Fall 11-29-2023

Behind the Scenes: Shining a Spotlight on Veiled Theatre Workers

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TH 498B-01

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My thesis aims to highlight traditionally underrepresented theatre artists. I wish to dive deeply into the many backstage, or "veiled" workers, who continue to go unacknowledged. Why is there an aspect of "veiled" theatre created to stay hidden? Even in technical theatre, some specialties receive more credit or recognition than others. For example, the Tony Awards offer categories for direction, sound, light, costume, and scenic design, yet no award for stage management. How are institutions working to create more representation in an intentionally hidden space? This project will specifically focus on the representation of stage managers, arguably the most invisible and the most important people in a production. While covering the role and responsibilities of a stage manager, I will investigate why stage managers are so often overlooked and even expected to go unnoticed. Many theatrical practitioners often refer to the adage that "a stage manager did their job well if you never noticed something went wrong." Is it true that the absence of conflict is the only quality to determine excellence in stage management, or is the impact of an excellent stage manager simply taken for granted? My thesis will explore the realm of dedicated theatre artists who continue to experience underrepresentation in their field.

The art of live theatre thrives on collaboration; new people bring their individual experiences to their work and create a cohesive, universal, and impactful piece of art. However, bringing a playtext to life requires precision, constant communication, and a strong team of artists willing to work together to achieve their common goal.

As Porter and Alcorn describe in their book *Stage Management Theory as a Guide to Practice*, "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[1]." The stage manager, or SM, guides the company through the nine stages of production:

[1] Porter & Alcorn 2020 p. xii

pre-production, first rehearsal, rehearsals, pre-tech, technical rehearsals, previews, opening, performances, and closing[2]. With the help of the assistant stage managers, or ASMs, a production stage manager, or PSM, can safely navigate paperwork, schedules, communication, personality, and cohesion. As a PSM guides the team, ASMs aid production by fulfilling any roles the PSM cannot. An ASM's duties include maintaining the offstage environment. At the same time, a PSM calls the cues of the show or creates and completes paperwork tracking various technical aspects of the show, such as props or costumes. An SM uses their emotional intelligence, communication, collaboration, and organizational skills to achieve this goal.

Most stage managers learn theory and practice through mentorship, studying the practices of their teachers and implementing ideas resonant with each individual. Because of stage management's apprenticeship approach, each SM has a distinct style "based on your history, experience, skills, education, preferences, and level of self-awareness and the attributes that make up your personality[3]." These unique SM styles influence how an SM navigates a production process and their priorities throughout the process. Since style centers around the individual, an SM may focus on their organizational, communication, or interpersonal skills throughout the process. Regardless of the individual style, each aspect of stage management is equally essential to the success of a production.

At Chapman University, I'm pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre with an area of study in Technical Theatre and a Leadership Studies minor. This degree path effectively prepares me for a career in interpersonal and organizational leadership and deepens my understanding of the demands stage management brings. While studying practices centered around transformational leadership, I've also stage managed about ten mainstage and student-produced productions at

[2] Porter & Alcorn 2020 p. 10
[3] Porter & Alcorn 2020 p. 6

Chapman. This paper will reference my experiences working on four different shows. These experiences propelled my growth as a stage manager, student, and individual in positive and negative ways.

As a practiced and dedicated stage manager, I've noticed how other theatre artists interact, engage with, and view stage managers. The theatre industry often overlooks stage management as an established and recognized field. While the responsibility of the job is never understated, there is an apparent lack of interdisciplinary recognition and inclusion. By studying the Stage Manager's Association (SMA), I will call attention to the lack of stage management advocacy and recognition, especially regarding SMA awards.

The most significant roadblock the theatre industry faces when awarding and recognizing excellence in stage management is that a stage manager's impact is not quantifiable. Because most of an SM's work lies in establishing the environment and effective communication, objective observers cannot watch a performance and measure an SM's quality of work like they can measure acting, direction, or design. However, because an SM's work is fundamentally different from the rest of the work in the theatre, it should have a unique measuring system. By compiling and comparing paperwork from various stage managers and feedback from those in the company, objective observers can measure and award excellence in stage management. Despite the prospect of winning an award, feedback is vital in developing and improving leadership skills.

Overall, intrinsically motivating stage managers via feedback will allow SMs to continue improving their skills, consequently improving the quality and experience of a production. Extrinsic motivation, such as awards, will generate friendly competition and camaraderie among stage managers. Awarding excellence in stage management will also deepen mentorship

connections, promoting stage managers asking each other for feedback on improvement and tips and tricks to adopt. Creating more recognition for stage managers will allow stage managers to grow independently and inform other theatre artists of the impact and importance of a stage manager to a production.

I plan to take these ideas into the professional world with my degree. Post-graduation, I plan to establish myself in the tight-knit theatre community on the West Coast, learning and refining my skills through work with already-established stage managers. I plan to return to New Jersey and work in New York City within a few years. My overarching goal is to stage manage on Broadway since I grew up a short bus ride from the Theatre District. While stage managing, I plan to use whatever platform I have to continue to advocate for stage management recognition. Young theatre lovers deserve to know that stage management is an accessible career path for those passionate about theatre but unsure how they fit into publicly established roles.

Professional productions often divide a stage manager's role into at least two parts: a Production Stage Manager and an Assistant Stage Manager. As Karyn Meek describes in her interview with NPR, a stage manager is "the hub of a wheel… in charge of making sure the lights happen, the set moves, sound happens" during every performance, often calling " hundreds of sound and tech cues for each performance[4]." While a PSM's primary role is to call every cue during a performance, and an ASM's primary role is to support the PSM, both positions are equally crucial.

My primary source for examining stage managers' roles and responsibilities is Lisa Porter and Narda E. Alcorn's book, *Stage Management Theory as a Guide to Practice*. As two accomplished and dedicated stage managers who worked in various fields throughout their careers, they are reputable sources about the responsibilities, obligations, challenges, joy, and

[4] Lunden 2017

passions for stage management. Their book covers stage management practices and theories and dives deep into the tips and tricks of effectively stage managing a production. Since stage management is rooted in apprenticeship, Porter and Alcorn compiled their best practices in hopes of leading and influencing the next generation of stage managers.

The SM team plays a critical role in each stage, ensuring that the team completes all objectives and that the entire team can transition seamlessly from one phase to the next. By looking at Bryan Runion's article for TheatreArtLife.com, "The Six Phases of Production," and Porter and Alcorn's book, I plan to describe a stage manager's role throughout each production phase and their influence on the production environment.

I also further examine the typical routine of a stage manager through Jeff Lunden's NPR article, "Stage Managers: You Can't See Them, but Couldn't See a Show without Them." By thoroughly understanding the time and dedication stage management requires, it is clear to see the skill required and the gap in recognizing excellence in stage management.

Since stage management is a deeply interpersonal field passed through apprenticeship, individuals must develop their unique SM style. Personalized SM styles motivate stage managers to pursue learning and improving their skills, even after establishing themselves in their careers. While examining Porter and Alcorn's book, I will highlight the impact of the stage manager as an individual on the production process. I will reference personal work as an experienced SM, undergraduate theatre technology major, and a leadership studies minor.

Through Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee's book *Resonant Leadership: Renewing Yourself and Connecting with Others through Mindfulness, Hope, and Compassion*, I will examine effective and ineffective leadership practices and how studying these practices influenced my leadership in the workplace. I will also reference my essays "Personal Learning

Plan" and "360 Feedback" to understand further the influence of intentionally cultivating leadership skills with stage management. Through anecdotes from practical experience, I will compare the theory to the execution, investigate how individual SM style impacts the production environment, and highlight common problems that a stage manager would resolve.

Finally, I will examine the Stage Manager's Association, the business branch of stage managers within the Actor's Equity Association. Through the SMA, I will discover how the theatre industry supports stage managers, rewards their excellence, or where there are support gaps within the system. Specifically, I will compare the guidelines and requirements of The Del Hughes Award and The Founders Award, the only two awards offered.

It's vital to note that this is one of the only platforms to offer awards for stage management; other platforms include regional and local theaters and small-scale events organized by stage managers. Large-scale theater awards ceremonies, such as the Tony Awards, the Drama Desk Award, or the Obie Award, often recognize directing or playwriting, occasionally design such as lights, sound, or costume, but never stage management.

While the magic of theatre stems from its inability to be the same again, there is one constant throughout an entire production process: the stage manager. Unlike an actor, who only joins the process during rehearsals, a designer, who does not attend rehearsals and leaves the project once it opens, or even the director, who also leaves after opening, a stage manager follows a production through every stage. According to Porter and Alcorn, the nine production phases are pre-production, first rehearsal, rehearsals, pre-technical rehearsals, technical rehearsals, previews, opening, performances, and closing[5]. However, each production is unique, with some processes requiring more or fewer stages; Bryan Runion only notes six phases, listing

[5] Porter & Alcorn 2020 p. 10

only prep, rehearsal, tech, previews, shows, and closing[6]. Since individual productions require unique support, a stage manager needs to recognize and accommodate the needs of the production.

Though this argument focuses on stage management within traditional theatre, meaning shows that follow Actor's Equity Association guidelines, stage management falls into diverse performance categories. Traditional theatre, such as Broadway, Off-Broadway, and regional productions, follow the same established rules and procedures, mostly dictating scheduling and safety, two significant aspects of stage management. Nontraditional theatre, such as dance, opera, or concerts, follows slightly different processes with unique guidelines and standards for stage management.

Each production phase yields responsibilities, tasks, and potential problems. Pre-production is the time before rehearsals begin when the production team becomes acquainted, establishes communication styles, and collaborates with the director to solidify the production concept. Porter and Alcorn note that this "prep" time allows stage managers to establish themselves as leaders while implementing systems and communication styles[7]. These "production meetings" usually include the stage management team, the director, the designers, such as lighting, sound, costumes, hair, makeup, scenic, projections, and props, and production management, such as the technical director and heads of departments such as lighting, sound, or scenic. While the design team, including the director, is employed for each production, the theater usually employs the production team full-time. Understanding each role and its concurrent responsibilities allows an SM to disseminate information effectively by remaining conscious of what information pertains to who on the team. Each individual in these meetings

[6] Runion 2023
[7] Porter & Alcorn 2020 p. 11

has their communication style and priority, but it is up to the stage manager to ensure effective communication and cohesive vision. For example, a smaller-scale production may not require daily updates after rehearsals via rehearsal reports, so an SM may choose an alternative form of relaying information rather than the standard paperwork.

The start of rehearsals signals a landmark for everyone involved in the production; the director starts working with the actors, forming the show's physicality and asking and answering various design questions. Before every rehearsal, it is standard for the SM team to arrive about 30 minutes early, allowing them time to unlock the doors and set up the rehearsal space for the day. This time also enables the SM team to delegate roles for the day, ensuring the completion of all necessary paperwork. At the end of each rehearsal, the SM team will stay behind until everyone else has left the building, cleaning up and locking the doors on their way out.

During rehearsals, the PSM will track directing and movement, or “blocking,” notes and create a “rehearsal report,” describing what the team accomplished during the rehearsal, attendance, injuries, breaks, and any questions, notes, or changes for designers. In addition to rehearsal reports, the SM team also creates a “daily call,” distributing vital information to the cast, such as forms to fill out, updates in the schedule, universal notes, and, most importantly, the rehearsal schedule for the next day. Both documents are typically distributed following the rehearsal since both documents are subject to change depending on what the team accomplished that day. If available, an ASM will track other aspects of the production, such as prop movement, actor entrances and exits, scene transitions, and line notes. Creating this paperwork accurately and legibly is crucial since it is distributed to each department, ensuring clear communication and preparing the production to transition into technical rehearsals. Though SM paperwork should be easily legible to any individual, an SM must know who receives what information.

Generally, the design and production management teams will receive the rehearsal report at the end of each rehearsal, allowing the team the next full work day to accommodate these notes and communicate any problems that may arise. By sharing potential issues throughout the process, an SM prepares what to resolve, how to resolve it, and when, considering the resources and information available at the time. Many of these design problems are often noted and put to the side until it's time to incorporate each design aspect into the production during technical rehearsals. Understanding the time and place to resolve specific situations allows an SM to manage their time and energy effectively, "accepting that the unknown is part of the process assists the stage manager in managing group expectations and supporting collaborators[8]." Regardless of whether or not the problem requires an immediate solution, the SM must ensure that every question finds an answer before performances begin.

Before moving into technical rehearsals, or "tech," an SM will finalize and distribute their paperwork, answering any questions the respective personnel may have. A PSM will also create their "prompt book," a copy of the script annotated with the light, sound, scenic, and other cues the PSM will call during the performance. During tech rehearsals, each aspect of the production comes together onstage for the first time. Typically, a director will step back and let the stage manager run these rehearsals since they will run each performance.

Tech - often only one week - consists of cueing rehearsals. The designers, board operators, actors, and stage managers will review each cue, ensuring the look and timing are correct. It also consists of dress rehearsals, where the hair, makeup, and wardrobe departments incorporate complete costume looks in time with the performance and cues. After tech, some productions go into "previews," where audience reactions dictate potential changes before the next performance. Next, the show opens.

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[8] Porter & Alcorn 2020 p. 17

Opening night is an exciting day in theatre, where every team member can physically see their finalized work onstage for an audience. By this time, all designers and the director left the production, leaving only the actors, crew, production management, and stage management to continue the show for the duration of its run. Every production has a unique run time; some shows last only one night, others run for over 50 years, like on Broadway. However, just because a production has opened, the stage manager works long hours daily. As Thomas Recktenwald, the PSM for *MJ The Musical* on Broadway, explained in his article for Playbill, a PSM is "either calling the show (cueing scenic, lighting, and sound) or in the office working on emails and schedule forecasting" during a performance[9]. A PSM may also hold fight, intimacy, choreography, song, blocking, or line rehearsals, called "calls," before a performance to ensure safety and cohesivity.

Since a production can run over several years, the stage manager must uphold the director's vision. If there is an understudy or "swing" actor performing for a character but did not work directly with the director on this role, the actor relies on the stage manager's notes from the director. Because a new actor may play each part, the SM team will also run rehearsals before a performance, highlighting complex moments and the actor's concerns about performing this role.

A stage manager may even leave the production before the end of the run, so the next stage manager would rely on all previous paperwork and communication to understand the production, its process, and how it developed. Once the show closes, the SM will compile all their paperwork to be archived. This archival process allows future theatre makers to produce the show again, taking note of the previous production's choices, successes, and struggles.

While the SM team diligently works on organizational aspects of the production throughout the run, they are also actively problem-solving. Before the start of a show, the SM

[9] Gans 2023

team will create a rehearsal schedule detailing essential dates, such as production meetings, rehearsals, tech, and performances. When creating this schedule, which often changes throughout the process, the SM team considers the personal conflicts of each individual involved. Because no one can predict every conflict, the SM must navigate and accommodate attendance, ensuring that the production as a whole stays on course.

Because every production is unique, an SM must determine how much time the production should dedicate to each phase. While production management may set dates for the start of pre-production, rehearsals, tech, and performances, an SM will determine how much rehearsal time the team spends working on lines, movement, character work, or even vocals and choreography, if applicable. The SM must also determine how much time they spend working on each form of paperwork. Because most of stage management's resources are due at the start of tech, but no one can finalize every answer until tech, an SM must actively and diligently work to ensure that everything is ready to distribute and communicate as needed.

Another major problem the SM resolves relates to personality differences. Since theatre is a collaborative art, often involving artists with diverse specialties who have yet to work together, an SM must establish effective communication. By not accurately understanding each unique vision, a production risks losing cohesion and creating tension when integrating these elements during tech. Ineffective communication also leads to interpersonal stress, which the SM also works to resolve.

Because the SM team is part of the few artists who stay with a production from beginning to end, every team member looks to stage management for guidance. While this often relates to practical problems, such as scheduling, clarification, or communication, an SM also plays a crucial role in safety. While a stage manager actively watches rehearsals and performances to

ensure the physical safety of each actor, this also includes comfort and emotional security. As a visible constant to everyone in a production, the SM can direct the environment and flow of the space. Porter and Alcorn describe this as "...your stage management style, the individualized combination of work habits, character, and disposition[10]." With the power and ability to guide the language and atmosphere of the production environment, the SM team can ensure the emotional security of each team member.

Theatre takes an apprenticeship-based approach, relying on teachers and previously established practices to pass down knowledge and continue the tradition. However, developing a unique SM style is essential to stage managing effectively. "Based on your history, experience, skills, education, preferences, and level of self-awareness and the attributes that make up your personality[11]," your SM style can influence your experience of the production, as well as everyone else's experience of working with you and on the production. Not only can an SM establish themselves as a friendly confidant, but they can also establish themselves as someone who takes charge and moves the process along. Porter and Alcorn argue that theory-guided practice develops individual yet effective SM styles because it "incorporates perspective, long-term thinking, aesthetic awareness, anticipation, and innovation into their work[12]."

Cultivating a harmonious environment is necessary for a smoothly functioning production. Boyatzis describes in Resonant Leadership that resonant leaders create "a group of followers who vibrate with the leader's upbeat and enthusiastic energy[13]." By setting the example of communication, language, boundaries, and shared respect, a stage manager can set the tone for interpersonal relationships throughout the production process.

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[10] Porter & Alcorn 2020 p. xii
[11] Porter & Alcorn 2020 p. 6
[12] Porter & Alcorn 2020 p. 5
[13] Boyatzis et al., 2013 p. 35

Typically, studying stage management focuses on the practices and qualities of a stage manager: proper communication, organization, time management, and respect. Thankfully, I was fortunate to study leadership as a minor. Chapman University's Leadership Studies minor focuses on transformational leadership or the idea that enacting change comes from within. Through my leadership courses, I've identified my personality and leadership types, which gives insight into how I best support a team. I've also, on countless occasions, compared my strengths, weaknesses, growth points, and hindrances. Studying myself and my leadership styles through introspection and feedback allows me to lead, learn, and grow within the workspace intentionally.

My SM and leadership style focuses on interpersonal relationships. By offering mutual respect and kindness in the workplace, others are more inclined to collaborate, especially if they feel safe and comfortable expressing new ideas. As I discussed in a Personal Learning Plan for one of my leadership courses last fall, "the best stage managers go above and beyond and spend time and energy cultivating a happy, healthy, joyful, and fun workspace. I do my best work when I enjoy what I'm doing and the people I do it with, and I hope to bring that energy with me daily[14]." Thankfully, this leadership course also required a feedback paper, where I interviewed various significant relationships. Through this feedback paper, "I learned I effectively balance a professional yet engaging environment where my team can achieve our goals and enjoy ourselves[15]." Understanding how others perceive our shared environment while considering the moments I intentionally and unintentionally cultivated allows me to determine which practices effectively flow with my SM style and which methods I should disregard or improve.

[14] Bradshaw "Personal Learning Plan" 2022 p. 3
[15] Bradshaw "360 Feedback" 2022 p. 9

The other integral aspect of my learning experience was actively and continuously working on a production. I've worked on about ten different shows, each varying in cast size, production size, and venue, from a four-person production in the Student Union to a 100-person production on the main stage. Each of these productions taught me invaluable lessons. However, some shows reinforced the importance of effective stage management and the impact of positive reinforcement and recognition.

Because my first year of university was over Zoom, all stage management classes focused mainly on theory while attempting to accommodate the lack of practical opportunity. Once I moved to campus, now with stage management theory under my belt, I had the chance to assistant stage manage a main stage production in the largest theater on campus. Since this was a very daunting task with an incredible amount of responsibility and little practical preparation, the other assistant stage manager on the production quickly stepped away from the team. This production was also the first show the PSM stage-managed, leaving me as a newcomer with the most experience.

While I had the skill, knowledge, and ability to support the production and the PSM, as a new stage manager, my voice fell unheard. During the first dress rehearsal, one designer even yelled at me for giving actors time warnings because they did not realize I was the ASM. Despite prior communication and introduction between us, keeping up with the SM team is not a priority for other production team members. A deeper understanding of the SM team and what falls under stage management responsibilities, such as keeping actors on schedule, would have resolved this tension and allowed the tech process to flow smoothly.

The production I worked on immediately after this also reinforced the importance of stage management. This show was directed and produced by a student who needed to be made

aware of the responsibilities and strains of directing and producing a show, especially in a found space on campus while producing a script for the first time. Despite organizational conflicts resolved by constant communication through various sources, the production also faced actor conflicts from the lead actor stepping away from the performance during the tech process.

Another show with similar roadblocks was a student-written and -produced screen-to-stage musical adaptation. We performed this "guerilla-style" show in the community rather than a theater. Through the hard work of the entire SM team for both productions, we could reserve spaces to perform, accommodate actor conflicts, and consolidate gaps in language between actors and new directors.

Most recently, I production stage managed a large-scale musical. Though the cast was only about 20 actors, the crew comprised over 100 people. Aside from knowing and effectively communicating with everyone working on the show, this production posed unique challenges.

From the start of pre-production, our director was late to every meeting, often causing the meeting to last 30 minutes longer than scheduled. During these meetings, he would lead the group into wild, unrelated tangents, disrespect faculty and staff, and publicly put down designers' work. As the PSM, I immediately noticed his unprofessionalism and asked professional faculty and staff for guidance. To give the benefit of the doubt, we all hoped this behavior would change once we entered the rehearsal space; we were wrong.

From the first day of rehearsal, the three assistant stage managers and I knew the environment was speeding down a toxic road. In addition to more tangents and disregard for time management, our director casually introduced ideas of violence against women and hypersexualizing the female actors in the play. While a director has creative freedom within a production, the stage manager must ensure that creative direction does not interfere with personal

boundaries. After multiple actors expressed concern about onstage intimacy within the show, this director told the entire cast to open themselves up to expanding and testing their boundaries. Rather than handling the situation privately and professionally, he instead called out actors who expressed concern in confidence and undermined personal boundaries and comfort.

Due to his blatant disregard for the safety of the students within the space, the Department of Theatre dismissed this director from the production after one week of rehearsals. Without the SM team's vigilance of the rehearsal environment and documentation of inappropriate behavior, the rehearsal environment would have continued to deteriorate, leaving each actor uncomfortable and unwilling to dedicate themselves to the work. Instead, the Department hired a new director the next week, and we began the rehearsal process again. While this solution resolved the toxic environment, it created many unforeseen conflicts.

Though an SM constantly monitors and regulates the rehearsal environment, this is not an easily perceptible job, so many theatre workers only realize an apparent lack of regulation rather than an excellent execution of environment regulation. Because our actors only worked with the director for one week, most did not recognize his toxic habits or consider the future ramifications of an emotionally intense production process. Other production members working with the director for an extended time expressed gratitude to the SM team for advocating for themselves and the actors; however, the actors struggled to understand the decision.

Unfortunately, this director was adopting a vision that was not his own, so any clarifying questions from designers were up to interpretation. Though we finalized the show's concept and most of the designs, it was up to the designers, the SM team, and the new director to seamlessly blend these designs into one cohesive show.

During rehearsals, the director's primary objective was to ensure the show was ready to open, meaning blocking the actors' movements and solidifying character motivations took priority. While an audience needs these elements, actors need a much more in-depth understanding of their characters, which our previous director began but could not finish. Because priorities changed, our new director could not effectively support each actor's needs.

The Chair of the Department of Theatre stepped into a Choreographer and Assistant Director role to support this gap in responsibility. This extra support allowed actors to dive deeply into their characters; however, conflicting director notes led to confusion about power hierarchies. Actors, stage management, and designers needed help distinguishing which notes to take and which voices to listen to. As we moved into choreography rehearsals, our Choreographer/Director took a more prominent role, also highlighting the voice of our dance captain/ASM. Because many authority figures held multiple titles, it became almost impossible to determine who had power in each circumstance, almost always taking authority away from the director and SM, the two people usually in charge of the rehearsal room.

The unclear shift in leadership also led to interpersonal conflict, with some production members picking one director's word over the other's or even disregarding both directors and taking decisions into their own hands. With all these conflicting voices, opinions, and decisions, the production rushed to ensure we completed everything. Throughout this process, I worked on paperwork or sent emails within the first hour of waking up until the last thirty minutes before I went to sleep. Despite our dedicated time and work spent in and out of the rehearsal room, we only ran the entire show thrice; our final dress rehearsal was the only one to include complete blocking, choreography, and costume.

While the production faced many roadblocks, the SM team maintained a solid foundation with every production member. By proactively asking and answering questions, preparing paperwork for future use, and keeping diligent notes from both directors, we positioned ourselves as a team as the people to rely on. During stressful times, our reassurance restored the hope that if anyone could make this happen, it was them.

A stage manager's work spans every aspect of each phase of a production process. However, most of a stage manager's job is not quantifiable. The actors couldn't see the pages of documents we created, referenced, and distributed, and the designers couldn't see the intentional language used and the relationships built in the rehearsal space. Stage management falls behind when comparing individual work practices Without concrete work to show, such as a performance or design.

In the technical theatre industry, stage management is easily the most underrepresented. Rather than belonging to the technical theatre union, IATSE, the International Association of Theatrical Stage Employees, stage managers are under the Actor's Equity Association. The Stage Manager's Association, or SMA, is a business branch of stage managers within AEA. However, this is the only large-scale resource for stage managers. Founded "upon the need to advocate for the stage management voice in the union," the SMA focuses on five main goals: "advocacy, education, mentoring, recognition, and community"[16]. While the SMA has made strides in stage management advocacy and recognition, there are still many gaps within this organization and general stage management resources.

As the only large-scale resource for stage managers, the SMA is the only organization to offer awards or accolades for stage management aside from local and regional theaters. The

[16] "Welcome to the SMA." 2023

SMA provides both the Del Huges Award and the Founders Award. The Del Hughes is awarded to an SM with a lifetime, dedicated career in a diverse field of stage management, but with a specified emphasis on only stage management[17]. The Founders Award is likewise given to an SM with a deep commitment to the practice and values of stage management, especially the SMA[18]. However, neither of these awards promotes excellence, skill, or upward mobility, only dedication and commitment.

In comparison, awards for other aspects of theatre motivate artists to continue improving. For many theatre artists, working on Broadway is the goal. However, even after achieving that goal, the possibility of winning a Tony Award inspires artists to grow and cultivate their skills with the motivation of their peers. A stage manager does not experience this anticipation for something greater; the only awards offered to SMs solely require dedicated SM experience.

Stage managers experience a widespread lack of recognition because stage management is not quantifiable. As previously established, most of an SM's responsibilities fall into interpersonal relations, which are not objectively measured. Aside from the inability to objectively measure individual experiences, each production requires support systems. This means that some large productions may need more paperwork, which the SM may send to more people, rather than smaller productions, where communication channels are much more tight-knit. Thankfully, a stage manager understands the individuality of every production and SM style.

The theatre industry can begin recognizing and appreciating excellence in stage management by assembling an objective board of stage managers to peer-review paperwork and feedback submitted anonymously. Because stage managers have the most accurate perspective of

[17] "The Del Hughes Award." 2023
[18] "The Founders Award." 2023

what it means to stage manage, an objective board of stage managers, meaning established and revered SMs not in the running for the award, can review each contender's paperwork and make assessments of what worked well, what didn't, and any exciting innovations or implementations. Some paperwork that an SM can submit for review includes rehearsal reports, daily calls, blocking notations, and their prompt book. By comparing similar yet unique paperwork from qualified SMs by qualified SMs, the SM community can continue to learn via mentorship. With more concrete comparisons of which practices or innovations best support a production, SMs can continue to improve their skill and strive for more outstanding excellence.

However, only reviewing paperwork barely scratches the surface of excellence in stage management. After a production closes, production management will most often send a "Post-Mortem" survey to each production member, asking for honest, anonymous feedback about the positives and negatives of the show. Similarly, I propose sending a feedback survey centered around the stage management team, their successes, and spaces for improvement. For example, questions will specifically ask about communication effectiveness, environment regulation, inclusive language, and safety. The same objective board of SMs will also blindly review this feedback, considering the gaps in understanding between stage management and other roles within the production.

After reviewing all the objective data, the SMs can determine who, out of a pool of qualified stage managers, demonstrated excellence via communication, environment, language, and innovation. The prospect of earning recognition for excellence will likely motivate stage managers to continue to improve their skills, try new things, and solidify their strengths. Even if an SM does not win an award, they can take note of who did, what practices worked for them, and any tips for personal improvement.

By intrinsically and extrinsically motivating SMs via feedback and recognition, the theatre industry can make a pivotal change and start to support and appreciate improvement and excellence in stage management rather than just expecting stage management. Though most SMs choose their career path with the knowledge that they will receive little to no recognition, without greater goals to achieve, it's challenging to stay motivated in the same position for years. Healthy competition with the reassurance of a safe learning environment will foster an SM's natural growth mindset and offer new platforms to learn from peers and consider new practices to adopt and improve.

Outside of the community of stage managers, these new practices will inform the rest of the theatre industry about the roles and responsibilities of stage management. Working with theatre artists who understand stage management offers stage managers more flexibility, patience, and respect because of theatre's natural impulse to evoke interpersonal empathy. When an actor or designer knows all the tasks on a stage manager's regular to-do list, they fulfill requests with a sense of urgency and leave space for delayed responses, knowing when gentle reminders may be necessary.

In the future, I plan to take these ideas and work to implement them wherever I go. Growing up in New Jersey, I plan to stage manage on Broadway eventually. However, I want to demonstrate excellence in stage management rather than solely focus on doing as little as possible to be effective. Once actors or designers make their Broadway debut, they continue working to improve their art in hopes of national recognition for skill in their field. I plan to work on Broadway and remain motivated to earn the same credit as my peers. Through my advocacy for stage management, I aim to inform young theatre artists about the various veiled

workers backstage who may still need to receive awards or recognition but are nonetheless integral to each production.

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