



TCG

THEATRE COMMUNICATIONS GROUP, INC.

CENTERPIECE

FOCUS ON:

GOVERNANCE

• • • •

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TRUSTEES

BY NANCY ROCHE

Most effective trustees are made, not born. Sometimes our education comes from nothing but trial and error. Sometimes we learn by watching other trustees we respect. Sometimes it is the result of thoughtful planning by staff and board committees. Many of us serve at theatres that understand the importance of trustee development and provide a myriad of opportunities for us to learn. These theatres invite us to join a first read-through, to tour facilities, to participate in orientations, retreats and long-range planning and they provide theatre reports and guest speakers at board meetings.

But, lamentably, in TCG's January 1999 report: *In Whom We Trust: An Exploration of Theatre Governing Boards*, a dismaying 92 percent of managers believe that their board is barely, or not at all, knowledgeable about theatre. Conferences and seminars offer trustees a jump start — sometimes an in-depth immersion in our art, sometimes a crash course on principles of governance, sometimes both at once.

With pleasure then, we highlight several offerings for professional development of theatre trustees. We announce a pilot program for trustees at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center. We provide brief introductions to three seminars on governance, one developed by National Arts Stabilization in collaboration with Stanford University Graduate School of Business, another given at Harvard Business School and finally, a program through the Kennedy Center's new Vilar Institute. We also invite trustees to participate in TCG's biennial National Conference scheduled this June in Philadelphia as well as TCG's Fall Forum focused on governance.

Governance *Centerpiece* Curator: Nancy Roche, Trustee, Center Stage

Copyright © 2001 by Theatre Communications Group, Inc. All articles reproduced by permission of the authors. No portion of this publication may be reproduced in any form, or by any means, including photocopying, without written permission from the publisher or author. Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 355 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017, telephone (212) 697-5230, fax (212) 983-4847, website: www.tcg.org. Ben Cameron, Executive Director; Joan Channick, Deputy Director; Christopher Shuff, Director of Management Programs.

EUGENE O'NEILL THEATER CENTER PROGRAMS

Trustees want to be effective. Professional development is a way of living a commitment to continuous quality improvement and learning. "Boards add value whenever they model the behaviors that they want their institutions to manifest," Richard Chait pointedly observes in *Improving the Performance of Governing Boards*.

Howard Sherman, Executive Director of the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, has announced a pilot program for theatre trustees in conjunction with the National Playwrights Conference. "You are our foremost advocates within our communities and you sustain us with your endless support — you belong in the highly democratic mix of the O'Neill. We have the opportunity to afford trustees unprecedented access to the creative process, far beyond what an open rehearsal at your home theatres could provide."

The National Playwrights Conference is under the leadership of James Houghton, who is also the founding artistic director of the Signature Theatre Company in New York. The month-long conference is designed to serve playwrights by mounting staged readings which are the culmination of a six-day process that includes design meetings and rehearsals. The conference brings together actors, directors, designers and playwrights — all gathered to develop the art of the playwright.

The conference takes place at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center for four weeks beginning in late June and running simultaneously with the National Critics' Institute. Located on a former estate on Long Island Sound in Waterford, Connecticut, it offers an immersion in the theatrical process in a congenial

environment that is half summer camp and half "let's put on a show." Shared meals allow for a casual give and take among actors, directors, playwrights, critics, technical staff, designers, interns, and now, trustees. It is an opportunity for intense savoring of a total theatre experience.

The pilot program is scheduled for July 10-15, 2001. Six to eight trustees will be invited to the O'Neill this summer to participate in the program with the understanding that they will also provide guidance to shape the program for the future. In subsequent years, participants will be recruited from diverse theatres across the country.

I spent last July at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center as a participant in the National Critics' Institute. Although it is a rigorous, challenging month, it is a joy for theatre junkies. Each critic was assigned a play to follow through the six days of rehearsal and staged readings. I had the pleasure of spending six days with Lee Blessing and his director, Michael Engler, their dramaturg, Kim Euell and a group of actors that included Mason Adams (you might not know the name but you'd remember the face from dozens of plays, movies and commercials). This access to the rehearsal process was the heart of my experience at the O'Neill and will be an important part of the trustee week.

What follows are excerpts from my final project, a description of the experience of following Blessing's *Thief River*. Our planned trustee week will include this kind of "behind the scenes" access. My hope is that this "fly on the wall" perspective will be irresistibly tantalizing, and that you will consider joining us in future years.

Lee's expectations are all about inspiration, not a finished product. He just wants to get the play on its feet. As rehearsals continue, he is open to collective input. He and director Michael Engler frequently confer, sometimes with Kim Euell, *Thief River's* dramaturg. He listens to ideas from the actors, sometimes incorporating suggestions. He is easy with the actors, asking, "Anybody missing anything? I buy back lines. You just have to outbid the director." He edits himself with similar ease. "Bromide alert," he says wryly about one saccharine line. "We'll embroider it on a pillow and sell it in the lobby." Or to a suggestion gently rejected, "Thanks for playing." One night, he shortens the transitions. He revises to solve inconsistencies, to amplify motivation and to deepen the relationship between Gil and Ray. An issue comes up: why do we see Ray Jr.'s brake lights come on twice? Lee explains that he wants them to blink twice to indicate that Ray Jr. is reading the letter that exposes his father. At one point he comments to the cast, "If you have a speech that you think someone else should say, please tell me. You won't upset my security." Throughout the rehearsals, he sits quietly. His eyes carefully follow each actor. Frequently, his head rests on his hand, elbows on his knees. A six-time participant at the conference, Lee understands how the experience works. The worst that can happen is that he rewrites some more.

While Lee is writing and rewriting for character and consistency, Michael is figuring out how the play's structure works — the timing of costume changes and entrances and exits when the same actor is in two consecutive scenes. The structure of the play is potentially confusing. Its scenes are deliberately out of chronological order. The events of the story unfold piecemeal, and more than one episode is truncated in the middle, only to resume later. For the second reading, Michael asks the cast to read the script in chronological order so the actors are clear about the basic story line.

The actors are cooperative and relaxed as they work out issues of plot and movement. Of the six actors, three portray two characters, Ray and Gil, at three different junctures of their lives (Ray 1, 2, 3 and Gil 1, 2, 3). All of the actors play an additional character. The performance space in the Barn is open and fluid, offering four options for entrances and exits, and the actors don't rehearse there until day three, so their sense of the space is wobbly. Only four and a half days of rehearsals. Daily script revisions arrive. Eight new pages arrive at 2:30 on Saturday afternoon before the 8:30 curtain.

Throughout, the work in rehearsal is collegial. The actor playing Ray 1 has an idea. Michael quickly says, "Show me what you mean." Lee and Michael confer over whether a direct address belongs better to Gil 2 or Gil 3. Michael thinks Gil 3 and Lee agrees. The actor playing Gil 3 exits but has an immediate entrance as another character. Michael teases Lee, saying, "You're officially backed into a corner now." Lee ponders, then changes the entrance to farther down the page. "I like the simple solution." On the fourth day of rehearsal, an actual doorframe, the only scenery, is added. Michael tries using the balcony of the Barn for scenes of letters and direct address. It works well until he tries sitting in the back row under the overhang and discovers that the audience can't see the actors. He starts to concern himself with pacing. "Direct address can't be an International Coffee moment."

The play's ending develops collaboratively. The actor playing Gil 3 suggests that he and Ray 3 (Mason Adams) walk out together after Ray 3's last line. Mason is concerned about the intent of his last lines. He thinks there is a sexual double entendre he doesn't want to lose. Lee suggests that what is really occurring between the characters is a kind of negotiation, a note that helps both actors. They try the walk, but Mason remains unconvinced. "What motivates the walk?" Mason thinks that the end should indicate a greater connectedness between the two characters. Michael and Lee agree. Mason adds some business relating to the house and its memories, then tries walking in a new direction. Before the two walk offstage at the end, they end up standing upstage of Ray 1 and Gil 1, who are holding each other in a tableau. Mason likes that and everyone is pleased.

The curtain goes up at 8:35 Saturday night with many crossed fingers. House management is unable to post a running time because the cast has yet to complete a run-through without stopping. But the box office is expecting 175 people because it is a Lee Blessing play. It begins well. Gil 1 has terrific energy. I laugh at lines I've already heard ten times. When Mason makes his first entrance, someone behind me whispers, "He's a famous actor." Mason's old friend, Max, sits next to me. The performance concludes without a single blatant hitch and the audience claps with appreciation. In the O'Neill convention, there is no curtain call.

On Sunday morning at 11:30, the cast gathers in brilliant sunshine outside the Barn for Michael's notes on Saturday night. A great first scene. The play and the cast took a huge step and it was artistically exciting to watch. Lee also seems to mean it when he says, "I want to thank all you guys. It was really a pleasure." Then a few war stories. Ray 2, flipping through his script, finds two page 99s and understands why he was so confused last night. "Scared the shit out of me." At one point, Ray 1 had lost his script. But Ray 2 is surprised to hear that backstage was so chaotic. Later, he describes the performance as a "rare thing. It all gelled."

At 2:20 on Sunday afternoon, the house manager rings the ten-minute warning bell and people stream up the walkway on a glorious summer day for the matinee, the second and final performance of *Thief River*. The house is even more crowded than the night before, with staff sitting upstairs on folding chairs, peering over the balcony rail. The cast picks up on many of Michael's notes, especially the pacing. In fact, the performance is ten minutes shorter than the night before. Ray 2 is louder and his speech about his wife is less emotional. Gil 2 has changed his reading of "Taking a Week" with Ray 2 and "What Does Ray Need?" Mason seems more comfortable, more understandable, and he's picking up the pace. Light changes work more smoothly. The applause is even more enthusiastic than last night.

I catch up with Mason as he's getting into his car after the show. "This afternoon really felt good," he says. Michael is visibly thrilled that he was part of putting up this play for the first time in front of an audience. When I ask Lee how close this staged reading comes to the play in his head, he thinks, then says, "Remarkably well."

The O'Neill has done its job.

For more information about Eugene O'Neill Theater Center's programs, contact the Center at (860) 443-5378.

NATIONAL ARTS STABILIZATION SEMINARS

National Arts Stabilization (NAS) in conjunction with Stanford University Graduate School of Business (GSB) announces a joint venture to bring executive education to arts leaders in communities. Participants are invited to "get new ways to think about their organizations, a collegial atmosphere for sharing insights with colleagues and time out of the daily routine to develop new skills, enlarge their horizons and test new ideas."

Many in our nonprofit theatre community are familiar with NAS. Originally conceived by the Ford Foundation and later funded by the Ford, Rockefeller and Mellon foundations, NAS has led arts stabilization efforts in Boston, New York, Baltimore, Seattle, Kansas City and Arizona, offering technical expertise and

grants to arts organizations. In recent years, NAS has expanded its focus to include a series of executive education seminars in a program titled *Leadership in a Changing*

Environment: Executive Education for Arts Leaders. Ed Martenson, previously executive director of the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, is program director for the project for National Arts Stabilization, and Jim Phils, acting associate professor of organizational behavior at the Stanford GSB, is program director for Stanford.

NAS and Stanford GSB present seminars on:

- ◆ Strategy: How to position your organization for continued success in a rapidly changing environment, and
- ◆ Managing Change: How to maximize your leadership effectiveness through active and productive management of change.

The seminars consist of case studies, discussion and practical applications to one's home organization. NAS's program is unique, however, because it is specifically focused on arts leaders. Participants are drawn from arts and cultural organizations of all sizes and types within a community. They include top artistic and management directors, board leaders, senior staff and representatives from key stakeholder groups.

When NAS held its seminar on strategy in Baltimore in 1997, Center Stage was represented by our managing director, our resident dramaturg and several Center Stage trustees. In addition, staff and trustees from the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, the Baltimore Children's Museum, the Walters Art Museum and the Baltimore Museum of Art, among other cultural organizations, participated in the three-day pilot session that launched NAS's executive education program. One of the program's great strengths was the collegiality fostered between trustees and staff of Center Stage and among Baltimore's arts community as we problem solved for ourselves and for each other.

The experienced faculty for both Strategy and Managing Change seminars are Stanford professors, augmented by faculty from Harvard Business School and Northwestern's Kellogg School of Business.

Theatres from all over the country have participated in NAS seminars on strategy. Among them are A Contemporary Theatre, Actors Theatre of Louisville, American Repertory Theatre, Arena Stage, Center Stage, The Cleveland Playhouse, the Goodman Theatre, the Guthrie Theater, La Jolla Playhouse, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, and representatives from Theatre Communications Group.

For further information on NAS executive education, contact Ed Martenson, program director, at emartens@newmex.com.

GOVERNING FOR NONPROFIT EXCELLENCE: CRITICAL ISSUES FOR BOARD LEADERSHIP

This Harvard Business School Executive Education seminar is designed for chairs of nonprofit boards and other nonprofit board members in significant leadership positions. The three-day curriculum focuses on issues of critical concern to board leaders, including:

- ◆ Defining and managing mission transformations and the resulting organizational changes;
- ◆ Strategic planning;
- ◆ Achieving financial sustainability and financial accountability;
- ◆ Developing effective relationships between the board and the professional leader;
- ◆ Productive use of alliances;
- ◆ Creating a productive and flexible board structure;
- ◆ Preserving trust and accountability.

I was an enthusiastic participant in this program and recommend the experience to board chairs and prospective board

chairs. My approximately sixty internationally diverse fellow learners represented a wide range of nonprofit institutions as well as personal and professional backgrounds. My classmates included the president of a hospital wrestling with a merger, the president of a Texas art museum and one of the internet's first megamillionaires turned professional philanthropist. We heard as much about the pressures of HMOs on hospitals as we did about financial pressures on the arts. A variety of perspectives created an enlivening and dynamic exchange.

The learning process used is the case study method. This "learning by analogy" demands significant preparation time before and during the seminar. The payoff is a rich learning environment — intellectually challenging discussions between teachers and students.

Most memorable was the extraordinary faculty — master teachers, leaders in their fields, immersed in the best of current

thinking and theories. Their lectures were pure theatre, their discussions perfectly orchestrated with pacing and participation. Prominent among the faculty are Richard Chait, co-author of *Improving the Performance of Governing Boards* and the *Harvard Business Review* articles, “The New Work of Nonprofit Boards” and “Charting the Territory of Nonprofit Boards” and Regina E. Herzlinger, author of *Financial Accounting and Managerial Control for Nonprofit Organizations*.

Our classroom work was enhanced by collaborative work with peers and faculty moderated peer consultation sessions. Living arrangements encourage this interaction. Private rooms organized in suites are arranged around a common area that provides for the possibility of collaborations. Our group met there first thing in the day for early morning group study sessions and later for our afternoon group consultation sessions.

Consultations focused on a critical issue we each identified

that our organizations were facing. For Center Stage, it was the approaching retirement of our long-term managing director, Peter Culman.

Although I privately thought Center Stage was in great shape, these peer consultations helped me to assess the importance of organizational planning for this major transition. As a result of our discussions, I returned to Baltimore and organized an Ad Hoc Committee on Board Effectiveness, which evaluated current board practices, began an effort to move the board into the strongest possible position for the transition, and planned for my own succession.

The next session of Governing for Nonprofit Excellence will take place November 14-17, 2001. To apply or to learn more about this program, contact: Executive Education Programs, Harvard Business School, Soldiers Field Road, Boston, MA, 02163-9986, Phone: (617) 495-6226.

KENNEDY CENTER'S VILAR INSTITUTE FOR ARTS MANAGEMENT

Made possible through the generous support of Alberto W. Vilar, as part of an unprecedented fifty million dollar gift to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the Vilar Institute for Arts Management is intended to be a dynamic learning environment for the development of performing arts managers and trustees.

In September of 2001, the Vilar Institute will inaugurate its program — which will fall within the aegis of the Education Department of the Kennedy Center, with center president Michael M. Kaiser as its director. Led by senior management of the Kennedy Center in collaboration with faculty from major American universities noted for business and management (Harvard Business School, The Wharton School of Business-University of Pennsylvania, etc.) and senior staff from other arts organizations, the institute is planned as a dynamic learning environment for the training of performing arts managers and trustees. The institute will provide an annual executive seminar for new and current board members of arts organizations throughout the nation to address the changing roles and responsibilities of board members and trustees in the nonprofit world. Through in-depth conversations, participants will discuss the impact of nonprofit arts institutions on the development of the social, economic and educational health of their communities. National and international issues facing performing arts organizations will also be highlighted during this seminar.

To learn more about the Vilar Institute's programs, visit www.kennedy-center.org/education/vilarinstitute/.

TCG PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR TRUSTEES

Trustee Leadership Network

TCG offers an enhanced form of individual membership for trustees of Constituent theatres. Members of the Trustee Leadership Network receive a free subscription to TCG's monthly theatre management publications: the *TCG Bulletin*, the *Centerpiece* series (including three issues annually on governance issues), Executive Director Ben Cameron's field letter, the American Arts Alliance *Legislative Update* and the quarterly *International Theatre Institute Newsletter*; in addition to the usual benefits of individual TCG membership: a subscription to the monthly magazine *American Theatre*, discounts on TCG books and other publications, theatre ticket discounts and a variety of other benefits. Trustees are also provided with a free copy of TCG's annual pocket-sized *Theatre Directory*, which lists essential information about every TCG member theatre, including artistic and managing leaders, board chairs, telephone and fax numbers, mail, email and website addresses, union contract information, performance seasons, special interests and personnel and state-by-state indexes, plus contact information for dozens of other organizations that provide services related to the nonprofit theatre.

Each Constituent theatre may nominate up to five trustees or, alternatively, any member of its Executive

Committee (or equivalent body), for membership in the Trustee Leadership Network. Over 100 trustees from theatres across the country have joined the Trustee Leadership Network. The annual membership fee is \$75. To join, contact your theatre's managing director about submitting a nomination.

American Theatre Magazine and Individual Membership

Individual TCG memberships, open to anyone, cost \$35 annually. The primary benefits are a subscription to *American Theatre*, discounts on TCG books and other publications and theatre ticket discounts. To become an individual member, contact TCG's customer service department at (212) 697-5230, by email at custserv@tcg.org or order online at www.tcg.org.

Forums

TCG regularly holds two weekend-long gatherings annually, one in the fall and one in the spring, in different cities to provide theatre staff and trustees the opportunity for in-depth discussion of artistic, managerial and governance issues, and the chance to meet and interact with their theatre colleagues from around the country. Attendance ranges from 40 to 120 people, and theatres are encouraged to send their artistic and/or managing directors together with a trustee. The format generally includes case studies, panel presentations, moderated group

discussions and talks by innovative thinkers and experts from both within and outside the field. Recent forums have focused on advocacy (*Making the Case for Theatre*, Denver, fall 2000), personal, professional and institutional renewal (*The Renewal Quest*, Houston, spring 2000) and governance (*Effective Governance for Changing Times*, New York, fall 1999). Another forum on governance is planned for the fall of 2001 in New York. Invitations will be sent to Constituent theatres in August.

National Conference

TCG's National Conference, a biennial field tradition, fosters a national network among theatre artists, managers, trustees and other theatre professionals. Over the years, these professional retreats have encouraged a sense of collegiality and provided crucial opportunities for the exchange of ideas and discussion of issues confronting the theatre field. The conference, typically attended by 600 people, includes artistic and managing leaders and trustees of member theatres, individual artists, funders, government representatives and leading practitioners and theorists from other art forms and disciplines. Attendance is by invitation only. Constituent theatres are invited to send a delegation of three people, Associate theatres one person. The conference includes speakers, panels, roundtables, "open space" sessions for

which content is determined by the attendees, workshops, a vendor fair and performances. The conference typically includes at least one event or session designed specially for trustees. The next National Conference, entitled *The Role of Live Theatre in a Digital Culture*, will be held June 20-23, 2001, in Philadelphia. Invitations have been sent to all member theatres.

Annual Fiscal Survey and Theatre Facts

Conducted annually since 1974, TCG's Fiscal Survey serves as a planning and reference tool for TCG's member theatres. The survey, verified by theatres' audits, collects theatres' balance sheets, detailed income statements and

information about personnel, production costs, attendance and ticket sales. The results, analyzed by budget group, are provided to participating theatres, who may also request special reports based on the survey data for theatres in particular budget ranges, geographic areas and the like.

An in-depth analysis of the cumulative Fiscal Survey data is published each May as a *Centerpiece* entitled *Theatre Facts*. *Theatre Facts* provides both current information and year-to-year comparisons. It is intended as a benchmark for theatre managers as well as an advocacy tool for trustees, funders, policy makers, the media and others who need to understand the nature and financial

realities of the nonprofit professional theatre. A less detailed, more accessible, public version of *Theatre Facts* is also published as an *American Theatre* article every September.

Model Board Handbook

A compilation of various kinds of provisions that might be included in a nonprofit theatre's board manual was prepared by Yale School of Drama theatre management students for use by TCG theatres. The manual is available, at no charge, on request. Please direct requests to Joan Channick, TCG's deputy director, at (212) 697-5230 or by email at jchannick@tcg.org.

For more information about these or other TCG programs, visit www.tcg.org.