
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

