
Crossing Boundaries: The National Outreach Project

Building Community and New Careers for Dancers by Paulette Fried, CTFD Senior Career Counselor

In 2000, Career Transition For Dancers (CTFD) began a new program to connect with dancers around the country. Prompted by the foresight and generosity of the Bossak-Heilbron Charitable Foundation, CTFD took our programs and services **“On the Road”**, initiating the **National Outreach Project** (NOP).

We had no idea how many **boundaries** would be crossed when we ventured out with the NOP initiative. Sure, there were state lines we would pass through, but there were also unanticipated emotional and relational boundaries to be traversed for those with whom we met in different dance communities. Also, how would the NOP’s be a catalyst for enabling attendees to **eclipse** the blocks and chasms that can impede a career transition? This begins by reaching out.

The NOP workshops held in communities around the U.S. include a number of activities targeted at helping dancers experience and grapple with career transition challenges in a very direct way. Taking advantage of the unique and specialized expertise, CTFD Career Counselor Suzie Jary brings a unique skill as a psycho-drama therapist; several techniques are incorporated to get dancers actively and fully engaged with where they stand along the transition process. Positioning themselves on an imaginary line that represents that continuum, dancers are able to really see and connect with the complexity of their present situation.

By sharing their circumstances as well as their hopes, beliefs and concerns, they can begin to associate what it means to be in their spot (literally and figuratively) and to understand how it is relative to those standing beside them.

Being able to voice such deep, often taboo, sentiments with other kindred spirits in such a safe and supportive environment, can be transforming. Hearing from others in different places along the continuum line is invaluable — often providing perspective and encouragement to those who are new to transition, while

infusing confidence and motivation in those who have had success. For the latter, sharing their experience helps them claim ownership of their achievements, realize their growth and appreciate the richness of the process.

Hence, the “transition line” exercise becomes a way to promote an acceptance and understanding of the stages of transition and diminish fears of the heretofore unknown. Recognition of what is entailed in the change process, makes the movement into unknown emotional and experiential territory less loathsome and being with others, in a community, makes it less lonesome.

Crossing from the emotional terrain of a career transition into the practical presents many barriers dancers must navigate and move through.

In the next part of the NOP workshop, we provide participants with a “Career Map” and a prescribed five-step path to follow in finding a next “good fit” career. To help them take that first step in their career development, counselors guide the dancers through a series of individual exercises and more group activities that give them the opportunity to explore different aspects of themselves — specifically their interests, skills, values, strengths and unique qualities. Noting these traits on their personal Career Map, each dancer can begin to envision other career prospects with increased hope and self-assurance. A group brainstorming simulation for one of the NOP participants, then helps all to see how they can creatively involve others in finding links between the pieces of information on their map — like linking together pieces of a puzzle — which often reveal “pictures” or possibilities for the future.

The second step along the practical path involves exploring the career options identified in Step 1. Again, a bit of “boundary crossing” may be required. Dancers may need to **move outside their comfort zone** and **reach out** to people they don’t know in fields or occupations with which they are unfamiliar. For some, networking and informational interviewing will involve making a big leap, which includes overcoming self-imposed stops in connecting with people who have had different life and work experiences. Yet, by accessing the same determination used in their dance training and performances, as well as the tools and information supplied in the NOP workshop, dancers find that differences need not be barriers. On the contrary, those in the “civilian world” are usually willing, even delighted, to engage with dancers if they will simply venture out.

Taking the second step paves the way to the third, **Focus and Goal Setting**, which leads to **Pro-Active Job Searching** (the fourth) and ultimately to **Career Management**. In time one finds they have become part of a new community, a professional community with new colleagues who are able to partner with and support them.

The experience of the NOP is often a catalyst for 1-on-1 discussions with a career counselor, immediately following the workshop portion of the program or sometime thereafter — be it in person or by phone. Whatever the timing or the circumstances, the CTFD career counselors are available to help dancers **move out** of the fog into greater clarity, to **cross** from now into the future, as well as to **traverse** barriers that might keep them from turning dreams into reality.



Spotlight On: Hans Kriefall

Views on passion and pragmatism from a former Broadway dancer

To a dancer, dance is an extension of one’s identity — a reflection of one’s devotion, drive and aspirations; and an established career validates one’s ability to succeed and confirms confidence in oneself. For dancers, the launching of a professional dance career is equivalent to a scientist establishing a breakthrough discovery, or a runner completing a marathon — it is recognition of their skill and dedication, and an embodiment of their lifelong passion. A career in dance exemplifies not only a dancer’s dedication, but also a dancer’s love for the art. Hans Kriefall, an experienced performer in musical theatre, refers to dance as his “first love” — a notion that many of CTFD’s clients can relate to, for it is their genuine love for this art form that motivates our dancers to pull through meticu-

lous and grueling rehearsals, and nerve-racking auditions for years upon years, to the point in which their bodies are no longer able to keep up to speed with their drive.

“If this was something I could do forever, I probably would” says Hans when asked about his dance career; and after glancing at his prolific resume. As a dancer whose focus was exclusively on musical theatre, Hans’ work experience includes an array of performances both on and off Broadway, with national tours, and in regional stock shows. His road towards a professional dance career



began in 1987, when, equipped with a bachelor's degree, Hans moved to New York City and began to study dance more seriously at Steps on Broadway. From 1988-1995, after performing in some non-Equity shows, Hans began touring nationally with a number of popular musicals starting with **West Side Story**, and followed by **Me & My Girl**, **Cats**, **A Chorus Line**, and **Jesus Christ Superstar**. Well on his way towards a successful Broadway career, Hans obtained a Broadway role as Alonzo in **Cats** in 1995.

It was during his four years in **Cats** that Hans began evaluating his need for a career change. He told CTFD that "I hit my early Thirties and realized that there's a finite life span to dancing."

While examining opportunities in other careers in theater, Hans decided, "rather than starting over from square one, in an aspect of performing that wasn't necessarily something I was 'dying' to do, I decided to retire and quit while I was ahead." With the help of Suzie Jary, CTFD counselor, Hans was able to take the next step towards finding something new. "It is an absolutely priceless resource to have 1-on-1 attention focused on you and your priorities...through the process of identifying what your strengths and interests are, and what you need to do to get where you want to be."

Hans was encouraged to apply for internships and to take advantage of his previous experience as an actor's union representative during contract negotiations with Actors' Equity Association. Recalling his experience as a committee member at Actors' Equity, Hans remembers being impressed by the knowledge and communication skills of the lawyers on staff. He recalls how these individuals not only had some passion about the subject of contract negotiations, but also the hard facts and skills to back it up. As he continued to work more closely with lawyers through various internships, Hans realized how much this work appealed to him and was ready to pursue a career in law for himself.

At Columbia Law School, Hans quickly learned the benefits of having an established professional career already under his belt. His previous career as a dancer left him equipped with a level of professionalism and a more "sophisticated view of the world," which his professors and colleagues

seemed to appreciate. And as he began working for law firms in New York City, he witnessed that his co-workers appreciated his real world experience. Now, as a corporate finance lawyer at Debevoise & Plimpton LLP, Hans has discovered how useful his discipline as a dancer is towards his career in law.

"It's the attitude of how you approach work that is consistent: putting your best foot forward and having no fear of failure. I was conditioned to accept challenges, do my best and rely on that to get me through."

This basic philosophy has helped Hans establish a successful career in law, and has availed some wonderful opportunities. Most recently, Hans' newfound career allowed him to spend two years in Europe as he worked from the firm's office in Frankfurt, Germany.

When asked about the challenges and some of the fears he faced during this period of redefining his professional self, Hans states: "the difficult thing with any transition in life is that there's such uncertainty...my fear was that I wouldn't be equally passionate about whatever other work I found...however, I think you have to realize that your next field may not be your first love — the way theatre was my first love." During this period of self reflection, Hans seemed conflicted between his true passion and his innate sense of pragmatism. Although, he understood the need to transition and pursue a career outside of dance, his devotion and love for the art remained.

"There are few things I would love as much as I loved dancing and musical theatre... it's a passion that I don't think ever completely goes away."

With CTFD's help, Hans was able to find a new area of interest, and eventually a new niche after coming to the realization that "you can't dance in a show forever" — a truism which made his pursuit of a career outside of dance even more attainable.

Sanford (Bud) I. Wolff In memoriam

Sanford I. (Bud) Wolff passed away in New Canaan, Connecticut on April 14, the day after his 92nd birthday and was interred at Arlington National Cemetery on June 14, 2007. Born in Chicago where he attended public schools, Bud Wolff was a graduate of Knox College, the University of Chicago, and The John Marshall School of Law. Soon after being admitted to the Illinois bar, Mr. Wolff enlisted as a private in the Army, and during World War II saw service as an Infantry Officer in New Guinea, the Central Pacific, the Philippines and Japan. His citations include the Combat Infantryman's Badge, The Purple Heart, The Bronze Star and The Silver Star. At the time of his separation from the service in 1946, he had achieved the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, commanding the 3rd Battalion of the 123rd Infantry.

Following the War, he resumed his legal career with a Chicago labor law firm, becoming a partner within two years. By the early 1950s Mr. Wolff had his own law firm in Chicago, representing many performers in broadcast-

ing, as well as the Chicago Local of AFTRA, the Central Region of AFTRA, the Directors' Guild, American Guild of Musical Artists, Screen Actors Guild in the Central Region and United Scenic Artists. In 1968 Mr. Wolff began a 17-year relationship with AFTRA, the 70,000-member union of professional performers, broadcasters and recording artists, as its National Executive Secretary. In 1978, he was honored by State of Israel Bonds which, presenting him with the coveted "Israel Award," cited his long commitment to the members of the performer's union and his parallel concern for the survival of the State of Israel. Mr. Wolff received AFTRA's highest honor, the George Heller Memorial Gold Card, in 1984 for his outstanding service to the union and its members. He resigned from AFTRA in 1985 to resume the practice of law.

In 1988, Mr. Wolff became the National Executive Secretary of the American Guild of Musical Artists and counsel to Career Transition For Dancers, which was incorporated that year.

He retired from AGMA in 1993 to become Of Counsel to the law firm of Becker and London until its dissolution. In 2006, Mr. Wolff received the Career Transition For Dancers Award for Outstanding Contributions to the World of Dance.

During his career, Mr. Wolff also served as a member of the Board of Directors of the AFL-CIO Department for Professional Employees and Chairman of its Arts, Entertainment and Media Industry Committee; as Executive Secretary of the Associated Actors and Artistes of America, and a member of the Archive Advisory Board of the Jewish Museum in New York.

He is survived by his wife of 37 years, Ann Barry, his sons Paul and David Wolff and his daughter, Laura Brant.

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