



House Manager's Guidelines

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The information included in this guideline comes from many years of theatrical experience. It is one person's summary based on year's of working in this capacity. Use it as you see fit.

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HOUSE MANAGER'S GUIDELINES

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HOUSE MANAGER'S GUIDELINES

I. INTRODUCTION

It is hoped that this guide will aid in the performance of the duties of House Manager for future performances. It is an attempt to document the many miscellaneous tasks required to continue the successful friendly interface of the theatre to the general public. The Poway Performing Arts Company (PowPAC) is dedicated to not only presenting quality plays but also to make the patrons feel as though they were a part of the presentations and to always feel welcome. It is important that the reader of this document also realize that every attempt was made to cover all the many details involved without delving into specifics in some cases. As always, one good way to learn the details is to volunteer to take on the function and then discuss this guide and the additional information with someone who has experienced the role in the past. Many items not completely spelled out in this document will be made clear by discussions with prior House Manager's.

II. RESERVATIONS

Telephone number is 858-679-8085. Guidebook is included with the reservation book.

Only the House Manager and/or a designated "reservations person" may pick up and confirm reservations from the theater. No one else is to touch the answering machine or to use that line!

Discuss with previous House Manager (or Kathy) how to obtain the telephone messages left at the theatre. If the answering machine does not work, call the theatre or contact previous HM for help. Remember that a non-working machine or a machine that has run out of tape means potential patrons who are unhappy and who may make other plans. If someone turns off the machine without unplugging it, it can be activated from another phone by letting it ring 15 times.

Do not re-record the theatre's message yourself unless you are certain you have all the required information; e.g. the handicapped parking and access in the back must be included. The outgoing message can be no longer than 60 seconds. Choose your words with economy.

We promise to confirm reservation requests within 24 hours. Most patrons will give you some leeway. Some will not. Don't be dismayed if someone tells you a reservation was not confirmed when you know you called. You're fairly safe if you spoke to the person. You're somewhat safe if you left a message on an answering machine. Leaving messages with other human beings is a gamble.

III. SEATING

A. Reservation seating:

Reservations are held until 10 minutes prior to curtain. If the performance is sold out and there are walk-ins waiting, use your best judgment in deciding whom to bump first. If you don't recognize any reservation as being particularly shaky, bump the smallest party possible to accommodate the walk-ins. It is easy enough to bump a large party later if the small party shows up at the last minute. (More often than not, the first party bumped will show up eventually.)

B. Assigning Seats:

Good luck. There are patrons who like certain seats, or at least certain areas. Usually they mention this, however, a list of important guide lines follows. Otherwise try to make most efficient use of limited space. Empty seats near the lobby curtain can be helpful for seating late-comers. Except for special requests, wait as long as possible before assigning seats. It makes it easier to accommodate last minute reservations by people with special needs..

If house is not full, it's best to skip rows between seat assignments; visibility is not 100%. Beginning with Row 1, use 1, 3, and 5 or 1, 2, 4, 6. Use the remaining rows as needed. If the house is truly tiny ("select"?) and there are no special requests or season ticket holders, open seating is OK.

Special requests should be accommodated, if possible; otherwise, first come, first served. Normally there are 60 seats available for each performance. If a performance is sold-out, one additional seat may be placed next to seat A10. Patrons may not be seated in the Lighting/Sound Booth without permission of the operators. This includes Board Members and other insiders who were frequently accorded this privilege at Golden West. Most operators will oblige; a few will not for fear of being distracted and missing a cue.

Do not bump season ticket holders. Do not offend a season ticket holder or anyone who requested the first row two weeks in advance by seating a walk-in in front of him. Remember, a season ticket holder has already paid for the seat (and PowPAC has already allotted the use of those funds.)

If the performance is not sold out, use any unsold seats to accommodate walk-ins. Someone who has requested special seating should not be reassigned in favor of a walk-in unless the house is actually full. If you have empty seats and the walk-in does not have a pressing need for special seating, don't risk alienating a party that may show up any minute. People who make reservations with special seating requests usually show up.

Some patrons are hearing- or sight-impaired. They will usually mention this on the phone and request the first (or second) row. These requests should be accommodated.

C. Standing Requests:

There are some patrons that come to every production. They say nice things about PowPAC in public. They often bring friends. They are to be treasured. If this is your first time as House Manager, discuss with prior Managers for info on these great people.

D. Directors:

The Director may attend any performance not sold-out, with seating at the discretion of the person at the ticket desk. The rule of thumb is that they sit at the back of the house, because they can't maintain a poker face when things aren't perfect. Those with season tickets use those seats on opening night. They may sit in the Light/Sound booth with permission of the operators.

E. Judge Seating:

Theoretically, ACT judges should not be seated together. In practice, this is tricky. Many like the first row and it's OK to insert some poor couple between the judges. However, if the audience is really small, don't bother trying to separate them. It looks and feels ridiculous.

F. Conflicts:

Don't panic if there is a conflict with a patron. Just remember the old saw that the customer is always right and try to find a way to make as many people happy as possible. If necessary, apologize profusely for any inconvenience, even when you are sure you have not made a mistake. Just treat the patron the way you want to be treated when you are the customer. You can vent your frustrations later.

IV. TICKETS

A. Prices:

General Admission: \$15; Seniors, Students, & Active Military: \$12; Groups of 20 or more: (Does NOT apply to special events) Call for info. Cash or check only. \$2.00 Surcharge on Opening Night.

B. Ticket Desk:

The ticket desk should be open for business as early as possible. Patrons, particularly walk-ups, may arrive as much as an hour before curtain. (Usually there is no business until 30 minutes prior to curtain.) It is best to set up the desk first, then deal with any other necessary pre-show preparations not being handled by the rest of the volunteers.

C. Cast & Crew Comps:

Distributed by the Producer(s) of each show. PowPAC's official policy is that comps will not be accepted opening night or on Saturdays.

D. Other Comps:

ACT judges and reviewers for Action! and other publications are comp'd and may bring a guest free of charge. This includes one reviewer who does an electronic review via Email to a substantial number of recipients.

E. Two for Ones, both PowPAC and Entertainment Book:

PowPAC's policy is pay for one admission and get another of equal or lesser value free. Entertainment coupons are accepted at all performances except benefits and fund-raisers.

F. Benefits & Fund-Raisers:

Comps and two-for-ones should not be accepted. Ticket prices may be different than above, the donation jar may be inappropriate at Intermission, and a pre- or post-show reception may be requested. Consult the Producer(s).

G. House Manager's Discretion:

In case of misunderstandings or conflict with a patron, the House Manager is to resolve the difference using his/her best judgment. A few examples - if some actor's grandmother was given a comp and will be in town for only one performance - a benefit - let her in. One actor gave her boyfriend a two-for-one instead of a comp. He came alone. We split the difference; I let him in for half price. Often cast/crew members promise friends and relatives to leave comps at the door and then forget to actually do so. A judgment call, but precedent suggests you seat the patron and consult the offender after the show. I have watched obviously embarrassed college students search pockets and purses for spare change and come up just short of the ticket price; I let them in. Trust your judgment when these things occur. At least they don't happen often. Just make a note on the cash box sheet to let the Treasurer know what you did. My personal rules of thumb: 1) The customer is always right and 2) Remember that this is community theater..

V. GENERAL

A. Cast Party:

The House Manager and any regular volunteers are invited to the cast party. Most parties BYOB and a dish to share. The theatre provides paper products (cups, plates, napkins, etc.) and usually donates any wine left over from the opening night party. I usually prepare a box of things to be sent over to the party with a member of the cast or crew who will get there promptly.

Keep the cast party in mind while monitoring supplies, particularly at the end of the third weekend. It is not fun to realize at 10:00 p.m. that you don't have enough cups for both the party and the next day's performance.

The cast party may be held at the theatre, although I personally try to discourage the practice. If the cast party is held on a Saturday evening before a Sunday matinee, the theater must be **audience-ready** by 1:00 o'clock Sunday afternoon. The House Manager and Producer(s) should agree on the terms of the party, including who will be responsible for locking up. Do not feel obligated to accept full responsibility for clean up. If no one is willing or able to ensure the cleanliness of the theater before the next performance, another venue should be found. These parties are a reward for and celebration of everyone's hard work, not just another duty.

Remember: If the party is held at the theatre, you are **not** obligated to provide access to the sodas and cookies you planned to serve at Sunday's matinee.

B. Decorations:

1. House general: You may decorate the house as you see fit, although some directors and producers want input in the decision. If house personnel are not in costume, the traditional black and white garb is strongly recommended but not mandatory (unless you say so). Your decorations must accommodate any on-going fund-raising efforts, such as the 1999-2000 raffle and season ticket sales.

2. Photo Albums: These should be displayed around the theater lobby. The only other required element of the decor is the Photo Board.

3. Photo Board. A required element of the decor for every production is displaying the photos of the cast. The photos can be 8-1/2 X 11 or 5 X 7 inches. Each photo should be labeled with the cast member's name and character. Color, size, and location of the board are at your discretion.

C. House Rules:

1. No outside food or drink in the lobby! This rule applies to the audience, not to the cast and crew backstage. House personnel should use discretion; keep food out of sight until the audience is in the auditorium. Avoid particularly aromatic foods, unless you want to deal with 50 people craving hamburgers.

Despite this official policy, I let people bring in coffee or soft drinks from the outside into the lobby before the show. We don't serve beverages (other than water) before intermission, and the drinks are rarely spilled on the carpet.

2. Telephone: Don't charge for use of the phone. The line is limited to local calls; the patron, cast or crew member will have to use a calling card to make a long distance call. Accept a donation if it's offered, of course, but it really isn't necessary.

3. Sales Materials: May not be displayed per the Board of Directors.

4. Flyers: PowPAC flyers should be plentiful. Flyers from other theaters should be posted backstage for the cast. They may be left on tables in the lobby, however, they may not be mounted on the lobby walls, per the Board.

5. Talking: The lobby curtain is not sound-proof. Keep all noise and talking (whispering) to a minimum and as far from the auditorium as possible.

6. Animals: No animals other than guide dogs are permitted in the theater (unless they are performing in the show.)

7. Future reservations: . Some patrons and judges like to make reservations for the next show when they are at the theater. This is fine, however, make sure the next House Manager or the FOM gets the message.

D. Opening Night Reception

1. Meatballs: PowPAC is one of the few theaters that has no difficulty in getting certain patrons to see every show. The secret: a recipe consisting of one bag of Price-Cosco or Smart & Final meatballs and one large bottle of Chef's Sweet & Sour Sauce, which is usually available at Smart & Final. One House Manager generally adds cocktail wieners to the meatballs and uses barbecue sauce, with no complaints.

2. General menu: Your menu is up to you, however, whatever you serve should be ready as soon as the performance ends. Most of the audience will not wait while something is being heated. One advantage of meatballs is that slow cookers and warming pans are quiet. Be careful before deciding to use the microwave or the toaster oven, which might be heard in the auditorium.

3. Budget/etc.: You have a \$50.00 budget, which won't go far. Feel free to ask others to donate food. Remember that just as at intermission, be careful not to make much noise while setting up the refreshments. For example, it's probably best to go on the landing to pour potato chips into a bowl.

E. Programs

Each patron is entitled to a program, however, not everyone takes one home. Therefore, PowPAC does not print the 720 programs theoretically necessary in the event of 12 sold-out houses. Recycle any un-crumpled programs left in the house. If you aren't sure you have enough programs, consult the Producer(s). It's probably best to play it safe and have a small number run.

The actors will want at least one program each when the show opens. They should be accommodated unless a printing problem has caused a shortage for the opening weekend.

F. Staffing/Volunteers

It is better to be over-staffed than under-staffed. Raffle tickets sell much better when someone is designated to encourage donors. There should be 2 volunteers behind the bar at Intermission, although it is possible to get by with one if coffee is handled on a self-serve basis. One person must remain in the lobby to intercept visitors and handle emergencies throughout the entire performance. Extra ushers can leave after the opening curtain if they wish, or watch the performance if space permits. A list of potential volunteers is included, however, new faces are to be encouraged.

There is no age limit for ushers and some children enjoy passing out programs. There are several good examples of children doing a splendid job and if they are willing to help, every effort should be made to accommodate them. Always make sure that children have the permission of their parents prior to doing the volunteering.

G. Supplies

Keep extra rolls of toilet paper and paper towels in a restroom, under the sink. That way, you needn't try to go to the Office during the performance and risk the Stage Manager's wrath by causing extra noise.

Make sure you check the men's room before each performance. There are only a few PowPAC members that will empty the trash without being asked. In the first eight months of operation, only one man told the FOM when he had run out of anything. The women will let you know they need something; don't rely on the men to do the same. (Spare me the sarcasm. I know this sounds sexist. Do you want a politically correct guide or do you want one that reflects reality?)

H. Video

We have one member who is willing to set up and tape a performance. This person must be asked ahead of time by either the Producer(s) or the House Manager. Otherwise he won't assume that his services are necessary. He sets up in the Sound Booth, therefore, seating is not affected. However, light from the lobby becomes critical; make sure the curtain is disturbed as little as possible.

I. Intermission

- 1. Food:** Cleaning the theater between performances is the House Manager's responsibility. Consider potential mess carefully when deciding what to offer. At this writing, no money is available to have the carpet cleaned. Trays can be prepared before the show and kept behind the counter.
- 2. Beverages:** Unplug the coffee and hot water pots about 15 minutes before the end of the act, otherwise, many patrons find the contents too hot to consume during a brief intermission. Fruit punch and lemonade may better suit the theme of the production than sodas. They are certainly less expensive. Be forewarned: most patrons prefer soft drinks.
- 3. Ice:** The sound of ice being put into cups can be heard inside the auditorium. Fill the ice bucket on the landing. You can pour beverages ahead of time, but do not add ice until the act ends.
- 4. Donation Jars:** If you wish, preset the seed money and leave it in the jars throughout the run of the show. To date, there has been no problem with this practice and it does eliminate the need to scrounge for dollar bills during each performance.

J. Judges

- 1. Judges in general:** Judges are not supposed to discuss the show being presented, nor any other judged show. Otherwise, feel free to talk to them and make them feel at home. They rarely bite. In fact, most of them are quite nice and feel almost as awkward as you do.

Note: Be sure you get the address sheets or at least the address information from the Producer(s) or Director. This is normally left until the last minute and inevitably someone's address is unknown and requires hasty research, or the phone numbers are omitted.

- 2. Judging Sheets:** Judging sheets are given to each judge with his/her ticket. The information on the sheets is provided by the Director and proof-read by the Producer(s). The typing and Xeroxing can be done by the Producer(s) or the House Manager. Usually the House Manager addresses the envelopes. Judges must judge the entire show, therefore, it is rarely permitted to seat a judge who arrives late. Be familiar enough with the play to determine if the judge has missed too much to score the production or actor(s) fairly.
- 3. ACT:** Current policy is that 10 judges are assigned to each show. If any judge cannot attend, he/she is responsible for arranging for a substitute. Despite this, fewer than 10 judges may actually attend. Frequently more than 10 judges will show up, each with a guest. Any judge may attend any show, whether or not assigned, and bring a guest at no charge. If fewer than 10 judges have made reservations going into the third weekend, please let Kathy (McCafferty) Van Buren know.

4. Judges Packets: Two judging sheets, 1 critique sheet inside a stamped envelope addressed to proper recipient. (Presently, 2002, Jacquie Day, 1925 Otay Lakes Road, #29, Chula Vista, CA 91913). The return address on the envelope should read: PowPAC, 13250 Poway Road, Poway, CA 92064, followed by the name of the production.

5. Judges' Rep Packet: 6 judging sheets, 1 critiques sheet, an address sheet (the names, addresses, and phone numbers of everyone listed on the judging sheet), and a manila envelope addressed to PowPAC, also labeled with the show's title. PowPAC is also the return address. The manila envelope requires sufficient postage - TBD. (Prior to latest postage hike, this was \$0.80.)

6. PowPAC: As of the 2002-3 season, judging is performed by Season Ticket holders. They should check in at the desk when they arrive and be given a copy of the PowPAC ballot. A box for completed ballots has been made available on the counter or they can be turned into House Personnel. Critique sheets will be available for all patrons as well.

VI. TO DO LIST

A. Pre-Show

1. Auditorium:

- Turn on elevator
- Vacuum (including elevator as needed)
- Turn on air conditioner/heater as needed
- Check seat alignment
- Pick up any left-over programs, glasses, ticket stubs, etc.

2. Lobby, Restrooms, etc

- Turn on air conditioner/heater as needed
- Clean restrooms
- Check toilet paper and paper towels
- Start coffee/hot water
- Empty small trash cans
- Damp mop floors (as needed, generally once a week)
- Dust (as needed, generally once a week)
- Vacuum
- Sweep stairways (as needed)
- Vacuum Green Room and dressing rooms (as needed, generally once a week)
- Get out programs
- Turn down volume on answering machine
- Turn off ringer on telephone
- Check volume level on receiver (after pre-show music begins)

3. Reservation Desk

- Assign seats
- Sort tickets by reservation.
- Sort empty seats by row
- Fill and stamp judges' envelopes (if necessary)
- Pull out judging forms for season ticket holders

B. After Intermission/During Performance

- Balance cash box. Count refreshment donations. Count raffle ticket donations
- Fill out receipt for Treasurer and put receipt and proceeds in envelope
- Put away left-over refreshments
- Clean counter. Sweep linoleum
- Check supplies for next performance

C. After Show

- Turn off elevator and air conditioner/heater
- Turn on telephone ringer

(If you suspect your time will be pressed before the next performance, do any pre-show preparation you feel appropriate. Be warned that this will do little good after a Sunday performance; weekday rehearsals and construction may thwart your efforts.)

D. After Sunday's Show

- Turn over money to the Treasurer
- Check supply of paper goods, etc., and purchase anything needed
- Freeze any left-over refreshments
- Make sure trash from dressing rooms and Green Room is emptied.