

How to Communicate With Our Target Market

Music Advocacy = Program Success, Part IV

Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser

Part Four of a six part series about advocacy and how it relates to your school music program.

As we have previously discussed, all too often we find ourselves “preaching to the choir” (literally!), trying to convince the “already converted” of the value of music in our schools. The audience enthusiastically agrees, everyone leaves with gratified feelings of accomplishment, and, to the dismay of all, nothing changes. We have missed the target with this strategy. While it is vitally important to share the good news about music learning with every facet of our society, the key people are those who are the decision makers. These are the folks who have the wherewithal to influence curriculums, schedules, and the academic agenda of our schools. This issue will focus on how to address this “target market.”

Who and Why?

School boards, administrators, curriculum supervisors, faculty representatives, and even local government officials make up the target market. The perceived importance of these high-profile positions can be daunting, intimidating even the most mission-driven advocate. However, this is precisely where we can have

the greatest impact, ensuring the future of music in our educational arena. While there are some exceptions, the majority of the people responsible for our educational foundation are committed to excellence and willing to listen to any data that will support a holistic, quality learning experience for every child. They are charged with the responsibility of preparing the students to assume the responsibilities of living a prosperous, successful life. If we begin with this perspective in mind, it offers a less confrontational forum of exchange, and, more importantly, we bring to the table information that will help them reach their goal.

It is imperative to frame the advocacy material in the language that appeals to our audience. Music supporters enjoy hearing the affective benefits of music education, from anecdotal situations to the emotional effects of a heartwarming performance. The language we use with those in our target market must highlight the cognitive aspect of the art form, relating statistics, research data, and evaluation results. While I personally believe that “music for the sake of music” needs

no further justification, such logic may not be understood by someone who has not experienced the intrinsic joy of music making and the aesthetic value it offers to every music maker. Therefore, it is time to set my artistic opinions aside in an effort to create a new level of understanding from a different viewpoint. The most dramatic successes generated from our music advocacy efforts evidence the need to highlight the convincing “facts and figures” that conclusively demonstrate the positive effect of music learning as it relates to the total development of the individual. This is the conversation that best relates the value of music to those who can (and will) determine the future of our music programs.

But How?

We have a library of conclusive data on all age groups ranging from preschoolers to senior citizens to share with the decision makers. Additionally, there are countless case studies demonstrating the increased academic performance of students when music was integrated into the rest of their school studies.

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It is difficult for anyone to ignore this compelling information, and when it is presented as a concern for all students rather than just a chosen few, there is a greater chance of mutual understanding and program implementation. (This is in contrast to a defensive “either/or” conversation, which can often do more harm than good for the welfare of music in our schools.)

Keep in mind that a musician’s understanding of the benefits of music is based on life-changing personal experiences, which do not always relate to someone who has not traveled a similar pathway. This is a crucial understanding as we develop a successful communication vocabulary with the constituents we wish to convince. In other words, the delivery of the message is equally as important as the message itself.

For example, we might give a personal testimony pointing to our observation of the music students’ abilities to learn new information at a faster pace. While this may be valid, it lacks the scientific framework needed to convince the undecided or skeptical person. However, consider information presented in this fashion:

A research project conducted with three-year-olds in a Los Angeles preschool tested children’s spatial reasoning after eight months of keyboard and singing lessons. The children who received the music training increased their spatial-temporal reasoning by 46 percent as compared to a 6 percent increase in the control group that received no training.

Rauscher/Shaw, “Music Training Causes Long-term Enhancement of Preschool Children’s Spatial-Temporal Reasons.” *Neurological Research*, Vol. 19, February 1997.

An enthusiastic music supporter could point to his or her child’s grade improvement in other areas

of school since joining the band/orchestra/choir, but such conjecture often falls on deaf ears. If it is accompanied with research, however, it immediately gains credibility:

Studying music strengthens students’ academic performance. Studies have indicated that sequential, skill-building instruction in art and music integrated with the rest of the curriculum can greatly improve children’s performance in reading and math.”

Martin Gardiner, Alan Fox, Faith Knowles, and Donna Jeffrey, “Learning Improved by Arts Training.” *Nature*, May 23, 1996.

The Key: Communication

Our target market is easy to identify. Perhaps the more important challenge surrounds our ability to communicate in a style that engages their support for the welfare of our music programs. To that end, let us pledge our efforts and energies. Participation in school music programs is increasing; music advocacy is making a difference. As we continue to gather new information that confirms the value of music learning, it is imperative we continue to communicate the good news with all those who are charged with the responsibility of creating our school curriculums. Let us “target our market” and “market our target”!

We all can make a difference. Music advocacy is an ongoing process that generates immeasurable benefits for every musician, young and old. The next chapter of our advocacy column will feature the various sources of data and information we can turn to in our advocacy efforts.

Meanwhile, let the music begin...

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Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser is a well-known name in the music education world as a teacher, clinician, author, composer, consultant, adjudicator, and above all, a trusted friend to anyone interested in working with young people in developing a desire for excellence. His own career involves ten years of successful college band directing at Northern Michigan University, the University of Missouri, and New Mexico State University. Following three years in the music industry, he created Attitude Concepts for Today, an organization that manages workshops, seminars, and convention speaking engagements on positive attitude and effective leadership training. Tim presently holds the Earl Dunn Distinguished Lecturer position at Ball State University. Tim is the Director of Education for Conn-Selmer, and he serves as the national spokesperson for MENC’s “Make a Difference with Music” program. Tim’s books ‘The Art of Successful Teaching’ and ‘The Joy of Inspired Teaching’ are best sellers. He is co-author of Hal Leonard’s popular band method, ‘Essential Elements’ and the creator of Director’s Communication Kits. Tim is a graduate of Ball State University and the University of Alabama. He was awarded an Honorary Doctorate Degree from VanderCook College of Music. Additional awards include the distinguished Sudler Order of Merit from the John Philip Sousa Foundation, Mr. Holland’s Opus Award and the Music Industry Award from the Midwest Clinic Board of Directors.