

**THE PRODUCER'S PERSPECTIVE**

# **50 TIPS**

ON HOW TO GET  
**YOUR SHOW**  
**OFF THE GROUND**

THE  
**THEATERMAKERS**  
STUDIO

**BY KEN DAVENPORT**

Thank you for reading my **50 Tips on How to Get Your Show off the Ground!**

These tips (or “Kenisms” as my office calls them) are actual quotes from me to people like you . . . producers, writers, artists and entrepreneurs of all types who are looking to get their shows off the ground.

The Tips were given to these folks over the past several years during my **Get Your Show Off The Ground** seminar.

**The Get Your Show Off The Ground** seminar is the first seminar I ever taught. I modeled it after a seminar I took with blogger Seth Godin. I plunked down \$2,500 to be one of about 40 people in a room with Seth. We went around the room and presented Seth with a business problem . . . and he tackled it for us right there on the spot.

Not only did I learn a ton from this marketing guru about my specific issue, but I found I learned even more from what he said to everyone else! And I made some fantastic networking connections (including someone who became a big investor of mine).

So, when I started trying to come up with ways that I could help people produce more theater, I said, “I’m going to make my seminar just like Seth’s! But I’m going to make mine smaller (I only take 8 people) and a heck of a lot cheaper.” 😊

That was about five years ago, and well over a hundred people have taken the seminar and we’ve had some massive success stories.

In this free EBook, you’ll get the gold nuggets from all the seminars I’ve taught. I hope that one of them gives your show a boost. Because we need more theater.

And maybe someday I’ll see you at the live seminar!

Enjoy.

Ken Davenport

# 50 TIPS ON HOW TO GET YOUR SHOW OFF THE GROUND

1. People don't invest in projects, they invest in people.
2. Creating experiential entertainment has never been more important than it is today.
3. The nicer the theater you put your show in, the higher the expectations from your audience and the press will be.
4. Your agents and your lawyers work for you. You do not work for them.
5. Just because your show doesn't belong on Broadway doesn't mean it doesn't belong. Define success for yourself.
6. It costs nothing to call.
7. A website can lend credibility to what you're doing.
8. Remove the word fear from your vocabulary.
9. Know when to work on something else.
10. It's always easier for someone to see a show than read a script.
11. Most people in this business are looking for a reason to say no. Don't give them one.
12. Word-of-Mouth is the strongest in the moment immediately after your event.

- 13.** When you build the biggest of anything in this country, whether it's the biggest musical ever created, the biggest skyscraper, or the biggest ball of twine, people are going to want to see it.
- 14.** Don't survey unless you're committed to doing something with the results.
- 15.** Do a reading for two reasons: to learn about your show, and to get everyone (including yourself) excited about your show.
- 16.** You'll find an agent when you're ready for an agent. Or better . . . the agent will find you.
- 17.** Producing a show is pure physics. An object in motion tends to stay in motion. It's your job to start the motion.
- 18.** Sending out unsolicited scripts is like an actor sending out headshots. It's a little like playing the lottery. It's ok to play, but I wouldn't expect to pay your rent on your winnings.
- 19.** If you want to produce a Broadway show but you don't have twenty Broadway shows on your resume, surround yourself with people who do.
- 20.** You are never too small to have fans. Start a list of the people who love what you do as soon as you start doing it.
- 21.** Critics, Awards, etc. all don't matter. The audience is the ultimate judge.
- 22.** Unique is attractive. Spend more energy making your project unique, not just making it pretty.

- 23.** People investing in the theater are interested in an emotional return, not just a financial one.
- 24.** If there's another show out there that's similar to yours, forget about it, because you can't control it. Just focus on making yours the best it can be, and the other one won't be able to keep up.
- 25.** Focus on the step in front of you, not on the top of the staircase.
- 26.** The word 'networking' was hijacked by computer engineers. But true networking can't be done through a computer. Get out and meet people just like you.
- 27.** Beware of the Entrepreneur's Curse of too many ideas. Focus on a few.
- 28.** It's fine to have fantasies ("I want Hugh Jackman to star in my show!" or "This is going to be the first Broadway show that Spielberg directs!"), as long as you're ok if those fantasies don't come true.
- 29.** Can't get a certain Producer to see your show? Invite their Assistant. Guess who has the Producer's ear? And more importantly, guess who is gonna be a Producer soon enough?
- 30.** Exceeding an Audience's expectations is not always a great thing. If you're exceeding too many expectations, then your Audience doesn't know what the #@\$% they are going to see in the first place.
- 31.** Don't decorate the house until you have a house/Don't plan your wedding after the first date. In other words, put the merch line and the logo and the set design on hold . . . until you've got a script and

a show that needs a merch line and a logo and a set design. It's easy to get ahead of yourself. Don't.

- 32.** If the cake isn't fully baked, I don't want to eat it. This tasty morsel was in response to a participant who asked when she should invite Producers to a reading. My response? Make sure you're ready for their response. In other words, make sure that cake is cooked.
- 33.** You need to put your show in a fancy outfit if you want people to see it. Give it some sizzle, some sparkle. Something that sets it apart from the rest of the fancy outfits/shows out there. In other words, shows can't afford to be shy.
- 34.** Producing is like landing a plane at JFK. Rack and stack your ideas so as one comes to an end, the other one is ready to go.
- 35.** Raising money is like brushing your teeth. Not fun, and no one really wants to do it. But necessary..
- 36.** Your show's biggest marketing tool is your title.
- 37.** Vanity projects are only called vanity projects when they fail. When they succeed, they're just called successes.
- 38.** As hard as it is for you to ask for money, it's even harder for someone, especially someone that you know, to say no.
- 39.** It's hard to raise money when you don't have something specific to raise money for (a production, a workshop, legal fees to secure rights, etc.).

- 40.** When everyone else is going left, go right.
- 41.** A rule is a rule, until someone decides to break it.
- 42.** You will never find someone more passionate about your project than you are.
- 43.** A Producer's goal isn't to make sure everyone gets along. A Producer's goal is to make great theater.
- 44.** Finding members of your team (press agents, general managers, etc.) is like finding a contractor to renovate the apartment. Cheapest usually means . . . well . . . "cheapest." Is that what you want your apartment/show to look like?
- 45.** Have you ever seen a bad show on Broadway? Yes? Good. Well that means your bad show can get to Broadway too. (You kind of had to be there for that one – it was funny, I swear! The translation is if bad shows can get to Broadway, any show can get there with enough of a push. My advice, of course, is just to make yours good.)
- 46.** A great creative team starts with a Director. Get the right guy or gal on board at the top, and the other team members will fall into place like dominos.
- 47.** Don't judge your own work too harshly. There are plenty of other people who are going to judge it for you.
- 48.** It's easier to raise \$10 million for a Broadway show than it is to raise \$1 million for an Off Broadway show.



**49.** The guy who said, “Never put your own money in a show!” was a Comedian, not a Producer.

**50.** Selling a show to a potential investor or anyone is like improv. Your answers always have to be, “Yes and . . .”

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See you there!

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Ken Davenport is a Broadway producer whose credits include *It's Only a Play*, *Kinky Boots* (Tony Award), *Mothers and Sons* (Tony nomination), *The Bridges of Madison County*, *Macbeth* starring Alan Cumming, *Godspell*, *Chinglish*, *Oleanna* starring Bill Pullman and Julia Stiles, *Speed-the-Plow*, Will Ferrell's *You're Welcome America* (Tony nomination), *Blithe Spirit* starring Angela Lansbury (Broadway and West End), and *13*, as well as *Altar Boyz*, *My First Time*, *The Awesome 80s Prom*, and *Miss Abigail's Guide to Dating, Mating, & Marriage* Off-Broadway. He also produced the award winning *These Magnificent Miles: On the Long Road with Red Wanting Blue*, a documentary on one of the top unsigned rock bands in the country. Ken was featured on a national commercial for Apple's iPhone, named one of Crain's “40 Under Forty” and is one of the co-organizers of TEDxBroadway. Combined, Ken's productions have grossed more than \$100 million worldwide and are being produced internationally in over 25 countries including Germany, Mexico, France and Korea. He created and developed the Broadway board game *Be A Broadway Star*, as seen on “The Today Show,” and a smartphone app called AT THE BOOTH™, which has been featured on *Entertainment Weekly's* “Must List” and called “Ingenious! The best thing to happen to New York theater since, well, the introduction of the TKTS® booth!” He also runs a number of theatrical websites including DidHeLikelt.com and YourBroadwayGenius.com. His blog, TheProducersPerspective.com, has been featured in *Vanity Fair*, *New York Magazine*, *The Gothamist* and more. He has written articles for Forbes, Mashable, Imedia and others. Current projects include his adaptation of the novel and film *Somewhere in Time*, which premiered at Portland Center Stage; *Gettin' The Band Back Together* which premiered at George Street Playhouse as well as bringing the first ever revival of *A Few Good Men* to Broadway. For more information, visit [www.DavenportTheatrical.com](http://www.DavenportTheatrical.com).