

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

High-Retention Teaching

For years I ran two music retail stores that, at their peak, taught 2,000 private lessons per week. My wife, Genett, and I were responsible for recruiting new students, creating programs that increased the retention of students, finding new print materials for lessons, and, on any given day, managing 30-plus private lesson teachers.

Since 2012, my role in music retailing has become that of an independent lesson teacher. I teach over 80 private students per week, and have been speaking at NAMM's Idea Center for 13 years. The question I get asked most often from retailers is, "What can I do to increase student retention? We sign up 60 new students after Christmas and, by June, they are almost all gone."

As a kid, trumpet lessons sucked. I played last chair in the high school band, and my band director told me, "If you ever do anything in music — I'll go back to selling shoes." I was waiting for the "Good Note Fairy" to magically wave the wand, and I would just play better. My private music teachers sat in the lesson room and made me play non-stop boring musical drill after drill, and then grilled me about not practicing.

What I needed was a teacher to make playing music fun. That is why I teach the way I do, which includes never using method or technique books and being OK

if students don't practice. My objective is, how can I make lessons so much fun that the student doesn't know they're learning? Here are a few ways:

1. USE SONGBOOKS. (ESPECIALLY SONGBOOKS WITH CD TRACKS.) I can teach note reading and all those other skills by playing songs. Why do we play an instrument? To play music. I have

a plan to evolve my students' progress, and I am a firm believer in using books, not handwritten pieces of paper or photo copies. Books show direction; loose papers show no direction and get lost.

2. IT'S ALL ABOUT PLAYING! I get my students on stage ASAP. If all they know is "Hot Cross Buns," they're ready. I want them to feel the excitement of playing music. It also makes parents feel that you're a great teacher who is getting their child playing. I do

eight student performances each year with my students.

3. UTILIZE TECHNOLOGY. I like to use sites such as YouTube when I'm teaching. If we're playing a Basic Jazz Chart, let's bring Basic into the lesson room.

4. REMEMBER, IT'S ABOUT THE STUDENT. I go the extra mile with my students. If there is an audition, I put in extra time. I run long on lessons if the next student is running late. I work on what is musically important for them, whether it is jamming with a punk band or playing in church.

5. DON'T ISOLATE YOUR STUDENTS! The more they play music with other students (especially different instruments and singers) the more fun they have. Promote jam sessions and performances with mixed students, and work with the other teachers at your store.

6. COMMUNICATION IS KEY. My students and parents can reach me 24/7 via cell phone, text, email and Facebook. Connectivity maintains retention!

7. PARTICIPATE & ENJOY THE LESSON. That's right — I participate in the musical growth of my students and enjoy the process of teaching. Being part of your students' musical adventure is what it's about. **MI**



When teachers are excited about instructing, your students will enjoy learning

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