

# Bridging the Gap Between Inspiration and Execution

**David W. Vandewalker**

Tell your band boosters about David W. Vandewalker's presentation:

## **"Strategic Plans for a Successful Booster Club"**

Friday, July 22, 8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

\$100 per school/no limit to number of attendees

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Reflecting on some of the greatest accomplishments in recent history, names like Jeff Bezos, Fred Smith, and Steve Jobs emerge. All are credited as being visionaries for some remarkable accomplishments. Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon, is a combination visionary and master builder of an e-commerce empire. It is noteworthy that he wisely hired others to assist him in the realization of his marketplace vision. Additionally, all of his hires had to be shown care, nurtured, and motivated to complete the task on such a grand scale that would meet the expectations of Bezos. Similarly, Fred Smith, of FedEx, is credited with founding, staffing and gathering supplies for an overnight air delivery company that no one knew they needed, but discovered that they couldn't live without. Steve Jobs is recognized with creating life-changing technological products including the home computer, iPod, iTunes, iPhone, App Store, iPad, and iCloud. Behind Steve Jobs, was a team of innovative marketers, designers, and engineers. As I explored deeper into these three inspirational geniuses, I began to find commonalities between these great masters of innovation and the execution of their inspired vision finding that:

- 1) A highly skilled team was behind their articulated vision.
- 2) They employed detailed action plans coupled with adept preparation.
- 3) Teams were strategically well suited for specific tasks.

Often in volunteer organizations, people are willing to help and serve but have limited experience. Prior experiences vary from leadership in Campfire Girls and Scouts, little league sports, elementary school parent

teacher associations, or church and neighborhood committees. Often the only volunteer experiences gained in those settings are limited and general in scope. Previous narrow involvement in volunteer organizations can create an overwhelming feeling when stepping into service in a music booster organization because music booster teams are often immensely broad dealing with everything from uniform care and distribution to high-dollar fundraisers to advocating for music education in the community.

Bridging the gap between inspiration and execution requires setting goals for your organization. These goals might be musical (i.e. learning new literature), or playing at a new venue (i.e. performing at the Meyerson Center), or of necessity (i.e. needing new instruments, instruction, or uniforms). After listing your ideas and goals for the organization begin to gather and communicate your plans to your team to help you attain these ambitions.

A modern booster organizational plan defines the volunteer as one who actively directs or manages others to a common goal. As you gather your team, seek to clearly define the tasks or projects you are asking them to do. The importance of definition of plans became evident to me when we had a vacancy for our Uniform Team Manager position. The VP for Support (the title we had at the time) called people and asked them if they were willing to serve in that capacity. He had a variety of responses. Most of which found people interested in helping but not willing to take on such a "monumental" role. So we had to ask ourselves was the role truly monumental or did we lack

concrete job descriptions that broke down tasks/responsibilities with included time lines. We pondered how to solve the problem and determined there needed to be a clearly shared vision with specific plan of action to attract the volunteer with the right skills to accomplish the task. Generally, volunteers will respond affirmatively to very specific tasks and a clear time schedule. Therefore, be prepared to share your broad vision statement coupled with well-defined and concise specific volunteer tasks to allow your comprehensive vision to take shape.

Begin to shape the plans of action for each detail in your booster organization by putting the details on paper and storing all the plans in one consolidated location (a notebook, a computer folder, etc.) creating a complex but clear plan of action for each event in which your booster organization takes part. Daniel Levitan writes, "Finding things without rummaging saves mental energy for more important creative tasks." So, after each event, fundraiser, or performance, tweak those plans of action and make changes to the original document allowing opportunity to improve the plan. Over the years, new volunteers will step in and glean from past experiences and make the plans for a specific event stronger and more innovative.

The adage, "the devil's in the details" has truth to it. Small errors can have large consequences; seek to be clear, thorough, and careful in your task explanations and management. Timelines must be developed and followed, thus, limiting challenges with completion of tasks. Consider enlisting a small team of people with different levels of experience in the organization

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as well as different skill sets and talents. Spend one hour brainstorming on a specific topic (i.e. a Night of Jazz event). In the first 15 minutes, make lists of everything and anything that one might need to create a successful event. Spend the next 15 minutes deciding on how many of those brainstorm items could be broken down again into specific categories. Use the last 30 minutes to create as many detailed lists for the top three categories that would require the most level of detailed preparation for the event to be successful. Once your hour has concluded, create action items for your team. Ask each person to take ownership of the specific categories remaining on the master list of topics that will need further detailing. Ask each team member to solicit the advice of two other parents in the completion of their brainstorming detailing of their assigned lists. Find a date to reconvene the team within the next two weeks to share the newly acquired information. Creating detailed plans is surprisingly easy using sure methods and timelines for such creation. As your volunteer team works through details for each task, the risk of surprise and crisis management is significantly reduced. Careful and thoughtful execution of plans allows for good volunteer retention as well as multi-generational booster volunteers.

In the words of Jim Collins (*Good to Great*), once the details are defined the team will know “where the bus is going.” So the next task is “finding the right people to get on the bus, and getting them to sit in the right seat!” Strong volunteer teams thrive in knowing their assignment and getting in their “groove”. A little work on your part thinking through the type of person needed for each job will go a long way in a healthy booster organization as well as helping to effectively and efficiently reach your goals. People want to help but need guidance that will allow them to be successful. Pairing an introverted seamstress with the uniform team manager position is a no brainer. However, placing an outgoing creative type in a room repairing uniforms and sewing buttons is not a good use of volunteer energy. That outgoing creative type might be coupled with marketing and recruiting positions in your organization. Just like Steve Jobs, you need to get the best skilled people for your project.

When developing your volunteer team for the upcoming school year, a nominating committee is charged with the matching of the organizational management needs with strategically suited volunteers. The purpose of the nominating committee is to assist the board of directors in developing and overseeing the application of policies and

procedures regarding board size and volunteer leadership positions.

The committee should meet to explore recommendations of candidates for nomination to the board and to examine any potential conflicts of interest (i.e. more than one voting right per household, etc.). Careful thinking about the tasks and the personalities needed to complete the tasks is vital to have a healthy well-oiled booster organization. Once the committee has successfully created a potential slate of new officers for consideration, the school band director or sponsor should assess the list for any potential conflicts of interest based on the confidential and/or proprietary information that only she or he may possess or that volunteer parents may not be privy to knowing. Upon approval by the school faculty member, the committee should solicit potential board members to inquire of their interest in serving on the board. When the candidates have been fully vetted and they have confirmed their interest, the nomination committee should present their motion to the Board of Directors who, after voting will send the final slate of candidates to the full booster membership for election.

The nomination committee is a standing committee of the organization, thus, it is a committee appointed by the president of the board and typically consists of three to five members of the board, and often includes a past president (as an ex-officio member) to provide insights regarding the characteristic needs for various roles. The chair of the committee is also designated by the president of the board and presides at all committee meetings. With these leaders in place, you will be set to develop great plans using people to their full potential creating a positive situation allowing for great goals to be accomplished.

Peter Drucker wrote, “Great leaders think of the needs of the opportunities...” Indeed, groundbreakers make plans and understand that planning is something that occurs with everyday decisions that culminate in an extraordinary occasion. Behind every successful music program, there is a team well suited for their task that has been armed with a vision and detailed action plans making their band the best it can be.

### References:

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