

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

The Lethal Lesson

If you teach beginning music students you've probably heard the song, "What Do You Do With A Drunken Sailor" over and over throughout the years. And if you run a music program, you've probably asked yourself, 'What do you do with a low-retention teacher?' Most might answer, 'Give them more students.' But why? Just because that teacher has availability? Your high-retention teachers don't have availability because they don't lose students.



It's January and new students will be visiting your store excited to learn to play that guitar or keyboard they got over the holidays. If you set them up with Mr. Lameoid or Ms. Snooze because they have availability, you will guarantee musical death to them — and to you since they will most likely not be long-term customers.

FINDING YOUR PLAN B

realize the predicament. You either turn the student away from lessons in your store or sign them up with a low-retention teacher. But you need a plan B.

Ask yourself: Does the teacher use fun books for the beginner student? Do they get the beginner students playing a song during the first lesson? Is the teacher over-demanding or downright mean? Does the teacher retain students who come in for lessons that already have playing skills? Are they constantly running late?

Some of these issues may be a lack of insight to teaching beginners, the rest of these issues are behavioral problems. You need to help the teacher improve. If you have teachers that only retain adult or advanced students, focus on giving them just those students. If a teacher is texting or eating on the job, those are signs of a teacher who is only there to make money and isn't into teaching the students. If a teacher is mean or cranky you need to address that issue ASAP.

HAVE A PLAN C

It is my belief that a teacher with skill and enthusiasm trumps a teacher with skill and no enthusiasm. And a teacher with enthusiasm and limited skill trumps a teacher with tons of skill

and no enthusiasm.

So here's plan C: Hire a few advanced students from your lesson program that are out of high school and train them to be your beginner teachers — on a limited basis. These advanced students need to be students of the high-retention teachers. You need to solicit the high-retention teachers' help in getting them up and running. Compensate that teacher for the help. Explain to your high-retention teacher that the more retention the store has the more new students come to take lessons. Give this "trainee teacher" only beginners and only younger students and start them on a one-day-a-week basis to see how they work out. They need to continue their lessons with your high-retention teacher.

Is it a little risky? Sure, but giving new students to a low-retention teacher is deadly.

Young teachers turn into high-retention teachers because they have been a part of your music lesson program, and they have experience with what your store does. They have learned skills on their instrument from an engaging and enthusiastic teacher. They will strive to give their students the great experience they had as a student. **MI**

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Low-retention teachers can be deadly to your lessons program, as well as your store