



The director instructs the student crew on the mood or style wanted for the background for a scene.

CHAPTER TWO

HEAD OF A TEAM

The director is the leader of the team that puts on the play. As a leader, the director must be able to keep a group working constructively toward its goal, even when a project encounters an obstacle or the director makes an unpopular decision. Sooner or later the director will have to deal with conflict within the group and still be able to keep the project on track. The first step in producing the play is to forge a team from the individuals involved.

The Players and the Crew

The director works with two groups of people. One group is the cast, which consists of the actors actually performing the play. The other is the crew, which includes all those who fulfill technical functions. The crew might include some or all of the following, depending on the size of the production:

- Stage manager: The person who oversees the activities that go on backstage during a performance.
- Lighting technician: The person who sets

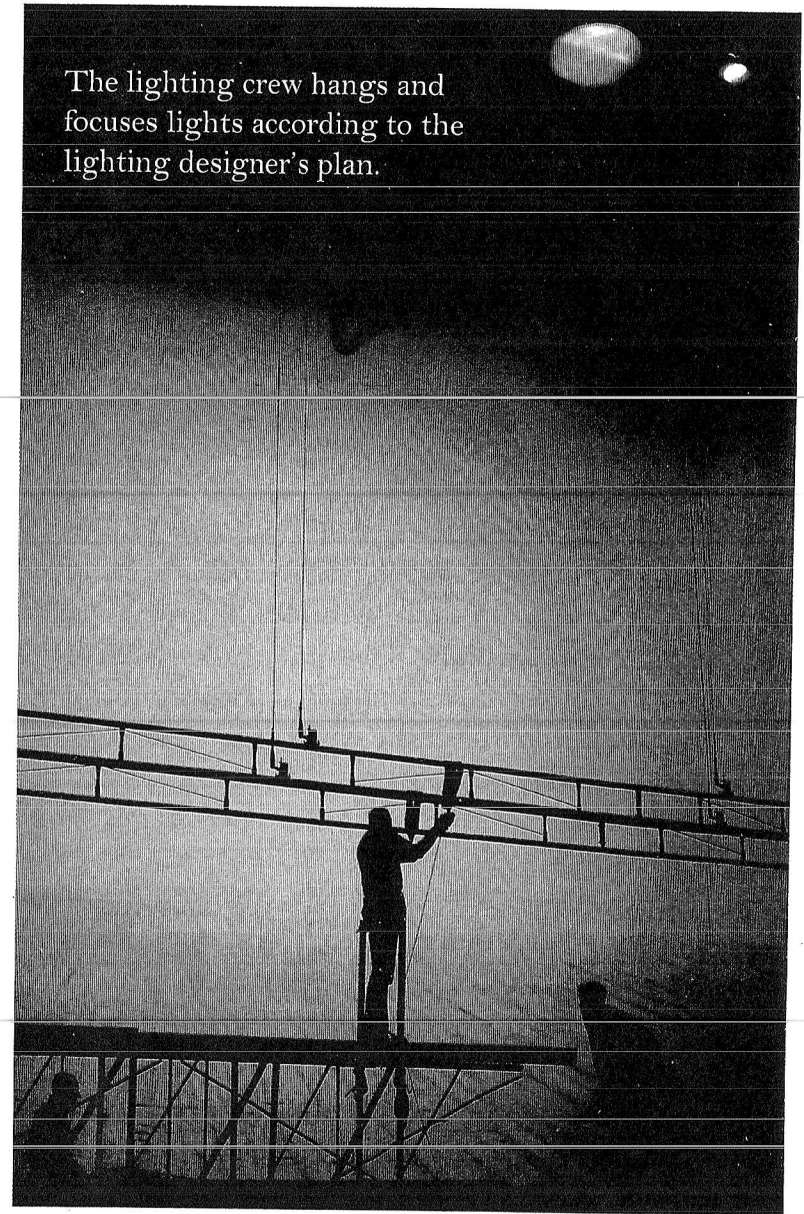
up the lights that will be used during the performance. If lighting changes during the play, he or she may also control the lights during the performance.

- Sound technician: This person designs and performs sound effects.
- Costumer: This person assembles or makes the clothing that the actors wear.
- Set designer/construction crew: These people build and paint the set. They may also collect furniture for the set.
- Props master: This person assembles the props required and makes sure they are set up for use during rehearsals and the performance.
- Makeup artist: In many community theaters, actors do their own makeup. However, some types of performances, such as holiday or historical plays, might require a person who knows how to do special-effects makeup.
- Stagehands: These people change the set, if necessary, for different scenes during the performance.

A high school or community theater may not use these formal names for the crewmembers, but it will still require people to fill these roles in order to put on the play.

The director must make sure that the members of the cast work well together to put on a seamless performance. He or she must work with the crew to

The lighting crew hangs and focuses lights according to the lighting designer's plan.



ensure that all the technical elements come together in the right way during the performance. In addition, the director must see to it that the cast and crew respect each other and work together **harmoniously**.

Motivating the Cast and Crew

When directing community or high school theater productions, the director most likely will be working with amateur actors and a volunteer crew. In most cases, no one involved with the production is being paid. Therefore, the director must find other means of persuading actors and crew to show up when required and perform the tasks they need to do. Many of these people also face the demands of a day job and/or family commitments. One way to **motivate** them is to create a sense that all the participants in the production belong to a team. People usually desire to support people they view as friends and do not want to let them down. The director must also create a sense of the play's importance to the group so that members give it priority among their responsibilities. The director needs to get the participants excited about the project.

Providing recognition and praise encourages people to want to participate and do their best. On television, directors are often portrayed as autocratic tyrants who force their will on the cast and crew. This is not the way most directors work in real life—and it certainly won't work with people who are not receiving large amounts of money to put up with a director who takes this approach. Directors do have to give instructions to the cast and crew and to correct their mistakes, but successful directors know how to do this in a productive way that creates an atmosphere of cooperation, not discord.

Actors act because they crave attention and praise. It is important for the director to put aside his or her

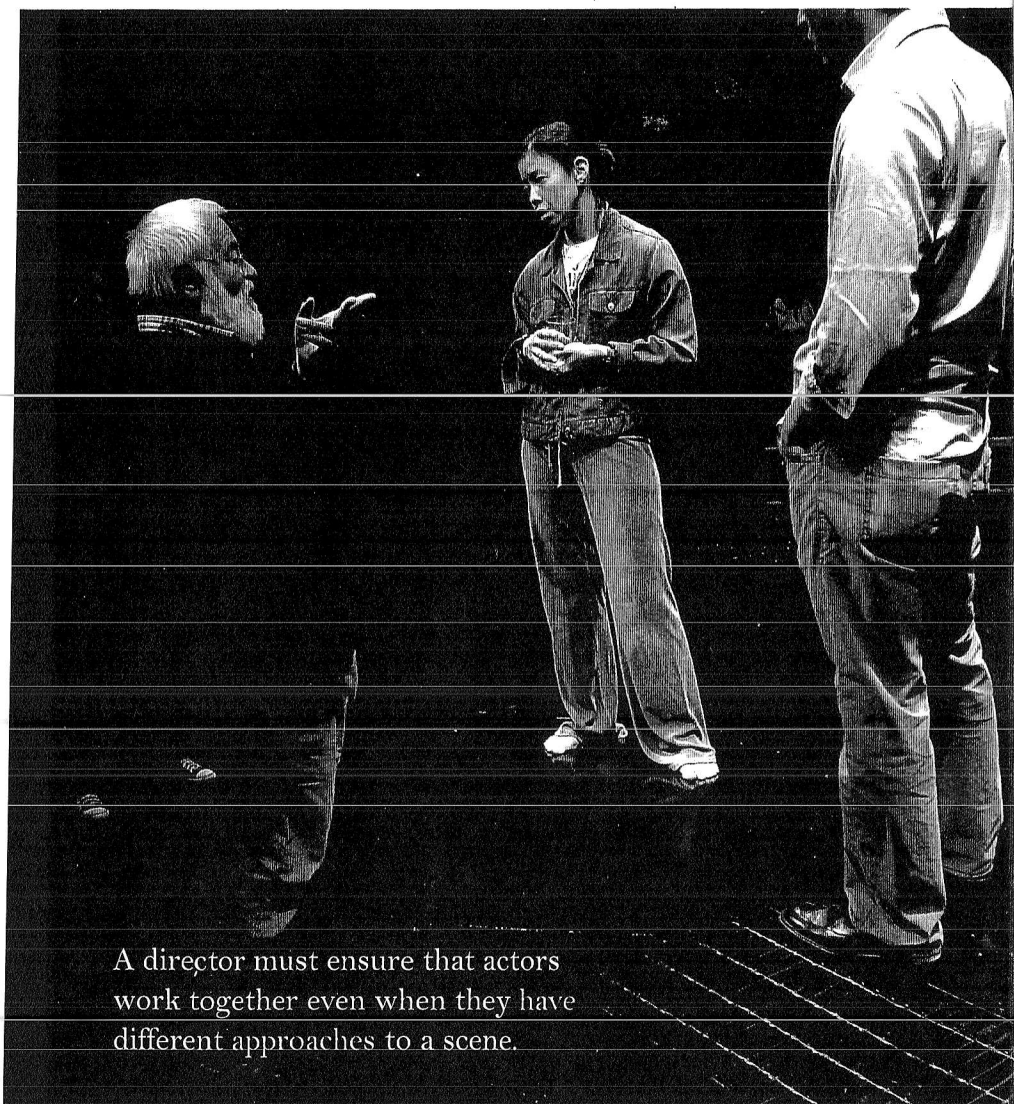
own desire for recognition and instead praise the cast (and crew) when they do a good job. The director can encourage actors to support and help each other, rather than compete for attention, by praising those who help other actors. This approach will make the lead actors and those with experience more likely to assist those who are less experienced.

At the end of each rehearsal, the director should thank the actors for their hard work. He or she should also thank the crew when they complete a project. Showing appreciation makes people feel valued and reduces competition among them for recognition. Providing a social element to group work helps people relax and become friendly with each other. For example, one might order pizza for the cast during the first read-through together of the script, or for the crew when they are working all day on the weekend.

Nurturing Creativity

Actors may come from diverse backgrounds. In community theater, members of a cast might include experienced retired actors, acting students, local actors who perform as extras in TV shows or movies that are made on location in their city, and employees in a variety of fields who act as a hobby. In a high school production, students might come from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. A director must ensure that people who have different levels of experience, different types of personalities, and different backgrounds feel comfortable together.

The director must create an environment in which everyone feels free to express their ideas. This means



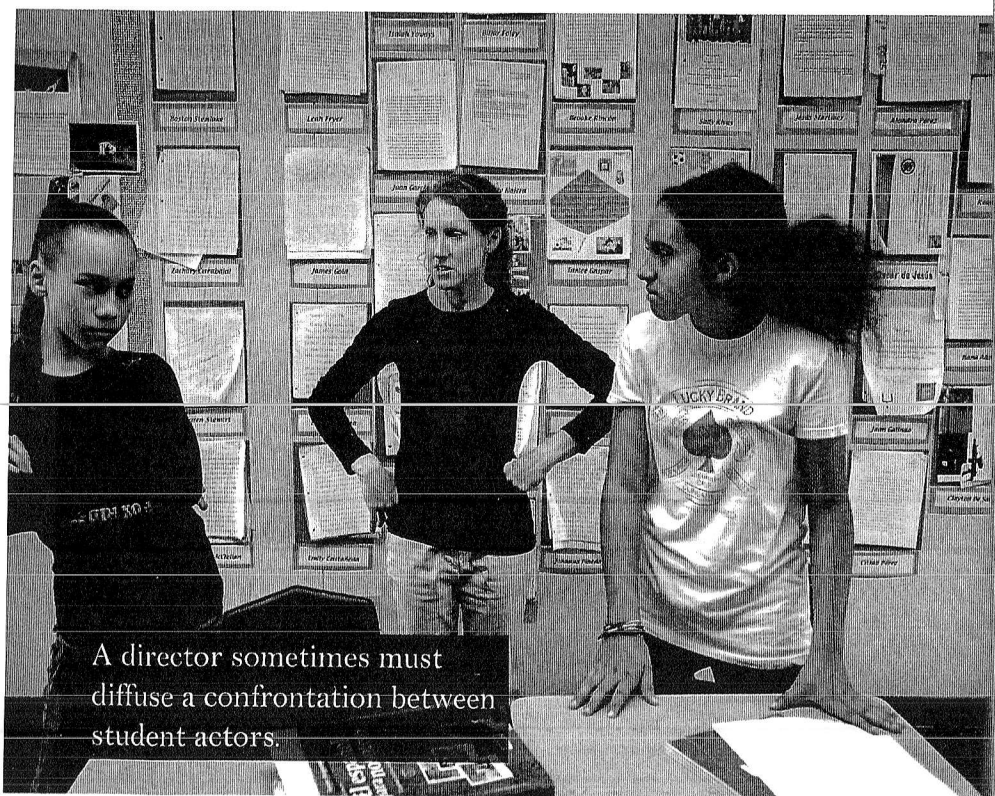
A director must ensure that actors work together even when they have different approaches to a scene.

keeping more experienced actors from dominating those less experienced, and ensuring that the less experienced actors feel confident when making suggestions about their role and characters. The director must make sure that actors can express their ideas without being criticized by others in the group.

Conflict

Many types of conflict can occur within groups, including theater organizations, and the director must be able to deal with them. Sometimes it is necessary to correct people when directing. The director must learn to do this in a way that is nonthreatening and constructive rather than merely critical. When problems occur or issues arise with the cast or crew, the director must be able to discuss these with the person or persons involved without blaming them. If people are not blamed, they are more likely to cooperate in fixing the problem. It's more productive to address a problem or mistake as something that needs to be fixed by working together. Creating a positive environment makes actors and crewmembers more enthusiastic about participating in the project and more likely to show up and do their jobs reliably.

The director may be confronted with issues such as actors attempting to dominate the group, people whose attitude is chronically negative, and arguments. Sometimes one of the cast members will be a pessimist who constantly explains why a suggested approach is wrong or won't work. This type of attitude can upset other cast members and may disrupt the entire project if others are convinced by this negative point of view. Often the director in a community theater does not have a wide choice of people to play a given role because of the character's age or physical characteristics and the limited number of people who wish to participate. Therefore, replacing a problematic person may not be possible. In this case, the director must neutralize



A director sometimes must diffuse a confrontation between student actors.

the person's negative attitude. One approach is to counteract the negative viewpoint by acknowledging that it may or may not be true, then requesting ideas on how the approach might work. Let the positive actors try it their way. This will provide an opportunity to demonstrate that the approach can work, and rewarding positive behavior makes the point that being positive gets one more attention than being negative.

Confrontations can occur if one person starts harassing another, or two people start arguing. This is more likely to happen in a high school rehearsal among young people who haven't learned to control their emotions. Sometimes conflicts

occur between actors and crewmembers who are trying to get their job done. Sometimes two people are competing for attention. Sometimes they have issues that have nothing to do with the play; these can affect their personal relationship and their ability to work together.

It's best to stop confrontations immediately, before they get out of control. If two people start exchanging nasty comments, the director can intercede, attempting to direct their attention back to the project. If there appears to be a real problem that will derail the production, the director can take the people involved aside or to a different room. In privacy, the leader can then discuss the problem with them, listening to both sides of the story. The director can work with them to arrive at a mutually agreeable solution, make a decision on how the issue in question should be approached for the good of the play, or, if the problem is personal, he or she can get them to agree to leave their baggage outside the rehearsal room and concentrate on the play when they're there.

People often cause problems because they feel insecure. They want attention and need to feel important. Therefore, one of the most successful approaches to people who cause problems is to coopt them. In this approach, the director redirects them from being disruptive to being constructive by putting them in charge of some area of the production. Acknowledging the work they are doing and making them feel important can often turn them into contributors who have a vested interest in the success of their project.

Balancing Avocation and Work/School

The director of a high school or community theater play is very busy. Rehearsals happen on several evenings or weekends, and the director needs to work out the details of costumes, lighting, the set, and other aspects of the play with the crew, and oversee the construction and setup. Although not all actors are needed at every rehearsal, the director certainly is. It's easy to turn an **avocation**—directing a play—into a nearly full-time job. When directing a play, it's important to balance the demands of the project with the demands of employment or schoolwork. One can't lose focus on the fact that the daytime activities are important for one's present and future welfare. One of the key aspects of putting on a play as an avocation is keeping the project manageable. It's necessary to make sure that the vision for the finished project is achievable in the time available. One needs to be realistic about how long it's going to take to get the play ready, and schedule it far enough in advance to allow time for the required number of rehearsals and the creation of all the sets, costumes, and props.

Going to school and directing a play require managing one's time carefully. Make a weekly schedule so you know in advance when you have to accomplish projects both at home and at the theater. Plan what you will do if you suddenly get a large school or work project and need more time for non-directing activities. Appoint a person as assistant director or stage manager and arrange for

him or her to split some responsibilities with you if necessary. Make a daily to-do list beginning with the most critical activities, then delegate the less important tasks.

Eat well, exercise, and get adequate sleep. This will keep you healthy and in good shape to deal effectively with the demands of school/work and your avocation. Enjoy what you're doing. Creating a theatrical production should be enjoyable for you and the other people working on it.