

Some stage managers eventually become producers, managing the entire play.

CHAPTER FIVE

Life After Stage Management

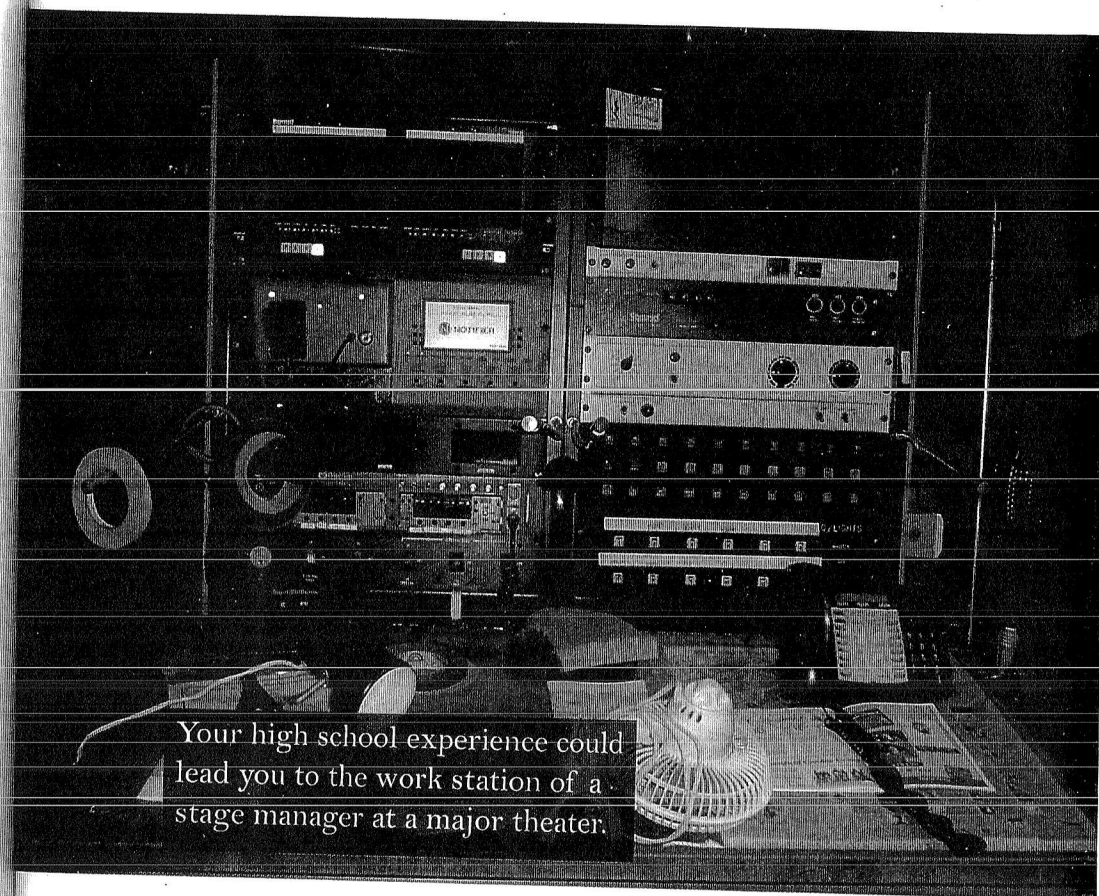
Some stage managers remain in that profession until retirement. Others move into other production-related areas, becoming production managers, directors, or producers. Many stage managers work for some years in the field and move on to nontheatrical careers. The skills learned as a stage manager transfer well to a wide range of careers, including business, event planning, travel and hospitality, sales, and other fields in which extensive planning and customer interaction are an integral part of the job.

Stage managers have excellent management skills in general. Therefore, they are equipped to handle pretty much any company management job. One job for which they are well suited is project management. In project management, the manager is responsible for all aspects of a single product or product line. He or she works with personnel in a variety of departments, including development, production, sales and marketing, and finance. Stage managers are organized, have excellent communication skills, and are used to meeting deadlines. Beyond this, they are good motivators and problem solvers.

However, because stage managers don't have corporate business experience, they may find it hard to get a job in general business management. They often find it easier to get hired in an area such as corporate events management. Private event and party planning are also areas in which former stage managers can use their management skills in a creative environment. Sales is another profession that uses the stage manager's skills. Salespeople for companies are on the road a lot of the time, dealing with potential customers in other companies. The ability to read and handle people serves them well, as does being able to present products in the best light. Salespeople have to be well organized and work independently as well as keep track of detailed information about customers and products—skills that stage managers have honed. In addition to practical skills, being a stage manager gives you confidence in yourself and your ability to handle problems and lead people, which is a key factor in being successful in any field.

Pursuing a Theatrical Career

If you decide that you want to undertake a professional stage management career, you will most likely want to pursue a degree in theater arts, stage management, or production management at the college level. If you want to work in Broadway, **off Broadway**, or professional summer or regional theater, you will need to join Actors' Equity, which is the union for actors and stage managers. Membership provides you with information about the field and



Your high school experience could lead you to the work station of a stage manager at a major theater.

contacts with professionals. Interning or obtaining a summer job as an assistant stage manager at a professional theater can provide you with a chance to work with a professional director, stage manager, and cast. Most likely you will begin your professional career as an assistant stage manager. Some stage managers began in specific technical positions, such as working on a light or stage crew. Then they advanced to assistant stage manager, and then stage manager. The knowledge you gained in community or high school theater can be applied directly in your new role, especially your skills in dealing with actors and crew

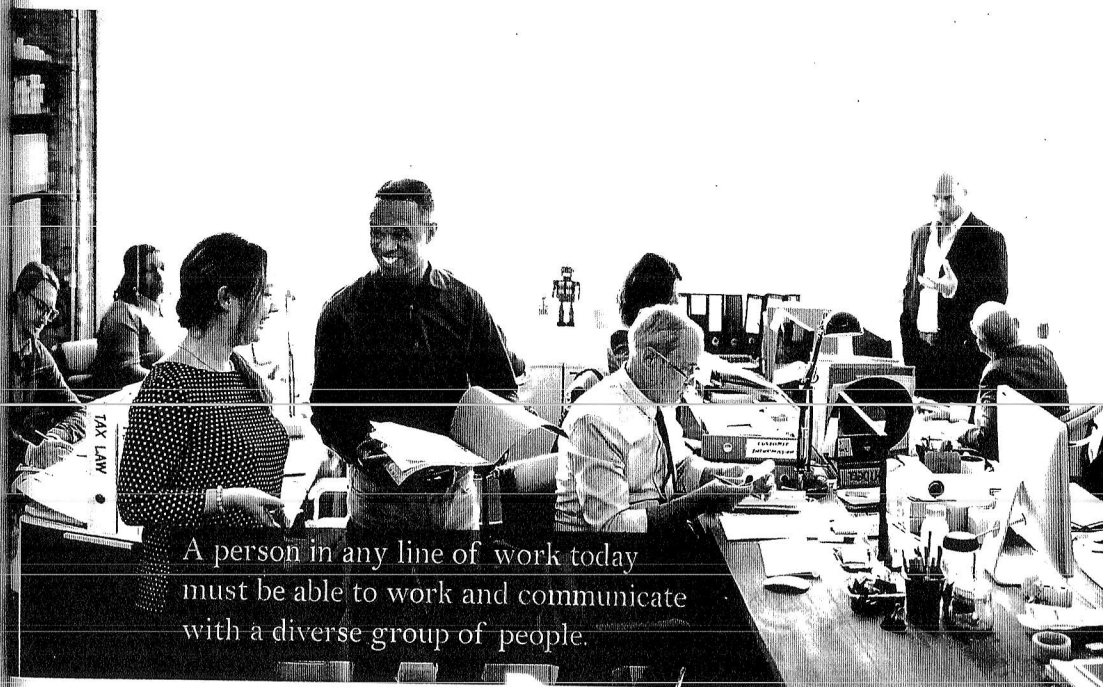
members, and this experience will help you advance in the field.

Real-World Careers

Most people who work in community theater groups do so part-time and work at a regular job in a business or profession. The skills you develop as a stage manager are the same skills needed to succeed in any nontheatrical profession. Therefore, working as a stage manager can help you hone your skills in a way that will benefit your career. The following are some of the ways they can be applied.

Leadership Skills

In any job, you will have to deal with superiors, coworkers, subordinates, and clients or customers. Working with a cast and crew—especially volunteers, who are not being paid to put up with you—teaches you the skills to motivate people. The techniques that make you successful when working with subordinates and coworkers are the same ones that made you successful with cast and crew members. Among these techniques are recognizing and praising people for their contributions, and criticizing them constructively in a way that focuses on fixing the problem, rather than chastising or embarrassing them in public. Work is a collaborative effort outside as well as inside the theater. If the people you work with feel that you respect them and value their contributions, they will be more likely to support you and do their best work for you.



A person in any line of work today must be able to work and communicate with a diverse group of people.

The key to being a successful leader in a business is being able to build a team from a diverse group of individuals. Leadership in business, as in the theater, is about making individuals work together for the good of the project. You will often have to deal with people who have strong personalities and an even stronger desire to gain recognition and advancement. It is your overall vision for a project, and your ability to motivate people to embrace it, that will make a project successful. You must be able to imbue team members with the belief that they must all support and help each other for the project as a whole to succeed. This is exactly what a stage manager must do in a theatrical production.

In business, as in the theater, one has to deal with people in a wide range of jobs and from various

educational, ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. A stage manager has to understand, communicate with, and get the best work from people with different skills and backgrounds, while maintaining a sense of **empathy**. In addition, the people skills one gains as a stage manager give one a better understanding of clients or customers. This understanding allows you to identify what they want or need, which in turn can assist you in making sales and establishing long-term relationships with clients. One of the key elements of success in business is the ability to communicate clearly and effectively.

Stage managers have to work with people who are sometimes annoyed, frustrated, angry, or arrogant. In the real world, you sometimes have to cope with difficult people as well, including superiors and customers or clients. As a stage manager, you should have developed the skills to calm a person who is upset about an issue and refocus the conversation on how to solve the problem. Stressful situations arise in businesses when deadlines are tight and problems occur. No one has more experience in dealing with this type of stress than a stage manager.

Budgeting Skills

As a stage manager, one has a certain amount of money available for the technical aspects of the production. The stage manager must keep track of expenditures and find ways of meeting the technical requirements without exceeding the budget. Budgeting is also a key part of business and professional activities. When managing a business,

department, or project, you will have to make a budget and ensure that the activities required do not exceed the amount of money available. This will require tracking the expenditures of those who are performing the project tasks and finding a way to deal with needs that cannot be met with the existing allocation.

There are generally ways to deal with a component of the project that are similar to those used in a theatrical production. Therefore, you will be familiar with strategies for addressing financial issues when they arise. For example, you might revise that component of the project so that it is done differently or on a smaller scale, or you might try to obtain more money from senior management (in the theater, the producer). Most school and community plays are produced on a shoestring. The ability to get the desired results with a limited amount of money is a valuable skill that allows a project manager to accomplish a lot with few resources.

Project Management Skills

Whether you are employed in a business or run your own, you will need to manage projects in the real world. Setting up and directing a project for a business or professional undertaking is very much like stage managing a play. You must analyze the requirements for the project and identify what resources and people are needed. Then you must gather those resources. You will need to organize people in various departments to carry out the tasks required for the project, including people who do

not report directly to you. You will need to break down the project into discrete tasks, create a schedule showing when each task must be completed, and then schedule people and resources. You will need to provide the people with deadline information and keep track of progress on each task to ensure that everything is ready on time. As in the theater, requirements may change over the course of the project. These changes mean the manager must adjust the schedule, update the personnel involved, and arrange for any additional resources. Stage managers have excellent experience in this type of project management, which is exactly what they do in the theater.

Time Management Skills

Time management skills are critical for getting things done. Stage managers constantly work under time pressure. The show will go live on a set date, and everything must be done by then. The curtain goes up at a set time for the performance, and problems must be resolved by then. Deadlines are inflexible. Stage managers constantly multitask. These factors mean that the stage manager must learn time management techniques. Time management begins with making a to-do list with all required tasks and ranking them in order of priority. One of the major problems with many managers is their refusal to delegate responsibilities and their insistence on controlling how all the tasks involved in a project are done. Stage managers, however, are used to assigning tasks to different experts on the crew and supervising them

at a higher level by keeping track of their progress in general. In the business world, where many managers don't give employees this level of freedom, delegation not only allows more tasks to be accomplished simultaneously but also leads to more contentment and loyalty among employees because they feel trusted and empowered. A stage manager knows that unexpected problems always arise, and extra time needs to be allocated to deal with them.

Like a stage manager, a business manager faces a constant barrage of interruptions, questions, distractions, and requests for help from those working on various technical areas. Like stage managers, business managers must address people who are late or who don't show up, who are disorganized or unprepared, or who engage in other actions that disrupt the flow of work. Yet the manager must still pull the entire project together for a successful performance.

Time management also means scheduling time for yourself and your other commitments. In business as in the theater, it is easy to let the job become your whole life. It is necessary to make time to balance the demands of work with those of family, school, or other activities, and to take care of yourself.

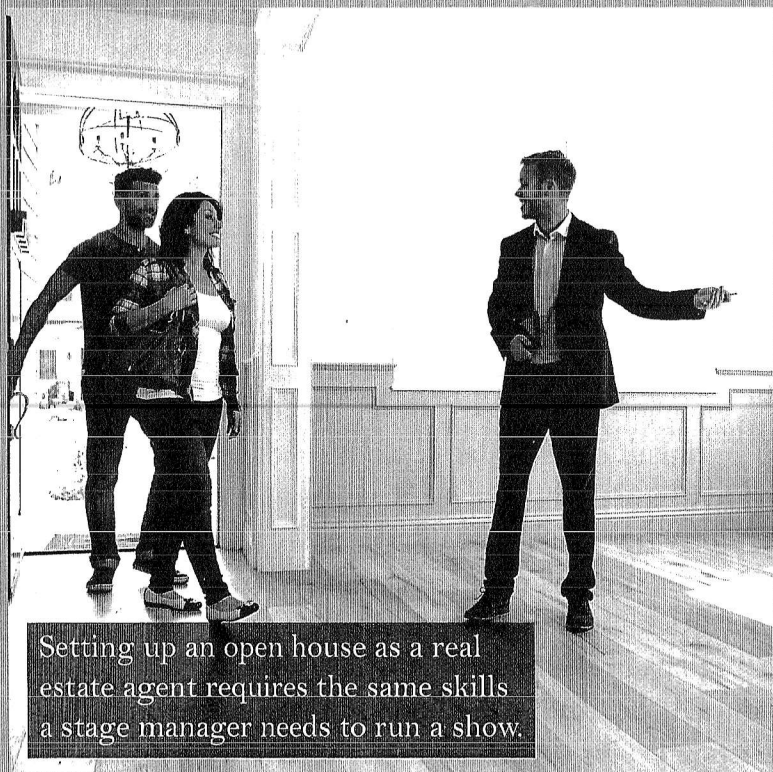
Putting on a Show

Sometimes ex-stage managers will find themselves in a situation directly reminiscent of putting on a play. In the business world, you may find yourself putting on presentations to customers, clients, or senior management. You may be asked

FROM STAGE MANAGER TO REAL ESTATE AGENT

SMNetwork.org is a website for stage managers.

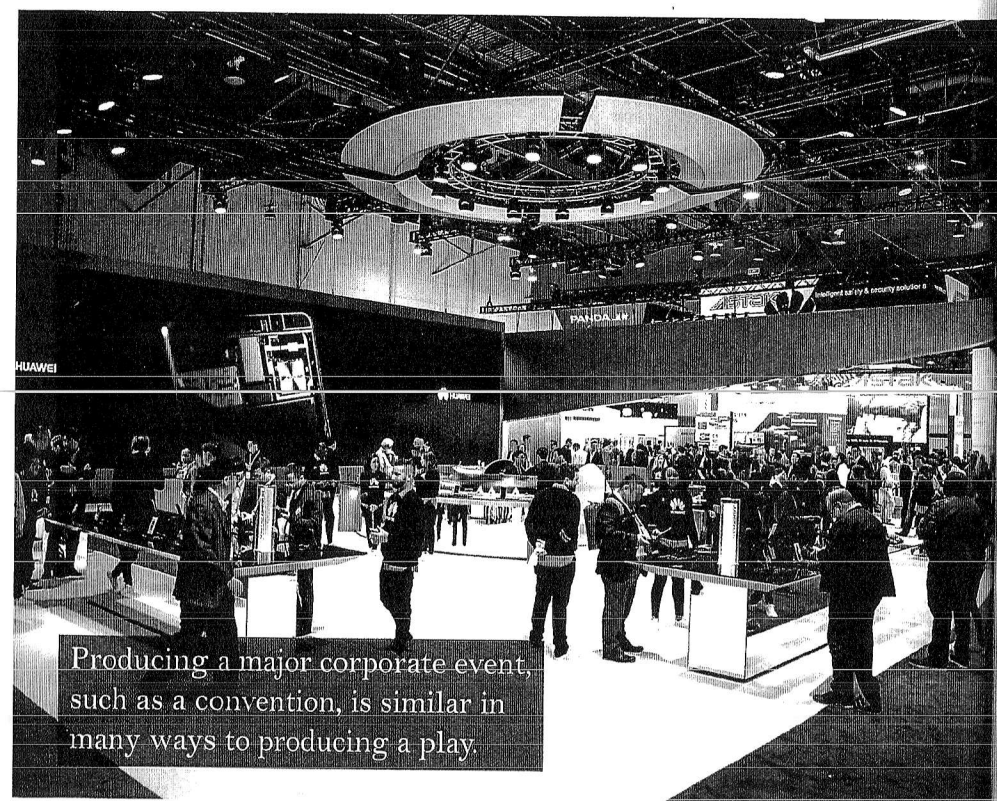
Among its ideas for possible careers for ex-stage managers is becoming a real estate agent. One respondent who had become a real estate agent indicated that many of the requirements for success in this profession are similar to those possessed by stage managers. Some of the aspects that these two careers have in common are the need for outstanding people skills and time management skills, and the ability to remain calm in difficult situations.



Setting up an open house as a real estate agent requires the same skills a stage manager needs to run a show.

Beyond this, being a successful real estate agent requires the ability to set up the property to be shown, the way one would set a stage, to give the desired impression. Both stage management and being a real estate agent require dealing with irregular work hours and a continuously changing group of people. As in the theater, it's necessary to stay in touch with people—in this case, potential buyers. In many ways, selling real estate and being a stage manager both require one to put on a show, although the former consists of many small shows rather than a single big one, and the amount of money one makes is larger.

to participate in creating events for customers or clients, or representing the company at a booth in a trade show exhibit. The event can be as small as an open house for a property for sale or as large as a corporate conference with hundreds of customers or clients. The process of producing a special event is very similar to the process of producing a play. You will need to establish the requirements for the "performance," acquire the necessary resources, and see that the necessary people, in the form of staff or vendors, are in place. The process involves planning all the aspects of the event, hiring all the vendors and



Producing a major corporate event, such as a convention, is similar in many ways to producing a play.

equipment required, and overseeing the production of the event. If the event includes speakers or performers, you will need to make sure that they are accounted for, that they arrive when they are scheduled to, and that they are properly prepared for their performance, just as with actors in the theater.

The Ability to Overcome Obstacles

Stage managing a production means doing whatever needs to be done with whatever resources are available. In a school or community theater, the stage manager must work with the people who are available to act and to do the technical work. He or she must

work with the materials that are available to make sets and scenery, costumes, and lighting and sound effects. This approach requires the stage manager to be flexible and adaptable.

The stage manager must be able to evaluate the characteristics and talents of the people who make up the crew. This allows the stage manager to determine who needs what level of guidance and supervision. This ability to use the resources at hand to the best effect possible is invaluable in business. In business, one can't always choose who is working on a project, but one can analyze what team members' strengths are and how to employ them to the best advantage.

Finally, being a stage manager gives one experience in working hard for long hours. The stage manager arrives at the theater first and leaves last. As in the theater, successfully completing projects and meeting goals often means long hours, especially as a deadline approaches. Once the project is completed, like the cast and crew, the team members disperse, and preparations begin for the next effort.

Being a stage manager is a creative and fulfilling job. One has the opportunity to bring all the pieces together to create a successful show. This can create a great deal of satisfaction, despite the hard work required. It is also an excellent way to learn a range of skills that can be used to enhance your performance in a business or profession.