Activity Report: Leading a Set Construction Event

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I am a part of student group here at Lawrence Tech known as LTU Society of Dramatic Arts (SODA). The purpose of this organization is to provide a way for students to express their interest in the performing arts, understand the function and work needed to put on such productions, and to provide entertainment for the student body at large. This semester I was in charge of designing and managing the set aspects of our show, *The Picture of Dorian Grey*. Designing the set was fairly simple as it mostly needed a two sided movable wall and a platform to represent the attic of Dorian’s mansion. Now normally to complete such sets within a semester we rely on about 4 to 5 set construction events that occur on Saturday for about 5-8 hours and use anywhere from 4-10 people. To lead such events so the project could be completed in a timely manner, I used many of the principles that are found in Donald T. Phillips book, *Lincoln on Leadership*. Using the first set construction day, where we built the frames and paneling, I will show how I based many of my decisions on the principles Abraham Lincoln had on leadership.

First and most important, I knew that quite a few people were going to come and there was a lot of work to be done. Dividing and conquering was defiantly needed if the entire wall and attic platform was going to be framed and paneled. There at the meeting there where 9 people besides myself that came to the event. So I grouped them up into three teams, one for each side of the wall and another for the platform. Now I knew I would not have time to work lead every group simultaneously, so I had to pick team leads that where capable of the general construction without my help. This is was not that simple of a choice as there was a vast difference in construction skill and leadership skills among the group. I needed to find my own Ulysses Grants so to speak. So what I did was sort the projects in easy, medium and hard. One side of the wall had old bookshelves that needed to be built into the wall, so it was the hard project. The platform needing to be reinforced properly made it the medium project, and the play wall was the easy project. So I made sure each group had someone who I knew had enough technical skills to use the tools properly while at the same time being able to teach others lead others. I naturally gave the person who had the most in-depth knowledge and experience the hardest job, with two people who did not have much skill but of who I saw as having a lot of potential.

The next two who I knew could both lead and have the knowledge to generally complete the project where about equal skill. One was slightly better at the technical aspects and the other was better on the leadership aspects. So I gave the one with better leadership skills the medium difficulty project, with a two people that already had some experience in the technical aspects of building a platform. I did this as I figure with his ability to lead the other two well their combined technical experiences would be more than sufficient in completing the platform. Lastly the person who I thought had better technical skills of the two I placed with the least experienced of people there on the simplest job. This I thought was best as his knowledge alone should be more than adequate for this project and the easy project is the best stepping stone for those with no experience in construction. And so, my teams where complete and working efficiently on their projects.

Now, I did not just sit there and wait or work on some other none related task while they were completing this project. No, It was my role to keep swapping assistance between each team seeing how there doing and helping them out with the construction. Just like how Lincoln would get out among his troops and address their needs, I would be doing the same. I would be constantly looking at issues others would encounter, like two pieces of lumber preventing someone from setting a screw correctly or predicting the length that a piece of lumber needs to be. In doing this with each group allowed me to check the quality of their work passively and quietly, while at the same time having them double check my calculations and numbers. It proved to be a good way to spot future issues we would encounter and prevent them, as they caught several of my mistakes when first planning and I caught a few of theirs.

While everyone was working on their individual projects, was to perform all of the busy work that needs to happen at the same time. For example, getting lumber and tools as they were needed, sorting the supplies for each group and making sure everyone had water and anything else they might need to stay healthy. I find that doing this these type of boring and simple jobs really shows the crew that you are will to do the annoying and tedious items. When they see a leader working hard like that, they also tend to work much harder, thus keeping moral high and finishing in a timely manner.

Eventually each part of the wall and the platform was completed and we group all back together to put those two wall pieces together. It was a resolution that brought great satisfaction to the crew members seeing that wall roll around the stage perfectly without any tilting or twisting. We finished the paneling for the walls in much of the same format as the paintings and where actually able to complete this in about 4 hours, much ahead of the time we were expecting to complete these projects. I really can see know exactly how studying the examples of other leaders in the past like Lincoln can be such a great way to refine and improve your ability to successfully lead a project to completion.

Works Cited

Phillips, Donald T. 1952-. Lincoln On Leadership: Executive Strategies for Tough Times. New York, N.Y.: Business Plus, 1993.