



Working with a Team

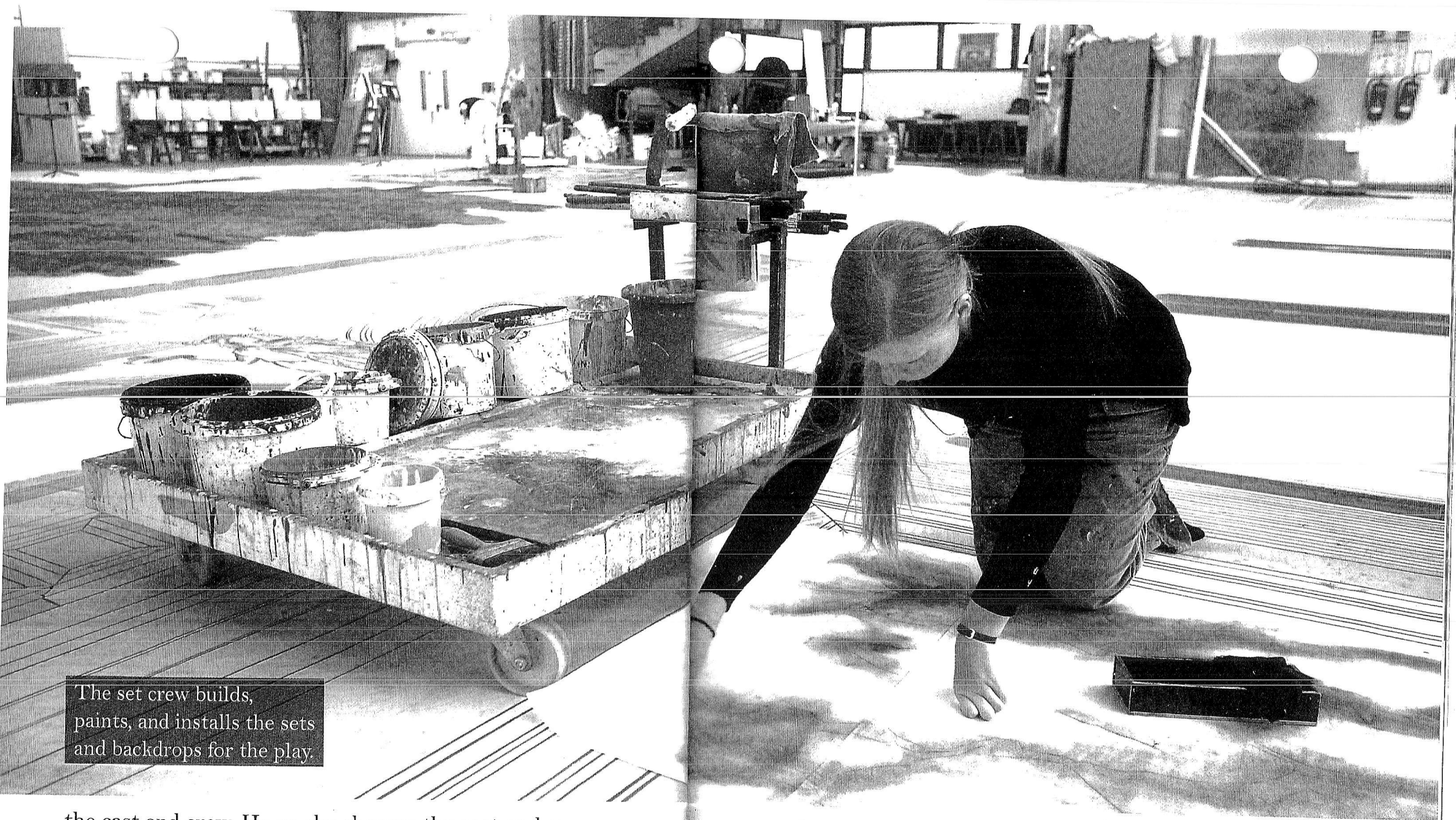
The stage manager works with virtually everyone involved in putting on the play. The stage manager does not have authoritative power as the director does. He or she does not decide who gets which role or who works on what job. In certain cases, such as when conveying direct requests from the director, stage managers have the authority of the director behind them. In most cases, however, the stage manager must get people to do what is required by using his or her leadership skills to motivate them.

The stage manager must keep volunteer crew members working constructively, even when problems arise. Eventually, all stage managers find themselves in a situation where they have to deal with conflict between crew members, or between crew and cast members. The stage manager's skills in handling people will be critical at this point.

The Cast and the Crew

The stage manager works with the cast, the crew, and the director. The director is in charge of managing

The stage manager oversees the setting up of the stage lights.



The set crew builds, paints, and installs the sets and backdrops for the play.

the cast and crew. He or she chooses the cast and crew members and makes the decisions as to the design elements to be incorporated into the play—including the set, lights, sound, costumes, and so on. The cast consists of the actors performing the play. The crew includes the backstage and technical personnel. The crew might have some or all of the following positions, depending on the size and nature of the play. A high school or community theater may not use

these formal names for its crew members, but it will still need people to perform these roles:

Lighting technician: The person who arranges the lights for the performance and controls lighting changes during the play.

Sound technician: The person who creates and records sound effects and runs them during the play.

Costumer(s): The person or persons who assemble or make the costumes the actors wear. If there are costume changes during the play, a wardrobe person might help the actors make those changes.

Set designer/crew: The set designer creates the plan for the set according to the director's instructions. He or she might also gather furniture used in the play. There will usually be a crew of people who build and paint the set according to the plan.

Prop master: The person who assembles or obtains the required props and sets them in proper locations for use during the performance.

Makeup artist: In many high school and community theaters, actors handle their own makeup. However, for historical or holiday plays, or those requiring special effects makeup, a makeup artist might be employed.

Stagehands: The people who change the sets and furniture, if necessary, for different scenes during the performance.

Building a Team

The stage manager is the person the director relies on to manage the crew as well as to assist in rehearsing actors. The director is extremely busy running rehearsals, working on the design of various

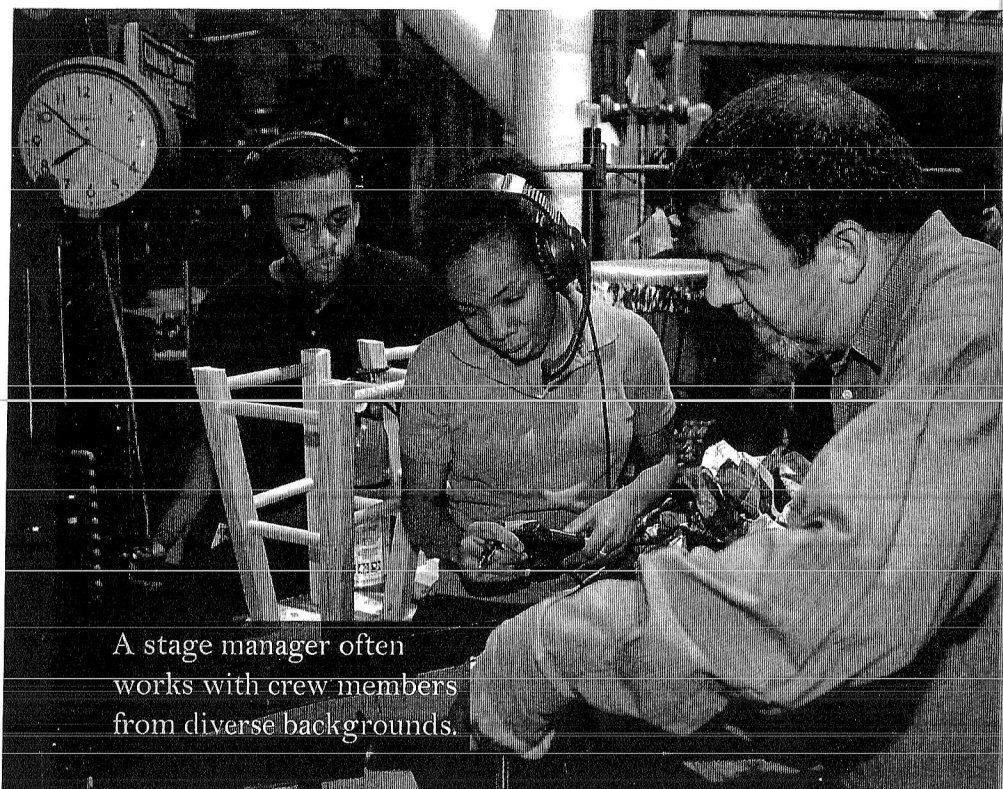
aspects of the play, and often handling issues such as advertising and other **front-of-house** matters. He or she counts on the stage manager to be able to work effectively without constantly coming to the director to resolve problems. The stage manager must make sure that the members of the crew are getting their work done properly and on schedule and that they treat each other with respect and work together well.

Getting People to Work Together

Community and high school theater productions employ mostly amateur actors and volunteer crew. Most of these people also have a day job or school responsibilities and/or family commitments to deal with. Since, in most cases, no one is being paid, the stage manager must be able to persuade the crew to show up when needed and do the work that needs to be done.

Members of the crew may come from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. It is the stage manager's job to ensure that all the people who make up the crew are working together, despite having different levels of experience, different types of personalities, and different backgrounds.

One way to motivate people is to create a sense of **camaraderie**—making people feel that they are all important parts of a team. The stage manager needs to treat crew members as people who can be relied on to help make the play a success, not as **subordinates** who can be ordered around. By emphasizing how



A stage manager often works with crew members from diverse backgrounds.

important each person is to the play, the stage manager encourages each one to feel a responsibility for its success and to make it a priority.

People like to do things that make them feel appreciated and important. The stage manager should give crew members recognition and praise when they contribute useful ideas and do good work. Making people feel valuable encourages them to want to participate and do their best. The stage manager may have to convey changes the director wants, correct mistakes, or ask people to do a better job. Rather than blaming the crew member, a successful stage manager will focus on the problem and emphasize that the stage manager and the crew member are working

together to address the issue. This helps to create an atmosphere in which people help each other rather than try to fix blame on each other when something goes wrong.

Likewise, if the stage manager is running rehearsals, he or she should praise the cast when they do a good job or make a positive contribution. This is especially important because the director is likely to ask the stage manager to rehearse the actors with smaller roles while the director works with the main actors. Because these actors are not the stars, they need reinforcement as to the fact that they and their roles are important to the production. This approach encourages actors to support each other rather than compete for attention.

Adding a social element to group work also puts people in a positive mood and makes them feel more like a team. For example, one might order pizza when the crew is working all day on the weekend. Even if everyone has to pitch in to pay for the food, it creates a sense of fun that makes the work less **onerous**.

Handling Conflict

Whenever one is working with a group of people, sooner or later conflict will arise. The stage manager must be able to deal with conflict. The stage manager must be able to discuss problems calmly and constructively, without blaming the person or people involved. People are more likely to cooperate in fixing problems if they are not blamed. If the stage manager sets a positive example by approaching problems and mistakes as something that can be fixed by working

together, others in the cast and crew will be more willing to step up and help others in the same fashion. It also makes people more likely to bring problems to the stage manager's attention promptly.

The stage manager does not choose the cast or crew, and even the director may have a limited pool of people to call upon. Therefore, the stage manager must be able to handle people who are temperamental. It's important to give everyone a chance to say what is on his or her mind. Sometimes just listening to a person helps defuse a difficult situation. When dealing with someone with a negative attitude, the stage manager can ask that person to help with a particular problem, giving him or her the opportunity to demonstrate technical expertise. The stage manager should recognize people who come up with solutions to problems and assist others. This can encourage those who want attention to behave in a more positive way to get it.

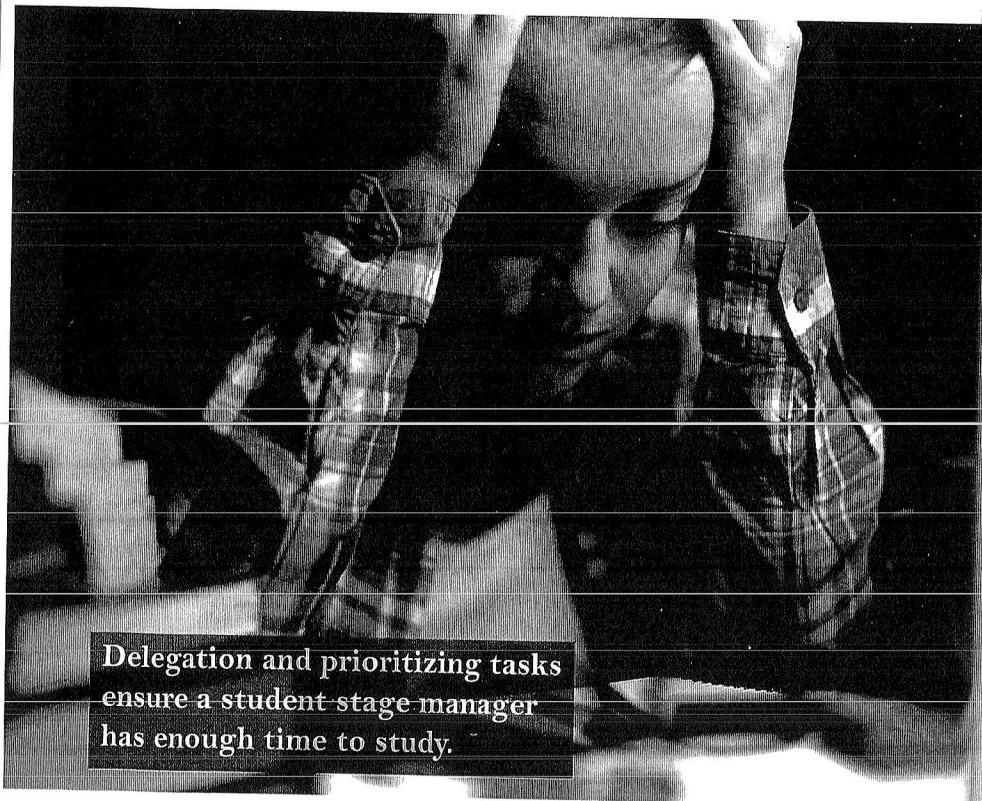
Occasionally, a confrontation between two people might occur. This might be the result of a disagreement about how something should be done, or the people involved might have personal issues. This type of argument can easily spiral out of control among young people, who haven't learned to control their emotions or to resolve disputes without **acrimony**.

The best time to stop a confrontation is before it gets out of control. As soon as two people start arguing or making nasty comments, the stage manager can interrupt them, asking what the problem is or redirecting their attention back to the project. If the people are willing to discuss the issue with

the stage manager, he or she can take them aside to deal with the issue. If it is a disagreement about a technical point, the stage manager can explore the pros and cons of both their views and make a decision on how to proceed. If it is a personal matter unconnected with the play, the stage manager can try to get them to agree to leave the problem outside when they are working, for the good of the production. Alternately, the stage manager can see if one of them can work on some other aspect of the production. If the participants cannot be calmed down or refuse to cooperate, the stage manager will need to have the director intervene. The stage manager should never get between two people who are having a physical confrontation. Instead, he or she should make sure no other people are in the vicinity, where they might get hurt, and then seek out the director or another person of authority to deal with the confrontation.

Balance and Stress Management

Stage managers must record all the technical cues and prompt actors during rehearsal, work with all the crew in preproduction, and make sure everything runs smoothly during performances. All of these activities keep the stage manager very busy. Rehearsals and crew work often take place on several evenings per week and on weekends. While not all cast and crew members need to be present for all work sessions, the stage manager will probably have to be there for most of them. Going to school and being a stage manager requires managing one's time carefully.



Delegation and prioritizing tasks ensure a student stage manager has enough time to study.

The stage manager needs to work out how long the required activities are going to take and how they can be fit into a schedule, allowing extra time for unexpected problems, which always occur. Student stage managers should make a weekly schedule so they know in advance when both school and theater projects need to be done. However, for a student, the educational aspects of school must come first. If time is needed to study for an exam, for example, tell the director. He or she can get another member of the cast or crew to fill in when necessary.

It is important to remember that the stage manager is not the person responsible for the actual implementation of every technical aspect of the play.

There should be a designated person in charge of each technical area, such as lighting, set construction, and costuming. The stage manager should check with those people to make sure everything is on schedule and there are no problems, but trying to manage every detail will mean giving insufficient attention to any one area and will only lead to burnout.

A stage manager cannot afford to get completely overwhelmed and stressed out. No one can do the impossible. The director, especially if inexperienced, may keep asking the stage manager to handle more and more activities. The director might not even be aware of how much work he or she has loaded onto the stage manager's shoulders. It's up to the stage manager to go to the director and explain that it is not possible to do everything the director wants. The stage manager can ask the director to prioritize which activities are most important or to recruit another person to assist the stage manager with some of his or her responsibilities.

To perform well, stage managers must take care of themselves. This means eating a healthy diet, getting enough sleep, and exercising. Working as a stage manager may be demanding, but participating in a theatrical production should also be fun and fulfilling.