

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

How to Be a Safe Haven

Have you noticed a drop in your music lesson sign-ups lately? Is your sales staff not bringing in the same number of new students as usual? Are your teachers worried, even panicked, about their lessons (and their incomes) dropping to disastrous lows? Do you feel helpless in your daily attempts to keep the bottom from falling out? If so, here are some tactics to help keep your employees, teachers and customers positive with all the negative economic chatter in the news.

COUNSEL STAFF

Focus staff on the positive events happening in your lesson program. Tell them about what teachers are doing, upcoming student events and any positive e-mails from customers. Have an open discussion about everything that is not doom and gloom for consumers. For instance, when I go to swamped shopping centers, I think, “What recession?” Come up with some examples near your store that you can point out. We are next to an independent diner where people drop around \$10 each, and it’s always busy.

Remind your staff that lesson sign-ups are a numbers game — the more people employees talk to, the more lessons they get. Remind them that people don’t always sign up right away and talking about lessons creates future sign-ups.

INVOLVE TEACHERS

Grab a cup of coffee with your teachers. Tell them what the store is doing to weather the economic storm. Let them know that you are going to schools, handing out fliers at their music events and talking to the scout troops.

Also, invite them to go with you to school guitar classes, jazz band rehearsals and related events that promote lessons. Ask teachers to get involved in student showcases and other performances. Keep current students excited, and create new students from event attendees. Ask your teachers for ideas, too. Getting them involved will create an atmosphere of “the store is out there hustling for me,” as opposed to “the store isn’t doing anything.”

LEAD THE CHARGE

You need to raise the flag, sound the bugle and yell “charge!” This is not the time for paralysis by analysis. If you keep looking for the sky to fall, it will. (And your teachers will run before it does.)

Keep the students you have by holding student events, such as showcases, guitar jams and drum-off contests. Videotape your teachers for an MTV-vibe promotional loop to run in the store. It will help create new lesson sign-ups, and it’s great for the teaching staff to see your efforts to get more students. Set up a music lesson info center with a video playing and lesson fliers and upcoming student events posted. Keep your store excited about music lessons.

CREATE CUSTOMER EXCITEMENT

Be warm and friendly to everyone that enters your store and everyone you talk to on the phone. Sounds simple, but it might not be happening in your store. For your students and parents, that 5 p.m. lesson time should be the event they look forward to each week. Have coffee in the waiting area with magazines for moms and dads. Have student-only string deals, or post this-week-in-rock factoids. Just make it fun.

None of us know what’s going to happen next or how long the current economic trends are going to last — plan on it being bad and long. But make your lesson program a positive refuge, and survive the storm. **MI**

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Your store and music lesson program need to be a refuge from the economic headlines