

reports from other shows, quality of the gear, speed of service, flexibility, and attention to detail. In addition to that, the management office may also be checking the fine print and comparing each shop's insurance policies, billing policies, and methods of accepting payment. And last, but certainly not least, is the issue of personal relationships between the show's management and the shops: who knows who, shared histories, financial scrutiny, desperation level, and so forth.

All of this is a complex process potentially involving significant sums of money. Proper research and analysis choosing the right bid take time. Because of that, standard operating practice is to build a day or two into the schedule between the submission deadline and the time the bid is awarded. While some of these events seem to take place in less time than one would prefer, it's certainly preferable to situations when suddenly the show seems to be on the brink of disaster, and serious choices must be made quickly in order to keep the production on course.

## THE BUDGET GETS SLASHED

When the quotes from the lighting rental shops return to the management's office, sometimes everything moves according to plan. At least one of the quotes is found acceptable, the lighting rental shop is chosen, the contract is signed, and the lighting designer can begin producing the final light plot and support paperwork in preparation for the rehearsals, the shop prep, and the load-in.

Other times there may be a bit of a bump in the flow, as some amount of negotiation must take place. In most cases, this includes private negotiations held between the show's producer or management office and the lighting rental company's owner or business manager behind closed doors. In many cases the lighting designer isn't requested to attend or, in most cases, is politely asked to be absent while these meetings take place.

Finally, there are the times when the lighting designer is dragged into tension-filled meetings or conference calls, where he or she may then have to quickly respond to hard questions that have nothing to do with the art and all to do with the dollar. Sometimes those meetings take on the immediacy of triage surgery; in those rapid-fire situations, the lighting designer needs to remain calm and be very careful about what he or she says. Whatever statements or agreements are made in the heat of those meetings are likely to become part of newly created verbal agreements that significantly impact the lighting for the show.

For the purposes of this text, the remainder of this chapter will deal with the repercussions of that third type of meeting, and the dose of stinging reality that all lighting designers know too well. The quotes have returned, and what was the reassuring happy-go-lucky "Don't worry, we'll see, let's just get the numbers back" has now turned into the grim "The show may not survive, what are you going to do?"

Sometimes shows lose investors, agreements are broken, or financing falls through. While any number of stories can be told about productions that have ran into financial shoals, the end result is often the same: in order to survive, the show has to make some significant artistic cutbacks. The lighting designer (presumably along with the rest of the design and technical departments) must make practical compromises in order for the production to move ahead, albeit not with the originally conceived financial firepower.

In the case of *Hokey*, the producer has issued a series of edicts in order to save the show:

- The pyro won't pass local fire code. It was going to require more folks with a license. It's cut.
- The mid-stage painted scrim and blackout drop are cut. The sprung floor is cut.
- The vinyl floor will be rented. Thankfully, the white translucency has been saved.
- The custom-made boots and footwear have been cut. The costume budget has been slashed. The number of dressers is going to be cut.
- The second assistant stage manager has been cut. The first assistant stage manager will have to run the entire deck.
- The stage manager will no longer call the show from the back of the house next to the sound console. The seats that would have been removed in order for that to happen are now desperately needed. The stage manager's calling position will now move to the followspot booth.
- The lighting console operator will no longer be in the back of the house either. Those seats are also required. The lighting console will also have to move to the booth.
- The sound console is going to be downsized; smaller footprint, fewer house seats lost. But it will remain at the back of the house. But no longer on centerline; it's going to move into a back corner of the orchestra.
- The producer has "made a deal" with a friend who will now provide all of the masking soft goods.
- Each department must make massive cuts in their respective budgets. Lighting is no different—massive cuts must take place in both the budgeted amounts for the gear, and for the labor involved to produce and maintain the show.

This is yet another time that the lighting designer may not be involved in this portion of the process. Meetings with the management team may provide enough information so that the lighting designer many not have to become involved in this level of negotiation or deal with these kinds of changes. For the purposes of this text, however, that's not the case, and the lighting designer and production electrician have been given the task to do whatever it takes, without the intervention or support of the management office, to get what's needed for the show but still come in under the newly reduced number.

In addition to all of those announcements, Figure 6.1 shows the new production schedule being distributed. Thursday, April 10, which had been originally scheduled for the completion of focus and cueing time, has now turned into a dry tech starting at 10:00. Friday, April 11, which had been an afternoon tech, has now turned into a full "10 out of 12"; that means the performers can rehearse 10 hours in a 12-hour period. Basically, the overall amount of preparation time available before performers are added to

the stage has been reduced by 12 hours. An already tight production schedule just got tighter. Obviously, this news dramatically impacts the load-in and labor for the installation of the light plot. While the lighting designer might initially be considering tactics to use in order to be ready for the technical rehearsals, there's no doubt that it's going to impact every work call before that as well.

### Initial Analysis

Receiving either one of these announcements is a shock. Every carefully projected scenario or plan has been thrown into the air like a handful of Pick-up Sticks. Being presented with both announcements back-to-back on the heels of one another can double the shock. While it's easy to feel daunted or overwhelmed, having both of these incidents simultaneously take place is a hidden blessing. Dealing with either a budget cut or the compression of the production schedule is an extreme challenge. But reacting to one of them, making a plan, and *then*

SUNDAY		MONDAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY		
4 APRIL		5 LOAD-IN HYBRID THEATRE		6		7		8		9		10		
		8:00A	1:00P	LOAD-IN ELEC & RIG	8:00A	1:00P	DECK LOAD FLOOR LOAD	8:00A	1:00P	FOCUS W/WORKS	8:00A	10:00A	CUE LIGHTS WALKERS PROPS LOAD DRY TECH	
											8:00A	9:00A	WALK THRU Q2Q-SPACE LUNCH	
											10:00A	1:00P	DRY TECH	
		1:00P	2:00P	LUNCH	1:00P	2:00P	LUNCH LAY FLOOR	1:00P	2:00P	LUNCH TUNE PIANO	1:00P	2:00P	LUNCH	
		2:00P	7:00P	ELEC FOH RIG AS NEED SCENERY IN	2:00P	7:00P	TRIM FOCUS FOH	2:00P	7:00P	FOCUS DONE CUE LIGHTS WALKERS	2:00P	7:00P	DRY TECH	
											5:00P	6:00P	DINNER	
											6:30P	10:00P	TECH A/A2 STOP & GO	
											10:00P	11:00P	NOTES	
											11:00P		END OF DAY	
											11:00P		END OF DAY	
11		12		13 PREVIEW HYBRID THEATRE		14		15		16		17		
8:00A	12:00N	TECH TBA	8:00A	12:00N	TECH TBA	8:00A	12:00N	TECH TBA	8:00A	12:00N	TECH TBA	8:00A	12:00N	TECH TBA
12:00N	1:00P	LUNCH	12:00N	1:00P	SET PIT SOUND	12:00N	1:00P	LUNCH	12:00N	1:00P	LUNCH	12:00N	1:00P	LUNCH
1:00P		HALF HOUR	12:00N	1:00P	LUNCH	1:00P		HALF HOUR	12:30P		SHOW CALL	1:00P	4:30P	NOTES/TECH
1:30P	5:00P	PIANO TECH	1:00P	5:00P	ORCH SITZ	1:30P	4:00P	ORCH DRESS (INVITED) PHOTOG	1:30P	2:00P	HOUSE OPEN PREVIEW 2			
						4:00P	4:30P	NOTES						
5:00P	6:00P	DINNER	5:00P	6:00P	DINNER	4:30P	5:00P	NOTES/CLR			4:30P	5:00P	NOTES/CLR	
6:00P	6:30P	HALF HOUR	6:00P	6:30P	HALF HOUR	5:00P	6:30P	DINNER			5:00P	6:30P	DINNER	
6:30P	10:30P	DRESS TECH	6:30P	10:30P	PIANO DRESS	6:30P		SHOW CALL	6:30P		SHOW CALL	6:30P		SHOW CALL
10:30P	11:00P	NOTES	10:30P	11:00P	NOTES	7:30P		HOUSE OPEN	6:30P		HOUSE OPEN	6:30P		HOUSE OPEN
11:00P		END OF DAY	11:00P		END OF DAY	8:00P		PREVIEW 1	8:00P		PREVIEW 4	8:00P		PREVIEW 7
18		19		20 PRESS OPENING HYBRID THEATRE		21		22		23		24		
						8:00A	11:00A	TBA						
						11:00A	12:00N	LUNCH						
12:30P		SHOW CALL			DAY OFF	12:00N	3:30P	NOTES/TECH	12:30P		SHOW CALL			
1:30P		HOUSE OPEN							1:30P		HOUSE OPEN			
2:00P		PREVIEW 8							2:00P		PERF 2			
						3:30P	4:00P	NOTES/CLR						
						4:00P	5:00P	DINNER						
						5:00P		SHOW CALL	6:30P		SHOW CALL	6:30P		SHOW CALL
						6:00P		HOUSE OPEN	7:30P		HOUSE OPEN	7:30P		HOUSE OPEN
						6:30P		PERF 1	8:00P		PERF 3	8:00P		PERF 7

Figure 6.1 The Hokey Production Schedule, Version 3

getting hit with the second situation, can be even more deflating. Making decisions and proceeding half-way through one set of changes, only to have the *second* one blow up in your face, can set you right back to square one. All of the initial changes now have to be reviewed and potentially altered to address the second new parameter.

While either situation is a challenge (and there is no question of that), having the opportunity to address both of them at one time has to be viewed as a tactical advantage. Figuring out the problems and solving the puzzles once will require only one set of decisions that can then be simultaneously applied to provide a single solution to both problems.

## A General Plan

Approaching these challenges can be conducted in any number of ways. Here's one list of steps assembled as a general plan. As a caveat, I don't presume that this list is composed in the best sequence to make it useful for all of these kinds of situations. For that matter, these may not even be the right steps. Experience has shown, though, that some sense of these steps will advance the process toward a successful solution.

- Determine the amount of time available, and when final decisions need to be made.
- Make sure that everyone involved who needs to be notified of the situation is.
- Define the parameters: Determine the final target budget number for the bid, the final hours for the production schedule, the final size of the crew to install and run the show.
- Acquire information: get copies of every potential quote.
- Analyze and compare each potential bid for accuracy against the original shop order. If time is limited, use broad strokes.
- Determine if more than one shop will be involved. The selected shops are then labeled "relevant."
- Speak with each relevant shop to clarify anomalies in the bids, clarify big-ticket items, and identify all potential options and substitutions.
- Analyze the show and define what can be exchanged, altered, or cut.
- Ensure that the director and management are aware of the current situation.
- Negotiate an agreement about an altered lighting package with the relevant shops.
- Notify everyone involved, relevant or not, when agreements have been made.

- Instigate the changes, have them double-checked, and then distribute the updated information as rapidly as possible.

Although many of these steps may overlap or take place in a different order than what's shown here, they can all be distilled down to three basic guidelines:

- Make sure that everyone is aware of what is going on, especially the producer and the director.
- Whenever possible, make rational decisions based on facts, instead of knee-jerk reactions.
- Keep a detailed diary of everything that takes place. Keep all documents in archive for reference. When possible, have information double-checked before publication.

## Determine a Timeline

Define a timeline to determine how quickly any actions and decisions need to take place. In almost any case, it's not possible to do much of anything in the next 10 minutes; merely getting a single account rep on the phone at any of the shops can conceivably take longer than that. In order to adequately analyze the situation, speak to all of the relevant lighting shops about changes in the shop order, make decisions, resubmit the shop order, and get new quotes—most lighting designers would agree that process would take some number of hours. Depending on variables, such as the complexity of the show or the monies involved, it may take a day or more to create the second version of the shop order. On the other hand, if an answer is needed immediately, presuming the lighting designer has the show fresh in his or her head, making quick decisions based on assumptions without a lot of analysis can always be made. In that situation, getting the information from the shops can take the most time. Sadly, however, if any of those quick assumptions turns out to be errant or off base, it's the lighting designer who will be stuck with the consequences.

Depending on the day of the week, or the time of day the announcements were made, getting new numbers may not be possible until at least the next day. While that may delay other decisions from being made, it may take an overnight session just to sort out what the alternatives, substitutions, or cuts need to be.

## Notify All Concerned

If the lighting budget is getting cut, it only makes sense that the rest of the creative team should be quickly consulted before any decisive action is taken.

Presuming there is any available time, a production meeting of any sort can be extremely important and helpful for everyone to hear the same information, discuss possible solutions and alternatives, and as a team chart the new plan for the show.

The producer and management can provide a financial overview of the current status, answer questions, and provide a direction. Presumably the director and choreographer will be present, in order to react and adapt to the changes. They can also then hear the same limitations be placed on the rest of the design team. The rest of the design team or their associates can attend in person or by phone as well. No doubt each has a list of potential actions and decisions that may be made, along with questions for the lighting designer about shared elements and moments of the show.

In addition to the creative team, the technical staff should be alerted and join the production meeting as well. It goes without saying that the stage manager, production manager, and technical director's attendance is important. For the lighting designer, having the production electrician attend the meeting is just as important.

After a point, though, the number of folks invited to the meeting may be limited, if nothing else, by the size of the room. Completely outside of the realm of the technical aspects of the production, information and directives may need to include company management, the box office, advertising, casting, and group sales. While a financial hit like this is significant for everyone concerned with the technical aspects of the show, they are often by no means the most expensive elements of producing a for-profit theatrical venture.

There may be so many pending decisions that the first meeting may be more of a review of the current status, rather than a time for making any final declarations. A second meeting may be required after each department has more clarity regarding its new course in the adapted show.

Then there are the times of crisis when it seems no one can collectively get together for a cohesive conversation. Everyone is scattered to the wind, swallowed up by rehearsals or production periods for other shows. Although folks might not be immediately available to react to these types of drastic developments, most folks will agree that situations like these quickly must take precedence, even briefly, in order for the process to proceed, and more important, for the show to be saved. Regardless of whether the "circling of the wagons" takes the form of a full midnight production meeting after rehearsals, or limited by time zones to a series of emailed or texted responses, folks will stay in touch. When the meetings become scattered fragmentary instances,

however, most designers agree that keeping detailed notes and some form of diary provides the lighting designer with better odds to remember the flood of decisions, actions, and questions, while the production and the light plot gets any kind of significant "makeover."

While some amount of subsequent communication breakdowns and confusion will take place, this is one time that Internet communication really comes into play as a communication tool. Sending email or text blasts of decisions, choices, or even assumptions to the relevant team can quickly put everyone on the same page and establish a basis for dialogue. Web sites with downloadable FTP links can be used to quickly distribute new drawing versions to all parties. Web services such as [gotomeeting.com](http://gotomeeting.com) allow several participants to not only discuss documents in a conference call, they can also all view the same document and add their own drawn or typed notes on screen at the same time.

In the case of *Hokey*, the scenery, costumes, and sound are all about to undergo significant changes. While it may be impossible to fully understand how each design element is going to integrate with one other, the basic framework often starts by talking (or writing) through the entire piece. While that may not be completely possible until clear decisions about the light plot are made, any decisions can only help provide clarity and the ability to make choices down the road.

In the meantime, emails, text messages, or brief phone calls should be sent to all of the account reps. Inform them that there has been a delay, and that the stated time scheduled in the shop order cover letter may be delayed. Let them know that you will be contacting them soon. This alerts everyone that any delay should not be construed as a dismissal. When your call comes in, it's not social, and you should not be put "on hold."

### Define the Parameters

In this situation, the show has been presented to the shops as an open-ended run, so all of the bids have come back front-loaded. The price for the first 3 or 4 weeks of rental is much higher, and then after that drops down to a lower weekly price. The producer has given the lighting designer a target number that is less than a third of any of the bids for these first weeks. The producer has also cut the subsequent weekly rental fees in half.

The labor to mount the show is also now too high. While the projected weekly amount to run the show after it has opened only needs to be reduced to fit within the original budget, the labor cost to

prep, install, and mount the lighting package cannot remain at the levels on the labor projection sheet. The producer has told the lighting designer and production electrician to reduce those labor projections by at least 35%.

Since the amount of time scheduled to prepare the stage prior to the beginning of the technical rehearsals has been truncated, however, the producer has approved extending the length of the work calls to 10 hours. This means that over the course of the first 3 days of load-in, there will be an additional 6 hours of stage time. But the amount of time to load light cues into the console between the end of focus and the beginning of the tech period with performers is still very short. It's apparent that a plan is needed in order to have some kind of light cues ready for the beginning of the technical rehearsals.

### Acquire Information

Get complete copies of the quotes from the management office. If there's any question, make sure they're the same version of the documents that were originally received at the management office, to verify that everyone is operating from the same starting point. Sometimes it's faster, and makes more sense, to just go to the management office and photocopy all of the incoming documents.

### Analyze and Compare the Bids

Check each quote for the dates of delivery, the contact information, and the billing information. Compare the quotes to one another for the number and size of the transport vehicles involved. Compare the quotes for any additional drop-off or pick-up costs.

Check each quote for the major components listed in the shop order. Large numbers to check include the overall number of conventional instruments, the number and manufacturer of moving lights, truss, consoles, and the number and make of the specialty instruments. Compare the overall number of dimmers, and the configuration of the dimmer racks. Check the overall number and lengths of the multicable, and the feeder cable. After the large numbers, then the smaller lengths of cable, iron, and so on. If time is an issue, assign some amount of time to each quote.

Make certain that what is being quoted closely matches what was originally submitted on the shop order. While some amount of substitution should be anticipated, sometimes miscommunication can occur. For example, dimming can be a point of interpretation between shop orders and quotes. Instead of the four 12 × 2.4-kw dimmer packs, the quote

may instead list a third high-density 96 × 2.4-kw dimmer rack. Maybe the shop didn't have any 12 packs. Maybe the 12 packs weren't listed clearly enough in the proper manner, on the proper page, in the way that the person entering the information into the rental system preferred. If something sticks out, it may only be the tip of the miscommunicated iceberg.

It may turn out that the shop didn't have the LED striplights and so was going to sub-rent them from another vendor. Doing so added another percentage to the rental for the instruments.

### Decide on the Number of Shops

A quick meeting or conversation should take place at least between the producer, management, and the lighting designer to define the first major decision: Is there enough time to send out a second reduced shop order and request a second set of quotes? More to the point, does it politically make sense to take this step? Will any (or all) of the lighting rental shops still want to be involved?

Once a shop has submitted a bid, they've done their job. The account rep has spent some amount of time assembling the numbers, negotiating the substitutions, and preparing the documents for the quote. At this point, all of this work has been done without any compensation whatsoever. When a shop doesn't get the bid, their account reps are being paid without generating any income. So after submitting the bid, all the shop wants to hear is either yes, no, or maybe. Upon hearing instead that the production needs to "cut down the design" sounds suspiciously like the show is clue-free, and wasn't properly funded in the first place. The "cuts" may merely be a decision by management that, after seeing everyone's bids, they didn't capitalize enough money for the technical aspects of the production. They're now announcing the cuts to get all of the shops to come down in price to match what was originally budgeted. After spending no small amount of time compiling the first submitted quote, some shops may see the cuts as a sign of poor management that may lead to unpaid bills. A second series of bids could be viewed as chasing a dead end.

If the decision is made at this point to ask all of the shops for a second series of bids, then each shop should be individually contacted in order to explain the situation, reassure them of the show's financing, and ask if they still wish to participate in the process. Those reassuring calls may need to come from someone with a little more financial "oomph" in the show management's office, rather than merely the lighting designer or the production electrician.