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Tech Note #1: Organization

How to be a Good Stage Manager

In addition to doing stagecraft, the other behind-the-scenes stage activities are also very interesting to me. As such, for this tech note I looked around and tried to find a good guide to other jobs that we might find ourselves doing for a show.

As it turns out, there is a great, basic guide for stage managers. As it also turns out, this guide is only available through purchase. However, with a little more digging, I found an online guide with tips for new stage managers. The interesting part about this guide is that it's written by a man who's practically new at the job himself! Below, I've summarized his tips, with a little of my own experience added in:

- Always be early, whether with rehearsals or (of course) before a performance. Be even earlier than you think you have to be, because there will always be more things to do than you think. It also sets a good example for the cast, and makes the director like you.
- Be organized. This guy recommends a big fat binder with plenty of paper. Write everything down—don't expect to remember anything.
- Anticipate. This means *don't* just do what you're told. You're going to be expected to handle the unexpected, so expect to. Got that? Seriously, though, try to think of helpful things before somebody needs to ask you for them. It makes everyone more relaxed, and we all know how annoying neurotic actors are.
- Build a kit. Every good profession worth its salt has to have a kit. This guy basically builds his kit out of half techie, half medic supplies:

Get a good size tool box with drawers. Early on during rehearsal start filling it with pencils, a pencil sharpener, erasers, post it notes, page markers, scotch tape, a three hole punch, scissors, and a stapler. As you can add items such as masking tape, duct tape, glow tape, jack knife,

utility knife, permanent markers, superglue, needle and thread, safety pins, and bobby pins. The theater should have a good first aid kit, but a few bandages will probably be useful. I also included a staple gun, a multi-tipped screwdriver, shaving cream and razor, toothpaste and brush, hair brush, breath mints, Tums, Gas-X, Imodium AD, and Advil.

- Get a nice big script. You will need to make many notes. This guy recommends a way to modify your script if copyright law prevents you from photocopying it:

A legal alternative is to cut your script apart at the binding, cut a hole in an 8.5x11 inch sheet of paper a little smaller than the size of the script pages, and paste the pages into this hole. This way you can see both sides of the script, and make notes on the 8.5x11 inch paper. You need lots of room to record everyone's blocking and your queues. You will be glad you did this.

- Get page markers such as sticky notes. Rather than just using them to mark pages, you can actually tape them into the script (once you like where they are) to warn you of some lighting, sound, or other cue coming up soon. They'll serve to jump start your mind when the time comes so you won't forget anything.
- Get to know the cast. This guy warns against spending all your time with the director, though I haven't had that problem in my admittedly limited experience. Perhaps it's more common on professional sets. Anyway, the point is that come showtime, your job will be MUCH easier if the actors know, respect, and like you.