

March, April, May

- a new member crash course

by Mary Wendt, Vice President, MA Dance & Auxiliaries

Your new members are feeling self-worth and confidence - they are now part of the elite dance/drill team of their high school! As they beam, now is the time to harness their enthusiasm and develop your students' potential. Providing them with solid information and steps to begin their journey as new members needs to begin now- they are a captive audience! So, what steps can you, as a director, do to capitalize on this enthusiasm?

- Give each member a list of phone numbers for current and new members. They should use this as a phone tree and to begin connecting as a team. Encourage social functions during these months and invite them to the multitude of community performances so they can experience watching their team.
- Discuss local dance studios in the area with your students. Education in dance needs to be through active participation. Have your officer candidates call the owners and compose a listing for the rookies. The questions they should ask the studio owners should include:
 - What accreditation(s) do you have?
 - What method of ballet do you teach?
 - Are all of your instructors accredited?
 - If not, what is their professional performance background and teaching background?
 - Does the studio attend conventions and workshops?
 - When are the dates for these? Is there any way the students can come in and take a sample class?
 - Is the studio willing to add a class just for the drill team members? (They can add a class for March, April and May, guaranteeing the studio 10-20 girls for this duration.)
 - Does the studio have competition experience?
 - "Competition is important because teachers must polish their dancers, resulting in a uniformity of technique and style," says Kathy McCormick, former Ballet Director of the Plano Academy of Dance.
 - Does the studio teach ballet, tap and jazz?
 - It is important that the teachers are diverse in styles and offer more than one perspective.
 - What style of dance should the girls study?
 - Ballet is the foundation of dance. Unlike jazz, the center is squared. It includes not only wonderful technical training but they learn an extensive dance vocabulary.
- Organize the new members into different specialty ensemble groups. They can try-out or sign up for the categories of jazz, high kick, lyrical, novelty, and pom. Each group begins with developing choreography and concludes by creating a routine that can be used for contest, spring show or pep rallies in the coming months. Officer candidates or squad leaders can participate in the sectionals or supervise rehearsal. Betsy Heathcock from Fort Bend Austin High School is excited to have a repertoire to draw from during the hectic months following competition. "Having the ensembles will be easier to develop my spring show program".
- Develop a stretching program by enacting mandatory injury prevention classes. Injuries are a common occurrence at camps, in part because the dancers are inactive during the off-season. Athletic trainers will be happy to share their expertise and have an abundance of informative handouts on common ankle and knee injuries. Common questions should be asked of the professional: heat or ice on a strain; do we wrap or wear a brace after a repeated injury? Instruct the performers on the RICE technique and other basic athletic treatments. Learning the correct way to stretch will benefit your members not only for the season but also for their entire dance career.
- Consult a nutritionist to meet with the team members and their parents at the opening booster or team meeting. The expert can discuss healthy eating at home and at school. What are the best snacks for the parents to provide at team parties, trips and for lunches? Informing the parents and asking them to assist their dancers eat healthier will be a life-long skill that you, as the director, can cultivate for local families. Some local hospitals provide free speakers and even donate poms if the families fill out questionnaires concerning their health habits.



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- Demand time organization! The girls soon become aware of the demands your activity will have on their academic and social activities. Have each dancer prepare a planner listing dates that are required for performances and practices. Financial deadlines should be included so that families can budget on a timeline. Included in this information is a primer for the parents. Holly Knight of Elkins High School has a letter written by several parents that is "handed down" and revised every year. The missive includes: how to clean the uniforms, what the girls carry in their drill team bag and why everything in it is important! The most touching section deals with parents supporting their daughters by attending the performances. Communication between yourself, the students, and their parents is an integral part of your success as a teacher.
 - An important section to give each student is a listing of your expectations along with a copy of the constitution and by-laws. Demerit and merit policies must be clearly stated and provided to the parents as well. These policies must be given as early as possible and signed by both student and parent. Each dancer should have a copy in her planner for quick reference. Clearly stated rules and their consequences will make the year smoother for you, your administration, and the parents.
 - Post on a bulletin board all the camp flyers, dance conventions and any other opportunities relating to dance that you receive. Do not limit your members to one camp as a team. Provide the materials you receive for them to individually peruse and perhaps attend. One of the best things I did in my drill team career was to attend four camps the summer before my senior year. Not only did I learn a variety of dances, but I also experienced many different teaching styles. This enabled me to fuse the techniques that I had observed and develop a distinctive method of being an officer. The more knowledge your students can attain on their own, the more they bring to your program.
 - Adopt a big sister/little sister program immediately following tryouts. The veterans can prepare the rookies for items to bring to camp, rehearsal etiquette and more importantly, a fellow member's perspective on team goals. The more information they have to draw from, the stronger team member they will be in August. They also have someone to talk to and not fear asking for help.

Let your officer candidates and/or new officers take some initiative in developing your rookies. Take advantage of the three months by channeling their enthusiasm in a constructive manner. Brainstorm with directors at convention to come up with other ideas-Assign choreography projects, set up clinics, begin fund-raisers. You will be delighted with the strength of the dancer by working on her technique, organization and creativity skills. Good luck!

