

Illinois Theatre Association

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eFOLLOWSPOT October, 2013

Dear Friends of the ITA,



On September 21, 2013, the ITA celebrated its 40th Annual Convention, *Play Right! Rediscovering the Playful Side of Chicago*. Theatre artists and educators from throughout the state boarded a luxury bus in Skokie, sipped on mimosas, and embarked on a delightful journey into the city - taking park in a pub-style crawl of some of Chicago's top theatre venues: Black Ensemble Theatre, Broadway Costumes, DePaul University School of Theatre's brand new facility, and Emerald City's Little Theatre.

A major highlight of the day included an inspiring "Playwrights Panel" led by ITA Member Stacy Deemar, featuring the nation's leading playwrights: David Barr III, Lydia Diamond, Andrew Hinderaker, Ron Hirsens, and Elaine Romero.

An annual tradition, the ITA also took time to honor its 2013 Awards of Excellence and Honor Recipients, say thank you to departing Board Members, and congratulate its newest members of the Board!

For those wanting to "play" into the evening, a delightful performance of *4,000 Miles* was experienced at Northlight Theatre.

As the ITA moves into its 40th season, it is important to recognize those key traits that have played a significant role in helping us reach this very impressive milestone: commitment, excellence, honor, leadership, and planning. As a token of appreciation, I was pleased to present convention participants with the following recognition pins:

- ITA Logo - given to all current members of the ITA, this pin also celebrates the spirit of volunteerism within the Association.
- Commitment - given to all Lifetime Members, and any individual/organizational members who have been a member of the ITA for more than fifteen years.
- Excellence - given to all past recipients of ITA's Award of Excellence.
- Honor - given to all past recipients of ITA's Award of Honor.
- Leadership - given to all past members of ITA's Board of Directors AND Executive Directors of the Illinois High School Theatre Festival.



Robert Schramm (Right) leads participants on a fabulous tour of Broadway Costumes!

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Illinois Theatre Association

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Upcoming ITA Events

January 9-11, 2014
Illinois High School Theatre Festival

- Planning - given to all those who have served on a Planning Committee for any ITA event.

It is my hope that everyone will proudly wear these pins to each and every ITA event! If you were unable to participate this year's Convention, please attend a future ITA event and claim your pin. For those wanting pins mailed to them, contact me at the office. I am happy to send recognition your way (there may be a minimal charge for this).

Thank you ALL for being a part of the ITA family. I look forward to seeing you soon.

Sincerely,

Aimee-Lynn Newlan
Executive Director

P.S. For photos, videos, and commentary from the Convention, please visit the [ITA's Convention Page on Facebook](#).

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ITA Announces 2013 Awards of Excellence Recipients

Each year the Illinois Theatre Association recognizes both individuals and organizations for their significant contributions of promoting quality theatre throughout the state of Illinois. Recipients are nominated by the Illinois theatre community, approved by ITA's divisional representatives, and accepted by ITA's Board of Directors. If you'd like to nominate a deserving individual or organization for recognition in 2014, please [fill out a nomination form](#).



ITA Member Timothy Ortmann presents ITA Member Jerry Proffitt with the Anne Thurman Mentorship Award

2013 Excellence in College/University Theatre
Rock Valley College Starlight and Studio Theatre

2013 Excellence in Creative Drama
Nancy Alban

2013 Excellence in Community Theatre
Floyd A. May

2013 Excellence in Professional Theatre
UIC School of Theatre and Music at Chicago

2013 Excellence in Secondary School Theatre
Cyndee Brown

2013 Excellence in Theatre for Young Audiences
The Penguin Project

Anne Thurman Mentorship Award

Explore the Extraordinary

Jerry Proffit

February 8-9, 2014
Annual Statewide Non-Equity Professional Auditions

2013 Award of Honor to a Non-ITA Member

Joyce Piven

2013 Award of Honor to an ITA Member

Betsy Quinn

Other Events of Interest

November 1-2,16, 2013
Chicago Spotlight, Inc.
Theatrical Skills Workshops

November 9, 2013
USITT Midwest Event
"A Day Onstage and Offstage"

Featured Performance

GreenMan Theatre Troupe
Presents

LUCKY STIFF

11/1-3, 8-10, 15-17, 22-24
Fri & Sat at 7:30pm
Sun at 2:00pm

232 S. York St.
Elmhurst, IL 60126

\$16-\$18
ITA Members receive a \$2 discount online orders only (enter promo code ITA)

630-464-2646
www.greenmantheatre.org
gmttboxoffice@gmail.com

Want your performance to be featured here?
Be sure to list your performance on the ITA Performance Calendar!



The ITA is a network of dedicated theatre artists and educators advocating quality theatre throughout Illinois. Please join us!

123 Mill Pond Dr.

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- President - Kristen Mackie
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Tamara Sibley & Madrid St. Angelo
- Secondary School Theatre**
Karen Hall & Jonathan Meier
- Theatre for Young Audiences**
Cynthia Bringer
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Abra Chusid

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Character Cat Walk

By Ioana Ligdas
ITA Creative Drama Division Representative

This is a fantastic character exercise to focus on physical and character traits. Students flesh out physical traits and character traits once they have developed characters from a play or characters they create. I then have them choose their top physical trait and top character trait that they want to focus on the most (in our case, they were doing scenes, so the most prominent physical and character trait in the scene).

I have students warm up and then we put on some funky music and create a "cat walk" where students are on either side of an area. In small groups, they come down the cat walk. First, they just focus on their physical trait and try it a few different ways. Then, they just focus on their character trait. After this, they put the two together and try the walk. To add fun and variety, I have them try their walks in slow-motion, fast-motion or backwards. The students love the interaction and putting the "cat walk" idea to popular music. If there is extra time, have students who feel brave enough show off their

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walk for the class and see if other students can guess their traits. You can extend this activity by adding props, as well. This is a fun and non-threatening way to explore characters, especially for middle/high school students.

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Appealing to My Senses

By Stacy Deemar

ITA Creative Drama Division Representative

I've always been one of those people who walks into a bakery and has a craving to order one of everything behind the glass case. The aroma in these types of establishments gets the better of me any time I pay a visit. The sight and smell of desserts makes my mouth water, my heart race, and my appetite is aroused, regardless if I am hungry. Those sweet sugary scents of cookies, cakes, and brownies are heavenly. In fact, I am salivating right now just thinking about those decadent desserts while I cry about the calories.

Desserts are not the only type of food that I find intriguing. The truth is I am a foodie. I find great joy in eating superb food as well as cooking it. Food is a very sensory experience that has a profound effect on me. The color, texture, weight, design, scent, taste, and even the sounds it makes while I cook, prepare or eat it, stimulates me. I admit it. I have a love affair with food and there are rare occasions when I find food abhorrent.



My admiration for food extends to French restaurants. The pronounced aroma of sautéed onions is a signature in French cuisine that arouses my appetite. I was first introduced to sautéing onions in butter while watching Julia Child on television as a small child. I was mesmerized by how Ms. Child's prepared her famed French cuisine. Her fondness for food, joyous distinct voice and desire to show viewers how to cook was very engaging. Her reverence for French cooking was contagious. I had never witnessed anyone as happy as Ms. Child cooking.

And as much as I am obsessed with food, I am addicted to first-rate theatre. So when I found myself last week in a theatre where they were actually sautéing onions in butter on the stage, I was in ecstasy. How could two of the greatest aspects of life convene so beautifully in one moment? You are probably wondering where you can experience this euphoria too. As long as you promise to spread the word with your friends and relatives, I will share with you a quality show that should not be missed: *To Master the Art* by William Brown and Doug Frew at the [Broadway Playhouse in Chicago](#).

I know. I know. You already saw *Julie & Julia* and you know everything you want to know about Julia Child. You are so knowledgeable about how Ms. Child started cooking French cuisine and her arduous journey in publishing her cookbook *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, that you have memorized how to make boeuf bourguignon in your sleep.

Julie & Julia and *To Master the Art* cover many of the same aspects of Ms. Child's life. But what is truly remarkable about watching the play, is that producer made a conscious artistic choice to appeal to the viewers' sense of smell. This is a rare occurrence in a live theatrical production. And when I smelled those onions sautéing in butter in the theatre, I felt like I was sitting in a French restaurant.



After the show, I spoke with the producer, Brian Loevner. I complimented him on the sautéed onions in butter scent that filled the entire theatre. Mr. Loevner explained to me that it took him approximately two weeks to master the art of filling

the theatre with the sautéed onion aroma. Two hours before the show, stagehands sauté the onions in butter and fans are strategically placed to push the aroma into the theatre when the actor on the stage sautés onions.

The only other time I have been exposed to a fragrance in a theatre was at the Phelps Auditorium at the [Shedd Aquarium](#), the only theatre in Chicago that is designed to house the 4-D experience. I took my twin boys to see *Dora and Diego 4-D Adventure*.

The 4-D experience is unique. Not only is the movie shot in a three-dimensionally medium that requires special glasses to see this effect, but the seats are synchronized to move along with mist and scents that are released into the theatre. While we were traveling through the rainforest in *Dora and Diego 4-D Adventure*, the scent of bananas and mist swirled around us. My family and I loved the experience because we were able to use our sense of sight, hearing, smell and touch. Hopefully, in the near future, 4-D films will evolve into 5-D, and food will be incorporated into the experience so viewers can use their sense of taste.

You don't have to be a foodie, be obsessed with French cuisine, or have a great admiration for food to enjoy utilizing your sense of smell in the theatre. It is a rare occurrence when pleasant scents and fabulous theatre are assembled. When the opportunity presents itself, take advantage of the experience. I hope you have a splendid time.

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Cooperation in the Drama Classroom:

By Karen Hall

ITA Secondary School Theatre Division Representative

A while back I wrote about using Cooperative Learning strategies during rehearsals. This month I thought I would share some Cooperative Learning strategies you can use during warm-ups or when you are playing theatre games. Using a few Informal CL strategies can get you just a little more bang for your buck in your group warm-ups and can serve as a formative assessment as well.

Pair/Share: Before playing a game (such as Zip, Zap, Zop or Let'sGo), have each student turn to a neighbor and set a goal before the game starts. It could be to take a bigger risk, always make eye contact or to keep their



concentration. This could take 30 seconds. Then it's time to play your game. At the half-way point, do a little side coaching to remind students to be actively working to achieve their goal. Once the game is over - have them turn back to their partner and discuss how well they achieved their goal. End with having them share their partner's successes with the entire class. This might add 2 - 3 minutes total to your game time, but the benefits of having kids set their own goals for learning and celebrating their successes will help in the long run. Also - debriefing at the end can serve as a formative assessment of where kids think they stand.

Student Observers: It's pretty chaotic to have 25-30 students practice character walks at once. I always find I am just playing traffic cop. What I've switched to is pairing students up and having one partner participate in the character walk and having their partner serve as their observer. Currently we are working on the concept that who we are informs how we move through time and space. So if I have the kids walk as if they are a politician or a dreamer, or as if they are terrified or as if they are cheerful - I will then have the observer tell their partner what they saw them do to show who they were. It lets every actor know they are accountable for their work - it's got to be clear enough for their partner to observe it and it gives student observers the opportunity to practice their observation and feedback skills. I do the same thing with exercises like the mirror game and trust walks - I give each pair an observer to either take notes or share some feedback at the end of the exercise. I will also ask a pair of performers to tell their observer their goal(s) before they start an exercise, so they can get some feedback from their observer at the end.

I find with these simple shifts - adding the positive interdependence and the individual accountability of a cooperative learning structure - I get much more bang for my buck, with very little effort. Also, I am meeting some of the goals of Danielson Domains 2 & 3: Danielson 2 c - Students take obvious pride in their work and initiate improvements in it, for example, by revising drafts on their own initiative, helping peers, and ensuring that high-quality work is displayed. Danielson 3c - All students are cognitively engaged in the activities and assignments in their explorations of content. Students initiate or adapt activities and projects to enhance understanding.

Take a moment sometime to try this out with your classes - hopefully you will find it as helpful as I do.

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Community Theatres Are the "Just Right" Places

By Dr. Joan E. Kole

ITA Community Theatre Division Representative

Several years ago I had the privilege of attending a conference about how a variety of arts can better serve populations with

disabilities. The conference was held at the Kennedy Center and facilitated by a number of experts. I thought I knew a lot about a variety of disabilities, but I learned that I had no idea for what certain icons stood. As a result of that conference, I am an advocate for how arts organizations serve and reach out to the disabled population; I am specifically interested in how theatres do so and why community theatres offer advantages that other kinds of theatre organizations can't. Read on.

In every one of our communities, some very special populations exist, and they are of all ages. Who are they? Here are just a few: visually impaired, hearing impaired, mobility impaired, learning disabled, those with Down's Syndrome or any of the many other physical, mental and emotional disabilities.



This is why our community theatres make our theatres "just right places." All of us have experienced what it feels like to become a member of a "theatre family." That is an aspect of community theatre that seems to be one of its greatest achievements. Theatre is often described as one of the most open, accepting, non-judgmental places to be, and any member of one of those "special populations" will know that instantly!

The question is, then, what can we do to encourage members of special populations to become involved with their local community theatre. Here are some suggestions:

1. Invite local Lions Club members to a special performance and ask that each member bring someone who is visually impaired as their guest.
2. Contact a local art museum curator or an art teacher in the area and arrange to have that person describe the set, costumes, lighting and sound effects of a performance to those with visual challenges.
3. If possible, install audio description systems for the visually impaired.
4. For hearing impaired, employ ASL interpreters or closed caption programs.
5. Encourage those with disabilities to serve as volunteers in various capacities.
6. Make sure that every aspect of your theatre facility is ADA compliant.
7. Last, and most importantly, ***display a variety of icons on all of your materials so that those with disabilities know that your theatre welcomes them.***

Other ideas? Form special focus groups composed of those with disabilities and ask them to tell you what you need to do to have them become involved. Offer classes in acting, in ushering, in any other variety of volunteer positions for those in these populations, and then make sure they are called on to help out.

Our community theatres' "theatre families" are just the "right place" to be.

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ATTENTION COMMUNITY THEATRE
ACTORS, DIRECTORS, DESIGNERS,
ADMINISTRATORS, VOLUNTEERS...

SAVE THE DATE!!!

October 24-26-2014
FIRE ON THE PRAIRIE
2014 Illinois Community Theatre Festival
 The Hoogland Center for the Arts
 Springfield, Illinois

Creating Connections

By Allan Kimball

ITA College/University Theatre Division Representative

We are hearing more and more about the Common Core. Many of us in the college world are thinking that it is just a "high school" thing, and on the surface that may be true. But the Common Core has numerous implications for those of us who teach at the community college and university levels as well.



First, and probably most obviously, is that it is impacting the students we will see in our classrooms in the future. Our Humanities Division is looking for ways to embrace the Common Core from our feeder schools and connect it to our

preparations for the next generation of students. Toward that end, local educators converged on Southeastern Illinois College's Harrisburg campus on September 20, 2013 for the Creating Connections faculty workshop. High school instructors in both math and English discussed strategies to meet national standards and shared ideas with their colleagues.

Brainstorming and "sharing" sessions provided a good glimpse into the classrooms of our local high schools. It also provided the high school instructors an opportunity to see what our expectations were for incoming freshmen and find some "connections" to make the transition from high school to the college classroom less intimidating for the student.

High schools represented at the event included Carmi, Carrier Mills, Galatia, Gallatin County, Hardin County, Harrisburg, Norris City-Omaha-Enfield, and Pope County. A trained team of local educators led the discussion, including Cathy Wall from Harrisburg High School, Kacy Tison from Pope County High School, Allan Kimball from Southeastern Illinois College, Jenny Billman from Southeastern Illinois College, and Jack Mummert from Southeastern Illinois College. The event was sponsored by the Illinois Community College Board, the Illinois State Board of Education, and the Illinois Board of Higher Education with the support of the Regional Office of Education.

Second (and probably the more significant for me as the "theatre person"), the event was an opportunity to network with Language Arts instructors about the other hat(s) that many of them wear...play director, musical director, Theatre Arts instructor. As college or university representatives, we are constantly in recruitment mode.

This Creating Connections workshop allowed an opportunity to get fellow directors on our campus and talk to them about how they are addressing the world of theatre in their schools. While theatre is not a major focus of The Common Core, it IS a common thread that we

are sharing between our feeder schools and the college stage. With so many schools cutting the arts from their curriculum, it is falling (at least



around our area) to the community colleges to help bridge or often fill the gap that is being left in the wake of budget cuts. It is essential that we make those connections with the local schools. If their programs fall, can ours be far behind? The life-blood of the community college theatre program is the talented young men and women being cultivated at our local high schools.

Reach out and create that CONNECTION between the local schools and your program. Together We Are All Stronger!

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Rocking Your Theatre Audition

(Advice from An Insider: PART ONE)

By Madrid St. Angelo

ITA Professional Theatre Division Representative

The following, while not "gospel," is advice for the serious actor, not the hobbyist, nor the faint of heart.

It is not enough to 'just' audition. As an actor, you must be firmly rooted in your knowledge of HOW TO AUDITION and you must be of the mind that you and only you are the answer to the Casting Director's



Dilemma. Killing (in a good way) or "ROCKING YOUR AUDITION," must be your goal each and every time you step out of the gate and venture into a world, business, career that literally is founded upon rejection. Trust me, in time rejection will give way to an incredible sense of accomplishment, a sense of being part of a thriving community and eventually the success and elation of landing work in the theatre!

Keep this in mind as you venture forth: competition is FIERCE. There are more of you (actors) than there are of them (casting directors). This alone is reason enough for you to tap into the mindset of being AWESOME at every single audition. And when I say AWESOME, I mean castable, right for the role, the guy/gal who gets the job!

You still with me? Don't get me wrong here. The above is not to say that every single audition is going to be AWESOME (although I believe every audition can and should be). Nor is the above meant to infer that every audition you "KILL" is going to land you the part. A hundred dynamics factor into casting a show, and casting directors have their hands full going over the gabbillion intricate details that they have to review and consider when casting. The bottom line is this: you are but one puzzle piece in a huge puzzle. But... none of that is anything you really need be concerned with. You are responsible for auditioning well, period.

Allow me to clarify further. Auditioning "well" is not the same thing as "doing your best." That won't cut it. Time and again I've heard an actor say, "Well, I did the best I could," to which I've replied, "So, you don't expect to get the part?"



When I say to you that casting directors expect your absolute best, that they expect you to **ROCK YOUR AUDITION**, I'm not BS'ing you. They want your best. Why? Because they want you to **WIN!** And they want to get their job done as quickly and efficiently

as possible so that they can move on to the next job.

I've compiled a partial list of absolute **MUSTS** and **CONSIDERATIONS** for you to contemplate as you prepare to knock 'em dead:

1. Are your **TOOLS** in order? Your headshot **MUST** be current, i.e., the picture has got to look like you. Not you 3-5 years ago, not a dolled up version of you... you, **TODAY**. Your headshot should be matte finish, not glossy. Glossies are **OUT**. Absolutely **NO** photo copies of your picture: no snapshots, no 5x7's, no black and whites. Headshots = current, color, matte, warm and friendly, approachable, cast-able.

2. Your resume needs to be firmly attached to your headshot, four staples, one in each corner; this is 'industry' standard. No glue, no computer/laser prints, no tape. **IMPORTANT:** your resume should be the exact same size as your headshot, not bigger, not smaller. Casting directors regard anything that is not the above as sloppy, unprofessional, and lazy, period.

3. Make sure your contact information is current. My personal suggestion is this: if you have an agent, use your agent's info as your contact info, not your personal information. Part of building a relationship with your agent is trusting him enough to handle your professional business. Your relationship with your agent is a partnership. Put him to work. Let him know that you are doing this, so that he can anticipate his phones ringing off the hook with inquiries about you, the actor he represents. If anything, this lets your agent know that you are out there hustling for work, that you trust him enough to handle your business; that you are participating in your own success and not sitting by idly waiting for your agent's phone call. Of course, your agent isn't going to make a dime off of you if you're booked for a non-equity gig... Okay, **MAYBE** they'll make a dime, but they're not going to make much. No one in Non-Equity makes much money. But trust me, it thrills an agent to no end to know that the talent they're representing is getting out there in front of industry decision makers. ****If your agent tells you that she does not have time to field calls from Non-Equity casting folk or non-money making ventures on your behalf, start thinking about getting a new agent.**

4. Never, ever be late or be a **NO SHOW** on an audition (if you do, be relentless with your apologies). The casting community is a whole helluva lot smaller than you think! Those of us working in casting talk about you, period. We keep lists of

actors who demonstrate unprofessional behavior. If you're repeatedly late, if you are a NO SHOW... you're gonna wind up on somebody's sh-- list. Period.

5. Regarding your APPEARANCE. Unless you have been instructed to dress the part of the character you're auditioning for, DON'T. And most definitely don't dress as any of the characters in the monologues that you're auditioning with. Casting directors and theatre directors have imaginations (if they don't, they're in the wrong business, in my opinion). Look sharp, look professional. Don't overdue it. Don't under do it either. In many, many ways, your audition is little more than an important meeting with someone who's hopefully going to give you a job. Wear professional, clean, neat looking clothes, clothes that scream: I'M A PROFESSIONAL. Clothes that allow you room to move, to breathe and vocally and physically deliver the goods. No men, you do not need to wear a suit. Nice slacks and a button down will do. NO FLIP FLOPS or SANDALS EVER, EVER, EVER. Take your 'feet' out of the audition. No one is going to cast your bunyons, corns, hammer toe or Prada approved manicure. NO ONE. Feet are unnecessarily distracting.

Again, this is but a PARTIAL LIST of the uber important casting/ROCK YOUR AUDITION TIPS that I have to share with you. Thus, this article's heading is PART ONE. Next, we'll get into actual Audition Material: how to choose your material, audition coaching, cold reads and monologues (and tons more after that)!

Your actor mantra should be something along these lines: EACH AND EVERY TIME I AUDITION, I WILL BE AWESOME. I WILL BE AMAZING. I WILL ROCK MY AUDITION. I AM THE ANSWER TO THE CASTING DIRECTOR'S DILEMMA.

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Recommendations for Theatre Students

By Gregory Chew

IHSTF Executive Director Emeritus



Many years ago [Dramatics Magazine](#) had a great article about what life skills theatre students learn. The article was very useful for me when I needed to write college, scholarship, and job recommendations for my theatre students, serving as a checklist I could fill out with specific examples, and I often got very positive feedback about how well it reflected the real skills and maturation students gained through the challenges of productions. This suits many different occupations and majors. I shared that article with guidance counselors on more than one occasion.

Here is a similar article which may aid you in writing such recommendations and evaluations. I hope you find it useful - it was passed along to me by a student of mine from the early '80's, Duane Bidwell, who is a college professor now at [Claremont College](#) in California. He sent this along with a nice note about how useful he found the skills he developed through drama at UHS. Save it for crunch time!

10 Ways Being a Theatre Major Prepared Me for Success

Posted on January 16, 2012

by Tom Vander Well

I have a confession to make. I was a theatre major in college (yes, complete with the snooty but appropriate "re" spelling). I'll wait for you to stop snickering. , Judson University (it was Judson College when I attended), the small liberal arts college outside of Chicago labeled the major course of studies as "Communication Arts" which is what I tend to put on resumes and bios because I realize that "theatre major" tends to elicit thoughts such as, "Do you want fries with that?"

When I chose my major, I had no pipe dreams about becoming a professional actor. I did it because more than one wise adult had advised me that my actual major in college would have less impact on my eventual job search than having the actual degree. "Study what you love" I was told, "not what you think will get you a job." I listened for once and chose theatre because I'd done it all through my secondary education, I had relative success doing it, and because I simply loved being a part of it. Fortunately, my parents gave me absolutely no grief about my choice (unlike most of my fellow majors. Thanks mom & dad!)

Fast forward 25 years and, like many people, I am nowhere near the waypoint on life's road I envisioned I'd be back in college.

Almost 20 years as a business consultant and now a business owner with a modestly successful track record in my business and blogging, I realize how much being a theatre major set me on the road towards success.

Here are 10 ways being a theatre major helped me succeed:

1. **Improvisation.** The great thing about the stage is that when it's live and you're up in front of that audience anything can, and does, happen. Dropped lines, missed entrances, or malfunctioning props require you to improvise while maintaining your cool. Theatre taught me how to focus, think quickly and make do while giving the impression that you've got it all under control. It's served me well when clients, airlines, coworkers, or technology wreak unexpected havoc at the worst possible moment.

2. **Project Management.** A stage production is basically a business project. You have teams of people making up one team working to successfully accomplish a task on time, on budget in such a way that you earn the applause and an occasional standing ovation. Being taught to stand at the helm of a theatrical production was a project management practicum.

3. **Working with a Limited Budget.** Everybody who has worked on stage knows that it's not the road to fortune. Most plays (especially small college shows) are produced on a shoestring budget. This forces you to be imaginative, do more with less and find creative ways to get the results you want without spending money. Ask any corporate manager and they'll tell you that this pretty much describes their job. Mine too.

4. **Dealing with Very Different Human Beings.** The theatrical community is a mash-up of interesting characters. It always has been. From fringe to freakish to frappuccino sipping socialites and everything in between, you're going to encounter the most amazing and stimulating cross-section of humanity

when you work in theatre. In my business career, I have the unique and challenging task of walking in the CEO's office in the morning to present our findings in an executive summary presentation and to receive a high level grilling. I will then spend the afternoon presenting the same data to overworked, underpaid, cynical front-line employees and get a very different grilling. Theatre taught me how to appreciate, understand and effectively communicate with a widely diverse group of human beings.

5. Understanding the Human Condition. Most people have the mistaken impression that acting is all about pretending and being "fake" in front of others. What I learned as a theatre major was that good actors learn the human condition intimately through observation and painfully detailed introspection. The better you understand that human being you are portraying from the inside out, the better and more authentic your performance is going to be. In my business I am constantly using the same general methods to understand my clients, their customers as well as myself and my co-workers. I believe that having a better understanding of myself and others has ultimately made me a better (though far from perfect) employee, consultant, employer, and ultimately friend. I didn't learn methods of observing and understanding others in Macro Econ, I learned it in Acting I & Acting II.

6. Doing Whatever Needs to Be Done. When you're a theatre major at a small liberal arts college, there is little room for specializing within your field. You have to learn to do it all. Light design, sound engineering, acting, directing, producing, marketing, PR, set design, set construction, ticket sales, budgeting, customer service, ushering, make-up, and costuming are all things I had to do as part of my college career. Within our merry band of theatre majors we all had to learn every piece of a production because at some point we would be required to do what needed to be done. I learned that I can capably do just about anything that I need to do. I may not love it and I may not be gifted or excellent at it, but give me a task and I'll figure it out. I now work for a small consulting firm that requires me to do a wide range of tasks. The experience, can-do attitude and indomitable spirit I learned in the theatre have been essential to success.

7. Hard work. I remember creating a tree for one of our college shows. We had no idea how we were going to do it, but we made an amazing life-like tree that emerged from the stage and looked as if it disappeared into the ceiling above the theatre. My teammates and I cut out each and every leaf and individually hot-glued them to the branches of the tree. Thousands upon thousands upon thousands of them glued on while standing precariously on a rickety ladder high enough above the stage that it would make an OSHA inspector soil his boxers. Sleepless nights, burnt fingers and a few brushes with tragedy were needed to get that tree done. But, we got it done. It was fabulous. And a few days later we tore it down, threw it out, and got ready for the next production. C'est la vie. In business I have periods of time with unbelievable workloads in which there are sleepless nights, seemingly endless days and tireless work on projects that will be presented and then will be over. The report will be archived and I'm onto the next project. C'est la vie. I learned all about that as a theatre major.

8. Making Difficult Choices. You've got four parts and twenty four schoolmates who auditioned. Some of them are your best

friends and fellow theatre majors. Do you choose the inexperienced jock because he's best for the part or the friend and fellow theatre major who you fear will never talk to you again if you don't cast him? My senior project was supposed to be performed outside in the amphitheater but the weather was cold, windy and miserable. Do I choose to stick with the plan because it's what my actors are comfortable with and it's what we've rehearsed and it will only stress out the cast and crew to change the venue at the last minute? Or, do I choose to think about the audience who will be more comfortable and might actually pay attention and appreciate the performance if they are inside away from the cold, the wind and possible rain? [I changed the venue]. Any business person will tell you that difficult decisions must sometimes be made. The higher the position the harder the decisions and the more people those decisions affect. Being a theatre major gave me a taste of what I would have to digest in my business career.

9. Presentation Skills. Okay, it's a no brainer, but any corporate employee can tell you horror stories of having to endure long training sessions or corporate presentations by boring, unprepared, incompetent or just plain awful presenters. From what I've experienced, individuals who can stand up confidently in front of a group of people and capably, effectively communicate their message while even being motivating and a little entertaining are among the rarest individuals in the business world. Being a theatre major helped me be one of them.

10. Doing the Best You Can With What You've Got. Over the years I've told countless front line service reps that this is rule #1 of customer service. You do the best you can with what you've got to work with. I remember an Acting I class in college in which a pair of students got up to present a scene they'd prepared. They presented the scene on a bare stage with no lighting, make-up, costumes, props or set pieces. It was just two students acting out the script. It was one of those magic moments that happen with live theatre. The rest of the class were transfixed and pulled into the moment, reacting with surprising emotion to what they witnessed. You don't need Broadway theatrics to create a magical theatrical moment on stage. You don't even need a stage. The same is true of customer service. You don't always need the latest technology, the best system, or the greatest whiz bang doodads. A capable CSR doing the best they can and serving a customer with courtesy, empathy, friendliness and a commitment to resolve can and does win customer satisfaction and loyalty.

I'm proud to be an alumnus of Judson University. I'm really saddened that the school's theatre program waned for a while and am encouraged that it shows signs of life once more. What I have learned I've tried to pass on to my own children. Study what you love. Follow your passion. It will serve you well wherever life's road takes you.

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ITA Member Spotlight: Ron Koepl

Submitted by Judy Klingner
ITA Second Vice-President

What is your name?

Ron Koepl

Please tell us about your background/education in theatre.

I audited 4 years of rehearsals (since my theatre major wife) was involved in every production at Elmhurst College. C.C. Arends was a fabulous teacher, and I didn't miss one thing that he said or did. I never took a course except for two tech



workshops at NIU with Dr. Richard Arnold. I was a first year teacher in District 54 who had a choice of doing bus duty or directing the 8th grade play.

Give us some statistics about how many years you have been doing theatre, how many shows you have directed, etc.

I have been directing theatre at middle school, high school, and community theatre for 54 years. There were a total of 138 productions, (76 of these were musicals). October 20, 2013 was last performance of *Noises Off*, my final production at St. Charles East High School.

Please share details about your most recent theatre project/production.

I'm very proud of my last two productions: *The Wiz* in April 2013, and *Noises Off* in October 2013.

What is the biggest challenge you face related to your work in the theatre?

I've had an increasing number of health issues recently. My stamina is not what it used to be.

Of what theatrical accomplishment are you most proud?



I narrowed my choices down to *Dracula*, the first commissioned play for the 1981 Illinois High School Theatre Festival; the 1988 All-State Play, *Joseph and the Amazing Techicolor Dreamcoat* (11 rehearsals); 1990 Executive Director of IHSTF; and performing the role of Pseudolous in *A Funny Thing Happened on to Way to Forum*.

Have you ever worked with theatre in a different capacity than you do now?

I've done most everything in the theatre, including every tech crew except lighting: make-up, hair, props, costumes, sets, etc. I've run ticket sales, started a subscription series at the high school, ushered, house managed..., and mopped many a stage floor.

What advice would you give to young theatre artists?

Theatre is incredibly time consuming, but very rewarding. It requires sacrifice. You must have a passion for theatre (all aspects), if you do not search elsewhere for your artistic outlets. ALWAYS BE AN EXCELLENT AUDIENCE MEMBER.

What impact has the Illinois High School Theatre Festival had on you and your students?

I attended the first Festival. I was impressed and saw the potential of it, so I agreed to get involved. My first assignment was

Workshops with Sharon Koziak (sp). All students who participate are better for the Festival experience. It impacted me by fine tuning organizational skills and building confidence.

Now that you have retired from directing at St. Charles East High School, what are your plans?

I may write a book about my "Theatre Life"think I may entitle it *ACT I 1/2*.

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