

REPORT OF FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

FINAL INVESTIGATIVE REPORT
PREPARED FOR
OTHERWORLD THEATRE COMPANY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction & Scope	1
Methodology and Approach	2
How this Report is Organized	2
Prioritization of Complaints	3
Approach to the Analysis	3
Observations	3
Limitations	4
Passage of Time	4
Inability to Contact Complainants	4
Witness Reluctance to be Interviewed	4
Investigative Details: Out On A Whim	6
[REDACTED]	6
[REDACTED]	7
[REDACTED]	7
[REDACTED]	8
[REDACTED]	11
[REDACTED]	16
[REDACTED]	17
[REDACTED]	19
[REDACTED]	19
Investigative Details: Otherworld Theatre Company	21
Summary of Allegations	21
Investigative Findings	21
Out on a Whim	21
Otherworld	22
Moonrise Games	25
Observations	25
Conclusion	29
Recommendations	30
Restore Trust Within the Theatre Community	30
Engage Subject Matter Experts	30
Provide Training & Executive Coaching	31
Restructure Operations	32
Develop Policies & Procedures	32
Build a Culture of Recognition	32
A Personal Note	33

INTRODUCTION & SCOPE

On September 27, 2020, four former castmates of Out on A Whim (“OOAW”), a comedy improv group, posted an open letter (“Open Letter”) to one of the castmates personal Facebook page. The signatories to this letter (the “Open Letter Complainants”) alleged that Katie Ruppert and Joshua Messick (“OOAW Management”) ignored concerns raised by a group of seven (7) castmates (“April Complainants”) during an April 17, 2019 meeting (“April Meeting”) regarding perceived inappropriate on and offstage behaviors of another castmate, [REDACTED]. They believe that no action was taken following the meeting and where actions were taken, those actions were retaliatory.

Otherworld Theatre Company (“Otherworld” or “OTC”), the performance home of Out on A Whim, is alleged to have provided support to OOAW [REDACTED].

Following this public posting, members of the Chicago Theatre Community responded with statements of support and began to share stories detailing similar experiences they had or were aware of concerning Otherworld Theatre Company’s treatment of its cast and collaborators.

In response, a member of the Otherworld team posted a statement acknowledging the awareness of the Open Letter, providing an explanation of events, and offering an email address wherein the community could provide feedback and ask questions.

As the volume of complaints and comments increased, Otherworld’s Board of Directors (the “Board”) recognized the need for and sought the support of an outside party by engaging Lisa Lindsey of Peale Piper to assess the validity of the allegations outlined in the Open Letter as well as allegations lodged against Otherworld and its subsidiary Moonrise Games (“Moonrise”), a Live Action Role Playing (“LARP”) game company (together “Otherworld”) and provide recommended actions Otherworld can take to correct any findings.

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

Prior to engaging Peale Piper, Otherworld appointed its then Director of Operations, Ali Keirn to lead the investigation into the allegations. Peale Piper requested and received access to Ms. Keirn's mailbox as well as all of the materials from Ms. Keirn's investigation files, including official statements, emails, and notes.

On September 30, 2020, the Board established an email address for those individuals preferring to submit their concerns directly to them. Upon being engaged, those submissions were provided to Peale Piper and a third email address to which allegations could be submitted was established.¹

Peale Piper conducted multiple video and audio interviews with complainants, respondents, and witnesses (the "Parties") to the alleged events. Further interviews were conducted with individuals outside of Otherworld and OOAW to gain context around Chicago theatre operations, performance standards, employment and pay practices within the theatre industry and to understand the nuances of LARP.

Finally, each individual interviewed was asked to provide any notes, emails, screenshots, or any other relevant material to support their version of events. Ms. Lindsey also requested and reviewed OOAW and Otherworld's staff logs, contracts, and other internal documents relevant to this investigation.

HOW THIS REPORT IS ORGANIZED

To simplify the investigative process, the allegations were organized into three distinct categories. The categories are:

- 1) Out on A Whim
- 2) Otherworld Theatre Company
 - a) Harassment
 - b) Safety Violations
 - c) Manager Misconduct and Abuse
- 3) Moonrise Games

¹ In their Facebook post dated October 23, 2020, Otherworld, at Peale Piper's direction, informed its community that comments to Otherworld posts and postings to personal Facebook pages *would not* be considered as official and would not be included in the review unless properly submitted via one of the two official email addresses.

This report is organized similarly and separated into sections. Each section contains (i) a summary of the allegations, (ii) findings and observations and (iii) conclusions.

PRIORITIZATION OF COMPLAINTS

Individuals submitted dozens of complaints via official channels, including claims related to Moonrise Games, which were included in a 56-page Google document. Given the volume of claims received, it was clear that unless the claims were prioritized, the investigation could easily continue *ad infinitum*. In an effort to perform a thorough review, all employment related claims, including harassment, safety, retaliation, or non-payment concerns² were prioritized for investigation.

Allegations of misconduct, abusive behavior, or mismanagement on the part of Katie Ruppert, Joshua Messick, Tiffany Keane Schaefer and/or Dylan Schaefer (together the “**Principal Respondents**”) were also reviewed. However, in the interest of time, no additional testimonial evidence was sought over and above the written evidence provided.

This investigation did not examine any non-employment related issues, nor were any determinations made about the way the claims were raised (i.e., posting to social media channels with the intent to “cancel” or harm OOAW, Otherworld or the Principal Respondents).

APPROACH TO THE ANALYSIS

The findings in this report rely primarily on the review of documentary and testimonial evidence, including the credibility of the parties and their statements during the interviews. The primary standard of proof used in this investigation is known as the “preponderance of the evidence.”³ This means that once all of the evidence provided has been considered, the standard is met if the fact finder is more than 50% convinced that the claims made, occurred as alleged. If the claim is found to have occurred as alleged, additional analysis was performed to understand the seriousness of the violation based on employment laws, company or industry standards, stated company policies and organizational behavior concepts.

OBSERVATIONS

In addition to the findings of fact, we have included any observations that we believe add context and helps to further clarify the findings. These observations are grounded in organizational behavior theories, which examine an individual’s behaviors, motivations,

² [REDACTED]

³https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/preponderance_of_the_evidence#:~:text=Preponderance%20of%20the%20evidence%20is,that%20the%20claim%20is%20true.

communication, group dynamics, power structures and more in organizations. Any definitions specific to organizational behavior theories are defined in the footnotes.

LIMITATIONS

The scope of the investigation was limited in the following ways:

PASSAGE OF TIME

The events identified in the Open Letter took place during Spring and early Fall of 2019. At the time of its posting, at least 1 year had passed since the resignation of the last member of April Complainants group, present at April Meeting.

The allegations lodged against Otherworld and Moonrise spanned the life of the Company, from its inception in 2012 to the present day.

Some of the individuals interviewed stated that they had difficulty remembering the details of the events as they occurred due to the passage of time. As such, we relied on the documentary evidence provided to either refresh recollections or to make findings of fact.

INABILITY TO CONTACT COMPLAINANTS

Throughout November and December of 2020, I contacted several individuals in an attempt to interview them in relation to this investigation and received no responses. In January of 2021, I learned that my emails were being routed the “Spam” boxes of individuals with Gmail addresses⁴, which was ostensibly everyone I had contacted. I obtained telephone numbers from Otherworld and called the parties multiple times over the course of two days and left messages. While the response rate improved, I remained unable to get in touch with several of the individuals with whom I wanted to speak in the first instance.

WITNESS RELUCTANCE TO BE INTERVIEWED

Several of the parties that I identified for interviews declined to provide further information via a formal witness interview. Witnesses cited concerns for their mental health, the potential for professional or personal retaliation, and concerns about being recorded⁵. In one case, I consented to an unrecorded interview, however the individual, who was represented by an attorney, declined to participate due to what was cited as a distrust for the investigation. In

⁴ Individuals with Gmail addresses who initiated emails to me were routed to my junk mail folder. I discovered that a third-party tool used for marketing purposes was the likely culprit. The issue persists today.

⁵ I utilize Otter Live Notes to transcribe notes during the interviews. The tool records audio and uses AI to transcribe notes.

another instance, a witness agreed to respond to questions by email, but did not respond to the emailed set of questions or repeated attempts at follow up.

As discussed above, we did not find that it is within our scope make any determinations about the manner in which these claims were raised. However, it is difficult to believe that what has become colloquially known as “cancel culture” did not have an impact on some of the parties’ willingness to participate in this investigation.

INVESTIGATIVE DETAILS: OUT ON A WHIM

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

- | [REDACTED]
- | [REDACTED]
- | [REDACTED]
- | [REDACTED]
- | [REDACTED]
- | [REDACTED]
- | [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

INVESTIGATIVE DETAILS: OTHERWORLD THEATRE COMPANY

SUMMARY OF ALLEGATIONS

Following the posting of the Open Letter which linked Otherworld to the events that transpired within OOAW, multiple individuals within the Otherworld community began to share their experiences with the theatre. These allegations were posted to comments on Facebook posts or on personal pages.

Otherworld and Peale Piper requested that all claims to be investigated be sent to one of the two email addresses created for expressly that purpose.

For the purposes of this investigation, the allegations against Otherworld were organized into two categories:

- (a) Human resources issues and violations including failure to investigate harassment or other claims filed, unsafe working conditions, misconduct, mismanagement, and negligence.
- (b) Business operations issues including scheduling, customer service issues (responding to inquiries, providing refunds) and contractual disputes.

This investigation focused primarily on the human resources issues identified in the complaints.

Business Operations and Other Issues

An overwhelming number of allegations regarding theatre administrative, contractual, customer service operations were submitted. The claims, many of which were nebulous and nonspecific, were outside the scope of this investigation and as such were not examined in detail.

INVESTIGATIVE FINDINGS

OUT ON A WHIM

Otherworld became the performance home of OOAW starting in approximately June 2018. Ms. Ruppert was appointed as Managing Director of Otherworld on or around April 29, 2019.

The Otherworld Principals said they became aware of the details of the issues at OOAW on or around May 3, 2019 following an ensemble meeting in the so-called Bradbury dressing room. Ms. Ruppert indicates that she sought advice from the Principals regarding how best to handle the situation.

At the time these events occurred, OOAW and OTC were discussing the potential of expanding their partnership. Merger discussions never closed, and those discussions are ongoing today.

Given the close relationship between the parties, it is reasonable to expect that Otherworld had a duty to intervene. Many of the events under investigation occurred in the theatre space. It remains unclear *exactly* when the Principals fully became of the issues at OOAW. If they were indeed not aware until May 3, 2019, this was still plenty of time to provide more direct support to Ms. Ruppert to resolve these issues before they escalated in early July. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

OTHERWORLD

Many of the individuals who may have been able to provide additional insights to these incidents either declined to be interviewed or were unreachable. Therefore, these findings relied primarily on the written statements submitted to the official email accounts for this investigation and any testimonial evidence provided by the Principals. As a result, the findings related to many of the allegations directed to Otherworld are largely inconclusive.

However, where we were able to make a finding based on the preponderance of the evidence, we have detailed them below.

Harassment

This investigation found one instance of harassment that was not investigated. The incident in question related to a cast party following closing night of the [REDACTED] show. The incident was reported to the show's director and to Ms. Keane Schaefer immediately following the events and a formal complaint was filed.

[REDACTED], the then Director of Operations, immediately interviewed two of the complainants but neglected to follow up²¹ on the complaint. As such the incident went unresolved until the start of this investigation.

During this investigation, we performed a review of the issues surrounding this incident and uncovered that there were ongoing problems with this production that largely went unaddressed during its run. The lack of action during the show's run ultimately led to an offsite altercation between members of the cast.

The other formal complaint included in the files was related to a LARP event and it has been resolved. However, the complainant was not formally notified of any outcomes.

²¹ [REDACTED] maintains that she was not authorized to perform investigations, but rather perform information gathering activities only.

██████████ notes in an email to the Board, dated October 7, 2020 that she was asked to review 2 LARP related complaints. Only one such complaint form was included in the files for my review.

██████████, former cast mate of OOAW alluded to harassment in her resignation letter dated June 30, 2019. ██████████

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Ultimately, ██████████ was subject to behavior that was unwelcome and in the case of behavior that was initially deemed welcome via agreement through the “consent circle” process, they later became unwelcome. Mr. Schaefer maintains that he was unaware that ██████████ was upset by his behavior and to avoid further incident, ██████████ decided to stop performing with Mr. Schaefer.

Unsafe/Unsanitary Working Conditions

Otherworld acknowledged the prevalence of various safety and sanitation issues as related the building within which its theatre is housed. These concerns included trouble with the sump pump, periodic standing water in the basement, a sewage smell and lighting issues.

Otherworld rents its theatre space and as such must rely on its landlords to make repairs and adjustments to the space. At times, the appropriate resolution for the issues they were experiencing also required the involvement of relevant authorities from the City of Chicago. Our review of the documentary evidence finds that Otherworld took appropriate steps to contact and work with its landlords to get the issues resolved.

Cleanliness of the Space

Multiple complainants assert that they had issues with the cleanliness of the theatre space. These grievances involved allegations of dirty dressing rooms, sticky or wet floors, overflowing sinks and trash, personal items and other tripping hazards strewn about the space. Some of the

complainants reported on the unavailability of cleaning supplies and an unwillingness of Otherworld's staff to assist with cleaning the space.

Ms. Keane Schaefer reports that she is primarily responsible for the cleanliness of the space and that the space was cleaned daily. She shared that everyone with access to the space had access to the cleaning materials and recalls only one instance of unavailability of these materials due to a late delivery.

The allegations were overwhelmingly similar across complaints and it is reasonable to believe that the space is not sufficiently kept in a manner that contributes to the overall health and wellbeing of the inhabitants. Since we have not personally observed the space, we are unable to determine whether the condition of the space fails to meet OSHA standards of safety.

COVID-19 Precautions

Several complainants shared that Otherworld failed to properly follow CDC guidelines and did not close until mandated to do so by the City and/or the State. This is generally an unfair allegation. The guidance around COVID 19 precautions were inconsistent during early March 2020. Many businesses did close until mandated to do so. That Otherworld remained open is not evidence of negligence or abuse.

Additionally, complainants state that Otherworld has required actors and others to perform in the theatre without proper masking and social distancing measures in place. This investigation was not able to make any findings regarding this allegation.

Other Allegations

Numerous other allegations were lodged against Otherworld relating to mismanagement, lack of appropriate staffing on productions including appointment of NEDs, failure to follow other guidelines of the CTS, disorganization, and a severe lack of appropriate communication on Ms. Keane Schaefer's part.

Here again, given the overwhelming number and similarities among the complaints, we find that these were prevalent issues within the organization.

Race-related issues such as tokenism, colorism and other behaviors were alleged. We were unable to find sufficient information regarding these issues to perform a substantive review of these allegations.

MOONRISE GAMES

The allegations against Moonrise Games are listed in the following 56-page Google document, curated by Rae Piper and Meredith White. Given the volume of information, the allegations have not been summarized here.

Findings

Many of the findings and observations as to Otherworld also apply to the Moonrise operations.

Specific to the allegations outlined in the Google document, the inclusion of the following statement (which has since been removed from the document) raises suspicion as to the motivations for creating the document in the first place.

“we ask that the rights and IP to Chronicles of the Realm are handed over to Meredith White and Rae Piper, the organizers of this document.”

The motivations as to Ms. White and Piper have been questioned by several of the witnesses interviewed, some of whom had other legitimate complaints about Ms. Keane Schaefer and Otherworld.

Many of the allegations cited, point to issues with how the games were organized, managed, and run.

The allegations of abuse due to inappropriate accommodations have been cited by others in the LARP community as not unusual. This appears to be the result of an expectations mismatch relative to the cost of the event. Further, the lack of food charge appears to be overblown and something that is not always in Ms. Keane Schaefer’s control and as such, is not evidence of negligence or abuse.

OBSERVATIONS

Business Operations/Customer Service

The claims related to Otherworld’s business operations were not fully examined during this investigation. However, due to the overwhelming number of such allegations and the similarity among the claims, there is evidence of a negligent pattern and practice. This suggests that some of the work that is necessary to keep the theatre operating optimally, is not being properly completed. Ongoing issues of this type often result in the loss of customers, partners and collaborators, reputational damage for those associated with the theatre and a loss of revenue.

Generally, the accusations are the result of mismanagement typically seen in small and growing businesses. The allegations were presented as severe abuse, but that really is not the case.

Many times, workers are simply not aware of what it really takes to own and operate a business, thinking that it is a lot simpler than it is or that the owners are better capitalized than they actually are. This has been a point of contention for almost every small business owner I know, and their employees.

Overreliance on the CTS

Otherworld had an over reliance on the CTS. [REDACTED]

The standard for initiating an investigation is not a formally filed complaint, but whether Otherworld knew or should have known about the issue. It was reported that [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Otherworld's then Director of Operations was present and should have initiated an investigation at that point. Certainly, if Ms. Keane Schaefer was present and witnessed the events as alleged, then she should have directed that an investigation be opened.

This failure to act allowed the situation to escalate, resulting in an offsite fight on closing night.

At several times during the conversations with the Principals, some version of "I wasn't aware, or a complaint wasn't filed" was offered as reasoning for some issue or another going unaddressed by Otherworld. At some point, the constant refrain started to sound like an excuse rather than a reason.

During our conversations, Ms. Keane Schaefer recognized and acknowledged this overreliance on the CTS and the need to operate differently to fill in the gaps left by the standards.

Communication

This investigation found severe communication issues on the part of Otherworld. The instances varied from failure to respond to inquiries about payments or refunds, failure to inform participants about the actions they may have taken following investigations and general lack of communication related to the status of the theatre as the severity of COVID became more widely known.

It is possible that the Principals are reluctant to openly share the challenges the theatre is experiencing, preferring to maintain a veneer of success. This is not unusual for business owners. Effective communication, however, is the cornerstone of trusting and functional relationships.

Lack of Adequate Staffing

Many of the failures cited by the complainants can be directly attributed to a lack of appropriate staffing for the ambitious productions and events that Otherworld undertakes. Ms. Keane Schaefer is a visionary and it takes a lot of work and capital to pull off events of the scale of those described by producers and participants alike. As such, Ms. Keane Schaefer takes on a lot of work to ensure that productions are executed. (Many in the community see this behavior as a desire to control and while there may be some element of truth to this, it is more likely a symptom of perfectionism.) This can lead to overwhelm and circumstances where the proverbial ball gets dropped.

Otherworld Theatre and Moonrise Games is primarily staffed by volunteers, who are paid minimal stipends for their performances. Sometimes the scope of work gets to be too much and must be delegated. Excessive pressure is placed on the volunteers to complete tasks to maintain show or event quality. It is unreasonable to expect volunteers who give their time in exchange for meager compensation, to provide greater services for the same meager compensation.

The Principals should also be aware that most individuals are not extrinsically motivated. For many in this community, the ability to create art that they are proud of is enough motivation. However, it is surprising how far a little recognition and sincere gratitude will go.

Consideration should be given to reducing the size, scale and/or frequency of the productions until there is sufficient capital and staffing to accommodate Ms. Keane Schaefer's ambitions.

Inappropriate Behavior by the Principals

There is no doubt that some in the community believe that Otherworld's Principals exhibit less than favorable personal qualities. The allegations allude to defensiveness, love bombing, coercive and blaming behaviors on the part of Ms. Keane Schaefer. Multiple complainants described their interactions with Mr. Schaefer as "hostile," "rude," "unprofessional," "offensive," and "immature." Others allege manipulation and performative actions.

Mr. Schaefer shared screenshots of a message exchange that he had one of the complainants in 2012. The Principals expressed embarrassment and regret for the tone taken in the messages and provided assurances of Mr. Schaefer personal growth since the event. Unfortunately, the

messages confirmed the descriptions of Mr. Schaefer's personality and affirmed the likelihood that this is the way he responds when he is harmed or perceives himself to be harmed.

Except where specifically noted, we did not comment on the claimants' perceptions of these behaviors. Certainly, it is not within our purview to comment, but it is unwise to dismiss or diminish individuals' experiences.

Power Dynamics

One of factors observed throughout this investigation is fear. Fear of retaliation or reprisal, fear for the loss of future opportunities and just plain old fear.

This report is not the place for a comprehensive lesson on power dynamics in groups or organizations, but they are at play and are a legitimate cause for concern and reflection.

Tiffany Keane Schaefer and Dylan Schaefer are the owners and operators of Otherworld Theatre Company and there is inherent power that come along with their roles. They have the power to reward and they have the power to punish. It is not unusual to believe that many of the people who may have concerns about their behavior chose instead to stay quiet simply because they are truly afraid of what might happen if they speak out or speak up.

Defensiveness and Avoidance of Responsibility

We observed a tendency for the Principal Respondents, to defend, deflect or justify their actions. In some instances, the behavior was explained away as an action that was taken by the character and in those cases appropriate because consent was received during the preshow "Consent Circle" exercise.

In several instances, I pressed Respondents in an attempt to assess whether there was an understanding of the point of view their respective complainants. In most cases, no remorse or empathy was forthcoming, and the justifications for their behaviors stood.

This is a somewhat distressing observation, considering what is at stake and the amount of time that has passed.

It is possible that Respondents believed that remaining in a defensive stance during our interviews would be beneficial to their case. Unfortunately, one of the charges lodged against them is defensiveness, unwillingness to listen or deflecting blame.

There were very few times where the Respondents would express some understanding in hindsight, and I have attempted to call that out when and where it was observed.

CONCLUSION

The Principals are the owners of the Otherworld Theatre Company and have been renting space for two years. This is no longer a group of friends putting on shows. Regardless of who they think themselves to be, they are theatre owners and with that comes the expectations for individuals with that status. Those expectations are leadership.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We would like to note up front, that we do not believe it is within our purview to directly call for the closure of Otherworld or the removal of its principals, Tiffany Keane Schaefer, or Dylan Schaefer. While the issues discussed herein are not minor, they are not severe enough to warrant the dissolution of Otherworld's operations.

Ultimately, the Board's goal should be to help Otherworld to recognize and learn from their mistakes. Second, calling for closure and removal in this case, might satisfy some members of the larger Otherworld theatre community, but does not provide the necessary accountability, which is in this case is learning and growth, something I expect the Principal Respondents will have difficulty with.

Ultimately, the practical impact of failing to implement these recommendations will be the eventual failure of Otherworld as a functioning and successful business.

RESTORE TRUST WITHIN THE THEATRE COMMUNITY

Release this Report.

Otherworld Theatre Company, its Board and Management staff must restore trust with its community and the theatre community at large. The first step in restoring trust is to release the findings in this report, preferably in its entirety and with only minimal redactions.

Accept Responsibility

Some of the findings herein show that actions taken by certain members of the Otherworld Management team resulted in direct and perceived harm to their cast members and the theatre community. It is necessary that OTC and its Principals acknowledge these facts, accept responsibility without qualification, and take steps to correct these missteps by implementing the recommendations found herein.

ENGAGE SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

Obtain Legal & PR support

Given the foregoing recommendations and recognizing that there are extenuating factors to consider, such as potential legal issues and reputational damage that may arise from these findings, Otherworld will need to make some strategic decisions. Since we are neither legal nor public relations experts, we recommend that OTC engage with the appropriate subject matter experts to seek advice and support with executing the foregoing recommendations.

Engage a Human Resources Professional

Develop a working relationship with a highly knowledgeable HR professional who can get to know the theatre, the players and its operations and support the implementation of the recommendations herein.

One suggestion is to work with a collective of other theatres to engage with a human resources professional who may be willing to provide the high-level expertise required for handling the types of issues likely to crop up in the theatrical workplace also known as HR-On-Demand. Don't forget the old adage – that you get what you pay for.

PROVIDE TRAINING & EXECUTIVE COACHING

The Principal Respondents should receive training and coaching²² to develop the requisite people management skills.

Minimum Training Requirements

The following minimum training is recommended:

- Employment Law Basics for Managers
- Supervisory/Management Basics
 - Communication
 - Power, Authority & Delegation
 - Decision Making
 - Conflict Management/Resolution
- Coaching to develop Emotional Intelligence.
- Coaching to develop Leadership Skills.

Provide Required Sexual Harassment Training

Sexual Harassment Training is now mandatory in Illinois. This training is applicable to all employers regardless of size and must be provided to employees and non-employees.

²² Research has shown that training on its own is ineffective to correct and maintain behavior change. Contact the Chicago Chapter of the International Coach Federation (ICF) where recently trained coaches are seeking hours for accreditation.

RESTRUCTURE OPERATIONS

Hire an Operations Manager

This should be a fulltime, paid role, if possible. Remove Tiffany from Administrative and Facilities Operations and allow her to focus on Artistic Director activities and executive management of the theatre.

Dylan Schaefer

Remove Dylan Schaefer from any day-to-day operations or front-facing responsibilities and performance roles for a minimum period of 6 months.



DEVELOP POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Stop Relying on the Chicago Theatre Standards

The CTS should be viewed as a starting point for developing policies and procedures for how to operate and manage issues in a theatrical workplace. The standards however are wholly inadequate and incomplete, they should not be relied on as gospel.

Develop Policy & Procedure Manuals

Otherworld should seek to develop a policies manual. We recognize the need for individual productions to have their own set of rules, and those should be developed as needed.

Rework the Conflict Resolution Path

Create new conflict resolution paths that do not include any of the Principals. Ensure that the process for issue resolution is objective, fair and is properly communicated.

BUILD A CULTURE OF RECOGNITION.

Say "thank you" and mean it.

A PERSONAL NOTE

Upon my initial review of the complaints lodged against Otherworld, my first instinct was to chalk them up to the kind of general “bad” stuff that happens in companies. I have worked in large international corporations, law firms, small businesses – you name it - and this is the sort of mismanagement, bad service and general disorganization that runs rampant in companies, no matter their size. Over the past almost 25 years of my career, I have been taught to suck it up and deal or move on the next opportunity if I didn’t want to deal.

As the investigation unfolded, I reflected on what I was learning, and I reflected on my past experiences. The kind of rampant bad behavior which we are taught to “just deal with” was never right and should never have been accepted. Thinking about theatre and performing arts, I found that overall, the culture is ripe for abuse because artists are taught that they must suffer for their art. How is that okay...like morally okay?

The Principals grew up in this culture that teaches suffering and no doubt have suffered too themselves. Even though the allegations have the tone and tenor of “piling on” and there are some hard and harsh lessons to be learned, they are fortunate to have learned these lessons now, before things go too far. Trust me, the longer these things go on, the more difficult it is to change. Thankfully, I believe the capacity for change exists, but it will be difficult.

In organizational change management, we are taught that change cannot truly begin unless it seen as urgent – someone has to essentially yell fire. That is what is happening here. The community has yelled “FIRE”! I hope the Principals are hearing “FIRE” being shouted.

I have some quibbles with how this investigation came to be and the motivations of some, but it is hard to deny what the ultimate goal is – that is to get things to change.

I sincerely hope that the Board takes its duty to manage this process seriously and works with Otherworld to implement the necessary changes within the organization. I recognize that much of the final analysis here is tough, but I hope that the Principals can be grateful for these lessons, difficult though it may be. Regardless of how it started and whether they believe it or not, their community cared enough to want to see them do better.

And I believe that if they act, the success Otherworld will see will be out of this world.
