

The Tech and the responsibility.

Tony Hansen 1-19-05

Several years ago I was working on a show and watched as an overworked, under-appreciated tech managed to pretty much destroy a show or at least the moment. This poor guy had come into the production only days before opening night and was given a series of CD's to play with the various tracks. Surprisingly maybe, the general public still tends to believe that all the music and even singing in a show is truly live. As we know, for a live performance it is often better to *enhance* the music with tracks of either the orchestration, background or even primary singers. Unfortunately, the gentleman in question managed to prove to the audience that this music was indeed tracked. It was by no means entirely his fault, but there is a responsibility both of and to the tech and technical departments that I believe is being overlooked.

Back to my story, the show began normally enough until a message was dispatched to the tech that a change had been made in the song lineup for various reasons. This caused a moment of confusion and clutter that was never recovered. The tech had two CD players that he would alternate between, playing one while cueing up another. In the middle of one particular song the tech mistakenly stopped the hot or active CD player. This of course instantly brought silence to the room and revealed that the choir was not "live" to their family and friends. Mistakes happen and we need to just move on, so the tech simply re-started the CD at the beginning of the song again. This is a pressure judgment call and I could hear arguments both ways as to whether this was proper. Either way this is not the end of my story. The tech was now so flustered and panicked that he couldn't re-focus and let the song run over at the end of the track, he also didn't turn up the announcers microphone on cue. When finally the next song was announced, the track was played and you saw rather hurried pandemonium on the stage as soloists re-positioned and the choir replaced their music. This was the wrong track, but everyone managed to adjust and sing the song just fine. UNTIL... Halfway through the song the tech realized that he had just played the wrong piece and without even looking up at the stage abruptly hit "stop". The first song to be stopped was a mistake, BUT, the second was a bad judgment call caused by the panic of the moment. The millisecond that this poor guy hit stop he realized his mistake, of course then it was too late. At this point several members of the audience arrived at the booth to "help", this managed to cause even more confusion and guarantee that the show would never get back on pace for the rest of the night. The next day the poor guy quit. Unfortunately I have seen this scene repeated in some part many, many times since.

As I mentioned earlier, I strongly believe that there is a responsibility both of the tech and to the tech that is often overlooked. The tech is as much a member of the show as any actor, dancer or musician. In some ways more so, because they have to be “On” from the moment the curtain goes up until after the final applause, they don’t get a break. The problem I see is lack of respect both to the position and to the tech themselves. Any show is a team effort and must be about the show, if you are going to be involved with the show you must give it all the effort it deserves and respect everyone involved for their part. If you are involved in a show, no matter how small the part, if you don’t give your all, it is an insult to those that are. When an audience gives of their time to sit and watch a performance, they are respecting you enough to sit quietly and listen. You must have something proper to present. Alternately, everyone that needs to be involved must be brought aboard in a timely manner and given the necessary information to do their job. In a professional environment the production team often exists long before the show is ever cast and is integral to the development of the production. They are not brought in at the end and handed their job. This rant being said, I now have a list of 10 rules of and for the tech staff. Please feel free to write to me with your rules and I may revise this one day soon.

Rules of and for the Tech

1. **The tech is a member of the overall team and will carry such responsibility and respect accordingly.** This means coming in early and checking all gear and focusing on the task at hand. This also means being brought in early and being a part of the entire production process.
2. **All necessary resources will be given to the tech in a proper and timely manner with respect for the job at hand.** No unreasonable last minute changes unless it is truly an emergency or the tech feels they can handle it. Don’t make something into an emergency that isn’t.
3. **The tech will stay informed and be informed of all pertinent manners of the show.** Once a show is cued, it can be exceedingly difficult to change the order without good cause and time for adjustment. Very few changes to a show will NOT affect the tech team, keep them involved. Once the house is open, the show is locked. Handle what is given to you.

4. **The tech will rehearse and prepare their role accordingly.** Proper time and focus will be given to the task at hand so all contingencies have been addressed and considered and a comfort level has been reached. No showing up 5 minutes before house opens and turning on the board. I require my team to arrive at *least* 1 hour before house opens and check everything. The house may not open until tech clears it and until then everyone is kept out for safety and so the secrets aren't revealed until show.
5. **When a mistake is made, MOVE ON!** It is human nature that we all make mistakes, but as I tell my team; *pick up the shattered pieces of your life and move on.* If you hang up on a mistake during the show it will snowball into more mistakes. Get a grip and go forward, you can de-brief after the show. If a tech makes a mistake, they know it, let them be.
6. **When a mistake is made, MOVE ON Part 2.** Often times the audience doesn't realize that you have made a mistake until you correct it. Don't distract them and they won't notice you. If you run the wrong light cue for example, it may be ugly but they will accept it until you correct it.
7. **Keep requests reasonable.** Undue strain is often caused by excessive requests that are beyond the scope of the show or budget. If the tech can't do it, find another way. If the show can't afford it, find another way. Anything is possible, but the resources need to exist.
8. **Watch the time.** It takes time to do anything and the tech may not have it. Cues and tracks do not just appear, they need creation time. No, you can't just push a button. Tech, plan enough time to do all that needs to be done and then some.
9. **Cherish and trust the tech.** They often stay many hours after rehearsal to make things right and can make things go very wrong. Give them thanks and what they need to do their job. When you order everyone pizza, remember them but also remember that they work when you break.
10. **Earn your respect.** As a tech you will need to provide the proper attitude and skills to handle an increasingly difficult job. Don't think of yourself as the extra person running the sound or lights and you won't be thought of that way. You are as much a member of the show as anyone on stage, the applause is for you too. Be careful though and don't push it, know your place as an equal.