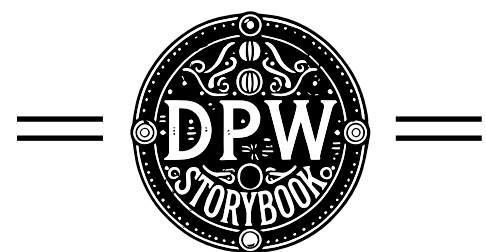


COBRA COMMANDER/ LOGAN

Logan Mirto, also known as “Cobra Commander,” has been a key figure of the Department of Public Works (DPW) at Black Rock City, Nevada, since 1998. Originally from Dallas, Texas, Logan joined the DPW after traveling with a circus troupe that brought him to Burning Man. From 2005 to 2021, he served as the DPW Personnel Manager leading the daily morning meetings, a central routine for the crew. Logan is also known for his notable 2005 art project, the “Dickie Box,” a 10 ft. by 10 ft. plexiglass cube installation. A full time worker for years, Logan “retired” from Burning Man in 2024.

This interview was conducted by “Flo”, Flore Muguet, a French anthropologist, in 2016. Most of Flo’s questions have been omitted to improve reading flow.



“Back in those days, if you showed up early you could work...”

I showed up in 1998. I was hitchhiking down the West Coast, and I got picked up by a circus troupe and traveled with them for a while. It was just, you know, a little caravan of these circus kids just doing their thing, and they had a couple of



Photo credit: John Curley, 2012.

shows booked here and there. And one of the things that they did regularly, or at least a few of them had done in the past, was Burning Man. Back in those days, if you just showed up early enough, you could work. And so, they showed up three weeks early, and I was a part of that caravan.

The site where Burning Man is held had moved from 1997 to 1998. So, when the caravan ended up on the playa, it was in a very different place from where the city was being built. One of the trucks ran out of gas, out in the middle of the empty desert, and I got left behind with the truck that was out of gas and a couple of other folks. The rest of the caravan went off to find the city or find the work crew. As dawn hit the next morning, the DPW showed up and filled this car up with gas and got us going. Then we all fell in with the

work crew. So, I just showed up, but was immediately inducted into the very first year of DPW being a formal department in the organization.

I worked about a month for DPW that first year, and Burning Man was overwhelming, and had a huge impact on me. I left afterwards and went back to my job and my life in Texas. I was born in Dallas, and I

“In 2005, I did an art project on playa. It was called the Dickie Box.”

lived a lot of my life in Texas. But anyway, I went back to Texas and to my job, and then every year I made sure to come back to Burning Man. I couldn’t afford at that time in my life to just abandon my life every year and go out there for months. So, from ‘99 all the way to 2003, I just came back for the event, as a participant. I was always moving around at that point in my life. Texas and California... I lived in Japan for a while. But I always made sure that I could drop what I was doing and come back for the Burning Man event.

In 2004, I came out and did a full tour of DPW again. I did the full three months. And then in 2005, I did that again, and I also had an art grant from the art department. I did a big art project on Playa. It was called the Dickie Box. It was a 10 ft. by 10 ft. plexiglass cube that

I had furnished like an apartment. At midnight, when the event opened, I locked my best friend, Dicky, inside of it. And I kept him inside of it for the entire week of the event. I just brought him food and let him be a human zoo exhibit for the week. I had a toilet in there for him, not a lot of privacy though. It was a pretty special thing; you can look it up ... It wasn’t a protest, just art. Just a response to Burning Man. You know, Burning Man had a narrative that was a lot about community and being included. I wanted to make sure that there was something out there to remind people that just because you’re at a party, that doesn’t mean you feel like you’re a part of things. It felt important to make something that was intentionally isolated in the middle of this place that is really inclusive and open. It was interesting to make something that was closed

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off by design. I wanted it to look like a blank canvas so that people could project whatever they wanted to on it. And onto him, if they wanted to.



The Dickie Box. Photo credit: Logan, 2005.

“This is my 14th year on DPW... If it seems like I care about your experience, it’s because I do...”

Then, at the end of strike in 2005, the person who was volunteer coordinator with DPW was stepping down. I talked to Marian Goodell, right in this house actually, and I sat there, and I told her that I wanted the job. To be the volunteer coordinator for DPW. I had known Marian personally from working on the Dicky Box and living in San Francisco. So, she hired me in 2005 to be the new volunteer coordinator, and I evolved that position into the position of Labor Manager, and then Personnel Manager, which is where I

am now. And I was part of the DPW Council as it formed and have kind of helped DPW’s management and DPW’s culture grow into what it is today.

I’m a year-round employee. I work with all the different managers and departments. DPW is about 600 people these days, roughly. There are around 45 different projects that are DPW, and each of those different projects has a Project Manager. And all *those* projects report to a different DPW Council member in terms of their management and their leadership and all that. But I work with almost all those managers directly to help them staff their teams, help them find people for their teams, whether those positions are paid or not.

I also operate a team of “Roustabouts” - a team of workers that move where the work is as jobs surge throughout the season. I vet new candidates for the team. We probably get around 1,500 applicants for DPW every year. Of those 1,500, I can only take

on 30-50 every year. So, I spend a lot of time talking to people and seeing if they are in a place where they feel this is the right job for them, and if they’re in a place to offer the skills that we are looking for. If I feel like it’s a good match, then I’ll slowly bring them on.

I didn’t always used to run the morning meetings. When I came onboard that was being done by a couple of different people. There were a couple of things about it that struck me. One is that I felt like they weren’t being run well. I could see the crowd; I could read the crowd—I’ve always been good at reading a crowd—and I could tell that the crowd wasn’t interested. They were tuned out, they didn’t care, and there was no real passion happening in terms of riling them up, in terms of motivating them, in terms of giving them any sort of humor or spark to start their day with. It was really dry and really not carrying well. ... The people that were doing it, they weren’t inspiring the crowd for whatever reason.

But the other thing is that back then, in 2005, I was terrified of public speaking. Just terrified. I couldn’t do it. White knuckled, tremble in my voice, my hands would shake. I just could not do it. I’m the kind of person that doesn’t like anything having that kind of power over me. I don’t like being afraid of anything.

“In 2005, I was terrified of public speaking. Just terrified. I could not do it.”



Photo credit: Chayna Girling, 2015.

I don’t like anything feeling like it’s too big for me. So, I volunteered myself to start running them, and over the course of many years, have trained myself out of being terrified of public speaking and got, I would feel, very good at it because... overcoming challenges, overcoming the challenges you find in yourself... That’s the best kind of work we can do.

I try to encourage everyone out here to take advantage of this situation and find something like that out here. Some way you can grow. If it seems like I care about your experience, it’s because I do. I care about everyone’s experience out here, and I want them to get the most

out of it. I mean, the whole reason I work for Burning Man and am a part of this is because I believe Burning Man makes people’s lives better. Just the experience of being out here as a participant gives people the chance to reevaluate their own lives and examine how they’re spending their time and what they’re spending their lives doing. That applies to us on the crew too. I want everyone who comes out here and contributes to this event to have the experience that they need. So, I really do care about every person here having a good experience. That’s all genuine and coming from a very real place.

There is a giant wave of depression that tends to hit everybody in about

two weeks when we get out of here. Myself included. But we all look out for each other even then, and I think that’s what makes us so strong. The community doesn’t end just because the job ends. The community is strong, the community is year-round, the community is worldwide. So many of us stay connected and stay interested in each other’s well-being, making sure that each other is well and happy and good and moving forward.

I feel like if there’s anything that I’m most grateful for, it’s that the community is here, and we carry each other through until it’s time to go back to work. That’s a big part of what makes this the best job there is.



Logan on crew. Photo credit: unknown, 2004.