**Best casting advice for fellow directors**

Every production requires the right blend of individuals to help tell the story. The challenge is finding these individuals and matching them to the parts that will best bring your production to life. So how do we ensure the casting process is successful for both your students and your show?

**We asked: What is your best piece of casting advice for fellow directors?**

**Kindness Counts**

Be positive and encouraging throughout the process. Some students are terrified.

BE KIND. Your community theatre production or high school play is not Broadway, so give it a rest. Your job is to nurture, teach, and inspire a love of theatre.

Remind everyone who auditions that they did a great job; even if they do not get a part they will feel better and try again.

Create an inclusive audition environment that feels like a workshop — a shared experience rather than a competition. Community is built and there is more support for those who get cast from those who didn’t.

**Talent isn’t Everything**

Work ethic > talent. All day, every day.

Attendance matters. Don’t cast someone in an important role who is absent a lot.

Cast commitment over talent every time.

Personality and character over talent! Always ask yourself, “Do I want to work with this person?”

Take a chance on talented, hardworking people even if you don’t initially see how their type can fit the role. If they can sing the part, are dedicated, qualified and reliable give them a shot — especially if that’s what you say you value. You can cast a taller sibling to be the young one, grandparents don’t need to look like their grandchildren, etc.

**Go with your Gut**

Absolutely go with your gut. If something feels off, don’t cast them out of pity or obligation. Cast what your show really needs.

Trust your instincts. Don’t be afraid to cast against type.

Create the callback list with your head, the cast list with your gut.

Craft the play you’d want to be in the audience for. Trust your sensibilities.

**Cast the best perform for the Part**

Sometimes your show needs that student and sometimes your student needs that show. I’m all about making amazing theatre, but I’m also about creating community, learning, and encouraging amazing human beings and sometimes that looks like casting someone who isn’t quite right or might take a bit more work.

Type can be important and is part of the story-telling, but as the great Artistic Director of the American Conservatory Theatre said, “When faced with a choice between the right type and the right talent, go with the talent.” To augment that, especially in educational or community theatre where your talent pool is limited, it’s important to put the right personality in the right role. A student actor might not be gifted, but if their own personality will illuminate a role, then they will be a success in it.

Don’t cast based on how long someone has been in the program. Cast the best person.

Don’t let parents bully you! If a 6th grader is better for a role than an 8th grader, don’t let their age hold you back from casting them.

Don’t be afraid to take risks. Cast against type if an actor is really best for a role. You will likely be pleasantly surprised.

Give newcomers a chance at acting. And don’t get hung up on the physical appearance of the actor. If the spirit of the character comes through, that’s your person.

**To Callback or Not to Callback**

Do not have callbacks unless absolutely necessary. Do good tryouts and you should know what you have. Callbacks just hurt kids more.

HOLD CALLBACKS. Look for chemistry between scene partners. I call it “SIZZLE,” that certain something that pops off and makes you want to see more.

**Do what you Say and Say what you Do**

If you say you don’t precast, don’t.

Whatever you say you’re going to do after auditions, follow through and do it. It is only your reputation. People tend to remember things like that.

No matter what, someone’s feelings are going to get hurt. You can acknowledge that at auditions with the students; let them know you’re aware of their feelings and casting is not easy, but that it’s your responsibility to place students in the positions where they can learn most and most succeed.

**Keep it Fair**

Cast with a casting team. It helps you when parents accuse you of favoritism or whatever.

**Communicate the Cast List**

Email the cast list to those who auditioned and BCC their email addresses. This way the students can choose the environment where they read it and react accordingly. They can choose to be with friends or by themselves. Also, email the list after school. If it is sent before or during school, the results could distract them in other classes. This way it gives them the night to think about it and process in their own ways, again, without having to be in public if they choose.

Post on Friday afternoon. It gives them (and you) time to reflect and recover. Ask for an indication from them that they “accept” (either initial the cast list or e-mail). Emotions tend to abate over the weekend (especially THAT parent!).

Post the cast list at the end of the day (preferably on a Friday), and leave the area immediately.

Always “sleep on it” at least one night before posting the cast list.

I always ask each student for their top three choices of characters they would like to play. It’s not always the lead parts you think they’d want. Makes it easier. Everyone got one of their top three.

 Look for the heart of the character. You can teach the rest (accents, style, etc.).

Always leave room for a surprise.

Be patient. Don’t rush the process. If you need another day, take it!