

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

Managing Teachers

Managing music teachers is like building a house. You need a blueprint. And you need to show that blueprint to all the independent contractors (i.e. the teachers not on staff) that are building the house. Otherwise, you'll have a house that isn't what you wanted!

My lesson program is successful if I have musically qualified, fun and dependable teachers who help students realize their musical dreams. If this happens, we retain students and customers, and teachers are successful. They have a full schedule of students and can pay their bills. If not, the reverse happens. This sounds academic, but it isn't. To keep your teachers in touch with your "blueprint," consider the following.

PETE'S EIGHT RULES OF TEACHER MANAGEMENT

1. Constantly remind teachers of your long-term goals. But music teachers are musicians and often not great business people, so corporate CEO-style management might not provide the best results. (A written memo may work for some, while others might not read it for two months.) Building trust between the store and teacher is a must. A one-on-one approach with casual chats works best with most teachers. Discuss new gear, books and events related to the lesson program. Bounce ideas off them.

2. Music teachers seek the path of least resistance. It's easier for them to follow your plan than create their own. Will every teacher follow your plan 100 percent? No, but if they follow it 70 percent, it's better than no plan.

To resistant teachers, I will say, "OK, what's your plan? Let's try that!" Most of the time, I get, "I don't have one." To this I say, "Why reinvent the wheel?" If the teacher has a "do my own thing" vibe, I direct that energy toward coming up with new student events.

3. Check in with teachers. If you don't pay attention to them and if you're not talking with students, they'll start developing their own blueprint.

4. Assign a "teacher manager." You've got a rental manager (or a go-to person) and a guitar department manager, so who's your teacher manager? It can be the store owner, assistant manager or a separate person, but you need someone who stays in contact with teachers. This person is the keeper of your blueprint. He or she hears customer and teacher problems, and pays the closest attention to your lesson program. The teacher manager needs to address issues, such as being late, not participating in student events, and unhappy staff and parents.

5. Music teachers must be thought of as a product. Your staff won't sell a product with problems. If you have a teacher who is late all the time, has non-

existent people skills and doesn't help students realize their musical visions, your staff would stop booking lessons for that teacher, just as they'd stop selling a bad guitar. I explain this to all the teachers when they start at our stores.

6. Teachers want to be cool, so if everyone is doing it, they will, too. I use the "Vic is really having success with this" approach with teachers. Or the "Dave, can you help organize some kids for the next student showcase?" approach. Teachers don't want to feel left out.

7. Know when to let a teacher go. If a teacher is a flake and you've tried getting them on track, you don't have much choice but to fire them. They will ruin your lesson program's reputation. The public won't remember the teacher's name, but they will remember your store's name. "Don't go there for lessons," they'll say.

8. Be committed to helping your teachers make a living. Your store needs to be committed to them being successful. If you have no compassion for their needs, why should they want to follow your plan? This is an important element of managing. It goes back to product. You'll do anything to keep a major product line. What do you do to keep a valuable teacher? **MI**

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