

**WHAT THEATRE MAJORS LEARN:
THE ADVANTAGES THEATRE MAJORS
HAVE FOR ALL JOBS**

or....

**What Can You "Do" with a Theatre Major?
Plenty!**

25 Special Advantages YOU Have.

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Of course theatre majors can "do" theatre. But they also develop a neatly large number of highly valuable skills that make them valuable employees for any job. This article seeks to help you recognize your special advantages as a theatre major....more advantages than almost all other liberal arts grads have.

In somewhat different form, this was first published in Dramatics magazine. It has since been re-printed in various other publications, and it also appears on internet sites hosted by colleges and universities. I am deeply appreciative to learn that many college theatre departments also have posted it on their bulletin boards. I've gotten interesting letters. For all that, thank you!

I spoke to a group of business leaders about our college's theatre program not long ago, and after my remarks we had an interesting discussion about what theatre students do and learn.

The executives were particularly interested in hiring people with qualities like discipline, dependability, loyalty, and leadership, qualities that theatre students learn because they *must* to be effective members of a production team.

One CEO told the group that her company has found that theatre-trained applicants are valuable employees because they're

energetic, enthusiastic, and able to work under pressure. She pointed out that they generally have polished communications and human relations skills, and they're experienced at working as members of a team toward a common goal. Most importantly, she said, theatre graduates have a can-do confidence based on their experience of successfully meeting difficult challenges.

"Theatre students have done extremely well with us," she said, "and we usually hire them because they're well-disciplined workers who learn quickly and give of themselves to the company."

Another business leader agreed:

"We like to hire theatre students," he said, "but it is a shame that when they apply to us they don't seem to realize their strengths and advantages." (Note his last phrase!)

Not all managers are as enlightened as those executives about the value of a theatre education in many apparently unrelated kinds of work. (When you apply for a job, you'll have to teach the personnel manager what special advantages you offer the company.) But the conversation started me thinking about what theatre students learn.

It seems to me that, quite apart from the special skills that they learn to use onstage and backstage, theatre graduates enter the job market with important points in their favor.

- First, theatre classes give them the broad vision that all liberal arts students are supposed to acquire in college;
- Second, theatre's special hands-on, learn-by-doing environment gives them training, experience and skills that can be valuable in any number of careers.

An examination of a theatre degree's value in finding work outside of theatre is important both for (a) students who are determined to study theatre and make it their life's work, and

(b) those who are only considering a theatre major among a number of other options.

For group "a," it is highly likely that at some point in their lives they'll have to seek non-theatre employment, either permanently or as a way of keeping body and soul together while they pursue a theatre career. For group "b," "*What can you do with a theatre major?*" is a question of fundamental importance.

The "two types of jobs"

John Munschauer writes in Jobs for English Majors and Other Smart People that there are just two types of jobs:

- "professional work" that requires special training in law school, medical school, architecture school, and so forth, and
- "trait-oriented work," for which employers seek workers with special traits, such as communications skills, imagination, reasoning ability, and sound judgement.

Theatre training can be valuable preparation for many of the innumerable careers that fall in the second category.

You need to be aware of the many skills you learn as a theatre major. Really. You're a better candidate for employment than perhaps you know.

And you need to be sure you let prospective employers know how well you are prepared-- better prepared, in fact, than students who majored in most other fields. The following discussion points out some special advantages you have--25 of 'em, and you can probably add more.

**25 SPECIAL ADVANTAGES
THE THEATRE MAJOR HAS---
(and may not even know!)**

Here's a list of twenty-five skills, traits, and qualities of personality that are usually well-developed in individuals who complete four years of undergraduate theatre study.

Take special note of them. They are more extensive and important than perhaps you recognize.

As you think about them, consider how many of these advantages are unique to theatre majors--and that you have *far* more advantages than majors in most other disciplines.

1. Oral Communication Skills

Many students find that theatre helps them develop the confidence that's essential to speaking clearly, lucidly, and thoughtfully.

Acting onstage teaches you how to be comfortable speaking in front of large audiences, and some of your theatre classes will give you additional experience talking to groups. Furthermore, your work on crews has taught you that clear, precise, and well-organized oral communications are best. Oral communication skills are so important to some employers that they often send management trainees to special workshops. You already have an advantage.

2. Creative Problem Solving Abilities

Most people expect theatre students to exhibit creativity in such areas as acting, design, playwrighting or directing, and many companies do recruit creative thinkers. *But employers are not always aware that theatre experience also helps you learn creative problem-solving techniques that are applicable to many jobs. Tell them!*

For one example, tech theatre work--building scenery, hanging lights, making props, running the show, and so on--is a particularly good way to learn how to think on your feet, to identify problems, evaluate a range of possible solutions, and figure out what to do.

The same is true of almost every aspect of theatre. Directing. Design. Acting. Playwriting. Management. And more.

The point here is that your creative ability, what you've learned about using creative processes to solve problems, *can be directly applicable to virtually any job you may have.*

Most major companies believe that a creative problem-solver will become a good employee. That's you .

3. More than "get it done"

But theatre students learn that just "getting it done" isn't enough. Not at all. It goes beyond that. You learn to do it correctly. In theatre we learn that merely "getting the show on the boards" is pure bush league and totally unacceptable. Whatever your theatrical job--tech, performing, research, management--it has to be done right . You learn to take pride in doing things at your very best level. Of course an employer will value that trait.

4. Motivation and Commitment

Being involved in theatre productions and classes demands commitment and motivation. These are qualities that college theatre faculty members and, in some measure, you and your fellow students, probably already possess. By example, we teach each other that success comes to those who are committed to the task at hand. Few other disciplines you study will so strongly help you develop motivation and commitment.

Many theatre students learn to transfer that attribute from theatre to other activities such as classes and jobs. For employers, that positive attitude is essential.

5. Willingness to Work Cooperatively

Your work in theatre companies teaches you how to work effectively with different types of people--often very different types!

Theatre demands that participants work together cooperatively for the production to success; there is no room for "we" versus "they" behavior; the "star" diva is a thing of the past. Your colleagues will usually let you know when you violate the team spirit of a production.

In theatre, it's important that each individual supports the others involved. Employers will be pleased to know that you understand how to be a team player.

6. The Ability to Work Independently

In theatre, you're often assigned tasks that you must complete without supervision. Crew chiefs. Directing. Putting together this flat, finding that prop, working out characterization outside of rehearsals. It's left up to you to figure out how best to achieve the goal. The ability to work independently is a trait employers look for in their workers.

7. Time-budgeting Skills

When you're a student, being involved in theatre forces you to learn how to budget your time. You need to schedule your days very carefully if you want to keep up your grades while you're busy with rehearsals, work calls, and the other demands that theatre makes on your time. Good time management skills are enormously important to employers.

8. Initiative

Personnel managers call people who approach work with initiative and enterprise "self-starters," people who do what needs to be done without waiting to be asked, without needing to be told.

The complexities of a theatrical production demand individuals who are willing to voluntarily undertake any task that needs to be done in order for the production to succeed. In theatre, we're all self-starters. We learn how to take initiative, to move a project from initial concept to finality--and to do it well.

9. Promptness and Respect for Deadlines

Tardiness is never acceptable in theatre because it shows a lack of self-discipline, and more importantly, a lack of consideration for others. Being late for a rehearsal or a work call or failing to finish an assigned task on time damages a production and adversely affects the work of many other people. Theatre demands that you learn to arrive on time and meet scheduled deadlines.

That's a job-skill. Employers appreciate workers who are on time and do their work as scheduled.

10. Acceptance of Rules

In theatre you work within the structure of a set of procedures and rules that deal with everything from shop safety to behavior at auditions, rehearsals and work calls. You learn that you must be a "good follower." Theatre teaches you the importance of rules, a concept that's valued in any organization.

11. The Ability to Learn Quickly-- AND Correctly

Theatre students, whether they're memorizing lines or learning the technical aspects of a production, must have the ability to absorb a vast quantity of material quickly--andaccurately . Your work in college theatre will show that you have the ability to grasp complex matters in a short period of time, a highly-valued trait to employers.

Note that part of this ability is another significant trait: *knowing how to listen*. If you don't listen, you're likely to make some major error that will damage the production. Listening is a skill for any job and an employer will respect your ability to listen and comprehend.

12. Respect for Colleagues

In theatre you discover that a successful production requires contributions from everybody who's involved. Mutual respect is essential. Working on a production teaches us to respect and trust the abilities and talents of our colleagues. A prospective employer will appreciate the fact that you have learned the importance of respecting your co-workers.

13. Respect for Authority

Only one person can be in charge of any given portion of a production. The director. The shop foreman. The tech director. The designer. Theatre teaches you to willingly accept and respect authority. That's a trait employers look for in their workers.

14. Adaptability and Flexibility

Theatre students must be adaptable and flexible. You need to be willing to try new ideas, accept new challenges, and have the ability to adapt to constantly changing situations and conditions. In one production you may be a member of the prop crew; in the next perhaps you're in charge of makeup, publicity or the box office; in a third production you might have a leading role.

A worker who is versatile and flexible is highly valued to most employers; both traits prove that you are able and willing to learn new things.

15. The Ability to Work Under Pressure

Theatre work often demands long hours. There's pressure-- often, as you know well, *a lot* of pressure. It's important that everyone involved with a production be able to maintain a cooperative and enthusiastic attitude under pressure. The ability to remain poised under such tensions is an asset that will help you cope with stress in other parts of your life, including your job.

16. A Healthy Self-Image

To work in theatre, you must know who you are and how to project your individuality. But at the same time, it's important to recognize the need to make yourself secondary to the importance of a production. This is a tricky balance that, although difficult to accomplish, is a valuable trait that employers treasure.

17. Acceptance of Disappointment-- And Ability to Bounce Back

Theatre people learn to deal with dashed hopes and rejection on a regular basis. Who hasn't failed to get a role he or she really wanted or a coveted spot on a tech crew? You learn to accept that kind of disappointment and move on. You try again. Employers need workers who are resilient enough to bounce back from this kind of frustration.

18. Self-Discipline

Theatre demands that you learn how to control your life. More than other students, you are forced to make choices between keeping up with responsibilities and doing things you'd rather do. You learn to govern yourself. An employer will respect that ability.

19. A Goal-Oriented Approach to Work

Many aspects of theatre involve setting and achieving specific goals. In employer's terms, you've learned to be task-oriented and capable of finding practical ways to achieve goals.

20. Concentration

Busy theatre students, involved in a production or other theatre projects while also taking a heavy academic load, must learn to concentrate if they are to succeed. Acting classes in particular stress concentration, and once you have learned that skill as an actor, it can be transferred to other activities.

21. Dedication

As you work in theatre you learn to dedicate your very being--to doing your best to create a successful production. There is dedication to that show...to your home theatre...to theatre as an art.

Many theatre students discover that committing oneself to a given task is deeply rewarding. Employers respect workers who have learned the value of dedication.

22. A Willingness to Accept Responsibility

Theatre students sometimes have an opportunity that is seldom given to students in other disciplines--the chance to take on sole responsibility for a special project. Being a production stage manager...a designer...a crew chief...a director. Students with other majors seldom have anything even close to these lessons. You can expect employers to value this unusual ability.

23. Leadership Skills

As a theatre student, you have many opportunities to assume leadership roles. You may, for example, assist a director or designer and lead other volunteers, serve as a crew chief, or even design or direct a production yourself. In the nurturing environment of theatre, faculty help you learn from mistakes so you become a better leader. Leadership training like this can open the possibility for comparable opportunities in a company that hires you. Can you think of any other major that offers this opportunity?

24. Self-Confidence

Theatre training teaches you confidence in yourself. Your accomplishments in theatre show you that you can handle a variety of jobs, pressures, difficulties and responsibilities. You develop a "Yes, I can!" attitude. Of course an employer will treasure that.

25. Enjoyment -- "This is Fun!"

You've discovered already that theatre people mystify civilians when we say we're having fun. Non-theatre folk shake

their heads when we tell them that, and they ask how it is possible to have "fun" in a job that keeps us working night after night, sometimes until after midnight, doing something that calls for a grinding rehearsal or work schedule day after day after day, that makes us miss going to a movie or a concert. *"That's fun?"*

Yes. It is. We've learned how to find enjoyment in what we do. That's a valuable attribute.

We can adapt that to other jobs, find ways to enjoy other activities. That positive attitude will mean a great deal to any employer.

AND MORE. MUCH, MUCH MORE

You get the idea. That list of 25 advantages is a start. No doubt you can add to it.

It seems almost incidental at this point to mention that theatre majors also learn about theatre. Most students who choose a theatre major do so because their training will prepare them for a career in the theatre, and it will. Theatre students learn to use their voices and bodies and minds and hearts to make magic on stage.

Clearly, though, they learn much, much more. Few people choose to set out on a difficult, demanding four-year course of theatre study because it will make them good candidates for employment in other fields.

But it will.

Far more than any other major, theatre is excellent training for virtually any job.

The trick is for you to recognize the advantages you have.

And to be sure you educate any prospective employer!

Make clear on your resume exactly what you have learned. Some employers may think that all an actor knows

is just memorization and the ability to walk on stage without bumping into furniture, and tech people know only how to put up a flat. Tell them what else you've learned. Teach them!

Let them know that a theatre major has had far more excellent experience than any other major could have accumulated.

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