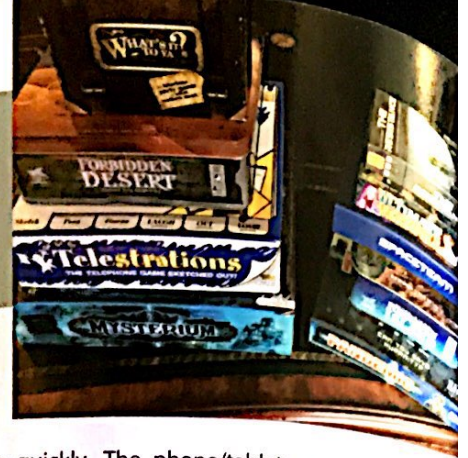


Get in the Game

Games that hone your stage management skills



When the question of how stage managers practice their soft skills was posed in an online forum, my immediate response was GAMES! I will confess that I am a life-long fan of games of all kinds but, beyond general enjoyment, I find them to be incredible learning opportunities for stage managers. Games can teach you how to analyze a problem and develop strategies to solve it, read people and their bluffs, cooperate with colleagues, negotiate with those in power, and even learn how to benefit when you know you are going to lose.

I have grouped a dozen games into four categories for when you are looking for a team-building exercise, a chance to hone your skills, or just enjoy some time with your company. I have included only board/card games (though I cheat with one game that started online) as they include more face-to-face time for those soft skills. I personally prefer longer, deeper games, but I have limited this list to games that run 5-60 minutes and can be taught in under 10 minutes.

Ice Breaker Games

Looking for a way to build comradery or introduce the new person to your team? My favorite is *What's It to Ya?*: a rotating dealer displays five random cards with an object or value on each and everyone has to guess how the dealer will arrange the items from most to least important. I love this game because people can reveal their values without feeling like they are stepping onto a soapbox or that others will judge them; we are just trying to score points by guessing the order.

The Game of Things and *What Were You Thinking?* are similar games that work well with larger groups and don't have to be played at a single table. In both, a prompt card with a question is read aloud and everyone writes down their answer. In *The Game of Things*, the lead player has to guess who wrote what. In *What Were You Thinking?*, you want your answers to match with those of other players. These games are very appealing because everyone is active all the time while sharing glimpses of personality.

Cooperative Games

I have deep respect for games where everyone has to work together to win. *Forbidden Island* and *Forbidden Desert* are races against time to escape a disaster. *Pandemic*, and its many variations, has you also race against time but the goal is to save humanity from an epidemic (far more fun than it sounds). The only drawback in early play is that a knowledgeable player can become the leader and these games are most satisfying when the whole group truly collaborates. Enter *SpaceTeam*, which started as a phone/tablet app but is now also offered as card game. Players are on an accident-prone spaceship where each can see a problem and need to communicate with the rest of the team to solve/repair it. Ever have a crisis erupt backstage and everyone rapidly offers

different solutions over headset? This game has the team learn to balance multiple problems and communicate quickly. The phone/tablet version is more expensive and zanier but you need everyone to download the app.

Find the Liar Games

Not that a stage manager would ever lie... but being able to see through bluffs is a good skill for SMs to have in their kits. There are many great deceit games, but I like the fast, easy games that can be taught to a large group quickly. The classic is *Werewolf*, which can be played with just a standard deck of cards (though the specialized game is easier for new players). There are a range of newer versions with extra levels of intrigue – my favorite of this generation is *The Resistance*. These games appear to be cooperative in that the group

must work together to solve a problem. The catch is that, at the start, some players have drawn cards that make them enemies trying to sabotage the work of the team. The team must try to work together as paranoia builds over whom to trust.

Nonverbal Games

The last major category of recommendations for stage managers are visual-based games. We need a sharp eye for detail and a way to communicate without text. The classic party game of *Charades*

is great, as well as the game *Telestrations*, which is a combination of *Pictionary* and the "telephone game" as a concept such as "double-play" has to go through a whole line of players drawing without anyone saying a word.

I am also a big fan of games that have you discern meaning from fanciful illustrations. *Dixit* has players select a card that best expresses an abstract concept such as "loyalty." *Mysterium*, a cooperative game, takes it one step further: one player is a ghost who sends visions to the other players so that together they can solve a mystery (in under an hour!). Come for the beautiful artwork, stay for communicating without saying a word.

Bonus: If literature is more your style, might I recommend *Bring Your Own Book* for a baker's dozen. As the name suggests, each player brings their own book (or grabs a script off the shelf) and races to find a line anywhere in the book that matches a randomly drawn prompt. Which line from *A Winter's Tale* works as a Facebook status update? Or which line from *The Fantasticks* would work on a business card? All those weeks of being on books finally come in handy!

There are hundreds of great board games and card games (let alone video games) to discover. Let me know which ones you think best serve stage managers? 