

# The Performance Project

Learnings for Leadership and Management from the Performing Arts



## Profiles in Performance - Steven Goldsmith



*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.*

Sitting in the audience, waiting for a performance (in Chicago) of the super hit musical, Jersey Boys, to begin, you'd notice (for most performances) that Steven M. Goldsmith is playing a key role in the show, the character of Joe Pesci -- who in reality played a key part in this energetic story of Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons. On some days, if you're fortunate, you'd discover that Steven performed the starring role of Frankie Valli, with the look, voice, and energy that brought audiences to their feet. *(Steven performed in the Joe Pesci role – and occasionally as Frankie Valli – for over 1250 performances in the first national touring company of Jersey Boys in San Francisco and then as part of the two and a half year run of the show in Chicago).*

On December 12, 2009 fortune ruled and I was in attendance for a last minute situation where Steven had to step up and perform the starring Frankie Valli role for the matinee performance – and then for the evening performance, he took the stage again for his multiple roles including his outstanding portrayal of Joe Pesci.

So for this story about "performance" there are two outstanding messages for managers. The first is based on the fact that by the time Steven walks on stage for the first "Joe Pesci" scene, he's already been on stage different times, playing -- with precision -- a variety of different supporting roles. By the end of the show, he'll have performed in 12 different roles.

**Message for Managers: Performers often play different roles. In a concert performance, they may move from singing an upbeat number to a ballad to telling stories. But in Steven's case, he's playing multiple parts during the same two hour performance, with multiple costume changes – and different character voices. Managers often have only a cursory awareness of the different roles they play every day. I wonder how much more effective managers could be if they'd recognize (by mentally changing costumes and behavior appropriately) the different roles they play.**



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With less than 24 hours notice in this case, because the performer scheduled became ill, Steven had to prepare to take the lead role that features complex dialogue, precise stage movements, singing the legendary Four Seasons harmonies, and performing solo as the predominant character on stage for the second half of the show. This was a performance that brought the audience to its feet and a delighted expression on Steven's face after a key song in his performance.

I asked Steven after the performance how he maintained the ability to step into a role that he might not have performed for weeks (or even months). His response, an outstanding message for leaders and managers everywhere, was "understudy rehearsal." On a regular basis, typically monthly, the performers who step into key roles participate in the "understudy rehearsal," a daylong session where all the performers involved as understudies or "swings" (who are always available to step into roles) rehearse for several hours.

**Message for Managers: Being prepared to play different roles on a single day is something most manager also do regularly. They switch easily between interactions with bosses, colleagues, subordinates, even customers. But what about the preparation, what about the "rehearsals," for a starring role that may be demanded without much more than 24 hours notice? "Succession" or "Replacement" planning often occurs in a limited fashion that exists solely on paper or on a computer. Hopefully, there's some leadership and management training scheduled. But is there "understudy rehearsal," a real simulation of the potential reality? If there isn't, there should be.**

All of the factors that we've identified for The Performance Project are important – but in studying the performance of individuals in live plays or concerts, and in sports, we've seen multiple occasions where some of the factors have stood out. One of these and one which Steven Goldsmith and "Jersey Boys" exemplify is "performance with precision." The Jersey Boys production has been praised and awarded for the precise nature of the staging, particularly scene changes and how the cast moves during scenes. Steven is involved in several scenes where he performs a complex set of physical maneuvers, following a scripted, rehearsed series of moves, but sets that clearly come across as a dance.

One of these scenes, in his main role as Joe Pesci, is one which I've watched very carefully multiple times. While Steven would probably say there are times where it is slightly different, I would state strongly that he's performed that key piece with a "six sigma" accuracy that is 99.9+ percent consistent. Observing others performing the same scene, no one has approached the level of precision which Steven delivers in his performances.



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**Message for Managers: “Performance with Precision” is a concept that is present in many organizations from a production or operational standpoint – very strict procedures for manufacturing a product or processing a customer transaction. But often, on management issues like communications, or interviewing, the precision disappears – and tremendous variability of performance follows. Some of the best management experts have suggested developing and using very structured templates for processes like e-mails, providing feedback, or conducting selection interviews. I strongly support these initiatives – we should learn from performers like Steven Goldsmith how this leads to consistent success.**

Steven Goldsmith is talented – that’s easy to discern. But talent is only the first part of the equation. For Steven M. Goldsmith, there’s the passion from spending his middle and high school years devoted to school shows and Florida theatre competitions. Steven's love of acting grew. In the third grade, he discovered his passion for acting, but more importantly he learned that he could act -- and act well. Then, when he saw the national touring company of “Les Miserables” on an 8th grade field trip, he discovered singing and acting could be combined. Passion cannot be measured easily – although it can be uncovered if, in an interview, you focus on key accomplishments. But it can certainly be observed – which is perhaps, in part, why the performing arts so clearly accomplish successful selection based not just on talent, but on the passion that goes hand-in-hand.

There was an amazing group of Jersey Boys fans in Chicago – several fans who saw the show multiple times and saw as many as five different actors perform in the Frankie Valli starring role. Among that group, there was unanimous agreement that there is one particular song that no one performed better than Steven. The song has a unique comedic element to it – and Steven’s passion for his performance shines.

**Message for Managers: It’s Talent! It’s Practice! 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.. 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](http://www.performance.project.com) and our special Performance Project blog, <http://performance-project.blogspot.com>.*