

ALL IN

Developing Professional Relationships

By Gary Markham

The key to success is you.

We all want success. Success for ourselves, our programs, and most of all, for our students. We want to reach the highest graduation and attendance rates. We want to help our students have the highest in social, emotional and intellectual capacities and the highest levels of citizenship. We want our students to have a lifelong relationship with music. And we want them to have the grounding in music that will help them achieve in life. For each of us to evolve from good music teachers to great music teachers, we need to build success on the pillars of trust: honesty, integrity, dignity, ethics, and sensitivity. Developing quality relationships is the bridge to guarantee success.

This part of the ALL IN series shows how develop professional relationships with workplace colleagues, music colleagues, administrators, community leaders, arts organizations, and Higher Education professors .



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ALL IN: THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

What are those qualities found in the exemplar music educators that result in a life-changing experience for students? Through their curricula and practice teaching, collegiate programs do a good job of preparing teachers. The graduates of these programs understand the basics of pedagogy and musicianship. Yet, the great music educators have that “something extra” which goes beyond the material and concepts covered in school. It is that “essence” which empowers the Ninja music educator to have a profound impact on students, inspiring them to succeed not only in music but in life. Students who study music stay in school and demonstrate higher GRADUATION rates than those who do not. The evidence is broad and deep that music learning improves a student’s academic achievement. But the best programs even further strengthen test scores and grades, and lay the groundwork for success in professional life following school. Behind each and every outstanding program is an outstanding teacher. What is it then that stands apart the model music educator? Such an educator:

- 1) Believes in him/herself as someone who can make a difference
- 2) Is inspired, passionate, AND persuasive
- 3) Is primarily interested in the PEOPLE s/he is teaching and working with
- 4) Is able to make personal connections
- 5) Is a music missionary

How can I, as a music teacher, create, revive, or invigorate a program than can reach my students, help grow them, and increase the likelihood that they will graduate? I should:

- 1) Investigate and determine whom I am serving. I need to make a sensitive and strategic assessment to learn what music-making modalities already strongly live in the community. It is important to consider what kinds of music-making might engage or be interesting to this body of students. I must remain open to a variety of musical styles and genres.
- 2) Perform an honest self-evaluation of my unique special interests, biases, and skills. I should consider all possibilities, be willing to free myself from a particular approach to music-making and embrace what may already exist in the community.
- 3) Develop ethical but real personal connections with the students. It is personal relationships that allow me to grow as a human being and to succeed as a music teacher.
- 4) Develop relationships with colleagues, administrators, parents, and citizens in the community
- 5) Become a well-informed, compelling advocate for music educations, able to motivate and persuade stakeholders of the core value of the music program
- 6) Become a dynamic and determined fundraiser, equipped to generate significant resources to advance the programmatic mission.

Building and maintaining professional relationships is **KEY** to career and personal success as a music educator. Basic relational competencies are critical to achieve program goals and build a solid foundation of sustainability and continuous involvement. Different from partnerships, relationships consist of influencing others to come along for the musical ride based on respect, rapport and trust. As a music educator, you will constantly deal with varying constituencies including individuals and groups, each needing unique interaction and perspective. It is critical that you attend to each carefully and commit to the importance of the relationships.

Developing Effective Professional Relationships

- Be trustworthy
- Build rapport and respect
- Learn flexibility and compromise
- Communicate effectively
- Be an engaged listener
- Model honesty and professional ethics
- Demonstrate sincerity and caring
- Respect the perspectives of others
- Get to know constituencies personally
- Encourage and model collegiality
- Become an active participant in the school culture
- Establish excellence and maintain high expectations
- Use personal interaction instead of electronic communication when possible

Connect and Develop Professional Relationships with workplace colleagues, music colleagues, administrators, community leaders, arts organizations, and Higher Education professors:

Workplace Colleagues: Music teachers have a tendency to become isolated in their rooms. Our work lives are extremely full, but we must make time to interact with school colleagues and staff.

Make it your goal to develop a true understanding of the other disciplines. The school or school district is an organization like any other and will not operate effectively without great relationships. Attentive listening not only contributes to understanding, but also to mutual respect. Reach out to the clerical staff and service personnel. They can be of critical importance to achieving your program goals. Offering to help your peers builds trust, collegiality, and a sense of team, a necessity for school-wide success.

One way to grow relationships with workplace colleagues is to directly engage them in your program. You can ask the English teacher to read the text of a poem which inspired the composition of a piece the band is playing. The teacher could explain what motivated the poet and the significance of the text.

Next, you could explain how the composer used the music to enhance the meaning of the text. Thank the English teacher publicly and provide him/her with a framed photo of the band with signatures of the band students affixed as a memento. Be sure to offer to do the same in reverse. Provide a listening lesson for the students of the English teacher when appropriate or volunteer students from your program to help the science teacher demonstrate the teaching of the physics of sound.

Another way to achieve this goal is to celebrate others. Write a personal congratulatory note to the science teacher whose students just won the State Science Competition. Send a thank-you note along with some bagels and donuts to the Guidance Department for their assistance in getting your ensemble students scheduled appropriately. Treat your custodial staff to dinner for helping you set up for the concert. Come up with an arrangement of a "Happy Birthday" type of song that students can use when popping in on faculty or support staff on that special day. Give that person a birthday card signed by the students. These gestures contribute to a sense of family and help build morale. They also signature your program as a positive force within the entire school.

Always remember to thank the faculty for their support of your program--particularly after a major event or accomplishment. Write a memo to copy to the faculty or host a "Thank You Luncheon" at the end of the year where your students serve the faculty. You can use the following letter, with the music department logo attached:

Date

Dear Holst High School Faculty and Staff:

THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

Holst High School's Instrumental Music Program is being recognized for its many successful achievements over the past several years by being chosen perform at the upcoming prestigious statewide XMEA Clinic/Convention of the State Music Educators Association. XMEA is recognized as the foremost gathering of professional music educators in the nation. Educators from all over the country attend the XMEA Clinic/Convention so that they may benefit from hearing the best ensembles in America as prepared by their exceptional directors.

Not only has our program been asked to perform at this prestigious event, but they have been further honored by being selected as this year's featured ensemble in the Command Performance Final Concert in which famed jazz recording artist, Tommy Trumpet, will perform with us.

The annual XMEA Clinic/Convention features workshops for band, orchestra, vocal, elementary and college educators; concerts by the finest musicians; and two exhibit halls filled with booths representing all facets of the music education industry. The clinic/convention closes with performances by All-State ensembles comprised of the best high school musicians in the state.

To be invited to perform alongside the caliber of many other student musicians in our state is an immense honor and we know that we have you, our most ardent supporters, to thank for helping us to reach this level of achievement. To honor you and thank you for your support, we would like to treat you to lunch on Wednesday, February 14th in the Faculty Lounge. Our grateful students will serve you that day and share the stories of their experiences while at XMEA.

Thank you so much again for all that you do for all of the students of Haydn High School.

Most sincerely,

Mr. Music Educator

Music Colleagues: One of our greatest resources is each other. Developing collegial relationships becomes a primary source of professional development. A music teacher's entire career depends on acquiring a vast repertoire of instructional strategies and programmatic techniques. Sharing our expertise allows all to benefit. Keeping our competitive "secrets" does not lend itself to effective relationships or program success. **Work diligently to develop a culture of sharing.**

Quality lesson plans, proven teaching strategies, student handbooks, and fund-raising ideas are just a few items that can be shared among colleagues. One idea might be to arrange for a Switch Day with a fellow educator. We learn a great deal by "walking in another's shoes." Another idea might be to plan a "Cone Concert" (i.e. a Concert with all feeder schools -- Elementary through High School-- performing) around a theme that would be decided upon collaboratively.

Administrators: Working with administrators is crucial to moving our programs forward and providing a positive image for the school. It is important to empathize with the administrator's perspective. We have a tendency to become mired in our own issues and lose sight of the broader purpose behind our program's existence and its place in school life and curriculum. **Take the time to discern what you can do to move the school's strategic plan forward.** It will do political wonders and can go a long way in establishing academic credibility for you and your program. If every time you come to an administrator it is about your needs, eventually your words will fall on deaf ears. If you are seen as a team player, your requests will have real meaning.

Meet with the principal to ask how the music program might help to build school spirit or help advance the mission of the school. The principal will probably be surprised to learn how effective music education programs can be to achieving these goals. Volunteer student groups to play at administrative meetings, parent gatherings, or at other events hosted by your principal. You might also consider engaging the principal by inviting him to conduct a march on one of your concert or to help you present special recognitions at the Awards Banquet. Be sure that one such recognition is called the "Principal's Award" and is given BY the principal to the student who has consistently demonstrated the "Best Attitude."

Community Leaders: Community Leaders have great influence on school policy and public perception. **Establish professional relationships with local and state leaders so they may benefit from your educational and music advocacy perspective.** If you can establish your program as a solid community asset, advocacy will be a natural outcome.

Arts Organizations: **Cultivate effective relationships with arts organizations.** They are a valuable instructional resource. Collaborations between your program and other arts organizations can strengthen instructional delivery and provide resources for the arts organizations as well. Again, we all need each other and relationships are the key.

Music Merchants and Manufacturers: **Reach out to music merchants and manufacturers.** They are potentially core allies. The co-dependence is obvious and it is important to cultivate relationships that are of mutual benefit. Vendors can help your program and vice-versa. It is imperative to demonstrate ethical character and fairness to all when dealing with these constituencies. Be sure to consult district policies and professional standards regarding your interaction with music merchants and manufacturers.

Vendors can offer great assistance in many ways and there are certainly ways for you and your program to contribute to their success as well. They provide us with advocacy materials, posters, and assistance with recruitment and retention. Dealers and manufacturers can also help us solve problems. In one instance, the Wenger Corporation was approached by a music educator in a quandary. How to store

mariachi instruments? Within a very short time, Wenger re-designed one of their cabinets to store guitarrones and vihuelas. Not only did they address the teacher's need, they also were then able to market and sell Mariachi cabinets to other schools. The personal relationship built between the teacher and the vendor made this possible.

Civic Organizations: Civic organizations are another valuable two-way resource. Often, civic organizations provide service for the community and particularly the school district. **Volunteer your ensembles to perform for civic functions.** Any positive interaction can be very valuable as an advocacy partner. Additionally, offer to speak at civic meetings about your program as a benefit to the community. The more you can educate the public about your program's educational purpose and place in the community, the better.

Your band could agree to march in a parade sponsored by one civic organization one year and in subsequent years participate in parades sponsored by different organizations thereby supporting various worthwhile endeavors in the community. Orchestra teachers can provide string ensembles to perform at lunches or banquets each year. These performances should be done gratis as a way to give back to the community, and so that they are not seen as using students from the school program to displace professional musicians.

Higher Education Professors: Most collegiate music education faculty are very interested in getting in front of high school students as a recruiting tool. **Invite professors to your music room on a regular basis to provide in-depth instruction as well as an opportunity for them to promote their collegiate programs.** Look upon these relationships as instructional partnerships.

