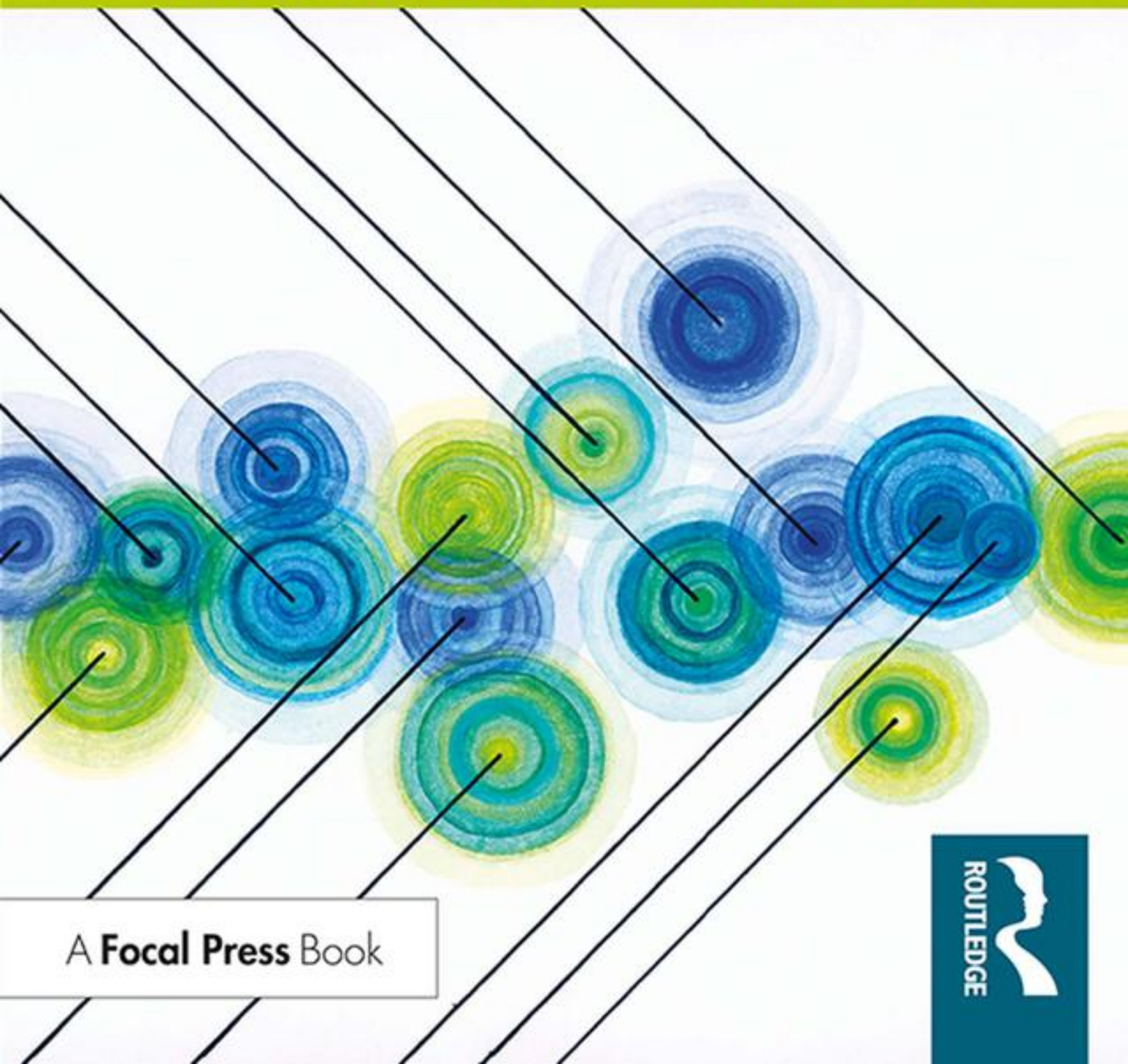
STAGE MANAGEMENT THEORY AS A GUIDE TO PRACTICE

CULTIVATING A CREATIVE APPROACH

LISA PORTER AND NARDA E. ALCORN



A **Focal Press** Book

ROUTLEDGE

Stage Management Theory as a Guide to Practice

Stage Management Theory as a Guide to Practice offers theory and methodology for developing a unique stage management style, preparing stage managers to develop an adaptive approach for the vast and varied scope of the production process, forge their own path, and respond to the present moment with care and creativity.

This book provides tactile adaptive strategies, enabling stage managers to navigate diverse populations, venues, and projects. Experiential stories based on extensive experience with world-renowned artists exemplify the practices and provide frameworks for self-reflection, synthesis, and engagement with theory-guided practice. This book empowers stage managers to include the "How You" with "How To" by flexing collaborative muscles and engaging tools to guide any collaborative project to fruition with creativity, curiosity, and the drive to build connections.

Exploring topics such as group dynamics, ethics, culture, conflict resolution, and strategic communication, *Stage Management Theory as a Guide to Practice: Cultivating a Creative Approach* is an essential tool for advanced stage management students, educators, and professionals.

Lisa Porter is a professor of theater and dance at the University of California, San Diego, where she has taught since 2005. She is the head of the MFA in stage management and teaches graduate and undergraduate stage management. She has also developed courses related to creativity, neuroscience, disability, and performance. Lisa has taught in the MFA stage management program at Yale School of Drama and has led international classes in Singapore, Taiwan, and China.

Working in diverse venues on six continents, Lisa's career has included international projects with Laurie Anderson, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Anne Bogart, Hal Hartley, Yo-Yo Ma, Silkroad Ensemble, White Oak Dance Project, and Robert Wilson. She has collaborated extensively on multiple intercultural productions with Singaporean director Ong Keng Sen and TheatreWorks Singapore. Her New York and regional credits include productions with Christopher Ashley, Charles Busch, Jonathan Demme, Richard Foreman, Doug Hughes, Tina Landau, Kenny Leon, Suzan-Lori Parks, Darko Tresnjak, and Mark Wing-Davey. She has also produced and stage managed non-profit and corporate events since 1996.

Narda E. Alcorn is a professor and stage manager who has worked on Broadway, Off-Broadway, regionally, and internationally. In 2019, Narda was appointed chair of the stage management department at Yale School of Drama. She has been head of stage management for New York University, DePaul University, and the State University of New York at Purchase. She received DePaul's Excellence in Teaching Award in 2015 and the Robert Christen Award for Excellence in Technical Collaboration in 2017.

On Broadway, Narda has had collaborations with Tony-winning directors Kenny Leon, Bartlett Sher, and George C. Wolfe. She premiered four of Pulitzer Prize–winning playwright August Wilson's century cycle plays and stage managed two Broadway revivals of his work. Her New York and regional credits include productions with Denzel Washington, Viola Davis, Billy Crystal, Kevin Kline, Annette Bening, Phylicia Rashad, David Schwimmer, and Richard Foreman. Narda was a longtime stage manager on the Broadway production of *The Lion King*, and she has collaborated with celebrated MacArthur Fellows composer George E. Lewis and playwright Tarell Alvin McCraney.

Stage Management Theory as a Guide to Practice

Cultivating a Creative Approach

Lisa Porter and Narda E. Alcorn

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To our students, past, present, and future.

Contents

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Foreword

The theater and its systems of training have for millennia been focused on an intergenerational model of apprenticeship. Generally, older people have passed on to younger people what it is they do, in both workplace and classroom situations, and the younger have received and borne the torch of practical knowledge as it was handed to them. In some cases, older and younger people have innovated new ways of doing things, and the catalogue of what should be done—current best practices, if you will—has been rewritten.

The theater maker required to understand the greatest number of best practices—the one who works most closely with every other kind of theater maker—is the stage manager. So the stakes are high for those who fill this role and for those who teach others to fill it. There is a critical opportunity and need to raise the standard of practice. In my own experience as an actor, director, and producer, I have relished collaborations with gifted stage managers (particularly the authors of this book) who knew not only what needed to be done, but also why and how it needed to be done. What if the next vital text about stage management could be written from such an informed and aspirational perspective?

Stage Management Theory as a Guide to Practice, then, is a most welcome and transformational contribution to the project of theater training. Here, Lisa Porter and Narda E. Alcorn harness more than 50 years of professional experience and more than 25 years of teaching gifted stage management students. Having known them since we were all three graduate students together at Yale School of Drama, I have spent a significant fraction of my career trying to recruit them for one project or another, only to discover they were unavailable because one was on a world tour or the other was on Broadway. We've worked alongside each other in production and as faculty colleagues; I've been close to them for both simpler and more challenging processes, marked by both hard-won successes and painful, if instructive, failures.

One thing most powerful to witness, throughout Lisa and Narda's careers, is how devoted other people are to them. They function superbly at a high level of vision and skill, and they have a gift for friendship. When new acquaintances find out I know and love either one of them, I can feel the room warm up and hear the ice breaking. Moreover, I can attest that either is eminently qualified to write the definitive volume on the practice or teaching of stage management.

But fittingly, this volume speaks with special power precisely because it reflects their collegiality, their companionship and their collaborations, their shared history and their vulnerabilities. They relate not only what work they have done, but also why and how they did it. Mined as the result of a chance meeting at Yale, fired by friendship, and forged in sturdy curiosity about modes of thinking that weren't part of their own training, the book reflects the best instincts of servant leaders. There is import in making the path wider and safer for those who follow in our footsteps. But there is vitality as well in giving close attention to why trailblazing matters and how many different ways one can do it.

This novel approach is part epistle, part manual, and part invitation. It organizes ideas and chronicles the orchestration of deeds, to be sure, but it also encourages in students the kind of striving for self-knowledge that separates adults from children and that can sustain both confidence and humility in work for a lifetime. As exemplary teachers, Narda and Lisa know the training is their responsibility, and the education is the student's. The brilliance of their production, as is true of all great theater artists, is in the timely and personal coherence of their reasons for doing the work, with its form, and the needs of its audience. Like a great play, it won't hit any two of us exactly the same way on the same night, so it captures the true spirit and power of the art form.

And, lights . . .

James Bundy
Dean/Artistic Director
Yale School of Drama/Yale Repertory Theatre
New Haven
July 2019

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Our Story

It is fitting that two stage managers with vastly unique trajectories would write a radically non-traditional stage management text focused on theory. Lisa is extroverted, big-picture oriented, reflective, and quick to process, while Narda is introverted, system-oriented, and a disciplined decision-maker and thoughtful problem-solver. Our common ground has been a fierce work ethic and a commitment to learning from all types of experiences.

Education

We are writing the book that we both would have wanted to read while studying together at Yale School of Drama. Many people have told us that stage management was not a serious or viable profession or that we would burn out and, worse, that the work lacked creativity. We repeatedly ignored that advice and have spent years combing through theories of psychology, business, science, sociology, neuroscience, philosophy, and anthropology to label concepts that we have intuitively employed from our early days. We are offering an approach to stage management that is based on ideas and techniques we have honed into theory.

We met in the fall of 1992 at Yale School of Drama, coming from immensely different backgrounds but equally passionate about similar aspects of life and work. At the time, the stage management MFA at Yale was a subset of theater management. The training at Yale, the oldest stage management program in the United States, was solidly traditional, focusing on preparing stage managers to work in an Actors' Equity Association (AEA)–governed environment on Broadway, Off-Broadway, and in regional theaters.

Our classroom debates at Yale exposed a difference in approach that led to deeper conversations about what stage management entails and why the field holds such significance for us both. While we honored the importance of a prescribed technical approach, we were both intrigued by the potential for the discipline to grow in scope and influence, and we identified the common goal of being an integral part of the evolution of our field. We sought an expansion that included interpersonal communication, system implementation and management, organizational culture and behavior, team dynamics, flow and style. These ideas began percolating for us during graduate school and have been the basis of many of our conversations about stage management.

Professional Paths

We both graduated in 1995 and moved to New York City, embarking on drastically different paths. Narda was in pursuit of Broadway, Off-Broadway, and regional stage management positions, as well as teaching opportunities. Lisa discovered her path in a non-traditional career that included international and interdisciplinary work, dance, and corporate events, as well as Off-Broadway and regional theaters. Narda has built her career with August Wilson and Kenny Leon, and she has had notable collaborations with Viola Davis, Bartlett Sher, and Denzel Washington. Lisa has stage managed on six continents and worked on significant projects with Laurie Anderson, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Yo-Yo Ma, and Ong Keng Sen. We continued to compare notes and remained close as our careers unfolded. At that time, stage management was evolving into a career in and of itself. We were part of that trend, having sought stage management as our life's work.

Ongoing Theory Conversation

Throughout the years, our discussions and debates around stage management methodology have been a through-line in our relationship. We have navigated marriages, raising children, disability, illness, death, divorce, and the related challenges of coming of age and growing into middle life as best friends. The conversation around theory has been at the forefront for many years, and we have asked each other questions about how to establish, incorporate, and embrace theories that support our practice. In some cases, this exploration means tapping into existing theory, and in others, we have developed our own, empowering you as the stage manager to include the "How You" with "How To."

This conversation about theory has been informed by our combined experiences as professionals and educators. Our identities have influenced these ideas, as mid-career women and, in Narda's case, as a person of color. We have integrated everything we have written in this book into our classrooms in one form or another, discovering that every challenge and triumph we have faced demands that we employ tools that cross disciplines and empower us to engage with ideas that inspire problem-solving. We are passionate about and dedicated to reinventing how we think about and do our work, no matter how familiar it may be at this point in our careers.

While our approaches to stage management have evolved, we are steadfast in our commitment to the process. People continue to be the most challenging and enjoyable part of collaboration. The volatility and joy in human connection in the service of storytelling fuels our engagement with each and every project. The failures, bumps, and bruises along the way have informed and enhanced each new collaboration, enriching our approach and ability to integrate theory that ultimately guides our practice.

We have witnessed many students engage with the material found in this book in ways that propelled them onto the career paths of their choice. Students have discovered hidden aspects of their passion for stage management and have gained self-awareness and authentic leadership skills. Graduates of our various programs have told us how valuable theory-guided practice is and how adaptable it has been to other genres like film, television, and, in one case, even "stage managing" a naval ship. Their feedback illuminates the effectiveness of our collective methods.

Theory-Guided Practice

The theories and practices outlined in this book will be helpful in considering an adaptive approach in which you respond uniquely to distinctive production environments and cultures. The stage manager who employs theory-guided practice incorporates perspective, long-term thinking, aesthetic awareness, anticipation, and innovation into their work. Theory-guided practice can inspire you to prepare for the vast and varied scope of a process, forging your own path instead of waiting to be shown the way, and ultimately respond to the present moment with care and creativity. The needs of the process are put first, using a creative methodology to work within a prescribed structure or devising a structure as the production demands.

Style

Your unique approach as a stage manager is based on your history, experience, skills, education, preferences, and level of self-awareness and the attributes that make up your personality. This is also known as your stage management style, the individualized combination of work habits, character, and disposition. Your style is your own, and it can grow, adapt, and change over the course of your career as it informs your decisions and interactions.

EXPERIENTIAL STORIES

The experiential stories provide glimpses of specific situations that we have encountered in our work. They are meant to enhance your understanding of the application of theory in a specific situation and are written in the first person by one of us. Out of respect for our collaborators, we are intentionally not naming names or referring specifically to productions.

Language

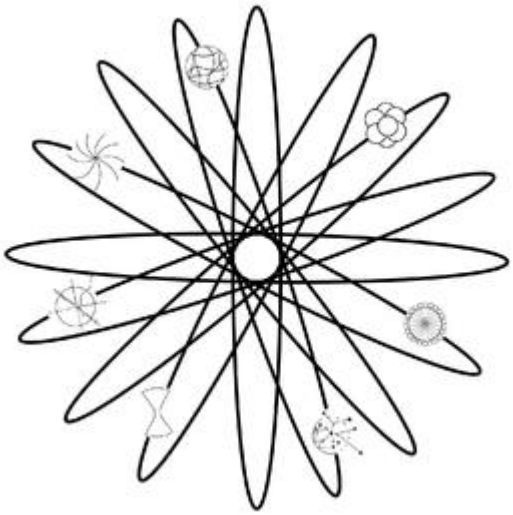
When we refer to stage managers, we are including all members of the stage management team. While ideas and expectations about inclusive language relating to race, ethnicity, gender, orientation, and ability rapidly develop, we have written with inclusivity, acknowledging the continuing evolution of these ideas.

Traditional stage management environments are typically regulated by Actors' Equity Association (AEA) rules and include Broadway, Off-Broadway, and regional theater in the United States. When we discuss stage management in the non-traditional context, we're referring to environments that could be non-union or unregulated, such as international projects, corporate events, and dance.

Conclusion

We have distilled our ideas into chapters that are geared towards students and educators, as well as professionals who have been engaged with stage management theory without a systematized framework. These theory-laden chapters can be approached sequentially or employed in a free-standing manner.

A quarter-of-a-century after meeting at Yale School of Drama, we have written the book our younger selves were hungry for. *Stage Management Theory as a Guide to Practice* provides methods for stage managers who are curious about authentic leadership and transformative process.



IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

- The practices at the end of each chapter provide a framework for self-reflection, synthesis, and meaningful engagement with the ideas within the chapter. You will be provided with self-assessment tools and practices to incorporate into your own work.

THINK LIKE A STAGE MANAGER

- • Recommendations to “Think Like a Stage Manager” will include specific prompts and ideas that engage the theory-guided practice to help you consider and examine new ideas about how you approach your work.

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Each stage manager has a distinct practice, an individual methodology and technique that comprises their style and creative approach. Every stage management responsibility has a "why" and a "how." The "why" is often determined by the needs of the production. The "how" is answered by each stage manager's unique way of working. During a production process, stage managers can engage their skills, principles, and aesthetics by drawing on stage management theory and being deliberate about the "how."

Nine Phases of the Production Process

One method stage managers can use to engage with theory is the Nine Phases of the Production Process. This is a theoretical framework that breaks down a production process into individual stages. By identifying the values and attributes they most want to embody, stage managers can then intentionally choose theory-based practices that guide each task, communication, and facilitation in service of the specific production. There are multiple strategies stage managers can employ as they use the Nine Phases to develop an individualized practice that is shaped by intention and an adaptive approach. The Nine Phases are:

1. Pre-Production
2. First Rehearsal
3. Rehearsals
4. Pre-Tech
5. Tech
6. Previews
7. Opening
8. Performances
9. Closing

Depending on the needs of the production, these can be implemented in a linear fashion, individually, or in different combinations. Some projects, such as corporate events or touring, might demand a compressed version of the Nine Phases, depending on time availability, the environment, or venue.

Phase One: Pre-Production

Pre-production, often referred to as prep, is a critical planning time when stage managers have the opportunity to establish themselves as leaders and creative partners. This phase can be where systems are learned and implemented, relationships are initiated, communication methods are determined, and information is generated. Stage management team members are often introduced to one another during this phase, creating a team dynamic. Stage managers can become familiar with the work or project during this phase and meet with primary collaborators to learn more about the artistry of the piece. In many traditional theatrical environments like Broadway, Off-Broadway, and regional theaters, stage managers have six to twelve days of preparation. Non-traditional environments, such as dance or international festivals, may establish a far more limited time boundary. Pre-production is a consequential time of intense preparation for the entirety of the process.

During this phase, the production stage manager (PSM) can employ strategies to establish the stage management team. Holding regular meetings allows the stage management team to reflect on and discuss the work. Questions such as "Why this project, why now, and what does the creative team want the audience to receive?" can be addressed, and the team can research the working culture and unique methods of the entire collaborative group and look for ways to connect and adapt to those processes. Proactively meeting members of the producing organization can position the stage management team to understand the authority structure and demonstrate that the stage management team values collaboration and each individual's contribution to the process. There are existing systems to diagnose and new ones to implement, based upon preliminary research. This is also when the team synthesizes all this information and determines which communication systems would best support the production.

THE RESULTS OF PREPARATION

> I was being considered for the PSM position on a classic American revival, and I was asked to interview with the director. Prior to the meeting, I read the script and investigated the last three years of his work. We sat down and ordered our meal, and I told him I admired a movie he had recently directed. I then asked a question about one of the characters in the play and why they made a certain choice. We spent the next three hours discussing the play; the playwright; the lead actor, with whom I had worked before; and why the lead and the director wanted to do this play at this time. The only logistical discussion we had was about our next meeting. Shortly afterward, I received an enthusiastic call from the producer's office, offering me the job. By being prepared, I demonstrated that I wanted to partner with the director as an engaged collaborator.
>
> *—NEA*

The creation, implementation, assessment, and maintenance of systems are critical tools that stage managers can begin utilizing during the pre-production phase. Every institution has its own protocols, and every project requires a unique approach. Simultaneously identifying established systems for communication within a producing organization or singular production, while adapting to the specific needs of a project, shape the stage manager's methodology. The stage management team can establish communication preferences which allow the PSM to disseminate information effectively. A traditional production typically distributes written reports after every rehearsal to an established group of staff and creative team members. A non-traditional production, like dance or a tour, may not require this frequency of communication, and stage managers might be most effective sending informal updates as needed. Implementation of systems during this preparation phase provides a map for engaging with a specific institution or a particular project and supports effective management of the often-unpredictable creative process.

While the PSM does not always get to choose their team, it is their responsibility to establish the workflow and develop the language of teamwork. Holding a meeting during prep in which the PSM discusses priorities, goals, and specific perceived challenges of the production can be a useful method to establish expectations. The PSM can share everything they know about the work and the producing organization, ascertain the team's experiences and interests, determine clear systems for generative work, and delegate responsibilities. Functional teams empower individuals, and each member contributes to a functional team. Specific practices can be engaged to build trust, efficiency, and collaboration.

The rehearsal room can be consciously prepared with the goal of creating an environment that is safe and supportive of discovery. The detailed aesthetics of the rehearsal space require consideration. By contemplating the work and the structural variables and considering all the individuals who will use the room, stage managers are able to make adjustments based on the requirements of the project.

Phase Two: First Rehearsal

A production process can last four days or 40 weeks, and the first rehearsal marks one critical day in that process. It is often the first time collaborators meet in person and begin to build the relationships that will drive the process. The stage manager, along with other leaders in the room, sets the tone for the rehearsal environment, intentionally or otherwise.

In a traditional, union-driven environment, it is standard practice for stage managers to dedicate a few minutes of the first rehearsal to discussing company business. During this time, the stage manager usually explains the structural expectations of the rehearsal process, allowing them to begin shaping the process. This is frequently the first opportunity for the stage manager to express who they are and how they work, and it can be a powerful tool to share their management approach and leadership style. Stylistic choices could include a formal or informal presentation style, a concentration on guidelines and prohibitions, and a focus on support systems and opportunities. Company business can clearly state expectations about the production schedule, describe how the rehearsal room and the theater will function as supportive environments, and introduce and empower the stage management team as liaisons to production departments.

Phase Three: Rehearsals

The rehearsal phase is filled with moment-to-moment work that activates theory for the engaged stage manager. This is the phase in which the project is developed or devised, and particulars of the design, which were composed before the rehearsal process began, are tested. Ideas are introduced, explored, and sometimes dismissed, and the group dynamics emerge. Stage managers are at the center of this phase, coordinating both the performative and design elements, recording blocking, tracking all physical elements, collaborating with the creative team, and communicating details about the process happening within the rehearsal room to the producing organization and others.

The rehearsal phase provides many situations where stage managers can consider how to approach the work. A stage manager's style within the room can be established by their physical and vocal presence. This can be reflected by welcoming the performers at the beginning of each rehearsal and providing a dynamic structure that includes effective communication. Stage managers can listen actively, using engaged body language, and ask genuine questions that indicate a strong commitment to understanding the director's approach. With a discerning eye, stage managers can act as surrogates for their design partners, ensuring that the staging is supported by the scenery and that the costumes will work in tandem with the blocking or choreography. Stage managers can serve the rehearsal process by attending to the needs of the process without hesitation or judgement, often anticipating needs before they are requested.

WHERE TO EAT LUNCH?

I was stage managing a revival starring an Oscar-and-Tony-Award-winning film actor, and our rehearsal studio was in a popular part of New York. This meant that our lead could not leave the building for meal breaks as going out in public just drew too much attention. His comfort was important to me, so I prioritized creating a dining area where the cast could sit together. It was simply tables and chairs in a corner of the room, but within a week, almost every member of the company was eating their lunch there. I requested partitions to further delineate the space, and over time, they were decorated with research about the play's period and the playwright. The tables soon had tablecloths, salt and pepper shakers, and napkin holders. Hot sauce and condiments

appeared, and cast members brought in dishes to share. The banter was like a festive family gathering, complete with anecdotes, verbal jabs, and juicy gossip. This dining area was central to the creative rehearsal space we were building, and ties were created that enriched the environment offstage, as well as the onstage storytelling.

—NEA

Phase Four: Pre-Tech

Toward the end of the rehearsal phase, the PSM determines when the stage management team will begin to prepare for technical rehearsals. Pre-tech requires stage managers to embrace two phases: what is still happening in the rehearsal room and what will be happening in tech. Discussions, plans, and paperwork can emerge from this multifaceted view.

Logistical staging or execution challenges involving scenery, props, or costumes may go unresolved and sometimes undiscussed throughout the rehearsal phase. Pre-tech is the time to revisit these moments and determine how a challenge will be orchestrated in tech, even if the approach is "We'll figure it out in tech." Accepting that the unknown is part of the process assists the stage manager in managing group expectations and supporting collaborators.

Talking through the technical elements with creative collaborators and the stage management team is a useful procedure during pre-tech. By beginning at the top of the show and discussing every entrance, exit, scenery or costume change, and any other transition that might occur on stage, the stage managers can uncover previously unanticipated issues. By understanding how the show will be realized in performance and anticipating the production's collaborative needs, the stage manager is often better prepared for unforeseen challenges during the tech phase.

In non-traditional settings, a thorough understanding of each phase allows stage managers to effectively manage and may require them to use the phases in a different order prescribed by the needs of the production. If technical elements are introduced earlier than they might be in a traditional process, concurrent paths of performative and technical rehearsals may occur at the same time, requiring the stage manager to address pre-tech in a different way than in a traditional production.

Phase Five: Tech

During this phase, the production transitions out of the rehearsal room and into the performance space, and the stage management team integrates technical elements. The careful and imaginative preparation conducted during pre-tech can prepare the stage manager to effectively lead technical rehearsals and develop specific cues. Deliberately cultivating relationships throughout the process supports the collaborative vision.

Tech can be chaotic and intense due to the number of people involved and the multiple elements that require coordination. Clear and consistent communication from the stage management team will not prevent challenges, but communicating with care and kindness can encourage a civil process. When stage managers are intentional with their words and tone, and when they prioritize compassion and safety during this high-stress phase, they can create an environment where every collaborator feels supported.

LEARNING CURVE

I was taking over a production that had been developed a decade earlier and touring it in Australia, Brazil, and Japan, with lengthy stretches of time between each stop. Most of the project was literally foreign to me, as it was about the Cambodian genocide, performed primarily in Khmer, and underscored by a Japanese sonic artist. I

wasn't familiar with the script, I didn't originate the cueing, I didn't speak the language of the performers, and many traditional theater practices just didn't apply.

In preparation, I watched the archival video and researched Cambodian history, and the stage manager who had originated the production briefed me before I flew to Cambodia. I was moved by the intensity of the storytelling and intimidated by the daunting process of authentically remounting the production and learning the intricate cueing.

The first day's rehearsal felt awkward. I had to show up and succeed, ready for tech and confident enough to lead the group. There was no learning curve. The moment the performers walked onto the stage, I felt a great sense of responsibility. This settled me and enabled me to settle into a rhythm, focused on connecting with the collaboration rather than worrying about the outcome. We used body language and gestures to communicate, allowing the performers to physically show us what they needed. My disciplined efforts to connect, intricately learn the cueing, and build relationships taught me a different type of collaboration.

—LP

Phase Six: Previews

Previews are performances with an audience that take place concurrently with rehearsals, prior to opening night. This is often the first time the work is performed publicly. During this phase, the stage manager is still running daily technical rehearsals in which everything from the script to the scenery to the order of the scenes can change. They are expected to incorporate these changes from the rehearsal and call the performance.

Tools and strategies that support navigating change can benefit the stage manager during this phase. These can include quickly circulating logistical and creative changes with methods such as written notes, group texts, and callboard postings. Neutrally communicating the outcomes of logistical and artistic choices can manage expectations. Stage managers can do this when they communicate how time will be impacted when the team chooses to rehearse a new idea. Additionally, ensuring that the offstage and onstage environments are as consistent as possible and acknowledging the vulnerability of meeting an audience can provide support to the performers.

Phase Seven: Opening

In traditional theater, opening night is the culmination of all the previous phases. In a non-traditional process, the condensation of tech, previews, and opening can be extreme, sometimes occurring in a single day. Opening is also the moment the company's preparatory work is considered complete and is usually celebrated with a party. Opening provides everyone in the company an opportunity to thank one another and recognize the achievement and hard work.

Directors and designers regularly depart immediately after opening, and the stage management team is responsible for maintaining the aesthetic integrity of the piece over the course of the run. In a traditional process, stage managers have the history of the rehearsal and tech process, along with the blueprint of opening night to maintain the show. This responsibility may be shared with music directors, dance captains, and associate directors, and how this responsibility unfolds each day is specific to the production.

Phase Eight: Performances

There are shows that run for one night or two weekends, and others that never close. Performances require stage managers to care for the unique interaction the project has with the audience and the continued challenges of repeating

and maintaining live performance. In a traditional process, the additional responsibility of rehearsing understudies during this phase requires stage managers to emulate the creative climate that was established by the director. Entire scenes and moments may be built upon a phrase or word that was given to a performer in rehearsal, and using the exact language of the director allows the stage management team to recreate the director's original intent in understudy rehearsals.

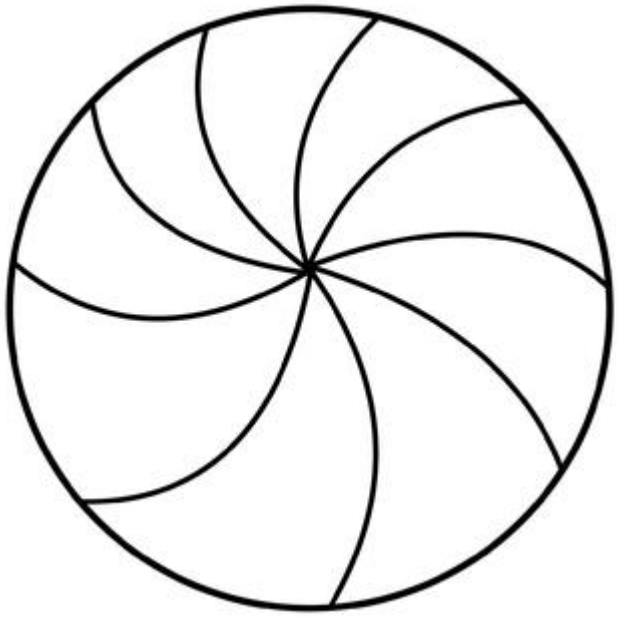
The performance phase is when the stage management team settles into a routine, building upon everything that has been established during the previous phases of the process. Just as stage managers can create a safe rehearsal room environment, they can maintain an environment where the work unfolds within a dynamic structure. Once immersed in the run, performers and the crew rely on the collaborative foundation that has been built to sustain their work, and the backstage atmosphere can be functional and enjoyable. The stage management team is able to influence this environment by prioritizing respect, thoughtfulness, and consistency.

Phase Nine: Closing

In many traditional processes, upon closing or shortly thereafter, stage managers are responsible for archiving the production. In the early phases of the process, the stage manager can devise effective systems to document the production in the event that it is remounted. Establishing a time for self-reflection and goal assessment can be important at the closing of a process. Evaluating triumphs, challenges, and specific moments of effective collaboration individually and as a team allow stage managers to develop stronger practices for the next collaboration.

Conclusion

The Nine Phases provide a bedrock upon which to evolve an approach that integrates theory and practice, allowing the stage manager to connect deeply with the challenges of the production process.



IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

- Review the list below, which is applicable to each phase and the theory-based practices they can inspire. Continue this list for yourself, specifically identifying how your theory-based practices can

guide each task, facilitation, and communication:

- o Leadership—Establish yourself as stage manager and creative partner.
- o Communication—Proactively meet the organization and your collaborators.
- o Safety—Create and promote a healthy environment that fosters discovery, risk-taking, mutual respect, and play.
- o Collaboration—Intentionally build primary relationships in support of the artistic vision of the project.
- o Empowerment—Purposefully introduce your team members as liaisons to the cast and production departments.

THINK LIKE A STAGE MANAGER IN PRACTICE

- Taking into account each of the Nine Phases, how will you approach your next project differently?
- Which values and attributes are most important for you to embody in each phase and why? Use a template to clearly articulate your theory-based practices: During (phase), I want to incorporate/ personify (value/attribute) because (why this is important to you/what this could mean to your team/cast/company).
- How can you habitually integrate communication and safety into your practice as the leader of a stage management team or as an assistant?

3

The environment in which a production process occurs greatly influences how it unfolds and how the collaborative team interacts. Environments can include different types of performance, such as dance, opera, concerts, events, and circuses, all of which are also referred to as genres. It can also refer to the physical venue, space, or geographic location, as well as regulated and unregulated processes and formal and informal authority. People can comprise an environment, and stage managers factor safety into every environment because of its widespread impact.

Genres

Genres can be specific or interdisciplinary, combining more than one category of performance into a cohesive whole. Whether working in one or a combination of genres, the unique challenges presented often require an adaptive understanding of multiple disciplines. While different types of performers often share similar traits, there are also observable differences in the ways actors, dancers, opera singers, and musicians train, practice, and prepare. Musicians usually require a quiet, solitary space to warm up, while dancers often need a sprung floor with marley and a regulated, consistent temperature. An opera singer arrives already having memorized their part, while actors learn their lines during the rehearsal process. Performers from different backgrounds have different instruments to care for that can include their voice, a physical instrument, or their body.

Stage managing in an unfamiliar genre can be disjointed, and research can help prepare the stage manager for the process. Additionally, identifying threads of connection can create unity for the collaborative team. There could be pre-existing relationships or an affiliation with the same educational institution. The creative team's work histories can also be examined. Is this a group that has worked together before, or is everyone involved new to one another? The stage manager's role as integrator, interpreter, and translator may vary, depending on the answers. Teams familiar with one another may not need the stage manager to interpret for them, but a group that has not worked together before may rely on the stage manager's ability to translate different production processes across genres.

Depending on the environment they are working in, the stage manager's initial conversation with a colleague may be their only opportunity to establish themselves as a creative partner, implement systems necessary to orchestrate the event, and build a relationship. If the production phases are compounded, explicitly stating expectations, goals, and intentions can be effective strategies. Thoughtful, well-framed questions that are designed to uncover useful information can quickly establish rapport and a working relationship during a first meeting.

When the stage manager joins the process at a later phase, questions about all aspects of the production, such as relationships, aesthetics, or tech, can reveal significant details. In dance, for instance, the stage manager may have learned the pieces in advance via video, but they often don't join the production until tech, which could last for a single day or just a few hours. Additionally, there is a common practice of stage managers joining productions that are already in progress. Surfacing information in either of these environments can aid the stage manager as they integrate into an already-formed group dynamic.

Space and Location

The space or physical venue and geographic location where production processes occur frequently shapes the stage manager's approach. These environments include different types of stages, such as proscenium, thrust, or in-the-round, and different spaces like outdoor amphitheaters, parks, or a coffee shop or living room. The geographic location of the production is also a factor in any environment. All these environmental elements require stage managers to consider a multitude of possibilities in relation to the production, including the proximity of the cast to the audience; different languages; if the performances take place outdoors, weather; and time zones. For example, rehearsing and performing a show in California whose producers are in New York impacts when stage managers might receive information, answers to questions or requests, or approvals needed to move the production process forward.

The physical venue can also shape the way communication is used during the process. In a traditional theater environment, tools like headsets, microphones, and god-mics are available to the stage manager and the crew. When working in an environment where the traditional tools aren't provided, accessible, or applicable, the stage manager may need to devise innovative and adaptive methods like group texts, flashlights, or two-way radios to effectively communicate. In international environments, apps that translate language, temperature, and systems of measurement could be adopted.

BACKSTAGE PASS

I was the production liaison and stage manager for a free outdoor concert performed by a world-renowned musician. The organizers had underestimated the number of attendees, and crowds formed on all sides of the stage, even in the streets behind it where there wasn't a sound system. I had planned on being out front during the performance, but over the course of the day, I decided it made more sense to call from backstage, where I could be close to the performer and in personal contact with the producers. Given the number of people, there was no way that I would have been able to walk between backstage and the booth. After a failed attempt at calling the show through the unreliable headset system, I ended up texting cues to the local stage manager who was in the booth. Because I couldn't see the stage image from my position, I frequently had to cross to the front of the stage to monitor the camera angles and lighting. The enormous crowd loved the performance, had no idea of the challenges that went into it, and the unconventional communication solutions fit the environment well.

—LP

Regulated and Unregulated Environments

Union status is an important consideration that structurally impacts many elements of a production environment. The International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) is the union that governs stagehands in multiple performance environments, including Broadway, as well as many Off-Broadway, regional theater, television, film, and event spaces around the United States and Canada. When the first stop of a production is a theater governed by union regulations and the next stop is a university campus where those rules have been replaced with university policy, adaptation is necessary. In productions that fall under IATSE's jurisdiction, rules determine who can touch what, when

rehearsals can take place, and who is allowed to move furniture and operate equipment in both the rehearsal room and the theater itself. In these scenarios, the stage management team intentionally navigates union rules while adhering to the demands of the production.

MOVING TO BROADWAY

I was consulting on a project that was moving from Off-Broadway to Broadway. The director wanted to know what the most significant differences would be and how best to prepare for them. I explained that moving from a non-union theatre to an IATSE-regulated house was going to be the biggest challenge. A large part of the play was improvisational, and the dialogue adapted the headlines of the day. I recommended the stage manager introduce the cast to the numerous union rules that govern Broadway by describing them as systems of support and safety measures. I also strongly suggested that the stage management team prepare the union crew for this non-traditional production by explaining that elements of the piece shifted daily, that almost everyone on the design and directing team was new to this level of production, and that this could be an opportunity for the veteran crew to teach this young creative team about working on Broadway.

—NEA

Formal and Informal Authority

The authority structures of the environment will impact the process of the stage management team. Formal authority is the established roles and responsibilities of the individuals, based on the existing organizational structure. Informal authority refers to the personal relationships and bonds that exist between individuals, and it exists in relationship with formal authority. Some relationships are based on both types of authority, while some will exist exclusively in one category. The production manager who has hired a stage manager they have known for years may need to invoke their formal authority in terms of a budgeting issue, or a famous performer may hold more informal authority than the rest of the cast members. The impact authority structures can have on a production process isn't always clear at the outset, and stage managers can research and investigate to discern the models of authority in a new environment.

AUTHORITY IN ACTION

I was stage managing a high-profile Shakespeare play with a well-known actor whose film career was on the verge of exploding. The entire show rested on his shoulders, and the stakes, especially his, were very high. He was transparent and direct when he approached me about missing an afternoon of rehearsal. He was reading for a leading role in an Oscar-winning director's next project, opposite two of the world's most famous actors. He could have easily gone to the producer and asked for the time, or he could have just told me he wasn't going to be there, but instead, he went through the proper channels, rather than invoking the informal authority of celebrity. It took some effort to reschedule the day in question, but ultimately, despite the protestations of the director, we made it work. The day after the star was absent, a different actor in a much smaller role came and requested the morning off for an audition. Bending over backward for the leading man was one thing; however, accommodating a younger and less established cast member was quite another. I chose to invoke my formal authority and say no to the request, clearly defining a boundary. For the record, the leading man got the part.

—LP

Environment Influencing Safety

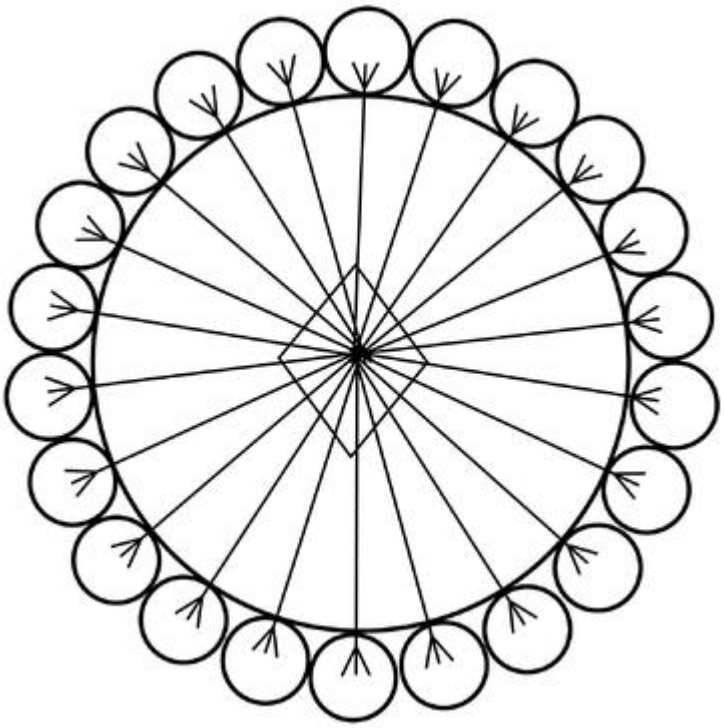
The stage management team's assessment of the environment will impact how they address safety concerns. Some productions include safety training for evacuation or health emergencies for both the audience and onstage. Large events or high-profile environments that involve celebrities, international diplomats, and government officials might require specific levels of security, including guidelines for how to respond to an active shooter. The pre-show production timeline may have to include background checks of company members, security sweeps, and the implementation of a safety screening process for the audience. Being aware of the safety requirements of the venue and thinking through the first few steps of an emergency process are often important duties of the stage management team.

In other environments, such as immersive theater where the traditional boundaries between audience and performers are blurred, performers could be more vulnerable. Creating and implementing response systems, such as a safe word to notify stage managers that assistance is needed, could be necessary. Notifying the audience that they are being filmed can also deter a potentially inappropriate patron.

Conclusion

The environment is also made up of the collective group of people who are a part of it, including the stage management team, the company, and the audience. By taking into account the various individuals who comprise this feature of environment, stage managers can better equip themselves for active collaboration. A stage management team that has never worked together before will require different practices from the PSM than a team that has been collaborating for years. A cast of recent college graduates may require a certain level of instruction from stage managers about professional practice that a group of seasoned actors would not need.

The effects of environment are far-reaching, and stage managers can better prepare for collaborative process when they consider the possibilities with thought and care. The information gleaned can be a useful tool as the information directly influences and determines stage management practice.



IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

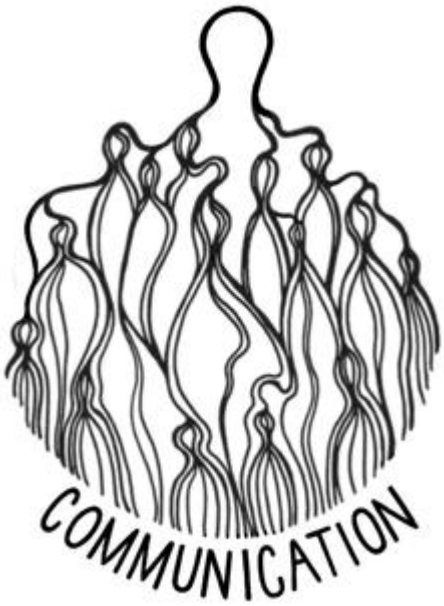
- Think about tools that would be most effective in the following environments. Make notes about the specific strategies you could incorporate or experiment with.

o Award shows
o Branded experiences such as Disney and Cirque du Soleil
o Dance
o Concerts
o Cruise ships
o Corporate events
o Olympics and other large-scale sporting events
o Opera
o Political events
o Site specific

THINK LIKE A STAGE MANAGER ACROSS ENVIRONMENTS

- Reflect on different environments in which you have worked, considering genres, physical spaces, authority structures, and union versus non-regulated venues. Do you feel more at home in one environment over another? Are there strategies from the home environment that influence your choices and priorities when you cross over into others?
- Is there an environment you aspire to work in? If so, what is it and why?
- How do you create your foundation of process in an environment you are unfamiliar with?

4



Stage managers are responsible for establishing the communication systems within a production. They communicate constantly and continually consider all the options when identifying the multiple styles and systems of communication that coexist in a collaborative environment. While often considered a soft skill, effective communication practices are actually some of the hardest to learn and implement.

The stage manager is often in a position to clarify a statement directed toward them or members of the company by repeating it back to the other person and then offering space for restating their intentions. The team can engage in multiple communication strategies, ranging from the effective to the destructive, during the production process. There are specific tactics that can impact collaborative chemistry and overall functionality. Resistance to feedback, new ideas, or the overall process could be a signal that the stage manager needs to encourage directness and engage that collaborator in active communication.

Communication Defaults

Communication defaults refer to the unconscious and habitual ways each person has learned to express themselves. For example, some people are very direct, while others have a difficult time communicating what they really believe or want to say. These defaults are often ingrained and can be difficult to address and change. Exploring and engaging new techniques and taking risks that sometimes require vulnerability can support and enhance an adaptive approach to communication. The given circumstances of age, gender identification, ethnicity, race, and a multitude of other aspects of identity can influence a person's communication defaults. Assuming that each person will have a different interpretation of a conversation or decision-making process can be one of a stage manager's most effective insights.

Effective Communication

Effective communication is communicating with a clear intention and an understanding of one's audience. An understanding of communication defaults, as well as different mediums for communication, enables the stage manager to employ tools that make them a more dynamic communicator.

Sometimes this process can be as simple as sharing information, while at other times an interaction could be more complex and emotional. For example, when relaying a simple technical note, there could be a unilateral correspondence to the technical director. However, when a technical note impacts the design, a more complex and sensitive conversation may be required that takes into account the communication methods and styles of the people involved.

Stage managers are frequently engaged in challenging processes in which emotions are heightened and collaborators are vulnerable. Tolerating discomfort and using effective communication skills can potentially diffuse tension, keep the focus on the production as a whole, and restore stability to the environment.

LET'S FIX IT IN POST

I was doing an Off-Broadway show with an Oscar-winning director who had never directed a stage play. After decades of working with actors and creating gorgeous images for the screen, he faced new communicative demands and challenges and had to learn how to direct in a way that actors could develop their own sustainable performances, rather than choosing the best take and orchestrating the direction in post-production.

One of the actors, an Off-Broadway veteran, saw warning signs early. She posed typical questions to the director about her character that he couldn't answer. Although they both began the process with patience, the relationship quickly devolved, and she started to openly challenge his authority in rehearsal. She would say, "My character wouldn't do that" or "This is a strong woman; you're making her weak." I played the peacemaker for as long as I could, but eventually I had to turn to the producer for help. There weren't many options left for me to encourage their collaboration. He had strong, structured, and inflexible ideas. She knew how to build a performance that she could sustain for eight shows a week. What started as a beautiful opportunity for collaboration ended with resentment, anger, and a piece of theater that reflected those conflicts.

—LP

Authentic Communication

Based on self-awareness and vulnerability, authentic communication is being genuine, honest, and clear, taking responsibility for opinions, ideas, mistakes, and aesthetics. Stage managers can build trust and respect by modeling authentic communication, aligning with their core values, ethics, and purpose. Being willing to say, "Yes, I made a mistake" or "My idea didn't work; let's try something else" can establish the stage manager as a trustworthy communicator. The use of "I/me" language over "you/we" language and taking ownership of one's words, actions, and emotions are simple and simultaneously complex approaches that can nurture an environment of clarity and effectiveness.

Authentic communication is frequently neglected during times of high stress when the pressure of intense time constraints can sometimes lead to uncivil discourse. Maintaining accountability for one's behavior can become increasingly challenging when dealing with someone who may be defensive, angry, or retaliatory. Receiving destructive communication and translating it into an empathetic response is an effective and authentic tactic. For example, if an actor is angry at the stage manager because a rehearsal is running behind, instead of meeting that behavior with anger, the stage manager can acknowledge the actor's frustration and assure them that the schedule is being scrutinized on a daily basis. By validating the actor's emotions, the stage manager empathizes with them and lets them know their concerns have been heard, even if there's no recourse to change the circumstances.

Active, engaged listening followed by a distillation of the words and ideas of a conversation into a summarized response are examples of simple and powerful tools to promote dynamic and functional communication.

Another aspect of authentic communication can be asking for assistance with a task. When others are stakeholders in how a task is completed, that form of collaboration can empower teammates, especially those with lower status than the person asking for help. A request can come in many forms, and stage managers can experiment with the method

most applicable to the current process. For example, the following could be asked by one stage management team member to another: “I’ve experimented with several ways to word this email, and I need help deciding on the most effective option. Please take a look and let me know what you think.” Or a request could be very technical, such as “I’m preparing this ground plan for our taping session next week. Please check my math.” The person requesting help can be more effective by actively committing to hear the reply and integrating the recommendations into their actions.

Conflict Navigation

The stage manager’s ability to recognize their behavior related to conflict navigation and potential resolutions can enable skillful problem-solving. By diagnosing patterns of conflict, the stage manager can identify alternative approaches and tailor those to the circumstances.

If the stage manager is conflict-averse, avoiding the conflict could aggravate the situation. Alternatively, stage managers who are very comfortable with conflict may jump to mediation without taking the time to determine a strategic approach.

Stage managers can proactively avert some conflict and destructive communication by initiating and sustaining difficult conversations. This skill, when used with self-awareness, can transform the stage manager from reactive to responsive. Developing a regular practice of opening uncomfortable conversations, particularly with the most challenging of collaborators, can render those conversations a healthy and typical part of the process. One tactic is rehearsing the conversation in advance with someone who will role play the other party, allowing the stage manager to practice several methods of response. The habit of engaging with words and ideas that others may not want to hear in an open and direct manner can elevate a stage manager’s practice and evolve their style.

Boundaries

Implementing boundaries serves as an important stage management competency. These refer to self-imposed or mutually agreed upon thresholds that could define elements of a process such as a relationship, physical space, or time. Boundaries can be fixed, meaning they are immovable, or fluid, when there is flexibility about the parameters. Indicating when a boundary is fluid, as opposed to fixed, can be a strategy to build trust.

Examples of criteria that can be considered when defining boundaries include:

- Physical: The person setting the boundary establishes how much access others have to their physical body and personal space. This term also applies to the type of architectural spaces where a conversation or work may take place.
- Emotional: Personal determination by the individual setting the boundary of how and when others have access to their feelings and emotions.
- Time: Setting clear markers for when an activity begins and ends, including extending or limiting time when necessary.
- Language: Clarifying what types of language are welcome during a process, as well as establishing words and other spoken and written expression that collaborators agree will not be used. Creating a specific lexicon that relates to the production can be useful.

Boundaries can be external or internal. An external boundary is one that is communicated directly to another party. An internal boundary is an intrinsic understanding of how one approaches specific collaborative relationships. The stage manager cannot expect a collaborator to honor an internal boundary that has not been expressed. Setting both external and internal boundaries can be an important process for a stage manager within a production process, supporting the navigation of power dynamics and relationships.

When collaborators are in conflict, the stage manager can keep boundaries intact by validating and empathizing without taking sides. The stage manager will need to decide whether to allow flexibility within their own boundaries in order to deescalate the situation. In these scenarios, one tactic is introducing a new time boundary, such as proposing a one-on-one conversation following the rehearsal, rather than addressing an upset collaborator during active rehearsal time.

Feedback

Establishing a work culture where feedback is freely given and received can be an effective communication tool. Considered responses can contribute to open dialogue amongst collaborators, which can result in changes in service to the production. The PSM can model this behavior by using feedback models, language systems that establish a structure for sharing observations and making requests for adaptation and change. This could be as straightforward as saying, "I observed _____, and based on that, I recommend _____." Feedback can also include moments of praise or gratitude that validate a collaborator and their contributions to the production.

Non-Verbal Communication

Recognizing and responding to body language can be as important as the spoken and written language. Reading facial expressions, as well as observing closed versus open body language are useful tools, especially if there is no shared verbal language. The stage manager's communication approach can be influenced by their awareness of the body language of themselves and others. This might include subtle factors such as facial affect and proprioception, the location of the body within space. For example, crossing arms, legs, and other parts of your body can indicate the person is unavailable for communication.

People are constantly communicating, through eye contact, somatic and sensory systems, receiving information that remains untranslated into words. The ability to read a room and observe the silence and unspoken moments as much as the elements that make noise can be an important aspect of communication. Following up with the performer who remained in the corner with crossed arms with a gentle question can be the turning point in supporting that relationship. Remaining engaged sends a non-verbal message to the performers that the stage manager is paying attention.

LISTENING FOR SAFETY

I was still adapting to a company that integrated theatrical storytelling with circus arts. This show I was stage managing had a contortionist, clowns, a high-wire, and a flying trapeze act, all performed without a safety net or harnesses. I had to accept that the thrill of these daredevil stunts was because they were actually dangerous, and I had to create new ways to facilitate safety. In circus, this meant checking-in with the artists each day, keeping their pre-show routines consistent, and preserving the environment to make it as dependable as possible.

During one warm-up, I noticed a trapeze performer rubbing her wrist. I caught her eye, raised my wrist and pointed at it. She grimaced back mouthing, "It hurts." I approached her, and we decided to cut two spins from her routine that evening. Another night, the tightrope performer didn't chat with the stage managers as he always did when he pre-set his ropes. I took notice and visited his dressing room before the show. Indeed, he was having a hard time being present. I suggested that he perform his backup routine, which was much safer. He agreed, and did so until he was ready to walk the ropes again.

—NEA

Technology and Communication

Technology platforms have replaced many traditionally face-to-face forms of communication, and the stage manager's role in shaping this aspect of the process is complex. Some of these choices will depend upon the tech-savviness and generational norms of the company. The platforms the stage manager defaults to and incorporates into their personal life may not always be the most effective options for the production or the stage management team.

The way in which the stage manager communicates with a collaborator is an important aspect of their style. Giving weight to the strengths and limitations of available platforms, whether the tone is formal or informal, and the confidentiality of the communication are all aspects to take into account in every interaction.

Taking a moment to consider who needs to be included, when, and on which platform, is an important tool for effective communication. Excluding one or more people from any type of messaging can send an unintentional statement. Some conversations could benefit from in-person communication, where all parties can more easily understand the subtlety of the exchange and respond to body language.

Stage managers model how they use technology for the company, and establish the boundaries of public, private, and personal communication within a production. Sending an email to a group requires a different approach than a private interaction, which might be better served by texting. If the stage manager is having a personal interaction, such as discussing an unexpected health concern with a collaborator, an in-person conversation or a phone call might be more appropriate.

Language of Production

The language of production that is inherent within the process is the shared knowledge of the technical aspects of the process. It applies in every production environment, even when diverse production dialects are spoken in different disciplines. Stage managers who are well-versed in multiple technical areas have the ability to communicate with collaborators in any production-oriented environment, and can ask clarifying questions to understand how each of them approaches their role. Mindfully attending to the nuances within the language of production can distinguish a stage manager's work by enabling deeper connection and mutual understanding.

THE INTERN

> The director had done the show several times, but my team and I were brand new to the play and each other. We were rehearsing the 25 scenes out of order, and he wasn't happy with our lack of familiarity with the material. Two days before we moved into the theatre, he asked us to set for scene 20. In an effort to prove that I knew which scene was which, I called out the furniture items that were needed before checking the breakdown. I was wrong, and the director did not hesitate to say that he was worried about me teching the show. After rehearsal, I shared with my team how miserable I felt and how hard it was for me to memorize the different scenes. Our intern spoke up, saying, "I know all of the scenes by number. I could help." The assistant stage managers and I quizzed her, throwing out random scene numbers, and each time she knew the scene title, who was in it, and what furniture pieces were necessary. In tech we made sure she had a headset so she could prompt us. While the director never commented about how swift we had become, it was clear that he was pleased. I wondered if my team thought less of me, but I reminded myself how important it is to fully utilize and depend on each team member, even those with the least authority, instead of being threatened by their abilities.
>
> *—NEA*

Language of Teamwork

Every stage management team develops its own language over the course of a production. Frequent and effective communication can establish a dynamic that is focused and highly functional. If team members aren't encouraged or are unwilling to share authentically, this chemistry can be drastically compromised. For example, if a task is delegated, and the assistant stage manager isn't given detailed instructions, and is then criticized for doing the task incorrectly, talking openly about that series of events can build trust and set a positive tone for future conversations.

The PSM can strategically engage in team-building by encouraging the team to share their personal and professional goals, potentially enhancing the health and integrity of the stage management collaboration. The PSM has the formal authority to set the tone and model having uncomfortable conversations early and frequently. Their diagnosis of the willingness of team members to engage, can empower them to encourage the participation of the entire team. Meetings in which logistical information is shared and triumphs and challenges are discussed can cultivate team morale and build trust. When the functionality of the team is discussed frequently and openly, the potential for positive outcomes can increase. Specific and timely praise, encouragement, and constructive criticism can promote an environment of mutual respect and shared responsibility.

THE TYPO

> My new show was in pre-production, and my new ASM and I were both still working on other projects. We had never met in person, and had time for just an hour-long meeting to determine who would accomplish what before the first rehearsal. One day later, the ASM sent an email that egregiously misspelled the production manager's name. I was mortified and angry. It was the first time each of us had worked for this theater and we had just made an unprofessional impression. I pulled out my phone and composed a terse text. Before pressing send, I read it aloud, and paused. Reading every correspondence I write before sending is a habit I developed through years of intentional practice. The ASM was just at the beginning of their career and might not have considered intentionally implementing systems to proof their work. I hadn't discussed how important it was to me that our email correspondence and paperwork be correct and free of typos. In that pause, I realized that this was a step in building our team culture. I was establishing the method of communication and tone I wanted to use when giving feedback. Did I really want this to begin with an accusatory text? I erased it, jotted down a few words to help me open the conversation, and called my assistant. That was the first time the two of us compassionately exchanged constructive feedback. Our working relationship evolved into one of my most successful in terms of collaboration and functionality, and that might not have happened if I had just pressed send.
>
> *—NEA*

Crafting and Framing Questions

Communication can be informed by the manner in which questions are formulated and posed. A question framed directly can be much more effective than one that is open-ended or a question asked to seek validation. A direct question states exactly the request of the asker, for example, "I need help with this paperwork. Do you have time right now" when an open-ended question is vague and without a direct inquiry such as, "Are you busy right now?" And a question seeking validation is fishing for a compliment or an acknowledgment of an investment of work that is asked like, "I've put so much work into this paperwork and I'm really stuck. Is there anything you could do to help?"

Any member of a team has the ability to shape a question in a manner that sparks useful information and taking the time to frame the question and recognize it as direct, open-ended, or in search of validation, can provide insight into the intentions of the person asking. For example, posing open-ended questions, including, "what do you think?" "how do you feel?" or "thoughts?" can be less productive than beginning with an "I" statement that includes an observation, recognizes the influencing conditions, and then requests feedback, such as, "I felt some tension in the room as we were blocking that difficult scene, did you share that observation and do you have any insight or recommendations?" In addition to examining the method in which a question is asked, the setting and timing can contribute to the usefulness of the question. Important details include ensuring that the person that is being asked is in a comfortable location and has time for the conversation. The stage manager's sensitive and intentional framing of questions, as well

as an awareness of timing, supports a healthy flow of information and assists in growing a healthy collaborative environment.

Open-Ended and Directly-Framed Questions

Examples of open-ended questions that have been translated into directly-framed questions follow:

Open-Ended Question	***Directly-Framed Questions***
Stage Manager to Director: How do you want tech to run?	Stage Manager to Director: I propose setting daily goals, as well as a method for checking in on breaks about our progress during the upcoming tech. How will this approach work for you?
Stage Manager to Director: How are you feeling about that performer's work?	Stage Manager to Director: I've observed some tension between you and that performer, and I want to support cultivating a more open dialogue between the two of you. Are you open to having a conversation about how to proceed?

Economy of Language and Tone

When the stage manager chooses their words carefully, using the fewest and most effective words to make their point, they are using an economy of language. This direct way of speaking is intentional and clear, without resorting to unnecessary filler phrases, such as sentences that begin with the word “if,” or regularly using phrases that might include, “like,” “you know,” “I mean,” or “sort of.”

Instead of saying “If you could take it back to the cross downstage,” for example, the stage manager could replace this request with clear direction, such as, “Thank you for your patience, please take it back to the cross downstage,” or “Let’s work on that moment again.”

The stage manager’s vocal tone is an important indicator of their confidence and authority. Tone that includes a blend of directness with kindness can be an authentic method of expression, reducing the possibility of misunderstanding that can exponentially expand when indirect communication is pervasive. Awareness of vocal habits that undermine strong communication, such as upspeak, when a request or direction travel up the vocal register and sound like a question, can undermine effective communication.

Collaborators in a position of power may feel more freedom to express themselves directly and to exercise authority through language. When a tone of disrespect enters into language, being prepared with a well-crafted response is an important mechanism for someone who has less power than those holding formal authority. Two responses could be, “I hear you and that was definitely a tough rehearsal,” or “I value your opinion and let’s schedule a time to debrief.”

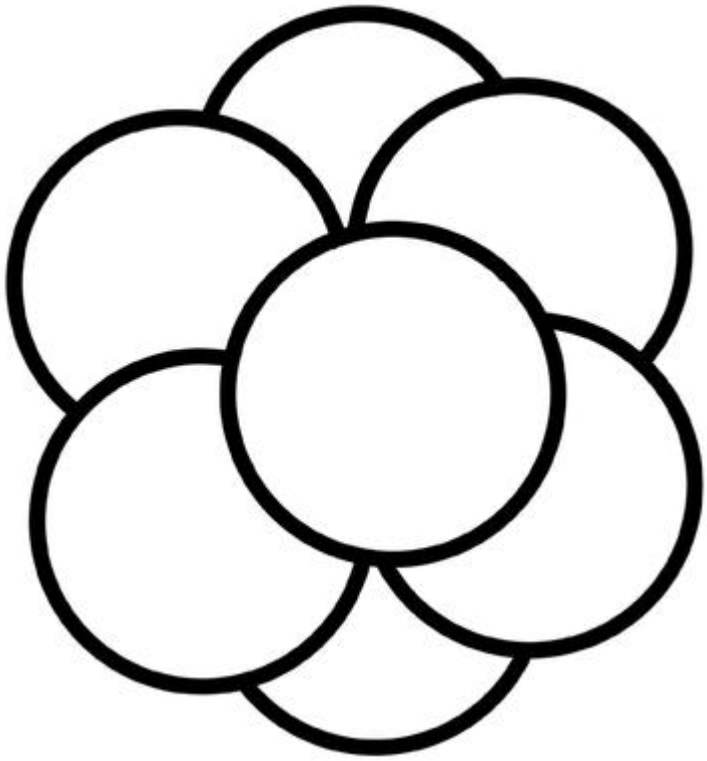
The stage manager can be in a position to carefully orchestrate airtime, who gets to speak in meetings and for how long. There will be collaborators who require an invitation to join the conversation, while others will readily speak and assume they have abundant airtime and a level of agency regarding conversations. Strategies to guide the use of airtime include setting clear time boundaries, asking a question that invites a particular person to speak, being attentive to the body language of someone who is hesitant to speak and inviting them to add a comment, and being familiar with who is an extrovert or an introvert.

Inclusive Language

Inclusive language incorporates an expression of identity and is becoming more prevalent in the workplace. One way that stage managers can express the importance of inclusive language is stating their pronouns, as well as speaking with "people first" language. Referring to "a person with a disability" is different than saying "a disabled person." The awareness surrounding gender nonconforming, transgender, and non-binary collaborators continues to develop. Many stage managers are replacing the traditional tech and pre-show announcements that begin with "ladies and gentlemen" to more inclusive phrases that adapt to the environment.

Conclusion

The stage manager's ability to adapt to the unique communication style and preferences of every individual and group can be shaped by experience and a commitment to being adaptive, contributing to effective and authentic communication. Developing a collective mindset around communication enables the stage management team to navigate environmental factors, diverse circumstances, and unclear authority structures.



IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

- Prior to your next show-related meeting or discussion, take a moment to reflect upon your most common communication strategies. Acknowledge the important role that your communication habits play in the creative process.
    - o Strengthen your awareness and implementation of the regular tools and techniques that you rely upon to connect with your colleagues.
    - o Choose to consciously work with your existing communication patterns as well as incorporating a new practice from this chapter. Name the new technique, share it with the team, and write it down along with a few desired outcomes.
    - o Observe when you can soften your communication style and when you could benefit from enhanced engagement.
    - o Develop a method for opening challenging conversations and rehearse your opening line in advance. For example, "Chris, I was unsettled by our conversation before rehearsal this

morning and I want to debrief. Is this a good time?"

- o Mirror the communication patterns of the person or group by tuning into the communication patterns of those you are working with.
- o Modulate the level of detail that you provide when explaining a development or giving feedback. Some people will stop listening if there are too many details, while others will crave them.

THINK LIKE STAGE MANAGER ABOUT COMMUNICATION

- Practice one or more of the following language tools that may be unfamiliar to you. Note how your communication style is or is not impacted by practicing the language technique:

  - o Place the "I" before "you," especially when giving feedback.
  - o Choose other words for "'should" (obligation), would (resignation), could (possibility).
  - o Observe the contexts within which you add a qualifier such as "if" to a sentence.
  - o Experiment with choosing another word for "if," and notice how your communication style does or does not change.
  - o Rethink the phrase "____ made me feel" and own your response(s).
  - o Notice when you say what you don't want instead of what you do want in service to a working culture of abundance over scarcity.
  - o Replace "but" with "and."
  - o Use "I want" and "I need" with intention and purpose.

5

Calling a show as a stage manager refers to verbally communicating with technicians, telling them when to execute the cues that have been developed with the creative team in tech. While calling cues is a form of orchestrating a show, orchestration can also involve varied areas like time, transitions, and relationships.

Cueing

Calling cues is the central way a stage manager orchestrates. They translate the formative work from the rehearsal room into the performance space, transforming creative intentions into actionable cues, and layering in design elements. There is no singular way that this occurs. Whether in traditional or non-traditional processes, stage managers can watch, listen, and work to understand the artistic intent of a production so they can best place cues and achieve the creative vision.

The relationship with each designer guides the cueing process, and inquiring about a designer's preferred method prior to tech allows the stage manager to plan accordingly. Some designers give stage managers cue numbers, placements, and descriptions in pre-tech, while others relay this information during technical rehearsals, perhaps moments before the stage manager has to execute the cue for the first time. If a designer doesn't communicate what a cue does, the stage manager can discern their intent by closely watching and listening. By adjusting to the different working methods of their collaborators, stage managers can be more effective orchestrators.

Incorporating the language that the creative collaborators have used throughout the rehearsal period can be beneficial. If a beat has been referred to as an explosive moment, or a director has given a note that the lights activate the scene, this can be helpful for both the stage manager and the designer, because it reveals the objective and informs the design. Additionally, stage managers can use language with collaborators that incorporates motivations and intentions when discussing cue placements. Using language that includes intent, rather than language that only references cue numbers, can improve the communication and efficiency of tech as well as demonstrate the stage manager's understanding of the show.

The way stage managers orchestrate cues can vary in response to the environment. In the theater, every detail is orchestrated during technical rehearsals and then executed during the run. In contrast, within the unpredictable culture of corporate events, stage managers are often required to improvise during a show, which could include something as extreme as changing the order of the show, or executing cues without rehearsing them first.

Time

Time has a natural place within the stage manager's relationship to managing the production process. Chronological time is sequential and can be measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, and years. The most opportune moment or the right time to take action can be subjective. Chronological time is quantitative, while the opportune moment is qualitative. Stage management theory in regards to time recognizes the responsibility to manage chronological time while allowing for essential moments or timing.

In the course of any given rehearsal day in most traditional and non-traditional processes, keeping track of how much time has elapsed, when breaks are due, and speculating about how much time it will take to accomplish a task or rehearse a section of text are responsibilities soundly within the stage manager's purview. Directors and stage managers constantly assess how much time any given rehearsal will take, as well as how much time they have left at any given moment. Inevitably, collaborators will feel like they don't have enough time, or wonder where the time went.

Time management is much more than just keeping track of the clock. Stage managers can strategically expand or contract the way time is used to serve the production. When a rehearsal comes to a halt due to a strong difference of opinion, the stage manager could opt to call a break, regardless of whether a break is due, in order to dissipate tension and allow artists to briefly step away from the challenge before re-engaging. Likewise, within a break, stage managers attentive to the room may observe that a director and performer are privately discussing a moment. Their body language may convey that they need more time, and a stage manager can choose to expand the break and allow the conversation to proceed before returning to rehearsal.

Day-to-day schedules rarely unfold exactly as planned, and introducing time restraints, after thoughtful evaluation, may also be what a process needs. Sometimes, informing collaborators that there is only a specific amount of remaining work time left in a prescribed schedule can lead to decision-making and closure. Applying time boundaries firmly and sensitively can be an effective strategy. Likewise, easing time boundaries can be effective. Stage managers can suggest disregarding part of a schedule to allow more time for a present moment. The impact of these decisions is weighed against the benefits of allowing more time for the immediate moment.

Over the course of the rehearsal phase, the stage management team records each part of the process. Transitions, monologues, scenes, and entire musical numbers will eventually be timed, as are whole scenes and acts. This information proves useful in many ways, such as generating run sheets for crew members who use time to know when to execute cues, or determining which scenes can be reviewed in a specific window of time. Carefully citing the time variance of a moment or scene is an effective maintenance tool, and many performers will adjust their performance accordingly if told that a scene or monologue is running longer than it has previously. This strategy is free of subjective opinion, and can be effective with performers who may be resistant to the stage manager's feedback.

In both traditional and non-traditional environments, every production requires prep time prior to each performance. The crew needs to test equipment, move scenery, and pre-set props, costumes, and scenic items. Performers warm-up vocally and physically, and sometimes require a fight or dance call. A speaker at a corporate event may need to review the stage layout or change their presentation. Stage managers frequently determine the hierarchy of the needs of preparation, especially when there are competing needs.

NEGOTIATING WHO AND WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT

> The electrician came to the stage management office to tell me we had two burnt out lights. He had discovered the problem during dimmer check, and replacing them would require a lift to be brought onstage. I immediately got up to see for myself where these lights were and how often they were used. Bringing the lift and replacing both lamps meant the stage would be unavailable as a warmup area, and the actors in this marathon-length Broadway play had a very specific physical and vocal warm-up that could only be done onstage, because of the space required. This was essential in aiding the mental and physical stamina needed to sustain the long performance. I considered several solutions including replacing one lamp that day and waiting to do the other one the next, not replacing either lamp at that moment and scheduling a specific work call that would not impact the

cast warm-up, or opening the house late to allow for both the lamp replacements and the warm-ups. Several of these ideas had financial implications, because they impacted the crew's work hours, and I discussed all of them with the company manager. We decided to change one lamp in that moment and save the other for the next day. The cast had abbreviated warm-up time onstage, and the overall design was not compromised with just one lamp out. Everyone's needs were considered as time was deliberately orchestrated.

—NEA

Timing

Determining appropriate timing is complex and requires the consideration of explicit and implicit information, sometimes communicated with non-verbal indicators, such as body language or tone of voice. For example, gauging the right time to discuss a challenge with a director or understanding the timing of a scenic transition in relation to where the lights are called. This level of orchestration occurs repeatedly and is informed by experience and instincts.

Stage managers influence timing for all sorts of situations, including when to take a break, initiate a conversation, resolve conflict, and even when to stop a show. Sometimes the stage manager can individually identify an excellent time to take action, while in other scenarios, they may ask team members their opinion. Stage managers often have to inform collaborators that the time they want or need is not available, in order to move the process forward rather than repeatedly focus on one moment.

SLAM DUNK

The corporate event had been intricately planned, plotted, and rehearsed. The demos for this well-known tech company had been tested, and the room was full of press. The backstage was made up of production staff and an army of engineers who had worked on these products for years. Part of the program involved a live feed from a basketball game that would give the press a virtual reality courtside point of view.

The CEO of the company had made it halfway through the content when we were supposed to cut to the game. It was halftime, though, so there was no action to be seen. We had known this was a possibility, but we didn't know how he would respond. He said, casually, "we'll come back to the game later." Casual for him, chaos for everyone on headset, who scrambled while remaining absolutely attentive to the cues in progress. We quickly mapped out a series of cues on the fly that could take us to the game whenever the CEO said he wanted to see it, while we orchestrated the rest of the presentation. Planning and rehearsal will get you in the game, but adaptability will often be what wins it.

—LP

Transitions

Transitions are progressions from one situation to another. This could refer to shifting from one part of the rehearsal day to another, or changing between scenes or segments of a production. The PSM calls transitions in tech and performance, while the stage management team facilitates them on the deck. Intentionally orchestrating transitions, during all phases of production, requires time and energy that results in paperwork that relays the intent to the rest of the company.

There are innumerable transitions that occur on a daily or even hourly basis as part of any production process. Stage managers are continually responsible for orchestrating transitions seamlessly and effectively with aesthetic acuity, including coordinating the technical elements that will unfold from moment to moment. Consideration and planning surrounding each transition can allow the stage management team to foresee potential issues, address various options

and solutions, and determine who will be impacted and in what way. Since change can be difficult for even the most seasoned professional, communicating the details of upcoming transitions before they occur can clarify expectations. This strategy is one of the most effective tools stage managers use to orchestrate transitions.

Relationships

Within the production process, stage managers are well-served by consciously orchestrating relationships. This includes one-on-one connections between themselves and others, and implementing strategies that enhance the group dynamic and contribute to the quality and effectiveness of the overall collaboration.

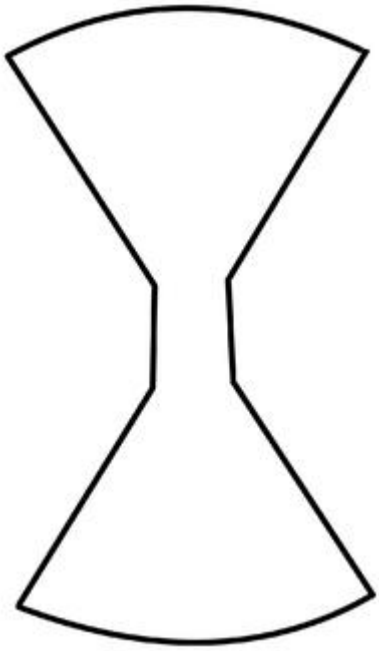
By assessing the power dynamics that are present in each production process and organizational structure, and how they contribute to how collaborators behave towards one another, the stage manager can better orchestrate and negotiate relationships. In a traditional process, the director often has the most status in the room, but in tech, there are moments when a designer may have more influence. In opera, however, the conductor has more status than they do in musical theater, and in the world of corporate events, the end client has the final say, rather than the executive producer. Studying and understanding the alliances and loyalties that exist between collaborators will assist the stage manager in navigating and building these relationships. Whether the stage manager approaches these relationships in a formal or informal manner is an expression of their style.

DYNAMIC DISAPPOINTMENT

> It wasn't going to be easy. I was collaborating with a foreign director and American design and stage management teams. We had just one day of tech in the theater, the aesthetics were ambitious, and the timeline was near-impossible. The director's background was in film and opera, so I explained the differences between a traditional theater tech and an opera tech, which has specific rehearsals for lighting, orchestral work, or stage direction. He was resistant, but I responded with patience and held my ground, acknowledging how different this would be from his previous experiences. As I rehearsed cues without the performers, he continually expressed his anxiety and concern. I made it clear that this was our working structure, and that while it was out of his comfort zone, we would make it work. The performers were flexible, so I encouraged the director to give notes when we worked on cues. We ultimately created a hybrid method that was strictly regulated by the intense time boundaries and working guidelines of the theater. Still, the director was disappointed with the process, and I had to accept that there was very little I could have done, within the framework we were in, to meet his expectations.
>
> *—LP*

Conclusion

Stage managers orchestrate many aspects of production process daily. Intentionally considering orchestration through various theoretical frameworks can provide effective management that is reflective of a stage manager's style and in service to the unique production.



IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

- Stage managers can engage their collaborators in the artistic intent of a production so they can best place cues and achieve the creative vision. The following are sample questions a stage manager might ask a director or designer during the cueing process. Consider some of your own.

    o Where do I pull the focus down?
    o I feel that lights and sound are a combined event, what do you think?
    o What initiates the next transition?
    o Does the moment conclude with the dialogue or the scenic shift?

THINK LIKE A STAGE MANAGER ABOUT ORCHESTRATION

- Determine areas in which you actively anticipate the needs of the production, and identify the tools you will use to orchestrate those needs as they arise. Conversely, are there aspects of the production that you could let unfold without orchestration?
- How is your orchestration methodology in alignment with your style? What aspects of your style are important for you to incorporate when orchestrating?

6

Culture is often defined as a specific group of people or geographic location, although it actually refers to much more than the origins of each collaborator on a project. Every production has its own unique culture, and there are existing and emerging sublayers that impact how a collaboration unfolds. The traditional theatrical production process is typically governed by established rules and structures, while an unregulated process can be impacted by cultural norms and values that may be more implicit than overtly discussed. Diagnosing and fostering specific cultural competencies can lead to rich collaboration and mutual respect. Recognizing the different facets of each culture, and creating an environment where all viewpoints are recognized, valued, and respected, is an important tool for the stage manager. In this way, they become a cultural curator, translating through more than language, and intentionally creating an environment that enables collaborators to connect authentically and work in service to a cohesive project.

Research and preparation allow the stage manager to understand the collective expectations of the process and backgrounds of their colleagues. Questions may arise when contemplating the production from a cultural standpoint. Does the process demand a detailed approach or a bird's eye view perspective? How much authority does the stage manager hold when circumstances become contentious? The capacity of the stage manager to diagnose the cultural dynamics that frame the process shapes the workflow of a production. The ability to distinguish between formal and informal systems and models of authority will also factor in the management of production culture.

Four Layers of Culture

Stage managers constantly navigate and translate the demands inherent to collaboration across multiple cultures. Often responsible for designing and shepherding a unique cultural environment for each project, stage managers frequently attend to the needs of each collaborator while ensuring that the overall culture is considered. There are four specific cultures that can potentially impact the workflow and production process. They are:

1. Interior
2. Discipline
3. Production
4. Geographic

Interior Culture

Interior culture is the mindset that informs the strategies and decision-making process the stage manager uses. It is formed by habitual thinking and behavior that is usually shaped by upbringing and early experiences. Resistance to new ideas or concepts, especially in an environment that includes previously unfamiliar cultures, is often based upon an interior culture that is unconsciously rigid or inflexible. An examination of the origins of one's interior culture and prevalent working habits can assist the stage manager in remaining collaborative, inclusive, and connected to the highest goals of the production process. An awareness of the interplay between receptiveness and resistance, as well as a focus on the present challenges, as opposed to playing out past practices onto future outcomes, is one of the most productive mindsets a stage manager can adopt.

Different environments demand unique approaches, which are often a series of active choices that are informed by culture. A willingness to adapt, especially to unfamiliar environments such as international or non-traditional work, and employ a skill set that supports a flexibility of attitude and practice, are some of the greatest attributes that a stage manager can learn. A strong interior culture and the willingness to take risks, being unconcerned about the judgment of others, can grow a strong sense of resilience.

Discipline Culture

The working styles of various collaborators are shaped by the nature of their disciplines. For example, sound designers have different needs than set designers, and although all collaborators would ideally be in service to the higher good of the production, the stage manager must negotiate a hierarchy of needs that is influenced by multiple production factors. Workflow, communication style, and technical skills will impact how different collaborators

interact with a stage manager. Design disciplines that require fabrication and construction such as scenic and costumes have different pre-production needs than lighting, sound, and projection, where much of the work takes place during tech.

Adapting language and translating across disciplines are valuable strategies the stage manager can use. Using a malleable vocabulary customized to the collaborators is a useful skill. When disciplines such as theater, dance, music, and events meld together, and expectations about the process are unpredictable, the ability of the stage manager to translate can become the primary role. The technical process in the traditional theater is extremely regulated, and a musician entering this world for the first time could find the system disorienting. In this situation, the ability to translate body language and unspoken tone to decipher the emotional state of rehearsals can cultivate common ground.

COMFORT ZONE

I turned down the job when they called looking for a stage manager with a theater background. I had never stage managed dance, or even seen very much of it. The idea of joining a company led by a world-famous dancer was intimidating and felt beyond my capabilities. I was finally convinced after watching the company perform. Even though the lead dancer was demanding, he was a perfectionist who expected the same from everyone around him, and I admired him for that. His discipline shaped our work culture, and I was continually nervous about meeting his expectations.

Then came the moment when I called a blackout incorrectly in the dress rehearsal. It was a piece of classical music that ended with an erratic series of beats, and I called the cue two beats early, based on the choreography of the famous dancer. It was an embarrassing moment, even in dress rehearsal, and he stormed over to me. I had been watching him instead of counting the music, and he emphatically told me that he needed to trust that I was following the music in case he was off. It had never occurred to me that he could be anything other than perfect. I learned a valuable lesson about cueing and how to discern what to follow and when, and from that day forward, I followed the music at the end of that piece.

—LP

Production Culture

Diverse environments such as theater, opera, dance, music, and live events all have their own unique cultural norms and expectations. Working across different production cultures demands the stage manager employ an adaptive approach that allows them to enter a room, build rapport rapidly, and begin leading the process with the available tools and given circumstances. For example, corporate events require a condensed ability in diagnosing the environment, and connecting with the crew effectively is essential to the sometimes improvisational method of the process. Whereas in opera, the process is highly structured, every collaborator's role is defined, and the formal authority structures determine many aspects of the production.

Geographic Culture

The other cultural factor to consider is the most obvious, the geographic background of the collaborators, and where in the world the work is occurring. The diversity of geography could be as straightforward as an international tour with a company based in the United States, or as complex as making a devised piece with collaborators from multiple nations, who may not even speak the same language, and taking it on tour in additional foreign countries. Stage management across geographies requires a sophisticated level of adaptation and employment of technology, and stage managers who possess a high level of emotional intelligence are particularly well-equipped to engage with groups

who are influenced by multiple geographic cultures. This process could even require learning phrases or calling cues in a foreign language.

There is an art to working with translators and building rapport with someone who may be fluent in the geographical language while not speaking the language of production. In situations where a request from the stage manager has been translated incorrectly, there may be a misunderstanding based upon the translation. In those moments, the stage manager may not be able to resolve the conflict and needs to accept the outcome of the conversation. The balance between translation and the overall needs of the production is an ongoing aspect for the stage manager to navigate when diverse geographic languages impact the production.

WHEN CULTURE PREVENTED ME FROM STAGE MANAGING

I was on tour with a new opera that had premiered in the United States and was making one stop in central Europe. I researched the venue, the local currency, the food, and overall logistics. The day we arrived, a male cast member and I, both of us black, ran an errand. Several men shouted to me as I passed them on the sidewalk and while I didn't understand what they were saying, it was clear they were making lewd comments. One man got very close, putting his hand around my waist. The cast member pulled me away from him and we hurried back to the hotel. In my research, I had failed to investigate how African-Americans were perceived in this country, and how black women were hypersexualized. I explained what happened to the other two black female cast members. Walking anywhere alone was out of the question, so we created systems to ensure that none of us would be by ourselves when we went back and forth between the hotel and the venue.

The theater proved to be just as challenging as the street. It was clear that the crew was not going to take my direction. Still, it was my job to supervise load-in and tech the show, so the white male director and I determined that those phases would have to appear to be unilaterally led by him. I told him what needed to be done and how, and then he, with the help of the interpreter, directed the crew. Although it appeared to the local crew that the director and translator were in the lead, by adapting to the culture we were in, we were able to remain committed to realizing the production.

—NEA

Diagnosing Culture

Stage managers will find that at the outset of any process, focusing on diagnosis in the pre-production phase will serve them more effectively than any other technique. Innately understanding how a collaborator's background and training shapes their work allows the stage manager to gracefully move between disciplines. The crossover between interior, discipline, production, and geographic cultures can create an extreme set of challenges for the stage manager. For example, when a solo performance artist works with artists from different genres, each person sees the ingrained nature of cultural techniques differently. If the process is more homogenous, there are many cultural aspects that are taken for granted. Moments of connection and an ability to ask the hard questions are important for the stage manager to cultivate as the unique production culture evolves.

An examination of the authority structure that is present within the collaboration, particularly the distinction between formal and informal authority, assists in diagnosing the culture of the production. Awareness of how intersections of trust and authority influence relationships and work environments can lead to a highly-effective collaboration. The stage manager's methods for building trust in a collaborative environment are vital to the functionality of the various cultures, and the power structures inherent in a production influence trust and the ways stage managers resolve conflicts, manage time, and interact with colleagues.

CULTURE CLASH

I was working on an intricate project in Asia, and tech couldn't begin until several pieces of freight arrived. There had been conversations in the previous week regarding how to handle the delay if it occurred, as well as how the timeline change would impact tech. Then, immediately before a production meeting, I was told that a critical piece of equipment would definitely be delayed in customs, information the rest of the group did not have.

In response, I chose to lead the meeting in a direct and traditionally assertive American style. This went against the atmosphere of conflict avoidance that was the norm of the theater company. Even though I had been told not to bring up the delay, I asked an open-ended question in an indirect fashion: "I understand a delay in customs could impact our schedule." When the response was silence, I chose a more assertive approach: "If there is a delayed arrival, it will push our first tech back by a full day, and possibly our first performance."

This caught the attention of the director, and the conversation shifted to brainstorming multiple strategic options that could be employed. I risked disrespecting the people and the culture in which I was working, but I also knew my communication style was one of the reasons the director wanted me on this project.

—LP

Cultural Capabilities

There are multiple ways the stage manager can navigate cultural challenges. Here are four approaches that can be incorporated into any environment, ranging from the strictly regulated to the most experimental.

1. Establish Articulated Expectations
2. Engage in Translation
3. Build a Universal Language
4. Grow the Collaborative Culture

Establish Articulated Expectations

Communicating and expressing expectations allows the stage management team to plan and adapt to the process as it unfolds. By clearly articulating an expectation about time management or the completion of a task, the stage manager gives another collaborator or team member the information they need to meet a deadline or fulfill a request. An unexpressed expectation can easily go unmet, potentially leading to disappointment or conflict.

Engage in Translation

The stage manager's ability to translate between collaborators and across cultures serves the higher good of the process and ensures that the aesthetic demands are being reasonably met. Once the overall stakes of each collaborator are transparent, the stage manager's approach can influence the chemistry of the process. Disagreements are frequently rooted in misunderstandings that are based in expressive language, and language barriers can prevent collaborators from understanding one another. The stage manager is uniquely poised to identify this confusion and serve as the translator between collaborators.

Build a Universal Language

In some productions, a unique language develops in the rehearsal process that could include a shorthand that connects collaborators who do not share a verbal or geographic language. This could refer to nicknames for scenes, a set of phrases for holding, resuming, and repeating sections in rehearsal, or a pidgin dialect that comprises components of the languages of the participants.

Grow the Collaborative Culture

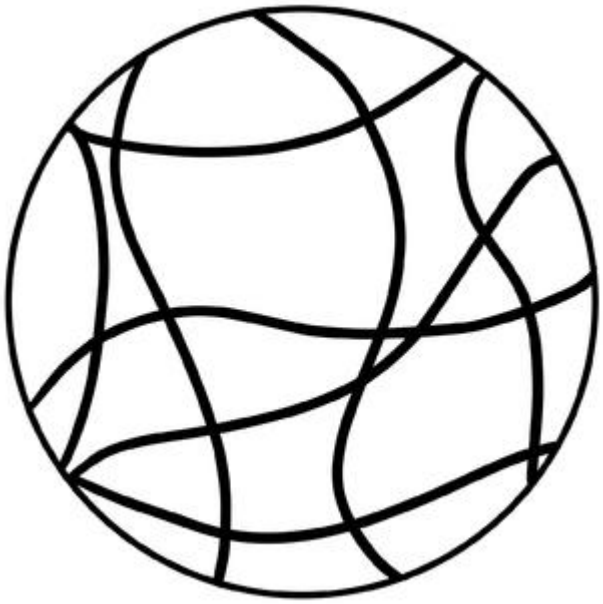
The collaborative culture is the unique environment created by a group of people embarking on a performative project and is based on disparate elements merging into a cohesive whole. The starting point for establishing a collaborative culture involves identifying the production standards that already exist.

In unregulated environments governed by organic structures, such as certain types of dance, music and intercultural processes, the stage manager establishes how much structure is necessary for a creative process. A culturally adept stage manager will strategically engage with group values, and provide a series of communication and navigational tools for all collaborators. These structures are employed first by the stage manager and can spread quickly amongst all collaborators. When a culture of trust is established by the stage manager, the entire group is free to perform at a highly functional level.

Research and knowledge of geographic culture can also assist the stage manager in building trust within a company. Many countries have culturally derived rituals that a foreigner won't or can't fully understand, but which can be critical to performative success. Paying particular attention to appropriate customs and dress, and respecting cultural traditions, can allow an uncomplicated integration into a local culture.

Conclusion

The savvy stage manager layers in culture throughout every project, integrating and expanding their skill set and approach. They embrace the backgrounds and values of differing cultures to connect with collaborators, aesthetics, and storytelling. Using an authentic synthesis of all levels of culture and a deep engagement with the intention of the process, the stage manager can cultivate an environment that supports the collaborative purpose of any production.



IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

- Think about a current or upcoming project, and ask yourself the following questions to diagnose the cultures:
    - o Does a majority of the group identify with one culture over another? This can apply to their training, culture of origin, and many other factors. Actively think about this question in relation to all categories of culture outlined at the beginning of this chapter.
    - o Reflect on your interior culture, and examine the habitual ways of thinking and associated behaviors that might be a hindrance to you as a collaborator. Likewise, consider how your interior culture may support this collaboration.
    - o Consider which cultural capabilities you might employ during your current or upcoming production process.

THINK LIKE A STAGE MANAGER ABOUT CULTURE

- Before you begin a new project, determine if your collaborators have any shared histories.
- What are your own expectations for this process? What do you believe are the group or individual expectations and metrics of excellence? Examples could include sold-out houses, income exceeding expenses, good reviews, or the realization of a project that has been gestating for many years.
- What are the predominant spoken and unspoken aspects of the culture?

7

Ethics, generally considered the principles that guide a society or group, are integral to effective and adaptive stage management. Navigation systems that are informed by ethics can be incorporated into many different areas of production, such as decision-making, planning a course of action, and addressing problematic behavior. Honesty, respect, trust, transparency, civility, compassion, and concern for safety are among the primary values that stage managers can prioritize when acting in alignment with their ethics. In their work, stage managers are constantly challenged by dilemmas that require them to make decisions. Not every quandary is straightforward, and when a stage manager is confronted with such predicaments, the way they make their decisions is in part due to their own sense of ethics. Every ethical dilemma is different, decision-making can be complex and multifaceted, and resolutions can be messy and unsatisfying to some, if not all, of the parties involved. Knowledge of ethical frameworks can provide methods to approach these situations, as well as strategies to assist the stage manager in making their decisions. Many stage management teams organically engage in conversations related to ethical practice, even if those conversations may not be labeled as being about ethics.

Ethical Frameworks

There is no single way to consider ethics, and there are many schools of thought, referred to as ethical frameworks, for how to approach a decision-making process. An ethical framework is a series of guiding principles designed to inform or reason through an ethical dilemma.

While there are many ethical frameworks, the three described below are often helpful to stage managers. They are:

- Utilitarianism, which places the needs of the greater good above the individual. While these principles date back to ancient Greece, John Stuart Mill published *Utilitarianism* in 1863.
- Ethics of Care. Developed by Carol Gilligan in the 1980s, this framework values care as a virtue, and has four tenets: Attentiveness, Responsibility, Competence, and Responsiveness.
- Servant Leadership. Robert K. Greenleaf's model posits that the primary goal of a leader is to put the needs of those they lead first.

Each of these is a collection of ideas, and it can be useful to incorporate facets of different perspectives into a cohesive individualized framework that prepares one to make decisions and respond to dilemmas when they present themselves.

SUBVERSIVE SCRIPTING

"I'm going to start a document that contains the ideas we've been working with," I said, intentionally not referring to this as a script. "I'd rather you didn't," replied the lead performer, a world-renowned musician, solo artist, and the producer of the piece in question. "I don't want to restrict the evolution of the piece."

As we prepared for tech, the designers were demanding documentation that would guide the cueing process. I was under mounting pressure to generate a script. So I secretly did. And while I was working on it one day, the lead walked in, caught me, and stormed out of the office.

I was in a panic and in fear of losing my job. But a few minutes later, she came back in, smirking. She took a breath and told me that the script was useful, that it could become part of our process, with the condition that changes will be constant. Then she sheepishly asked if she could have a copy. Later that night we reached a solo section of hers that none of us had witnessed in rehearsal. The music was breathtaking, and we all stopped and listened, truly experiencing the story for the first time.

—LP

Core Strategies

When stage managers are faced with ethical dilemmas, careful consideration of the structural guidelines associated with the circumstances is essential. These may include considering union and house rules, human resource directives, administrative standards, and professional practices. Stage managers can also use their instincts and core values to assist in the decision-making process and choosing a course of action. There are many different kinds of ethical dilemmas, and what follows are some that stage managers most frequently encounter. They are:

- Identity
- Safety
- Confidentiality
- Language
- Incivility
- Intimacy

Identity

Stage management is influenced by the given circumstances or identity of the stage manager and their collaborators. Visible factors such as skin color, age, physical abilities or native language may be easily identified. Other attributes, like immigration status, survivorship from illness or abuse, disability, relationship status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and economic class may be less evident, and may only be apparent if this information is disclosed. Public and visible circumstances are discernable for the stage manager to recognize and incorporate into the process. Each person discloses private and personal aspects of their identity based on specific conditions, such as where they are and who they are with, as well as their comfort level. Stage managers can only integrate this information when it is shared with them.

Each collaboration and production experience can be an occasion for stage managers to take into account how their own given circumstances will impact their role as a leader and stage manager. When the stage manager's identity is represented in the material being produced, the entire stage management team can proceed with care and awareness to support healthy collaboration. There are strategies available for navigating challenging content, including mindful breathing, taking a break, speaking with the other members of the stage management team, or intentionally separating

the material from oneself. Stage managers can carefully navigate how to care for themselves regardless of the material so they can remain engaged and supportive of the ultimate goal of realizing the production.

Safety

The stage manager's responsibility to prioritize safety will be influenced by environment, cultural expectations, and the stage manager's ethics and core values. In a traditional union-regulated process, the stage manager has a contractual obligation to follow guidelines, procedures, and protocols when questions regarding physical safety arise. Union-regulated work provides several options to remedy an unsafe environment. For instance, AEA regulations state how much haze can be used in a performance space. There are protocols about how high off the ground a performer can be before railings or safety harnesses come into play. Representatives from AEA frequently see productions within their jurisdiction to determine safety risks and ensure proper standards are met. There are avenues for union members if these guidelines are resisted or ignored.

In a non-traditional or unregulated environment, the stage manager often must decide how to address issues of safety and exercise authority. One potential strategy is speaking with collaborators about a safety concern and whether safety measures can be implemented that retain the aesthetic integrity of the show. This inclusive approach has the potential to produce positive results while minimizing defensiveness from impacted team members.

While the stage manager may not have a legal obligation to address the emotional safety of the production's participants, the way they do so will be shaped by their own ethics. Production processes that are civil, communicative, fair, supportive, and free of harassment and hostility can create an environment where team members feel safe and collaboration and creativity can thrive. Additionally, many productions have implemented anti-harassment policies to protect individuals from bullying or emotional distress, and stage managers can invoke these policies when navigating these behaviors amongst company members.

In any environment, the stage manager can experience an ethical dilemma regarding safety. These concerns could be dismissed by those in higher authority, or the stage manager's recommended adjustments could be ignored, regardless of the hazard level. In situations such as these, the stage manager will need to determine whether to accept the dangerous circumstances, and if so, how to ethically do so. Egregious safety practices can challenge a stage manager's core values and require them to examine how to remain in alignment with their ethics.

JUDGMENT CALL

The responsibility to decide when to stop a dress rehearsal or performance weighs on the stage manager strongly when a safety issue is present. In a dress rehearsal for a regional theater production, there were a few stunts that led to a dangerous environment that had to be closely orchestrated and regulated once the show approached performances. In preparation for our final dress, I had a conversation with the director about one moment and we disagreed about the plan if the situation became unsafe. I was already agitated at the director and held the strong opinion that they did not care about the safety of the performers. I also felt a lot of pressure to do a dress rehearsal without stopping. When we reached the dangerous moment in the dress, the safe choice would have been to call "hold" and bring the performer, who was suspended in the air, to safety. However, fear of retaliation from the director overwhelmed me at that moment and I pushed through to the end. The performer hit her head and the director accused me of ruining the moment for the rest of the run. Retaliation from the director was inevitable no matter the choice that I made. This experience has informed my choices about safety for years to follow. I slow down and check-in with myself about whether I am making a decision based on fear or judgment instead of what is best for the health of the performers and overall production. My poor decision in the situation described here gave me great insight into how much I need to own my authority regarding safety and engage as an advocate, especially when the production transitions into tech and performance.

—LP

Confidentiality

Stage managers can draw upon guiding principles when making choices about how to approach issues surrounding confidentiality. Open communication can establish expectations, and enables the stage manager to incorporate ideas such as transparency, consistency, and discretion into their work. When stage managers are transparent about how information will be shared with other collaborators or the producing organization, as well as whether the information is public, private, or personal, they can decide what to do when faced with questions about confidentiality. The stage manager can build trust by taking a straightforward approach and clearly articulating to company members at the beginning of a process what information will be kept confidential and what will be shared.

In traditional theater, daily events are regularly reported to the producers, including lateness, sickness, and injuries. Stage managers typically don't share personal circumstances with producers, such as bankruptcy, divorce, or family illness. Stage managers can be confidantes, and members of the company could discuss a break-up or a death in the family with them. Discerning if, when, to whom, and how personal factors can be disclosed is a complex scenario that requires careful consideration within the ethical theories practiced by the stage management team. For instance, an actor may begin regularly missing shows, and they could tell the stage manager that their long-term partner is in hospice. The stage manager might want to give the producer a reason for the actor's multiple absences, and could ask the actor if they can share the details with the producers.

There are aspects of confidentiality governed by contracts and other legal stipulations. The requirement to sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA), a contract that limits private and public conversation about the content of the project, is common practice in some contexts. Many companies mandate how, when, and what collaborators may post on social media about their work. Adhering to these legal guidelines is part of ethical practice, and often the stage manager is modeling professional practice to other members of the company.

Language

Language that requires ethical consideration can be referred to as loaded, explicit, charged, or derogatory, referring to words or phrases that elicit a significant emotional or visceral response. Among the many examples are racial epithets, sexually explicit language, words that recount a traumatic event, or hate speech against any individual or group. This language may exist in a performative piece, and organizations or producers frequently post warnings in the lobby or on the organization's website to inform patrons that the content is potentially disturbing. While this language may exist onstage, stage managers, with other leaders of the team, can determine how the language will be treated offstage.

In a play that includes derogatory language about women, for example, the company could establish a practice in which the language is only spoken while the scene is being rehearsed. The company could choose to not repeat the words when they are discussing the scene during table work or when they are informally talking with each other during breaks. Every collaboration is different and each individual has a unique relationship with words and trauma. Facilitating conversations about the diversity of experiences amongst collaborators can inform how the stage manager opens discussions about language.

The "N-word" is one of the most charged words. It can be derogatory or affectionate, but even when it has been reclaimed, sung, and rapped, it carries a history of oppression, degradation, and slavery. When the word is written into a production, discussions about when it will be used and by whom can help guard against collaborators feeling harmed or injured. An all-white stage management team could discuss with the director, playwright, and the cast how best to prompt the actors when this word is used in a dialogue. A multi-racial cast can specifically discuss who in the cast can use the word in their specific process. These unwritten contracts amongst company members are voluntary agreements that the collective strives to uphold, in service to their specific process and to care for each individual. Stage managers, along with other leaders of the team, can be instrumental in suggesting that these conversations occur.

I had discussed how we would use the N-word in rehearsal with my assistant, the production assistants, and the cast, so it was a shock when a white male collaborator used it while repeating a line from the script. The room, filled primarily with young African-American men, became incredibly tense.

Didn't he know that in our process only people who identify as black could use that word? I called a break and privately explained that his language was inappropriate. I expected an apology, but he told me he had used it in other productions where it had appeared in the script and no one had seemed upset. He agreed not to use the word again and excused himself.

The second time it happened, a different member of the creative team used the word as he repeated a line from the script to illustrate where a shift might occur. My white colleagues said nothing. I told him I would appreciate him saying "N-word," rather than the word itself, when referencing the text. He agreed to this practice, and the rehearsal continued.

Later, I vented to my assistant—also a white male— about both men, until he explained that the two collaborators had not been part of the rehearsal room conversations we had about the N-word. I hadn't reached out individually to inform the team members who were not in the room when we discussed these parameters with the cast. He was right, and I acknowledged that I did not tell them even though I also felt like I shouldn't have to. That word carries so much history and oppression and I assumed all of the collaborators, especially the white men, would refrain from using it. There is not a universal understanding of the ethics of language, even regarding words that I clearly think demand consideration before using.

—NEA

Incivility

The process of creating and producing live performance can be chaotic and full of discord. Artists, like all people, sometimes behave poorly towards others. Live performance is time-bound, often under-resourced, and can be deeply personal. The resulting work is typically open to public opinion and criticism. The act of meeting an audience and being formally open to disapproval can lead to heightened vulnerability which can result in friction.

Power structures influence who feels that they may or may not have agency over someone else, and the more awareness the stage management team has about who holds formal authority, the more effective they can be in responding strategically.

The stage manager can choose to respond to objectionable behavior within an ethical framework. Some strategies of response can include actively listening and considering multiple perspectives, responding with empathy, implementing disciplinary measures, purposely ignoring the conduct, and directly addressing, naming, and sharing the impact of certain behaviors on others. If the stage manager has a personal reaction to the situation, those feelings can impact the strategy for response, requiring even more careful consideration about how to proceed. Speaking privately with a colleague and telling them that the words they used or the behavior they displayed was hurtful or rude can be emotionally taxing, and could be met with defensiveness or denial, but this direct approach can also yield positive results if the colleague is receptive to honest feedback. Modeling kindness, compassion, and respect as professional behavior can be a stage manager's most powerful tool.

When objectionable behavior occurs, stage managers determine if they are the most appropriate person to respond to a situation, or if the responsibility lies elsewhere. Methods of assessment include analyzing the power dynamics of the individuals involved, whether this is an isolated incident or a chronic problem, and whether feelings were hurt or significant injury was caused. Some organizations have anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies, and those formal systems provide the stage manager with a protocol to address related behavior.

Intimacy

When managing moments of intimacy in performative pieces, the stage manager can foster an ethical process. Sensitive moments could be choreographed by directors or collaborators who have specifically been trained to direct intimate moments. Intimacy Directors International (IDI) is an organization that defines intimacy direction as "the codified practice of choreographing moments of staged intimacy in order to create safe, repeatable, and effective storytelling." IDI utilizes The Pillars[1], five practices stage managers can adopt. They are:

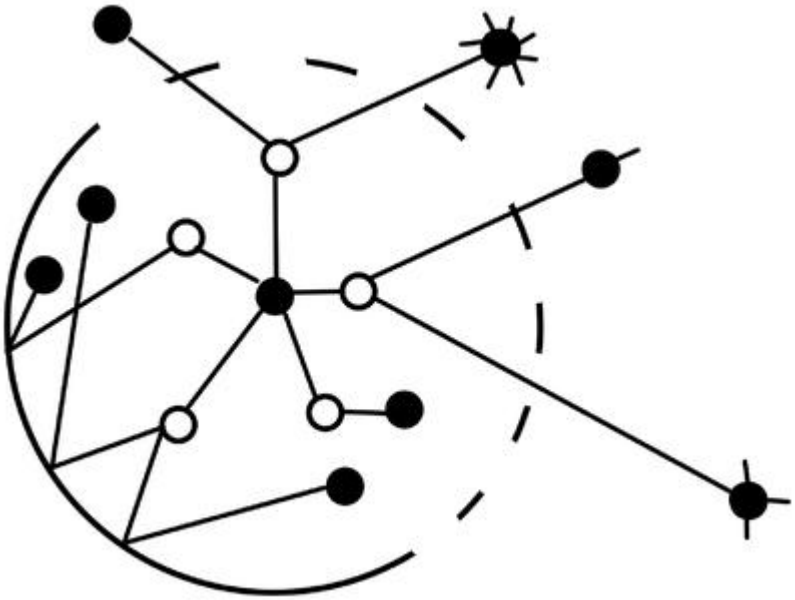
- Context: An understanding by all parties involved of the story being told and its relationship to the intimacy being portrayed.
- Consent: Permission granted by all individuals to participate in choreographed intimate moments, which includes the option of revoking consent at any time.
- Communication: Open dialogue between the director, intimacy director, stage manager, and performers throughout all rehearsals and performances.
- Choreography: Each moment of intimacy is strictly choreographed, and that choreography is adhered to and maintained by stage management throughout the entire production.
- Closure: A moment or ritual created between performers that signifies that the intimate moment has concluded.

Stage managers can advocate that these five tenets be followed even if an intimacy director is not engaged on a project. Intimacy discussions can be uncomfortable, and sometimes the perception exists that if the moment is discussed, it will lack authenticity, chemistry, or spontaneity. Stage managers can initiate intimacy conversations and remind cast members that moments of intimacy are comparable to a dance or fight choreography. As such, intimate touch can be specifically discussed, taught, rehearsed, recorded, and repeated.

The nature of the stage manager's role in all phases of a production process necessitates involvement in intimacy direction, and IDI specifically recommends stage managers be proactive in regards to communication and choreography. When speaking about the intimate moment, using correct names for body parts and avoiding slang or colloquialisms can be a useful tactic to formalize the process and create a professional environment. Intimacy calls, similar to fight calls, can be utilized within a process. In connection with choreography, stage managers can document all movements, and time boundaries can be assigned to intimate touch. The amount of detail recorded is dependent on the specific choreography, the personalities involved, the direction, and the stage manager's ability to infer what is necessary to maintain and repeat the moment. Intentionally practicing IDI's recommended principles can promote an ethical process of rehearsing and performing intimacy.

Conclusion

As the world grows more complex, so do the dilemmas stage managers may face, as well as their options for response. Ethical debates flourish in every performative environment, and the stage manager's willingness to engage in adaptive theory-based practice when questions of ethics arise is one step in cultivating skills that can support the navigation of ethically-charged situations.



IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Think about your most recent project:

- What were the ethical challenges?
- What factors did you consider and why?
- Which ethical frameworks proved most helpful?
- If you crafted your own ethical framework, which concepts did you include?

THINK LIKE A STAGE MANAGER ABOUT ETHICS

- When you first familiarize yourself with a project, make space to acknowledge whether there is content that connects to your identity and given circumstances in a potentially harmful way. For example, if you have a history of trauma and there is a storyline that navigates this subject matter, you may find it difficult to focus on your work. Acknowledge that you are in a vulnerable situation and identify allies in the production process and your personal life who will support you without judgment.
- Reflect on a decision that you made regarding an ethical dilemma. Were there collaborators who reacted poorly to your decision? Did you consider their reactions in making your decision? Did their reaction to your decision influence how you proceeded? Have you made a decision that challenged your ethics?

Note

1. Intimacy Directors International, https://www.teamidi.org

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Purpose is the intentional articulation of core values as they relate to the project at hand, the work a stage manager aspires to do, and their overall career. The focused ability to incorporate aspects of one's life experience into the production process can be essential to curating a career that is inspiring and meaningful. Purpose may feel abstract and elusive, however, with strategic self-examination and implementation, tangible outcomes can be realized. Ultimately, trusting intuition and the senses can lead to the purpose-driven pursuit of goals, and the cultivation of a unique stage management path.

There are specific strategies and tactics the stage manager can use to connect to their work with purpose, trust, intuition, and engagement. In his book *Working With Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman defines the Emotional Competence Framework, specific strategies that can be incorporated into working style. These are broken into two categories: Personal, which includes traits such as self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation, and Social, as in empathy and social skills. These competencies provide frameworks for self-assessment and goal setting.

Additionally, understanding the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can contribute to setting authentic personal and professional goals. These are tools to consider when developing a professional profile that is influenced by a strong sense of purpose. Knowing and leading with the "why" and engaging effective goals and habits has the power to shape a career and a sense of identity. There isn't a path waiting, rather it will be forged by setting fierce intentions and making goal-driven choices. The strategies herein are intended to empower the innovative stage manager to cross between environments and cultures.

It has been said that when President Kennedy visited the NASA Space Center in 1962, he asked a janitor what he was doing. "I'm helping to put a man on the moon, Mr. President," was the response. Whether or not the exchange actually happened or the President simply made it up to inspire people is lost in the annals of history, but the allegorical sense of higher purpose rings true to this day.

Stage managers can approach every detail with an extraordinary sense of purpose. The tiniest and seemingly inconsequential piece of paperwork can provide information that enables a collaborator to be extraordinarily effective. Similarly, a purpose-centered approach can be infectious when the stage management team takes a distinct interest in every crew member's work and values the details spent on each endeavor.

Frequently, the real challenges of stage management work are more about relating to people rather than the technical areas. With that in mind, the overall potential for messiness during a creative collaboration is usually about people who have varied expectations and communication styles. Stage managers can cue automation, set it with certainty, and replicate it with each performance. The scenic pieces do not have feelings or need to debrief. But during a production

cycle that has uncommunicated and uncoordinated expectations, there can be individual and collective disappointments. Each person's engagement and self-awareness governs much of the experience, as well as the overall chemistry between everyone in the company. Purposeful evaluation of potential collaborators and existing relationships can factor into the "why" of seeking to work on a particular project.

The Importance of "Why"

Purpose, or the "why" is most effective when motivated from expectations that live within, rather than extrinsic ideas of success or the judgement of others. Director Anne Bogart writes in *and then, you act: making art in an unpredictable world*, "The why determines the value of the what. For this reason, it is essential to examine the reasons that motivate you. Stay close to the why." Knowing why is one of the most essential insights to develop when designing a purpose-based career.

Stage managers do not take a bow. When a stage manager, consciously or not, seeks to be the center of attention, rather than focusing on the needs of the production, this behavior may prevent them from being an effective leader. As the person in the process who most frequently needs to make decisions that may displease more than one collaborator, stage managers require a resilience that transcends the collaborative alliances that exist within the production process. Put simply, the more a stage manager seeks approval and has a desire to be praised, liked, and valued, the more risk there is in compromising the critical decision-making that supports the production. Tailoring a unique stage management approach to the process, while maintaining a continuous state of curiosity, can lead to extraordinary collaboration.

Mentorship

Trusted mentors can provide lifelong guidance in the pursuit and realization of goals. They can be invited to offer feedback and help clarify who to work with and why. Mentors who understand the field of stage management, as well as those from other backgrounds are important in providing different points of view. Whether or not there is mentorship in the formal context of stage management training, teachers from all different backgrounds can be active supporters of purpose, goals, habits, and daily practices.

Goals

Goals are an important tool for identifying and articulating intentions in every aspect of the stage manager's work. They can be professional or personal, and can range from how many pages will be blocked in a rehearsal to what the stage manager wants their next big project to be. Actively articulating goals that are measured by time, as well as goals that are specific to a production, are potent practices that enable a close connection to purpose.

Goal setting enables the mapping of intentions and engages specific habits and practices that will support the work. During the process of crafting them, the stage manager is well-served to distinguish between something they are expected to do versus something they aspire to. When success is defined exclusively as an accomplishment, such as a professional credit in a particular context, or securing the praise and approval of others, it is easy to lose sight of authentic aspirations. Additionally, the original expectations of working on a project go unfulfilled, and the disappointment that can accompany that can interfere with clearly determining the next steps in a career. Determining the "why" helps the stage manager better understand their own motivations. Whether they are driven to work with a specific person, or they're seeking to do a project based upon the status associated with it, understanding the "why" will assist them in creating guiding goals and associated habit systems. Committing to goals will provide a continual view of the big picture, as well as specific tasks along the way.

Goal Setting

Authentic goal setting requires a distinct interest in taking risks while working beyond expectations, engaging curiosity and aspirational values that support innovation and exploration. Goals are frequently most effective when measured by a clear set of criteria. These metrics could include a time frame, accomplishment of specific steps, or more elusive yardsticks such as building rapport with a collaborator. Goals can be organized into different categories, such as the ones listed here.

Goal Categories:

- Aesthetic Awareness: Engagement in the production process as a creative collaborator, sharing responsibility with others and supporting the aesthetic integrity of community process and subsequent outcomes.
- Boundaries: Clearly accepting or rejecting circumstances or a request and communicating when a collaborator is coming close to a line or has crossed one.
- Communication: Actively crafting interactions by employing tools that support the exchange of information.
- Conflict Navigation: Embracing the role of mediator by working outside of the comfort zone and into the growth zone.
- Connection: Identifying common ground between colleagues with vulnerability and grace.
- Group and Team Dynamics: Diagnosing and shaping the unique and complex tendencies that emerge amongst people in the collaborative environment.
- Self-Awareness: Owning actions with authenticity while being prepared to explain choices without defensiveness, admitting failures as well as triumphs.
- Self-Care: Creating time for renewal activities such as exercise, connecting with nature, and flexing physical and mental muscles that are not typically used during the stage management process.
- Technical Skills: Studying the various production areas to strengthen fluency in the language of production. This goal also includes tactical stage management practices such as generating paperwork and setting up organizational systems.

The mediums of goal setting can be fluid and are not restricted to writing lists or prose. Music, drawing, or even using a metaphor can expand how ideas are generated related to goals. These alternative strategies can work well for those who are averse to writing or have a tough time with written expression. Being playful and creative with goal setting will frequently shed light on additional ideas that support self-awareness.

A MUSICAL WAS THE GOAL

It was New Year's Eve and the dawn of a new millennium. I had never been one to make resolutions, but I carved out some time and wrote what I hoped to achieve for the upcoming year. I'm not sure I even realized I was setting goals and habits. I wanted my next project to be a Broadway musical, and I gave myself twelve months to accomplish this. My list looked something like this:

- Build at least two relationships with stage managers and general managers who frequently do musicals.
- Ask stage managers who are currently running musicals to coffee.
- Improve my sight-reading skills and become more proficient at following a score.
- Familiarize myself with the AEA rules specific to musical productions.
- Study new musicals coming to New York, and learn who the producers/general managers are.
- Tell at least 20 people, and at least one new person each week, that I want to do a musical.

It was this last habit that proved most helpful. Later that evening my friends poked fun at me for being so systematic, but the very next day I began practicing my habits in service of my goal.

Three months later I received a call from the PSM of a successful, long-running show. She'd heard from a friend of a friend that I was interested in working on a musical, and she was looking for a permanent stage manager to replace one of her four assistants. After several interviews with her and the producing organization, I got the job and ended up having a relationship with the show for more than a decade. All of this happened less than six months after I wrote down my goals, and to this day, when I want to achieve something, I list the habits I will practice and tell at least 20 people I know.

—NEA

Habits

Each goal can have multiple and specific habits, the practices intended to bring the desired outcome to life. They can be effective when clearly articulated and measurable in a way that is regularly referenced and assessed. For example, if a goal relates to initiating uncomfortable conversations, it could be helpful to establish the number of times each day or week that an effort will be made to exercise a habit related to this goal. There may be specific people with whom to have this type of conversation, and even some who are open to engaging in practice sessions. Regular time reserved to support the measurement of goal progress and the inherent challenge in each goal can be modulated over time. Some habits will be easily achievable, while others can be practiced over a lifetime.

Vulnerability

A firm commitment to be vulnerable as an important component of purpose can propel the stage manager into new and unexpected places, and influence the overall process. Several ways to exercise vulnerability include actively owning mistakes, acknowledging internal emotions and the emotions of others, and naming expectations. Once vulnerability has been established as an individual and, ideally, a team practice, various tools can be identified to nourish the process with sustained openness and growth.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the practice of focusing on the immediate moment, and being aware of the present without judgement. Mindfulness can be practiced anywhere and at anytime, and can be particularly useful when stress or a busy mind impede the ability to be present. The ability to be mindfully focused when setting goals and exploring purpose can support the stage manager's authentic awareness of their intentions.

UNEXPECTED PURPOSE

I was scheduled to teach a seminar at Yale School of Drama on September 12, 2001. Following the terrible events that took place on September 11, I called to say I wouldn't be able to teach the next day's class. A few days later, the Chair of Stage Management called me and offered me a show and asked if I wanted to teach a class. I accepted the show but declined the class. We remained in conversation, and she ultimately offered me the opportunity to create the class I would have wanted to take in graduate school. I accepted immediately. The class explored non-traditional work: dance, corporate events, international work, and even projects that defy categorization. This was what I had focused on since graduation, and I was being handed a platform to introduce this work to graduate stage managers.

I cautiously developed a syllabus and found the process of recycling my experiences to be unexpectedly gratifying. I learned the Harvard Business School Case Method while typing papers for my mother's friends,

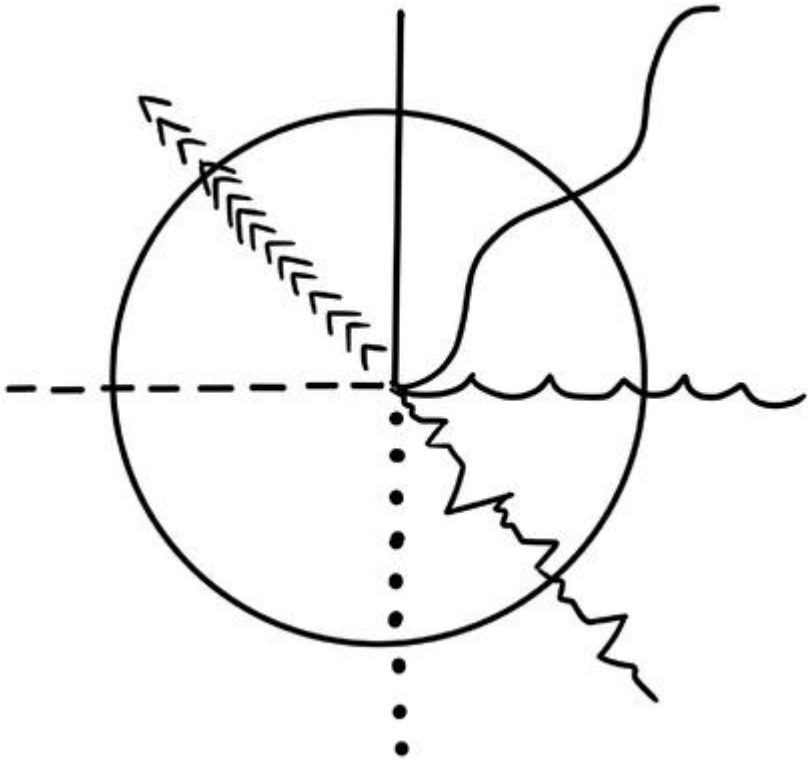
absorbing many of the soft skills from the business content. I began writing case studies, which have now evolved into these experiential stories.

I fell in love with teaching and discovered that my experiences were powerful teaching tools. My purpose shifted, and I offered to teach whenever I traveled. In 2003, I visited a seminar at UC San Diego, and the following year I was hired for the full-time position I now hold.

—LP

Conclusion

Purpose can guide the stage manager's production process while simultaneously shaping their career. Well-articulated intentions can empower the stage manager to connect with their "why" and lead effectively.



IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

- Write a clearly written statement of purpose, also referred to as a 'mission statement,' that articulates your purpose today.
- Articulate at least five goals and correlating habits that support your purpose as you view it in the present moment. Write with "I" statements, don't use qualifying words such as "should" or "might," and focus exclusively on what you desire to accomplish rather than what you are looking to avoid.
- Place copies of this document in locations where you can view them frequently and devise a way to track your goals and habits.
- Share your intentions, goals and habits with trusted friends, mentors, and colleagues who can support you in staying connected to your purpose.
- Devise a system for updating this supportive group about your progress.

THINK LIKE A STAGE MANAGER WITH PURPOSE

Sample Goals and Habits

- Goal (Connection): I have an aversion to networking and I seek to improve my networking skills by making positive and memorable first impressions.
    - o Habit: Follow-up with collaborators and let them know about my current projects. Track the accomplishments of the people I aspire to add to my list of colleagues and reach out with a congratulatory note.
- Goal (Technical): I will become more acquainted with the production shops and actively build rapport during the rehearsal period.
    - o Habit: Track unresolved rehearsal notes and take that opportunity to learn something new about the skills associated with that production area as well as the leader in that shop.
- Goal (Conflict Navigation and Boundaries): I will deepen my empathy and compassion for my collaborators by letting go of my sense of judgment when others do not meet my expectations. I will remain open and receptive during moments when I feel a strong emotion as opposed to shutting down.
    - o Habit: Engaging as an active listener, be curious, relate to what is unfolding with my collaborators and ask clarifying questions that contribute to conflict resolution.
- Goal (Self-Awareness): I will accept that making mistakes is part of the process, and own the consequences of my mistakes without shaming or blaming myself or others. I acknowledge that the mistakes matter less than the action I take as a follow-up to the mistake.
    - o Habit: Notice how I feel when I know I have made a mistake and engage specific language like an ‘I’ statement to identify next steps. Write about a mistake I made in an unfiltered manner in a journal or on the technology platform of my choice.
- Goal (Communication and Self-Awareness): I will open uncomfortable conversations with people that I perceive as difficult and/or resistant to me. I will refrain from personalizing situations and speculating about what other people may think or feel about my choices.
    - o Habit: Accept that my thoughts have the capacity to deeply shape my perception and experiment with turning my thinking around into alternate viewpoints.
- Goal (Group/Team Dynamics): I will foster a collaborative team environment and facilitate an open space for dialogue about conflict, excellence, challenges, and team dynamics.
    - o Habit: Schedule a team check-in after rehearsal each day with a structured prompt that surfaces the voice of each team member.
- Goal (Self-Care): I will continue to make space for my emotions by accepting them as they come, without judgment, consciously breathing when I feel agitated.
    - o Habit: Mindfully practice conscious breathing prior to rehearsal, cultivating calm and the capacity to be present.
- Goal (Aesthetic Awareness): I will engage with the creativity inherent in the process and give attention and energy to my collaborators.
    - o Habit: Practice open and available body language that indicates my engagement. Refrain from crossing my arms and legs, and creating a physical shield between me and those around me.

- Goal (Boundaries): I will define and articulate personal and professional boundaries with intention.
    - o Habit: Communicate clearly with my collaborators and indicate my expectations with clear time markers.
- Goal (Communication and Group/Team Dynamics): I will uncover my voice and use it even when I am intimidated by the formal authority of the Production Stage Manager.
    - o Habit: Connect with the Production Stage Manager by asking clearly framed questions about the definition of roles and assignment of tasks. Invite observations and feedback.
- Goal (Aesthetic Awareness and Technical): I will trust the often improvised and foreign culture of dance and feel confident in my instincts and abilities.
    - o Habit: Invest time in planning, knowing that implementing a strategy will almost always require adaptation and change.
- Goal (Communication and Technical): I will generate paperwork that is both efficient and clear for others to follow and understand.
    - o Habit: Request feedback from team members on the accuracy and implementation process of my paperwork.
- Goal (Technical): I will actively experiment with organizational and productivity systems on a personal and show specific levels.
    - o Habit: Experiment with new technology platforms that will enable information sharing and increased efficiency.

Recommended Resources

10% Happier: How I Tamed the Voice in My Head, Reduced Stress Without Losing My Edge, and Found Self-Help That Actually Works. First Edition. Dan Harris. New York, NY: IT Books. 2014.

A 21st Century Ethical Toolbox. Fourth Edition. Anthony Weston. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 2018.

And Then, You Act: Making Art in an Unpredictable World. Eighth Edition. Anne Bogart. London: Routledge. 2007.

Authentic Leadership (HBR Emotional Intelligence Series). First Edition. Harvard Business Review. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press. 2017.

Conscious Business: How to Build Value Through Values. Fred Kofman. Louisville, CO: Sounds True. 2006.

Dare to Lead: Brave Work: Tough Conversations: Whole Hearts. First Edition. Berné Brown. New York, NY: Random House. 2018.

Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead. First Edition. Brené Brown. New York, NY: Avery. 2012.

Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most. First Edition. Douglas Stone. New York, NY: Penguin Books. 2000.

Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds. First Edition. Adrienne Maree Brown. Chico, CA: AK Press. 2017.

Ethics of Care. Website last accessed July 12, 2019. https://ethicsofcare.org/carol-gilligan/

Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience. First Edition. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. New York, NY: Harper Perennial. 1990.

Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity. First Edition. David Allen. New York, NY: Penguin Books. 2002.

Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving in. Second Edition. Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton. London: Penguin Books. 1991.

Grit. First Edition. Angela Duckworth. New York, NY: Collins Publishers. 2016.

Harvard Business Review. Website last accessed July 17, 2019. www.hbr.org

Intimacy Directors International. Website last accessed July 22, 2019. www.teamidi.org/

Leadership Without Easy Answers. Second Edition. Ronald A. Heifetz. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Review Press. 1998.

Send: Why People Email So Badly and How to Do it Better. First Edition. David Shipley. New York, NY: Vintage Books. 2010.

Servant Leadership: A Journey Into the Nature of Legitimate Power & Greatness. 25th Anniversary Edition. Robert K. Greenleaf. New York, NY: Paulist Press. 2002.

Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well. First Edition. Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen. New York, NY: Viking. 2014.

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change. First Edition. Stephen R. Covey. New York, NY: Free Press. 1990.

The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World. Fourth Edition. Ronald A. Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press. 2009.

Time Warped: Unlocking the Mysteries of Time Perception. Claudia Hammond. New York, NY: HarperCollins. 2013.

Transgender Language Primer. Website last accessed June 4, 2019. www.translanguageprimer.org/primer

White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism. First Edition. Robin DiAngelo. Cambridge, MA: Beacon Press. 2018.

Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race. First Edition. Reni Eddo-Lodge. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Circus. 2017.

Working With Emotional Intelligence. First Edition. Daniel Goleman. New York, NY: Bantam Books. 2000.

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