

MUSIC THEATRE INTERNATIONAL

MUSIC THEATRE INTERNATIONAL is one of the world's major dramatic licensing agencies, specializing in Broadway, Off-Broadway and West End musicals. Since its founding in 1952, MTI has been responsible for supplying scripts and musical materials to theatres worldwide and for protecting the rights and legacy of the authors whom it represents. It has been a driving force in cultivating new work and in extending the production life of some of the classics: *Guys and Dolls*, *West Side Story*, *Fiddler On The Roof*, *Les Misérables*, *Annie*, *Of Thee I Sing*, *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Damn Yankees*, *The Music Man*, *Evita*, and the complete musical theatre works of composer/lyricist Stephen Sondheim, among others. Apart from the major Broadway and Off-Broadway shows, MTI is proud to represent youth shows, revues and musicals which began life in regional theatres and have since become worthy additions to the musical theatre canon. MTI shows have been performed by 30,000 amateur and professional theatrical organizations throughout the U.S. and Canada, and in over 60 countries around the world. Whether it's at a high school in Kansas, by an all-female troupe in Japan or the first production of *West Side Story* ever staged in Estonia, productions of MTI musicals involve over 10 million people each year.

Although we value all our clients, the twelve thousand high schools who perform our shows are of particular importance, for it is at these schools that music and drama educators work to keep theatre alive in their community. MTI shares with these educators the goal of raising the next generation of theatre artists and audiences. To help these educators, it has taken a leading role in theatre education by creating MTI THEATRICAL RESOURCES, a "theatrical tool box" designed to help not only ensure the success of each musical production, but also to establish the study of musical theatre as a permanent part of the school curriculum. These resources include: STUDY GUIDES designed to bring the study of specific shows into the classroom; MTI REHEARSCORES® which provide unlimited rehearsal accompaniment via an easy-to-use, fully interactive computer program on disk; professional TV SPOTS allowing companies to affordably advertise on television in local markets; LOGO PACKS to aide in poster and program design; TRANSPOSITIONS-ON-DEMAND to allow flexibility in casting and musical key changes; and VIDEO CONVERSATIONPIECES™ featuring video seminars with artists such as Martin Charnin, Stephen Sondheim and Scott Ellis discussing the creation of their shows from inception to production.

MTI is also a leader in providing materials to meet the increasing demand for symphonic arrangements of popular theatre music. The MTI CONCERT LIBRARY offers arrangements of selected songs, as well as full scores from Broadway shows.

Musicals are America's premiere contribution to the theatre and MTI is firmly committed to supporting and nurturing a musical theatre that will continue to develop and flourish into the next century.





HOW TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS WITHOUT REALLY TRYING!

Book by ABE BURROWS, JACK WEINSTOCK and WILLIE GILBERT
Based on the Novel by SHEPHERD MEAD
Music and Lyrics by FRANK LOESSER

How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying Lyrics © 1961, 1962 by Frank Music Corp.

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About How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying

How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying, the fourth musical to win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, is a brilliant satire of the world of Big Business as seen through the eyes of J. Pierrepont Finch, a disarming young man looking for an easy way to get to the top. The show, which has a book by Abe Burrows and a score by composer-lyricist Frank Loesser, opened on Broadway on October 14, 1961 and ran for 1,417 performances.

How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying was inspired by Shepherd Mead's tongue-in-cheek manual of the same name, in which he skewered American corporate life in the 1950s. Using as their point of departure Mead's Horatio Alger-like tale of an opportunist on the rise, Loesser and Burrows created a musical comedy masterpiece featuring a main character who got ahead not through hard work, but through a series of fiendishly well-formulated deceptions.

We watch as the opportunistic Finch rises from window washer to Chairman of the Board of the World Wide Wicket Company, relying on his "self-help" approach rather than on education, ability or intelligence.

The show's biting, clever book and score perfectly capture the "corporate world" and those held captive by it. The authors take on nepotism, old-school loyalty, coffee break obsessions, office parties and yes-men in this perfect send-up of the mores and morals of corporate life and the thirst for success.

"It is crafty, conniving, sneaky, irreverent, impertinent, sly, malicious, and lovely, just lovely," wrote Walter Kerr in the *Herald Tribune* in October 1961. "This is a musical with a mind."

The Characters in How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying

J. PIERREPONT FINCH: A young, ambitious window washer

ROSEMARY PILKINGTON: A secretary

J.B. BIGGLEY: President of the World Wide Wicket Company

BUD FRUMP: Biggley's nephew

HEDY LA RUE: Biggley's girlfriend

MISS JONES: Biggley's secretary

SMITTY: Rosemary's friend and Bratt's secretary

BERT BRATT: The Personnel Manager

MR. TWIMBLE: Head of the Mailroom

MR. GATCH: Head of the Plans and Systems Department

WALLY WOMPER: Chairman of the Board

BENJAMIN BURTON DANIEL OVINGTON: New head of the Advertising Department

OFFICE PERSONNEL:

MR. JENKINS

MR. JOHNSON

MR. MATTHEWS

MR. PETERSON

MR. TACKABERRY

MISS KRUMHOLTZ

MR. DAVIS

MR. TOYNBEE

COMPANY POLICEMAN

FIRST SCRUBWOMAN

SECOND SCRUBWOMAN

CHORUS

Plot Synopsis

Act I, Scene 1

J. Pierrepont Finch, a young window washer with large ambitions, is at work on the windows of the World Wide Wicket Company. He has a squeegee in one hand and a copy of the book *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, in the other. A disembodied voice (the voice of the book) announces that from the book's lessons, Finch will learn everything he needs to know to get ahead. Excited, Finch sings the titles of chapter headings in the book ("How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying") as his scaffold descends. He removes his overalls, under which he is wearing a business suit, and steps into an office tableau.

Scene 2

After accidentally knocking down J.B. Biggley, the feared president of the company, Finch announces he'd like a job. Biggley stuffily refers him to the personnel manager. Rosemary Pilkington, a secretary, is impressed by Finch's boldness. She offers to help him meet Mr. Bratt, the personnel manager, who initially treats Finch brusquely, warming only at the mention of Biggley's name. Finch ingenuously implies that he and Biggley are old friends, causing a marked change in Bratt's attitude. Finch is promptly given a job in the mailroom. One of his fellow workers is Mr. Biggley's nephew, Bud Frump, who never hesitates to use his familial position to get ahead. Rosemary, who dreams of married life in the suburbs with an executive, has taken a liking to Finch, and fantasizes about him to her friend Smitty ("Happy To Keep His Dinner Warm").

Scene 3

A coffee break is called, but the machine has run out of coffee. The caffeine-addicted office workers begin a frenzied dance ("Coffee Break"). Finch feels frustrated at having been at the company for a whole week without discernible advancement. Through Rosemary, Finch meets Miss Jones, Biggley's secretary. He flatters her and makes sure to put in a bad word against Bud Frump.

Scene 4

Twimble, the head of the mailroom, is moving to the shipping department and must choose his successor. He explains to Finch that a lack of ambition, a fear of being fired and an absolute trust in the company's wisdom have kept him happily in the mailroom for 25 years ("The Company Way"). He announces that Finch is his choice to head the mailroom. Finch — as per the book's careful instructions — insists that Bud

be given the job instead, for the good of the company. This impresses Twimble and Bratt, and Bratt offers Finch a job as a junior executive in the Plans and Systems Department, which is headed by Gatch. Realizing he has been outmaneuvered, Frump fumes.

Scenes 5 and 6

Biggley arranges a secretarial job for his beautiful mistress, Hedy La Rue, formerly the cigarette girl at the Copa. Her entrance attracts the attention of all the men in the office, prompting Bratt to explain the office policy on flirting (“A Secretary is Not a Toy”).

Scene 7

It is late Friday afternoon, the end of the work week. As they wait for the elevators, the secretaries complain of unwanted attention from their male bosses, while the men talk of sales figures. The ever-attentive Finch discovers that Mr. Biggley is a proud graduate of Old Ivy. He also learns Biggley will be returning to the office Saturday morning to retrieve his golf clubs for a game with Wally Womper, the Chairman of the Board. Rosemary arrives at the elevator with Smitty, who knows that despite their awkward silences, Rosemary and Finch like each other (“Been a Long Day”). Smitty recommends a dinner special for two at a nearby restaurant, and Rosemary and Finch decide to take advantage of it. After they leave, Bud Frump runs into Hedy and Biggley, who are arguing about her job. Bud surmises the nature of their relationship and threatens to tell his mother, Biggley’s sister-in-law, if Biggley doesn’t guarantee him a promotion (Reprise: “Been a Long Day”). Biggley is trapped and Frump, like Finch, is on his way up the corporate ladder.

Scene 8

It is Saturday morning. Finch, knowing Biggley is coming to retrieve his golf clubs, shows up at the office before Biggely arrives and creates a mess to suggest he has been working there all night. When Biggley arrives, Finch begins “absent-mindedly” humming Old Ivy’s fight song, suggesting to Biggley that they are both Old Ivy graduates (“Grand Old Ivy”).

Scenes 9 and 10

Biggley demands Finch be given his own office and secretary. Bratt assigns Hedy La Rue to him. The book has warned him about just such inadequate secretarial help — Hedy has many skills, but typing and shorthand aren’t among them. When Finch discovers Biggley is Hedy’s sponsor, he sends her to Gatch on an errand, knowing Gatch will make a pass at her. Soon Finch is sitting at the desk of the now Venezuela-bound Gatch.

Scenes 11 and 12

Rosemary hopes to win Finch over with her new dress, a Paris original, at the reception for new Advertising Department head Benjamin Burton Daniel Ovington. When she arrives at the party, Rosemary sees that every woman there is wearing the same dress (“Paris Original”). Hedy has too much to drink, and Biggley orders Bud to take her home.

Scenes 13 and 14

Hedy goes up to Biggley’s office to take a shower. As she showers, Bud tells Finch that Biggley is waiting to see him there. Bud goes off to find Biggley, hoping to trap Finch with Hedy. Hedy finds Finch in the office and makes a play for him, but when she kisses him he realizes he loves Rosemary, who enters as Hedy returns to the bathroom. Finch proposes to her (“Rosemary”). As Rosemary is about to accept, Hedy comes out of the bathroom in a towel. Rosemary angrily leaves the office, but returns to announce that Bud and Biggley are just outside the door. Hedy goes back into the bathroom, and Finch and Rosemary embrace as Biggley enters the room — Bud’s plan is foiled. Bratt and Ovington enter, looking for Biggley. Ovington is forced to resign after Finch prompts him to reveal that his alma mater is the arch-rival of Old Ivy. Biggley then makes Finch Vice-President in Charge of Advertising, just in time for a big strategy meeting two days later. Biggley departs, leaving Finch and Rosemary alone again. They declare their love for each other as Bud vows to stop Finch’s meteoric rise (“Finale — Act One”).

Act II, Scene 1

It is the morning of the big meeting. Rosemary, feeling neglected by Finch, has decided to quit. Smitty and the other women in the office convince her that she can’t quit and remind her that she’s living their dream of marrying an executive (“Cinderella, Darling”).

Scene 2

Finch is quite pleased with his promotion, though the book sternly warns that this new advertising job is a dangerous position. However, as long as he already has the job, the book suggests that the one way to save his situation is to come up with a good idea. Unfortunately, Finch doesn’t have one. The book foresees this and suggests that he steal someone else’s. It is at this moment that Bud Frump approaches him with the idea for a televised treasure hunt. Delighted, Finch adopts the notion, unaware that Biggley has already heard the idea and shot it down. Finch tries the idea out on Rosemary, who responds by telling Finch she loves him (Reprise: “Happy to Keep His Dinner Warm”).

Scene 3

Hedy, unhappy with her secretarial duties, announces to Biggley that she is quitting. Biggley pleads with her to stay (“Love From a Heart of Gold”).

Scene 4

In the executive washroom, Bud assures the other executives that Finch’s presentation will flop and end his rapid rise in the company. Finch enters and gives himself a pep talk before the meeting as he washes his hands (“I Believe in You”).

Scene 5

Finch presents his idea for a televised treasure hunt/give-away: he will hide five thousand shares of company stock in each of the ten company offices around the country, and give the audience weekly clues as to their whereabouts. Biggley doesn’t like the idea until Finch explains that each week’s clue will be given by the scantily-dressed World Wide Wicket Treasure Girl, Hedy La Rue.

Scene 6

During the first television show, Hedy, as the Treasure Girl, is asked to swear on a Bible that she doesn’t know the location of the treasure. She can’t lie: the previous night Biggley told her the treasure is located in each of the ten company buildings — a fact she relates to the entire television audience.

Scene 7 and 8

Eager treasure hunters have wrecked the World Wide Wicket office, and the executives, including Chairman of the Board Wally Womper, are waiting in Biggley’s office for Finch to appear to hand in his resignation. Rosemary, told by Finch that he’ll probably have to go back to washing windows, assures him she’ll still love him just as Bud arrives to take Finch up to the office.

Scene 9 and 9A

Finch, about to sign his letter of resignation, reveals he was a window washer before coming to the company. This immediately draws the admiration and trust of Womper, also a former window washer. Finch adroitly places the blame for the give-away show on Bud. He also tells Womper that Bud is Biggley’s nephew. Womper is about to fire all the executives when Finch convinces him to spare them, telling him that everybody is part of the human family (“Brotherhood of Man”). Bud Frump, however, is fired and escorted out of the office.

Scene 10

The show ends with the announcement to the employees that Biggley is still the president, that Womper is retiring to travel the world with his new wife, Hedy, and that the new Chairman of the Board is Finch. Finch calls Rosemary to his side as he starts to think about capturing the Presidency of the country. Outside, Bud Frump is seen on a window-washing scaffold, reading *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* ("Finale").

Themes and Topics to Explore

Questions and Assignments

Our study guide includes a wide-ranging list of themes and topics suggested by the style and content of *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*.

Avenues for exploring each theme and topic are suggested in the form of:

QUESTIONS: Designed to prompt in-class discussions before and after viewing or reading the show.

ASSIGNMENTS: Designed to be researched and written out of class.

How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying as Drama

Questions and Discussion Prompts

- Tell the story of *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* in one sentence.
- Tell the story in one paragraph — include all the main characters.
- Tell the story as it develops, action by action, through the play.
- Tell the story as a series of causes and effects. List each action taken by a character (cause) and what happens in the story as a result (effect).
- When did the action of the show first grab your attention? Where did you start to become interested, care about the characters and plot, become excited or delighted?
- Turning points are key moments in our lives or in the lives of characters in musicals and plays. A turning point changes the course of our lives forever. What are the key turning points in the plot of this show?
- What is the theme of the show? How do theme and plot differ?

Assignments: Writing Prompts

- Retell the basic story of *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, setting it in a present-day business in your community. Does anything about the contemporary setting change the basic structure of the plot?
- The final twist in the plot of *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* involves Mr. Womper. What is it? In classical drama the Greeks often ended their plays with a *deus ex machina*. Find out what this term means. Is the plot twist involving Womper a *deus ex machina*? Why or why not?
- Imagine you are writing a non-comic piece dealing with the same issues as the show. How would you address these concerns in a serious way?
- *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* is a satire. What is a satire? Write a satirical essay or short play about an institution you think deserves to be spoofed.

The Characters In How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying

Questions and Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between a major and minor character? Who are the major characters in *How to Succeed...?* Who are the minor characters?
- Who was your favorite character? Why?
- With which character did you identify most? Why?
- With which character did you sympathize most? Why?
- Did you recognize anything in any of the characters that reminded you of yourself?
- Does Finch change by the time the play ends? If so, was it for the better? Would you be spoiled by such rapid success?
- What do you think is more important: the musical play as it is written down or as it is brought to life by the performers? Which one is the “real” play?
- Is Rosemary a real-life Cinderella, as her friends describe her? Does she have ambitions of her own?

Assignments: Research and Writing Prompts

- List characteristics about Finch, Rosemary, Bud Frump, J.B. Biggley and Hedy La Rue. Where did you learn this information? From dialogue? Lyrics? Music? Design elements such as costumes, etc.?
- What do you think happens to each of these characters after the show ends?
- When playwrights create characters, they often invent “character maps” before they begin to write. These “maps” list everything about the characters, from their favorite color to their political beliefs. A character map tells us what is in that character’s pockets and that character’s heart. Write a character map for Finch and Rosemary based on details of your own invention.
- “Back stories” are the histories of characters before we meet them. Tell the “back stories” of Finch and Rosemary.
- Create a character map for a character other than Finch or Rosemary. Does your map suggest ways in which that character could be more important in the show?
- Create a character map for a character of your own invention. Write a short story about the character, using the map as a departure point.
- Describe a typical day in Finch’s life — perhaps the day before we meet him in the show.

The Theme of “Getting Ahead” In How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying

Questions and Discussion Prompts

- What does “getting ahead” mean?
- If you were trying to move through the ranks in a competitive work situation, what strategies would you use to accomplish your goals?
- What are some of the specific techniques Finch used in his attempt to “get ahead”?
- Does Finch have any real aptitude for business?
- What finally seems to stop Finch from succeeding during his struggle to “get ahead”? What reverses this situation?
- What comment are the authors making about “getting ahead” when Bud Frump appears on the window-washing scaffolding with a copy of the book Finch used throughout the show?
- The author of the book Finch is reading suggests that “thousands have reached the top” without education, intelligence or ability. Do you think this is either true or possible? Why or why not?
- Do you think a past school affiliation such as the one Biggley assumes he and Finch share actually makes a difference in the job market or in the process of getting promotions? Why or why not?
- What, if anything, does Finch learn about “getting ahead” at the end of the piece?

Assignments: Research and Writing Prompts

- Have you ever used a strategy comparable to Finch’s to get what you thought you wanted? How successful were you? Describe your efforts to “get ahead” and their consequences.
- Have you ever observed someone using a strategy comparable to Finch’s to “get ahead” in a social, school or work situation? Describe those efforts and the outcome of the strategy.
- Interview individuals who have succeeded in a particular field. Ask them what kind of strategy they used (if any) to achieve that success.
- Do you agree with Finch that “mediocrity is not a mortal sin”? Write your answer in essay form.

Self-Help Books

- Throughout the show, Finch refers to the book *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, which is a self-help book. What is a self-help book?
- Do self-help books still exist? What are examples of current popular self-help books?
- Why do people turn to self-help books? What do self-help books replace? Where else might people turn for this kind of wisdom and insight? What does it say about our society that a large number of people turn to self-help books?
- At what key moments of the show does Finch use tips from his self-help book successfully?

Assignments: Research and Writing Prompts

- Have you ever used a self-help book? Describe the experience. What motivated you to use the book? Was it helpful?
- Go to a bookstore and look at the self-help books currently available. Make a list of their titles. Analyze what areas of life they seem to concern.
- Browse through the business section of the library and check out a self-help book whose purpose is to motivate the reader to succeed. Read the book and compare it to the book Finch reads throughout the play.
- Check out of the library a self-help book that directly addresses an “issue” of your own, such as succeeding in a social situation, dieting or fear of public speaking. Evaluate the practical and emotional support you find in the book. Was this book useful in addressing the issue?
- Research the figure of Horatio Alger. When were his characters popular? Why has his name become linked with a struggle for success? How does Alger’s approach to accomplishment differ from that of Finch? In what ways is this show spoofing the Alger myth? Write your own parody of the Horatio Alger story using characters from your own life.

Corporate Life

Questions and Discussion Prompts

- What aspects of corporate life do the authors parody in this show?
- How has Bud Frump gotten his corporate position? What is the source of his power?
- What kinds of roles do women play in the corporate world portrayed in the show? Does Rosemary aspire to be a major player in the corporate structure? What is her job? What are her aspirations?

- When the coffee runs out, the workers at World Wide Wickets lose control of themselves. Why is coffee such an important part of life in an office setting? Is the need for coffee at certain times of the day a socially-sanctioned addiction?
- Does Finch place any value on interpersonal relationships during his climb to the top? Discuss the ways in which he manipulates Miss Jones and Mr. Gatch.
- Trace Finch's relationship with Rosemary. How does it fit into the corporate setting? Do you think relationships can exist within corporate settings?
- What issues are addressed in the song "A Secretary Is Not A Toy"? In what ways was this song ahead of its time? How are these issues dealt with today?
- Mr. Twimble, who runs the mailroom, sings the song "The Company Way" to describe his philosophy of existing successfully in corporate life. Could you be satisfied doing things "the company way"? What are the rewards of such a philosophy? What are the dangers?
- What does Twimble mean when he says "I have no point of view"?
- While he is "conning" Mr. Twimble, Finch begins spouting clichés and platitudes. What are clichés and platitudes? Why are they at home in a corporate setting?
- As head of his company, Mr. Biggley should be its moral and ethical center. What kind of leader is Mr. Biggley? What interests primarily motivate his behavior? How does his inability to keep his personal life out of his professional life set important plot developments in motion? Do you think real executives ever behave like Mr. Biggley?
- What does Finch pretend to have in common with Biggley?

Assignments: Research and Writing Prompts

- Describe a contemporary version of this show in which Rosemary is as ambitious as Finch.
- If you were Rosemary, would you have been as patient and long-suffering in your pursuit of Finch? What comment are the authors making about corporate male-female relationships in their portrayal of Rosemary?
- Think of a moment in the life of an office (like the coffee break) that could be interpreted in dance and song. Write a short story about it.
- Have you ever known someone like Mr. Twimble, who does things "the company way"? Write about that person. What do you admire about this individual? What do you not admire?
- List as many clichés and platitudes as you can. Look in the reference section of your library and find a book of clichés. List those that are new to you.

- Make up ten new platitudes similar to Finch's "the whole omelet is bigger than any egg."
- Interview a female worker who is a secretary. Read her the lyric for "A Secretary Is Not A Toy." Ask her whether she feels the situations in the song still exist.
- Research cases of law suits related to claims of sexual harassment in the office setting.
- Write about an experience you have had with a "yes-man," in a school, work or family situation.
- Read about nepotism in American business and industry. Write a profile of a business that has been victimized by nepotism.

Quick Takes: Further Prompts For Writing and Discussion

- Mr. Biggley is enchanted with the notion that he and Finch both attended the same college. What role do you think the college one attends plays in corporate success?
- Rosemary arrives at a party wearing the same outfit as other women guests. Has this ever happened to you or anyone you know? How would you feel if this happened?
- What makes Finch realize he loves Rosemary? Have you ever had strong feelings for someone? Were you aware of those feelings during the early stages of your relationship? What made you get in touch with those feelings?
- What is the role of office gossip in *How to Succeed...?* Have you ever worked or studied in a setting where gossip was part of the daily routine? Is gossip detrimental to a good work environment? Can it ever be productive or positive?
- The Treasure Hunt sequence in the show spoofs popular television shows of the 1950s. Research the quiz shows of the 1950s. Write your own spoof based on what you learn about them. Have quiz shows fundamentally changed? What do quiz shows and Finch's philosophy have in common?
- What do you think is actually manufactured at World Wide Wickets? What are the authors spoofing with the use of the word "wickets"?

Adaptation and Musical Theatre

- *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* is based on a book by the same name by Shepherd Mead. Musical theatre works are frequently adapted from sources such as plays, novels, fairy tales, short stories, films and television shows. How many examples of musical theatre works adapted from such source materials can you name?
- Name five musical theatre works not based on any other sources.

- What does a team of musical theatre collaborators add to a work from another medium in adapting it for the musical stage?
- Read biographies of the show's creators to learn about the process of adapting this show from a book to the stage.

Assignments: Research and Writing Prompts

- Read Shepherd Mead's *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. How does the show differ from the book?
- What was the source material for the following musicals:

Fiddler on the Roof

Hello, Dolly!

Sweet Charity

The King and I

Cabaret

Guys and Dolls

A Little Night Music

South Pacific

- Select a non-fiction book, satirical book, play or group of short stories you think would make a strong musical theatre work.
 - Why do you think this piece “sings”? What is inherently musical about it? What can music add?
 - What elements of the source would be hard to transfer to musical theatre form?
 - Outline a musical theatre work based on your source. What role would music play? Would the text be completely sung, or would the work include dialogue as well as songs? What role would dance play in your work? What would be the musical style of your adaptation?

How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying as Musical Theatre

Questions and Discussion Prompts

- Would an adaptation of this source material be as successful without music? Why or why not? What does the score contribute to the basic storyline? How does it move the action of the show forward? What does the music tell us that we might not otherwise know?
- How do the songs help us to understand the larger themes of the show?

- Did the music and lyrics evoke time and place for you? When and where did you imagine the show taking place? What prompted you to imagine this setting?
- In what ways are the songs indispensable to the plot?
- Describe what you hear in the music for the song “Coffee Break.” How does the music suggest the frenzy of the addicted coffee drinkers? Think of other physical or emotional states that could be conveyed in music.
- The sounds of the office are a central part of the musical landscape of the songs “A Secretary Is Not A Toy” and “I Believe In You.” What sounds in a contemporary office could become part of a musical landscape? What kitchen sounds could function this way? Highway sounds? Construction site sounds?
- Is the music in the show ever humorous? Where?
- Is there a conventional love song in the show? What does your answer indicate about the show?
- Discuss the ways in which music and lyrics can compress and elevate the importance of information.
- How does dance help communicate information about the office in “A Secretary Is Not A Toy” and “Coffee Break”?

Assignments: Research and Writing Prompts

- Why do theatre song lyrics rhyme? Write a few verses in prose about something you wish would happen. Then write it in rhyme. How is the experience of writing in the two forms different?
- What role does music play in your life? Which moments in your life might be set to music? Describe these moments in prose. Try to turn one of your descriptions into a lyric.
- Select one of the following songs or musical segments of *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*:

“How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying”

“Happy To Keep His Dinner Warm”

“Coffee Break”

“The Company Way”

“A Secretary Is Not A Toy”

“Been A Long Day”

“Grand Old Ivy”

“Paris Original”

“Rosemary”

“Cinderella, Darling”

“Love From A Heart of Gold”

“I Believe In You”

“Brotherhood Of Man”

Discuss this song in terms of the following:

- a. What do we learn about the singing character or characters? What do we learn about each character’s personal philosophy?
 - b. How does the song relate to the larger themes of the show?
 - c. What makes singing appropriate at this moment (e.g., does the emotional energy of the moment make song more appropriate than dialogue)?
 - d. Does the song further the action of the plot? How?
 - e. Every dramatic scene has a “main beat” or central moment of importance. Is the song the “main beat” of the scene in which it appears?
 - f. Does the song exist in real time (i.e., does each minute of stage time represent one minute of actual time in the world of the play)? Or does it take place in suspended time (does it magnify or expand the moment temporally) or compressed time (does it speed up time)?
 - g. What is the physical action of the singing character or characters during the song?
- What is a “reprise”? What is its function? What do you know when you hear a reprise of a song you didn’t know the first time you heard the song? Which of the songs are reprised? Discuss the way in which the song “Rosemary” is reprised at the end of Act I.
 - Imagine you are asked to create a new song or musical sequence for the show. Who would sing it? Where in the show would it take place? What would it be about? What kind of music would it involve?
 - Often in the musical theatre, special musical material is written to suit a particular star’s personality and abilities. The role of J.B. Biggley was tailored to the specific personal style of its original star, Rudy Vallee. Find recordings of other Rudy Vallee songs. What similarities do you find between these songs and the songs created for Biggley to sing? Can you think of other Broadway performers for whom special material has been created?

The Creators of Musical Theatre

Questions and Discussions Prompts

- What is the meaning of the word “collaboration”? Why is the process of having more than one person create a musical a “collaboration”?
- How do you imagine a librettist, composer and lyricist work together?

Assignments: Research and Writing Prompts

- Read a biography or autobiography of a famous musical theatre collaborator or collaborative team. Report on their creative and/or collaborative process.
- Read and listen to other works by Frank Loesser and Abe Burrows to obtain a broader view of their approach to their craft and a deeper understanding of their artistic sensibilities.

The AABA Song Form

Questions and Discussion Prompts

- Just as stories can be divided into paragraphs, songs can be divided into sections called stanzas. The arrangement of ideas into stanzas and the placement of these stanzas in relation to each other are very carefully thought out by the composer and the lyricist when they create a song. Songs may be arranged in different patterns, depending on which structure best serves their meaning. One classic pattern is called “AABA.” “Coffee Break” is an example of an AABA song.

FRUMP:

- (A) If I can't take my coffee break,
My coffee break, my coffee break,
If I can't take my coffee break,
Something within me dies...

ALL:

Lies down and something within me dies!

SMITTY:

- (A) If I can't make three daily trips
Where shining shrine benignly drips,
And taste cardboard between my lips, —
Something within me dies...

ALL:

Lies down and something within me dies!

A DANCER:

No coffee, no coffee, no coffee, no coffee,

A DANCER:

No coffee, no coffee,

ALL DANCERS:

No coffee, no coffee, no coffee.

SMITTY:

- (B) That office light doesn't have to be fluorescent,
I'll get no pains in the head.
That office chair doesn't have to be foam rubber,
So if I spread, so I spread.
But only one chemical substance
Gets out the lead!

ALL:

Like she said!

- (A') If I can't take my coffee break,
My coffee break, my coffee break,
If I can't take my coffee break,

SMITTY AND BUD:

Gone is the sense of enterprise...

ALL:

All gone and something within me dies.

No coffee, no coffee, no coffee.

A DANCER:

No coffee.

ALL:

No coffee, no coffee, no coffee, no coffee, no coffee,
No coffee.

If I can't take my coffee break,

SMITTY:

Somehow the soul no longer tries...

ALL:

Coffee, coffee!

BUD:
Somewhere I don't metabolize...

ALL:
Coffee, coffee!

SMITTY AND BUD:
Something within me...

ALL:
Coffee or otherwise, coffee or otherwise,
Coffee or otherwise,
Something inside of me... dies!

- The stanzas (or sections) of this song are arranged in a classic AABA pattern. This means 3 sections (*As*) are basically alike and one section (*B*) is different. Can you find the *A* stanzas and the *B* stanza in the song?
- The last *A* stanza in an *AABA* song is often somewhat different in design from the first two *As*. Is this true of this song? An *A* stanza that is slightly different in design from the other *As* in an *AABA* song is called an *A'* ("*A prime*").
- Each section of an *AABA* song has a job to do.

The first part of the song (the first *A*) sets up the situation. How does the first *A* of "Coffee Break" accomplish this?

The second *A* further describes the situation and deepens its importance to the singer. How does the second *A* in "Coffee Break" accomplish this?

The third section (the *B*) of an *AABA* song moves the action of the song forward. How does the *B* section of "Coffee Break" accomplish this?

The final section (the *A'*) intensifies the emotion and the stakes, summarizing the message of the song. How is this accomplished in the last *A* section of "Coffee Break"?

- Listen to the song. How does the music for the *B* section differ from that of the *A* sections? How does the music for the *A'* section differ from that of the *A* sections? How does the music reinforce what is happening in the song?
- Many songs are organized around a key or central idea. This idea is called a "hook" because it grabs the interest of the listener and brings the listener into the song. The hook is often the same as the title of the song. What is the hook of "Coffee Break"?

- Does understanding the form of a song help you to appreciate it more, or does it get in the way of your listening to it effectively?

Assignments: Research and Writing Prompts

- Think of a current pop song arranged in an *AABA* format. Analyze it according to the process outlined above. Often pop songs do not have as much dramatic action as theatre songs. Does the character in your pop song progress in understanding his or her situation during the course of the song? What is the hook of the song?
- Write the lyric and/or music for an *AABA* song on a subject you feel deeply about, for a character of your own invention. Be sure to use a hook.

Create Your Own Musical

- Select a classic play that could be turned into a musical.
- What elements of this classic play make it relevant today?
- What would be the setting of your musical, in terms of time and place? Would you use the play's original setting, a contemporary setting, etc.?
- Why would this play make a good musical? How would it "sing"?
- What role would music play in your work? What kind of music would your characters sing?
- Outline your musical scene by scene.
- Make a list of the characters.
- Make a list of musical sequences you would include.
- Would your work include dance? How would dance be used?
- Try to write the first scene, a turning point scene and the final scene of your musical.
- Try to write a lyric or melody for one of the songs.
- Design your own sets and costumes for *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. Explain the reasons behind your choices.

Critical Analysis

Assignment: Writing Report

- Write a review of a performance of *How to Succeed...* You may wish to include any of the following elements in your review:
 1. Did the show hold your interest? Why?

2. Describe the manner in which the story was presented to the audience. What was the dialogue like?
3. What was the structure of the story? Was there one story or were there multiple stories? Was there anything unexpected about the story? How did the story begin and end?
4. Describe the way music and lyrics worked in the show.
5. Describe the sets, costumes, lighting and musical accompaniment. How did these elements add meaning to the show?
6. Discuss the effectiveness of the performers.
7. Discuss the ideas presented in the show. Analyze their importance to your reader.
8. Explain why your reader should make an effort to see the show.

Appendix

The following background material and bibliography are designed to enrich your exploration of the Themes and Topics.

About The Creators:

FRANK LOESSER (Music and Lyrics): One of America's great composer/lyricists, Frank Loesser began his songwriting career during the Depression as a lyricist, contributing songs to Broadway revues and nightclub acts. His work with composer Irving Actman in the 1936 revue *The Illustrator's Show* led to a songwriting contract in Hollywood, where he spent the next eleven years working with such composers as Burton Lane, Jule Styne, Arthur Schwartz and Hoagy Carmichael. Some of his film songs from that period include "Two Sleepy People," "Jingle Jangle Jingle" and "I Don't Want To Walk Without You." The first song for which Loesser wrote both words and music was "Praise The Lord And Pass The Ammunition," written during his World War II service. His Hollywood work after the war included the hit songs "Spring Will Be A Little Late This Year," "A Slow Boat To China," and the 1949 Oscar-winning song "Baby, It's Cold Outside." In 1948 Loesser was approached by fledgling Broadway producers Cy Feuer and Ernest Martin to write music and lyrics to George Abbott's libretto for an adaptation of the classic Brandon Thomas play *Charley's Aunt*. The new musical, which starred Ray Bolger, was called *Where's Charley?* and was a hit. This led to Loesser's next show, the hugely influential and successful *Guys and Dolls* (1950), also produced by Feuer and Martin, with a script was by Abe Burrows and Jo Swerling. In 1956 Loesser wrote the libretto, music and lyrics for his next show, *The Most Happy Fella*, adapted from Sidney Howard's play, *They Knew What They Wanted*. This impressive score contains over 30 musical numbers and makes extensive use of operatic techniques and forms, including recitative, arias, duets, trios and choral numbers. In 1960 he provided the score and was co-librettist for *Greenwillow*. In 1961, Loesser wrote the score for the Pulitzer Prize-winning *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. His last show, *Pleasures and Palaces*, closed in 1965 during out-of-town try-outs.

ABE BURROWS (Co-librettist/Director): After studying to be a doctor and an accountant, Abe Burrows had a career in sales before becoming a successful radio script writer and writer/performer of musical parody numbers. His first Broadway libretto was *Guys and Dolls*, co-written with Jo Swerling, with a score by Frank Loesser. Among the musicals for which he provided librettos are *Make A Wish*, *Can-Can* and *Silk Stockings* (both with scores by Cole Porter), *Say, Darling*, and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* (which he also directed; score by Frank Loesser). His non-musical plays include *Cactus Flower* (wrote and directed) and *Forty Carats* (directed).

WILLIE GILBERT & JACK WEINSTOCK (Co-librettists): Jack Weinstock, a native New Yorker who attended Columbia College and was a graduate of NYU's Bellevue Medical College, was in private life a doctor. He did not start to write professionally until he met his collaborator Willie Gilbert, first as a patient and then as a friend. Willie Gilbert, who came from Cleveland, Ohio, received a B.S. in education, but pursued a career as a comedian. Together Gilbert and Weinstock won Tony Awards as co-writers of *How to Succeed...* Subsequent stage credits include the 1963 musical comedy *Hot Spot* and the 1965 hit comedy mystery *Catch Me If You Can*. TV credits range from science fiction to classic children's shows like "Howdy Doody," and sketches for comedian Jackie Gleason. In addition to his successful writing career, "Dr. Jack" (as Weinstock's friends called him) successfully lived two lives, one as author and one as doctor. He was medical director of a life insurance company, surgeon at two hospitals, and had a Fifth Avenue medical practice. Jack Weinstock died in 1969. Willie Gilbert died in 1980.

BOB FOSSE (Musical Staging): A prolific and highly influential choreographer and director, Fosse was one of the people most responsible for elevating the importance of the dance director in the Broadway musical. He began his professional career dancing in such Broadway shows as *Call Me Mister*, *Make Mine Manhattan* and *Dance Me A Song*. He also appeared in Hollywood musicals, including *Kiss Me, Kate*. In addition to *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, Fosse choreographed *The Pajama Game* (1954), *Damn Yankees* (1955), *Bells Are Ringing* (1956) and *New Girl In Town* (1957), and both directed and choreographed *Redhead* (1959), *Little Me* (1962; co-directed by Cy Feuer), *Sweet Charity* (1966), *Pippin* (1972), *Chicago* (1975), *Dancin'* (1978) and *Big Deal* (1986). He recreated his original choreography for the film versions of *The Pajama Game* and *Damn Yankees*, directed and choreographed the films *Sweet Charity*, *Cabaret* and *All That Jazz*, and directed the films *Lenny* and *Star 80*. He is the only person to have won a Tony, Oscar and Emmy Award in the same year (all three were for Best Director, 1972). Bob Fosse died in 1987.

About Corporate Life and the Organization Man

Until the last decades of the 19th century the structure of the American economy was characterized by small businesses, mostly proprietorships and partnerships. Most Americans lived in rural areas, farming the land or working in a small business. This economic structure conformed with the popular idealized image of the American as rugged individualist. During the years 1890-1910, a wave of mergers and consolidations created huge business entities which controlled entire sectors of the economy, wiping out many small firms in the process and permanently changing the structure of the American economy. The wave of consolidations became so extensive that single companies controlled every aspect of raw material acquisition, production and distribution. This process of consolidation has continued; today, a handful of companies account for most of the revenue created by businesses worldwide. As businesses

continue to grow they expand across national boundaries, seeking new markets and labor. Factories move to countries where labor is cheaper. In America this has meant a decrease in manufacturing jobs, and an increase in the non-manufacturing sector, which includes banking, information, and health care services.

Rugged individualism is not necessarily welcome in an economic landscape dominated by huge corporate concerns. As early as the late 19th century, individuals like Frederick Taylor studied workers in an effort to increase their productivity. These efforts led, in the early 20th century, to the development of an industrial psychology. Managers learned how to arrange the work day, the work space, and all the relationships therein to increase worker satisfaction and productivity. Workers were encouraged to identify their success with the company's success. In 1956 writer William Whyte named this new breed of company- or organization-identified people "Organization Men." Their goal was to survive in the organizational hierarchy by not stressing their individuality. They placed their hopes for the future in the company's hands and looked to the company as a place of security and identification.

Depictions of the Organization Man proliferated in Post-World War II American popular culture. In the 1950s and 1960s, television shows featured husbands who donned sports jackets and trench coats to catch the train to city office jobs, and mothers who wore fashionable dresses and jewelry to stay home and prepare dinner for their family. Television became less and less interested in images of rugged, self-sufficient individuals. Conformity was the underlying message of many of the most popular shows.

In 1952 Shepherd Mead, a novelist and advertising executive, wrote a satirical instruction book for getting ahead in the corporate environment, *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. It counseled flattery, flirting, manipulation and nepotism as the best ways to professional advancement in the corporate world.

About Comedy and Satire

Comedy, like tragedy, is based on the idea that life results in constant contradictions between mankind's social and animal needs. But unlike tragedy, comedy offers a way out of these contradictions.

Comedy often concerns itself with the tension between a character's self-perception and how that character is perceived by others.

Although comedy is usually intended to amuse, there have been many forms of comedy in the history of Western literature that have had other purposes. For example, comedy can serve as a mirror of society, reflecting its vices so society can correct them. This type of comedy is called satire. The best satire can be quite sharp and cutting. *How to Succeed...* is an excellent example of this. The remarkable power of satire has even provoked many governments throughout history to ban satirical works.

About How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying

With Mead's book a success, playwright Willie Gilbert and neurosurgeon Jack Weinstock wrote a dramatic adaptation in 1955. The play remained unproduced until 1960, when theatrical agent Abe Newborn brought it to the attention of Broadway producers Cy Feuer and Ernest Martin, who thought the play could work as a musical. Feuer and Martin had had a huge success with *Guys and Dolls* in 1950 and asked the authors of that show, librettist Abe Burrows and composer/lyricist Frank Loesser, to write the adaptation. Burrows and Loesser turned it into a highly integrated and hilariously cynical show, with songs as biting and satirical as the book from which they sprang (for example, the closest thing to a love song in the show is sung by the main character to himself).

Rehearsals began in August, 1961, with Robert Morse, fresh from a Broadway success in Burrows's *Say, Darling*, as Finch, the ambitious window washer. Rounding out the principal cast were Charles Nelson Reilly as Bud Frump (the boss's equally ambitious nephew), Bonnie Scott as Rosemary, and 1920s/30s recording star Rudy Vallee as J.B. Biggley (the stuffy philandering company president). The choreography was credited to both Hugh Lambert and Bob Fosse although Fosse, already an experienced choreographer, contributed most of the big ensemble numbers; Lambert's contribution seems to have consisted of mainly the TV Treasure Hunt number. Burrows directed and Loesser co-produced.

The show opened in October, 1961, to almost unanimous raves from the critics. It ran a total of 1,417 performances, winning multiple Tony Awards (including Best Musical, Best Book of a Musical, Best Director of a Musical, Best Actor in a Musical, Best Supporting Actor in a Musical, and Best Musical Director), a New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, and a Pulitzer Prize for Drama, only the fourth awarded to a musical.

Critical Acclaim

"Eleven years ago next month *Guys and Dolls* opened at the 46th St. Theatre. It was the definitive musical about low life in New York. Last Saturday evening practically the same crew offered the definitive musical about high life in the city. This is not the high life of social doings and misdoings, but what goes on up in the upper reaches of an office building. What goes on up here is murder — murder by stiletto, by poison, by decapitation. This splendidly sardonic account of Big Business is an example of perfect musical comedy construction, swift, sharp, jam-packed with characters and incident and clear-headed as it moves unerringly through an interesting and funny story. Loesser is the perfect man for his end of the show — the songs; for he is a cynic without being tough. He has not put in a note of music or a syllable of lyric that doesn't carry the story along..."

— John Chapman, *Daily News*, October 16, 1961

“Not a sincere line is spoken in the new Abe Burrows-Frank Loesser musical, and what a relief that is. It is now clear that what has been killing musical comedy is sincerity. What most distinguishes a sassy, gay, and exhilarating evening is — you’ll never believe this — the book. Abe Burrows has done it, with acknowledged help from Jack Weinstock and Willie Gilbert. But what has happened is that, for the first time really, an entire musical comedy has been fashioned along the deadpan, and deadly, lines of Mr. Burrows’ celebrated piano parodies. A bland and caustic kidding of the American success story goes on all evening, without ever losing its frosty and lunatic attitude. Gags are subordinated to impish running commentary; Mr. Loesser’s perky score is subordinated to the merry malice that is afoot; meaningful fantasy is given its head, and the point of view grins and glows with its own cocksure effrontery.”

— Walter Kerr, *Herald Tribune*, October 16, 1961

“The most inventive and stylized and altogether infectious new musical in recent recollection opened at the 46th St. Theatre Saturday night and should remain there until the building wears out. It is the sheerest farce, down to the last paper clip, there isn’t a smidgen of ‘heart’ on the horizon, and honesty is consistently the worst policy. It is gay, zingy, amoral, witty, and shot with style. It comes very close to being a new form in musicals. The score by Mr. Loesser is not great by ‘pop’ standards; it is better than that. All the music has been integrated into the plot, to fit the mood as well as the momentum. His lyrics are generally superb; thoughtful, witty, and often hilarious. The numbers, under Bob Fosse’s direction (with special credit to Hugh Lambert), are a whole new chapter in ingenuity. In most of these people jiggle on and off in little groups, the beats are small and fast, building to a story climax when the stage is filled for the finish, and the audience screams.”

— John McClain, *Journal-American*, October 16, 1961

“It’s an open question whether big business in America should be warier of trust busters than of this new musical. The antitrust watchdogs can crack a mean whip, but *How to Succeed* applies a gigantic hotfoot. It stings mischievously and laughs uproariously. Big business is not likely to be the same again; it will be so busy chuckling at its reflection in this impish mirror of a musical that it won’t have time to do big business. But you can bet this show will. It belongs to the blue chips among modern musicals. Let Wall Street and Madison Avenue tremble as the rest of us rejoice... Imagine a combination of Horatio Alger and Machiavelli and you have Finch, the intrepid young hero of this sortie into the canyons of commerce. As played with unfaltering bravura and wit by Robert Morse, he is a rumpled, dimpled angel with a streak of Lucifer. Butter couldn’t melt in his mouth because he is so occupied spreading it on anyone who can help him up a rung of that ladder you’ve heard about.”

— Howard Taubman, *The New York Times*, October 16, 1961

"'How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying,' hereafter to be referred to in this review as 'How,' is a brilliant musical comedy in which everything works out. In its first performance at the 46th St. Theater Saturday night, its satire, humor, book, music, lyrics, cast, staging, choreography, setting and general gaiety of spirit combined in a smooth, fast pattern of expert showmanship to make the occasion a delightful event. It was a triumph for many talented people and cause for an ovation to Robert Morse in its vital central role.

Because it is basically a chillingly satiric picture of the rise to the industrial heights of a ruthless young monster with no conscience and great charm, a tremendous task faced Mr. Morse. He has to indicate the shamelessness, ego and bogus charm of the outrageous youth and yet keep him humorous and appealing to the audience, and he manages it superbly. In his hands, the youngster named Finch is a deplorable fellow, who deserves to be chastened, and he remains amusing and downright endearing, and you find yourself pulling for him every minute."

— *Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, October 16, 1961*

RESOURCES

American Musical Theatre and How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying

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SARAH SCHLESINGER is the Associate Chair of the Graduate Musical Theatre Writing Program at New York University. She is a lyricist and librettist whose work has been seen Off-Broadway and at Regional Theatres around the country. She has been commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera Guild to write the librettos for two new operas — *The Amazing Adventures of Alvin Allegretto*, which premiered in 1995 and *Different Fields*, which premiered in 1996. With Nashville composer Mike Reid, she has written *The Ballad of Little Jo*, a new musical developed in the Harold Prince-Denver Theatre Center Musical Theatre Program. She is the co-librettist and lyricist for *Love Comics*, a new musical which has been optioned for Off-Broadway. She is also the author of recent non-fiction works published by Villard / Random House and William Morrow. She is also the author of recent non-fiction works published by Random House / Villard, William Morrow, Avon Books and the Princeton Book Company.

FRED CARL, co-author, is the archivist of the Harburg Foundation. He has worked as a researcher for the following book: *Who Put the Rainbow in The Wizard of Oz? Yip Harburg, Lyricist* by Harold Meyerson and Ernie Harburg; *The Broadway Musical: Collaboration in Commerce and Art* by Bernard Rosenberg and Ernie Harburg; *Fascinating Rhythm: The Collaboration of George and Ira Gershwin* by Deena Rosenberg. He has taught classes in the history of popular music in America at Ramapo College and New York University. He has composed the score for the short film *Over*, by Carl Capotorto; music for the jazz theatre piece *...in the waiting room of the 21st century*, text by Hattie Gossett; and a number of art songs for voice and piano. He is a graduate of the New York University's Musical Theatre Program.

The Music Theatre International Study Guides are edited by John W. Lowell. Tom Dunn and Robert Lee are associate editors.