

FULLY COMMITTED

by Becky Mode

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1. About the play

Fully Committed is a play about the young actor Sam, who, because he keeps getting turned down for roles he auditions for, works as a reservationist for an unnamed top restaurant in New York. His work mainly consists of answering the phone and dealing with unsatisfied customers who want to reserve a table.

He has to struggle with colleagues who let him cover their shifts, a brutal hierarchy in which he stands at the bottom, capricious superiors, and a wide range of customers and V.I.P's who subject him to different kinds of verbal abuse. His recently widowed father wants him to come home for Christmas, his former acting-school colleague Jerry torments Sam by telling him about his success while Sam still remains in the service industry, and calls to his agent do nothing to improve his mood.

As Sam's mood deteriorates while his problems pile up, the situation, however, begins to change. Sam reclaims his self-respect and, through the use of wit and with some luck, manages to find a way of escape from the situation his basement office represents.

2. About the author

Becky Mode graduated from the American Repertory Theatre Conservatory in 1991 and moved to New York, where, like the character Sam in the play, she had to work in restaurants to make a living. Her experiences as a struggling actor/waitress prompted her to write her first play, as she says because she had "a horrible job" and needed to "entertain herself." *Fully Committed*, in which one actor plays 37 different roles, was the result of collaboration with acting-school friend Mark Setlock and became an instant hit.

The success of this play opened doors for Becky Mode, and she could leave the service industry. In the meantime, she has written, among others, for NBC, Disney, and Columbia Pictures, and she is currently working on a television pilot based on *Fully Committed*. Becky Mode is married with children and lives in Brooklyn.

3. New York and its Upper East Side

New York, Big Apple, Capital of the Financial World... Most non-New Yorkers have Manhattan in mind, when they think of New York City. Fact is, however, that New York consists of a total of 5 boroughs, which by themselves are as big as other cities. Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, Staten Island, and Manhattan are populated by a total of 8.6 million people; only 1.6 million of them live in Manhattan.

Originally, New York was called New Amsterdam when the Dutch settled there, but in 1664 the English seized the colony and renamed it. New York once even was the capital of the United States, although only for a short period of time (1789-90).

Until this day, many people from all parts of the United States and from all over the world come to the city to either try their luck or because, if they are lucky, they have been offered a job with a big company. The often naïve "American dream" has turned into a utopia in most cases, which most people, however, are well aware of. Still, the city offers a great diversity of jobs and attracts younger to middle-aged singles as a place to try and climb the career ladder. Foreigners usually need a lot of money due to strict immigration laws; they, moreover, need an even bigger portion of luck!

Manhattan itself consists of a number of parts, amongst them West Village, East Village, Lower East Side, Mid-Town, Hells Kitchen, Chinatown, Little Italy, Upper West Side, and Upper East Side, to name only a few.



The Upper East Side ranges from 59th to 96th Street and from 5th Avenue to the East River. The atmosphere of its streets is characterized by large apartment buildings guarded by doormen, as well as by beautiful smaller walk-ups without any signs of who lives in the building. It is the domain for wealthier business people, who take great interest in park views (Central Park forms its boarder to the West), expensive meals, well-known private schools and expensive shopping on Madison Avenue. Another characteristic of the Upper East Side is the fact that people actually own their apartments. This is even more amazing when one takes into account that the prices buyers have to pay for a four-bedroom apartment average about \$ 3 million. In the New York world, being able to state an Upper East Side address adds a lot to a person's status, even more so when the address is Fifth Avenue or Park Avenue, where apartments are still known for their rather luxurious interiors.

Needless to say that the Upper East Side wasn't developed by Irish or Italian immigrants. They were shown the way to Brooklyn and to the Bronx, where to this day their culture is highly celebrated wherever you look. Your typical Upper East Side resident is white, upper-class, and well-educated. People of other colors and the obviously less rich who work in the Upper East Side shops and restaurants certainly take the subway or a bus at night to get to their homes in different parts of the city.

However, both Upper East Siders as well as residents of other parts of the city take great interest in the area's shopping. Madison Avenue offers expensive and exclusive boutiques, where one might even spot a celebrity; it also hosts beauty salons and gourmet supermarkets. Bloomingdale's, one of the country's best-known and trendiest department stores, is located there as well. You can spend a whole day in this rather posh area without ever getting bored: shopping or at least window-shopping, brunching, and of course visiting the big museums (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Guggenheim and The Whitney Museum), which add to the great variety of things one can do on the Upper East Side.

Walking down the streets of the Upper East you easily start feeling underdressed. Expensive labels are characteristic of the attire residents strolling along the streets can afford. Prices are important, so is having money; therefore, the word modesty doesn't exist in this great part of Manhattan.

4. New York Restaurants

Whenever you're hungry in New York City, you won't find it difficult to find a place to eat, but it can be quite a task to decide on a particular restaurant. Basically, you can find anything your mind could dream of or your stomach could possibly crave. The diversity of cuisines stands for the international history and diversity in nationalities that influence the city and add to its flavor. The immigrants from every corner of the globe that populated the city brought their food with them. New York Bagels and Pizzas are supposedly the best in the world. In China Town you can get original Chinese food that might even scare you off! In Manhattan alone, there are as many as 20,000 places to eat.

Alongside the many delis and diners, there is a large number of original restaurants, which have got their own rules to follow: going to a more upscale restaurant, you should be aware of its popularity and make a reservation in advance. If there aren't more than two people in your party, you might be lucky and even get a table when you call the same day, but usually you have to be a V.I.P. of some sort for such a short-term reservation. Furthermore, many places require formal dress, which means jacket and tie for gentlemen, elegant pantsuit or evening dress for ladies. If a person is not dressed appropriately, the restaurant might lend the customer a tie and jacket from their stock.

The more important you are, the easier it will be for you to get a table. In general, you can spot right away who belongs to the more influential people. The whole staff is aware of their status and treats them with special care. And they don't have to wait at the bar for their table to be ready like "regular" customers, either.

Even at the cheapest and most dingy place in the United States you will have to "wait to be seated" at the entrance. A hostess or host is there to seat customers and to make sure that no-one who isn't welcome will enter the restaurant. The better places in New York City have a bar or lounge belonging to the main restaurant. In general, everyone is asked to wait there for a few minutes and to have a drink during that time. This takes away the time they would need for their "aperitif" at the table and the restaurant can fit more people in on one evening. Having to wait 45 minutes can easily happen, but customers don't mind. Going to restaurants doesn't

simply fulfill the purpose of eating; seeing who else is out there and being seen are the main reasons for wealthy New Yorkers to spend a night out.

The most exclusive places, such as the one in the play, would not have their prices listed on the menu. If you choose to go there, you are expected to have plenty of money, or at least to have saved up enough for a special night out. So you wouldn't mind how much is charged for the food and drink.

5. Actors in New York

If you ask waiters in New York what brought them to the city, many will tell you "acting." Musicians and other kinds of artists are also featured among the many hopeful young people who work late nights, but acting is the least surprising answer to come out of their mouths.

The centers for film and television are located in New York and Los Angeles, plus there are lots of additional smaller studios spread out throughout the country. Los Angeles might be the center of the film industry, but New York is mostly known for theater and is also home to many famous acting schools.

Most actors struggle to find steady work; only a few ever achieve recognition as stars. Some well-known, experienced performers may be cast in supporting roles. Others work as "extras," with no lines to deliver, or make brief cameo appearances, speaking only one or two lines. Because earnings for actors are erratic, many supplement their incomes by holding jobs in other fields. Actors endure long periods of unemployment, intense competition for roles, and frequent rejections in auditions. They work under constant pressure. To succeed, they need patience and commitment to their craft.

Acting assignments typically are short-term – ranging from one day to a few months – which means that there often are long periods of unemployment between jobs. The uncertain nature of the work results in unpredictable earnings and intense competition for even the lowest-paid jobs. Often, actors, producers, and directors must hold other jobs to sustain a living.

People give different reasons why actors often choose to work as waiters or waitresses. The most prejudicial argument would be that you don't need to have studied anything "serious" for this kind of job. Fact is that working hours are often even longer and physical pressure is even worse in restaurants than it is on a film set or during a theatre production. Some might have to spend six or seven nights a week working long shifts and depend largely on tips while they go to numerous auditions to make it big. In times like these, the job as a waiter can be really frustrating. Being talented but not being able to do anything with that talent burns young actors out. On the other hand, the restaurant is a kind of stage as well. Waiters talk to people, deliver their speeches about specials, they walk around being watched all the time, and: the friendlier their attitude, the better the tips. Often this kind of job serves as a substitute in times of unemployment in their chosen profession.

One major argument in favor of restaurant work mustn't be forgotten: it can be really well paid!

In a city like New York, there might be a whole variety of acting jobs available, but there is also a whole lot of more or less talented people seeking these jobs. Worse than that, talent and ambition aren't necessarily the main criteria for which actors get chosen. Looks are important. Often, an actor or actress will be told they are "too short, too tall, too fat, too thin, too blond, not what we are looking for" etc. Even the best professional training won't be a guarantee to be successful in their dream job.

The common understanding of how to make it in the entertainment industry is to "be at the right place, at the right time", talent, a good agent, and a big portion of luck!

6. Possible Assignments

Extract 1, pp. 15-16:

SAM (*new line*) Thank you for holding, how can I help you?

BRYCE (*frighteningly cheerful*) Hi, this is Bryce calling from Naomi Campbell's office!!!

SAM Oh hi, Bryce, How are you?

BRYCE I'm fine, thanks, who's this?!!!

SAM Sam

BRYCE (*Pathologically excited to talk to Sam*) Sam!!! I didn't know you were still working there! How are you?!!

SAM Good, how are you?

BRYCE Super! How's the acting career?

SAM It's okay.

BRYCE (*Gushing sympathy*) Oh, it's such a tough business!! Hang in there!!

SAM (*About to respond*) Thanks I –

BRYCE (*not waiting for a reply; quickly shifting gears*) Okay, Naomi would like to come in this weekend with fifteen people, on Saturday night at eight P.M., and she's gonna need a round, freestanding table, hold on for just one second ... (*Checking his records*) ... it's number seventeen.

SAM Okay.

BRYCE Thanks! You can put that in her name. Naomi H. Campbell. And you can confirm that with me. I'm Bryce!!

SAM Right, and the number there?

BRYCE (*very hush-hush*) Okay, it's 866-2250 and I know you'll be discreet with that information.

SAM Of course.

BRYCE Thanks! And you know she doesn't eat dairy, right?

SAM Right.

BRYCE And no female wait staff at the table!

SAM Okay.

BRYCE Thanks a million!

Assignment

You get to spend one day as a star! Everybody is treating you like you are the most important person in the world and fulfilling all your wishes. This is YOUR evening at one of New York's finest restaurants, rounding off a perfect day. Describe your evening at the restaurant and everything that is going on around you.

How would you want to be treated at the restaurant? Who else would be there? How would people react to your presence? Which special requests would you have? What would you eat?

Extract 2, page 23

Sam (calling his agent)

CURTIS Diana Drake Agency.

SAM Hi Curtis, it's Sam.

CURTIS (*Tired*) Sam, how are you?

SAM Pretty good, could I talk to Diana?

CURTIS She's ... (*Silently communicating with Diana, who's dodging Sam*) ... in a meeting, is there something I can help you with?

SAM I was just calling to see if you had heard anything from Lincoln Center.

CURTIS Sam, if we would had heard anything I would have called you.

SAM No, it's just that I was talking to Jerry Miller and he said he's going back in this afternoon and –

CURTIS Sam, why don't you worry about your career and let Jerry worry about Jerry's.

SAM No, I just wanted to know if today was the last day they're seeing people.

CURTIS I have no idea. (*The phone starts to ring.*)

SAM Well, can you have Diana call me when she gets back? I'm at the restaurant.

CURTIS (*unimpressed*) Oh ... I didn't know you were still working there.

SAM Yeah, I'm still working here. (*It's still ringing.*)

CURTIS All right Sam, I'll give her the message. Ciao.

Assignment 1

Actors as waiters; having read a few facts already you understand how difficult it is for people like Sam to make it in the city and get out of the restaurant business. Write an angry but reasonable speech ending the selected sequence of the play, in which you, as Sam, explain to Curtis, why you are “still working there”.

Assignment 2

Many actors who come to New York have to work in the service industry. They get miserable pay in a job they do not want and that offers them very little financial security. In the play, Sam even has to clean a toilet. Try to create an interior monologue of his while he does the cleaning.

Assignment 3

The actor playing Sam has to play 37 different characters. Write a little scene yourself, in which you (or somebody else) play(s) up to six roles. Try to make each character unique (voice, pose, something they have in their hands), and put them in a public setting (a restaurant, cinema, theatre, or someplace else you come up with).

Assignment 4

Maybe one of your favorite film stars started his or her career in a restaurant, or in a call-center. Imagine and write about your favorite star’s former, badly-paid job. Write how the nobody then finally became a star.

Assignment 5

Naomi Campbell’s personal assistant keeps calling Sam with sometimes ridiculous requests. Find out about the quirks of the rich and famous, and how far the portrayal of Naomi Campbell and other V.I.P’s is removed from reality. Try to come up with some demands of your own (e.g. there can be nothing that has the color green within a ten-meter radius).

7. Analyzing a One-Person Show

A play in which one actor is alone on stage and performs a large number of roles is particularly interesting to analyze with regard to the techniques that are used to keep the individual characters apart so that the audience can always know who the actor is portraying at any given moment.

Staging elements to look out for in this respect are, among others:

- costume / props

Does the actor change into different costumes for different characters? Are different props (e.g. a particular telephone, an umbrella, a hat, a cigarette, etc.) used to indicate a particular character?

- physical appearance / body language

Does the actor change his or her physical appearance and/or body language to keep characters apart? Does he or she look older or younger for particular characters? Is there more or less energy for different characters? What can the audience learn about different characters through their physical appearance and body language (age, mood, attitudes, ...)?

- voice

Does the actor change his or her voice for each different character? What is typical in a particular character's voice and pitch? Do we as the audience simply get to keep characters apart that way, or do we also learn something about a character through the way he or she speaks?

- facial expression

Are different facial expressions used to indicate different characters? Do the facial expressions tell us something about the individual characters as well?

- position on stage

Does the actor move about on stage and always stand/sit/lie in the same place for a particular character? What effect does this have in addition to defining characters? (it also helps define the space, particularly if the set is non-naturalistic).

This list is by no means complete, but it provides a number of suggestions for analyzing a one-person performance from a more technical point of view.

8. Vocabulary

chef	Chefkoch
effeminate	verweicht
utmost	äußerst
neurosurgeon	Nervenarzt
Wisconsin	U.S. Bundesstaat
Gourmet magazine	eine Feinschmeckerzeitschrift
salutation	Begrüßung
saran wrap	Frischhaltefolie
to be all set	fertig sein, bereit sein
L.I.E.	Long Island Expressway
to go overboard	übertreiben
sympathy	Sympathie
lyme disease	Zeckenborreliose
dying to do something	etwas unendlich gern tun würden
pathologically	pathologisch, krankhaft
gushing	überschäumend, überschwänglich
cover someone's shift	die Arbeitsschicht von jemandem übernehmen
to confirm	bestätigen
dairy	Milchprodukte
wait staff	KellnerInnenpersonal
cuisine	Küche, im Sinne von: Art des Essens
fusion	Verschmelzung
menu	Speisekarte
jicama	Süßkartoffel, „Mexikanische Rübe od. Kartoffel“
squab	noch nicht flügge, junger Vogel
poached	pochiert
ginger	Ingwer
broth	Eintopf; Suppe
wrapped	eingewickelt
wilted	gewelkt
herb-crust	Kräuterkruste
grouper	Barsch
speckled	gesprenkelt, bespritzt
hyssop	Ysop

to ramp	wuchern
cedar	Zeder
organic	organisch
on average	durchschnittlich
crescendos	Crescendos, immer lauter werdend
piercing	stechend
hostess	Hostess
to graduate	die Schule abschließen (maturieren, promovieren...)
in advance	im Vorraus
to make up one's mind	sich entscheiden
advance deal	Frühbuchertarif
US Air	amerikanische Fluglinie
familiar	bekannt
callback	zweites Vorsprechen; für diejenigen, die in der engeren Auswahl sind
HBO	Home Box Office; amerikanischer Privatsender (produziert u.a. „Sex and the City“, „The Sopranos“...)
audition	Vorsprechen
vegan	veganisch
tasting menu	Kostproben
soy	Soja
Bell Atlantic	amerikanische Telefongesellschaft
The Village Voice	New Yorker Stadtzeitung (vgl. in Wien: "Falter")
digit	Ziffer
four-digit number	vierstellige Zahl
to dodge	ausweichen
impressed	beeindruckt
unimpressed	unbeeindruckt
Lincoln Center	Kulturzentrum in New York, beherbergt u.a. Metropolitan Opera, Julliard (Kunstschule)
cab	Taxi
FedEx	amerikanische Expresspostgesellschaft
global positioning unit	GPS Empfänger, Satellitennavigationsinstrument
"I'll be there in five"	"Ich komme in fünf Minuten"
scratch	kratzen
party of two	eine Gruppe von 2 Personen

to honor	ehren
a regular	ein Stammgast
anniversary	Jahrestag
tacky	klebrig, schleimig (im Sinne von: einschmeichelnd), geschmacklos
"It's not rocket science."	Im Sinne von: "Es ist nicht wer-weiß-wie kompliziert."
authority	Autorität
Mickey Rourke	amerikanischer Filmschauspieler
to transfer	transferieren, weiterleiten
upset	verärgert, aufgeregt
detained	verhindert, aufgehalten
seniority	höheres Dienstalter / höherer Rang in der Hierarchie
to buzz someone	jemanden mit dem Summer / Gegensprechanlage rufen
Cheetos	eine amerikanische Chipsmarke, Knabbergebäck
file cabinet	Aktenschrank
attitude	Einstellung, Verhalten (oft: überheblich)
vital	wichtig, lebenswichtig
ASAP	as soon as possible, so schnell wie möglich
rude	unfreundlich
to accuse sb.	jem. beschuldigen
hilarious	zum Schreien komisch
to tow	abschleppen
to insist on	bestehen auf etw.
Mr. Zagat	famous New York restaurant critic
to bump sb.	hier: einen reservierten Tisch an jem. anders vergeben
to assume	annehmen, vermuten
balls	ugs: Hoden, Eier
node	Knoten, hier: Lymphknoten
to strain	zerren, beanspruchen, belasten
vocal chords	Stimmbänder
to yawn	gähnen
to pull a file	eine Akte heraussuchen
marinated	mariniert
fluke	Flunder
quail	Wachtel
head cheese	Presskopf, Presswurst

alternate appetizer	andere Vorspeise, Vorspeisenalternative
maitre d'hotel	Oberkellner
to be entitled	in der Position sein / die Erlaubnis haben / einen Anspruch haben
double A.R.P.	A.A.R.P. = American Association of Retired Persons – Pensionistenverband
discount	Preisnachlass, Sonderangebot
cataract	grauer Star (eine Augenkrankheit)
glaucoma	grüner Star
bladder suspension	Blasenerweiterung
Paramount Pictures	amerikanische Filmgesellschaft, Mediengigant
the paper	newspaper; Zeitung
salmon	Lachs
scrumptious	toll, prima, ausgezeichnet, lecker
puddle	Pfütze, Lacke
urine	Urin
pretentious	anmaßend, anspruchsvoll, hochtrabend, angeberisch
crap	Quatsch, Unsinn, Mist
to convey	überbringen, mitteilen, vermitteln
worthiness	Wert
catfish	Katzenwels
harsh	brutal
sconce	Wandleuchter
bulb	Glühbirne
to supply	ausstatten, zur Verfügung stellen
to puke	sich übergeben, speiben
outlet	Ausgang, Auslass, Öffnung
apoplectic	apoplektisch, cholertisch, zu Schlaganfällen neigend
apoplectic stroke	Schlaganfall
busboy	Hilfskraft im Restaurant, Tellerträger, Bedienungshilfe
dignitary	Würdenträger
Le Barnadin	thin disguise for Le Bernardin, a famous New York restaurant
Bed Bath and Beyond	ein in New York beliebtes Einrichtungshaus
interview	Vorstellungsgespräch
gross	grauslich, eklig
ruckus	Krawall, Unruhe
gumdrops	Gummibonbons

goody goody gumdrops	Ausspruch, der Freude ausdrücken soll; hier zynisch verwendet
entitlement	Anspruch, Berechtigung
national spot	hier: ein im gesamten Land gesendeter Werbespot
Carson Aviation	private Fluggesellschaft, mittlerweile aufgelöst (2001)
Bell Atlantic	amerikanische Telefongesellschaft
to get cut off	abgeschnitten werden
favor	Gefallen
to appreciate	würdigen, schätzen
orange roughy	tropische Fischart
dish	Speise
"Break a leg."	"Hals- und Beinbruch" – Schauspielerjargon für "viel Glück"
to pop in	hereinschauen
to leave sb. in the lurch	jemanden hängen lassen