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Stage Management

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### Autobiographical Management Essay

Management skills are important in every facet of life. Everyone manages something to some degree, whether you manage a staff of 150 people or you're just managing to make yourself breakfast in the morning. To me, being a good manager means you are a good communicator, motivator, and problem solver. Above all, it means that you don't crack under pressure. No matter who you are, life is going to toss you some curveballs, and how you manage them determines everything.

The worst day of my life began much like any other. I woke up at a normal time, I had a normal breakfast, and the traffic on my way to work was just like it was any other day. On the worst day of my life, I happened to be working in a movie theatre, so I punched in and went to the box office. Everything was just fine, and I even started to think I might get out early and have a nice, calm day. That hope was crushed about 2 hours into my shift when the fire alarm went off.

Our manager had never gone over fire safety with any of the staff, so no one knew what the exact procedure was. We were confused, the customers were confused, and there was so much noise. When the fire alarm went off, no one could find the general manager. I was close to the exit, so, not knowing what else to do, I left the building and waited in the parking lot. I managed to find a couple other employees who were just as baffled as I was.

We were waiting for a manager and the rest of the staff to come out when people started approaching us. Some customers wanted to know if there was actually a fire, how they could get a refund, if the movie was going to continue to play once the fire department cleared the building, etc. None of us had any of the answers, and our manager was nowhere to be found. Customers started getting extremely rude with us (way too rude for what I was

getting paid), and when the fire department came, they were livid at how poorly the evacuation of the building was handled.

My manager was in the projection booth not really paying attention to anything when the fire alarm went off. It turned out that there was no fire, just a kid playing a prank, but the situation was still an absolute catastrophe due to the lack of management. There was no preparation, no communication, and definitely no problem solving involved in that scenario. It turns out that in all the chaos, someone had stolen money out of one of the cash registers, there were roughly 500 dissatisfied customers who wanted a refund which no one they were speaking to had the authority to do, and my manager ended up having to answer to the higher ups when customers and employees alike started calling corporate to vent about the insanity of that day. A situation involving fire alarms and the disturbance of hundreds of people's entertainment is far from ideal, but there are definitely excellent ways to manage bad situations.

A few years after the worst day of my life, I was performing as Olivia in Twelfth Night. It had been a very fun, very professional show, and I was beyond excited for people to see it. That said, preview started off *horribly*, mostly due to the actors not being attentive. Entrances were missed, lines were dropped, part of a wall fell down, and two props were broken, and that was all before intermission. The cast was disjointed, and everyone was upset with how our show was going. Some actors were getting very snippy with each other and blaming each other for the unfortunate way the show was progressing.

During our intermission, the stage manager came to talk to everyone individually to make sure that the second act went smoother. She was able to facilitate communication between everyone in a calm, peaceful manner to get everyone focused and working towards the same goal. It was absolutely incredible. During the second act, every single line was said perfectly, our energy was up, and the entire show was better than we had ever done it. Had our stage manager not intervened and just let us sit in all the awfulness of the first act, I can only imagine that an awful night would have gotten worse.

That night, the stage manager typed up her rehearsal report and sent it out. It was visually apparent what an absolute whirlwind the first act was, and the fact that we got our

act together in the second act was clearly celebrated. She single handedly got the cast to communicate again, which changed the energy of the show. That stage manager went above and beyond to make sure everyone (both onstage and off) could have a good show and be well represented.

Ironically enough, many Shakespearean plays hinge on miscommunication, which is what a stage manager must work their hardest to avoid. When she talked to us and later sent us her report, she literally got everyone on the same page and working together again. She recognized that there was a problem and she took the proper steps to fix it, which is the mark of a true leader. Despite how poorly the first act ran, that experience was invaluable to me. I was able to see a stage manager step up to the plate and take control in the best of ways.

In my experience, the single most important quality of a fantastic manager is the ability to communicate with people. When you are clear with people, your expectations are set from the beginning. I interviewed Keyshaan Castle about his experience being a leader and a manager as an RA in the freshman dorms, and his experience echoed mine in many ways. In particular, he stressed the importance of clear and concise communication. When you don't communicate your expectations to people from the beginning, confusion ensues. He told me that he set up appointments for his residents to check out, but he only listed days instead of dates. This led to a miscommunication where a resident assumed they would be able to check out a week after school ended. This one small miscommunication ended up causing problems for the resident, the resident's parents, the head of student life, and for Keyshaan too.

Another quality I think is invaluable is the ability to unite people. When you are able to get a group of people focused and working to the same goal, the results can be magical. Theatre is all about people coming together to contribute to something that's bigger than themselves, which is why a stage manager is so vital. The clear communication of goals amongst the talent, technical crew, and business side of the theatre keeps everyone working; it's what makes our work worth doing.