

PRO ACTION ITEM OF THE MONTH

A 10 MINUTE EXERCISE TO HELP YOU RAISE MONEY

The key to a successful raise is everything you do before you start raising money. (Ever take a ballet class? A pirouette is all about the prep before you turn. Do everything else right and the turn just happens.)

But sometimes you don't have months or years to prepare for the raise. Sometimes a show lands in your lap, a theater lands in your lap, and you've got to hit the ground sprinting (raising the capitalization for *Spring Awakening* in 86 days comes to mind).

If you've got limited time to put together your prep for your raise, here's a ten minute exercise that you must do before you ask anyone for money.

IT'S SIMPLE BUT SUPER EFFECTIVE.

All you need to make your raise easier is to channel your inner David Letterman and write a list of "Top 10 Reasons Why Someone Should Invest In Your Show."

And be hard on yourself. When I do this exercise, I often substitute the "someone" for me. "Top 10 Reasons Why I Should Invest In My Show." If I can convince myself to do it, then I know I can convince other people.

In just a few minutes you'll have a long list of powerful reasons why your investment is a good one.

For example, some of your top 10s could be:

- **A Tony Award-winning Director**
- **A subject that appeals to the traditional Broadway audience (44 years old and female)**
- **An author on the rise who you expect to be the next David Mamet, and you want to support now**
- **A show that should have tremendous appeal in the subsidiary market (regionals, high school, international)**
- **You! (I believe and will tell folks that I am going to have a *Wicked* someday, I just don't know exactly when that will be.)**
- **A name actor**

And so on and so on.

And there are always at least ten. So don't give up as you get to eight and nine. The digging you do now will help you so much when you're pitching. This exercise is especially valuable for those of you with riskier projects (and with rational minds), because it forces you to convince yourself why you're doing what you're doing, and you'll help start to build your marketing campaign at the same time! (Those top 10 reasons why someone should invest, often are the same as the top 10 reasons why someone would buy a ticket – which is an investment of a different kind.)

Look, I know most of you don't have Hugh Jackman as your star, or an Andrew Lloyd Webber score, but you can still find ten reasons why your show is a good investment. And those ten don't have to be only ROI-based reasons. "Because it's important to get this message out to the world," might be enough, depending on what that message is.

And if you can't find ten reasons why your show is a good investment?

Don't produce it. Because if you can't prove it to yourself, you'll never prove it to anyone else.

5 TIPS ON HOW TO BUILD YOUR BLURB

AH, THE BLURB . . .

That short piece of copy that's supposed to encapsulate everything about your show, and convince the reader to fork over \$121.50 so fast, they don't even have time to check for discounts.

Creating the perfect blurb is one of the biggest and earliest challenges that Broadway and Off-Broadway shows face, but it's one of the most important things in your advertising arsenal. Right after your artwork, the perfect blurb can mean the difference between a high-grossing week, and losing all of your customers to the show listed right next to you.

So how do you create a blurb that can guarantee butts in the seats? Here are five tips on how I do it.

you've got a better chance of driving that hook deeper into your customer's gills.

Of course, don't write long just to be long. Your copy still has to be exceptionally relevant, but it doesn't have to be 140 characters.

4

PEEKING IS NOT CHEATING

Visit Telecharge and browse through the shows, reading each blurb. Notice what techniques are used.

After reading ten blurbs, decide which shows of the ten you would want to see? Which shows do you not want to see? Why? By examining what's working today (and more importantly what's not), you can figure out what will work for you tomorrow.

1

PEOPLE LOVE STORIES

We read books (even non-fiction) because we want a story. We watch movies (even documentaries) because we want a story. We watch the news because . . . yep, stories. Give the people what they want! Make sure your blurb contains details about your story (the plot, etc.), even if it's a thin one.

Don't just fill your blurb with accolades, awards, stars, etc. Those are all great, but if there isn't a story that the reader finds compelling in your blurb, kiss those bucks bye-bye.

LET THE PEOPLE PICK YOUR WORDS FOR YOU

Need help on what words to use to describe your show? Hear how other people describe it first, then look for commonly used words. Have ten people read your play and tell them to give you ten words to describe it. Invite an audience to a reading, have a talk-back and pay attention to the (positive) words that are said more than once. These are the characteristics that are resonating with your audience, and they will resonate with the reader as well.

2

SHORTER IS NOT BETTER

Contrary to popular belief, shorter copy is NOT better. It has been proven time and time again that longer copy converts at a higher rate than shorter copy. Don't believe me? Your truly interested customers want to know as much about your show as possible, so give them all of the relevant details you can. The person that doesn't want to read the longer copy and stops after the first paragraph? Well, I'd bet you 2 premium tickets to *Wicked* that he wasn't going to buy your show anyway. But with longer copy

DON'T BE SATISFIED

Lots of shows pick a blurb and stick with it for extended periods of time. When you're just starting out, write TWO blurbs, not one, and test

them. Which one converts at a higher rate? Ok, now discard the loser, write a variation on the first, and repeat. Then again. Then again. There's always a way to improve the blurb, and it's your job to keep tweaking and testing throughout the life of your show.

There's nothing more daunting than the all white Microsoft Word screen starting back at you, just waiting for you to fill it with the words that'll turn your show into a seller.

But don't be scared. The blurb is not The Blob. Just start writing and you'll find out that you know what sells your show better than you think you do.

After all, you got sold on it, right?

5

PRO ACTION ITEM OF THE MONTH

THE SECRET TO MAKING MORE PEOPLE FALL IN LOVE WITH YOUR SHOW.

It's dramatic writing 101 that the hero of your story (whether that's a play, a musical, or a movie) has to want something. Badly. It gives him (or her) an action. A hero that doesn't want anything just becomes a couch potato. And there are enough of those in the world, right?

And it's musical writing 101 that the hero of the show comes out and explicitly states what they want in the first few scenes of said show. "All I want is a room somewhere," "I want so much more than this provincial life," "I gotta find my purpose," "Gotta find my corner of the sky," "I wanna be where the people are," and so on, including my favorite, "I wanna be a Producer!"

But I've noticed something very simple lately about that want that seems to have a direct correlation to the mass appeal of the story, again in whatever medium that story is being told.

It's the secret to making your audience for your show bigger.

The more the "want" is something your audience also wants to do? The bigger the crowd.



It's why a musical about someone who wants to be an impressionist painter may not have as much appeal as a musical about someone who wants to be a rock star.

The want has to be something a large audience can relate to, or want to achieve themselves (even if they don't know it).

When this happens, they root for your hero to succeed that much more . . . because deep down, they are rooting for their own success at that very same thing.

The first thing all writers of musicals need to do is discover what their hero wants. The second thing they need to do is find out if the audience ever dreams about the same thing.

5 TIPS ON NEGOTIATING (FOR THEATER PROFESSIONALS)

1

LISTEN UP

One of the most important things you can do in any negotiation is actually not negotiate. Just listen.

Listen to what they want. When you have a counter argument, don't interrupt, just write it down and come back to it later.

Sometimes I find that folks want/need to get their emotions out about why they need more, deserve more, etc . . . and often when that's over and they get it out . . . and when I've shut up, listened, and agreed with them . . . and then simply explained that because of the constructs of the project, what I've offered is the best I can do, they agree. (One of my favorite things to say when someone tells me how talented, important, etc. someone I want to hire is, I usually say, "I know . . . I called you remember?")

2

KNOW WHEN TO WALK AWAY

Sometimes deals don't come together. And honestly? I can't

think of a time when a deal hasn't come together that I've regretted it. You know the saying, "Things happen for a reason?" Well, things DON'T happen for a reason too. If you aren't getting a good vibe, if your negotiating partner is asking more than the project can bear unreasonably, and, most importantly, if you don't feel there is a strong desire for the person/theater/etc. to make the project happen, then walk away. And find a person/theater/etc. who does. Creating great theater and producing great theater to financial success is waaaaay too hard to go into it feeling like you've been taken advantage of, or that the other party is doing it just for the gig. There are other fish in the sea of theater. Cut bait and "cast" again. (Bonus tip on the same subject – if you say, "If you don't get back to me by XX day and time, we are moving on," you better mean it. If you say you're going to walk, you gotta be prepared to walk . . . otherwise it has the opposite effect.)

3

YOU CAN HANDLE THE TRUTH

And you should always tell the truth.

And this goes for both sides. There is credibility for a negotiation and future negotiations more than making something up . . . and then getting busted. Because you will get busted. I've seen people lie about other people on projects, figures, etc. It's fine if you don't want to reveal information, but don't just make up something to prove your point. Remember, you're in this business for the long haul – the best way to get the best deal "now and forever" is to be honest and respectful. Lying may seem like the "sharky" thing to do, but no one wants to do business with sharks.



4

NEGOTIATE AS HIGH UP AS YOU CAN

It's always better to get the decision maker on the phone. You want to deal with the top rung of the ladder if possible. It's not always possible, but do try . . . at the same time, be careful of insulting the person who is a rung or two below when you ask. But don't hesitate to appeal to a higher power if you aren't getting what you want along the way. And I don't mean, "Will you ask SO-AND-SO to please consider this?" I mean, "I would like to speak to SO-AND-SO. Can we arrange a call?" It's kind of like asking for a supervisor when you're dealing with AT&T and not getting anywhere.

5

DON'T BE AFRAID AND HAVE FUN

This is the most important tip of all. Too many people dread getting on the phone or negotiating in person (which – and here's another bonus tip – is the best way to negotiate) and that sets the wrong tone for the discussion. First, remember, that most people feel the same way you do about negotiating . . . including the person you're dealing with. It's a necessary part of business, but we all wish we could just skip over it and get to the good stuff of making the play. But we can't. So embrace it. Don't get nervous. Have fun. If ever you do feel a little flummoxed . . . take a break, ask to call back, leave the room, "press your pause button" and then go back in. Negotiating can actually be a blast, especially if you keep your eye on its purpose and remember that you're doing it to produce something wonderful. In fact . . . oh boy, here comes an analogy I may regret someday, but I'm going for it anyway . . . think of it like sex when you're trying to have a baby. If you put that image in your mind, you're bound to have a good time. Happy negotiating, everyone!

