

Getting Serious About R&R (Recruitment and Retention)

Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser

Like it or not recruiting and retention are the primary goals of every successful teacher, coach, band director, businessman, minister, etc. In any form of leadership “enrollment” stands as the fundamental ongoing responsibility. Professional athletic teams hire entire staffs to scout for the best players, and then a second wave of people to “convince” these chosen ones to sign-on and become a part of the organization. Outreach groups are constantly discovering new avenues of communication to bring more supporters into-the-fold. The world of advertisement and marketing would not exist if everyone would simply cease the game of “involvement.”

While many music educators seem somewhat hesitant to wave-the-banner of MUSIC

LEARNING, it is apparent the successful programs have a tried-and-true recruitment-and-

retention blueprint that attracts new members and convinces the present members to continue their participation; it is the lifeblood of any healthy band, a great orchestra, or an exemplary choir program.

FOUR CORNERSTONES OF RECRUITMENT and RETENTION SUCCESS

■ **Success breeds success.**
MUSIC LEARNING = SUCCESS.

There is no substitute for EXCELLENCE. The human creature, by design, wants to be a part of a quality group. While there are many tricks-to-the-trade, nothing will replace the intrinsic motivation of the young musician who eagerly awaits his/her chance to be a part of THE BEST IN THE LAND. The “word is out” when an ensemble represents the highest quality of musical artistry and appropriate behavior. MUSIC FOR THE SAKE OF MUSIC is still (and always will

be) the key component.

■ **Personalization.** People join organizations when they are recognized for their potential and their value to the group. It takes far more than the “poster of invitation”—that is merely the announcement of the chance-to-participate. Recruiting requires special visits with the new candidates, chats with parents, handwritten cards of appreciation, phone calls supporting the inclusion of the student, and an ongoing agenda of outreach communication. Equally, retention of students requires a similar process. We often “take for granted” those who tirelessly give their time and effort for the betterment of the group; there is much to be said for the value of THE SPOTLIGHT OF RECOGNITION. Shine it brightly to include every one, and shine it often. To “assume” all the students will re-up for the next year is a dangerous attitude; we need to extend our appreciation for what they have contributed and our enthusiasm for their wanted-and-needed leadership in the future.

■ **The best recruiters are the performing students.** There is a reason marketers are quick to

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embrace the latest HERO to be associated with their particular product; it suggests to the potential buyer, "If you use this product, you TOO can become a great basketball player, golfer, whatever." When the young ones witness their peers (of just a few years older) ENJOYING themselves in a performance, there is little more persuading to do. Let's not "talk" about the benefits of being in a musical organization, but let's allow the students to EXPERIENCE all the positive value by involving them in a specially designed LIVE PERFORMANCE, and including the "to be musicians" in some fashion will insure their desire to "join the group." For retention effectiveness, those students you invite to "be the musical recruiters" will become the loyal promoters of the organization. We all want to feel a sense of self-worth and you have provided this forum for them.

■ Communication; a three step process.

Step #1: Let your the students you plan to recruit KNOW how much you and the other members of the group want them to JOIN.

Step #2: Do an extended and personalized follow-up immediately after the recruiting effort.

Step #3: Send a second follow-up a week later with another invitation to become part of the music-family.

We are all good at step #1 of this communication process, but momentum is often lost on step #2 and step #3. In the sales world it is known as "THE ASK." We must ASK and RE-ASK. Many students are lost because we do not ASK them (and their parents) to become involved in the program.

If we could focus on one vital aspect of recruitment and retention success, it would be COMMUNICATION. Those who emphasize the importance of personalized communication are certain to enjoy a healthy harvest of new musicians as well as a dedicated group of students who will stay-the-course and serve as the key leaders for the continued growth and development of the program.

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... STRIKE UP THE BAND ...

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 focusing on the pathway-to-excellence. Tim presently holds the Earl Dunn Distinguished Lecturer position at Ball State University. Tim is the Executive Director of Education for Conn-Selmer, Inc., and he serves as the national spokesperson for MENC's "Make a Difference with Music" program. His books The Art of Successful Teaching, The Joy of Inspired Teaching, Music Advocacy and Student Leadership, and Everyday Wisdom for Inspired Teaching are best sellers. He is co-author of Hal Leonard's popular band method Essential Elements - 2000.