



The Fellows Gazette

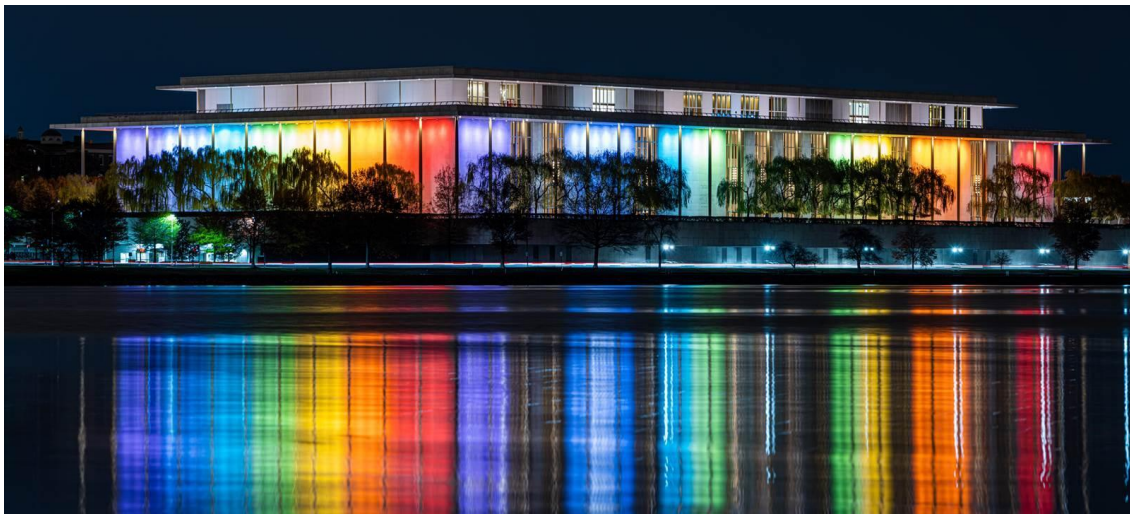
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Table of Contents

- “Lessons in Leadership” (Roundtable)
- Awards and Honors
- Announcements and Updates

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Lessons in Leadership

In the Fall 2024 issue of the **Fellows Roundtable**, we invited our interviewees to reflect on the lessons in leadership they had learned over the years over the years and to pay tribute to the mentors who had supported them on their journeys. We talked about making hard choices *and* what kinds of qualities future leaders of US theatre will need.

Our call drew a wonderful array of participants, including **Ben Cameron, Dan Carter, Bonnie Fogel, David Grapes, Sandra Shannon, and Suzan Zeder**.

Some of our participants had found their way into leadership roles “accidentally,” noting that while leadership might not have been their original goal, they took on responsibilities to make important things happen. Others reflected on the ways in which their leadership style had changed over the years as they learned more about themselves. Our leaders brought a wide range of experiences to the conversation, as heads of theatres, leaders of professional organizations, and academic deans.

We hope that you will appreciate engaging with their reflections on the importance of responsible, ethical, and equitable approaches to leadership, and that their thoughts will offer inspiration in the days to come.

Our five questions for the Roundtable Participants included:

- 1. Who mentored you and what valuable lessons did they share along the way?**
- 2. What have been the most important or unexpected lessons in leadership you've learned?**
- 3. Some are born to leadership, some achieve leadership, and some have leadership thrust upon them! How has your leadership style changed during your career? Why?**
- 4. How have you grappled with hard choices? How did you know they were the right ones?**
- 5. What kinds of leaders do we need today to support the future of American theatre?**

The next **Fellows Gazette Roundtable** will focus on **“What’s at Stake: Sustaining DEIJ in US Theatre.”** We look forward to connecting again in the spring, and in the meantime, we wish everyone a restful holiday season!

*--Javier Hurtado (Colorado State University) &
Heather Nathans (Tufts University and CoF, 2023)*



The Fellows Roundtable

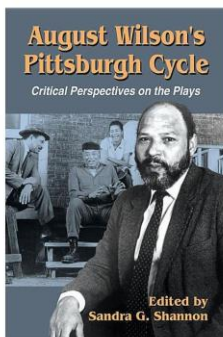
1. Who mentored you and what valuable lessons did they share along the way?



Describing the crucial role of educators in helping students envision future possibilities, Dean of the College of Fellows, Professor Emerita of Howard University, and former President of both the August Wilson Society and the Black Theatre Network, **Sandra Shannon** paid tribute to a graduate school mentor, Dr. Garnett Mack at Virginia State University, as someone who had encouraged her writing and who helped her to feel confident as a writer and scholar. Prior to that, an undergraduate mentor, Malachai Green, supported her

writing for her college newspaper. Both mentors invited Shannon to develop her own unique voice, “They validated my writing, and from then on, writing papers and graduate classes came a little easier.”

It may have been this early encouragement and mentorship that led Shannon into a career in



the academy and prompted her to mentor her own successive generations of scholars at Howard University and as president of various national organizations. She learned firsthand the importance of professional and intellectual cheerleaders in pushing forward the future of US theatre scholarship – particularly in critical areas such as the history of Black American Theatre and the drama

of August Wilson (<https://works.bepress.com/sandra-shannon/>).



Bonnie Fogel noted that her experience of mentorship was not “the typical one.” After starting her first career with Marks & Spencer, the British retail giant, Fogel eventually pivoted to launch the renowned and award-winning children’s theatre, **Imagination Stage** in Bethesda, MD

(<https://imaginationstage.org/>). As Fogel recounts, her experience in retail work helped her understand how to engage

with theatre patrons because it taught her to pay attention to their needs as consumers.

Describing her early days with Imagination Stage (originally the Bethesda Academy of Performing Arts), Fogel recalls herself as “supremely *unconfident*,” but adept at the behind-the-scenes work with a partner who helped to develop the theatre’s image in the community.

But when her partner in the project moved out of state, Fogel says, “I was left holding the baby.”

*“You can, **because you have to** – despite the odds.”*

She cites College of Fellows colleague **Gail Humphries** as someone who helped her persevere at this pivotal moment, “The most personal lesson that I learned was

that really I could do things that I could never have imagined that I could do.” And what Fogel did was to transform Imagination Stage into what *The Washingtonian* called the East Coast’s best children’s theatre ((<https://www.washingtonian.com/2016/06/14/story-bonnie-fogel-imagination-stage-bethesda-best-childrens-theater/>)). Fogel hopes that her experience can offer an example to other aspiring arts leaders who may not have had the opportunity to follow a conventional path. As she says, “The odds were so much against my being able to do anything in this field... I have in no background at all.” She adds, “I didn’t go to college or university. I did not have a background, therefore, in theatre, education, or arts administration.”

Fogel reflects on her own experience and how it has invited her to support others: “I think I have been pretty staggered by how much is possible, even when the groundwork isn’t there

that would suggest that this would be your pathway. And so that has been a lesson for when I have mentored other people. I use this because so many people do not come equipped with the knowledge they need to run their organization, or to start an organization, or to approach people for help with their organization.”

Like Shannon, Fogel also sees how much her own mentors have taught her about the importance of offering encouragement and bolstering confidence. She reminds her mentees, “Oh, my goodness, of course you can. Yes, you can because you have to, despite the odds.” In the end, she says that discovering how to build confidence, “was a very important lesson because it *is* possible to succeed if you have a vision.” She points to the key qualities of, “passion, boundless grit and determination, and humility,” and the crucial interest in, “listening to others,”

Dan Carter has spent much of his career as a leader in various academic institutions (Florida State University, Illinois State, and Penn State), and as a leader of the National



Association of Schools of Theatre

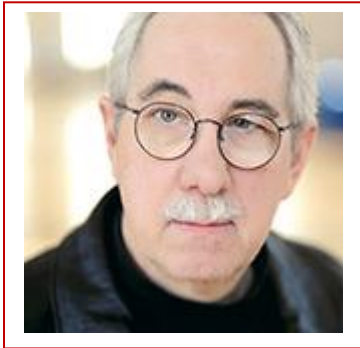
(<https://www.nationaltheatreconference.org/living-legacies/dan-carter>), as well as a former Dean for the College of Fellows. Carter cites Dean Emeritus of the Florida State University School of Theatre, Gil Lazier as the person who offered him two pieces of advice that he describes as “critical” to his professional identity. The

first focused on hiring the best possible team. As Carter says, “People will get you through times with no money better than money will get you through times with no people.”

Additionally, Carter remembers that Lazier said, “To your colleagues, you're *always* your position. You may think you're walking across the parking lot talking about the football game this Saturday, but they think they're having a meeting with the Associate Dean.”

Carter also cited Florida State Dean, Bob Glidden as someone whose mentorship came through the example Glidden set in his role as Dean. “I learned a lot from him just rubbing elbows with him and being in the same room with him. He was one of the very best in the

country, and people respect him.” Through mentorship, Carter learned to pay attention to the way power differentials shaped his interactions. He also learned to accept that not everyone will like him, and finally, that if he was able to hire well, he did not have to hire *often*.



David Grapes shared an extensive list of mentors starting with his parents, specifically citing his mother who taught him not to “personalize failure.” As she reminded him, “The *plan* failed. You didn't fail. You need a better plan.” Among many other mentors throughout his career, Grapes credits Shakespeare scholar Dr. Merrill Patterson for making sure that he had the resources he that he needed during his tenure as a one-man department early in his career.

Through mentors such as Martha Rivers Ingram, founder of the Tennessee Repertory Theatre, Grapes learned how to, “engage the board of directors, so that they were both giving money *and* coming to productions.” Additionally, Ingram taught Grapes how to deliver a “passion speech,” or a speech outlining, “Why we do what we do, why you should give money, and what happens if you *don't* give money.”

From other mentors such as Andrew Svedlow, former Dean of the College of Performing and Visual Arts at UNC, Grapes learned the importance of community engagement, in a way that foregrounded listening and setting clear boundaries and balancing those boundaries with a willingness to take risks.



Playwright and former University of Texas at Austin professor **Suzan Zeder** told a story about a former professor, “Miss Olson,” who encouraged Zeder to write her first play, which she said now lives “somewhere in the archives at ASU.” The process allowed Zedler to discover that “I was a writer. I wasn't an actor, and I discovered from that that plays aren't so much

written as they're rewritten. And they're listened to, and they're tried on.”

(<https://www.dramaticpublishing.com/authors/profile/view/url/suzan-zeder>)

The second mentor she cited was, Claire Rosenfield, widow of the drama critic on the “Dallas Morning News,” John Rosenfield. Through Claire Rosenfield’s mentorship, Zeder learned the “environment of the theatre and how people make beginnings.” Rosenfield’s mentorship also helped her get into graduate school where she met a third mentor, Jim Hancock (eventually her husband), a movement specialist. Zeder’s criteria for citing these three mentors was that each of these people “saw something in me that I never saw in myself and then they held me to that standard for it,” which is what Zeder described as “the deepest part of mentorship.”



Ben Cameron, whose many professional credits include time as the Program Director for the Arts for the Doris Duke Charitable Trust Foundation, as well as the Executive Director of the Theatre Communications Group, received the National Medal of the Arts from President Barack Obama

(<https://www.jeromefdn.org/ben-cameron>). In contemplating his development as a leader, he offered profiles of three different mentors who informed his trajectory, each one sharing lessons about renewal, connection, and risk. He pointed to Tom Haas, the former Artistic Director of the Indiana Repertory Theatre, who had an unusual style of mentoring: “Posing what you thought was an impossible challenge, not telling you how to get there, and then watching what happened.”

Cameron also pointed to Peter Coleman at Center Stage in Baltimore as someone who taught him about the importance of transparency and sharing information. Cameron recalled, “If you were a guest director at Peter’s theatre, on your first day, he called you into his office, offered a pot of tea, and laid out the entire organizational budget in front of you and said, ‘This is how much we spend on marketing. This is how much we have to raise... This is where your show’s budget is’.”

As Cameron remembers, “For directors who had no sense of institutional size, it was a revelation to them.” Cameron emphasized that Coleman showed the directors where they might find some budget flexibility, but that he wanted them to understand how their production “fit into the bigger scheme of things.” For Cameron, “That was a generosity of sharing that I still hearken back to.”

Coleman also showed Cameron the value of “using a different bathroom.” While this may sound like a strange suggestion, Cameron’s mentor recommended, “First time go near the box office the second time you go in the scene shop the third time you go in the costume shop, by the end of the day you’ve seen everybody. You’ve heard things that you never would have heard otherwise, and everybody believes you care about them very deeply. So just go to a different bathroom.”

Cameron’s third influential mentor was Ronnie Brooks, the founding director of the James P. Shannon Leadership Institute. As Cameron describes, “She lead our group for a year. We’d meet a day and a half every month. We’d get together on Thursday afternoons and we’d cook dinner together on Fridays. We’d meet the full day, and at the end of the year you had to present to your classmates your three core values and your life, purpose and plan. And that was very different. It transformed my career and me personally in the aftermath.”

2. What have been the most important or unexpected lessons in leadership you’ve learned?

All of our Roundtable participants described lessons they had gleaned while trying to translate their visions into realities and how leadership raised the stakes for their artistic and scholarly work.

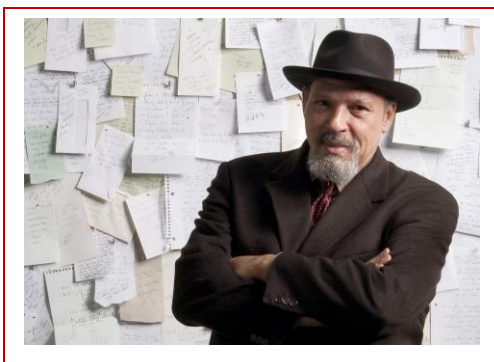
“I had to learn to be more conspicuously welcoming.”

One of **Dan Carter’s** most important and unexpected lessons was that it was not enough to be welcoming or inclusive, but as he states, “I had to learn to be more

conspicuously welcoming. It wasn't enough to attend to the issues, it's not enough that we're a safe space. We have to be a *conspicuously* safe space. It was not enough to be inclusive and to be attendant to issues but you had to be *conspicuously* inclusive.”

Like Carter, **Ben Cameron** thinks about the ways in which institutions should foreground their priorities and the ways in which leaders have to facilitate that process. He notes, “Ronnie had taught me three important lessons about core values, which I always took to heart.” She said, “A value permeates the organization. So if it's a value for the artist and not the managers, it's not a core value. If it's a *true* core value, it will be for the artists, the managers, the technicians, the board, and even the audience, will gravitate and select you because of their affinity around values.”

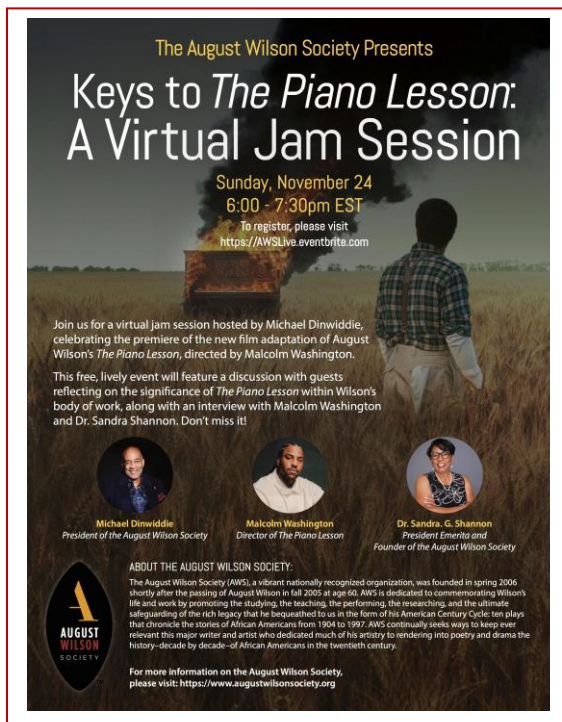
Her second rule was, “Every value has a consciously rejected yet equally viable opposite. So excellence can't be a core value because you can't viably choose to base an organization in poor work.” By contrast, Cameron observed that, “We believe the diversity of the field is our core strength. Homogeneity is equally viable, but we embrace diversity and set homogeneity aside.” He offered the example of a company winning a grant to diversify its audience, but being willing to sacrifice that goal of diversity if they lost the grant. In such an instance, he says, “I question whether diversity can be called a core value for that company, because if it's a core value will pursue it,” even in the face of financial challenges. Cameron adds, “Using those litmus tests became the bedrock for me.”



Sandra Shannon described the challenges of blazing a new trail in the creation of the **August Wilson Society** and the grit required to sustain a project you believe in, even when the structure and support may still be works in progress. She recalls, “Through my seventeen years as President of the August Wilson Society I learned that sometimes you have to go it

alone.” Shannon discovered the challenges of translating her own passionate commitment to creating the AWS into reality – and the difficulties inherent in marshalling volunteers who

may not have the same level of dedication or expertise to share. (Image at <https://www.augustwilsonsociety.org/>)



She recalls, “You come in with ideas and energy, and you want to do this and do that, and people may agree, but say that they don’t have time, etc.” She notes ruefully, “You’re all passionate and excited about a project, and you look behind you, and there's nobody there.” The experience taught her that, “My job would be to educate people and to instill in them some degree of the passion that I have for this organization (AWS).” She adds with a chuckle, “But I’ve got to tell you there were times...” Thankfully, the AWS now thrives under the leadership of College of Fellows member,

Michael Dinwiddie, as the upcoming November 24, 2024 symposium entitled, “Keys to *The Piano Lesson: A Virtual Jam Session*,” reveals.

For **David Grapes**, important lessons came during his actor-training that he translated into his life as a full-time fundraiser. However, Grapes shared that no matter how proficient you might become at fundraising, “Nothing quite prepares you for the fact that you're raising money to support staff or people's salaries, and that those people are dependent upon you.” The stakes heighten the urgency, since “When you're in a regional theater and Equity company, if you do not raise the money, people are laid off or people aren't paid.”

Bonnie Fogel shared similar crash-course lessons about leadership and finances, “The thing that I have learned about running a theatre is that you have to understand every aspect of the business just the same as you would with the corner grocery store.” For Fogel, that responsibility has proved both fascinating and invigorating. She says, “That's what I love about it. There's always something new to learn, and as your business grows, so does your

opportunity to learn to find new opportunities. The challenges grow too, but it's all endlessly interesting.” Her experiences have inspired her to co-author a new book with Carnegie Mellon’s Dr. Brett Crawford entitled *Entrepreneurial Arts and Cultural Leadership: Traits of Success in a Nonprofit Theatre* (forthcoming in 2025).

Suzan Zeder spoke about having a surprise work transition when, during her time at UT-Austin, a series of personnel shifts led to Zeder having to take the reins of a program she never expected to lead. About halfway through her tenure as Head of Playwriting and Directing at UT-Austin, she learned how to navigate institutional bureaucracy through a more subtle form of leadership, “You can get farther by empowering somebody else, especially somebody *above* you in the power struggle.” Zeder cites this lesson as one that allowed her to have a significant impact during her time at UT-Austin, including making intentional hires that she described as, “the most exciting mix” of “someone who is different from you as a teacher, as different from you as in terms of the kind of writing that they do that is in many ways a polar opposite, but a good companion.” Zeder concluded with the realization that, “Sometimes the way you lead the most strongly is by taking three steps back and seeing how to create a win-win situation for everybody involved.” She also reminds leaders that their role doesn’t include, “always being the loudest voice in the room.”

3. Some are born to leadership, some achieve leadership, and some have leadership thrust upon them! How has your leadership style changed during your career? Why?

*“Think on it,
pray on it, and
go for it.”*

Sandra Shannon thinks that she has become more empathetic as a leader over the years. As she observes, “Back in the day, I would get a little frustrated when people weren’t as passionate as was. But now I can put myself in their place.” For Shannon, her recent retirement has offered more perspective on her colleagues’ workload and reminded her to acknowledge *whatever* contributions they’re able to make to a given project. As she says, reminding

people that, “they have something of value to contribute,” can help them to invest in the future of an organization.

Shannon has also learned to rely on her instincts and “gut feelings” as a leader. She comments, “When you’re in the middle of something, you can only rely on your past experience and your gut. You think on it, pray on it, and go for it.”

Bonnie Fogel says, “I definitely belong to the category where leadership was thrust upon me.” For Fogel, that shift happened when her founding partner in Imagination Stage left with two weeks’ notice. As Fogel recounts, “I had maybe a hundred people in the school at the time, so that was a pivot point.” She struggled with the choice, “I either had to close things down, which was actually the way I was leaning... but the board said, ‘Please keep this going. It’s an important community resource. We will do what we can. We will raise money...just please try and keep it going.’ And so I did. But you have to understand that we were a completely fledgling organization.”

At the time, Fogel’s theatre board consisted of only four people. With her unexpected plunge into leadership, she began to amass all the training she could, “I went to all these courses” about non-profit management, “I went to everything they offered on how to raise funds, how to grow a board, how to do marketing, how to do communications, PR, everything you could think of. I took every single class, and I read all the time about what makes effective leadership. What is a non-profit organization? What non-profits are *good*



non-profits?” Fogel committed herself to becoming fluent in best-practices in every area of non-profit management that she possibly could. She adds, “To my surprise, I liked it.” For Fogel, just as for Shannon, her devotion to the cause sustained her, “I was invested in the idea of arts for children, and I knew that nothing was going to change on its own, so

this afterschool operation (Imagination Stage) was going to be the only thing in our area to

meet the need for children to have access, regular access to theatre arts and theatre education.” (Image: <https://imaginationstage.org>)

*“How can you tell if
someone needs
encouragement?
They’re breathing.”*

Dan Carter’s leadership style has shifted in that he is now more able to clearly identify who needs encouragement and when. Carter says, “I never said ‘No’ to anybody. I didn’t want to be responsible for somebody walking away, thinking, ‘Well, I had this great idea, and he wouldn’t let it happen.’ How can you tell if someone needs encouragement? They’re breathing. Leading by offering more empowerment and encouragement makes some really amazing things happen.”

Ben Cameron describes a career arc as one that, “hasn’t been an even trajectory.” From teaching to graduate school and from staff member to CEO, he talked about how the demands of each role shifted his leadership style. “The corporate environment,” Cameron says, “was a very horizontal structure, and you were totally empowered to act as long as you were taking the action within the corporate values and the corporate and goals.” He adds, “I learned that through my corporate time. I went from a vertical, a *very* vertical consciousness to a horizontal consciousness.”



Suzan Zeder described a life-changing event that reshaped her leadership trajectory – an accident that impacted her physical ability to remain in roles to which she had given much of her time and energy. She temporarily stepped back from her presidency of the Children’s Theatre Foundation of America (Image at <https://www.childrenstheatrefoundation.org/index.html>). Founded in 1958, the organization is, as Zeder notes, “The only foundation in the country that is exclusively devoted to giving grants and giving awards and supporting artists in theater for young audiences.”

After time away during her recovery, Zeder recently shifted back into a leadership role. She inaugurated a strategic planning process and a legacy campaign to help support the future of the organization. Zeder adds, “I’ve started a legacy campaign where I have communicated with almost all my fellow playwrights, and I’ve asked, ‘What are you doing with your future royalties?’ And I’ve talked about that the most important part of a legacy is the other leg, and it’s the one that keeps walking.” Zeder notes that the COVID crisis created the opportunity for a reset in the field of Theatre for Young Audiences. Pre-COVID, she described how organizations such as Seattle Children’s Theatre and the Children’s Theatre Company of Minneapolis and the Child’s Play Company in Phoenix grew into models and venues that mimicked larger regional theatres and ultimately struggled to sustain their momentum and to cultivate daring new work for young audiences because they grew dependent on steady box office revenue. Zeder argues, “We came into something that I used to call the ‘Pinkalicious Syndrome.’ Unless it was a title that everybody had heard of, and something that was safe, you were not going to be produced.”

Ben Cameron’s experience as an actor taught him that “at some point you can’t blame somebody else for your bad performance... you know you have to ultimately embrace the responsibility.” Another lesson that shifted Cameron’s leadership style came through a formula offered by a colleague during his time in corporate giving. The colleague reminded him of the breakdown of how fundraising works: “Seventy percent of what you do, you’re going to feel good about and the corporation is going to feel good about. There will be twenty-percent *you’re* going to feel great about, but the corporation isn’t going to care or thank you, but you’ll feel good.” Cameron’s colleague cautioned him that there will also be ten percent of the fundraiser’s role that will require, “You to bite your tongue until it bleeds because you hate it so much.” Ultimately, she reminded him that, “The ten percent buys you the other ninety percent.” Cameron suggests that this advice, “really helped me calibrate the battle lines to draw, and where and how fiercely to protect them.”

David Grapes has found that being thrust into leadership roles made him a better listener and better at creating consensus. That process also invited him to boost his skills as a long-

range planner and as someone able to, “develop strategic goals and keep everybody on track.” Both Grapes and **Dan Carter** note that they became better at understanding “what motivates university administrators.” This awareness empowered both of them over the years as they competed for campus resources.

4. How have you grappled with hard choices? How did you know they were the right ones?

Following up on her discussion of the challenges that have faced the field of Theatre for Young Audiences in recent years, **Suzan Zeder** dove into the issue of how to fund smaller, risk-taking companies, since she underscores the pressing need to invest in “the smaller companies, the companies of color, the companies that are more nimble and lighter on their feet.” And like many theatre-makers, artists who create TYA have felt the post-COVID crunch of not being able to make a living wage.



Zeder sees another challenge facing TYA in the conservative political, social, and cultural movements that have been reshaping what gets allowed in US schools. Zeder points to two of her former students who have pushed back against this agenda, saying, “I’m so proud of one of my students, Gabriel Jason Dean, who wrote a beautiful play about a boy who wears girl’s clothing to school, and another one of my students, Emily Freeman, adapted a story into the play *And Then Came Tango* about the two same sex penguins at the Bronx Zoo.” These penguins lived as a

bonded pair and raised a chick named Tango (<https://www.austinchronicle.com/arts/2012-11-30/all-over-creation-the-persistence-of-penguins/>). Zeder remains hopeful that stories like these will make their way back into schools and TYAs willing to take risks.

Dan Carter reflects that the hardest leadership lesson he as he has learned was, “I decided

“Every time I have to make a decision by myself, that’s a failure of our process.”

early on that it was important not to let the unsaid thing hang in the air.” Carter emphasizes that he never expects 100% agreement on an issue. Rather, he hopes that by naming different wants, needs, and

expectations, people can come to a clearer and more transparent collaboration. He also learned that – as much as possible -- he needed to bring opposing parties into the room with him, rather than appearing to “take sides” by listening to people express concerns privately. Carter has always seen his colleagues as crucial in his leadership, declaring, “Every time I have to make a decision by myself, that's a failure of our process.”

In contemplating hard choices, **Ben Cameron** began by citing his time at the National Endowment for the Arts where he put significant trust in his belief in peer-reviewed panels to inform his decisions. He notes that colleagues learned to trust that process and that it enriched the review of the projects the organization received.

Ultimately, Cameron argued that we can know if we’re making difficult choices if we have “given ourselves permission to fail.” Citing his time at the Doris Duke Foundation where he supported twenty projects a year, he observed, “If all twenty of them work out, we may have been too conservative in what we chose to fund. We should be expecting failure somewhere along the way, and if we don't have it, that's a good challenge to us” in thinking about the next round of choices. Cameron also acknowledged the frustration of realizing, “the limits of time” in accomplishing all the urgent goals and projects leaders see waiting in the world.

David Grapes underscored that, “Hard choices are always about money and then hard choices then become about people, because people and money are often connected.” He describes the dilemma of being brought into a struggling theatre and having to figure out how many staff members he needed to sustain the artistic vision of the company. He adds, “If I could figure out a way to keep a person on board, and not cut someone that was always the first way I went always because people already make sacrifices to be in the arts and to be

in theater.” He adds, “You know you've made the right decisions when there's community buy-in.”

Grapes recalled the post-9/11 period at the Tennessee Repertory Theatre “We were we were doing incredibly well. We had just raised a lot of money. We had a ‘Ticket to Greatness’ campaign. And then 9/11 happened.” For Grapes, that crisis revealed the huge stakes associated with leadership. “It taught me perseverance. You can get through anything if you have enough heart.” Waiting out the hard times helped the theatre to survive, and then twenty years later, COVID-19 shut down arts organizations across the world. Grapes had retired just before COVID, but seeing two catastrophic crises like this in his career reminds him that the leader has to focus on how the work will “make a difference in people’s lives.” Like Carter, Grapes underscores the need to create a collaborative leadership model. In navigating turbulent times, leaders have to turn to their teams for guidance, rather than trying to produce solutions on their own. As he says, “The more bad things happened, the more I tried to listen.”

Like Grapes, **Fogel** also highlighted the need for leaders to seek counsel in times of crisis. She says, “I did make a lot of hard choices through the years, but I was never alone. I never felt that I was alone.” She describes relying on her Board, her staff, and the theatre’s artists and educators, who all shared their insights. Fogel says that tough decisions were made in collaboration, through conversation and her team always brought curiosity to the issues as well. But she acknowledges that even the best teams in the world can’t work miracles every time, stating, “I think the hardest decisions were the ones when there was something you *really* wanted to do, and you would be prepared to work like a dog to make it happen, but you didn't have the staff structure.” In those instances, Fogel realized that the overall wellbeing of the team took precedence over trying to do “everything.”

She recalls the big transition in Imagination Stage’s history, “When we moved into our forever building on Auburn Avenue. We went from two very compromised buildings including a small educational space and the little theatre at White Flint Mall, which had

lights on/lights off, and no sound system. And suddenly we had two theaters, a 200-seat theatre and a 400-seat theatre. The staff went from eleven to twenty-five, the budget went from \$750,000 to \$4 million dollars, literally overnight. Wow!”

That massive transition meant that Imagination Stage had to let go of some “fairly major projects, innovative projects that we were very excited about.” While Fogel regretted having to make those choices and realized that the company would not be able to circle back to them in the future, she knows it was the right choice in the end. She described facing backlash from team members because of the scale of the change the theatre made in its leap to the new space. She reflects, “There are always people who want to just stay where they are, and there are always people who are excited to try new things.” Like Cameron, Fogel argues that even choices that may turn out to be mistakes teach institutions how to change and grow. As she says, “There’s nothing worse than working for a forty-year-old organization that is stuck and not doing anything new.” Fogel challenges herself and her team to constantly reinvent themselves in response to audiences’ needs and to have “big, big dreams.”

5. What kinds of leaders do we need today to support the future of American theatre?

“If you’re the smartest person in every room you walk into, you need to get new rooms.”

Dan Carter suggests that the future needs people who aren’t afraid of conflict, “The essence of drama is conflict and people seem to be conflict averse right now.” He adds, “We need a whole lot of people who don’t always think alike or act alike, and don’t have the same talents. You don’t have to be the smartest. If you’re the smartest person in every room you walk into, you need to get into some new rooms.”

Sandra Shannon thinks about the need for humility in generational shifts in leadership, “Leaders need to know when to pass the torch--you do the best that you can to get the organization or team to a certain position that you feel confident in stepping away.” She suggests that this makes for healthier organizations, “because there's somebody's waiting in the wings who could do a much better job than you.” As Shannon notes, “You have to stand back and resist the temptation to jump in and get involved. Don't be a helicopter leader.” Shannon also reminds future leaders that they need to be willing to let “their” vision evolve as the organization changes. They also need to understand that leadership is almost never glamorous. It involves a willingness to perform whatever task needs to be done for the good of the organization to realize the group’s vision. Once a leader decides something is beneath them, they’ve probably reached the end of their time as an effective leader.

“We need leaders who will ground in values again.”

Ben Cameron thinks about the ways in which our current climate has impacted the growth of future leaders. He says, “You know, this is the thing I struggle with most because the values of the generations are at such different places. Not that one's right or wrong, but they're just so in conflict inherently with each other that many people trying to harmonize those into coherent cultures are really fried.” Cameron says he sees US theatre and society, “at a heartbreaking moment,” adding, “I've been trying to figure it out. Maybe the clock just has to run, and the new generation has to take over. We need leaders who are generous in ascribing positive motives to other people. If you're assuming malevolence, I don't know how we're going to get through this.” Cameron stresses, “I think we need leaders who hear and assume positive intent and I think that we need leaders who will ground in values again.” Cameron invites communities and organizations to “look at values as the mortar that combines the organization together and think about building a culture by hiring, not on skill set, but on values.” With that approach, he argues, “We might get to a different place.”

Cameron also encourages future leaders to sustain their *outward* focus on service, rather than turning inward, “Leaders should constantly remind us to look out, to be humble, to cede authority to others *beyond* their own walls, and to be values-grounded. For Cameron, “It just feels like a different moment, because the stakes are higher, and I think that the conditions

are harder. And I think there's going to be a lot of change foisted upon the field,” some of its own making and some not. Cameron emphasizes that, “For the field as a whole, we're on the brink of needing to find another way, so leaders need to have that same spirit of inquiry and curiosity and fearlessness as they search the paths.”

“The next generation is going to have to learn how to be fundraisers and friend-raisers.”

For **David Grapes**, the kind of leaders we need are, “People who are willing to take a risk and willing to admit mistakes” and fix them. For Grapes, new

leadership should also be chosen with the explicit charge to “include more people at the table.” Grapes argues, “As a leader you cannot wait for people to come to you. You have to look for them and find them.” He underscores the importance of not having preconceived notions about where potential leaders might come from or the backgrounds they “should” bring to their work. Grapes also reminds future leaders about embedding themselves in their communities on an ongoing basis, rather than just asking for (or expecting) support during fundraising season.

Suzan Zeder invites rising generations of leaders to invert (and subvert!) old paradigms. As she suggests, leaders support visions when they focus on getting obstacles out of the way. However, Zeder also stressed that grappling with obstacles *teaches* leaders, “Never be afraid of darkness because the darkness is what is absolutely essential.” Like Cameron, Carter, and Grapes, she reminds future leaders that, “out of that darkness comes some kind of a solution, even if it's not the traditional, happy ending.”

Bonnie Fogel also argues that future leaders will need courage, “because it takes a great deal of courage to do exceptional work.” She suggests that only exceptional work will bring people back into the theatres after the COVID crisis that still continues to impact so many arts organizations. For Fogel, that riskiness includes both scale and content – especially as theatre-makers try to support future generations of theatre-goers. Along with Zeder, she believes that Theatre for Young Audiences can nurture creative thinkers who can lead in *whatever* field they choose.

Each of our Roundtable participants leaned into the ways that leaders develop *shared* systems of values, grounded in the willingness to listen, to grapple with conflict, and to create more inclusive and welcoming communities. Each also acknowledged their own failures and perplexities along the way – as well as their triumphs. Hopefully, as we look towards supporting future leaders who can create greater equity in US theatre, their experiences will remind us of how fortunate we are to be part of a community of such kind and generous mentors.

Awards and Honors



Congratulations to **Michael J. Bobbitt** who received the Founder's Award from the Educational Theatre Association. <https://schooltheatre.org/awards/award-winners/>.

Dean Emerita Karen Berman received a \$75,000 Robert W. Woodruff Building Fund award to repair wind and flood damage to the gymnasium at the Boys & Girls Club in Milledgeville, Georgia where she serves as President of the Corporate Board of Directors.



In June of 2024, **Rives B. Collins** was the joyful recipient of the Campton Bell Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Alliance for Theatre and Education at their national conference in Chicago (<https://www.aate.com/>).

Baron Kelly has been named the Inaugural Colin Cook Endowed Visiting Professor of Acting and Directing at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (<https://education.wisc.edu/news/uw-madisons-kelly-awarded-prestigious-international-fellowship-in-london/>). **BRAVO Baron!**



Kudos to **Kristoffer Diaz** who received the Arthur Miller Foundation Legacy Award in October 2024! From the Foundation's website: "The Arthur Miller Foundation (AMF) is a grassroots, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that increases equitable access to theater education for public school students.

To honor the legacy of Arthur Miller and his New York City public school education, we provide theater teachers with critical resources to build and sustain quality in-school theater programs impacting 63,000 public school students across all five boroughs of NYC and in Bridgeport and Norwalk, Connecticut." For more on the awards ceremony, see:

<https://arthurmillerfoundation.org/amfhonors/>

For more news...

If you're looking for announcements and news items about the doings of your Fellow Fellows, visit the website: <https://www.thecollegeoffellows.org/gazette>

***Remember to submit awards, honors, and news items to
fellowsgazette@gmail.com***

Announcements

- *The College of Fellows of the American Theatre, in partnership with the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF) and the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center, is proud to announce the inauguration of **THE AUGUST WILSON FELLOWSHIP IN THEATRICAL PRODUCTION** for Students of Color in Design and Theatre Technology. The fellowship was created to bolster emerging BIPOC theatre professionals by providing opportunities at the highest level of immersive training and practice in technical theatre, theatre production, and design in a professional workplace. Please share this opportunity within your respective networks. To learn more visit <https://thekennedycenter.smapply.io/prog/awfellowship/>*
- **The College of Fellows celebrates its 60th Anniversary next year! See below for updates about the gala events that will commemorate this wonderful milestone!**

From Dean Sandra Shannon:

Dear Fellows:

In just five months, we will reconvene to invest another stellar class of Fellows, reconnect with each other, make new acquaintances, and CELEBRATE the 60th ANNIVERSARY OF THE COLLEGE OF FELLOWS OF THE AMERICAN THEATRE! As your Dean, I look forward to again welcoming you to Washington, DC, from Saturday, April 26 through Sunday, April 27,

2025, where you will be joined by our vibrant community of current Fellows, inductees to the class of 2025, special guests of stage and screen, and yours truly.

Plans are being finalized for an elegant Saturday evening Gala that will pay homage to August Wilson's impact upon this field and draw attention to several Wilsonian Warriors who figured prominently in securing his legacy. The formal Investiture is scheduled for Sunday, April 27 at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and will be the culminating activity for a uniquely celebratory weekend.

As we countdown to April 2025, here are a few more helpful, time-sensitive details:

- **THE RIVER INN RESERVATIONS:** It is not too early to make your travel arrangements and hotel reservations at the lovely and conveniently located River Inn located at 924 25th Street, NW Washington, DC. This hotel, which is always in high demand, is mere blocks away from the Kennedy Center where the Sunday Investiture Luncheon will take place. Click on The River Inn booking link for the College of Fellows Room Block with special negotiated rates (<https://be.synxis.com/?adult=1&arrive=2025-04-25&chain=22582&child=0¤cy=USD&depart=2025-04-28&group=COFOTAT409&hotel=40985&level=hotel&locale=en-US&productcurrency=USD&rooms=1>). If you prefer calling in your reservations, please let them know up front that you are booking for the College of Fellows Membership Weekend. That phone number is 202-337-7600. The negotiated College of Fellows room rate at the River Inn is \$249 per night. I encourage you to make your reservations well in advance of April 2025.
- **SATURDAY AM INTERVIEWS** (11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.) Location to be determined On Saturday, April 26, Class of 2025 inductees will be interviewed in 15-minute time slots. As a reminder, nominators must be on hand to interview their inductee(s). Each nominator will receive in advance: 1) An interviewer script, 2) A list of sample interview questions, and 3) A schedule of assigned times for each interview.
- **SATURDAY PM DYNAMIC DIALOGUE WORKSHOP** (12 p.m. to 2 p.m.) Location to be determined Fellows will convene in a moderated workshop setting for spirited dialogue on trending topics and consequential issues facing the American theatre. Pre-

selected moderators will provide prompt questions and/or assigned readings as potential discussion items.

- **SATURDAY EVENING 60th ANNIVERSARY GALA RECEPTION (7-9 p.m.)**
Cosmos Club (2121 Massachusetts Ave, NW; Washington, DC 20008) Next April's much-anticipated Saturday evening Gala Reception at Washington, DC's famed Cosmos Club, will be the highlight of our 60th Anniversary celebration! The theme chosen for this special gathering is **Walking in the Footsteps of August Wilson: Tradition. Inspiration. Innovation.** Featured guests will include Wilsonian Warriors Constanza Romero Wilson, Stephen McKinley Henderson, Phylicia Rashad, and Andre De Shields. *The cost to all Fellows to attend this event will be \$150/person.*
- **SUNDAY AM BUSINESS MEETING (9-11 a.m.)** John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; 2700 F. Street, NW; Washington, DC 20566 On Sunday morning, April 27, we will hold our annual business meeting at the Kennedy Center. The Board of Directors presents reports, and we vote on new business. You are encouraged to attend to gain more insight into our operations.
- **SUNDAY FORMAL INVESTITURE LUNCHEON (12-2 p.m.)** John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; 2700 F. Street, NW; Washington, DC 20566 Fellows Weekend will culminate at the majestic Kennedy Center on Sunday, April 27, where all who gather will witness the exciting and historic investiture of 10 new Fellows into the College of Fellows of the American Theatre! *The cost to each Fellow and each additional guest to attend this event will be \$150/person.* **NOTE:** Members of the Class of 2025 will be invited to participate in a panel presentation as part of the Investiture ritual. This light-hearted yet informative session, which will be facilitated by one of our Fellows, has become a welcomed addition to the annual Investiture Luncheon.

I hope that this preview of our annual Fellows Weekend will answer some of your questions and build a sense of excitement about what we have planned for you. Come join us as we celebrate and honor this organization's impactful 60-year legacy of excellence. I look forward to greeting you individually during our time together. If questions remain, please reach out to College of Fellows Administrative Assistant, Kristy Simpson at ksimpsoncof@gmail.com.

--Sandra G. Shannon, PhD, Dean College of Fellows of the American Theatre

Opportunities to Serve

The College of Fellows Board of Directors invites applications and nominations from the Fellows membership to fill the key position of **BOARD TREASURER**, beginning in April, 2025.

Please consider this as an opportunity for you or an interested colleague to be of service to this important organization. Please send nominations/applicant interest to Dean Sandra Shannon at sshann2591@gmail.com.

The College has no permanent infrastructure and is, therefore, dependent on the work of individual Fellows who volunteer their time and effort to serve in various capacities. Anyone who wishes to volunteer for service to the College should reach out directly to Dean Sandra Shannon.