

THE CUSTOMER WHISPERER | BY GREG BILLINGS

Do You Believe in Magic?

In the days after our most recent event, I heard from two doctors who were suffering from “Physicians’ Talent Show withdrawal.” Only 90 days earlier, these same professionals were telling me how busy they were and that they didn’t know if they had time to commit to the show.

They weren’t the first performers to crash after a gig. Anyone who has ever participated in community theater, a church Christmas cantata or even a simple piano recital knows the feeling. When people come together in a creative endeavor, something magical happens.

Certainly, the nervous stomach and adrenaline rush of performance are powerful, but the effect of the group dynamic is more profound. Performers and crew become friends, and strong emotional bonds are formed. Even political and religious differences disappear — or at least become irrelevant.



ESPRIT DE CORPS

If there’s a scientific term for the magic that happens when individuals join in a creative effort, it has escaped my research, but it is magic nonetheless.

Any artistic collaboration requires courage and a certain sublimation of ego. People who are rehearsing make mistakes, and artists searching for something great produce a lot of failures along the way. Experimentation, imagination and constructive criticism encourage risk, and freedom to fail fosters trust.

Trust, incidentally, is an interesting human invention. Once we develop trust in one area, it broadens and generalizes. We like people we trust more than we trust people we like, so by the time the show goes on, new friendships have been formed and we have what the French call *esprit de corps*.

Human collaborations also require leadership. We tend to develop emotional bonds with those who lead us. We remember our high school band, chorus and drama teachers’ names decades after the memory of other fine teachers has faded. Maybe, because they led us through a creative group endeavor, they left a stronger impression than those who just imparted knowledge.

FOCUS ON THE DREAM

Our customers come to us with a vision. Maybe it’s their daughter performing at Carnegie Hall. More likely, it’s her performing in a recital or playing Christmas songs for the family. But it’s probably not all about lessons and practice. Practicing a musical instrument is not an end. It’s a means to an end. We err when we focus on lessons and practice rather than the pure joy of making music.

Many perceive the study of music as a solitary effort. While private practice is necessary, the real magic happens when we start playing music with and for others. Whether it’s the worship team or choir at church, open mic night at a local pub, a ukulele circle, or jamming with friends and family in our home, everything changes when we start to play.

Taking music lessons and practicing are admirable activities, but playing is what really matters. This is a message we need to take to our customers and parents.

And there’s an obvious financial benefit for dealers who get people playing. This year, docs returning to our Physicians’ Talent Show had new electric guitars, a new Selmer soprano sax, a very expensive custom flamenco guitar, four new ukes and countless accessories. We sold one Steinway to a doc before the

‘The key to turning first-time customers into lifelong customers is getting them playing and performing with others.’

show and have sold two more since. NAMM's Wanna Play?, Weekend Warriors, New Horizons and other programs are proven, turnkey methods you can use to get your customers playing right away.

'We err when we focus on lessons and practice rather than the pure joy of making music.'

In the classic film about our industry, "The Music Man," Marian the Librarian perfectly captures the essence of being in the band in her climactic defense of the hapless professor Harold Hill.

"It all happened just like he said: the lights, the colors, the cymbals and the flags. It was in the way every kid in town walked around this summer and looked and acted."

When we talk with our customers, let's stay focused on the dream. Magic really does happen when a kid joins a band (grade school or garage), when a soccer mom joins the worship team or, as I saw this fall, when an 85-year-old physician picks up a ukulele he hasn't touched in decades and joins the fun.

The key to turning first-time customers into lifelong customers is getting them playing and performing with others. Unlike professor Hill, let's make sure there really is a band for them to join. **MI**

Greg Billings whispers to customers at the Steinway Piano Gallery in Naples, Fla. He welcomes questions and comments at greg@steinwaynaples.com.



+ REAL-LIFE MAGIC

Fifteen doctors showed off their musical gifts at the 7th Annual Steinway Physicians' Talent Show. Held Oct. 25 at The Sugden Community Theatre in Naples, Fla., the evening was hosted by the Steinway Piano Society of Southwest Florida, the nonprofit arm of the Steinway Piano Gallery of Naples. The event raised nearly \$50,000 for the Neighborhood Health Clinic and the Steinway Piano Society Scholarship Fund.

Pianist Priscilla Navarro, a 17-year-old sophomore at Florida Gulf Coast University's Bower School of Music, gave a special performance during the show.

Dr. Bill Lascheid, the 85-year-old co-founder of the Neighborhood Health Clinic, performed in the All Physician Ukulele Orchestra with a uke he brought back from the Korean War.

"Our six previous shows have generated over \$125,000 for the Neighborhood Health Clinic, but with so many still underemployed, the need for our support is greater than ever," said Steinway Piano Society Chairwoman Sara Billings.

The Neighborhood Health Clinic delivers medical care to low-income, working but uninsured Collier County adults.