

# ROLE OF THE STAGE MANAGER IN EDUCATIONAL THEATRE

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## **Abstract**

In Educational Theatre, majority of students usually opt for the post of Stage Manager. Many believe that it is the easiest job where one is not inconvenienced by anything like brain racking or otherwise. Based on this notion the student who gets the position of the Stage Manager in the course of time discovers to his chagrin what he never bargained for. Where the play is being directed by a lecturer - he is forced to start teaching the so-called stage manager his roles. This often leads to frustration for both the director and the stage manager who erroneously does not know the enormous function and responsibility of the stage manager. This paper therefore is meant to give insight into the functions of the stage manager and responsibilities, in the theatre as well as the functions and challenges of stage management.

## **Introduction**

Management has always been applied in all ramifications of life-house management, school management, office management, farm management, educational management, and in traditional settings-traditional management and Theatre Management, etc. Though approaches may vary, from organization to organization any organization that wishes to attain success must take into account , effective and efficient management procedure. The success of any life endeavour rests on the management capability of the team. Management is thus a team work. The sum total of it all is that any group with a good management team is on the right pedestal to success. Management involves managing human beings as well as the other factors of production, infrastructures, money, land, labour etc.

The need for management has been recognized by all societies down the ages. As could be seen from history, the concept of management has existed since at least before the time of Plato. All societies – traditional societies inclusive have used and still use the principle of management though in varying form and degree. A work of this nature will be incomplete if we fail to take a cursory look at the term management.

## **Management**

Management could be defined as the process of planning, organizing, directing and controlling the activities of an enterprise to achieve its objective. Musselman et al 1977. see management as a process of getting things done through other people. According to Akani (1987:3);

*Management is concerned with man's contact with fellow human beings and with his behaviour under a wide range of pressures and influences ... a professional discipline that assembles and uses resources to accomplish objectives.*

In the course of this study, we shall be concerned with stage management and the role of the stage manager in a production. Suffice it to say that the nature and role of stage management and the role of the stage manager do not make it very possible to arrive at a given definition of the term stage management. So many questions arise in trying to examine the term-as many writers, have made us believe. Is the stage manager the director off stage? Is he the house keeper, on stage, off stage and the general house? Also, to the ignorance what has management got to do with the theatre talk less of stage management.

In the natural world of ours, man produces either or both of two things – goods and services. Whereas some produce physical goods like buildings, bread, roads, cloths etc others produce services for instance-medical, legal, entertainment, etc. The practice of theatre falls under entertainment. In all, management involves the coordination and the use of man and other resources as we earlier stated. On this note, one would agree that theatre as human venture utilizes management principle like any other human endeavour or discipline especially.

Experience has shown that the work of all the different departments or crew in the theatre should grow with the process of a play performance-according to Derek Bowskill 1979 for proper coordination and good result from the day one-after the auditioning and casting.

According to Drucker (1982:6)

*All institutions have in common the management function, the management task and the management work. All require management and in all management is the effective, the active organ. Management is the specific organ of the modern institutions. It is the organ on the performance of which the performance and the survival of the institution depend.*

### **The Stage Manager**

In discussing the roles of the stage manager the challenges of stage management would be made manifest. But suffice it to state that a lot is apportioned to the position of the stage manager that one tends to see him as a super human creature. Indeed he has to be if success is the target of the team. He is said to be responsible to the artistic director, responsible for rehearsal when the director is not available, takes over the performance from the director after the dress and technical rehearsal and he is even responsible for the striking of the set after performance. He monitors what goes on stage and off stage during performance and even after the show and relates with the public through the press.

In any Theatre production the role of the stage manager falls under the followings headings:

- (a) The stage manager's relationship with the director
- (b) The stage manager's relationship with the actors both at rehearsals and out of rehearsals.
- (c) The stage manager's relationship with the other crew members or other departments.
- (d) The stage manager's relationship with people over whom he has no managerial controls-the public.

### **Relationship with the Director**

For any production to attain a success there must be a good working relationship between the stage manager and the Artistic Director. The stage manager must all the time consult with the Artistic Director. He is accountable to the director throughout the period of preparation (rehearsals) to the technical performance night. He makes prior arrangement for rehearsal venues, making sure that the stage is set for rehearsal, before the arrival of the director, the cast and crew members. The general condition of the house during rehearsals is under his control. It is his responsibility to make available all the actors the director needs to work with. In this wise he must be accountable to the director of the where about of any actor at any point in time during rehearsals.

As the director plots his blockings, the stage manager takes down all the blockings in his rough note which he eventually transfers into his main notebook as soon as the blocking is perfected by the director (the director may change any blocking at any point). Usually all the directions should be noted in his short hand that is, in symbols with full note of what the signs stand for at the foot of the note or overleaf. The stage manager should be very vast in all stage craft-knowing all the stage positions e.g down stage left (DSL) Up stage right, (USR) or centre stage right (CSR) etc so as to record down the crossings by the actors as stipulated by the director, e.g Actor "A" crosses to centre right (CR) while actor "B" moves to take actor "A"s former position. When the director is not present, the stage manager handles the rehearsal, though he must not on any account block the part that has not been done by the director. On no account should he change what the director has done earlier. According to R.A. Adedokun 2001:6 where there is no Assistant Director, "it is the responsibility of the stage manager to assist the director in all aspects of his work as the director may instruct him".

Being responsible for rehearsal venue it is the stage manager's responsibility to arrive at the rehearsal venue to see that it is made suitable and ready for the day's job. At rehearsals the stage manager takes roll calls before rehearsal and after rehearsal so as to curtail absenteeism and indiscipline as some time some actors exhibit unruly behaviour. No member leaves the room without permission from the stage manager. The attendance register must be intact at every point in time. He keeps a register containing the names and these days of cell mobile phone, he keeps the phone numbers and addresses of the actors and the crew members. The stage manager must keep and

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maintain a production file. Above all he must take note of how long each scene lasts, so as to get the appropriate timing of the play. As the rehearsal progresses, with the aid of the stop watch, he should be able to state the estimate of the time the play would take. He must also ensure that other crew members or departments keep their production files. Another important role-whereas each crew or department keeps accurate record of the responsibility under its jurisdiction, the stage manager must make sure this is carried out to the later. The stage manager must submit the whole files at the opening night to the department. i.e in the case of Educational Theatre.

### **Responsibility to the Actors**

The stage manager is in charge of the general house and being responsible to the director, he must present the actors for rehearsals and productions. He therefore owes it as a duty of knowing the where about of each of the actors and the other crew members. The well-being of all the crews is in the hand of the stage manager.

He is in a position to deal with all problems that might affect any of the actors during the period they are working on the play. The nature of the stage manager's job makes it mandatory on him that he should be very humane in his approach at tackling the actors numerous problems. In other words the stage manager must have some element of psychology so as to be able to perform his duty and functions affectively. He must always have at the back of his mind the nature and fluidity of theatre environment as well as ever changing nature of man. He must understand that the success of any management strategy depends highly on the skill with which the manager is able to manage the human beings under his care. His knowledge of the complex nature of man is very crucial in his role. He must be quick and shrewed at handling issues. He must have insight of his job and understand that his success as a stage manager depends on how well he responds to the pressure of his job. The pressure of work must never weigh him down. As much as he understands the complexity and nature of man, in his approach to the actor's problems he must not sacrifice discipline on any ground. It is his duty to respond to the actor's problems as much as humanly possible and be fair to every person: the rule of the game being "fair is fair". He must see to it that the actors maintain their cues. To keep the situation at ease, calm and under control, he must print out the actors cues which should be placed at strategic positions where it would be readily seen by each person during rehearsals and performance. He must try and relate very well with each actor in their role playing (one on one relationship).

### **Relationship with the Other Members of the Crew**

If there is proper definition of roles and the principle of division of labour is applied to the later, the work of the stage manager would (in his relationship with the members of the crew) be made lighter. This is essential so he (stage manager) could deal directly with the leader of each crew rather than every member of the team. The stage manager makes sure that all the elements of stage management – set, lighting, properties, costume, music and sound, blockings, etc grow with the production from the first rehearsal. The stage manager must know the script thoroughly so as to be helpful to the actors and the crew. The sketches and models needed for the production must be available to all from the onset of the production. There is this problem often created in the theatre that is waiting for the last minute action which often throws people into pressure and panic. If ideas and all factors are made ready early enough as the job progresses every member of the crew would work with, and at ease. It thus becomes imperative that things be done at the proper time. This will aid and prompt the actors/ actresses to master their role, while the crew also master theirs. The need for the provision of proper costume, set, lighting, music, sound, prompt cue for all, that is actors and crew would aid the interpretation of the play. This would in turn translate into rich reward for the groups' out-put: a rich theatrical whole.

Often we run into problems because of our inability to delineate the role of each member of the crew and the director. We make the mistake of thinking that it is the director who should be backing orders to everyone during rehearsals. If the stage manager knows his job for instance a situation where the director gives permission to the different crew or cast during rehearsal would be minimized as it distracts the director from concentrating on his job.

To achieve the objective of the theatre organization while creating opportunities for all the crew and actors, the stage manager and his crew need the spirit of team work. There must be a-give-and-take posture in its highest level. The marriage between the crew, set, property, stage,

lighting, costume, house management, publicity and public relations aspect must be maintained and protected by the stage manager.

### **Relationship with the Public**

He owes the public a nice and satisfying performance. He therefore must ensure that the responsibility of the group to the audience is maintained. In all, most of his responsibility to the public is through his publicity team though after performance he may have the opportunity to relate with the press on interview. Even during and after performance he ensures the security and properties of his audience and maintenance of order during performance.

Even though the artistic possibility and opportunities are created by the director, in essence it is the stage manager who creates the practical condition for the realization and achievement of the goals of the director. According to Bowskill (1995:295).

*The Director may devise artistic possibilities and opportunities but he will get nowhere without a stage manager who can efficiently create the practical conditions for their realization.*

### **Conclusion**

Foresightness, shrewdness and astuteness being essential ingredients in management, the stage manager must possess all these qualities. His judicious handling of the issues that affect his duties would to a large extent depend on his thorough training in human management as well as his mastering of the art of the theatre. He must know the enormous responsibility attached to his job. He must play fair in his job.

Above all he must be physically fit and alert to be able to perform his job. Efficiency and effectiveness must be his watch word.

### **Recommendation**

Bearing in mind the enormous duty of the stage manager auditioning for the role is very important. In short his auditioning should be more rigorous than that of the cast. In addition apart from taking the course (theatre management is only done in year one) students of theatre arts should be subjected to take elective courses in business management department so as to be grounded in management.

The topic in theatre management should have such subheadings as theatre management, stage management, business management, etc.

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