

ALPHA ACTORS MANUAL



ALPHASHOWS

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This manual has been compiled to give you important, useful information that will assist you in performing in an Alpha Show. Whilst not required reading (like the “Touring Manual”) it is useful in preparing yourself for the unique performance style that is an Alpha show. If you haven’t read the “Touring Manual” yet we suggest you do so as it contains information about the fundamentals required to ensure you are ready to do the job as a whole.

THE OUTCOME

ALPHASHOWS’ outcome for our performances in schools are:

To provide an intense, memorable, high quality and high impact musical, that engages children the entire time. We hope to give them an experience of what ‘theatre’ is that encourages further participation in arts and theatre in the future.

To make specific spiritual and physical truths about our world and ourselves available in a metaphorical format to encourage learning at the soul level.

To give performers an opportunity to work in a full time performance based job, and have them give a real experience of ‘being a performer’ to children by answering questions and generally being happy, accessible, fun and cooperative with children and teachers.

To provide the most outstanding role models of truthful and humble human beings within the stories and in real life.

To provide a launching pad for creativity, writing, drama, music, and fun in the classroom. To create enthusiasm and encourage children to be in the peak state for learning.

To have an artistic theatrical performance that expands a student’s soul to enable greater capacity in all learning areas (including learning areas not specifically covered by the shows).

To have an artistic theatrical experience that is of the highest quality possible, as close to a show at a big theatre in a capital city as we can.

To make available our shows to anybody who wishes to invite us for as low a cost as we can.

THE SCRIPT

Your script is your bible to the show. All of Alpha's scripts are customised and have had a great deal of thought put in to them from multiple angles.

Firstly, the words of the script are not 'random' or cobbled together quickly without significant thought. Virtually every single line is worded in a way that is very specific. What may seem trivial to you, such as a change in wording, emphasis or even tonality, may change the entire outcome of the show, character or intention of the scene. And this is not an inconsequential occurrence if this happens. Alpha performs to almost 100,000 children and grown ups every year; this is a big responsibility and as a result we will partner with you to ensure every word and meaning of the script and your performance of it is exactly in line with the intention behind the show and your character.

So please be sure to learn your script very very well before rehearsals (including both YOUR OWN lines as well as the cues for your lines and what else is going on in the scene, and your songs), so that rather than having to concentrate on accuracy of lines during rehearsals we can instead concentrate on performance, acting and intention. When you don't get your lines right, or you decide to randomly change your lines at your own whim, this can have ramifications that you are unaware of, on multiple facets of the show, cast and company.

So, that said, some parts of the script are purely about comedy, and we want to utilise the skills and talents of our actors! So feel free to find ways to make your character clearer and to deliver the outcomes of your character in a more profound way. If this means trying out an addition to the script, changing something to include a pop culture reference etc etc... do so in rehearsals, do not wait until the tour starts. We want to be able to know what you are planning on doing to check if it is in line with our vision. We may ask you to change things when they don't fit, including changes you make later as a natural result of growth in your performance. This is just an expected result so please never take anything personally.

With that in mind, it is important to talk about the types of characters in the shows, and how we pretty much stick to those archetypes for each show due to the way children perceive and make sense of stories (ie. Children expect a villain to stay a villain, not change half way through!). Some of these 'rules' can be stretch a little (Lancelot can become a villain and then come back again Anakin Skywalker style). In every show, there are variations on the following 'cast of characters' that make up the necessary components for a successful Alpha show:

- The Principal girl and boy
- Villain
- Villain's sidekick/s
- Comedy roles
- Character roles
- Wise character/s (who can also be comedy at times)
- Narrator

It's important to understand what kind of character you will be playing. You have to decide what your purpose is in each scene and stick to that. A principal boy can't suddenly deviate out and start making jokes or stealing the comedy away from the comedy character in the scene. If you have a bunch of values education content to deliver and the scene is structured to help you deliver it by having a comedy character with you butting in, realise that's their job, and your job is to acknowledge the comedy but not delay the scene. Katja often talked about her role as Cinderella (she played it for 3 years running) and how she would let Ben do stupid things as the Evil Stepmother but she always felt it was her role to keep the show's pace going and not let it hold up too much. Your role in a scene can change too. A principal boy working with the girl might suddenly be more focussed on some comedy. A character who has been introduced as silly and ridiculous might suddenly later have to deliver important plot moving along dialogue, like Zeus in Hercules. Some stuff in the scripts can be very wordy – you have to figure out a way to deliver this without it being boring.

The principal boy and girl also have a very special purpose, allowing the audience to connect more deeply with themselves and their respective journeys. It is therefore imperative that these characters be played in the way that is true to the story and in a way that allows the message of the characters and their growth to be maximised.

Be careful to decide in advance before you learn your script what sort of character you are playing. If in doubt, ask a question on the Alpha Shows social network (www.alphashows.com.au/groups/company-cast-members/) to discuss your thoughts.

PERFORMING THE SHOW

Performing an Alpha show is quite unique, but in many aspects it is the same as performing any music theatre show. You must project, speak clearly, and ‘face the front’... all the basics still apply! We don’t generally do too many crazy theatrical/music theatre modern things, so your general ‘performing rules’ will most likely apply in most situations. There are subtle (and some not so subtle) differences, which we’ll outline here.

Children in our shows are preframed and allowed to pretty much ‘do what they want’. If they wish to ‘yell out’ and tell you something random, we usually allow it and often ‘use it’ for comedy or to move the story along in a unique way for that specific audience. It provides a more memorable experience for the audience. You may have been used to learning a script over months and months at amateur theatre shows or at drama school and then performing each show identically regardless of the audience. This won’t be like that. You must learn the script in advance to a very high standard, create and block your character during rehearsals, then be willing to be flexible enough (and certain enough about what you’re supposed to be doing) to adapt to an audience. Some hard and fast rules you may hold dear for ‘acting’ or ‘theatrical conventions’ will be enthusiastically ignored by all of us who have worked with Alpha for a while. This is because we must do what is right by the audience. Too often children have a negative experience of theatre when they are young (which turns them off for life) so we do whatever we can to ensure that they ‘love it’ or at least have some strong positive emotional experience.

Remember that the purpose of this experience for these audiences of mainly children is different to a normal piece of theatre. It is there to engage them in specific ways that may differ from other theatre. Whilst you may have many skills you’ve developed for engaging an adult audience emotionally, we use different techniques that are streamlined to work best with children. So in addition to these points below which should help you during your pre-rehearsal stage, we’ll also work with you during rehearsals to optimise your performance for our audiences.

In addition to the differences between adult’s theatre and children’s theatre – our outcomes, techniques and intentions are different yet again from ALL other children’s theatre. So even if you have performed in children’s theatre in the past, be prepared yet again to throw most of that out the window, as that experience is not valuable to our shows.

So here is a rundown of some of the operating principles for performing an Alpha show:

- **It is loud!** Part of creating an emotional experience is to overload the senses of the audience to whatever the safest maximum is. We also encourage the audience to be loud, so be used to a ‘loud’ experience for everyone
- **It is fast!** Children get bored easily, so we keep the pace to a maximum. More specifics on this are:
 - **Speak your lines fast**, but ensure your diction is impeccable. A great technique is to speak MOST of the content of each line fast, but whatever the KEY WORDS or punchline are in the sentence, emphasise with an ‘attacking’ way of delivering the line. This way the ‘essence’ of the line is understood by the children. It should be fast enough for adults to be overwhelmed slightly, but kids to ‘get it’ without thinking. The difference between adults and children is that adults want to hear every word, whereas children are more impatient and ‘get it’ – they get the point of what you are saying quicker and they also are more attune to non-verbal cues like tonality and physiology.
 - **NO GAPS!** Don’t leave any gaps between another actor’s line and yours. It should feel UNNATURAL. There are no ‘dramatic pauses’ except in very special circumstances. If any pauses need to exist, put them in the MIDDLE of your line, or make some sort of ‘sound’ immediately after the previous actor’s line is finished, to indicate that it is currently your line. This helps children focus on who is speaking and to understand the plot better. Remember, if they don’t ‘get it’ they won’t sit there trying to understand (like adults would), they’ll just tune out. So you’ll know if you’re not doing a good job of keeping them engaged by your pace, energy and lack of gaps if they start to disconnect and/or ‘chat’ to each other.
 - **Enter the stage whilst the last person is still exiting** – leaving no time for a ‘blank stage’. This should also feel completely unnatural. You’ll want to get on stage asap and when you’re on, keep thinking about wanting to ‘get off’ stage as soon as possible too.
 - Don’t BABBLE to be fast. It’s more about clarity, speed and energy than anything else. Variation in tone helps too, no monotone!
- **“Play against the script” most times.** Most importantly, don’t play lines that are seemingly written as ‘sad’ as too depressive. Keep things upbeat and happy most of the time. That said, some content is designed to illicit a profoundly sad, angry or fearful response from both the character having the transformation (such as Fairy Godmother or Sterky allowing their Cinderella/Ariel principals to cry) and the audience.
- **Most of the time you will be looking at the audience** when you perform, not so much at other performers. Eye contact with specific audience members is very useful at certain times.

ALPHA ACTORS MANUAL

- The audience is another character essentially, and in most cases they will abide by answering on cue. There may seem to be a LOT of questions and references to ‘boys and girls’ in the script but trust us, it really works. As you start to perform your character and get some experience, you may even find it necessary and useful to add in even MORE questions (eg. “don’t you think that’s true boys and girls?”) to ensure maximum engagement.
- Sing your songs as music theatre style, in almost all cases. Even when they are pop songs we want to introduce children to the genre of musical theatre. However, we must also engage with children and we want to avoid ‘arrogant’ or disconnected music theatre singing styles. If you have a specific skill in pop music styled singing, show us what you’ve got in rehearsals and we’ll work out what’s best. Sometimes it is great to show children we can be ‘all things’ including a full on pop singer or a belty diva!
- Keep engaged in the show at all times. Don’t ‘lie down’ or ‘tune out’ when you’re not on stage or the sound desk. Watch the show on the screen, listen, keep engaged. Look and listen for what’s going on stage that might be relevant to next time you’re on stage.
 - Because what happens on stage changes EVERY show, you need to be in ‘up-time’ at all times in case what changes affects you and your character. No reading, sleeping or lying down during the show!
 - Remember your ‘performance’ is seen as a holistic thing combining your ‘on-stage’ performance with the off-stage bits. You must understand how you are not being hired to just ‘perform’ in the traditional sense of the word, where you could lie down and relax when not on stage. The scripts are written very specifically with all tech, lighting, sound, and set changes all thought out and your role includes all this in a complex and streamlined journey from start to finish incorporating all of the above tasks. It’s important that you see yourself as part of a ‘show creation machine’ so that you can be most effective and positive in all your roles.
- Be flexible and willing to divert from the script if one of the more experience actors is doing so, or be flexible to deal with the audience taking you somewhere, but always be wary of ‘losing focus’ and ‘mumbles’ (and time!). Any adlibs or random lines you make up to deal with an audience should be CLEAR and like any other line. Don’t get funny about other actors diverting from the script and playing with an audience for a moment.

Most likely you will be performing the show with other cast who may have a lot of experience performing with Alpha. Use them, and to a degree you can learn from them. But there is also a tendency to want to ‘mimic’ what the comedy character is doing or the villain, when that isn’t necessarily your job. Again, know your character and don’t try to ‘compete’ with other actors as everyone has a different outcome and purpose in the team of an Alpha cast.

MORE INFORMATION ON PERFORMING AN ALPHA SHOW

The clients are all provided with pre and post-show discussion and activity packs. The following is an edited excerpt from what we provide them that will probably be valuable to you with regards to performing in an Alpha show.

These activities and points for discussion are great if you want tips on how to create characters on stage or even for emotional mastery in all areas of life. For example:

- ◆ the experience of being an actor:
 - Managing feelings of embarrassment on stage. This is a common issue for children performers. Our answer to it is always “Who do you have to focus on to feel embarrassed?” The answer is, of course, yourself. So we use the example of the actors on stage and say we’re focussing on the audience’s enjoyment, not ourselves, so we don’t get embarrassed. This is a great lesson for life too. Focus on other people and contributing to others and your life will be better and you won’t get so ‘internal’ and embarrassed all the time
 - Learning lines, the importance of doing this BEFORE rehearsals
 - Having fun and playing FULL OUT. The best parts in the show were created from us being silly, being over the top and having a lot of fun in rehearsals
 - Making the decision to “BE AN ACTOR/PERFORMER”. If you have children who would like to do this as a career one day, or even just want to be in the school production, this is the NUMBER ONE thing they must do first. Make the choice, and declare to everyone “I AM AN ACTOR”. That way all the necessary teachers, lessons, opportunities etc will come into your life to create this identity for you. Make sure they understand that they don’t need to know

ALPHA ACTORS MANUAL

“how” to do it, just make the choice and everything will eventually fall into place if you focus on who you have decided to be, and keep having fun and feeling good.

- ◆ the process of developing and portraying a character on stage:
 - Specifically, state management. All emotions are created by your ‘state’, your emotional state. State is controlled by ONLY 3 things:
 - PHYSIOLOGY. ie your physicality, your internal biology etc
 - FOCUS. What you’re focussing on (and what you decide things mean)
 - LANGUAGE. The words you use to describe things and communicate with.
 - You can use these 3 things to create any emotional state on stage that you want.
 - Incidentally, this is also how you can teach children to manage their emotional states at ANY TIME in their life. If you’re feeling bad about something, first thing to do is change your physiology. Drink water. Move around. Put your shoulders back and head high. The other 2 have a similar effect, although physiology is the most powerful, especially with children.
 - If they also change their focus, and what things mean to them, that will also change how they feel in any moment. Same with language – what you label things within our language creates your reality.

Theatre and pantomime are different to ‘real life’. Here are further ways that performing an Alpha show has unique characteristics

- ◆ Repetitions (usually groups of three). We don’t usually speak like this in real life.
- ◆ Clichés and stereotypes.
 - We use these to quickly communicate the type of character, situation or problem
- ◆ Comedic traditions
 - Like our ‘He’s behind you’ ‘Boo!’ asking the audience questions or other traditions we use in almost all our shows.
- ◆ ‘Asides’
 - ie. talking to the audience without the other characters hearing
 - some of our shows have two scenes going simultaneously on either side of the stage
- ◆ Stage conventions
 - Like the fact we all talk to each other whilst facing the front
 - Stage Right (SR) and Stage Left (SL)
 - Add singing and sound effects (you can make all kinds of sounds with your mouth!)
- ◆ Gestures
 - These are always BIG! This is different to real life and part of playing a character on the stage
- ◆ Suspension of disbelief
 - You can’t get emotionally involved and excited without this occurring
 - Discuss the importance of this with ALL theatre, movies and stories
- ◆ ‘Cheating’
 - The way we might enter on stage when a character we’re not supposed to see is just leaving – to avoid gaps in the show
 - Maybe we are pretending to be able to see something when we really can’t
- ◆ Time distortions
 - To keep the show moving and maintain a good pace, we distort time. So even though 80 to 90 minutes passed it could represent days or weeks, and sometimes even years

We have found many students are just generally much more excited about theatre in general after seeing one of our shows – you can encourage more participation in the arts as well as going to see more live theatre outside of school.

CONTROLLING THE AUDIENCE

An Alpha audience can vary quite dramatically. From small quiet audiences to large audiences of 700+ children, to the most rude, over-the-top groups to lovely polite (but also loud in the right places) audiences. Many audiences are in the environment of a school, which can vary from lower socio-economic areas to reserved private schools or catholic environments. Other shows take us to theatres with families; festivals with all sorts of variety of people to even the occasional adults only show where we really adapt the performance.

As a result many techniques are required for various audiences. If an audience is polite and willing to do everything 'as scripted', it is usually a pretty easy gig because it's as you would expect from your reading of the script initially and there isn't anything you would need to deal with that would be out of the ordinary.

However, most shows don't work out like this!

Most of the time we are dealing with audiences that are anywhere from a little bit to VERY out of control. Very occasionally we deal with an underwhelmed audience (this might happen once or twice a year for us, very rare. Usually in 'open to the public' venues, not schools). We'll discuss both here and what to do.

HOW TO CONTROL AN AUDIENCE WITH LITTLE OR NO WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE:

- Assume participation. Always follow the script and continue to ask all the questions. Be prepared to 'wait less' for audience response and 'move on' quicker, especially when dealing with other actors on stage. Some cuts may occur too, as experienced Alpha actors keep the show focussed on the needs of this particular style of audience, so be ready for a fast show, quick costume changes etc etc.
- Never ever ever criticise an audience for 'not being good enough' at participating. Keep to the script. They are always the 'best' audience for that moment. They don't know how a show is normally for us so more than likely they are having the time of their lives; it just doesn't look like it to you because you're comparing.
- Enjoy it as usual! Don't look like you're 'over it', even if you are.
- That said, don't let them 'get away' with not responding. You only need 1 child to respond but it's best to continue to expect a high standard of participation - just be willing to be flexible on what a 'high standard of participation' might mean to this particular audience.

HOW TO CONTROL AN AUDIENCE THAT IS OUT OF CONTROL:

We use 3 specific techniques for controlling an audience that has stepped over the line of being 'out of control' and not listening etc. Also included below are some other ideas, but the 1st three are the primary tools we have.

An audience that becomes out of control usually results either from actors who aren't performing in a way that is engaging for the audience, or as a result of certain personalities in the audience who affect the entire audience, thus creating a lack of focus. Sometimes it is also just because the teachers have really gone overboard with our suggestion to 'let them do what they like and not shoosh the children' (even though we ask them to watch for inappropriate & over-the-top participation and stop it/curtail it) or it might be an audience of children with parents and the parents find it amusing to let their children run riot.

Some audiences are just 'talkers' and the way they experience the show is by discussing it with their friends as it happens.

Generally, this is all ok, we pretty much let anything happen, however, there may be something that is imperative that the entire audience hear or you just want to 'get them back' for whatever reason. Here's how:

- **Tell a secret.** Instead of trying to speak over the top/louder than the audience when they are talking or being over the top (which communicates that they don't need to quieten down, as they can still hear you), try telling 'a secret'. So get down low, almost whisper and they'll come with you because they want to know what you're saying. What we mean by a secret is just simply a variation on your line (or the actual line), that lets them know you're talking to them and it's something 'juicy' that they really want to hear.
- **Ask a Question.** Often an unfocussed audience is just due to randomness on stage and the resulting randomness in response from an audience. If you ask a question clearly and loudly, and you can get a unanimous response in return, it will normally settle them down. The audience feels like they have been 'heard' and they return to being 'one' instead of "multiple audiences" doing different things! If you can't get a unanimous response, try again, or try another option. This also applies to other universal responses, such as 'booing' or anything else. Any way you can get a universal response from the whole audience, it will help get them back under control.

ALPHA ACTORS MANUAL

- **Create a Suddenly.** A classic children's theatre term is what is known as a 'Suddenly'. Each script should have 1 or 2 suddenly's per page as a minimum. These are various things, anything that gets the attention, jolts the nervous system in a small or large way, not quite a 'shock' but almost. They include a character entering stage, a random loud noise, a song, a kiss, a funny taboo word, a joke, a sword fight, a dance, any other sort of interesting interaction, etc etc etc... The possibilities are endless – anything you use to create a minor jolt that gets attention and keeps attention until the next suddenly. Sometimes when you have an out of control audience, just 'getting through it' as fast as possible to when you know the next suddenly is the best option (provided no important plot-related dialogue is contained in what you are speeding through).
- **Confusion Pattern.** A great way of controlling an audience is to say something that absolutely confuses them! This is because children, as a rule, don't pay attention when they don't 'get' something, ie. When they don't understand something. In our shows, this is generally not a problem, so purposely confusing them can help to slightly 'disconnect' them for a second so you can find a way to get back control and move on. Genius!
- **Move on!** If you are struggling, sometimes just get moving and they'll come back once something happens they're interested in.
- **Ask WHY they are disengaged and face the truth.** One truth you'll have to confront, is that all of our shows have been performed many many times and refined to ensure maximum engagement. Why have you lost them? I'd want to get curious about that and be humble, and figure out what you directly can do differently to ensure more engagement. For instance, are YOU not passionate or are you embarrassed about performing a certain part? Do YOU want to skip over it yourself? And thus it affects the audience through your desire? One time a female actor was having trouble performing something that I had performed many times and it was very engaging and funny. It was a section as the Evil Stepmother where you notice an adult male and approach him and notice how 'handsome' he is and ask if he's interested in you. When another actress began to play that part, I noticed the show got 'weird' at that moment and would be slow and awkward and not funny or engaging. She felt uncomfortable and her eyes were darting all over the room. It made the kids confused as to what was happening, and it just wasn't funny. I knew how funny the section could be if done right – and if performed with obvious humour and an acknowledgement that it's 'not real' the audience will pick up on that and find the whole thing hilarious. So instead of trying to give notes on how to deliver it, I spoke to the actress about her fears of men. As she went into those fears herself and had some new realisations, she found the section much easier to perform. The next time I saw it it was as funny as I had ever done, and she'd even surpassed me and added something that was just hilarious. That's the perfect outcome, when every year a new actor takes on something that might have been done before by one of us original cast members and makes it even better! So look at your own emotions as to what might block you. Also look at how you're not implementing the skills and techniques in this manual. Most times when I've come to see a show and the cast have lost the audience, it's due to too many gaps between lines, not enough looking at the audience and acknowledging them (just blazing on through without noticing what the audience are doing) and/or sloppy performing style, such as not punctuating words or having good diction. Being clear with how you speak (not babbling or not being overly boring and slow) is one of the primary ways to keep them engaged. You have to be insanely passionate about wanting to know what the audience is thinking, feeling and doing at every moment. I remember I used to be insane, if I felt the audience hadn't understood what was happening, I'd reiterate lines, I'd expand, I'd ask a zillion questions, just to satisfy my own desire for them to 'get it'. Some other shows where they got it really easy, you have to be ready to move fast and move on, not to bore them with too much explanation. If the show from audience to audience doesn't change **dramatically**, then you're doing something wrong. You're not REALLY caring or connecting with your audience. Every show should be incredibly different.

THE 'OPPOSITE TECHNIQUE'

Often the OPPOSITE of what you would think would work is what actually works best. Too often I've seen actors on stage trying to get back control, and really struggling. I've come on and done the complete opposite of what they were using to try and get back control and it has worked. For instance, a simple example is if an audience is booing and they won't stop, there might be a tendency to try and 'stop' them booing, or to 'move on', ask a question, or tell a secret, to get back control and get them listening again, but none of it is working. I'll instead come on and say "Is that the best boo you can do?!". So they boo even louder! But they get it out and then they're done. It acknowledges and shows appreciation for their willingness to participate, and it's so different to what they are used to with teachers always telling them to settle down and be quiet that it gains respect as well. So whilst this example is specifically for a villain, have a think about how the 'opposite technique' may apply to your character and when you may need to use it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF AN AUDIENCE

Always be on the lookout to notice individual (or group) contributions to the story. If someone yells out the actual end of your line (ie. Before you do!), or an answer to a question that wasn't necessarily even asked of them, you want to acknowledge them. This makes an audience feel 'clever' and will increase the level of engagement, and your level of control. If an audience knows you are listening to them and noticing everything, then they will be less likely to 'misbehave' as an audience.

EYE CONTACT

A simple way of controlling an audience is just through eye contact. Make sure you 'calibrate' your audience as early as possible. If you identify 'problem areas' early on, then you can usually minimise this by creating a connection with them early on with eye contact. **Physical contact**, whilst harder to do until later on in the show, also creates a strong bond and rapport which is really beneficial to control and mutual respect.

So if you find certain children either behaving in a way that is disruptive or completely disconnected, eye contact can help them to know they are being noticed. You can choose certain lines to deliver directly to them, perhaps a line that directly 'moves' them in some way (as a villain I'll direct insulting lines to children who are bratty and not paying attention or being annoying, so they know I noticed). At times, during a monologue (on stage by myself) I'll even wander through the audience (if possible) to get closer to audience members who need controlling, and hold direct eye contact with them. This is also called 'marking', for more info, see the Closed Eye section below.

OTHER POINTS TO REMEMBER

Otherwise, it's just generally about effective performing, following the rules above with 'how to perform an Alpha show' and keeping things snappy, 'punctuating' your lines and the way you deliver them etc etc.

Generally anyway, it's just great to be really skilled at controlling an audience in a way that isn't like a teacher or isn't 'telling them off'. It's respecting their participation and focussing the energy of that into what is going to serve the greater good. That way they'll have more respect for you as a performer and be willing to stay with you in the future.

ADDRESSING IMPASSIONED RESPONSES

One unique experience you will most likely have performing an Alpha show is when a single child, or small group of children (that also then may lead to a large or all of the children) decide that a single plot point **MUST** be communicated to the characters, thus resulting in an almost derailing of the entire show, preventing you from really moving on effectively.

You **COULD** move on, but in most situations this leads to absolute mayhem as frustration ensues for both actor and child. Still, this is an option, to just speed through it so they realise that we aren't going to listen to them. However, it is usually better to address it in some way, to get the show back on track. Here's some operating principles for addressing these sorts of responses

- Remember, the child is **ENGAGED** and emotionally involved – this is good! We want to encourage this! If we ignore them they will learn that feeling like this during a theatrical performance leads to frustration, and therefore in future they will avoid this pain – we have therefore given them a disempowering experience of theatre
- Children are used to feeling 'inferior' and unknowledgeable in life. Many aspects of our shows assume the superiority of the child's intellect and purposely make out the characters to not know something that the children know. This helps them to feel powerful and in control, something they rarely feel in real life. So we want to find a way to reinforce this especially when they are insistent that something must be told to you
- It's generally best not to blatantly argue or disagree with them, as this will simply get them more riled up and yell louder and become more frustrated. As a villain this can sometimes work because you **WANT** them riled up and opposing the villain, but definitely never argue with them as a non-villain character.
- You must find a way to align with them and then redirect them where you want them to go. Questions are a useful tool here. Get them to come up with the answers. For example, often we have the problem of the younger children believing that Sleeping Beauty is actually dead instead of just asleep after she's pricked her finger. We mention her dying a number of times and it's only through the Fairy's spell that it really can be derived that she isn't going to die but simply fall asleep. When this first happened, I remember actors blazing on through, causing problems with the scene and making it torturous for everyone, including older students who 'got it' that she was just asleep and wanted to enjoy the story. I then came on as the King after a good 2 minutes of this nonsense, and addressed the issue. By simply asking the questions and using an 'inferior posture', I managed to get the children to finally agree that she was **NOT** dead but simply asleep. "So is she sleeping?" "YES!!" "Oh good because it wouldn't be much good us doing anything if she's dead, right?"
- Once you align with an audience, you can redirect them. This technique is called **ALIGN & REDIRECT**, a common tool taught in rapport building skill development. So in the above example, continuing on, it would be "So if she's not dead and only asleep, should we help to rescue her?" "YES!" "Ok great, well we'll have to help Jamie feel more confident to save the princess, should we do that?" "YES!!". And then you have their agreement to move on with the plot and the purpose of the scene, and they are with you, rather than against you. This takes skill and thought so try to be prepared for this in advance, and have questions and ways to redirect the audience to where you want to go ready at rehearsals.
- Sometimes it's almost impossible to address the random callout. Either the moment in the play isn't right, or the character who has control of the scene can't know the fact that the child is telling them (and if they did it would wreck the plot); so just do the best you can. Therefore, know your character inside and out!
- Remember that with an over-the-top audience, stopping all the time to address every single random callout may mean they get the message that we will stop for anything (and they have control over us!), and then you'll have **LOST** control because any random thought that a child has will suddenly end up being verbalised, or you'll get a lot of "excuse me, excuse me" or lots of hands going up. Be careful that you don't encourage too much of this; just know your audience in advance to know whether this is likely to happen.
- If you are a skilled actor and your role permits it, sometimes using an impassioned response from the audience can lead to very very funny moments, and sometimes it's just absolute comedy gold, so you just have to use it! Just remember, that when you do this, you are always just running the risk of opening the floodgates for more ridiculous call outs! Be wary of the greater outcome and the big picture, keep things tight, and be ready to use other audience control techniques if you addressing a callout does become permission for every child to have a go!
- The types of call outs that really must be addressed are ones that are directly related to the plot (not just, "You look funny in that hat!") and are obviously misguided attempts to suggest alternative courses of action which we don't want to head down, or a meaning that is completely wrong that needs to be explained (if 1 child is thinking something is happening, like Sleeping Beauty being dead, it's likely others are thinking it too, so it's better to address that sort of plot misunderstanding).

STYLE OF PERFORMANCE for VARIOUS AUDIENCES

In Alpha, we often have to perform to audiences of varying natures. This is in addition to the overall ‘culture’ and ‘style’ of an audience as mentioned above with being over-the-top or underwhelmed. On top of this dynamic is also other facts about an audience which will affect how you perform:

1. **Young group.** Often we’ll only have a group of younger children. You need to slow down ever so slightly and be clear with everything. They may be over-the-top or just normal but what is important here is understanding that the plot is essential and they may confuse things in their heads easier, leading to the need for the skills above with ‘addressing audience responses’ and ‘controlling an audience’. They will also enjoy the sequences that are more silly, behind you gags and other stuff for the younger members. Therefore you can be free to ‘silly’ stuff up even more, the suit characters will be liked more than the sarcastic or older characters, and they’ll also love the princesses and heroes more too. Just be aware and ensure your performance is streamlined to them understanding and enjoying the show to the maximum possible.
2. **Equal spread of ages 4–14.** These shows are an average audience, which means we need to keep a balance in our performance, to appeal to all ages. The shows are written with this age group present in mind, so this kind of show is as you have rehearsed and what we perform most of the time.
3. **Older group.** Often the 9–11 year olds, or even older, up to 14 or 15 years old. This is Alpha’s speciality, to be able to ensure maximum engagement for even students who aren’t into theatre or are really ‘blah’. However, it is the most challenging type of audience to perform for so it is when we need to be most alert and ready to be flexible with our show. Generally, alter your performance in the following ways:
 - a. Speed up even more.
 - b. Skip or skim over bits that are clearly for younger students. New Alpha actors check with your TM first.
 - c. These shows are ALL about the comedy. Not so much the silliness or audience participation. They want to laugh.
 - d. If you can get them in enough, they’ll be willing to ‘go with you’ on more serious bits like closed eyes. So you need to start out with massive efforts to create rapport, especially if you’re the ‘wise’ character who does the closed eye. This goes for everyone though, start out where they’re at, so calibration of the audience is essential.
 - e. Most likely this means being far more cynical and sarcastic, especially first up. If there ARE silly sequences in the show that are normally enjoyed by younger students (eg. A behind you gag) then let the audience know that you ‘know’ what’s going on and you also think it’s daggy. They’ll be more willing to play with you. You can do it faster, get through it, make it as though you know it’s dumb and get to the jokes. Even find ways to take the piss out of the moment in the show or the script – we call this ‘contempt for the script’. It seems at odds with what else we’ve told you about having respect for the script and the words and the intentions, but it does work to engage an older audience. I’ve even used this with the closed eye I do in Sleeping Beauty, a teacher even noticed how I knew getting older kids to scream “NOW I AM THE VOICE” is kinda full on and silly, but they saw the look in my eyes and whilst I showed a bit of cynicism, because I still assumed full participation that we were all going to do it despite it being daggy, they played full out anyway.
 - f. Don’t be over-enthusiastic until the time is right. More of a ‘whatever’ attitude is good.
 - g. Principal boys and girls, you need to work hard at this, being almost like a Year 6 student in your stance and attitude. You can even calibrate different areas of the audience, some will be more ‘mean girls’ and you can be really ‘whatever’ with them, but then over another side there may be some more enthusiastic students where you can be more like that with them.
 - h. Top of your priority list is RAPPORT first...THEN when it’s really important for your character or the message of the show, go where you need to go (eg. When Jamie wants to save Rose, that’s his time to start ‘stepping up’ and showing up as the man he is, before that, he can be more cool and laid back). When the stakes are high enough, (and for older students they need to be high) they’ll be willing to go with you.
 - i. Being ‘whatever’ doesn’t mean you lose the ‘high stakes’ aspect of the show. Still take the plot and message seriously, it’s still real. But you can take moments to step out of the show for comedy, within reason.
 - j. Otherwise, the ‘rules of engagement’ previously talked about are imperative here, eye contact etc etc.

CONSERVATIVE AUDIENCES

Every so often, you will be told by your Tour Manager before a show that the audience you are about to perform for is marked on the client list as 'conservative' or they have chatted with the staff at a school and they have indicated that the culture at their school is more conservative than most.

Here's what we communicate to our clients, to find out. In addition, the Tour Manager MUST every new client ask them directly if they need a conservative show. This is to avoid bad feedback from these unique clients. We send them this in the Touring Pack & Cheat Sheet (which you can download the full doc from www.alphashows.com.au/downloads):

IMPORTANT: HUMOUR & TABOOS – Is the culture at your school extra conservative?

If so – we want to make the show just right for you! We sometimes use poo jokes and the like to make the children feel at ease and have jokes they understand and find funny. This maximises engagement and rapport, and ensures we have their attention for later in the show when we present the main message in terms of values education. Please discuss with us if a problem before the show so we can adapt to your culture (from a teacher point of view not the children – we just don't want any negative feedback from adults who don't understand the reason for this humour – ie. to engage children at their level). Humour includes very tame sexual innuendo (eg. "you're hot"), teacher inclusion (children love this), teasing/highlighting the villainy of the bad guy (what every kid dreams they had the courage to do, so they find it funny) and some naughty kid level jokes similar to Andy Griffith's "Bad Book" (fart/vomit/burp, that kinda thing) that has been seen as a great way to get kids to read – we use similar strategies. **IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT YOU TELL US BEFORE THE SHOW as we will not appreciate negative feedback if you don't tell us about your culture!** Also – don't over-react, everything in the standard / scripted version of the show is G-Rated, it's perfectly appropriate and fine for 99% of schools, and fits perfectly fine into standard Australian culture and this generation of children (for instance, we never swear in the shows or encourage negative stereotypes or anything like that). Please just tell us if you are a conservative school and we will mark you as such on our database and alter the show accordingly every year.

So you can see that we take it very seriously and want to make the show right for every audience. There's a school up in Toowoomba (The Glennie School I think) that we perform for the older girls (it's a girls only school). They giggle at such innocent stuff, that there is just no need to do anything taboo or slightly risqué! They are already engaged just from very minor things. There's some schools that will get excited just if the principal boys says to the girl "you're very beautiful"! An islamic school we'd have to cut all the kisses! Sometimes less is just enough for that audience, due to their upbringing, unique cultural taboos and school community.

So your job is to know in advance any lines you have that might be considered not appropriate for conservative schools. The script is written SPECIFICALLY to jolt, get attention, cause a reaction, trigger emotionally etc all of people's issues, all of people's hang ups, and all of people's shame based feelings, which can often lead to different emotional reactions. Our opinion on this is as long as people have an emotional reaction to the show, that's a good thing. However, we don't want to go overboard, there's always a balance of how much we do this and how much we also respect the culture of the school. And we don't want bad feedback and we definitely don't want them to decide to not have us back.

Most content in the script has been tested and refined to be fine for 99% of schools. But each audience is different so STAY PRESENT and feel your audience. Connect and be sensitive to adult's reactions to things. Some teachers get angry when you even reference them, some teachers want to get up on stage and dance with you, and then grab your butt and call you sexy! It can be widely different. You have to be able to accurately feel where an audience is at (especially the grown ups). Try not to let 'fear' be your guide on this, try to let it be your positive intention to make the show appealing to every audience. I used to be very fearful of female teacher's criticising me, which guided much of what I did (this relates to my own fears about my mother criticising me). I also had some anger about this, which caused me to sometimes 'rebel' and be more confronting in a show, much to the horror of some conservative teachers.

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ALPHA ACTORS MANUAL

As a villain I used to often get in trouble for pointing out a teacher's flaws (such as pointing out them working on a laptop or marking work and how 'rude' it was). As I worked through some of these issues I no longer cared as much if an adult wanted to be rude and disconnected in the show. It also happened less once I had less of those feelings inside. (You always attract things appropriate for the repressed emotions you hold on to from childhood, to help trigger those feelings).

So the purpose is just to give an audience the most appropriate and perfect show for them.

Go through your script, work out and mark anything that is obviously taboo or inappropriate from a conservative point of view. Every conservative show will be different. One school may just not want any sexual references or engaging with teachers about their 'beauty' or something like that. Some may just not want toilet humour. That's fine. Just be aware of it.

The most important thing is that you stay aware because there may be conservative teachers in the audience that aren't in charge of the booking, and the booking teacher might be actually quite liberal and said to not bother with being conservative. We once had an older male teacher get very upset because Hermes in Hercules decided to change the line "you're so excited you're about to wet your pants" from saying it to a child to saying it to this older teacher who was sitting there like he was bored. His intention was to try to get a reaction out of him to engage him or playfully let him know we noticed he look pointedly unexcited! But it ended up in quite the controversy at the school, and we almost lost the booking. The teacher in charge was a crazy artistic lady who probably never even read our material and we had no idea the school was very conservative. This was in the mountain areas around Sydney. Lots of those areas are very conservative – areas outside of the cities where people specifically move to to escape the 'immorality' of the city. Kanwal this was. Buderim outside of Brisbane is similar.

If you're at a conservative school and you know it or you have felt this from the audience early on, you wouldn't even say the line about wetting your pants. You'd just change it to "you're very excited aren't you, look at your face, you're about to explode with excitement" or something like that. The child will still find this hilarious as you've noticed something about them or they'll giggle that you're even talking to them (common at conservative schools).

Generally it's also not about just CUTTING stuff. Try to replace it with something else funny, without using the taboo words. The script contains these jokes just because most people are fine with it, and kids find it hilarious. It's the type of humour they all get, they all make these jokes in the playground (even at most conservative schools!) and it's a great easy way to get rapport with them if we show we're not afraid to make the same jokes as them.

Your job is to be prepared in advance so when your Tour Manager says to you this is a conservative show, you can just go 'yep, got it'.

Your only other job is to take notice and if you think something didn't go down to well, to tell your Tour Manager off stage and you might have to go 'conservative' mid-show. So if this happens, or you're just getting a 'vibe', the Tour Manager or people with the taboo lines may change them on the spot! So if you're in a scene with someone you need to LISTEN and be ready to change stuff! We had an actor not listen one time and as the Villain changed their line to a conservative one, the Sidekick responded with the original, non-conservative line! Not only did he end up saying something non-conservative when the Tour Manager (as the villain) was picking up a vibe from the teachers, he also said something that made no sense!! This is a terrible outcome, it would make the line stand out even more! And it's very unprofessional to not be listening to your fellow actor on stage!

AD LIBBING

Part of performing in our shows means that you, depending on your character, will most likely add to the script in some way. We do want you to have fun performing and... adlibs are best if they focussed on the audience's enjoyment, not just our own so please keep adlibs that are for yours or other cast members entertainment only to a minimum or not at all. Some further tips:

- It is best to only add to the script, rather than changing/dropping lines that are written. That said, some things don't work the same for certain actors, so find a way to make things work in your performance style. Everyone is unique. The focus should be understanding the reason for a line and ensuring whatever you say, if you do consciously choose to change the wording, communicates the same thing. Practice this in rehearsals, as quite often there are reasons for why it's written as it is and your director will tell you. If you just simply haven't learnt your script accurately and your choices to change things aren't conscious, this isn't good...
- Most lines in the script have had a lot of thought gone into them and it is disrespectful of you to change things randomly for your own amusement / at your own discretion. So whether it's on purpose or just because you haven't learnt the script accurately, you will be challenged during rehearsals to 'get it right'.
- Come discuss a line or characterisation if you want to change or drop it, ideally at rehearsals or at least early on in the tour. But once you've been on tour a bit and understand the show, we trust you to alter things for different audiences and try things out, so you can also be free to do that as long as it remains with the purpose of making the audience more engaged or to get them laughing etc.
- DO NOT drop a line at your own discretion. Sometimes paraphrasing is also unacceptable, for the reasons stated above. It also can have silly consequences you're not aware of. For instance, Fairy Godmother has a line that is to the audience when she's meeting Cinderella for the first time but she's in disguise: "Shh boys and girls, it's me, don't tell Cinderella etc etc"... This actress paraphrased to: "Shhh it's me, boys and girls!". It ended up sounding like she was saying "Shits Me"!
- Ideally you would run any adlibs/changes you have in mind by your Tour Manager / Director first, but this is only for major things. Some things just come to you in the moment and we want you to have the freedom to say them. Just be aware of the culture and appropriateness of what you're about to say, and don't get too tangled up in extra weird things that cause a loss of focus or a slight derailment of the show.
- Please be understanding if you are asked to drop a certain adlib or line that you have changed; your Tour Manager or Director may know something about the show and the outcome of the scene that you do not
- Generally we won't give much acknowledgement to all the great stuff you may have added to the script in rehearsals and on tour. We hired you with that expectation in mind, that your talent would add to the overall texture and dynamic of the character/s
- Make an effort to understand the philosophies of the company by reading the Teacher Notes for the show you're in (and ask questions). That way you will have a better understanding of what is appropriate and what isn't from the start. You can download these from www.alphashows.com.au/downloads
- We're not putting on some dinky di crappy kids show. This is important and everything we say on stage is remembered and incredibly significant to tens of thousands of audience members; **we have been in trouble before for random adlibs that got misinterpreted**. An example is the one above about conservative audiences and referencing a teacher for a joke that was supposed to be aimed at a child.
- The shows are usually also to create subconscious learning's for the adults in the audience so don't assume it 'doesn't matter' because it's a show marketed at children. The tiniest things you say are remembered, we know because we receive hundreds of letters from children with the most amazing insights, learnings and revolutionary thought and reflection after experiencing an Alpha Show.

VALUES EDUCATION

All of Alpha's shows have a specific theme, and then a bunch of sub-themes scattered throughout subtly. The main theme of the show usually is addressed and directly communicated to the audience through a 'closed eye process' (see below). However, even if you're not the person performing the 'closed eye' you will undoubtedly have a part to play in the overall communication of the themes and/or sub-themes.

To get a sense of these, read the teacher notes about the show you are in, available from the downloads section on the website.

What is most important for you to understand is that our clients GREATLY appreciate the level of impact and our unique ability to have an audience take ownership of advanced ideas about life and the soul etc. It is what has secured us additional business as a company beyond the limited market of schools and venues who are content for us to just 'put on a show' that is aimed at simple entertainment. And it has gained us additional respect and attention by parents committed to taking their children to valuable learning events during the holidays at theatres too, that aren't activities that suck the energy out of their children or provide no valuable educational content or worse, teach them negative role models and behaviours (like video games or rubbish kids movies, or live events like Shrek, Scooby Doo or Hi-5).

Here's some additional points for you to know:

- All values education in Alpha's shows are based on ideas and concepts that originated from the very best in education, personal development or spiritually-based techniques or philosophies.
- We are not making it up based on our own personal beliefs
- It differs greatly to any other "theatre-in-education" which tries to tackle 'bullying' or other such basic ideas. These shows all offer value and have their place in the market. Their strategy is usually just to present the ideas in a unique and fun way and provide a platform for discussion in the classroom. For example, using animals as a metaphor for various ways of 'dealing with a bully'. This is of course valuable, however our outcome in our shows is not to look at 'behaviour management' or simple strategies of what to 'do' when someone bullies you. Instead, we focus on how to create a new level of consciousness, and a foundation of emotions, that not only helps a child become more resilient emotionally, but would additionally move a child to a place of understanding and compassion, and focus on contribution; and perhaps even solve the underlying emotional challenge the bully (for just one example of negative behaviour we might notice transforming from taking ownership of the ideas in an Alpha show) themselves may be dealing with. All behaviour results from emotion; it is difficult to 'stop' a behaviour just by dealing with the surface behaviour. Instead if you can change the emotions, or even better, change whatever belief is determining the behaviour, or vehicle for meeting a need is being used, then you change their life permanently. It has moved beyond simple 'behaviour management'. Behaviour is always linked to emotion, and we have a bunch of techniques we use to both release negative emotions and to foster and condition positive emotions that become the dominant and habitual way a person lives.
- We are also not trying to 'force' children to believe certain things; only to offer them ideas that are based on WHAT WORKS to create more joy, passion and happiness in life. You can think what you like, but it is a fact that the ideas we present are proven to WORK in all contexts and for all people.
- These ideas are also not rooted in stuff that only works 'on kids'. This is the most cutting-edge personal development technology modelled from the world's leaders in this field; as a result, the ideas WORK in real-life scenarios and are therefore ideas that would work for YOUR life too. Alpha values actors who grow and take ownership of the messages we communicate. By focussing on your own growth and willingness to become a real-life walking talking role model, you become someone who is greatly appreciated by the company. An actors job is to feel emotions. Alpha's shows focus a LOT on emotions, so it would make sense that you as a professional and dedicated to your craft actor you would want to investigate emotions and what underlying repressed emotions from childhood result in behaviours in our present day life. If you understand this, not just intellectually but because you have also experience it and felt a lot of your OWN feelings that have been bottled up for years, then you're going to be a better actor. Your life is also going to be a lot less stressful and problematic. The only thing that will stop an actor from wanting to investigate these psychological ideas about emotions etc, is their own fear of the size and magnitude of their own grief about early events. All of us have a large amount of grief from our childhood (yes, even those of us

ALPHA ACTORS MANUAL

who had a lovely childhood. There are still things that we need to grieve and face the truth about). Being humble is key, so we ask you to be humble with both your onstage performance and life outside of your character. For instance, we once had an actor who was so scared of making a mistake on the lighting desk. He literally was shaking. And he kept making mistake after mistake and ruining the scene from lights going crazy, going to blackout etc. He just couldn't get it. I asked him to spend the next hour feeling this fear and experiencing the grief about his mother yelling at him for getting things wrong. He came back after doing this, we did the scene, and he did the lighting perfectly and never made a mistake again (the task wasn't overly difficult to begin with). This is a true story. This stuff works.

- As much as it is nice to give an audience the choice of whether to enjoy the show as a simple entertaining 90 minutes or whether to use it as a chance to learn and grow as well, our clients have been reasonably unanimous with their praise for the direct ways we impact children. Therefore you may feel that the show is pretty full on in some of the ideas we portray and the way the ideas are portrayed, but everything we do is based on a great deal of experience of knowing what engages children at the highest level, and the best way to impact a person's soul condition and awareness. Additionally, this is what our customers need, and in the end, what serves the greater good for the children given the outcome of providing a 'measurable progression of consciousness, awareness, connectedness and love', as per the opening page of outcomes at the start of this manual. So anyone who doesn't agree won't be taken much notice of! This is what we get paid for!
- So it may seem like some segments of the show are unable to be 'enjoyed' as pure theatrical entertainment, and this is probably right. For those in the audience (or backstage!) that aren't interested in feeling happier or aren't willing to have the courage to go inside to explore one's own beliefs, dark emotions or fears, and have a block to doing so, will most likely find some of the show less enjoyable. However, because we know that audience's still have an awesome time overall, and we realised it is our duty to use the 'peak state' the children are in to create new understandings and learning's (as even teachers rarely would follow up on the values in the show in the days when we used to rely on teachers to do the follow up values work), we realised we can no longer waste the opportunity as we have too great a chance to help those in the audience who DO want to grow and learn. So we know some children and adults won't necessarily be affected greatly by the special messages in the show, but it's worth losing them for a second in order to reach those who will be affected (and sometimes affected profoundly, from what we've heard as feedback from schools and parents).
- Some people don't always agree or like everything we communicate in our shows. This is always an interesting dynamic to notice on our part, as it usually is the result of a set of beliefs or rules that are outdated or very rigid, and it only makes us realise even more that we need to keep doing what we're doing, as we're on to something good! Teachers, parents, actors and other interested in the company who seem primarily focussed on contribution, love and joy all seem to appreciate what we do and how we do it.
- In order to make the ideas 'stick', we use techniques in the show to get the children in a 'peak state'. This means an emotional peak state, where they are in up-time, engaged and feeling good. Only in this state can you effectively learn and remember things. So with this in mind, you want to ensure your performance follows this outcome, that in order to get them to learn and remember the stuff we're offering, they need to be engaged emotionally to begin with. For the most part, engaged emotionally (for children) is usually done by humour or excitement, and very occasionally by 'feeling' empathetically for the character (eg. When Cinderella's ball dress is ripped by her stepsisters, it's actually a moment when the children will feel genuinely sad for her, as it's a pretty 'real' and 'intense' moment). You may feel that the audience is encouraged to be too over-the-top, however, it really is done for a very important reason and it is definitely the way it works best. We kinda know what we're doing and we need actors to align with us in this purpose.
- All shows follow the same pattern emotionally. We set up the problem, we point out the unhealed emotions that have caused that problem, we get the audience to help the main character feel those emotions to get them out, and then we reinforce better actions/choices/beliefs/emotions etc with some technique. Get on board with this outcome and do whatever you can do reinforce this pattern and make it more powerful. Be wary of being too 'obvious'. We don't want the audience to be feeling 'yeah yeah we get it, enough about emotions'. Keep it focussed on the CHARACTER'S JOURNEY, not projecting at the audience that they need to change. Use the audience as 'experts' of change psychology, and elicit their help to help the main character. Never go into 'teaching' mode towards the audience.

PERFORMING A 'CLOSED EYE'

Performing a closed eye in an Alpha Show is a privilege and a responsibility only given to select Alpha actors. It can be a profound, unique and quite moving experience both for actors and the audience. It is what will make this job a special experience, whether or not you are part of it or not.

All of the closed eye processes are generally created, decided and guided in intention and message by Ben, who writes the entire script with Katja. They are often based on spiritual concepts, emotions that are necessary for children and adults to lead effective lives and the process of anchoring them in, and powerful processes that allow an audience to decide what they want out of the show and out of life. It is important to allow an audience to 'choose' if they just want to experience 90 minutes of entertainment or are willing to go that step further to get more than just entertainment out of our shows. The ideas portrayed are not 'made up' or based on personal belief. They are modelled from excellence, of what 'works', and are offered simply as a guide for children and teachers and adults to use as a way to bring more joy, happiness, truth and love to the world. You may find a certain message or value in conflict with one of your personal beliefs, but just remember that these processes aren't based on our beliefs, but simply universal truths that have been proven to create the result of a better life. Remember, this is YOUR process, and you own it. However, Ben still owns the greater outcome and you are required to work within these outcomes – he wrote it to begin with after all. Please be ready to work closely with Ben if you perform a closed eye, as he will no doubt have specific language or portions of the process that are essential that you cover, and will also be doing his normal thing of looking to 'make it better' whenever possible. Closed eyes are the most impactful part of the shows so it will get the most attention from Ben. Other than that, this is all about the children and how you can find the best way to reach them.

As always, we are always growing and are determined to make things better. This is an art form and a combination of many genres of 'stage-work', and we are open to ways of making it all even better!

PERFORMING AN EFFECTIVE "CLOSED EYE PROCESS" FOR CHILDREN

A closed eye process (CEP), for the purposes of this, is defined as any process whereby the audience are asked to participate with the actors on stage, in order to help the protagonist come to a realisation about themselves. CEP's have become an integral part of Alpha Shows, with many amazing experiences coming from actors, both onstage and off, and most importantly, audience members! CEP's are Alpha Shows' major point of difference from the massive amount of TIE and children's theatre that exists these days, and is something that, if handled correctly, make an already hugely dramatic and moving experience, into something that will stick with a young audience member for many years to come, and hopefully, for the rest of their life. This is by no means a bible, everybody will find their own way to do this that works for them.

There are three basic areas to any CEP. I call them **the setup, the game, and the victory** (notice I say victory as there is no way you can lose! I'll get to that later). These three areas work together, play off each other and are all vital in equal parts to the success of your CEP.

Before we get to them, I should talk about the CEP as a whole. A CEP is a process that is generally done with adults, often using techniques derived from Neuro Linguistic programming, or NLP. This technique uses words and imagery to conjure images, thoughts, feelings or memories in a person's mind, and then anchors in or alters a person's neural and emotional pathways to create a new, positive association, or collapse a negative association. NLP is a very effective therapeutic tool, and combined with the high energy, high stakes environment of an Alpha Show, it has an even higher chance of being effective. The goal of a CEP is to create a positive physiological response in an audience member, in essence, showing them how good it feels to feel good, and showing them a way to feel like that all the time. This is done through NLP* and techniques adapted from many many other philosophies and teaching styles. If I was to say to you "remember when you were really happy" how would you feel? Happy for a second maybe... Try this "Think of a time when you were the happiest you have ever been, feel the way you felt when you are this happy, see all the things you see when you are this happy, hear the things you hear when you are this happy. Feel all of those feelings right now" how do you feel? Pretty happy, and probably for a longer than you did the first time. The difference is in the language that is used. A few simple words can have a profound effect on the way something is perceived and the way it is received.

ALPHA ACTORS MANUAL

All you are doing with NLP and indeed with a CEP, is eliminating the variables so that all that is coming across is your intention. Eliminating all the variables does not mean cutting half your dialogue, it means making what you are saying crystal clear. Crystal clear words have the most impact and will be the ones that last the longest. You don't need to know too much about NLP, however the understanding that everything you say needs to be headed toward your goal of getting your message across, is paramount to your success. The way you perform a CEP is different to the rest of the show and your character. You need to step outside of the plot for a moment, and be very connected to the audience, to the outcome, and to use verbal and visual cues to get the audience doing what you want them to do. This will require very specific ways of speaking and moving, specific tonalities etc.

* Katja and Ben are both NLP practitioners and have also done numerous other psychological based learnings. Ben has his Masters in Psychology.

THE SETUP

Now, the setup. This is a crucial part of your CEP, as it involves getting the audience on your side, and gaining their confidence as someone they can trust and look up to, so when the time comes, you have them right where you want them. The main thing you need to be aware of is keeping the audience on your side. Your character should not lose patience, yell, or tease the audience (teasing can work, but not too much), as you run the risk of them casting you as the villain in their mind, or as someone who is not here to help the protagonist of the story. I ran into this problem myself during Hercules as the character Philoctetes, and tore my hair out show after show wondering why the audience would not trust Philoctetes when the time came. It came down to being as simple as toning down my character on his entrance and not making him so hostile toward the audience early on, once this was done my CEP had an almost 100% hit rate. The fascinating part and the revelation for me is that there was at least 40 minutes of show between when Philoctetes first came onstage, and when he delivers the CEP!! Something so early beforehand can make such a difference to how your CEP is received.

Marking

Something else I find extremely useful in the setup is a process known as 'marking' where you target certain people in different areas of the audience, and look at them occasionally from time to time, for no longer than a few seconds. This process comes in handy during your CEP as well, but more on that later. What this is handy for now is making sure you are watching your entire audience.

Calibration

You should be what I call 'calibrating' your audience to find out where pockets of resistance may pop up, where the noisy full on kids are, where the genuinely nice kids are, and where the genuinely bratty kids are, so you know who to go to and when. They all serve their purpose – don't panic! Calibrating is probably your most useful tool in all of your setup, as it allows you to glide through the CEP knowing exactly where you will get what you want in terms of responses. You may even find consistent responses to a line of dialogue and a line in your CEP, so check out where it comes from. If you get a big response from one group, the others will unfailingly follow!

The final part of the setup is to calibrate the overall audience. How old are they? Are they rowdy? Are they from a remote area? Are they all one gender? Are they particularly slow? Are they mainly English as a second language students? Etc etc... All of these factors can be taken into account both during and more easily BEFORE the show. There is a wealth of information open to you as you walk through the playground or listen to the teachers or look at the work stuck up on the walls around the school. Even something as simple as asking someone (ie. One of the other actors) who has performed at the school before what they are like can really help, whilst audiences are vastly different from year to year, some aspects never change. So now you have all the information you need to deliver this effectively, let's figure out how.

THE GAME

A previous actor who delivered a number of CEP and helped create them when we first put them in the show had a revelation. He discussed that he often found himself believing that he had all the answers and all that these children needed to do was listen to him and they would be fine for the rest of their life. "I am the hero, I am their saviour". This, clearly, is a slightly skewed view of what we actually do! In some ways, this is a thankless task. You put all your effort into calibrating the room, noticing all of the ins and outs of the audience, learn this ridiculously long and overly wordy speech, and for what? The audience to cheer the hell out of the guy who makes fart jokes, and the feedback form to say it was too long, again? Whilst it seems a little unfair, the path of the CEP character is a little different to that. Whilst all of the accolades are nice, what we are there for is the one percent changes. The tiny shifts in the way a child looks at their friend, their parent, their teacher, their sibling, and most importantly,

ALPHA ACTORS MANUAL

themselves. The difference comes from you, and it is in realising your purpose within the bigger picture of the show.

The obvious choice in this instance is to believe that you are their saviour, their leader and you have all the answers. Let me tell you now, you are not, and you don't! No matter how much research, practice and no matter how much preparation you do, you are always going to get the curve balls. My choice, and I believe this is the right one, is to see yourself as their servant. You are there to serve them on their journey, to serve the information to them in the best way that you can, and in a way that they are going to be able to digest as easily as possible. You are not someone who barks orders at them, or someone who is there to whip them into shape. They haven't come to a self-help seminar, they have come to be entertained, so lets do that. The beauty of NLP is, that even when they don't want to listen, the soul can't help it. Our souls are preprogrammed to want to progress and grow and seek information that is truth based to help us be happier and more fulfilled. Our minds may get in the way of this, but the soul always seeks it. The information may lay dormant for years, but when it is needed, up to the surface it will rise, all the stranger and more profound for having those years to sink in.

So don't force this on them, they will get it. You also want to avoid bullying them into doing what you want. There is no surer way to lose your audiences trust and respect than by yelling at them for not doing what you want, It is the same in acting as it is in this, as soon as you are yelling, you have lost control.

I have fallen into the trap too. The audience were not doing what I wanted and there was this annoying din of noise constantly over the top of everything that I was saying. Instead of being smart about things, I made the choice to yell and scream at them, believing that they would see their friend, the character that had worked so hard for their trust really upset and come back into line. WRONG! All they saw was Mum or Dad or their Teacher screaming at them, straight away the trust that had been built up was lost.

Children get yelled at all of the time and believe it or not, it is easily the least effective way to get a meaningful message across to them. Sure, they might do it in the moment, of course they will, they know when they get yelled at they do it or there will be trouble. By going this route, even if you succeed in getting them to do what you want, you are just reinforcing a negative pattern that will repeat into adult life – do what you're told in order to get love. They have also just made a negative association toward whatever idea you are putting to them. We have some valuable messages to get across to them, lets get them across nice and easily and effectively. So, with that in mind, lets go through the things that I think are most important to this area both before and during the process.

First of all is your physicality. We all know that this is how children get most of their cues and ideas about a person or an idea, so your body needs to be telling the story first and foremost. If you want the audience to feel happy, show them how a happy person looks! If you want them to feel sad, show them how to look sad. Simple. The ideas you are going to be putting to them are quite advanced and your physical communication is your greatest tool to getting this across. The second layer to this is your neutral communicative physicality, that is, your physicality when you are talking to them during the bulk of the process, or the "game". There is a balance to be struck here between character and what you are communicating. I have found that conversational tone with the audience is most effective, as they listen up and feel they will miss something if they don't! A conversational tone and very small monologue portion, really only the actual process, these have been the most effective and well received CEP's we have done. Your aim is for the audience to not realise you are teaching them something; teach them while they are not looking so to speak! The last thing in this section is eye contact. This is gold! Staring someone in the eye or a look of understanding to a child that needs it can make all the difference.

Second of all is your language. It is best to use the simplest language that you can, as you want the children to consciously comprehend what you are saying as best they possibly can. This can come down to changing seemingly meaningless words or phrases for an adult, to phrases that have a palpable meaning for a child's mind. For example changing the phrase "feel this love absolutely" to "feel lots and lots of love". You may have lost the impact from an adults perspective, though the children now understands fully what you want them to do. A child does not have the same concept of absolutely as an adverb, and the phrase "lots and lots" is something they understand as that is the pinnacle of acquisition for them in regard to anything. So be careful of your language, it can make the world of difference.

Repetition is also a major key to this process. Choose some key phrases ("really, really", "all the strength of superman", "with your eyes closed", "grab it and pull it to your heart"), and repeat them whenever you want the audience to perform another part of the process. It may be a little tough the first time around, though when you get to the second, third and fourth time, they will know exactly what you want them to do and do it eagerly.

ALPHA ACTORS MANUAL

Owning your own emotions helps. Not projecting at an audience as described above is paramount. But also looking at how you are blocked to any of the ideas you are actually supposed to be teaching is also key. Don't blame or criticise the teaching, or the person who wrote it! It works. The only block will be you and your own fears, anger, sadness etc. So own those feelings and be humble enough to remove enough of them so you can be effective delivering the process. You need to be comfortable with your OWN emotions (ie. the dark ones) before you can effectively give permission and encourage an audience to go into THEIR dark emotions and express them. Remember, all closed eyes ALWAYS let them express, verbalise and yell out their anger, fear, grief etc. Then we do 'something' with the space created by the release of those negative emotions. So you have to be comfortable and passionate about the importance of getting an audience to express repressed negative emotions. If you allow this fully, then the follow up anchoring and NLP processes work so much better and easier. It's almost like once that's happened (releasing emotions) the rest of the CEP is easy and can just be a fun celebration.

There is not too much more to the game other than to know your stuff!! Know your script inside out and know why each part of the process is there. When you know why each part of the process is there, you know what will serve each audience the best. Be fluid. You don't have to include everything every day because, depending on the process, it may not work for that particular audience. It is your choice, nobody knows this process better than you. Clarity is power here and the clearer you are on your structure and form and script, the clearer you will come across.

THE VICTORY

The finish of the process is a difficult one to write about, as it is different in every show, and each process commands a different ending, or "victory". The victory is when the character on stage has made their transformation and is moving ahead. Sometimes it calls for the audience to cheer and applaud wildly, sometimes they have done too much of that already, sometimes it will call for a big cheer for the subject character. Whatever it is, you want to make a clear end. Once again clarity and certainty is power. It is also up to the actor that you are working with to "sell the change". They need to show that there has been a definite transformation in their physiology and their soul through their physicality and their expression of emotion. This shouldn't affect you, as you are in the zone – this is for the audience, so that they can see the change that has occurred and see that it works. It is a kind of conditioning in their heads as well, they can see it work, so they know it does. You then want to get the audience to sit down with a clear command that they understand, you don't want to, and shouldn't have to say it more than once or twice, and you also don't want to leave the performers onstage after you with a mess to clean up!

I said earlier that there was no way you could lose with this, and there isn't. It all depends what you want to achieve and what you want to give. You have all the tools in the script and in these paragraphs to smash this. If you do fail miserably, at least you have learnt a way not to do it! See how you can't lose?

That's about all there is to it. Have fun, keep all of this in mind, and also find new discoveries of your own. Above all this should be fun. Serve your audience; it is a rewarding experience and an experience which you will enjoy. If you have any questions ask Ben or your director as we are always here and always happy to answer anything at anytime.

Good Luck and Have Fun!

QUESTION TIME

At the end of each show, when time permits, Alpha's performers come back on stage to give the children an opportunity to ask questions. 99.9% of the time we do a Question Time.

We welcome and encourage all of the performers to have the maximum possible contact time with children. We are also very happy to provide autographs and personal messages to each child. So be ready for this and check the Touring Manual for more information on how all this works.

Here is how Alpha does a Q&A differently:

- ◆ It is almost 'part of the show'.
- ◆ We have a voiceover introduction and 'pump-up' music before the actors come back out on stage. It is always important that children (and us) are in a 'peak state' to ask and answer questions
- ◆ The actors will come out in costume, but as 'themselves' (not in character). They will remain energised and enthusiastic, rather than showing fatigue (even if the Actors themselves are fatigued at all)

Question Time has become this 'gem' of a thing, something we are very passionate about and are committed to making happen every show, even if we're running out of time. It's our opportunity to meet with the entire audience as ourselves, communicate special messages that we may be passionate about (including your own!) and condition in positive anchors set during the show and ensure we can come back next time to continue the process with another show.

The quality of life is in direct proportion to the quality of the questions we ask, especially those we ask on a consistent basis

ALPHA ACTORS MANUAL

So there are a few standards we expect from you during question time, to make the process run smooth and to be most effective:

How to perform question time:

- ◆ DIRECTED FOCUS. Focus on whomever is speaking with your attention and eyes
- ◆ Repeat the question! Always.
- ◆ Answer the question succinctly. Keep it quick and snappy in most cases. Ben or the Tour Manager may go on and on a bit but your answers should be quick
- ◆ A good way to end the answer is to ask a question that relates (eg. Did you like the costumes boys and girls?)
- ◆ When you're done answering, end your answer with "1,2,3 You rock". That's the signal for the next person to pick a question, and it also ends each question on high energy & positive anchor
- ◆ Understand Ben/TM or other experienced cast members may jump in on your answer to cover a certain topic or something important to that particular client. Don't take it personally. You're doing fine!
- ◆ Enter and leave the stage in the same order as you did for the finale song 'Fly Away'
- ◆ Pick children who are easily identified and/or are isolated, rather than trying to pick a child who is in a cluster of children all with their hand up. It just speeds things up & avoids confusion of who you've picked
- ◆ Never get personal or discuss personal lives on stage, unless you want to share a personal story of how an emotion affected you this way, and how you released it, and it had this effect in your life etc etc. It does help to teach that the message of the show is real. But this stuff will usually come from the Tour Manager. If you are particularly passionate about a specific message, feel free to express that (we don't want to shut you down, we like that you want to have a positive impact on kids!)
- ◆ Never lie! If you make a joke that includes a lie, always clarify that you are joking. Kids don't always get it.
- ◆ Be passionate but real. Speak in your normal voice as though speaking to an adult. Stand up straight!
- ◆ No 'kiddie talk'. No bending forward as though you're speaking to someone stupid. No teacher-like personas.
- ◆ DO NOT make random mumblings, noises, sneezes, coughs, strange faces at an answer, confused looks, or generally look like you are bored, tired or 'too good for this'.
- ◆ Don't show scepticism for an answer Ben or your Tour Manager is giving. We know the message can be confronting for many actors but they are based on truth. You need to get humble with why you are resisting the message and stop projecting these fears onto the audience or your Tour Manager in Question Time.
- ◆ Listen to answers from other cast as a way to learn the best way to answer questions, but don't try to just 'mimic' or copy our answers. Come up with a way to answer each common question in your own style.
- ◆ Focus on contribution and serving the audience/greater good as a whole. Nobody is interested to hear how good you are, your life story or the 10 years of tap training you've had. Keep it relevant to children and what is going to interest, grow and/or impact them.

ALPHA ACTORS MANUAL

Below are some examples of questions we've had or like to get.

Rehearsals and Preparation

- *How long does it take to rehearse?
- Where do you rehearse the show?
- *Who makes up the dances?
- *Who writes the shows?
- Was it hard to learn your lines?

The Set-up

- *How long does it take to set the set up?
- *Who made/painted the sets?
- What's behind the set?
- Where did you get the costumes?
- How do you get changed so quickly?
- *Where does the smoke come from?
- *How do the lights/music/sound work?
- Were the swords real?

Show Specific

- Why is it different to the Disney movie?
- Why were there extra characters?
- ***Why was the Stepmother/sisters so mean?
- How did the magic work?
- ***Why did the Prince give up being a Prince?
- How did the Fireplace work?
- How did the flash and smoke work?
- ***Why didn't the Prince want to dance?
- *Why was Cinderella so kind/beautiful?
- ***Why did Cinderella not feel like she deserved to go to the ball?

- ***Why was "comedy character" so funny?
- ***What sort of values were in the show?

The Company

- **What other shows does Alpha do?
- How many shows have you done?
- *Which show are you doing next year?
- ***Why do you do shows like this in schools?
- Whose idea was it to perform in schools?
- *Do you perform anywhere in the school holidays?

The Performers

- *How did you all get to be in the show?
- *What acting training have you done?
- *Where/How did you learn to dance/sing?
- How old are you?
- *How does it feel to be an actor?
- *Do you get scared/nervous?
- Have you ever been on TV?
- *What other shows have you been in?
- *What is your favourite thing about performing?
- What is your favourite colour?
- What is your hair like?

Please note: "Question Time" sessions are an extra value in addition to the show your school has purchased from Alpha, provided free of charge – as a result, we cannot guarantee that we will have time – especially if we have another school to go to afterwards, or if it is already too close to the end of your school day. If this is the case, please feel free to allow children to speak to the performers as they pack up.

SYMBOLOLOGY

All Alpha shows contain hidden meanings and subtle themes. They also usually have a focus on the importance of femininity and the power of it and the importance of reintegrating it into our lives. Also a focus is the value of "being who you really are", emotional truthfulness and expression, positive role models, inner beauty, bullying and its consequences, and many other themes.

We use various methods of communicating these ideas, through the above mentioned 'closed eye processes', but also through various other means, such as set designs, costume and other more subtle sequences in the shows. Suffice it to say, there is a lot going on beyond a silly children's show, so feel free to explore the symbols in greater depth and ask questions, either on Alpha's social network or at rehearsals and during your tour.

SPECIFIC THEMES FOR EACH SHOW

Please download the teacher notes for the show you're in to get more information. We'd love it if you did! The post show packs are the most helpful. They're all available at www.alphashows.com.au/downloads

Thank you and we hope this manual is helpful in assisting you to be an awesome performer in Alpha's shows! To read all this, we very much appreciate it. So you rock and we love you!