

Game Changer

by John Cospier

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GENRE: Dramatic Monologue

SYNOPSIS: A teenage girl resists her best friend's urgings to accept Christ, but when that friend is seriously injured, it changes her mind about believing in God and hoping that He's not only real, but listening.

TIME: 5 minutes

CAST BREAKDOWN: 1F

THEME: Christian living, Finding purpose

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: Philemon 4-7

CHURCH YEAR SEASON: Any

SUGGESTED USE: Seeker Service, Youth Group

CHARACTERS:

ALISE—a female soccer player

PROPS: Kleenex, some chairs

COSTUMES: A dirty soccer uniform

SOUND: One wireless microphone

LIGHTING: General stage

SETTING: A hospital waiting area

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DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Playing for keeps

Actors of course vary greatly, but the challenges of performers often run in similar veins, so it's helpful to be able to identify hang-ups and habits that are likely to surface frequently. One common tendency among actors is to distance themselves emotionally from their character, especially when either playing 1) a character that they find repulsive in some way, i.e. villainous or immoral, or 2) material that is in some way potentially personal or emotional for them.

This aversion is completely natural and perfectly understandable, but letting an actor keep the material at arm's-length will inevitably result in some pretty lackluster drama on stage. An audience can sense when an actor is refusing to 'connect' with the character, and it pretty much guarantees that they won't take the effort to connect either. After all, if the actor doesn't care about this character, why should we?

So don't let your actor get away with it. Encourage them to make strong choices and really commit to them. Help them to be honest about why the material may be uncomfortable for them, and then work through it. The fact that Alise is an unbeliever and struggling with deep emotion can be tricky to approach as an actor, but we've all been in both of those positions. So dig. Find the reality and bring her to life. The result will be a real game changer.

Wait for it...

Another common tendency for actors (and directors alike) is to 'play the ending'. Since we of course know where a scene is headed and have spent infinitely more time with the material than the audience has, we tend to want to broadcast where the material is going to end up before our audience is technically ready for it. This is all brand new information for our audience, and the general rule is for the character to 'get it' either with the audience or slightly after them. Rarely should a character get a revelation before the audience, and playing the emotional content of the scene's closing lines before we 'get there' can

come across as self-indulgent, disjointed, or just plain weird.

Let the actress playing Alise take her time in reaching the tearful final lines. There's an emotional build to the piece that's important, and though she's of course upset from the beginning, be wary of going full tilt until she should. As an audience, we don't even know she's in a hospital until the last couple of lines, and that's a secret that should be kept as long as possible.

Crocodile tears

When it comes to crying on stage, there are many schools of thought. Some say you should never "fake" it—if you can't dig into some kind of emotional truth and produce real tears, then don't go through the motions, as it risks cheapening the whole experience for the audience. Then there are those that insist you never have to actually feel anything on stage—you just have to convince the audience you're feeling something.

As a director, I could argue either side. But as an actor, I know there are times that I just can't produce actual tears when the scene calls for it, and I'd rather have a gimmick up my sleeve to be able to cry than go dry-eyed when my character really should be crying in the context of the scene. In film, this is a lot easier—actors often use menthol drops and even have production assistants blowing onion fumes into their eyes through an off-camera tube—but on stage, we're largely on our own.

So here's a little trick. The tear ducts can produce real tears even when you're not sad. The secret is to make your body do all the things you're typically doing when you are really crying, and the tears will usually follow. Ironically, what this means is to mimic trying not to cry. There's a very distinct tightening of the throat and clamping down of the breath and facial muscles that most of us do naturally when tears are threatening and we're trying to keep it together. Fully commit to this action and you'll be crying soon. Try it!