

# STAGE MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK

SPRINGER THEATRE  
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Instructor: Debra Sherrer

# Stage Managers Do Make Coffee

## A Handbook for Stage Managers

by Carissa Dollar

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### Job Description

There is no single definition or job description for the tasks performed by the person who accepts the title of Stage Manager for any theatrical production. Every theatre or production company has different ideas and expectations regarding the Stage Manager's role in the production process. Each Producer or Director may ask different things of the Stage Manager for each individual production. Therefore, the individual who accepts this position must be as flexible as the job description itself.

According to Actor's Equity Association (AEA), the union of both professional Actors and Stage Managers, the Stage Manager performs *at least* the following duties:

- Calls all rehearsals, before or after opening.
- Assembles and maintains the Prompt Book.
- Works with the Director and the Department Heads to schedule rehearsal and outside calls.
- Assumes active responsibility for the form and discipline of rehearsal and performance, and is the executive instrument in the technical running of each performance.
- Maintains the artistic intentions of the Director and Producer after opening.
- Keeps any records necessary to inform the Producer of attendance, time, welfare benefits, etc.
- Maintains discipline.

A Stage Manager's success generally can't be measured in quantitative terms. There are, however, some basic qualities and character traits of good Stage Managers which remain constant.

- A Stage Manager is someone who desires and accepts responsibility.
- A Stage Manager is a tactful communicator with a sense of humor.
- A Stage Manager is organized, adaptable, and thinks quickly on her feet while keeping the goals and priorities of the artistic staff in mind.
- A Stage Manager is often privy to confidential information such as salaries, disciplinary action or health problems. As a condition of this knowledge, a Stage Manager knows when to keep her mouth shut and her eyes and ears open.
- A Stage Manager creates positive energy and inspires those around her to give 110% to the task at hand.
- A Stage Manager has at least some basic knowledge of each aspect of a theatrical production.
- A Stage Manager should be familiar with the requirements of the many unions for Stagehands, Actors and Musicians.

In short, a Stage Manager is an artist, parent, friend, confidant, nurse, drill sergeant and cheerleader. Anyone who does not have the potential to possess all of these character traits and is not comfortable with juggling all of these responsibilities and roles at once should think twice before accepting a stage management position.

## **The Stage Manager**

“Stage managers are responsible and adaptable communicators who have the ability to handle and coordinate diverse artistic personalities with tactful discipline and a sense of humor. They establish a creative environment by combining the ability to prioritize and anticipate and solve problems, with calm sensitivity and grace under pressure. Their ability to do the above stems from organizational ability, acquired technical knowledge (sound, music, lights, design, construction, typing, use of computers, and so on), familiarity with union requirements, and an inspirational personality that creates positive energy.” (Kelly)

At some point during the production period the stage manager (SM) will probably deal with virtually every aspect of the production. For this reason, the SM is carefully selected from those with a broad knowledge of the theatre, organization, responsibility, the ability to work well under pressure, the capacity for work with various personality types, and the ability to anticipate problems.

Stage managers coordinate productions during rehearsal and performance periods and maintain the artistic intentions of the director after the opening of the show.

### **Important Principles and Responsibilities for a Stage Manager**

1. The stage manager must merit respect, not demand it.
2. The stage manager must deal fairly and responsibly with everyone and be capable of making difficult decisions.
3. The stage manager is ALWAYS an effective communicator.
4. The stage manager must know the physical theatre. This includes the house and backstage area, location of exits, emergency lights, fire extinguishers, circuit breakers, telephones, etc.
5. The stage manager must keep a to-do list and not trust memory alone.
6. The stage manager is prepared to handle emergency situations.
7. The stage manager makes sure the rehearsal space is safe and prepared for each rehearsal, prior to call time. This includes sweeping the rehearsal space (Before EVERY rehearsal!), and sweeping and mopping the performance space (once approved by the technical director.) Allow enough time for the floor to dry.
8. The stage manager must know Springer policies for handling emergencies.
9. The stage manager must keep the technical production staff informed of any proposed changes the director and/or designers desire. Changes do not become official until approved by the director, designers, and technical director.
10. The stage manager must be prepared to maintain backstage decorum.

Kelly, Thomas A., The Backstage Guide to Stage Management. New York: Back Stage Books, an imprint of Watson-Guption Publications, 1991

## **Pre-Production Responsibilities**

### **READ THE SCRIPT**

- Carefully read the script and become familiar with the needs and try to anticipate unique challenges it may present. Take notes on required props, sound cues, and costume requirements. Although it is not your job to gather these things, you should know what is needed so nothing is overlooked.

### **MAKE A PROMPT SCRIPT**

- The PSM will provide you with a script, but the rest is up to you. The Prompt Script, Prompt Book, SM Bible, etc. is a written record of the entire show. The Prompt Script should include at least four sections: Contact Information & Schedule, Rehearsal & Performance Reports, Script, and Technical Information. Based on the needs of the production, other sections may be added. Every addition, subtraction, or minor change is recorded in the Prompt Script. Every piece of blocking and every light, sound, follow spot, etc. cue is recorded in the script and used as a reference for calling the show.

### **MAKE A CONTACT SHEET**

- The contact sheet should include all contact information for cast, director, designers, props master, sound engineer, master electrician, stage manager, all assistants and shop numbers. The Production Stage Manager (PSM) will have the needed information for your crew when they have been chosen.
- Distribute to all people involved in the show

### **MAKE A SCENE BREAKDOWN**

- This form will help you in calling actors for rehearsals, aid the costume shop in determining quick changes, help the sound engineer in determining microphone assignments and with running microphones during the performance.
- Some directors prefer to make scene breakdowns themselves. Check with your director.
- Once a breakdown is made, distribute it to those involved with the production, including actors, and post a copy on the call board.

### **MAKE A PROPS LIST**

- Make a list of all props you find in the script
- Keep the props list updated with all changes (additions and subtractions)
- Distribute updates as needed

### **TAPE OUT FLOORPLAN IN REHEARSAL SPACE**

- Tape out the set design in the rehearsal space, ask the PSM for supplies and help if needed.

### **MAKE A REHEARSAL SCHEDULE**

- Along with the director, establish a rehearsal schedule. Type and distribute to all involved with the production.

### **ANNOUNCE THE FIRST REHEARSAL**

- Contact all actors and assistant stage managers with the date, time and place of the first rehearsal.

## PULL REHEARSAL PROPS

- Talk with the director and props master to see what props/furniture are needed immediately for rehearsal. With the props master, pull needed props and furniture.

## MAKE A CALL BOARD

- Post rehearsal schedules, rehearsal reports, meeting times and places, scene breakdowns, set design, etc.
- Located in your rehearsal space
- Actors are expected to check this daily

## PRODUCTION MEETINGS

- Set up a time and place to have a production meeting. The needs of each show vary, so the number of meetings necessary in the process will vary. These meetings help ensure that everyone is on the same page and that everyone knows what is expected of them.
- Take minutes at the meeting and distribute them to everyone involved.

## TYPE ALL PAPERWORK

- The date should be in the upper right corner of all paperwork

## **The Rehearsal Process**

### OBTAINING REHEARSAL MATERIAL

- Rehearsal Props: Pull rehearsal props and furniture with the Props Master. It is important not to use glass in rehearsal, as it may be dangerous. The props master must be aware of all items pulled and may even pull everything for you.
- Costumes: All requests for rehearsal garments or shoes must be made to the costume shop manager.
- Scenery Pieces: All requests for scenic pieces for rehearsal must be made to the TD.
- Supplies: Ask the PSM for spike tape, glow tape, pencils, coffee supplies, etc.

### DISTRIBUTE INFORMATION

- At the first rehearsal, distribute contact sheets, rehearsal schedule, and scene breakdowns to the cast.
- Keep an updated rehearsal schedule and distribute any changes.

### MAKE COFFEE

- A little thing, but it keeps people happy. The PSM will provide supplies and instructions if needed.

### MAINTAIN UPDATED COPIES OF ALL FLOORPLANS, CALENDARS AND SCHEDULES

- Distribute all changes

## MAKE AND DISTRIBUTE REHEARSAL REPORTS

- Rehearsal reports should include any design questions that come up, any additions or changes to the props list, run times of acts, special needs for costumes or set pieces, and any information that affects the designers or shops
- Reports **MUST BE DISTRIBUTED DAILY**. Distribute a copy of each report to every member of the production team. It is usually more effective to communicate with the production team through e-mail. Ask all members for an e-mail address and this will cut out on foot work.
- Keep designers informed of when you will be doing run thrus in rehearsal so they can watch.

## RECORD BLOCKING IN PROMPT SCRIPT

- Record all movements, business, entrances and exits made by the actors. The blocking often changes and should be taken in pencil.

## PROMPT ACTORS AND GIVE LINE NOTES

- While actors are getting off book, a stage manager or assistant stage manager should be on book to prompt actors. When the actors are off book, line notes should be taken and distributed to the actors.
- With the director, establish dates for the actors to be off book and the last day to call line. Put these dates on the rehearsal schedule.

## TIMES ACTS/SCENES

- When running a scene or act without stopping, the time should be taken and recorded in the rehearsal report.

## CREATE A PROPS TRACKING CHART AND A PROPS PRESET LIST

- These will help you in determining where your prop table should be and where props should be preset.

## DISTRIBUTE ANY SCRIPT CHANGES

- It is important to date all script changes
- When issuing new scripts, the pagination must not change
- Make sure designers and shop managers also get copies of the changes

## CONTACT CREW

- Contact crew members with the dates and times of rehearsals they will be required to attend, including the crew watch.
- Have the tech/performance schedule with specific call times ready if any crew members wish to pick it up
- Distribute a detailed tech/performance schedule to all people involved with the production and post a copy on the call board
- Determine with the costume shop manager call times for wardrobe crew.

## PREPARE A RUNNING ORDER

- This should detail all scenery and prop moves for the show and who is responsible for them. It should also include any costume changes the crew are responsible for
- This should be distributed to all crew members and posted backstage

## GET WITH THE LIGHTING AND SOUND DESIGNERS

- Place cues in your prompt script. Use numbers for light cues and letters for sound cues. (Or you may use numbers for both. Make sure you and your designers are speaking the same language before you begin.) Often the director will be present at these meetings. Check with your director before scheduling a time to book cues.

## PREPARE PROP TABLES

- Meet with the props master to make sure all props are gathered.
- Set up table and cover them with paper. Assign a placement for each prop on the table, outline, and label. The stage manager and props master should do this together if possible. The props master is responsible for the props, but the stage manager knows where they go and is ultimately responsible for making sure props are where they should be.

## CREW WATCH

- This is usually the last run thru before tech week
- Inform the actors that the crew will be watching
- Distribute Running Crew Guidelines and/or go over what is expected of them, i.e. promptness, wearing all black, etc.
- Distribute tech/performance schedules and running orders
- Give the director and the technical director the opportunity to speak to the crew if they wish

## **Technical and Dress Rehearsals**

### MOVE CALL BOARD TO GREENROOM

- Post schedule, sign in sheet, announcements, etc. Make sure the cast and crew know where the call board is located
- Cast and crew should initial by his/her name, no one should ever sign anyone else in

### MAKE SURE THE CAST AND CREW ARE READY TO START ON TIME

- Give actors adequate time to acquaint themselves with the performance space, props locations, and the set. Do a walk through if necessary
- Make sure the theatre is unlocked before call times. This includes dressing rooms
- Tell actor when they can check their props

### KEEP THE DIRECTOR, DESIGNERS, AND TECHNICAL DIRECTOR INFORMED OF ANY POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

## KEEP A COOL HEAD

- It is your job to know exactly what is going on at all time. In the theatre, the stage manager must be the single person who has a handle on the coordination of the entire process. Nothing can happen by accident, or it might not happen that way again. This means the stage manager might not get to take breaks with everyone else, or socialize in the green room. The stage manager moves everything along.

## BEGIN ANNOUNCING CALLS

- Start giving calls at the first tech rehearsal. Give a call for the house opening (let actors know when props are set and they can check their props prior to opening the house.) ½ hour until Curtain, 15 minutes, 10 minutes, and places should be given in the dressing rooms, greenroom, outside smoking areas, bathrooms, and shops. Always say please (“Places, please.”) The assistant stage manager/crew chief can of course help you to give calls, but you must be the one keeping track of time.
- Always give 5 minutes and places during intermission.

## Production

### CHECK SIGN-IN SHEET AT CALL TIME

- Note all late arrivals. 10 minutes after call, make phone calls to cast and crew member that have not arrived. Let latecomers know that tardiness is not acceptable. We are all working together to create the show. Even one person being late can create a problem.

### DIMMER CHECK/SOUND CHECK

- Prior to opening the house, all dimmers must be checked by the light board operator
- Make sure all work lights have been turned off. The best way to test this is to do a blackout test.
- All speakers, body mics, and sound cues must be checked by the sound board operator prior to opening the house.

### OPEN THE HOUSE

- Thirty minutes (or whatever time has been decided by the director) before curtain the stage manager gives the house manager a clear to open the house.
- When the house manager arrives, the stage manager should meet with him/her to go over the late seating policy, running time of the show, and length of intermission.
- Before opening the house the set should be ready, house lights should be up, the first light cue or preshow look should be complete and preshow music should be playing.
- The stage manager should check with the house manager before starting the show to determine if there will be a hold. Let the house manager know where you are in your calls, especially during intermission so they can let the audience know when to return to their seats.

### COLLECT AND LOCK UP VALUABLES

- Collect valuables in large envelopes labeled with the actor’s names. The PSM will provide these.
- There are lockers outside the greenroom that can be used for locking up envelopes. Ask the PSM for a lock. Some actors prefer to lock up their own valuables, or not at all. This is fine, but make sure you always provide the option.
- Return all valuable at the end of the night.



## COMPLETE A PERFORMANCE REPORT

- Take notes on any problems, needed repairs, missed lines, late cues, running times, etc.
- These should be distributed to everyone involved in the show, just like with the rehearsal reports. Give missed lines and cues to actors.

### **Photo Call**

#### ANNOUNCE SHOT LIST

- Post a list of shots on the callboard and in the dressing rooms as soon as the shots have been decided by the director and designers.
- Chronologically run the shots from the end of the show to the beginning of the show. Unless, due to scenic or costume changes, there is a more efficient order.

#### BE PREPARED TO SET UP SHOTS

- Know necessary shifts for the shots, props that will be needed, and the correct light cue. Try to stay a step ahead and be prepared for the next shot. You will probably be running the photo call, so stay focused.

### **Strike**

- The PSM, the Technical Director (TD) and the Stage Manager will make strike assignments. No one will be excused from strike unless approved by the SM or TD. If someone wants to work a certain crew, try to make every effort to allow them, within reason.

### **Stage Manager Kit**

- A stage manager kit will be provided if you do not have your own. The kit has a first aid kit and other supplies you will need during rehearsals. If you are getting low on something or need something you do not have, contact the PSM.
- The PSM office is located on the first floor. Never be afraid to ask questions or go to him when there is a problem.

## **Equity Policies**

- Because we have visiting artists who are members of the Actor's Equity Association, we need to follow Equity rules for running rehearsals. The most important thing you need to be concerned with is the break periods. Equity rules concerning breaks are:

“There shall be a recess of 1 ½ hours after a period of not more than 5 consecutive hours of rehearsal and/or performance combined. In addition, there shall be a break of 5 minutes after each 55 minutes of rehearsal OR 10 minutes after 80 minutes (1 hr. 20 min.) of rehearsal for each actor. These break requirements are also applicable during the technical rehearsals except the last three days prior to the first preview.”

- Before you begin rehearsals, ask your director if he/she prefers 5 minute or 10 minute breaks and then follow that schedule in every rehearsal.
- Keep the director on track with breaks. Let him/her know when you are about 10 minutes from a break. When it is time to break you can tell the director and stop rehearsal. If you are taking a 10 minute break, give the actors a five minute call. Whether you are taking a 10 minute or a 5 minute break, give the actors a 1 minute call.
- Bring all actors back together at the end of the break and make sure everyone knows where you are picking up, scene or page number, etc.

## **Fire Safety**

- Know the location of fire extinguishers, fire hoses, alarm boxes, etc.
- On a minor fire that appears controllable, promptly direct the charge of a fire extinguisher toward the base of the flame. Send someone to notify the Fire Department.
- If the fire is around electrical equipment, DO NOT USE WATER to put it out.
- If the fire appears too large for you to control or the extinguisher did not put it out, leave the area. If possible, make sure all doors and windows to the area are closed (not locked!) to help contain the fire.
- Activate the building alarm. (It's a good thing the Fire Department is next door.)
- If a performance is in progress and the fire is serious, interrupt the performance and calmly direct the audience to exit the theatre. This can be done over the god mic or by the stage manager on stage.
- Once everyone is safe, contact the Operations Manager, Allie Kent.
- Know that fog, smoke, and haze will set off the alarm.
- Know that the fire alarm is VERY LOUD!

## **The Assistant Stage Manager**

The Assistant Stage Manager (ASM) is just what the name entails. The ASM is the stage manager's right hand man (or woman) and the first person the SM will go to if they need assistance.

During the rehearsal process, the ASM will have many varied jobs. Prepping the rehearsal space is one of the many ways the ASM can help. Sweeping, setting props, and making coffee on occasion will certainly help the SM out a lot. When the actors are getting off book you may be asked to be "on book" for the rehearsal; this means it will be your job to give line notes at the end of the rehearsal. An ASM must also be up to the challenge of conducting a rehearsal without the SM. Things happen, and that is why you need to be as equally aware of the production process as the SM. You must be able to maintain order, give breaks at the proper time, and everything else that the SM would do during a rehearsal.

During production, the ASM will act as Crew Chief and supervise all happenings on the stage. In essence, the stage belongs to the ASM. Someone must sweep, mop, set props and scenery, and anything else that needs to happen to the stage before the house can open. During the actual performance, the ASM becomes the communicator between the crew and the SM; so you must be aware of everything that is going on backstage. The SM will prepare the running order, but the ASM will put that plan into action. The ASM will often assist the SM in giving calls. Mainly because two people can cover more ground more quickly.

If you are an SM and are blessed with an ASM, do not be afraid to use him/her. An ASM is there to help you in any way that he/she can. If you are privileged enough to pick your ASM, you must pick someone you can work well with and trust to do things when you can't.

If you are the ASM, do not be afraid to ask questions. If you never ask, you will never learn.