When I arrived at my new academic appointment in rural Indiana, I was received by passionate colleagues, soliciting my aid in transforming their theatre department into a cutting-edge drama program. As the school year began, I encountered the routine isolation and confusion that accompanies a new appointment, but I felt something else as well. There seemed to be a layer of confusion, perhaps even suspicion, surrounding my position. This was confirmed with my first Promotion and Tenure meeting when the panel admitted they had no idea what a “Voice Person” did, therefore, finding themselves with no yardstick with which to measure my performance. I would need to legitimize myself, before I would participate in policy or curricular development. I’m sure many of my VASTA colleagues are familiar with this seemingly insurmountable task.

Legitimizing my role as Vocal Coach and Instructor in a college theatre department that had been marginalized both geographically and conceptually, would require the following: defining the role of Vocal Coach within the rehearsal process, defining the role of Vocal Instructor within the faculty unit, and documenting both of these roles for Promotion and Tenure. I created a set of guidelines for Vocal Coaching, a kind of vocal coaching menu offering varied service options while maintaining the moral imperatives for actor preparation. Some menu items: demystifying the space through sound and movement, image enhancement, and ensemble building. As my colleagues began to request these items, the results were tangible. My presence at rehearsals became less suspicious as I began to see a flash of relief cross faces upon my arrival. “I’m glad you’re here! I wonder if you could…”. The rewards dominoed into my second goal, defining my role as Vocal Instructor within the faculty (continued on page 3)
unit. Most of my colleagues are directors and a mutual respect was born out of our collaboration; the shift from “the gal who knows all those theatre games” to someone with a method to her madness began and by the year’s end, I was participating in development. Which brings me to the present, it’s late summer with Promotion and Tenure review waiting in the wings; now that I have defined my roles, I’m to document how I have met those expectations – the third goal. Focusing on these three goals has legitimized my work and myself in this geographically, and formerly conceptually marginalized arena. Hopefully, others will continue paving this path blazed by folks long before me. Resulting in not only the establishment of more positions for Voice teachers at these marginalized colleges, but also necessitating a shift of perception from the Vocal Coach as inconsequential to the Vocal Designer/Director as a required member of the artistic team.

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