



# **ESTABLISHING A DRAMA TEAM FOR THE LONG HAUL**

**STEVE PEDERSON**

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After teaching at the college level for fourteen years, Steve Pederson became the director of drama at Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Ill. in 1986. He leads a drama team of 25 lay people. Team members perform as part of Willow Creek's seeker services, and also frequently contribute to conferences both at home and abroad.

Pederson has traveled throughout North America and Europe, as well as Australia and New Zealand, teaching and leading workshops for the Willow Creek Association on drama in the church.

He has an M.A. in theater from the University of Minnesota and a Ph.D. in theater from the University of Iowa. He is the author of *Drama Ministry*, published by Zondervan.

He and his wife, Kathy, live in Streamwood, Ill. They have two married daughters.

## **Session Goal**

For attenders to assemble, train, and maintain a team of drama volunteers for the long haul

### Audition Suggestion

After some warm-ups, much of my audition is made up of nursery rhymes, i.e. "Jack and Jill," "Mary had a little lamb." This provides the text, with flexibility and creativity "tested" by saying the rhyme in different ways. Stand in a circle (so no audience/performer distinction) and begin with going around and having each person say only one line, i.e. "Jack and Jill went up the hill," the next person says "to fetch a pail of water," etc. Have them say it assuming different emotions/states of being: anger, proud, fear, shy, as though "in love," as if "funniest story ever heard," saddest story, irritated, sly, etc. Be creative.

Eventually have each person say whole rhyme. Now move to imposing animal character traits on rhyme. The idea is not to imitate an animal, but to use a quality of the animal as you say and physicalize the rhyme. This is very good for "testing" flexibility and how free-spirited your auditioners are. Suggested animals: elephant, giraffe, monkey, bear, puppy, snake, cat, ostrich, etc.

Now set up idea of a high school and all the people one would find there. Have people say the rhyme as the following characters: head cheerleader, burned-out principal, druggie, drama coach, football coach, captain of wrestling squad,

## I. Building a Team

### A. Assembling a Team

In auditions, look for:

1. Naturalness
  - People who are real and not “actors”
  
2. Free spirits
  - Not afraid to risk, go for it
  
3. Flexibility, versatility
  
4. Spiritual commitment

shop teacher, friendly bus driver, valedictorian, janitor, etc.

For one more layer, add animal adjustment to above characters.

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### B. Training the Team

Most essential requirements for actor training:

#### 1. Safe environment

- People grow most when not threatened or intimidated
- People need an environment where they feel freedom to explore, expand, grow
- Safe environment is greatly enhanced by community — people who know and care for each other — strong correlation between *ensemble* and *community*
- Provides positive reinforcement, encouragement, constructive criticism
- Enjoyable when risk leads to success

#### 2. Challenge

- Creative people want challenge, tend to get bored more easily
- Set goals
- Where do your actors need to improve?
  - Do they tend to "act"?
  - Do they push emotion?
  - Do they mug?
  - Do they lose concentration?
  - Does blocking seem like blocking?
  - Do characters appear one-dimensional?
  - Do their voices/bodies lack expression?
- Design training that will address an area actors need to improve upon

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3. Hold the process in high esteem
  - Process is connected to how we live out our faith
  - Good process supports a good product
  - We cannot be product driven
  - Be open communicators

### C. Maintaining the Team

A major reason people want to be part of a ministry team is to connect in a significant way with other people. As leaders we need to foster an environment where this can happen. If we do not do this, we will not have a team for the “long haul.”

1. Community
  - Small Groups
2. Actors need to feel valued
  - Built in to, not used
  - Their personal lives are important
  - Encouraged/challenged to have balanced lives
3. Actors need to be frequently reminded that what they do matters for the Kingdom
4. The team needs to regularly celebrate together what God is doing through them

## II. Leading a Team

Desirable qualities of a drama team leader:

- Affirmed talent in the area of drama
- A love for team, not a lone ranger
- A shepherd, as well as a vision caster and leader
- Recognizes potential and knows how to develop it
- Values people over product
- Committed to artistic and spiritual growth within a safe community

## Organizations and Publishers

### **Baker's Plays**

45 W 25<sup>th</sup> St  
New York, NY 10010  
212-255-8085  
[www.bakersplays.com](http://www.bakersplays.com)

### **CITA (Christians in the Theatre Arts)**

PO Box 26471  
Greenville SC 29616  
864-679-1898  
[www.cita.org](http://www.cita.org)  
(Sponsors numerous regional and one national conference a year; a very good organization which brings together church drama people with those working in professional theaters and Christian college theater programs.)

### **Dramatic Publishing Service**

311 Washington St  
Woodstock, IL 60098  
800-448-7469  
[www.dramaticpublishing.com](http://www.dramaticpublishing.com)  
(A few religious plays)

### **Dramatist's Play Service**

440 Park Ave., South  
New York, NY 10016  
212-683-8960  
[www.dramatists.com](http://www.dramatists.com)  
(A few religious plays)

### **Lillenas Publishing Co.**

2923 Troost  
Kansas City, MO 64109  
816-931-1900  
[www.lillenas.com](http://www.lillenas.com)  
(From Lillenas: *The Worship Drama Library* — offers numerous volumes of sketches for enhancing worship, as well as other drama materials)

### **Samuel French Inc.**

45 W 25th St  
New York, NY 10010  
212-206-8990  
[www.samuel french.com](http://www.samuel french.com)

### **ServiceBuilder**

Willow Creek Community Church drama  
DVDs and scripts are available at:  
[www.willowcreek.com/servicebuilder](http://www.willowcreek.com/servicebuilder)

## Books

### ***A Sense of Direction: Some Observations on the Art of Directing***

William Ball  
ISBN: 0896760820

### ***An Hour on Sunday***

Nancy Beach  
ISBN: 0310252962

### ***Drama for Worship, Vol. 1 & 2***

Curt Cloninger  
ISBN: 0784709165

### ***Theater Craft: Creativity and the Art of Drama***

Nigel Forde  
ISBN: 0877888078  
(Out of print, but available on Amazon. A good book written for Christians doing drama; covers both the theoretical and practical; deals with topics such as: the Christian artist, the director, writing, etc.)

## Recommended Resources

### ***Behind the Screen: Hollywood Insiders on Faith, Film and Culture***

Spencer Lewerenz & Barbara Nicolosi

ISBN: 080106547X

(While the focus is on film, an excellent book that holds up the value of truthful writing that doesn't preach.)

### ***The Playwright's Process***

Buzz McLaughlin

ISBN: 0823088332

(An excellent and practical book on the craft of playwriting)

### ***The Heart of the Artist: A Character-Building Guide for You and Your Ministry Team***

Rory Noland

ISBN: 0310224713

(An excellent book that challenges artists to a deeper level of Christ-likeness)

### ***Drama Ministry: Practical Help for Making Drama a Vital Part of Your Church***

Steve Pederson

ISBN: 0310219450

### ***Audition***

Michael Shurtleff

ISBN: 0802772404

### ***Christianity and the Theatre***

Murray Watts

(Available from Riding Lights Theater Co LTD, Friargate Theatre, Lower Friargate, YORK YO1 9SL, UK or

[www.ridinglights.org](http://www.ridinglights.org). A small book presenting an apologetic for theater; discusses the church/theater dynamic, and covers such issues as the predicament of a Christian actor

### ***Thriving as an Artist in the Church: Hope and Help for You and Your Ministry Team***

Rory Noland

ISBN: 0310257328

