

**Crash Course Guide to Community Theatre Stage Management**  
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## Introduction

The role of the Stage Manager in any theatrical production is like the keystone of an arch; without it the entire structure falls apart. And if the task is not executed with certain major ingredients, the keystone will be weak and the arch will fall anyway. I do not claim to be an expert in Stage Management. I, like most people who agree to take the position, only knew a little bit about what I was getting into. My experiences as Prop Master for several large productions at my Alma Mater, Illinois Wesleyan University, gave me insight as to what the stage manager's duties are. Performing double duty as both director and stage manager during my two years teaching theatre at Brighton Academy, gave me some practical experience to draw upon journeying into *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> St.* The following text is the summation of the latter experience in retrospect; what I knew before and what I know now I, humbly, present to you in what I hope will be a guide and support for future stage managers in their efforts. Please keep in mind that I am, first and foremost, an actor that has benefited from a well-rounded Bachelor of Fine Art's education in Theatre. Each chapter of this guide will address the major ingredients I spoke of before: the necessity to understand the difference between community theatre and professional theatre; and how to blur that line as much as possible, overall attitude and approach to specific duties, and being ready for anything. At the end of this guide is a glossary of theatrical terms and an appendix of forms, that you may choose to copy and use for your stage management needs.

Thank you to the following people who also contributed material for this publication:

Joyce Kephart  
Michele Kyle (MK)  
Rusty Wood

Also thanks to Bobbi Kidder, Impact Theatre, and ACT for giving me the opportunity to share experiences toward the enjoyment of theatre in all communities. Theatre started in the backyard of the common man with our most natural desire to tell stories. The memorable stories are told and we are changed as an audience. We get lost in the magic before us. We might know some of the crew, or our doctor might be waiting in the wings to come out and warm our hearts with a song, and our cousin is dancing for the first time in front of people, but it is the collaboration found in theatre that creates synergy night after night between strangers and neighbors alike.

## Prologue

The following is a solid summary of advice from, Joyce Kephart, a great woman who has stage managed for many decades and in many types of theatres. I particularly enjoyed watching her manage shows at the late, Stardust Repertory Theatre, in Grants Pass, OR. Her figure, unmistakable, as she smoothly adjusted a couch, threw clothes all over it, and removed a picture frame before she left the stage and called lights up. I was also a witness to the keen effect of “the wilting flowers.” Well done!

*People often ask, “What does the Stage Manager do?” This is a difficult question to answer. The Stage Manager assures that everything runs smoothly onstage & backstage before, during & after the production and must be, at least, prepared to do almost anything required to do this. It requires the collecting and tracking of every detail of the production including props, costumes, scenery, sound, lighting, special effects, blocking, and maintaining the show as it was directed and designed after the show has opened. It is also very much a people's job, managing people, not things. Therefore, it requires a great deal of diplomacy and the ability to work with others calmly in stressful situations. It is quite normal to be moving a large set piece on or off stage during a blackout, giving an important light cue to lighting technician, finding a misplaced prop, helping an actor with a quick costume change or a costume malfunction, and, oh yes, going on stage, in character, to do a walk on part...ALL AT THE SAME TIME. It requires a great deal of flexibility. Each production has different requirements, each director will ask different things of the Stage Manager, and each individual show is different. The job can be quite challenging and require real creativity. In the large theatre there will probably be an extensive crew for sets, props, etc. whom the Stage Manager will assign duties to and oversee. However, in the smaller theatre he must assume a lot of these duties himself. It can be quite challenging to find the proper set pieces, props, or special effects that will fit the available space, be usable by the actors, and still be right for the show. I remember working for hours on such things as making vases of flowers wilt on cue. Food can also be a tricky thing. If it was just beverages and cake or cookies, that would be fine, but many plays require that some rather strange combinations of food be served. If nobody has to eat them, artificial foods can quite often solve the problem; but if the food has to be eaten on stage things like ease of preparation, making sure the actors can eat the food and still deliver lines etc., and ease of cleanup must be considered. One that I will always remember is a stew made on stage with a base of "Gravy Train" (this was not consumed by the actors). Stage Managing is a job that requires a large time commitment, but is never boring. It can, however, be very rewarding, for when you hear the applause at the final curtain of a great production, and hear the words of appreciation and enjoyment expressed by the audience, you know that you had a part in enabling this to happen.*

The keystone of a beautiful arch, supported by every stone and line of mortar sharing the stain glass story within to all that behold it. The diplomat, the fearless leader, are just a few other names for this position, some names are not so nice, and one in particular I find to be misleading: GOD. The duties of a stage manager should be

accomplished with integrity and complete support for the cohesiveness of the production. It may feel like you're the all powerful man or woman behind the curtain, but the safety net and trust created by your being there is what makes the actors and the show great. I have found Michele Kyle to be particularly apt at creating an atmosphere of respect and trust. Here is her stage managerial advice.

*A good Stage Manager works with the Director, cast and crew to make the rehearsal process run smoothly. He or she deals with problems or issues directly allowing the Director to focus on the creative process and protecting the relationship between Director and actor. The Stage Manager is responsible for keeping all balls in the air all the time, anticipating problems, solving issues before they become problems, communicating with all entities. Stage Managers need to exude competence, kindness and firmness. This creates trust, calm and cooperation among cast and crew. This attitude sets the standard for the show. If Stage Managers are out of control, unkind or disrespectful in any way, screaming at cast and crew out of anger, disorganized and making excuses, others will follow their example. The show disintegrates into chaos and misery when it should be a joyful albeit intense creative experience. A Stage Manager needs to firmly insist on kindness respect and competency for and from all and lead in the example. Cast and crew need to know the correct way to deal with a problem is to make an appointment to discuss it with you, not broadcast the issue to all during a rehearsal. All problems need to be dealt with quickly and quietly, meeting with those involved separately, keeping the drama on stage.*

Truer words were never spoken. I felt acutely the effects of being my own stage manager while directing plays for Brighton Academy's students. If, in the middle of directing a tender or comedic scene with a fresh young actor, you are the only one able to turn and sternly hush the three other young people who have been chatty Cathy's all rehearsal, whom you are also about to ask for creative risk taking, then you have broken the artistic trust that is necessary when you're asking actors to step outside themselves and act their part. The director in no way wants to hush or squash the impulses of their performers, however at the same time it is necessary to keep a focused and organized rehearsal. That is the stage manager's duty so that the director does not have to switch hats and hinder the artistic process. Wearing all hats at once reminded me of one of my favorite childhood stories, *Caps For Sale*. In the story a cap peddler balances many caps on his head and some silly monkeys steal his caps and "Tsss. Tsss," at him from high up in a tree. He shakes his finger and fist at them while they shake their fingers and fists at him in return, until he is so frustrated he throws his cap to the ground, which they all then copy, returning the caps at last. Be sure that no matter what monkeys cross your path, you keep your cool and think creatively to solve all problems. And try not to wear too many caps. There are always people who want to help and contribute to theatre.

## ACT I- Setting the Scene

### Pre-Production

One of the hardest things and biggest differences between Community and Professional Theatre is the gathering of people. When everyone is contracted and paid to put their time toward a production it is easier. But in the case of community theatre, most everyone involved has life obligations that can make it difficult to create a schedule. Once you become a stage manager the play is your priority, no matter what. So working around people's work, school, important meeting, etc. is tough from beginning to end.

Ideally, you will meet with your director a month, or more, in advance of auditions for the show. At this meeting you should discuss the plan, the production team, when production meetings will take place, how rehearsals will be run, clarify each others job descriptions (some directors will want you to watch time for them during rehearsal and stick to scenes planned to the second, others will not, each director will have a particular way of using you), and then set down the rehearsal schedule from day one of auditions to closing.

Depending on how long your rehearsal process will be, (I have been involved in 8 week processes and even 3 week processes) you should try to fit in the following:

- Audition Dates
- Meet & Greet, 1<sup>st</sup> Read Thru (might be separate dates)
- Music Rehearsals (when needed)
- Choreography (when needed, includes dancing as well as fighting)
- Blocking Period
- Off Book Date- with calling for line
- Scene Work
- No More Calling Line Date
- Run Thrus
- Designer Run Thru
- Costume Parade (director approves costumes)
- Scene Change Rehearsal(s) (without actors, only run crew)
- Tech Week
- Dry Tech (without actors)
- Cue 2 Cue (only running cues (light, sound, special effect) and the play around the cues.
- 1<sup>st</sup> Tech (Wet Tech- with actors)
- Tech First Dress
- Second Dress w/ Hair & Makeup
- Final Dress and or a Preview Night (might have an audience!)
- Opening & Run of Show thru Closing
- Strike
- Production Meetings Throughout

Though some of the above may fall on the same day or you won't have as much time for Tech Week so you might forgo a dry tech and go straight for 1<sup>st</sup> Tech. Production meetings are very important. If you're lucky you will have a full production support team, which includes:

(FR-Full Run Position, RO- Rehearsal Only Position, SO- Show Only Position)

- TWO assistant stage managers (ASM) (FR)
- Technical director (TD) (RO)
- Set designer/ Scenic Designer (SD) (RO)
- Set builders (RO)
- Scenic Painter/Charge Artist (RO)
- Painters (RO)
- Lighting designer (LD) (RO)
- Lights operator (LightOP) (SO)
- Sound designer (SD) (RO)
- Sound operator (SoundOP) (SO)
- Costume designer (CD) (RO)
- Costume technicians (RO)
- Props Master (RO)
- Wardrobe crew (one or more people), Crew Chief (SO)
- Run crew (one or more people), Crew Chief (ASM) (SO)
- Hair & Makeup designer (RO)
- Hair & Makeup crew (SO)
- Publicity People (FR)
- Box Office People (FR)
- House Manager (SO)
- Ushers (SO)

The list *does* go on and is more specific...but this list expresses a broad and ideal situation. All of these designers should have assistants, as well. In a community theatre setting you might be without more than one of these positions; and it is up to you to pick up the slack. The more of these positions you can fill with other people the less you will have to do, though you remain the keeper and collector of the same amount of information.

When you leave your first meeting with your director, try to have selected and solidified people filling production roles, agree upon what the audition form should look like, and finalize your rehearsal schedule for presentation at auditions. Also, have your first production meeting scheduled (ideally before auditions to discuss director's vision and preliminary needs) with the entirety of your production staff. Make calls well in advance to get them all there. In professional theatre, these meetings usually take place 3-6 months in advance.

Also make sure you now have a script from your director. You'll need to have a copy to cut up and turn into your prompt book. Find out how, where and when you'll be able to make copies of calendars and contact sheets for the actors and production staff; or if you'll be given a budget for your own paper and ink, if necessary. (This is a huge part of your job!)

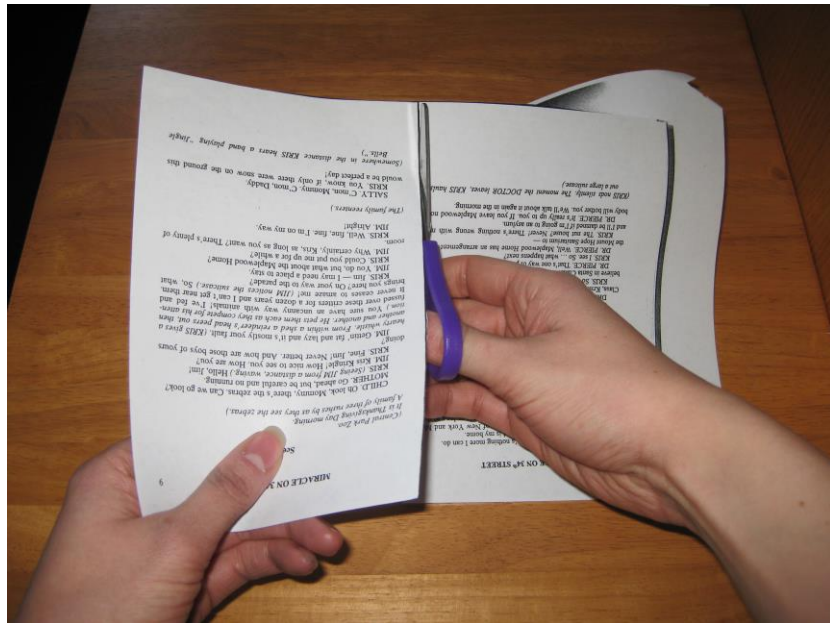
Now your TO DO LIST looks like this:

- Create Audition Forms (or make copies of pre-existing form, if available)
- Create Conflict Sheet

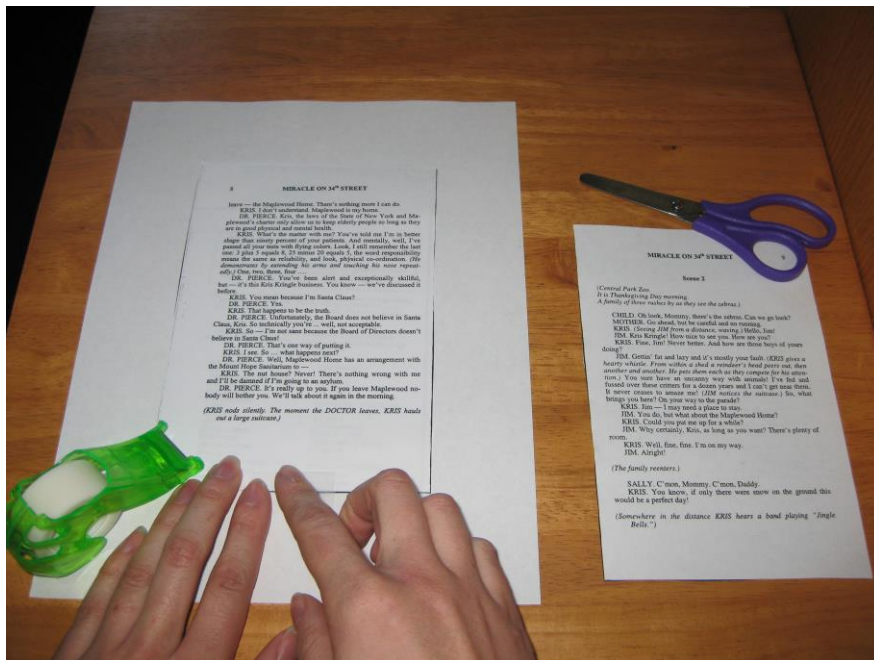
- (double-sided copies of the above will save paper and headache medicine).
- Create Calendar (two different formats are useful, calendar and listed).
  - Create “Show Bible” (or prompt book)

To prepare your prompt book:

First, cut apart each page of the script. If your script already appears as one page on a page, skip to step three.

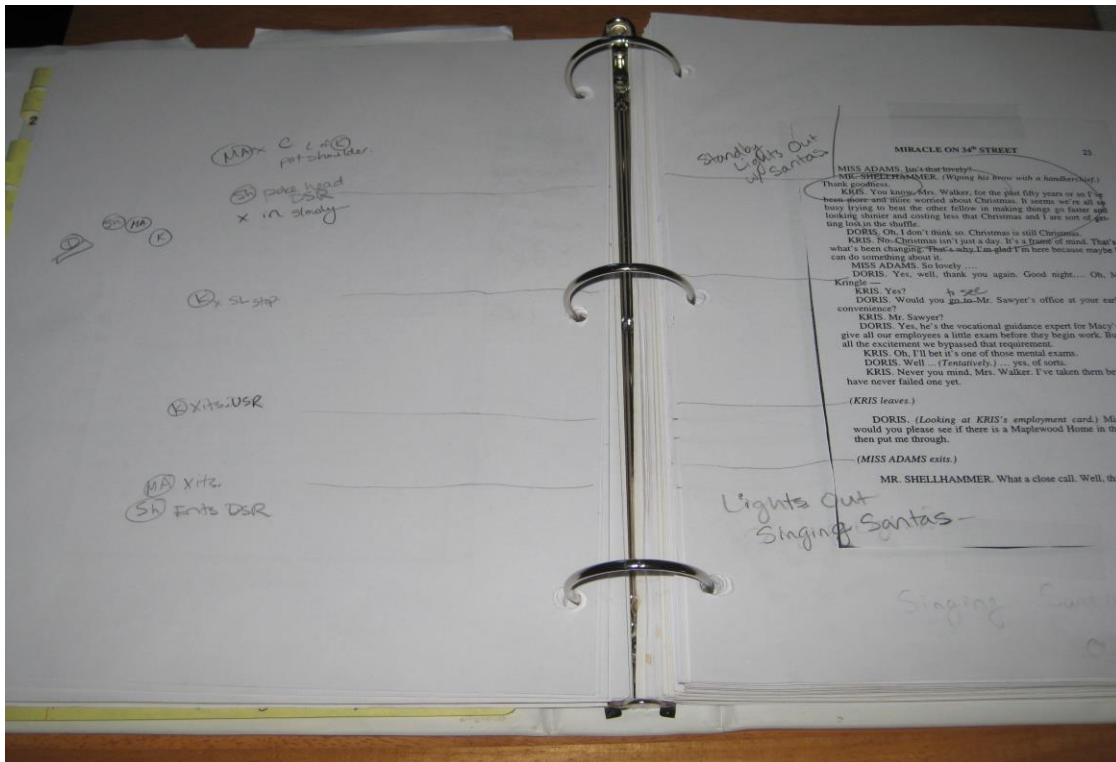


Second, glue or tape each page to a full 8”x11” sheet of paper.





Thirdly, three-hole punch, and insert in a binder so that each page of the script is faced opposite by a blank page. This is where you will take blocking notes. I leave the margin for the show cues.



Next, go through your script and highlight all things technical. Differentiate color between props versus sound cues versus light cues. Highlighting required furniture will help you to know what kinds of rehearsal furniture you will need before the show furniture in provided by you or the set designer. I felt like I was playing the great juggling chair game during *Miracle On 34<sup>th</sup> St.*

Now get your lists going:

- Prop List
- Set/Furniture List
- Costume List
- Scenes & Scene Change List

In the Appendix you will find examples of what prop, set, and costume lists could look like. Sans production team, you, or the director (depending on who they are), may have to do the procuring of show materials yourself. Keep these lists in your show bible so you know the status of each item's completion.

Make your list of scenes and scene changes as soon as possible. Hand it out to all and POST IT EVERYWHERE. Having a common vocabulary among cast and crew for the order of the show will help all members of the ensemble. Agree with the director on numbers or nick names for scenes, then use them on your calendar and during rehearsal, a little think like this can go a long way in ease of communication.

Let me take a moment to say that I love lists! (If you couldn't tell by now.) So get used to it! This is also a major part of your job.

Now, if you're unable to gather and schedule a weekly production meeting time for your production staff that works for all the varying people's schedules you will have, then it is all the more important for you to be the HUB of information, by meeting with each person individually and reporting back to your director.

## ACT II- Introducing the Characters

### Rehearsals Begin

As soon as the show is cast get the audition forms back from your director. Decide who will call which actors. Most commonly directors will want to call the, “yeses,” and you call the, “no’s,” or you’ll call everyone. Then make your preliminary contact sheet listing crew, cast, roles, phone numbers and e-mails. Write actor conflicts into your calendar, have your director preview both contacts and conflicts for error, or in case they have cast a leading role as someone who is actually going to be in the Caribbean on opening, or what have you.

Rehearsal number one is a Meet & Greet. Your director may want to do a first read through on this day or schedule a separate first read through where he or she may spend more time discussing the script with the cast as it is read the first time. You might call this kind of rehearsal Table Work. Aside from introductions (including people who may not be present, like designers) at the Meet & Greet make sure you:

- Hand out scripts
- Pass the contact sheet to check for corrections/omissions/or privacy requests
- Hand out copies of Calendar
- Make sure everyone has your phone number
- The costumer may take measurements on this day or schedule individual fittings.
- Your director runs each rehearsal, while you mind the flow of time.







Be clear with the cast that this is the last day to schedule conflicts and that anything beyond what was written on their audition sheet or told to you on this day will not be approved. Emergency absence or tardiness must be communicated to the stage manager as soon as possible. Make sure everyone knows you are the point of contact; the director should be free from this kind of communication, so they can keep their mind on the creative side of things. Ask that people be 5 minutes early. The director usually will have important things to say about rehearsal that night and it’s preferred to start on time. Some actor/community members are very touchy about their time efficiency; ergo a well-organized rehearsal is appreciated by all. You will always be the first to arrive at rehearsal and last to leave. Arrive at least 30 minutes to an hour early to set up your space and set props, etc. Pre-rehearsal is a valuable time to check in with your director before everyone else arrives with questions for the both of you.

Make copies of the contact sheet having corrected any mistakes and taken anyone off who would not like their number distributed to the whole cast. Hand it out at the next rehearsal after Meet & Greet. You need everyone’s contact information, but respect is the name of the game, so some people may not want others to have their e-mail or home numbers. “Try to get agreement from all [to] watch their email daily for communications from the stage manager. If someone does not have an email try to pair him or her with a cast member who will call and up date them. This seems small but it is huge in terms of time management for the stage manager and everyone being on the same page during rehearsals”(MK).

Ideally, after each rehearsal, the stage manager will fill out a rehearsal report (see Appendix), which would contain any needs that came up during rehearsal for the designers, “notes” or questions from the actors to the director, and miscellaneous. If this is not possible or you fall behind...just make sure you are keeping current lists, sharing that list with those who can and have offered to help you, and seek help when you need it. Pay close attention because sometimes it will be in passing, while blocking actors, that the director will suddenly add a prop to the show that wasn't in the script or suddenly there is a live animal needed for character decoration and if you miss it in context and don't write it down you will run into problems later in a time crunch.

That is why you MUST have an assistant Stage Manager, if not two. In the beginning of rehearsal you will be writing down blocking. Blocking is the term for where actors move on the stage and other business, what they do with their hands, etc. If, at the same time you have actors who are already off book (smiley face), they will need to call for line, so it is useful to have someone who can keep their eyes exactly following along in the script while you are transcribing the movement that just happened in the scene. Both duties are valuable to the process and can slow down rehearsal if you have to do both. Why do you have to write down the blocking? Because not every director will pre-block or correct any changes they make to their plan during actual rehearsal, in their own script. Unfortunately, even actors won't always write down their blocking and everyone makes mistakes. Ergo, don't use pens! Here is your major reason to carry 50,000 pencils. Be patient, and remind your actors to write their own blocking down. Be ready for blocking to change but only change what the director approves. At some point, before runs, the blocking, or stage movement, will be consistent and show ready.



Here is some of the short hand I use to denote blocking. Small diagrams of your stage contribute to understanding your notes. Keep in mind, whether you use my abbreviations or your own, that if anything happens to you, the stage manager, anyone else should be able to pick up your show bible and be able to do your job.

-  (Fred) -Character or Actor initials within a circle
- |T| (table) -Furniture abbreviations
-  (spoon) -Prop abbreviations within a box
- X -cross
- X 2 -cross to
-  (left)  (right)-counter cross
- X   -cross around right -notice these are described as opposite because stage directions are from the actor's perspective.
- cross around left
- R o C -right of center
- L o C -left of center

UR	UC	UL	up right, up center, up left (away from the audience) center right, center, center left down right, down center, down left (close to the audience) (left and right are determined from the actor's perspective.)
CR	C	CL	
DR	DC	DL	

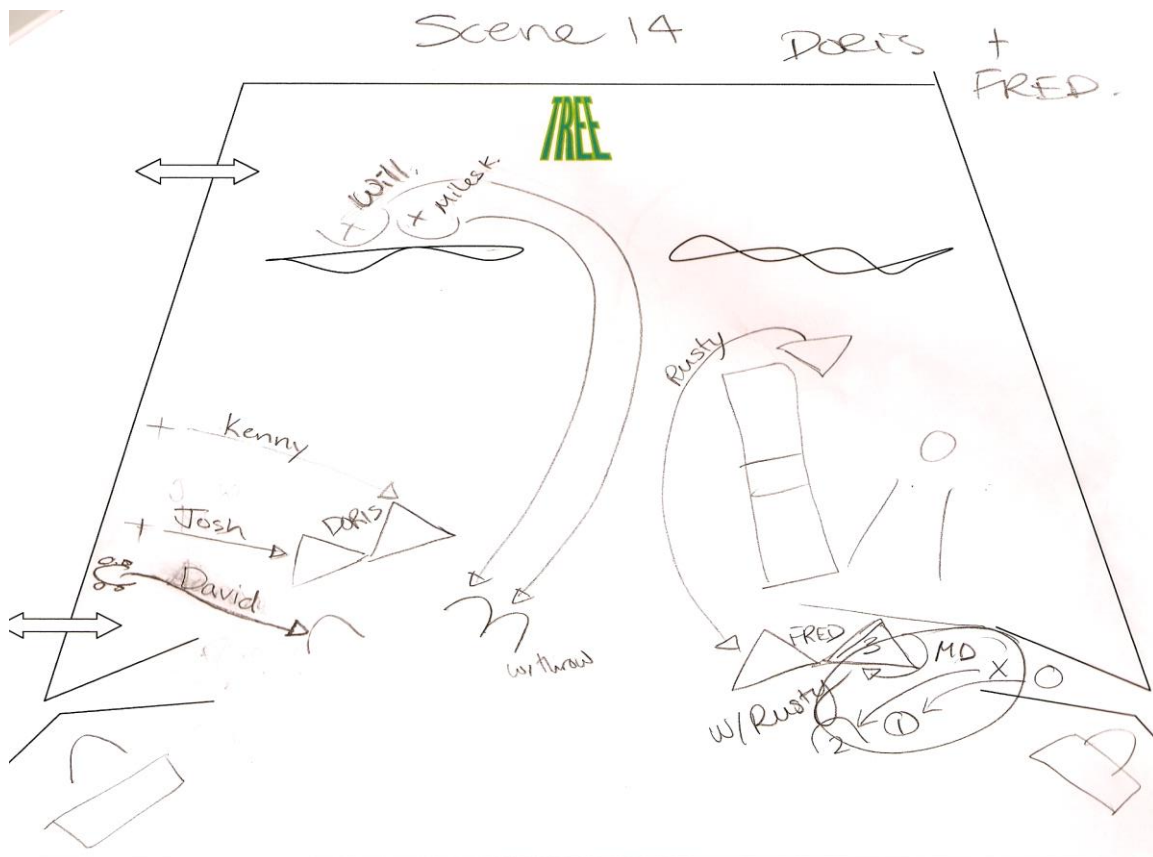
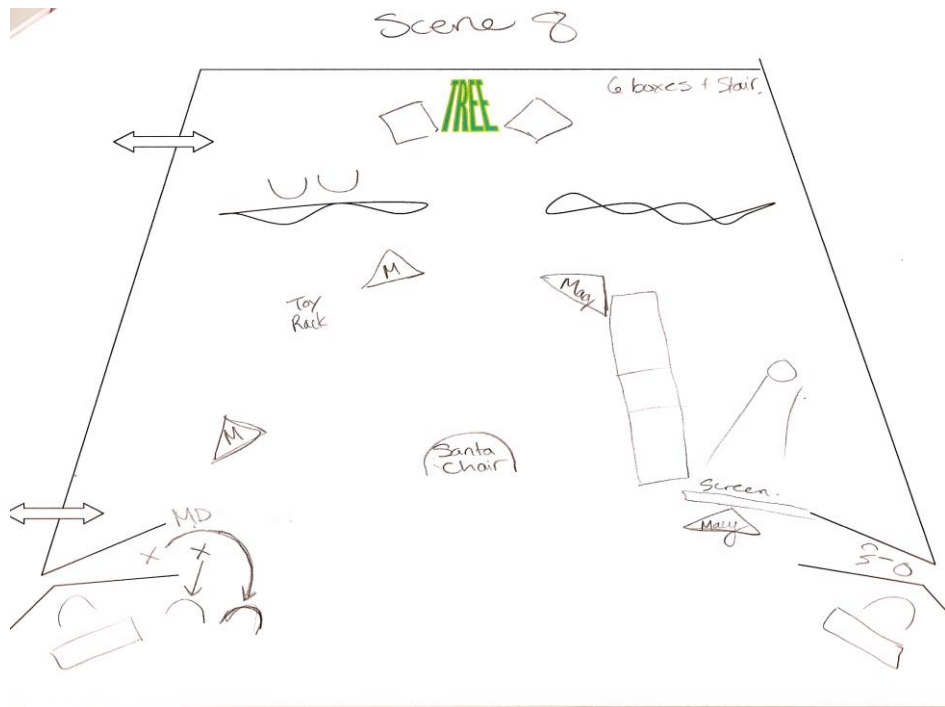
Examples:

Fred crosses around couch to sit next to Doris:  X  |C| 2 sit nx2 

Susan crosses right to cane, Kris Kringle counters left:  XR2   

Developing your own style is best but remember it should be intelligible by anyone and especially your ASM. All paperwork and information relevant to the show should be kept track of in your bible. Save ALL receipts! Keep an attendance sheet and post one for your actors to use, not just during show dates but rehearsal as well. Making sure everything is gathered in one place; it makes your job easier and more coherent. Your prompt book is the cellophane that keeps the show together. Speaking of, duct tape will come in handy in a pinch. Have some. See other supplies in Appendix. You'll notice all different sorts of tape required for this job. Two of the most important I'd like to talk about here. Glow tape is generally used backstage in the dark for ease of cast and crew getting off stage, seeing steps, corners, or odd objects that might stub toes. Spike tape should be used in early rehearsal, before the set is built, to denote the set and entrances/exits. It may also be used to mark where furniture, etc. is set on stage. Actors truly appreciate the help before walls and mantle pieces arrive. Specialty tape for theatre, commonly called Gaffer Tape, or glow tape are not available at general hardware stores. Many colors and types of tape can be found online at sites such as: [www.findtape.com](http://www.findtape.com) and [www.stagespot.com](http://www.stagespot.com).

At this point you should design a simple sketch layout of your stage to use in diagramming scene changes. The sooner you have a plan for who's moving what, when, and how the easier it will be to implement your strategy and iron out the kinks. Susan Russell said after her first stint in stage management, "Have your scene and costume change technical rehearsals at least a week in advance of opening...with no actors other than those directly involved." I've met directors who didn't want a single actor to touch a set piece and I've also seen beautifully choreographed dance numbers that transformed a scene while continuing the flow of entertainment. Either way you shoot for 30 seconds or less and do whatever it takes. Here are two examples of my scene change diagrams for *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> St.* You will see the difference between a simple scene change and a more complex scene change. Both can be done with ease and grace.



## ACT III- The Plot Thickens

### Attitude, Motivation, and Tactics

“Usually the stage manager is responsible for everything that does not have to do with the actual directing of the play”(MK). Keeping track of everything the director thinks and says, but also managing everyone else. This is a true feat of endurance, patience, fairness, and sanity. You need to have the will or the desire to be on the phone a lot. After an hour and a half and the thirty-fifth phone call to remind people about “the newspaper is coming to take pictures tomorrow” and “there has been a change in the rehearsal order” plus, answering any costume concerns or questions you might feel faint of heart. An unwavering desire to problem solve will serve you well. Even if you’re tired and discussing the sound effect on page 42 at three in the morning say, “I’ll write that down and see what I can do.” Your notes will determine the efficiency of your leadership. Write everything down and you will be able to take care of your actors, of your crew, and of your design team. You will be successful. Your show will succeed because you met all situations head on and dealt with them respectfully and thoroughly.

Some people think that being on the phone is the whole job. “If anyone is late I’ll call them and ream them so they’ll never be late again!” Sometimes this is the attitude and it is so far from the mark. It is necessary to be firm and up front about expectations for punctuality, however if the first time knee jerk reaction of the stage manager is to chew out a person for not hushing right that second, or being late because they couldn’t get a ride, or what have you, then the trust and respect exchanged between actor and stage manager will not be equal. There is always a better way to communicate than through raised voice and insults. If someone is repeatedly late it is a good idea to take them aside individually, away from the rest of the cast, and be supportive in your query: “Is there anything I can do to help you be on time?” This lets the person know it is affecting the rehearsal process without putting them on the defensive. And yes, you will be on the phone a lot. If you don’t like being on the phone get one of your ASMs to help call tardy performers and arrange a phone tree for other important all cast announcements.

Some would say that the relationship between director and stage manager is good cop and bad cop. This is true in respect to stage managers protecting the creative relationship between director and actor, but the stage manager is also always looking out for his or her actors. Actors inherently are emotional beings. When they don’t play nice together or have a bad day, they might have a melt down right in front of you or you can just tell something is up. Check in with that individual, because simply being aware can improve their feeling about being at rehearsal. They know it is a place where people care to be around that person and want to enjoy that experience no matter what other influences might be causing in an individuals life. It is important to keep your actors happy. I am not saying to acquiesce to egos and diva like behavior but stay close to the grapevine of your cast and be supportive where you can. Make sure they know that you are a confidant and friend that they should bring any problems with the process or other collaborators to. And be willing for the problem to be you. Confront all problems early and find the most fair and respectful way to solve them.

Aside from a generally optimistic outlook here are a few more tips for success: Arrive EARLY, Leave LATE, follow and know your script, BE QUICK and project lines for starting places to KEEP REHEARSAL FLOWING. Have your key words for calling attention and use consistently, for example: “Audience!” “Quiet Please.” “Hold.”

Introduce your word on day one.

LISTEN, WRITE, REMEMBER, RESPECT.

If your production team is lucky enough to meet frequently, you run the meeting. Call the meeting to order, take notes (use the rehearsal report form and title it “production meeting”), make sure everyone gets a turn to speak and respond to each topic thoroughly, check on progress of rehearsal notes and the design process, and adjourn the meeting when all production staff is satisfied.

Above all things try to keep your cool. When you become frustrated have some kind of coping tool or way of expressing it that is away from your cast and production team, so you can find the most respectful way to relay requests for solutions without frustrations after collecting your thoughts. I find a bathroom stall is very useful for this operation. And remember to neutrally excuse yourself from the area for an “emergency break” rather than dramatically storming off to the bathroom with tears in your eyes and slamming the door behind you. Your cast and crew will be guided by your example.



## ACT IV- The Test of the Quest.

### TECH WEEK & Catastrophes

The actors have pushed themselves, the director has prodded everyone, the designers have sweat and bled into their work, and now it all melds together. One would like to think that it is the “magic” of theatre, but so much goes into the final 7-14 days of tech. I’ve never had a two-week tech...but I have wished for one several times.

By tech, you want to be working with all actual show props in actors’ hands. Props should be taped out on paper-covered tables backstage. You or an ASM will check these in at the beginning and end of every rehearsal and show.

You should have had a scene change rehearsal before tech week or at the beginning. If you have a lot of furniture to move, do this rehearsal without actors; so they aren’t in the way. Your first technical run can be a dry tech or cue to cue. Or separate these two. Dry tech: without actors, the lights, sound, and stage crew coordinate all technical queues. Cue to Cue: done with actors performing the pieces of the play surrounding your technical cues, skipping the rest. During a cue to cue, be clear about how you will run rehearsal at the beginning. When you call, “HOLD!” to stop the action on stage, the performers fall silent and stand still. If an actor or crew member calls Hold to let you know something backstage is wrong, (you will be in the house or booth at this point), you repeat, “HOLD!” in your official voice so that continuity is upheld. As with all your other rehearsals, you should be clear and loud when you give actors the pick up line to where you wish them to begin again and give them a, “GO.” Tech rehearsals are for you and your crew to get comfortable running the show and you facilitate that transition to show time.

Calling the show means you communicate every cue in the script over headset to your crew backstage. If you’re in community theatre and can trust everyone running your show you may not need to do this. Inexperienced crew members will benefit from hearing how the show runs and veterans to the stage will enjoy the efficiency of your technical leadership. Calling a show is especially necessary in larger venues or for shows with many complicated cues. Your lighting and sound operators should also be on headset, as should at least one, if not both, of your ASMs backstage.

By First Dress you can begin sitting in the booth, wherever the light board and sound equipment runs from. In your script you need to have marked for every individual cue a:

- Warning
- Standby
- Go

Start using these cues at first tech. Not every cue will have space and time for a warning but you must have a standby and go. When you come to those places in the script you will warn the operators:

“Warning, L17 & S5 “(light cue 17 & sound cue 5)  
In reply you get: “Lights warned” “sound warned” (or just “check.” Come up with the plan that works for you and the people in your crew.)  
“Standby lights and sound”  
“standing by” “standing by”  
“17 & 5 GO.”

The more precise and clear you hone these skills the smoother your show will run. Stay in communication and you can get through anything. Backstage lets you know what is happening behind the scenes and you can keep them informed of what is happening on stage.

Now lets take a look at an equally effective but opposite situation, which also helps to illustrate that catastrophes or at least the unexpected will happen:

In the show, *A Bad Year For Tomatoes*, it is documented on film the true magic of theatre. I played one of the character roles in this wacky comedy about a female actress, played by Sabra Sturley, that moves to the country to be alone and instead finds weird neighbors that won't leave her in peace. So she invents a deranged sister in the attic. Rusty Wood, as stage manager and sole crew person backstage, remains one of the best stage managers I've worked with. The director, Tanya Reasor, was in the booth with Rusty's sister, Tanya Wood as light operator. *No one is on headset*. In the scene I'm about to describe a particularly large & hairy ax-wielding neighbor, played by Heath Koerschgen, falls in love with the crazy attic sister but wants to teach her a lesson about manners, so he man handles her onto his lap in the rocking chair and spansks her. Only the steel-stomached should read on. I was backstage at the moment when, on this particular night, suddenly something went terribly wrong. Rusty, attentive to the monitors broadcasting the show backstage, heard the sound before I did but we both looked at each other and said (in a small whisper), “Is Sabra crying?” On the video, I have seen in play back, slow play, reverse and fast forward, when Heath picks Sabra up and sets her down to lay her over his lap, her foot comes down on the foot of the rocking chair causing it to fly up and crack Sabra right in the nose. Heath, aware something isn't quite right but not knowing quite what, continues the action, spanking Sabra, while spurts of blood fly from her nose to the floor with each swat to her buttox. Fortunately her character only had a few more lines before running upstairs to change back into her usual ego. Sabra described later, that she tried her best to blurt something like her lines out while avoiding passing out and ran off stage. Meanwhile, Rusty ascertained the situation from a tiny hole in the back flat. As soon as Sabra went off stage Tanya W. and Tanya R. decided to take the lights out. The audience clapped like it was the end of the scene. I don't know what Heath thought onstage in the dark. Rusty was helping shove Kleenex up Sabra's nose and checking in with her pupils, while I dumped a bottle of water over her hands to wash off the blood that had pooled in her hands during the scene. Sabra, trooper that she is, made her costume change and reentered. Lights came up and the scene continued. Sabra's kids were in the audience and though slightly worried soon accepted with the rest of the audience that it was just

another part of the show; hadn't it all happened on purpose? Weren't those blood special effects cool? How did they do that?

That is what I mean about keeping a cool head and having a circle of trust with your crew and cast. Catastrophes MAY happen. It is how you wage through them together, united, that will be remembered.

After first tech, running the whole show with all light and sound cues, the rest of tech should feel easy. Second tech or First Dress (depending how much time you have): add costumes. Second Dress: add Hair & Makeup. At Final Dress you may have a preview audience. Remember this is still a rehearsal. Be Ready.

## ACT V- Climax and Closing

### Opening Night

To use the cellophane metaphor: you are now the protector and keeper of a delicious sandwich. The director found the ingredients, tasted and perfected the construction of it, and now it is up to you to help serve the same delicious sandwich to each audience member that sees...your sandwich. You help keeps it fresh. You keep the show and actors' energy up. Monitor the drama on stage and off the stage to make the show run smoothly. Any changes affect the director's original vision; so you give notes only when that vision seems compromised. Hold the technical operations to the highest standard and make sure when buttons fall off costumes they get sewn back on, etc. Continue to make calls when anyone is tardy. And call the time increments to show go, starting at least an hour before, while actors and crew are prepping.

1:05 minutes to go time = 60 minutes to places

50 minutes to go time = 45 minutes to places

35 minutes to go time = 30 minutes to places

20 minutes to go time = 15 minutes to places

15 minutes to go time = 10 minutes to places

5 minutes to go time = PLACES!

(call times in between the ones listed above if you have a chance.)

You should make sure your cast knows to respond to you when you call a time for places. The correct response is to repeat the time you said and then, "Thank you." Make sure you get the correct time back in response. Also make sure you tell everyone, including house manager and box office people. Actors appreciate it when they hear each time call. If everyone has repeated it back to you then you won't run into any problems.

Tell actors to check their props before the house opens (usually 30 minutes before show time.) When you are at places the House Manager will close the doors. Take your place in the booth and begin your show on time! Of course you may have to hold for late audience members or actors that have one more piece of hair to curl. Rush them with care and don't put up with disrespect. You might wonder if it would be easier to run the show if you were backstage yourself. In *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> St.* I was in the stage right wing because I was also the sound operator and the CD player for the theatre could not be moved. I would have liked to have removed myself from the actors' pathway and let another crewmember run sound for me, but I lacked the manpower. Meet all situations with dignity and calmness. That is your job.

If you feel that you are doing too much, don't get frustrated. Get help! Ask. It's easier than you might think. By opening night you should have all the help you need, performing the tasks you've delegated like clockwork. You are a rock, the keystone, mama, brothah, sistah friend to all, peacemaker, sandwich keeper, and occasionally the firm hand of Machiavelli coming down hard to get the work done. Good luck! But mostly have fun working on one of the most rewarding team efforts in existence: the art of storytelling on the stage.

## Appendix

If these forms are not compatible with how your mind works then please use their example to design your own. Designers may have their own forms they like to use. Scene Change Lists are specific to each show, and is therefore not included here.

Rehearsal Report	22
Prop List	23
Scenery/Furniture List	24
Costume List	25
Supply List	26

Example:

### WORKING PROPS LIST

PROPs	BUILD	BORROW	BUY	DONE
3 name plates+ 1 tag			irene	X
whip		Irene		X
4clipboards and pencils		Barnstormer		X
2 metal clipboards				X
cane-wood shaft/marble top				X
Susan's pics of house	Mikayla			X
easle		Michele		X
pointer				strike
poster of Cocacola Santa	Madeline			X
Newspapers (3)			Wall Street	X
Newboy satchels (2)				strike
feed bucket		Madeline		X
Sign"Feeding Reindeer"	X			X
basket of candy canes			X	X
5 telephones		Barnstormer		X
Sawyer's questionnaire	Miles			X
Office materials?		Madeline		X
Microphone		Irene		X
jingle bells				X
non-jingle bells				strike
Camera		Don		X
Brooche		Mad/Michele		X
Band Aide?				_____
Catalogue?		Madeline		X
Briefcase Mr. Mara		Barnstormer		X
Commitment Papers	Madeline			X
Pen		Madeline		X
Gavel		Barnstormer		X
World Almanac		Library/Wayd		X
Briefcase Fred		Barnstormer		X
Legal Pad/Pen		Madeline		X
cigar				strike
subpoena				strike
Susan's Letter	X			X
Mail bags (many)		Bobbi		X
Filling	X			X
Letters on top	Cast			X
6 sunglasses 4 Santas		Santas		_____
Ten Dollar Bill		Barnstormer		X
Large Present	X			X
Bible		Bobbi		X

# REHEARSAL REPORT

PRODUCTION:

**Location:**

**Day:**

**Stage Manager:**

**Date:**

<b>Rehearsal start:</b>	<b>Break:</b>	<b>Costumes:</b>
<b>Rehearsal start:</b>	<b>Break:</b>	
<b>Rehearsal start :</b>	<b>End:</b>	
<b>Total Rehearsal Time:</b> <b>Attendance:</b>		
<b>Rehearsal Notes:</b>	<b>Lights:</b>	
	<b>Properties:</b>	
	<b>Scenery:</b>	
<b>Schedule:</b>	<b>Sound:</b>	

PROP	BUILD	BORROW	BUY	DONE
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**Miscellaneous:**









Cell Phone  
Scissors  
Tape: duct, masking, gift wrap, packing, gaffer, spike, & glow tapes (search for the latter three online)  
Glue  
Three Hole Punch  
MANY Pencils  
Paper  
Stapler  
Headsets  
Safety pins  
Bobbie Pins  
Deodorant  
Anything else you can think of that might help you.

There are also many other guidebooks and textbooks available online or in bookstores about the job of a stage manager. There are also extensive and free glossaries of theatrical terms online, which you might find useful as a supplement to this text.