

Persuasive Speaking – How NOT to Make an Argument!

Anyone who knows me well knows that sometimes I can lack confidence. I suppose years of adolescent torment can do that to someone. But one thing I was confident in was my ability to make a good persuasive argument.

NOT ANYMORE.

After recent events as a member of our local theatre's "Play Reading Committee" I am wondering if when I talk I simply make no sense... If what is a compelling argument (point) to me is just plain stupid to everyone else.

You see, our theatre has a play reading committee where people involved with the theatre meet to discuss what plays and musicals to do for the following season. This year, to start, we were given the assignment of bringing a complete season (OR TWO – with dates & location) to the meeting and your reason for selecting the shows you named.

As far as I could tell, I was one of the only ones who completed the assignment in it's entirety. Some had just a few shows they would recommend while others had 5-shows for a full season and no particular order.

I brought in two complete seasons... Shows, dates, and REASONS as to why I picked those shows and those dates. I made sure to keep in mind the needs of our struggling theatre and the mandates which had been given to us from the Trustees of the theatre. These mandates were to do a show that involved children, pick one show where everyone who auditioned could be cast, and to pick shows which the audience would have an awareness of already.

The shows I named specifically were:

Bryan in Feb – *A Few Good Men* (or) *Diary of Anne Frank*
May in Montpelier – *Phantom* or *Clue the Musical*
August in Montpelier – *The Goodbye Girl* or *Lost in Yonkers*
October in Bryan – *Little Shop of Horrors* (Cast ALL)
Nov/Dec in Montpelier – *Miracle on 34th Street* (Cast ALL
KIDS)

My logic was to create a season around a theme of “The Movies”. As many of the general, non-theatre lover, public might not know some core plays – almost everyone has heard of these movies.

I also placed a Christmas show (with kids in the cast) in our December slot, a show with a “Halloween” theme in our October slot (which could be one where we cast everybody), and a serious acting play (drama) at the beginning of the season.

I argued that as a theatre we need to do more to entice the public. Giving them something they already know is a key factor. This is why so many community theatres in large markets focus on primarily musicals. While a theatre lover may have heard of *Scapin* – almost everybody has heard of *West Side Story*.

Anyway, since we don't want to do 3 – 5 musicals a year I thought “movies” would be a good way to go...

GUESS NOT.

The latest meeting of the play reading committee has left me with no doubt. I DO NOT KNOW WHAT I AM TALKING ABOUT.

I have been with the theatre several years now and, not to pat my own back, but the productions I have been heavily involved in have been extremely successful from both a financial and cast-retention standpoint. However, it seems I make such a poor argument and such little sense that... Well, as the season begins to form I can see that NONE of my suggestions will be there.

It's not that I love those shows or anything. Anyone who knows me knows I would rather do *Assassins* and *Shear Madness*... Or even *Noises Off*. But the point is, what I saw as a persuasive argument (to get known shows in the season) seems to have been more of a pointless and non-compelling one.

It seems that my (obviously misguided) banter has become so apparently flawed that I am just getting ignored now. For example...

This last meeting we were trying to get any show that already had a director and solidify it into the season. I reminded the group that I was willing to direct *Little Shop of Horrors*.

Another member of the committee (a dear friend of mine!) suggested another musical, *Honk*. She suggested that she might be able to find a director for that one.

Well, the leader of our committee (who I absolutely adore – no sarcasm – love the guy!) says “I move we commit to *Honk* and put it in the season since we have a musical that someone will probably want to direct”.

I reminded the committee that we have two other musicals who people have COMMITTED to direct. *Little Shop* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. I asked that maybe we commit to one of those.

“No, I think it's too early to commit to one of those. Let's see what happens with some other things first.”

WHAT!?! The same person who JUST WANTED to put HONK (a musical of which he had never seen / heard) into the season because it MIGHT have a director said NO to putting either of the shows I talked about in the season for the reason of??

That is when I realized – I have completely devalidated (is that a word) myself. Apparently I have made so many bad mistakes and so many poor arguments that now when I speak it is just considered nonsense.

Oh well. At least I know now not to think too highly of my persuasive speaking skills.