

## **Current Resume Attached**

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Last October, I was asked to submit a resume to my alma mater, where I received my MA in Theatre as a means of starting my career as a professional dramaturg. The new program chair, a name I didn't recognize, emailed me with the request on a Wednesday afternoon. It was part of his effort to "find and organize a rather large amount of data" as the university undergoes "a reorganization and program review" in the wake of COVID.

Looking over my resume, I became cognizant of my stark transition from theatre to higher education administration about three years ago. I made the change pre-COVID for reasons our current climate now highlights. As I prepared to send the document over, I thought about the data the chair would mine from it and what questions he's hoping to answer, for himself and for the university. My dramaturgical training taught me to read between the lines, so I tried to fill in these blanks: Is he wondering how many alumni remain active in the theatre community, some sort of litmus test for post-grad career retention? Is he exploring candidates for adjunct work in the face of budget cuts? Does he really just want to "get to know the alums"?

Quantifiably, my resume provided him with all the data he needed. But then I thought: does it tell the full story?

I'd been looking for ways to voice my concerns about the industry's failure to adapt that extended beyond pithy social media commentary, mostly because I forced myself off all major platforms sometime in August. Now I had the chair's ear, at least momentarily, as I fulfilled a "simple" request. I felt it appropriate to use the platform presented to me. Here is the story I chose to tell him:

I've attached my current resume.

I know you're looking for hard data trends at this time. Qualitative data is likely not of as much interest, but I wanted to provide some context for my career post-education.

I pursued the MA because it was the gateway to every single dramaturgy opportunity in this city. I was fortunate to have so many professional experiences that stemmed from my graduate career, and I do credit our program's strong ties to the industry with facilitating many of them. I chose to leave the theatre industry in early 2018 after being active in dramaturgy and theatre administration since my first year as a graduate student, back in 2013. The change was precipitated by some personal conflicts that needed the attention I was devoting to my career. To say that's the only reason I made such a change, though, would be a disservice to my career narrative.

Sustaining a life on part-time work that is devoid of benefits and an understanding for the needs that exist outside our spaces is emotionally and physically draining. Despite working 50-60 hours a week, none of my opportunities provided health insurance, retirement planning, or paid time off. If I had not been married at the time to a partner who could add me to his plan, I would have had to figure out a way to protect myself on no more than \$30,000 a year.

Many of these opportunities I cobbled together to strengthen my resume and maintain a foothold in a number of organizations until a full-time position became available. What I learned, both through personal experience and observation, is that the few full-time positions available at the theatres in town might be salaried, but they also ask for a level of personal sacrifice that even now (perhaps especially now) I have a hard time wrapping my head around.

For a long time, I was led to believe I didn't have the stamina or the right perspective to make it in this industry. When I would voice concern, I was often met with, "Well, you wanted a life in the theatre, didn't you?" I was taught through both program and practice to say "yes," but that never applied when I was choosing to say "yes" to myself over an opportunity to advance my career; to do so was an admittance of weakness. Such a mindset is destructive and dismissive.

At some point I realized that while I wanted a life in the theatre, I also wanted a life. Since my transition nearly three years ago, I've entered into careers that do not blur the lines between personal and professional. I have made work for myself that utilizes all my dramaturgical talents without insulting me through pittance contract work or demoralizing comments.

There's a much-needed reckoning happening in this country and in the theatre industry at large, and I would hate for our city to be immune to it. Should we want to retain young professionals, it would do us a world of good to re-evaluate how we promote careers in an industry that often robs us of a life outside it.

I respect my mentors who taught me the value of advocating for myself and my work. To not say something would go against these foundational lessons.

I am happy to continue this conversation in whatever way you find appropriate.

Admittedly, I was pessimistic about a response. I sent the email not so much looking to engage in an industry debate, but to voice concerns post-career I was unable to articulate while working in the insular environment that is local professional theatre. So often as a young professional, I was expected to observe, learn, and do my job without asking too many questions of the establishment. Distance from my experiences and the revelatory lens of 2020 encouraged me to break my silence.

About thirty minutes after sending the email—one I took nearly a day to craft through edits and conversations with a fellow alum—I saw a response pop up on my phone. It was largely and somewhat surprisingly empathetic. It showed a kindness from someone who had no knowledge of me outside of the resume and story that had just arrived in his inbox.

It also, in its omissions, highlighted much of the problems facing our industry. I was particularly shocked at his observation that our industry is likely headed toward a future of semi-professionalism, and his seeming acceptance of that reality rather than complete dismay. There was awareness that the needle could be moved by young professionals growing tired of the status quo, followed by mention of the small peace-offering the department was making in response.

Like much of the discourse coming from industry leaders, it's not enough.

I remain hopeful, perhaps somewhat foolishly, that my Thursday morning email sparked questions a theatre administrator never anticipated asking. His response certainly raised questions for me that I feel are imperative for him, the university, and the industry to answer if theatre hopes to move forward:

When you mention the challenges of building a future audience, how are you actively engaging with those in your own community who might find solace in the theatre?

When you mention creating work for a paying audience, how are you learning about the stories your audience would like to hear?

When you mention the difficulties of modern-day storytelling, how are you ensuring the stories you do choose to tell are inclusive, accessible, and of interest to people outside your standard subscriber base?

When you mention the young artists who have concerns about our industry's standards, in what ways are you listening to and actively addressing their concerns?

When you mention retention of future generations of artists, how might you acknowledge that your own path through the profession is not a sustainable way forward?

These questions have been sitting in my drafts for a few months. Experience has taught me that few administrators and industry leaders like to be questioned by a dramaturg, so they ended up here in this essay rather than back in his inbox. They seem important to ask beyond one university official's attempt to recalibrate. Because if we aren't able to ask these questions—of ourselves and of our profession—who is?