

Sustain Your Successful Band Program

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Have you ever wondered why certain college football teams are so dominant year after year? Yes, some have a great season every now and then, but just a few are always highly ranked and widely respected. The same is also true with Band programs across America. There is a master plan and a series of actions that absolutely ensures both your success and that of your program. The secret is not really a secret at all, it's just the bravery of planning and the execution of a strong plan, in every aspect and doing so every day.

As a very young educator, I was once asked to close my eyes and think of the very finest Band program in America. I was in a large workshop and to be honest I thought this exercise was silly. The presenter was a giant in our profession, so I at least played along. He asked if we had the name of our "fantastic" program in our mind and then went on to say he would identify the program each of us was thinking of. I thought: really? As we all opened our eyes, he requalified his intended prowess over our thinking and said that he would in fact tell us all "about" this amazing Band I had selected in my brain.

- He said the Director has been in place a very long time. Check
- He said the Director was highly respected, approachable and helpful to all. Check
- The Director is well known for his interest in and love for students, both in and out of the classroom. Check

He nailed it.

Here is my synopsis many years later: Stay Put and grow your program and yourself where you are. Consistently embrace your students, parents, local community and colleagues. And above all understand that your students do not care of what you KNOW, but rather they want to really know that you CARE. Success breeds success.

I recently came across a quote by the great George Parks where he reminds us all: "A Band is not proud because it performs well, it performs well because it is proud." This is empirically true and here are a few elements to bring pride and permanent success to your program.

BEGIN YOUR PLAN

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (S. Covey) has provided me with much guidance and peace over the years when planning the direction of my program. Though not specifically written as a Band resource, it has always served me well when in times of doubt. From initial planning to the final push for that all-important performance, reviewing just a few words and phrases has proven to make a significant difference in my teaching delivery and the results illustrated by my wonderful students. If you are not familiar with Stephen's words, pick up a copy, you won't regret it.

(1)Proactivity, (2)Begin with the End in Mind, (3)Put First Things First, (4)Think Win-Win, (5)Seek to Understand, then to be Understood, (6)Synergize and (7)Continue to Sharpen the Saw are the

cornerstones from which I build the tower of a respected and accomplished Band program. Planning and remaining on the plan are not only the most efficient paths toward building strong musicianship in your students but also in bringing those “unique opportunities” to your program and to your community.

RECRUITMENT

When recruiting students as beginners or even an upperclassman later to your program, think of it as a 24/7 challenge within your school and out in your community. Be seen in your school by all students. Be in the hallways every day. Speak to lots of students, Band or not, as they don't have to think you're COOL, they just want to know that you're OKAY. The thing that sets you apart from all other educators on your campus that you can play instruments and students want to do the same. It is your carrot. This is your lifestyle. Demonstrate that passion to all you contact.

RETENTION of your students is not much different than recruitment. In fact, I often refer to it as Re-Recruitment. Each of the “recruitment” tools still apply here and they too must be present every day, 24/7, 365 days a year to retain your most prized possessions.

If the Band Experience is worth students' time, they will join your program and continue to be your students. We all stayed in our respective programs through thick and thin, think of this as your “why” and continue to strive to supply that very same interest, excitement and devotion (Why) for your students. Somebody did it for you!

Band, if nothing else, is all about experiences. From bus rides through the myriad of musical styles and literature performances, memories were important to all students way back then and still so even today. You never said that Band would be easy, just that it would be worth it. Stay that course.

BUDGETING

Planning for and remaining on task with budgets are quite challenging tasks for Directors throughout their careers. In our case with Band programs, budgets are no more than your planning for the available resources to see your instructional plan to fruition. To begin, set a small budget. That will be fine....in fact it will be GREAT. Know that the budget will be successfully funded, and all requested items are necessary. Through time your budget will increase to meet all new and additional experiences you desire for your students. As your program develops so will the need for a new and larger budget to include additional items and activities. If you have poised yourself correctly within your school and your community, both will rise to the occasion in support of your kids. But as I said earlier, you MUST stay put. You MUST invest in time.

Be specific with your expenditures. Know exactly what everything will cost and how you plan to successfully fund it. Your accuracy here is in fact your integrity. Spend their money more carefully than that your own. No one will ever question you until the math goes wrong.

If you didn't plan for it during your budget construction, don't expect to do it on the fly later. If it is what your school or community really wants, "they" will find a way to make it happen. Let their passion drive the development of additional items to your initial planning. Call it Synergy.

Avoid any overhead. Whether it be on music, accessories, instruments or activities, spend the money on your students exclusively. One tip I have found is when in need of instruments or emergency repairs that are not previously budgeted, display the outdated, damaged instruments as parents walk into your concert. Just think of it as evidence as to why you are requesting things after your budget was set. If you hide it, they will never know. I think of the Phoenix here.

Build your MUSICAL ALLIANCE. We are all on the same team. Build your network. You don't have to know everything, just that someone that knows what you don't. Jump on someone else's network and it becomes yours. Simply ask and always share. Local, state and national contacts are vital.

Stay active with your local music store. They should be the hub from which everything else expands. If nothing else, they know everyone.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The support from your community will inevitably define your success in so many ways. Be a vibrant part of your local community. Get involved, volunteer and spend your time making your local community a better place. They will notice. Does your community understand who you are both at school and away from school? Make that happen. The more they know about you and build confidence in you, the smoother the road will be to the success of your program. Though you might not be aware, many are always watching you.

Be consistent. Your personality is who you are and in simply remaining consistent, you will build trust and respect in all that you encounter. And above all, don't be afraid to show how much you care for the children you teach. Be worthy of their trust. The public's perception is the key to your future.

Be the musical expert in your school and community. Gladly accept the challenge of wearing many hats and spinning all the plates. Your personal time is the least important of those in your orbit. Take the time for all questions or any discussion. After all, someone did it for you years ago. Now is the time to repay the efforts and energy of the leaders of the past that was directed toward the younger you.

INFLUENCE

Never ever forget that as a Band Director, you have an amazing impact on each of your students. Always use it for good. Choose to stand for what is right in life and model those characteristics as a successful adult at every turn. Students and adults are taking notes. Constantly ask yourself: Are You Worthy of their respect and then always BE worthy. Careful analysis will show that students imitate you by using your words and phrases and will even begin to dress and act as you do over time. You have the power to change the lives of your students for the better. Make every moment count.

CODA to the FINE'

Lastly, teach everyday like it is the last rehearsal before a performance. Every minute is important to bringing music into the lives your students. Beginners learn something new every day, why not ALL of your students from beginners to seniors? Never shortchange them.

Please don't assume that any young musician "knows" how to practice. Teach them how to assess their skills and how to improve small nuances while at home. The rest will take care of itself.

Understand the difference in WHAT Band is and WHY kids are in Band. The WHAT is just that, what we do, how we play and what we learn. Though highly important, it is not singularly the total package. All humans need a WHY to fully actualize their potential. To put it simply and clearly, the WHY is the actual reason they choose come to your class. The person you are, the knowledge you possess, how you treat them and the experiences you provide through the teaching of music are all the motivational passion that they will feel toward you and your program. The very same reasons you stayed the course through your developmental years are valid even today. Just bring it!

Best wishes for incredible success.

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