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## The Role of a Stage Manager: the Importance of Communication, Respect, and Trust within Production Work

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The Role of a Stage Manager: The Importance of Communication, Respect, and Trust within  
Production Work

by

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An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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## INTRODUCTION

The craft of theater is ephemeral. Although the labor and journey on these productions may have felt eternal for those involved, the process from auditions to strike is short lived. However, that is not the end of theater; it repeats itself. We move onto the next production and so on and so forth. This cycle continues as well with its associated paradigms. We have auditions, read throughs, rehearsals, tech, performances, and finally strike. This cycle is very much common knowledge to us in the world of theater. Even though every production is different, the cycle remains relatively the same. It's the way theater operates. Once we get accustomed to how the ropes work within theater, things tend to fly by with ease. If only it were that simple! Diverting from assumptions, theater is a living, breathing beast that can be challenging to tame. Art should always be a challenge; it should never be easy for those who create it.

After stage managing six shows at Portland State University, I began noticing a pattern with these challenges. Regardless of what the specific obstacle may have been within a production, I felt that there was a common source for it. As a stage manager, being able to create newer methodologies to address and remedy these challenges has been a goal for me. Thus, based on my research and from my own personal experience, whenever there is a problem within a production, it is usually due to a lack of communication, respect, and/or trust. It could be possible that rehearsal went awry as there wasn't clear communication about the rehearsal schedule? Maybe the actors are afraid to step out of their comfort zones because there has been a lack of trust developed between them and the director? Maybe the cast feels a lack of respect because they are being taken advantage of throughout the production? As a stage manager, your goal for any production is to have a smooth transition from readthrough to strike. This puts us in

a unique visionary role, where we seek to maintain order through this chaos, in order to obtain our objective. It is crucial to understand that the best way to surmount any challenge is to use our skills in communication, respect, and trust to our advantage.

So if we know that these three aspects do contribute toward a more successful process, why do these problems persist? Perhaps a better question to ask is have we ever spoken about these three aspects during production work? Whether you're an actor, director, or stage manager; we generally don't have this discussion because we assume that everyone within our world knows this. We all assume that every director knows how vital it is to have your cast trust each other. We assume the actor understands how to respect the rules of theater. We assume the stage manager knows how to communicate well. Ay, there's the rub. The only way we can shine light on this problem is if we stress why communication, trust, and respect are crucial to the production process, and how they can even ameliorate these inevitable problems. Thus, in this paper, I plan to address why communication, respect, and trust are vital to production work; how they each affect the work environment within this artistic culture; and how a stage manager should be utilizing them in order to construct their management approach, all in the pursuit of a smooth production process.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### *Definitions of a Stage Manager*

Beginning to define a stage manager is complicated. They have one of the most important roles in a production. (Kinckman 2013) In simplest terms, their main duty is to be responsible of managing all aspects and protocols necessary in order to have rehearsals and performances. On a more complex note, they are liaisons, coordinators, facilitators, leaders, and voices of reason;

sometimes the best question to ask is what does a stage manager not do? I think that is the key here. There have such a specified job that it can vary depending on the unique needs of the production. That is why defining what a stage manager is to someone unfamiliar with theater, or even someone who is involved with theater, can be quite challenging. One of my stage management professors captured this role by saying “It's like shuffling a deck of cards: the stage manager must add the acting, directing, the technical, and the human elements together to create a new deck.” (Hartshorn 2017) At the same time, I've often thought that Stage managers are like pastry chefs; they may have all the ingredients necessary to bake a cake, but unless they take the initiative to incorporate all the ingredients together, they will not have a cake. Without the stage manager, there would be no one present to incorporate all elements of a production together.

In addition, the Actors Equity Association, or the AEA, has a clear definition of what a stage manager is based on their duties. The AEA is the labor union that represents actors and stage managers in America by “advancing the careers of its members through negotiating wages, working conditions, and providing a wide range of benefits, from health to pension plans.” And for the purpose of this paper, I chose to list the duties that are universal for any production; regardless if you're working equity or not.

- *A Stage Manager under Actors' Equity Contract is, or shall be obligated to perform at least the following duties for the Production to which s/he is engaged, and by performing them is hereby defined as the Stage Manager:*
- *Shall be responsible for the calling of all rehearsals, whether before or after opening.*
- *Shall assemble and maintain the Prompt Book which is defined as the accurate playing text and stage business, together with such cue sheets, plots, daily records, etc., as are necessary for the actual technical and artistic operation of the production.*
- *Shall work with the Director and the heads of all other departments, during rehearsal and after opening, schedule rehearsal and outside calls in accordance with Equity regulations.*

- *Assume active responsibility for the form and discipline of rehearsal and performance, and be the executive instrument on the technical running of each performance.*
- *Maintain the artistic intentions of the Director and the Producer after opening, to the best of his/her ability, including calling correctional rehearsals of the company when necessary and preparation of the Understudies, Replacements, Extras and Supers, when and if the Director and/or Producer declines this prerogative...*
- *Keep such records as are necessary to advise the producer on matters of attendance, time, welfare benefits, or other matters relating to the rights of equity members...*

### *The Stage Manager's Role in Conjunction with the Production*

The AEA's definition adds emphasis that the stage manager is the inner mechanism responsible for operating the show. The reason why they are included in this labor union of actors is because they are the advocate for them and for the entire production. Yet the stage manager isn't the person calling the shots for the entire production. They are not the producer nor the director. Like any other hierarchy within the world of business, the theater has its own. For this example, I will be referencing the many organizational charts from the works of Ionazzi, Kelly, and Stern. Since these organizational charts vary depending on the theater company, we'll often find that person calling the shots is usually the producer/board of directors. From there, we have the directors who have a specific artistic vision for the show. What we often find is that the stage manager is generally in the middle of this hierarchy. They are here to further assist with the artistic vision by establishing order within the production, just as a costume designer is here to further assist with the artistic vision by designing the costumes. Theater is a collaborative artform. Remember that no one is more important than anyone else, and that your job as a stage manager is to be the right hand man to the director, to the actors, and to the production in order for collaboration to happen.

You may be wondering why this paper is primarily targeted towards stage managers and not directors or actors. I personally believe that everyone within a production should be aware of communication, respect, and trust. However, at the end of the run, the show belongs to the stage manager with the task of maintaining the artistic intentions of the director and producer as indicated by equity. A stage manager works on a production from beginning to end unlike a director or an actor. This means that a stage manager becomes a beacon for every production and must act like a lighthouse: strong, dependable, and their light always guiding the lost to shore. They are often the sole person that people go to in times of troubles because they can trust them. Their work goes beyond managing as so much of what they do can influence the quality of the production in ways that can overall promote the artistic vision of a show. That is why this paper is stressing the vital role that communication, respect, and trust plays, and why a stage manager should be utilizing them into their work.

### *Preface*

Before we begin to examine each of these three aspects, I should preface the next following sections. The next portion of the paper will address what these three aspects are, how they operate, and how they can affect a production positively when used correctly. There will be many specific instances of how these aspects operated and how they achieved “said” goal. Often, I will use an anecdote from my past experience to illustrate that effect. It should be noted that these three aspects are not singularities. They are a complex mechanism that can affect a production in numerous ways. What these next sections offer are the many ways these aspects can operate. Not the only way.

## **COMMUNICATION**

“Communication is the cornerstone of a collaborative production, and the stage manager is the keystone holding the various parts of communication together.” (Kinckman 2013) At its root, communication is “a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior.” (Merriam Webster) As a stage manager, everything you do in a production is a form of communication. Whether it's taking blocking, scheduling rehearsals, or calling a show; communication is as “vital a part of stage managing as memorization is to acting.” (Kelly 1999) Communication allows a stage manager to efficiently and effectively manage a production. Because communication is an extensive subject: this section will primarily focus on the two forms of communication a stage manager will use within a production, how these skills can then be applied to very specific communicative aspects, and what those benefits look like.

### *Part I: Verbal Skills*

We use verbal communication throughout the day to call the show, function with actors, and to exchange information pertinent to the production. At the same time, Being able to clearly communicate information will lend to an easier process and prevent any confusion from occurring. As a stage manager, you should always be wary if there is confusion among your cast. Even something as small as not articulating the call time can create a mess. It is thus within a stage manager's interest to make sure they have communicated their information in an articulate way.

### *Managing*

As a stage manager, you have to be able to verbally communicate in order to manage a production. As equity states, stage managers are responsible for calling all rehearsals, have the



responsibility for the form and discipline of rehearsal and performance, and be the executive instrument on the technical running of each performance. This also means that a stage manager will have to report to the many heads of each department as equity also states. Already, a stage manager bears the weight of responsibility on their shoulders. In order for us to manage these aspects to our jobs, we need to communicate efficiently and effectively. How does a stage manager call rehearsal? They make sure they've created the schedule and have communicated that information with everyone. How do they become the executive instrument on a technical performance? They organize tech and facilitate all the technical and design elements together by communicating with the heads of those departments. Communication is a stage manager's best friend. What has always helped me make sure that my communication is clear, is I ask myself where could my communication have gotten lost in this process? Go to that area and see if a lack of communication is happening or not.

### *Interpersonal*

A large part of being a stage manager is to be a welcoming figure within the show. Knowing how to speak and work with people is necessary. The stage manager is the advocate for the actors, but they're also the right hand man for the director. Whether you're in the rehearsal room or up in the light booth, you will always be interacting with human beings. Interpersonal skills will play a significant role in creating a sense of respect and establishing a foundation of trust. This will continually be discussed throughout this paper, but as for now, treat human beings the way you would want to be treated. Communicate to your team honestly and sincerely; don't be fake to them. At the same time, don't ignore people. Do you have the capacity to truly

engage in active listening with others? Remember that you're as much as a listener as you are a speaker.

### *Disciplining*

With being a manager comes responsibility. This often means we have to be the disciplinary figure, which is what equity states anyways. Reprimanding cast and crew members can be an uncomfortable situation. Luckily, it's something I've rarely had to do now since the days of high school theater are over. However, those situations will continue to pop up throughout your career. If there is anything I have learned from my past experience, it is that putting the blame on a particular person doesn't solve anything. If an actor shows up late to rehearsal and you start reprimanding them, will that prevent them from being late the next time? Maybe, or maybe not. When I need to discipline, I always look at it from their perspective and see what could be causing this problem. Could I do something to prevent it from happening again? Often, by changing the tactic from discipline to help, the person getting "disciplined" gets caught off guard. You're no longer mad at them, you're worried for them. They might even begin to feel responsible for their own actions. Allow me to elaborate.

I stage managed a production of *The Bacchae* recently and that show had a problem of many cast members arriving late to rehearsal. If there is anything I find most disrespectful to a production, it is arriving late to rehearsal. Arriving late will not only waste the stage manager's time, but also the director's and fellow cast member's time. Thus, in order for me to "reprimand" many of these cast members, I chose to "kill them" with kindness. I went by asking if there was any way I could help out with attendance, and continued by saying: "*Something that usually helps me arrive to rehearsal is this motto used in the theater. 'if you arrive late, then you're*

*fired; if you arrive when you're called, then you're late; if you arrive early, then you're on time."*

*Although this sounds extreme, it's very helpful to implement in one's life. There will be certain deadlines you will encounter in life that you cannot finesse. How will you meet these deadlines? What steps do you have to take in order to get there?* What this communicated was that I knew the circumstance that was happening, that I would not tolerate it, and that instead I would help the cast ameliorate this problem. I didn't have to put the blame on anyone because this will put the blame on themselves. I found that this did improve attendance and many of the cast members felt sorry for what they did. That's why I prefer to kill them with kindness; it gets the person who is being reprimanded to reprimand themselves.

### *Part II: Nonverbal Skills*

Then we have nonverbal communication which is everything else in which information can still be exchanged between individuals, yet, does not rely on the denotations. Nonverbal communication doesn't even need to rely on language, it can still be exchanged through gestures, actions, and impressions. This plays such a large role within the theater, and within a stage manager's job. Thus, like with verbal communication, it's important to understand how nonverbal communication can affect a production.

#### *Gestures*

When a stage manager is actively doing their jobs as they're supposed to, we end up creating very simple, yet, meaningful forms of nonverbal communication. These small gestures can often create a large impact. Opening the rehearsal room early, for example, communicates a sense of welcoming. It lets the cast know that the stage manager is present to help out in any way, and that they're ready to work. The same can be said about sweeping the rehearsal room

before call, working on presets, or taking line/blocking notes. What these small gestures of responsibilities and predictable behavior communicate is that there is a sense of trust being established. (Richards 2017) Stage managers should be considerate to the potential needs of a show. (Stern 1987) Nowhere in the equity does it say a stage manager must do all of this. A stage manager doesn't do these small gestures because they have to, they do it because they want to.

### *Impressions: Playing the Role of the Stage Manager*

First impressions can make a difference. How you present yourself as a stage manager during the first rehearsal is key to your success. This is where you can establish what kind of stage manager you are and set that record straight. Do you want to be a stage manager that your cast can count on because you're always prepared? Or do you want to be the stage manager that your cast has no faith in because you come in not knowing what to do? I often find that "playing" the role of the stage manager is in fact a form of nonverbal communication that can imprint a strong impression. Imagine the role of a stage manager as a character in a play, think of *Our Town* if you will. In a world with no physical objects, the stage manager in that play acts as a narrator painting the scenes. They are the operating force in that world and the audience trusts them because of their leadership and guidance. While this should always apply to directors, the same should be said to stage managers! Their presence should communicate responsibility, organization, trust, respect, and all other qualities of leadership that a stage manager should have. How are they able to you may ask? A quote I've always believed in by Alexander Pope really answers this question: "act well your part, there all the honours lie."

### *Cadence*

The order and speed in which we communicate is another way we can exchange information. You'll find that as stage managers, we speak in very specific speeds when we want to deliver important information. For example, the way you call cues has a specific cadence to it. It's a universal way of communicating to our board operators. Therefore, when we say "Standby light 15, light 15...Go," they know exactly when to press the go button. Just like if a stage manager calls "five minutes till places" and the cast respond with "thank you five!," both parties are aware when top of the show will begin. These phrases, with its cadence, contains all the necessary information that the board operator or the actor needed. Regular and consistent communication is key to any management protocol as it allows others to know what we have done, and what we plan to do. (Richards 2016)

*Tone: Connotation and Subtext*

As it is evident by now, words play an important role in shaping a production. This means that how you use your words is pertinent. (Hauser & Reich 2003) However, they can do the opposite as well. When communicating, remember that your information may be misinterpreted by the listener due to the tone you're using. Meaning, be cautious with what and how you say it. The last thing you would want to do is to speak in a manner that may accidentally offend, concern, or may make someone feel uncomfortable. When our words are matched with specific tones, we are inadvertently creating a connotation or a subtext to it. This can ultimately affect how people in your production interpret you. One of the ways we often see this is when a stage manager is having to give direction such as correcting blocking or prompting for lines. Yet, connotation and subtext are not necessarily a negative feature. They can also be positive and useful in connoting a sense of trust, stability, and leadership that a production

needs. Grinstein & Kronrod discuss that it's not what you say that truly matters, it's how you say it. And in the end, it's not the words that defines a stage manager, it's how they use those words is what truly defines them

### *Personality, Humor, and Soul*

Regardless of how you use your words, remember to be your true honest self. I cannot stress that enough. It's great to be aiming for a communication that is professional to the workplace, but make sure it serves the artform. Don't throw away your compassion and soul because how could you lead a show? Your personality is key to how you stage manage. In Stern's *Stage Management*, he discusses that a good characteristic of a stage manager is that they keep their sense of humor. Sometimes the production may need that extra boost of positivity. I'm a very sarcastic human who loves deadpan humor. I choose not to use this during the beginning of the process as sarcasm can be misinterpreted so many different ways. However, towards the end of the process when I'm very comfortable with the cast, I will begin to show that side of me. I'm not here to make laughs or anything like that; rather, this helps humanize me especially in the role of a manager. How you articulate your words will create an impression upon others and affect the overall production. Your words can create an atmosphere where your cast feels safe to openly communicate their own thoughts. Nonverbal communication isn't just managing a show, it's the language dynamics that happens during the day to day process.

### **RESPECT**

Respect is an unusual aspect to production work. Unusual in that we often do not consider the potential it has. First, however, we must understand that there are many ways to define respect. I find Merriam Webster's definition of "to acknowledge with high or special

regard,” to be the best fitting. Because theater is a collaborative artform, there will be many channels of creativity pouring from all directions. When that happen, there will be different opinions and viewpoints about specific matters. People may react to this in many different ways, sometimes to a personal extent. Yet at the end of the day, no viewpoint is better than the other, just as no person is better than anyone else within a production. We have to consider these different views and value them with the same integrity as our own. This is where respect plays such a vital role. Appeasing or being a yes-man doesn’t create respect; it is acknowledging and valuing the processes of theater and its many roles that can create respect. You may work with people you do not like or even respect as a person at all. However, you do have to be able to respect their work and their role in this collaborative artform. This section will expound how respect can encourage work, improve morale, and accept people from all backgrounds.

### *Encouraging Work*

I cannot say that I have been apart of a production where collaboration was not allowed. Unless you’re working on some type of one-man-show, collaboration is always happening. However, collaboration can be limited. For example, a director may have very specific intentions about the direction of a scene which could then limit what an actor may bring to the table. At the same time, you as a stage manager may have a solution to a specific design problem but know it may not be your place to talk about such areas. The last thing you would want is to make a designer feel that you know their work more than they do. This is where respect plays a crucial role. If a sense of mutual respect has been established within a production, then I believe that no one should have the fear to share their ideas. A stage manager should seek to create a working environment in which the creative process can flourish. (Ionazzi 1992) This can encourage work

and can even lead to a more satisfying art experience. My favorite shows that I have worked on have always been ones where collaboration was encouraged. Even if what you're saying may not be the right fit for the production, I believe that valuing an idea is incredible as opposed to dismissing it.

Dismissing creativity, or dismissing the processes of theater can lead to negative work environments, and in turn, establish a lack of respect among many other things. I believe that a stage manager should always be prudent in regards to respecting the processes of theater. They should never be irritated when the actor need prepare themselves for the stage. Nor should they be annoyed when blocking will continue to change throughout the rehearsals. Or even question the importance of read throughs and table work. Trying to tamper with these processes can have your actors and director feeling a lack of respect towards you. And remember that equity states that your are responsible for assembling and maintaining the prompt book, which must be the accurate playing text. If you're annoyed by all of these formalities when working on a production, which is part of the stage manager's job anyways, you would essentially be communicating to your cast and crew that you didn't care about their work. If they don't respect you, or your role within the theater, then they may not take your orders seriously.

This notion of encouraging people to work through respect goes hand in hand with the type of work environment the director has established. Similar to Ionazzi, an environment that encourages creativity and risk taking over one that is contained and dismisses ideas may be more beneficial. (Mayfield & Mayfield 2017) While negative work environments lack opportunity, positive environments promote it. As a stage manager, you can assist with the environments your director is establishing by catering it to the types of plays you're working on. An



energetic-robust environment could encourage great work for a comedy while a more stoic-calm environment could be well suited for a drama. This is where a stage manager not only has to approach their management style from a logistical standpoint, but even with more visceral approach. Every play is unique. What unique needs do you have to address in order to create an atmosphere the encourages work through respect?

### *Improving Morale*

Morale is “the mental and emotional condition of an individual or group with regard to the function or tasks at hand.” (Merriam Webster) From past experience, this has always been a challenging obstacle for my cast, and myself included, to surmount. You may find yourself lucky to work on a show that didn’t experience any form of low morale. That may be rare. However, I feel that the most rewarding shows to work on are those that seem most challenging to overcome. That being said, there will be shows where there may be phases of low morale. Morale is crucial to have because without it, we would be managing a show where people would have no desire to work on.

Low morale can come from a variety of reasons; sometimes it has nothing to do with communication, trust, or even respect. Maybe the audience isn’t receiving the show well that night. That is out of a stage manager’s hands. The purpose of this sub section is to show how a sense of respect can improve morale. Certainly, a lack of respect can correlate with low morale because it completely disregards what we value in respect such as: promoting collaboration, creating safe environments, and respecting the process of making theater. As I mentioned earlier, stage managers often act like lighthouses and thus must be able to guide the cast during moments of travail. This is true, but they have to be careful that they are not further contributing to low

morale. What a stage manager should begin to learn is that there is a specific relationship they must have with it. They should be striving to be the company's spirit and promote morale as Kelly indicates, and at the same time, Stern warns that they should distance themselves enough to where they do not contribute to low morale. Sometimes the best approach is to just be blunt with it. This can be achieved by not overreacting to the situation, by getting it out of the open, by not acting elated when others are depressed, and by keeping your own personal morale high.

(Stern 1987)

For instance, our cast experienced low morale in the *Revenge of the 47 Loyal Samurai*, while I was stage managing it. There were many reasons why, but at this moment in the process, it was due to the fact that they were only given six days of rehearsal to learn a very complex sword fighting scene. Much of those rehearsals were spent on learning how to properly wield a katana instead of learning the choreography to the fight. Eventually, the cast didn't feel prepared at all to show their work to the director. At the same time, the director was confused why the cast felt this way when they gave them sufficient time to work. This is where you as a stage manager need to step in. Stern's four steps to handling low morale is beneficial in these matters. Instead of overreacting, or acting like everything is fine and cheerful; the way I solved this was by honestly communicating to my director what the cast was experiencing. I also stated that I understood their frustrations along with the director's frustrations. We then began exploring solutions to the problem and both agreed that an extra day of fight rehearsal would then benefit us all. The cast were so relieved to hear about this that this did improve their morale. One of your goals as a manager is to create a safe work environment where people feel safe to take risks and be able to explore their creativity. (Mayfield & Mayfield 2017) Low morale can contribute to low work

engagement which overall will diminish respect. What we can gain from this anecdote is that respect for the processes of theater can improve morale.

*Accepting People from All Backgrounds*

Often, people find themselves within the theater partly because of this feeling of being in a safe inclusive space. When we work in such collaborative environments, we will find ourselves meeting people from all different backgrounds. We may interact with people, groups, and types we never had the chance to encounter before. I think that is one of the best aspects of theater. The stories you'll hear and the experiences you'll make allows theater to feel alive. Regardless of what the situation may be, you have to be able to work with everyone. Period. Including the people you may not like. This isn't a rule that just stage managers need to follow; everyone in a production should follow this.

Being able to accept people for who they are and to still be able to work with them goes a long way. There's a common saying that whenever you enter the stage, you have to leave your real world baggage out the door. This is true. Any prejudice or any negative sentiments that exist need to disappear the moment we're on stage in order to create that safe place. If you are able to respect the processes and formalities of theater, then you are sure able to accept anyone regardless of who they are. There are many reasons why I find this to be crucial for productions. Obviously discrimination of any sort will create a hostile environment to work in. However, I think the most important reason of all is that theater is meant to be shared with everyone. Theater allows everyone to tell their stories and experiences. This can overall help a production. Sometimes this will work on shows that have characters from specific backgrounds or who have unique experiences. For the average actor or director, this may be difficult if you yourself are not

familiar with those said experiences. Yet by being accepting and embracing can create much more depth and authenticity for a show. This would in turn, instigate an encouragement of work and even positive work environment. When you can respect the individuality and diversity that people bring to a production, then you can learn how to work with some of those difficult types. You might work with that over-demanding director, or that intense stage manager, or even those dramatic actors; overall they have great intentions. Yet, that should not allow you to treat them differently. In my philosophy, if you're doing your work and showing up on time, then that's great for me as a stage manager.

Regardless, one of the reasons why I feel theater has such a strong knit community is because they embrace all of these backgrounds. They value diversity. Or they try to at least. Respect can come in many ways; I've worked with some of the most toughest people in productions and I still respect them in their position because of their work ethic. Respect is a complex structure that reveals itself on many layers. If you're having trouble working with someone because they're different than you, find out what you have in common. Sometimes the best ways to create respect and even trust is to share similarities with each other. (Hurley 2017) I find it is the best place to learn how to work with all kinds of people is by respecting them for who they are and not by judging what they are.

## **TRUST**

If I had to decide which aspect was most crucial to any production, I would go with trust. As a stage manager, you need to have a foundation of trust in order to have a work environment optimal for the production. It can create an atmosphere of engagement, guidance, and confidence. However, a stage manager shouldn't expect trust from their trustees, they have to

earn it. Just like the prior two aspects, the dynamic of trust depends upon two parties. Yet this dynamic depends on a leader/follower model. (Baker et al 2016) This section explores the various ways on how a stage manager can establish trust, be able to maintain it, and ultimately culminate it towards the end.

### *Establishing Trust with Engagement*

A stage manager gets a “freebie” when it comes to having their cast trust them. They are in a role of leadership meaning the cast and crew has to trust them. Yet assumptions are dangerous to make and often lead to poor management styles. No matter the circumstance, a stage manager should always have to earn their trust. They have to actively engage in their work and commit to all the function and needs necessary. Meaning, you’re always committing to your duties 100 percent of the time and even going up and beyond those tasks. This creates a sense of predictability and integrity crucial for any production. (Hurley 2006) What predictability means is that the leader should create routines, such as taking blocking, in which the repetitive pattern could garner the trust of the follower. When you’ve established these types of routines, your cast and crew know that they can depend on you because they’ve seen you work. They are able to trust your management because of your engagement and work ethic. Integrity works the same way. (Swift and Littlechild 2015) When you make a promise, you have to meet that promise. If you undermine it, then you are ultimately undermining the trust dynamic others have of you. That means if someone ask you to do something, and you agree to it, you better do it.

This beginning phase of trust building is making sure everyone can rely on your actions. Similar to when communicating, everyone needs to be able to rely on your words. I mentioned earlier that I stage managed a production of *The Bacchae*. Well one of my main obstacles in this

production was that we had a sudden snow storm that made us lose our first week and a half of rehearsal. I knew that this given circumstance would create confusion and fear among the cast. However, I also knew that it served as my moment to establish a sense of trust. A snowstorm is going to scare people in regards of what to do with rehearsals as communication can get lost or mishandled. And since we as stage managers unfortunately cannot control the weather, we need to create tactics to overcome this obstacle. How I handled the situation was by making sure I was predictable. I thought of every question cast members may have and addressed them to my director. Once I received those answers, I then communicated them via email to the entire cast. I also gave them an invitation for them to ask me any questions they may have. I found that this worked very well during that moment of confusion because not only did it show the cast that I cared about them, but also I cared about the overall production and will continue to work even during all of these snow days. It created a foundation of trust that we as a cast could start building upon.

### *Maintaining Trust with Guidance*

Let us imagine that it's now week three or four of rehearsals. There should have already been an establishment of trust within the work environment by now. The matter is how do you maintain that trust? During this middle process of rehearsals is where things may get tricky. We've probably already finished blocking the show by now and off book date may be soon. Or maybe the first stumble through of the entire show is coming up. Maybe even tech. From past experience, these important rehearsal dates often challenge the cast. Emotions may be high, morale may go low; a variety of situations can happen. Your job at this point is to maintain that trust you established. Inspiring a shared vision can ameliorate this process. "An effective leader

demonstrates optimism and enthusiasm in appealing to followers interests by espousing to a vision of the future that includes shared aspirations.” (Baker et al 2016) Ask yourself what is your goal as a stage manager? I imagine that it is to have an excellent production. The cast most likely has that same goal. Bring that to the rehearsal process during this point. A vision has the potential to instigate a shift which can then guide those to a promise of a better future. (Richards 2016) Let them know that this is a team effort and that everyone is in this together for a great show. In addition to the director, the stage manager must assist in executing the creative vision of each production. (Kelly 2009) Not only can this help boost morale, it increases guidance and ultimately trust.

I’ve seen so many actors stress over the off book date, about tech, or really just about anything. This is where a stage manager has to guide their cast out of this abyss. There are many other tactics, beyond visioning, that a stage manager can utilize. The best and easiest way is to communicate with them honestly. Let your cast know that the first few days of being off book are going to be rough. That is a given. However, they need to know that they shouldn’t feel deterred by it. At the other hand, let them know why tech shouldn’t be stressful and how it actually is really fun. Tech is one of my favorite moments of a production because we finally get to see a play on stage. It is at that moment where art has been realized. So I let my cast know about this because if I’m not worried, then they won’t feel worried. If you continue to communicate honestly, then you can garner trust with your guidance.

I remember this one time back when I worked on a production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* where one of my actors felt that their work wasn’t good enough. When they told me that, I felt sad because they were one of the most funniest and hard working actors I’ve met.

In this instance, I spoke honestly because I wanted them to have a sense of value at that moment. I wanted to reassure them that I'm always there in case they need me. By letting your cast know that you believe the show will be great and that you value their work, can potentially prevent fear. It is with this type of guidance is what maintains trust. Remember that as a stage manager, you have to be a lighthouse all the time, and hope you only need to guide people when they most need it.

### *Culminating Trust with Confidence*

This last phase of the production process goes by in a blur. So much can happen that it's often difficult to remember those memories. However if all went well, then this phase of culminating trust is often the most rewarding. Through the ups and downs of the entire production, we finally get to "another opening of another show." Due to the live nature of theater, anything can happen during a performance. It is with this fact that trust becomes tested one last time. How does your cast know that in the event of a mishap that occurs onstage, that you will be able to cover for it? How do you even know that your cast and crew will hit all their cues on time? And to bring up another equity rule, how does the director and producer know that a stage manager will be able to maintain their artistic intentions throughout performances? There has to be a sense of confidence between the stage manager and everyone within the production.

When the show gets to the point of performances, the cast is placing all their faith into the stage manager. They believe that the stage manager will be able to manage the show just fine because of their work they have done throughout the process. It's the same in the opposite direction. The stage manager believes the the actors will be present with the show and always hit their cues. I feel that this confidence can only exist when they not only have done the first two



steps of creating trust, but by also encouraging the heart. What that means is that leaders are required to “engage their own hearts and that they be honest and open in communicating their own dreams and interests to followers.” (Baker et al 2016). Thus our cast and crew can get this confidence only when you encourage them with your own heart. And this is something you should do as your director may have left by this point; the show now belongs to the stage manager. Ask yourself when has your cast seen you that expressive about the artform? I feel that much of stage management is just behind the scenes work. Although this paper explores the many ways stage manager can be engaged with the show; it’s often done in a silent, and unnoticeable way. So bring your passion and heart into the production at this point! My favorite part of the production process are performances. I love calling the show, and finally being able to watch it for once. It’s also that moment when you’re proud of the work that everyone has put into. So I’ll let the entire cast and crew know about this. Really engage with your cast and crew members. This is the point where you really get to know each other and this moment is brief. Do not take it for granted and enjoy the relationships you’ve made. I feel that this last segment of trust culminates only when all of these steps have been taken. You have established trust with your engagement as a leader, you maintained trust with your guidance, and now you’re culminating trust with this confidence that was developed during this entire process.

### **CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this paper was to create a new methodology for stage managers to use in their management. Through the unraveling of each aspect, we revealed the importance of communication, respect, and trust with production work; how it affects the artistic culture of theater; and how a stage manager should utilize them in their management approaches. This

paper primarily focused on the positive ways each aspect operated as opposed to looking at the negative ways. It took account of how these aspects can facilitate the equity duties of a stage manager, and at the same time, it showed real world experience of how they influenced productions. Although there is much that can be said about stage management, in the end, sometimes the best way to approach this craft is to just have fun with it.

**APPENDIX A****Credentials: Shows Stage Managed at Portland State University**

- 1. *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*. Dir Karin Magaldi (Spring 2014)**
- 2. *The Importance of Being of Earnest*. Dir Karin Magaldi (Winter 2015)**
- 3. *Eurydice*. Dir Karin Magaldi (Fall 2015)**
- 4. *The Revenge of the 47 Loyal Samurai*. Dir Laurence Kominz (Winter 2016)**
- 5. *The Bacchae*. Dir Richard Wattenberg (Winter 2017)**
- 6. *Sons of the Prophet*. Dir Karin Magaldi (Spring 2017)**

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Bacchae Prompt Book**

I chose to create a template prompt book as a resource for my department. Students learning stage management could review my prompt book as a means of discovering ways to organize and communicate information effectively. Please feel free to review my prompt book at your own pleasure.

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