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## Keep Calm and Manage on: The Importance of Being an Even Tempered Stage Manager

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It's no secret in the theatre world that stage managing is difficult. Between creating schedules, tracking each and every change and development in rehearsal, making sure the show runs smoothly each night, and of course, managing actors and tech staff, it gets hectic. You are ultimately charged with creating order out of varying amounts of chaos. And one thing that must be kept in order is your own attitude.

Something I hear young stage managers, especially student stage managers, say a lot is that they have their normal personality, and their stage manager personality - their normal personality is nice, but their stage manager personality is tough, mean, scary, etc. Now, it's certainly true that being willing and able to lay down the law or have those difficult conversations is an important quality in a stage manager, and I think we've all dealt with those people that needed to be whipped into shape.

But if your default "stage manager mode" is tough and mean, or you're relying on fear to manage people, or you think you need control people's every move, you are absolutely doing it wrong. That is not the way to be a stage manager, or any kind of manager for that matter. If you are defaulting to tough, angry, disciplinarian mode, you are sending the message that you don't trust the people you work with. You are fostering an environment that is unpleasant to work in, and people will feel like they have to walk on eggshells around you because they know that any problem or concern they bring to you will be met with anger.

Your actors and tech staff need to be able to come to you with questions, concerns, and problems. If they feel like they have to fear you, they are going to avoid coming to you, even in situations where they really need to.

Just as importantly, you need to be able to remain calm in emergencies, or when things don't go as planned. And believe me, there will be times when things don't go as planned. There may even be problems that require you to urgently spring into action. Urgency is good, action is good, and panic is bad. The worst thing to do in the face of an unexpected problem is to panic, because that will only make everyone else worry, and will ultimately do nothing but slow down finding a solution to the problem. And if you can remain calm in the face of a large problem, you should definitely do so in the face of minor mishaps on stage. To be in the booth with a stage manager that gets angry or sighs frustratedly when a cue or a line is missed is at best annoying, and at worst downright insulting.

While there's a lot I remember from theatre classes I took in college, this is the thing that stands out the most - "Stage managing is managing change." I think it is the best summary of stage management that there is. Ultimately, no matter how good you are, no matter how much you can think ahead, how well you can plan, how many unforeseeable situations you can foresee and be prepared for, there will be things you don't expect. Things will change, and you will have deal with these changes. After all, the rehearsal process itself is change. A finished production is never the same as it was during the first design meeting or rehearsal - it continually changes and evolves through collaboration. And we as stage managers get to see it from where it starts, and help guide it along to becoming the best embodiment of the play.

And isn't that why we do theatre in the first place?