

# The 10 Commandments of Stage Management

A few holy 'musts' for superlative stage management

If you're looking to become a stage manager, you're in for a terrific ride! The stage manager is often described as being the glue of any production, the person who always knows what's going on, where it's happening, and how things are actually progressing.

A great stage manager is typically a calm, professional, and organized person with a good base knowledge of stagecraft, and an ability to courteously manage others. To help you in honing your skills and approaches for that next upcoming production, following is a brief list of "10 Commandments" for great stage management:

## 1. Thou Shalt Be Prepared.

Begin your preparations before your very first production meeting, jotting notes on what you'll need, as well as on preliminary scheduling or contacts. As some productions are always more challenging than others, it never hurts to do a little research on Google, as well, to get a feel for any common hurdles ahead. And once the rehearsal period begins, make sure you always have a toolbox of essentials with you, including everything from administrative stuff (pencils, chalk, tape, highlighters), to tools (flashlights, penlights, batteries of all kinds, and more), first aid basics, emergency sewing supplies (especially buttons and snaps), and more.

## 2. Know Thy Contacts.

*Always* carry your production contact info with you on any meetings, rehearsals, performances, and more. Luckily, today's cell phones and gadgets make this easy, because it's vital. A little administrative planning can be a godsend when an emergency pops up, so be sure to write, print, and copy call lists and rehearsal schedules as soon as they're set. Most importantly, always ensure that you have contact information for *everyone* in the production, from the director and assistant(s) and other personnel, cast and crew, to the venue managers or janitorial staff for your rehearsal (and performance) spaces.

## 3. Taketh Good Notes, and Giveth Good Notes...

In the life of the stage manager, especially during the rehearsal process? There are *never* too many notes. So listen closely at each and every meeting, taking extensive notes on blocking, lighting and tech cues as they occur, as well as any other noteworthy aspects. Write in block capitals, clearly, and in pencil until the show is set. And when giving notes to actors after performances, be tactful and professional. Sometimes you'll have to keep an eye on morale, so if an actor, for instance, flubbed six lines tonight, but four of them were minor omissions or rephrases? Save it for another note, or talk to the actor privately, later. Try to consciously point out something positive when giving multiple notes, as well, as a sweetener.

#### **4. Know Thy Blocking Language and Abbreviations.**

To take good notes, you'll need a working knowledge of stage terms and especially blocking language. For instance, if Chris is going to cross to upstage right during a monologue, you'd ideally write it in simplified form, like this: C X USR next to that action in the script. This language will enable you to write notes fast, and to be able to accurately recreate even complex stage movement back to the director or players as needed.

#### **5. Go Forth and Make it Fun.**

Stage managers are often the caregivers of the production, keeping up morale, making sure everyone's happy, on time, and doing their best. So cultivate an enjoyable work atmosphere. Be attentive to breaks, noting the times in your logs, and bring candy and veggies to rehearsals for cast and crew to snack on (get reimbursement if you can--it's a common and legitimate expense). When it comes time to open, give out small gifts or heartfelt well-wishes in personal, handwritten cards on opening night. Make sure you include EVERYONE who has helped to bring the production to life--not just cast and crew, but any other volunteers, venue support or janitorial staff, and others. All these little things mean a lot in the crazy world of the theatre.

#### **6. Thou Shalt Be Accountable.**

The buck stops with you. So arrive first. And leave last. The stage manager's job is as gruelling as it is rewarding. Being ever-present is an important part of the work.

#### **7. Thou Shalt Stay Classy.**

This doesn't mean you have to abandon the awesome casual feel of working in the theatre. It just means you need to be attentive to how you present yourself. So, make an effort to be presentable and professional, and even when casual, try to stay classy, with no low cleavage or exposed midriffs in the girls, or shirtlessness for you guys, etc.

#### **8. Be Thou Courteous.**

As the stage manager, people will look to you for cues on how to behave, and for what's acceptable during the production. So, try to reign in your language, and avoid profanity and ANY questionable slurs or references, even in jest, among friends, etc. Be professional and courteous always. And during a tedious rehearsal or difficult production, a simple smile or encouraging word from you can accomplish great things, so make sure you're always cheerful, accessible, and approachable.

Pay special attention to your crew, techs, volunteers, and janitorial help. Make sure to point out jobs well done, and thank them for their contributions regularly. We all want our hard work noticed and acknowledged.

## **9. Thou Shalt Not Gossip!**

This is a tricky one, just because the theatre's a fun place, and it's one in which we all tend to make friends and form relationships. But, in a nutshell, while it's great for you to make friends with actors and crew during the process of mounting your production, make sure that you nevertheless maintain a certain amount of slight but professional distance. Try to avoid too much carousing with the actors, and absolutely *never* badmouth the director in front of cast or crew, even casually or after hours. You should always put yourself forth as a united front with the director.

## **10. Know Thy Tech!**

Ideally, all stage managers should know how to run the lightboard, sound effects equipment, and spot(s). If you don't know? Learn. It's invaluable knowledge for anyone in the theatre. While not every stage manager can run a lightboard, you never know what will happen, and it's always good to have good working knowledge of your lighting and sound equipment. At best, it will enable you to manage those crew members more effectively, and at worst, you'll be able to step in, in case of emergency. Also acclimate yourself to common headset workarounds, errors or snafus.

[http://performingarts.about.com/od/Stage\\_management\\_tips/tp/The-10-Commandments-Of-Stage-Management.htm](http://performingarts.about.com/od/Stage_management_tips/tp/The-10-Commandments-Of-Stage-Management.htm)