing.
Fine. My meter's probably expired by now.

KARL: OK. So now, when you step on the scale, I don't want
you to have any false expectations.

RENEE: Fine.

KARL: You were getting used to the program — settling into
it — so you wouldn't have lost weight yet. Don't want to build
up false impressions. But you will. You hold onto your faith.

RENEE: All right. All right, Karl. Would you let me get on the
scale now?
*(Karl nods and gestures to it. Renee sucks in her stomach
loudly.)*

RENEE: *(Handing stuff to Karl.)* Here take my sweater and my
hat. And my ring. I just don't want it to give me a false read-
ing. *(Renee steps on the scale.)*

KARL: *(Karl's face drops.)* Oh boy. Oh my —

RENEE: That bad?

KARL: No, this couldn't be right.

RENEE: How bad is it? How bad could it be?

KARL: You lost ten pounds.

RENEE: *(Disappointed.)* Oh great! Lost? *(Realizing.)* That's
good! I lost!

KARL: No, it isn't. There must be something wrong with the
scale.

RENEE: *(Smacks Karl.)* Don't you dare touch that scale, Karl!

KARL: *(Shaking his hand at her.)* But you didn't follow the
program. You had extra cards everywhere. Wild cards! It
just can't be.

RENEE: My grandma taught me how to play Five Card Draw.
She was really good. I told you.

KARL: This isn't a game, fat girl!

RENEE: Watch it, dog breath. Or I'll be using the other F-word
while I rearrange your face. You're just jealous that I lost
ten pounds! Admit it. *(Singsongy, dancing around.)* Some-
times you gotta shake it up, Karl.

KARL: Shake it up? I'll shake you up. How much would I like
to suck down some chocolate cake and peanut butter crack-
ers? But nooooo! I have to follow the program to the let-
ter. I love eating. I love snacks! And all the while I have to
convince you people that the program works. It's all about
your cards, your feelings, your activity points. You, you,
you! Where am I in the deck? I'm the discarded joker. The
one you yell at when you gain a few measly pounds. Gain
because *you* decided you don't *like* eleven cards. "What's
an extra card here and there?" And then someone like you
ruins everything by losing! By cheating. I am the butt of the
joke.

RENEE: Personally, Karl, I would use the A-word in this
situation.