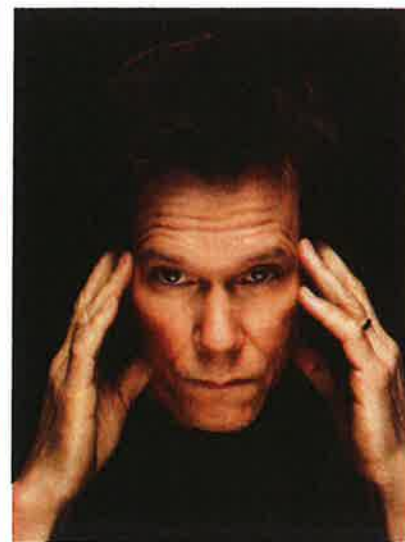


Aziz Ansari

COMEDIAN, ACTOR

I try to find people who are going to push me and not just let me be like, "Yeah, this is good enough." Because it's easy to do that. It's hard to be like, "Let's see if we can beat this." When I first started moving from smaller venues to theaters, I would e-mail Louis C.K. with questions and **he was always so cool about writing back and telling me he thought it was cool that I cared about wanting to do a good job.**



KEVIN BACON

Center of the universe

My brother, Michael, who helped me decide that I wanted to become a performer. And when I started taking acting classes, it became clear that there were only two options: One was to be a waiter and one was to be a superstar. And one of the first jobs that I ever got was a play with a guy named J.T. Walsh. At that point no one had really heard of him, but he kept going from show to show to show. He would say, "Well, I was down at the Arena Stage, and then I'm going to do something at the Guthrie." And it completely changed my mind about what it was to be an actor: **The skill and the talent and the hard work need to be respected and nurtured.** So all of a sudden I kind of shifted my idea of what it was like to be an actor, and what kind of actor I wanted to be.



STEVE CARELL

ACTOR, DIRECTOR, OSCAR CONTENDER FOR AN ASTONISHING PERFORMANCE IN **FOXCATCHER**

My second-grade teacher was named Mr. Blackman, and he pretty much sent me on my way as an actor. I remember we were doing the Indians and the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock. I was a Native American in a canoe, and I was rowing. It was all mime. And I remember rowing and then switching the oar and rowing on the other side. And Mr. Blackman—the first time this ever happened to me—pointed it out and said, "You see what Steve did? He rowed on both sides of the canoe so he wouldn't go in a circle." **Having that recognition so early, something clicked in my brain.**



ARMIE HAMMER

Actor

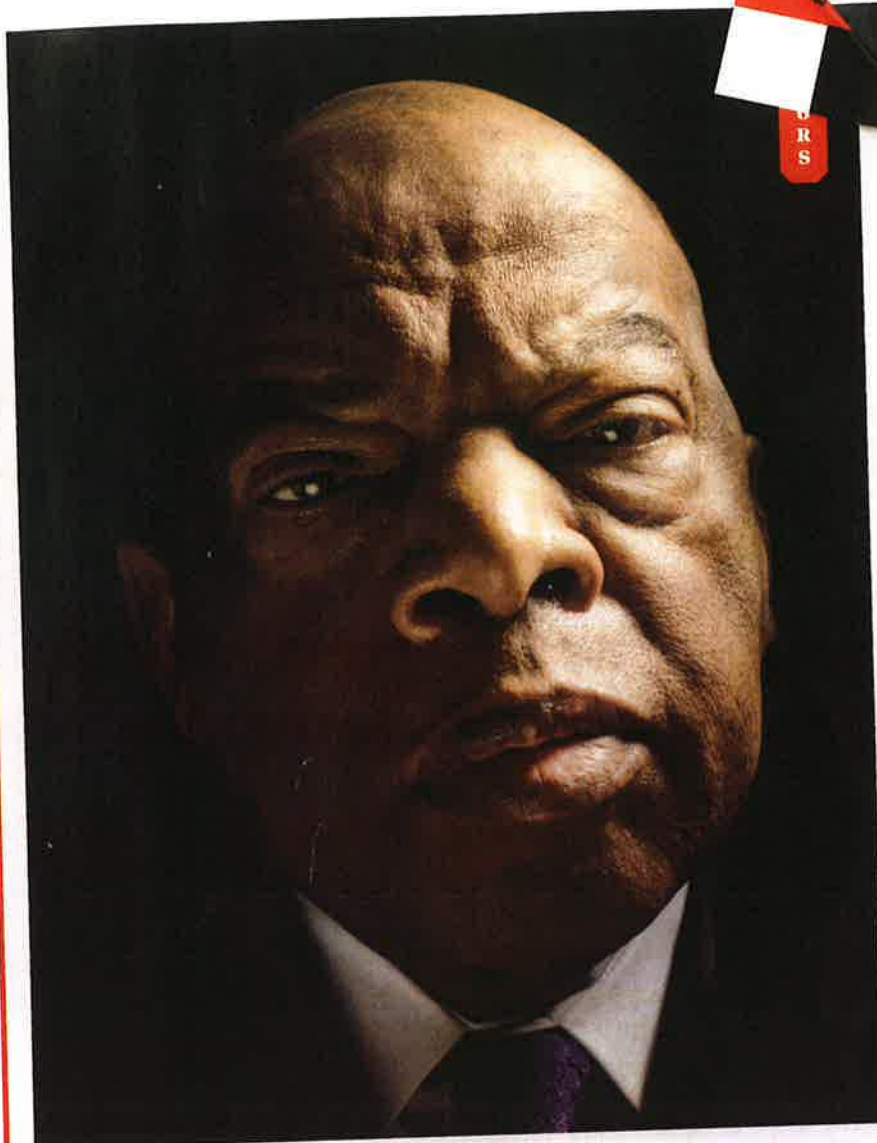
When I was about eleven, I told my parents, "I want to act," and they were like, "No!" And it was the greatest thing they ever did for me, because what gets child actors isn't the fame. It's spending their developmental years associating who they are with their jobs. And then when they lose their job, it's not like an adult who can say, "Shit! Now I need another job." They lose who they thought they were. There's things in this business children shouldn't deal with, you know?



WILLIE GEIST

Newsman

The early days of my career, my dad, who's also in TV, would write me notes. And one time, he wrote, "No one strenuously objects to beige," meaning if you play it safe, you play it beige—you'll probably be fine. But when you have a personality, **it's better to be you, your full you, and draw emotions out of people.** Don't compromise who you are.



JOHN LEWIS

U. S. REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE GEORGIA FIFTH,
CIVIL-RIGHTS ACTIVIST, HERO

When I was growing up in rural Alabama, I wanted to attend Troy State College. Submitted my application, my high school transcript—never heard a word from the college. They didn't admit black students. So I'd written Martin Luther King a letter, told him I needed his help. He wrote me back and sent me a round-trip Greyhound bus ticket to come to Montgomery to meet with him. So in March of 1958, my father drove me to the Greyhound bus station, I boarded the bus, and a young lawyer by the name of Fred Gray met me at the bus station and drove me to the First Bap-

tist Church and ushered me into the pastor's study. I saw Dr. King—and Rev. Ralph Abernathy is standing right behind the desk—and he said, "Are you the boy from Troy? Are you John Lewis?" and I said, "Dr. King, I'm John Robert Lewis. I want to attend Troy State College. It's close to my home. My family's very poor. I want to get an education. I need your help. I need your support." **He told me, much later, he saw something in me—he saw that I wanted and needed help.** He became my hero, my inspiration, my leader, and my teacher.

Lewis, second from right, seated next to his mentor in 1964.





DAVID BLAINE

MAGICIAN

There used to be a hangout spot, a deli, in New York. And in the back room, all of the top magicians would come and meet, and every young magician would go and try to learn something. I met a magician there named Bill Kalush, and he showed me an incredible card move, and as he was about to leave, I stopped him and said, "Please show me how to do this." He was like, "Kid, don't waste your time—you'll never get this." But before he left, he showed me how to do it, and for the next six months—every day—I practiced it. Kalush, who's one of my best friends now, taught me **that even when it feels like you're not going to succeed and everything is crumbling apart: keep going.**



JON FAVREAU

Cofounder of Fenway Strategies; former director of speechwriting for President Obama; not a movie director

It was after the 2012 convention, and the president had just done the convention speech. We had all been very proud of the convention speech and the president thought it went well, but the press coverage was miserable. So we were on the plane after the convention, and I'm reading some of the coverage, and I'm complaining about it with the president, because I had worked so hard on this speech, right? And finally he looks at me and he's like, "Hey, man, how do you think I feel?"

I wake up every day and half the country doesn't like me. But what you've got to realize is **you can only make the decisions that you think are best, and you have to let the chips fall where they**

fall. And if you think that you're doing your best, and you're making the best decisions that you possibly can with all the best information, you can't worry about what everyone thinks about you. You just have to keep going forward." And watching him take all those criticisms, obviously on a much larger scale, you realize it can be easy to go through life worried about what other people think about you. And I think about what he said: You should take criticism and take it seriously, but then you've got to kind of make the decisions that you want to make. And you gotta go forward. That's the best you can do.



Favreau wrote speeches for Barack Obama for eight years, from 2005 (when he was twenty-three) until 2013.