

## PEOPLE WHO NEED PEOPLE

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(1) When cast members commit themselves to a play, the depth of their self-investment directly reflects the depth of their relationships with one another. Investment involves sacrifices of time, responsibilities, social activities apart from the play, and personal interests. As if these sacrifices were not enough, cast members sometimes experience emotional roller-coaster rides in trying to meet the demands of their director. When the pressure mounts, they begin to re-evaluate their "love" for theater: "Was it for this we wanted to be in a play?" No, theater is not merely the discipline of acting; if this were the case, no actor could survive. When actors truly love the theater, they are in essence loving and caring about the people involved in it, because people are at the heart of theater.

(2) The people in a cast can be quite diverse in their backgrounds, values and personalities. But the common bond which unites them is their ability to evoke a sense of reality in the characters they portray and bring them to life. In the theater world of fantasy, a play reproduces life; and the better it is performed, the more life-like it seems. However, the play is not real life itself, for the life of a play lasts only for a few fleeting performances. The only remnant of the play is the impact it has made on the people who have witnessed it.

(3) The relationships the actors share on and off stage are the only real-life elements of theater, since much of the fantasy and the glamor of theater is phony. The cast members share the beautiful experience of watching their own personalities blossom into those of their characters. The actors' new identities become meaningful as they interrelate with each other; after all, the secret of acting is reacting. They work together like a clock mechanism--if one gear is not functioning properly, the clock will not tick.

(4) However, in order to devote their energies to life on the stage, they must neglect their own personal lives, quite a sacrifice. First, they must make a major daily time commitment. Not only do they lose schedule flexibility, their grades and jobs suffer. Physical demands and fatigue make them more susceptible to illness. They lose the freedom to carry on a normal social life. These sacrifices, especially the last one, make it imperative for the cast to have a social life among themselves, one apart from their interaction during rehearsals. How else could they keep their sanity? They

are spending most of their time together anyway and are expected to deal with each other on an intense basis through their characters. Working so laboriously with each other, they need a chance to relax, let off steam, and have fun together. At the very least, there are trips to eating places; even McDonald's will suffice, or better yet, a cast party.

(5) Although group support is an important element in helping actors through the sacrifice of their personal lives, it is even more crucial within the actual play rehearsals. This hidden, unglamorous element of theater involves "blood, sweat, toil, and tears," and patience and endurance. It takes a real trouper to have the patience to stand around in the wings, unable to do anything productive while waiting to perform on stage. Endurance is necessary for the actors who are on stage, running through a scene perhaps twenty times before it meets the director's specifications. In some ways, the actor's greatest difficulty may be dealing with the director. The director chose the play and has a definite idea of how to interpret it. Usually, the better and more demanding the director is, the more he restricts the actor's freedom to create a character. Conflicts can arise when the director chooses an abrupt or challenging manner, one that may achieve artistic results but cause the relationship with the actor to suffer for the moment. Such tension is particularly difficult for an inexperienced actor who has not yet developed the sophistication to separate his acting from his personal feelings. The more experienced cast members empathize with the sensitive actor and encourage him: opening night will be worth it all.

(6) Certainly the close bonds between cast members does not exclude an actor's need for support from other people, especially his family and friends. He needs these good sounding boards on which to vent his frustrations, the opportunity to say things which fellow cast members might find insensitive. Too, his family and friends can provide objective insights, advice, and encouragement. Nevertheless, these same people are the ones in the audience who make the actor most nervous during a performance and send him hurrying back to fellow cast members. Only they can reassure each other that, just as they have shared the joys and hardships during rehearsals, together they will share the excitement necessary to give first-rate performances.

(7) This thrill and joy increases after each performance and reaches its peak after the last. And then . . . it is over. The "family" must now be dispersed. They will probably see each other from time to time, but not with the same intensity or sense of shared purpose. Yet, the physical separation does not completely sever their ties; they will always have memories and the special love for each other which was

nurtured by sacrifice and discipline. They will remain a family, recognizing themselves as people who need people.