

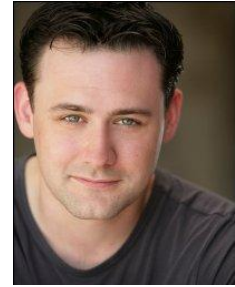
The Performance Project

Learnings for Leadership and Management from the Performing Arts



Profiles in Performance – Michael Ingersoll

Part I



For managers to be successful, they must be students of “performance,” in areas beyond just the people they manage or interact with. To create superior performance for individuals and teams, managers must understand the depth of superior performance in a variety of areas. There are many options for studying the superior performance of others, in sports, entertainment, and the arts. Successful performance is a combination of talent and a variety of elements best summarized as “energy-based” traits. Some would say these are vision, or commitment, or passion – others would use different terms that still fit the concept. There are a million stories about performance, this is one of them.

Because Michael Ingersoll inspired one of the factors for this project –and because he so graciously provided extensive information, there are going to be two profiles. This is the first.

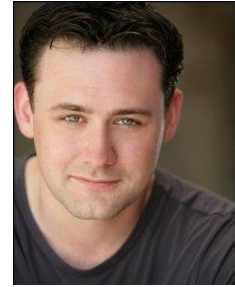
For the first half of “Jersey Boys,” Michael Ingersoll’s character, the talented Nick Massi, is a very observant, fairly quiet yet critically important contributor to the early success of the Four Seasons. Michael performed this role more than 1250 times, starring in this role in the first touring company of Jersey Boys in San Francisco, and throughout the show’s two and a half year run in Chicago. While each performer brings his own unique style to a role, Michael has perfected his performance of the slightly obsessive Massi character.

Michael Ingersoll was “bitten by the performance bug” late, as a high school student in Ohio. But there’s a heartfelt connection to his grandfather, a jazz musician, who passed away when Michael was fourteen. Michael’s grandfather injected into Michael a love for jazz – which he notes was likely the first thing he wanted to pursue as a career. As early as age four, Michael sat at the piano with his grandfather, learning to play by ear. This “moment” is so powerful that Michael closes his own concerts with a story and the song, “That’s All” which his grandfather performed when he was on the road. Michael was cast in “Jersey Boys” because a review of his performance in “Tick, Tick...Boom” noted he would be perfect for the show. Originally trying out for the Frankie Valli role, he was quickly cast as Nick Massi.

Michael has inspired one of the factors for this project and he clearly demonstrates other key elements of our Performance Project. He has the “**Passion**” that all of our selected performers have. His spark for performing is clearly evident in his performances – and it’s further illustrated by the fact that he performed for three and a half years in “Jersey Boys” missing only 20 performances in a show with eight performances a week.

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Profiles in Performance – Michael Ingersoll Part I

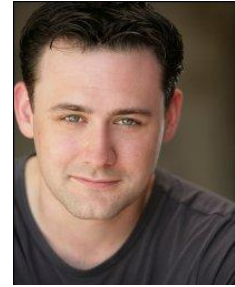
Message for Managers: The passion of our peak performing artists is consistently fascinating to me. Every performer has a deeply personal memory of the “spark” that led them to their profession. At the same time this is often absent in the day-to-day actions of leaders and managers. There is a challenge here for leaders and managers – they must understand the “spark” that led them to being a leader, to being a manager. I do not believe any leader or manager can be successful without the passion, the love for the work they do. Ask yourself, why are you a manager, why are you in a leadership position?

Michael Ingersoll became the direct inspiration for one of our Performance Project factors – “**Stretching – Challenging**.” The inspiration for this factor is described in detail as a separate “Lesson” (available at www.performance-project.com). The factor itself is easy to explain. What we’ve noticed in most of our profiles is that our peak performers are frequently challenging their own performance – stretching to reach – within their own craft.

Michael Ingersoll performs in “Jersey Boys” eight times a week. Yet his passion for performance, his passion for the arts, led him to develop a cabaret performance that he’s booked on Monday nights (and occasional Sunday nights). He’s performed the show for fund raising events and local theater organizations. To say Michael has developed this show is insufficient – he has created, organized, produced, directed, and starred in twenty plus performances. He’s enlisted the support of an orchestra, his equally talented wife Angela, and several of his fellow cast members from “Jersey Boys.”

The question is why – why does Michael invest his time and effort, to demonstrate his talent even beyond what he does in “Jersey Boys.” There are actually several reasons, but clearly one of them is that it pushes him to new professional levels. The show he’s produced has changed – it’s evolved into an increasingly polished, precise performance. I believe that it’s an inherent quality of peak performers, challenging their talents and passions to new levels.

Message for Managers: Peak performance is built on talent. It’s performed with passion. It’s sustained through constantly stretching and challenging beyond the day to day structure of what is already outstanding successful performance. For leaders and manager, are you looking at a future, even within your current position, where you make decisions about stretching opportunities that provide you with new challenges?



Profiles in Performance – Michael Ingersoll

Part I

Talent is only the first part of the equation. Michael (and his wife Angela) stated “It’s not talent, it’s persistence,” Michael clarified this even further. He stated that “talent is the most over-estimated factor of successful performers; you have to be “right.” He further stated: “You have to be the one who can solve the director’s problem. You have to be the person they’re looking for in a particular role.”

Interestingly, Michael has inserted his insights into one of the most important debates in the world of leadership and management. Should a manager hire based on talent alone? Some argue this although it won’t be debated here. Talent is critical but as hiring guru Lou Adler states, we all know people with tremendous amounts of talent who achieve little. And we know people with average talent who achieve greatness. So we need to be careful. A complete lack of singing ability will get you nowhere – but there will always be more “talented” singers, or actors, or... The difference then becomes the “fit,” and the energy-based traits, as Michael listed them: “the attitude, being on time, respect, and the willingness to listen.”

Michael Ingersoll is tremendously talented. He can sing – he can play – he can tell stories **with passion**. And the effort, the passion he puts into his performances is clear to anyone who sees him. He “fit” the role of Nick Massi perfectly – he “fits” the role of a cabaret performer equally well – and ultimately this results in sold out performances and thousands raised for the local arts.

Message for Managers: Leaders and managers need to get more precise in their understanding of the relationship between talent and the energy-based traits. Picking one over the other is rarely going to work. What’s interesting is that in studying live performances, this is much clearer than in many organizations. Let’s learn from them.

It’s Talent! It’s Passion and Commitment! Become students of performance!

Profiles in Performance is a series of insightful perspectives into the talents and dedication of individuals who are defined by a variety of authors as peak performers, one of the “2 out of 10” who play to their strengths most of the time. This is Part I of a two-part series on Michael Ingersoll. For additional information, including a more detailed explanation of the concept and intent of this series plus an archive of profiles, visit www.performance.project.com and our special Performance Project blog, <http://performance-project.blogspot.com>