

Broadway Bound

Category: Stories

written by Marc D. Wager | October 11, 2022



“Nobody wants to
wear a mask
anymore...”

Ever since his adolescent years, my son and I have had an ongoing conversation (you might call it an argument) about my habit of speaking too frankly when sharing my opinions, which I do frequently.

Or, as he puts it, I have a big mouth.

I’ve sometimes wondered whether, as a pediatrician, I’m so used to asking my patients personal questions and stating my medical opinion that I habitually talk this way even in conversations where it’s not entirely appropriate. This has the potential to create conflict—especially in these pandemic days, when many people feel strongly about so many issues.

This question was the unspoken backdrop to my recent talk with a patient’s mother, who’d accompanied him into the exam room.

After caring for the patient, I spent a few moments chatting with his mother, who is a busy producer of Broadway shows’ touring companies.

Me: I’ve been wondering how you’re handling your tours, now that Broadway has removed its mask mandate.

Mom: Nobody wants to wear a mask anymore.

Me: *I* do!

Mom: Of course you do! You’re a doctor.

Me: I guarantee you that there are lots of other educated older people who make up your audience and who want to feel comfortable in a crowded theater and will only feel comfortable if everyone around them is masked.

Mom: Do you really think so?

Me: Of course! After not having gone to any concerts or shows for almost two years, I finally starting going back, but only when I knew that everyone around me was vaccinated and masked.

Mom: You can still wear a mask; lots of people do.

Me: The case numbers aren't great, and I don't feel prepared to risk my life by going into a theater unless I feel safe, and the only way I'm going to feel safe is if everyone around me is wearing a mask. Think about all the shows that have closed because the cast has been sick with COVID. I worry for their safety, too.

Mom: Good point.

Me: So what are you working on?

Mom: I'm producing my first Broadway show. I'm a producer for *The Kite Runner*.

Me: You're kidding! I just finished reading it, just because I want to see the show!

Mom: You're going to love it! It's a great production!

Me: Do you require masks?

Mom: Of course not!

Me: I really want to see it, but I'm not gonna see it.

Mom: Really?

Me: Yeah, really! And I'm sure there are lots of other people who feel the same way. I also just finished reading *Between the Lines*, because I want to see that made into a musical

Mom: It's a great show! You're going to love that one, too.

Me: And they require masks!

Mom: Yes, they do.

Me: I'm going to see that show, but I'm not seeing yours unless there's a mask requirement.

Mom: Do you mean it?

Me: Yes!

More talk, then a lightbulb moment:

Mom: What do you think of the idea of having one performance every week that requires masks?

Me: I love it! You tell me when it happens, and I'll be there.

Mom: Let me present it to my team and see what they think.

She emailed me the following week to tell me that they were going to start requiring masks for all Friday-night performances. It was so successful that a few weeks later they added a masking requirement for Wednesday matinees.

I saw the show, it was excellent, and I felt totally safe.

I haven't seen the data, but I hope the ticket sales for the masked performances are strong, and that other venues will adopt a mask requirement for some (or all!) performances, so that more people can go to see live theater and concerts and still feel safe.

Best of all, perhaps, my success in this encounter allowed me to point out to my son that sometimes it pays to have a big mouth: to speak up and help to change the world one step at a time—or, in this case, one performance at a time.