

Theatre People: Stage Manager

A stage manager is a leader of people who works with the director, actors, designers, and production staff to “facilitate a process where creativity can flourish”.

Winston Morgan, in his book “Stage Managing the Arts in Canada” describes stage management this way: *Stage Management is an art form. It is the art of working with people. It is the art of gathering and disseminating accurate and timely information. It is the art of interpreting ideas. It is about people, paper, and perception.*

A stage manager’s work can be divided into three parts: rehearsal, technical rehearsals, and performance. During rehearsals the stage manager is responsible for organizing the rehearsal process, ensuring communication flows back and forth between rehearsal and the production departments, and record keeping for the show. During technical rehearsals, the stage manager integrates the technical elements with the work that has been done by the director and actors in rehearsal. In the same way a Maestro conducts an orchestra, the stage manager ‘conducts’ the technical elements of a show by calling (or initiating) all technical cues. After opening the stage manager is responsible for calling the show, maintaining the artistic integrity of the production, and ensuring the health and safety of everyone working on the show.

Tasks and activities in a typical day

One of the exciting parts about being a stage manager is that every show is a new experience - no show is the same and no day is the same for a stage manager. Here are some typical tasks during the rehearsal process:

- Prepare the space for rehearsal – set out all the set, props, and wardrobe pieces needed for rehearsal.
- Record blocking, which is the entrance, exit, and movement of the actors on stage.
- Create a schedule for the day’s work and keep everyone on task.
- Take notes from rehearsal (including requests for other departments) and share that information at the end of the day.
- Create paperwork that clearly communicated information from the rehearsal hall to production staff.
- Schedule fittings or activities outside of rehearsal (interviews, dialect sessions, meetings).
- Prompt – watch the script closely and if an actor asks, feed them the next line.
- Attend production meetings with the creative team and production staff.
- Check in with production departments to make sure they have all the information they need.
- Anticipate and address safety concerns.

¹ Laurie Kinckman – The Stage Manager’s Toolkit

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10 skills that a Stage Manager uses:

- Organization
- Leadership
- Communication
- Time management
- Multi-tasking
- Project management
- Scheduling
- Creativity
- People skills
- Problem solving



View from the stage manager's desk

Building Abilities

There are probably lots of things you are already doing, and things you can start to do, that will serve you in a career in stage management. Some of these are:

- Get comfortable using word processing programs like Microsoft Office - Word and Excel.
- Start thinking like a stage manager when you read a play - make lists of the set, props, wardrobe items that you would need if you were rehearsing the play.
- Watch as much theatre (in person, or online) as you can. There is a lot of access to free filmed theatre out in the world right now - check out the Stratford Festival on CBC Gem or your local library for examples of filmed theatre.
- Make 'To Do' lists for your weekly tasks.
- Track your schedule and tasks in a calendar.
- Take a picture of a room in your house and make a list of where everything is placed. Move things around and the next day, try to put everything back where it was based on your list.
- Work on your ability to multi-task. Listen to music while you do something physical and then have a conversation with someone. Notice where your focus goes and what you might have missed.