

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

Here for the Party

Think of your entire store as one big party. Everyone wants an invite. No one wants to be excluded from the crowd. This includes teachers in your music lessons program.

Many times, music retailers complain that their teachers are terrible supporters of the retail side of the business and that teachers advocate shopping online or not buying print music.

Sometimes, a product and brand mix might be partly responsible for this debacle. But for now, let's look at a bigger issue: How do teachers perceive their value at your store? Are they even invited to the party?

Many of our music industry colleagues talk about the inverted pyramid of management. Owner on bottom, management next up, then sales team and, finally, customer at the top. I never see where the music teachers fit into that pyramid. Many of them are independent contractors, but they operate in your stores. They are in direct contact with a large number of your customers.

So, like it or not, they are part of the pyramid. Every interaction your customers have with anyone associated with your store must be positive.

HOST WITH THE MOST

Invite your teachers to the party. Little actions can keep them contributing and fitting into your management plan.

Say "hello" when they arrive to teach each day. Engage them in conversation to let them know they are important to you and your store. Make sure their lesson rooms are ready for students. Be sure chairs, stands, amps and other equipment that often "wanders out" is set up and ready to go. Chat with

them about their student load.

Get their opinion on print music. Purchase some books as samples. Pass them around to the teachers, and get their input. They know their students — and their students are a large part of your customer base.

Invite them to sit in on product reps' presentations. The

teachers will learn more about your products and feel more involved in selling those products.

Attend your teachers' gigs.

Don't you feel good when people show up to see you play? Showing up at teacher gigs also gives you and your staff great material to talk with students and parents about when promoting lessons.

Keep your teachers in the loop.

Let them know what's happening at the store with student events, new products and industry trade magazine articles. Ask your teachers for leads on what their students are looking for. Create a retail "looking for" card the teacher can fill out.

Give back to your teachers.

Provide them with an employee discount on their purchases.

Train new staff on the importance of the lesson program and recruiting new students.

If your teachers don't get support from them, they will treat your retail efforts as optional.

Take these steps, and you'll be amazed by the effect they have on teachers. Your teachers will become a valuable asset to the success of your music store. So invite them to the party, and get started. **MI**

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