

TPS Executive Director Search: Member Forum 7/17/17

Candidate 3 (3:10pm)

Transcript of Presentation and Q&A Session

(Name of candidate and identifying information has been removed from this transcript by the request of the final candidates to preserve anonymity at this stage in the process.)

Liisa Spink: Hello there, and we are thrilled to have you here as part of the process in searching for our new TPS Executive Director. This is our third and final phase of the ED Search Committee, and today as a result of our membership survey that we sent out, asking members how they'd like to engage in a search process, and based on the results of that survey, we had members in every single stage of the process, including member representatives as part of the resume review stage, members represented at the first interview panel, and the membership forum as the final stage and you should all have forms that you're going to fill out for member review. So, if you don't have a form, raise your hand and Jillian will go around and make sure that you get one.

We know not everyone is available to be here because it is during the day, but we will be sending out the transcripts of these sessions and a form online for anyone to participate. So we encourage folks to do so.

We have been requested by the candidate pool to keep the anonymity of the final candidates. So, that's why we're saying Candidate 1, 2, and 3. We are trying to make that request for our candidates. So even though you're lucky people because you can see these people, so you'll know who they are -- that you won't necessarily message it on social media, in deference to the request from our candidates.

There will be a 10 minute presentation, following that 10 minute presentation, there will be a 10-minute Q&A. After that, we'll request that you fill out the forms and hand them back to Jeanine. And we'll go ahead and use that in our final decision-making process. Enough from me. Without further ado, I'd like to introduce to you [Candidate 3].

Candidate 3 Thanks everybody. I just want to first say I'm really honored by being here, so thanks to the Search Committee. This is a really cool opportunity, and I'm really passionate about theatre, as anyone and my husband will tell you, probably too much, so I'm really excited to share my vision with you.

First I just wanted to let you know a little bit about me. I graduated 10 years ago from Western, I then worked professionally as a stage manager for 4 years at the 5th Avenue, Seattle Children's, Village Theater, and the Orlando Shakespeare Theater. I then transitioned to the venue production manager at West of Lenin for about 2 years, where I learned the ins and outs of running a facility. I then worked as the Operations Manager for a 300-person startup called Voicebox Technologies. During that time, I handled a yearly annual budget of \$1 million. And I also project managed a \$5 million office build-up move, which I delivered on time and under budget. There, I created an intern program, I created travel policy focused on company culture,

and managed a team of four direct reports. Among other things, I am experienced in people management, renter management, budgeting, systems (inaudible) and running a lean team. I'm also a passionate fringe practitioner. You can see my TPS and my LinkedIn.

I started and co-artistic directed a fringe theatre company called [Theatre Company], we did site-specific, immersive work. I've also worked for ArtsWest, (inaudible), Ghostlight, Annex, Theatre 22, Theatre Schmeater, Jet City Improv, and 14/48 Projects.

I see a lot of shows. Last year, I saw 102. This year, it's shaping up to be more like 75. I was born here, I was raised here, I love the Pacific Northwest, and I love theatre.

I think collaboration and transparency are at the heart of any good endeavor, I think the TPS Executive Director will be first and foremost the person that amplifies and enables other people to do their best work. I'm very passionate about enabling other people to do amazing things, and will first in creating systems and cultures that make people thrive.

There is some rebuilding of the TPS reputation, and I think this should be as transparent as time and resources allow. I will work on cross-training staff and hire people that are rock stars at what they do.

My vision for TPS has 3 main tenants.

Expand access to TPS resources to smaller theaters, educators, and audience members.

Advocate for theatre in Puget Sound both politically and economically.

And be a leader for social justice in the theatre community and reach out to audiences and artists.

First of all, the website. Right now, the website is the most visible part of TPS. It has great functionality, if it does have some sizing issues. There's also room for growth and greater access to resources. The major reason people you and visit TPS is for the auditions. Can we make this even better? For example, can we offer audition scheduling in the website?

Right now the website profiles and e-mails are very focused on actors. Is there a way to publish playwriting calls just like auditions? Directing calls, and can we have resources for educators and get more members and membership organizations that way.

And the forums, which area great place to post things, very rarely gain interaction.

I think if we added -- in some way, if we could get more interaction there, we could drive traffic to the site.

Also a blog or online newsletter, for our memberships. We could solicit people for articles, highlight issues that affect artists and publish it, that could make the website more trafficked.

And also continuing with the Seattle industry night calendar, focus it on events geared towards performing artists, like galas and opening nights.

These things would make membership more valuable, and the website more trafficked, which would lead to more memberships and create perhaps better ad sales.

All sizes and types of theaters: TPS needs to be available for everything from Equity theaters to smaller fringe theaters, as this diversity strengthens the Puget Sound theatre community.

To this end, I would like to see TPS do the following:

Expand the Unified General Auditions to include weekends and/or night time audition slots to accommodate actors and theaters not available during the workday.

Expand the Gregories to include a fringe or a non-equity category to mark the success of the small theaters, while still giving the deserved accolades to the professional theaters.

Look outside Seattle city limits and see what theaters in the greater Puget Sound area need.

Use the Seattle Fringe Festival to give opportunities to smaller fringe theaters to promote themselves and the larger fringe theater in a much lower stakes way.

And provide resources for educators and educational institutions.

Crisis Management, which is something I have some insight into.

I think TPS should have a stake in every theater that is a member. Recent years, I've seen various kinds of crises in theaters of all sizes. TPS should work to create guidelines and resources that help crises from happening, and they should act as a mental organization to lean on when a theatre starts to feel strain.

For example, #NotInOurHouse, which is a Chicago code of conduct that started after an article came out, detailing some egregious behavior in some Chicago theaters. It includes, agreements, support groups, an e-mail where you can ask for help. I think TPS can help people already trying to put this into place, and we can help theaters abide by this. Also, if a theater is in crisis, or an artist or a technician needs help communicating its needs, TPS could perhaps help them through with mediators, mentors, and resources. Most crises are preventable, and TPS could be an organization that helps artists, technicians, staffs, and board members through times of crises.

Advocacy. TPS should be helping theaters understand and react to the changing environment and demographics of Puget Sound. We are not unique in this journey in Seattle, we can see what other cities like San Francisco and theatre in the Bay area are doing with audience development. We are seeing an influx of younger, more technically minded people with a lot of money, who aren't necessarily interested in connecting with the theatre or their community. TPS could help theaters partner with local tech companies, and also research and have available information about demographics. From simple things like collecting articles about the changing landscape, to partnering with a marketing firm and creating focus groups.

TPS could also be audience-facing. With the possibility of having membership available to theatre-lovers via weekly newsletters and ticket discounts and other VIP deals would help the Seattle community tap into what's happening in the theatre.

Theatre development.

TPS has several great programs that could help theaters. For example, the Seattle fringe festival is a great place where Seattle fringe artists could try something new and cross-pollinate potential audiences. If we are able to curate it more, not totally abandoning the lottery and all the beauties that come from it, but maybe focusing on more existing theaters and artists, we can grow audiences, and grow exposure for some of Seattle's smaller theaters.

We can also help theaters navigate grants by educating people when grants are out there and getting them. And lastly, TPS could become a center for theatrical knowledge.

How-tos of marketing, demographics, space rental, job descriptions, board membership. It would be amazing if people didn't have to learn from scratch every time they started a theatre company.

Space development.

Renting a space in this area has become harder. But there are theaters that stand (inaudible) when people want rehearsal space and performance space. TPS could with scheduling more than just its spaces. TPS can also work with city, county, and state resources and officials to help keep rehearsals in spaces that are affordable, and not just in Seattle.

There are artists that live and work outside the city limits, and we shouldn't leave them out.

And of course keep the TPS rooms that we have clean and functional.

There's also room for advocacy, when it comes to reserving theatrical spaces in Seattle.

The report that the city of Seattle just put out, the (inaudible) is a great example, we need to be advocating for these ideas.

A political voice for theatre. I think we should be more focused on the things that are happening politically-wise, for example, Access for All -- Proposition 1 initiative -- we should be enabling artists, sending out flyers, and organize volunteers.

Social justice leadership.

That's something I'm passionate about. I would love to see TPS become a leader. For example, we should listen to the community leaders who are already doing work on this. We should expand the geographic region of TPS. While these spaces are amazing, this is a historically white neighborhood, and it's easier for those demographics to get here. Having a presence in the East and the South would be a good start, and accessing those artists and audiences. And also, we could be a center where people send people to learn about the Americans with Disabilities Act, and perhaps get resources for closed captioning or ASL performances.

And revenue.

If we make membership more valuable, and we get audience members engaged in TPS, and we look for grants for the social justice work, we can make membership more valuable, get more membership organizations, and also cover these works not just with membership dues. I think that keeping TPS financially viable is really important because I would like to see it for a long time.

And then just to remind you, the values that I think that TPS should be really :

Advocacy

Access

Outreach

And I think I'd be a very good candidate to revamp the systems that are in TPS for the greater Seattle area.

Thanks.

Q&A:

Q1: I've asked the same question to the other candidates as well, historically TPS has had a rough road in the area of contributing income, unearned income. Well over half, well over 50% of our income is earned through memberships and space rental. The reasons and causes for that are many, certainly lack of staffing or effective staffing is part of it. But to me, the biggest piece is that TPS as a service organization doesn't present a sexy, high-visibility public image. We don't produce, we don't put stuff on stage, nobody knows who to applaud, nobody knows who TPS is, except of course the membership. How do we bridge that gap? How do we make TPS viable and fundable and donatable to the general community, to the granting organizations, and to the corporations who are taking over our world? Thanks.

Candidate 3: Well, one answer to that would be hook 'em young. If we can offer student memberships, if we can go to colleges and high school and say, "You want to know what's happening in Seattle? Central, Western, Evergreen, join us." We can also revamp the website and make it look, as you say, sexier. We can also -- I'm really passionate also offering an audience membership, that they can get newsletters and the people who are community members who really want to be part of the theatre but don't want to be onstage or backstage, they can get behind-the-scenes looks, they can get ticket deals, and then they can perhaps come to the Gregories. Buy a ticket for that. And if TPS could just have a political -- a very transparent local stance, if you will -- like if we were out there for Prop 1, we could say "Donate to Prop 1." And we could use those funds to -- I don't know if we can legally say that. We could say, "Donate to Culture." "Donate to us that way." Join us to really bring culture to the forefront of Seattle, and you could be cool like us.

Q2: I'm going to bounce off the last question a little bit. Traditionally as an ED, you're doing quite a bit of, you know, facetime with people -- and it sounds like you're very passionate about advocacy in the community. I was curious what has been your experience being a face for theatre companies or doing that kind of outreach and fundraising work.

Candidate 3: I first started producing when I was 17. I ran a theatre company for 3 years in college. I then started [Theatre Company], and we were totally self-funded. Recently, I am on staff at [Theater Company], and we had a public kerfuffle, I'll call it. And I feel really confident in the way that I handled that. Since our Artistic Director and Managing Director quit, I put myself out there. I was taking meeting with people and talking to people about what happened. Anyone that wanted to talk, I did that. So that's one example, and with fundraising, I've run a lot of galas. I don't have a lot of grant writing experience. I have some.

Q3: I really appreciated your approach to the crisis management, and so if I may piggy back on the [Theater Company] situation, what would be TPS' role in that, for the future of how TPS supports member vision when there's a collapse, as such.

Candidate 3: Literally, even just a phone call would have been nice. I don't want to go into what happened behind the scenes at [Theater Company], but there was a lot of people that didn't know what was happening, and we didn't have a lot of communication skills because that was the system at [Theater Company] was set up. It was set up to fail. And it did. And there were a

lot of board members who were scared. There was staff members who were scared. There were subscribers that didn't know what to do. And really, someone calling and being like, "You should call Matthew Richter at the city. You should talk to Kathy Hsieh. You should talk to these bookkeepers. And we had to go and scramble and find all these resources, and if someone had said, "This has happened at these theaters, we've created these." One person that I did talk to was (inaudible), just because I know her. And she was a really great resource.

Q4: What would you do to make community theatre attractive to tech companies?

Candidate 3: We could focus on theaters that are close to where they live. A lot of people don't know there's theaters where they are. If we can somehow -- having worked at a tech company, tech companies are always trying to get their people to have greater roots in the community. So, I think we could really work with them and say, "Hey, Redfin. Here's a show that's kind of about housing. We can offer you a discount." Because one of the issues tech companies are having right now is that they have people come for a couple of years, and they leave. And I think the human resources has a stake in that. So we can talk to them. We can also highlight theatres that are doing shows that might have something to do with tech. Things that are hipper, things are more technically-minded, and we could also reach out to these people in town that might have done something in college. They work at Amazon, and maybe they have sound designing experience. And if we could really reach out to those people and get them hooked, then their friends at Amazon will come see a show in a basement, and the next week they come see Hoodoo Love, you know? Who knows.

Q5: I see that you've kind of worked both in theatre and out of theatre, so what do you feel makes a healthy office environment?

Candidate 3: I think a healthy office environment has a lot to do with transparency, and it has a lot to do with checking in with each other. It has a lot to do with supporting each other and being cross-trained. If I don't know what this other person is doing at all -- if I'm a little keyed into knowing what they're doing, then I can help them. They feel more supported, and brain-storming can happen. When it's not one person against the world for everything, it's a lot easier. And also just having daily check-ins and a modified scrum board. This is what's happening, this is a block for me, I need help doing this. Just making it feel more democratized. I'm a big fan of democratization in office culture. And also, having really clear values coming from the top to get everyone a kind of focus.

Q6: My question kind of piggy-backs on the last question there. There's really been a lot of conversation about outreach and engaging with outside organizations and inside the organization itself, and I'm curious about getting insight into how you would take your first steps internally in terms of restructuring the organization and creating a solid base for TPS moving forward.

Candidate 3: That's tricky because I have the job descriptions, and I know some people are on staff, and they're temp and some people are on staff, and they're not temp -- and the first thing I would do is talk to people, and if I came up with a plan right now, I don't think it would be terribly healthy to come in and say, "Now, everyone's a project manager, and we're all going to do this."

But what I'm really passionate about is systems and how systems work because things move a lot easier when a system is clear, if it's out, everyone knows what's happening -- so coming in and vibing the system that exists and how it can be improved or perhaps implemented, if one wasn't there. We have really great community members like you, creating the Seattle industry night calendar. And there are people working for free on that stuff, and if we can help tap into that, we can lighten the load on the staff members as well.

Q7: What kind of things do you think TPS should not be doing?

Candidate 3: Producing. Favoritism. I think favoritism and producing are -- that's a good question. I don't know. Nothing. We should be doing everything. Overstretch itself. I know I have a lot of ideas, and there are more ideas out there, but I don't think we should do everything at once. That's impossible. If I could put this as 5 years, this is 10 years out there, probably I would have. But TPS is right now a smaller organization, and we shouldn't expect too much of it right away.

Agastya Kohli: Thank you very much, that's time.

Candidate 3: Thank you, thank you.