Over the past 28 years, I have been involved with numerous dance officer tryouts primarily in the state of Texas. Directors and many school districts have designed their own score sheets for these tryouts consisting of multiple criteria - each with a varying percentage of the final score. Most commonly, I see score sheets for dance skills, solo routines, interviews, notebooks, teaching abilities, choreography skills, performance of line tryout routines, director evaluations, and team votes. Every director's methodology varies as do the length and intensity of each tryout.

My two most significant observations in this process are:

1. The score sheets the judges must use are not well-designed instruments for producing the types of officers the team needs, and
2. Many of the requirements in the officer selection process are not really effective indicators of officer potential and success.

My purpose in this article is simply to give directors “food for thought” concerning the value of different phases of an officer tryout. If you are content with your process and it works for your situation, continue to use it. However, if you find yourself a little nonplused following officer tryouts and are continually searching for a more effective way to select the leadership for your team, feel free to incorporate any or all of the following suggestions.

I cannot tell you how many times directors emphasize to the judges that leadership ability is just as important, if not more so, than dance (including choreography/teaching) ability. Unfortunately, the score sheets the judges then use sabotage this position.

My suggestion is very easy. Unless you are bound by the district to utilize a standardized score sheet, you must devise one that reflects your preference, whether it be weighted 50%-50% or 60%-40% leadership skills vs. dance skills. If you do not, then your judges may have to lower scores for solos, dance skills, teaching skills, and choreography skills for students who excel in these areas, even though they may lack the necessary leadership skills for an officer position. Mathematically, the more categories and facets you have to evaluate during an officer tryout, the more you lessen the value of any one of those criterion. More categories and divisions allow students who are less qualified to “stay in the running”.

When all is said and done, 3 aspects of an officer tryout standout in my selection process as a judge. These include: (1) the interview, (2) a solo routine emphasizing the candidate’s dance strengths, and (3) a teaching and polishing segment which conveys the candidate’s ability to teach and polish dance steps as well as work with team members. For your professional judges, additional criteria to evaluate become unnecessary. Usually, once the interview, solo, and teaching/polishing segment have occurred, most judges are certain of their selections. Truthfully, what invariably happens beyond this point is that the judges give scores for additional segments that are almost identical to the ones given in the 3 elements mentioned above. In other words, it has minimal effect on the final outcome.

Now, I do believe that it is very important to have director input/teacher evaluations and the team vote considered along with the judges' scores. In about 80% or more cases, you will find that the candidates selected for officers by the team are identical to the ones chosen by your professional judges. This should not be surprising. The team members have dealt with these candidates for a full year and have the most information for casting their ballot. If the director simply tells her team to vote “based upon the entire year’s performance” and not that given over the past few weeks, the team members usually hit the nail on the head. Finally, I value placing all of the candidates in the same environment and
having them respond to various situations that are likely to arise during the year. Basically, this is a 30-60 minute quiz administered to each of the candidates one to two hours before the outside judges are scheduled to arrive. I will explain and illustrate this concept in more detail later in the article. Thus, I might structure an officer tryout in the following manner:

I. Judges’ Interview  100 Points
II. Solo Routine  100 Points
III. Teaching/Polishing  100 Points
IV. Teacher Recommendations  100 Points
V. Team Vote  50 Points
VI. Leadership Quiz  50 Points

POINT TOTAL  500 Points

As you can see, the officer tryout would be based upon a 500 point scale. Why are these effective leadership measurement tools? First of all, you have designed a paradigm for officer tryouts that is 60% leadership oriented and 40% technically based. Only the Solo Routine and the Teaching/Polishing facets evaluate the physical aspects of dance (performing, teaching, polishing) while the other four sections measure leadership and character. Since your outside judges are involved in parts I, II, and III only, this will significantly reduce their time commitment at your tryout and probably increase their willingness to accept more invitations to judge. Parts IV, V, and VI of this process give the director 3 different opinions of the candidate’s leadership and interpersonal skills (in three different settings). That is, you have the faculty’s evaluations, your team members’ input, and your input from personal experience and the quiz. What else do you need?

Let’s break down each of the 6 elements in the officer tryout in more detail. We first examine the importance and content of the judges’ interview.

**PART ONE: THE INTERVIEW**

Of all the components of an officer tryout, the interview probably has the most significant impact upon the professional judges. As the adage goes, “You do not have a second chance to make a first impression”. Candidates who interview well seem to receive a little more leniency when it comes to evaluating their dance skills. The reverse, however, is not true. I suggest a 5-10 minute per candidate interview which begins in a relaxed manner but quickly becomes intense and insightful. Each student should realize that the judges are trying to discern his/her ability to articulate and communicate as well as their personal charisma and power of persuasion. Questions by the judges can be pre-arranged, spontaneous, or a combination of both. The Leadership Quiz alluded to above could serve as an excellent “springboard” for interview questions. It is also not unfair for the director to submit certain questions to ask each candidate. After all, he/she has worked with these individuals all year and knows which issues to address. The following represents a sample of good interview questions for the professional judging panel:

**Judges’ Interview Questions for Officer Tryouts**

1. Among the candidates trying out, who do you think would make the best officers? Captain? Who, among the candidates, would you not recommend to be selected officers?
2. What is your strongest characteristic? Your weakest trait?
3. You have watched many officers in the past - who was the best leader and why? If any were poor leaders, what were their flaws?
4. Fast forward to a year from now. What do you hope your teammates will say about you as officer?
5. What other leadership positions have you held outside of drill/dance team (school, church, scouts, and community)? What did you accomplish?

6. What do you think were the team's biggest problems this past year? Did you contribute to them? How did you help solve them? What are your suggestions for handling these problems/situations in the future?

7. If you do NOT make officer, what do you hope to contribute to the team next year?

8. Is it more important for an officer to be a good dancer or a good leader? On a scale of 1-10, rate your leadership ability. Now, on the same scale, rate your dance ability.

9. If you could identify yourself with a symbol (or an animal), what would it be and why?

10. What does self-initiation mean? Name some specific things you can do that are self-initiated?

11. What are 3 of your main goals for the team next year?

12. Identify your proudest moment as a team member last year? Now, if you could turn back the hands of time, identify the moment or incident that still causes you pain or embarrassment to think about.

13. Everyone realizes that an effective group of officers is comprised of individuals who compliment each other's strengths. Picture the candidates that you believe to be the best choice for officers next year's; now, one by one, identify them with their greatest strength: motivator, disciplinarian, organizer, comedian, etc.

14. Give us an example of your ability to discipline as it relates to the team? Can you assume this role and not be an officer?

15. What did you do this year to make membership on the dance team more enjoyable for everyone?

16. Think of your schoolwork, extra-curricular activities, work, and other involvement at home and in the community, do you have enough time to serve as an effective officer? Give us a list of your priorities that surround your life. Would you have to make sacrifices in any of your activities to fulfill your duties as an officer?

17. Complete the following sentence: "If I could change one thing about our dance team, it would be _______________________."

18. The clock is ticking: You have 15 seconds to give us your best sales pitch on why you should be selected as an officer. (Look at watch while student is responding)

19. Give us an example of your ability to think quickly on your feet and handle a crisis.

20. Besides your director, name the teacher who has had the most impact on your life and tell us why.

Obviously, you may add a dozen other questions to the list above. However, this list of 20 should provide good insight into the character of any officer candidate. Enclosed is also a sample score sheet that might be used for the professional interview section. Notice how each caption of the score sheet is clearly defined for your judges to evaluate. The judges' interview should be worth a total of 100 points which represents 20% of the total score for the audition.

**PART TWO: THE SOLO ROUTINE**

In my estimation, the primary purpose of a solo routine is to evaluate the officer candidate's dance ability and technique. Since many officer "hopefuls" receive outside help with their choreography and a director hates to discourage further training and instruction, the solo routine should be structured similar to the "short program" in ice skating. What am I talking about? Well, in the short program, the competitors must combine all of the essential elements (in the case of dance, axels, switch leaps, grand jetes, fouettes, splits, layouts, etc.) into the routine in a creatively choreographed manner. The judge's see choreography to music that still should display variety, difficulty, and technique, and also have an opportunity to compare the essential dance element skills of each aspiring officer. The candidate should provide the judges with a choreography chart of the musical selection with specific notation of the placement of the essential elements. I believe that the solo routine should also be valued at 100 points which represent 20% of a candidate's total score. Enclosed is a sample score sheet that might be utilized for evaluating the solo routine of each candidate.
PART THREE: THE TEACHING AND POLISHING SECTION

One component of a complete officer tryout must include some variation of teaching and polishing a routine. It is important for the director as well as the judges to see an officer candidate “take charge” in terms of choreography, teaching, and polishing. In my opinion, there are 2 ways to accomplish this facet of the audition.

One method is to select (8) eight counts of a piece of music and give each officer candidate a tape or CD. Their job is to choreograph these 64 counts and present a written copy of their choreography with any formations to the judges. Then, each candidate proceeds to teach either 5 selected members from the team or the rest of the officer candidates. After watching their teaching style, voice control, clarity, ability to mirror, etc., the judges score this portion based upon 100 total points or 20% of the audition. A sample score sheet for the teaching a polishing section has been enclosed.

The second method to utilize for teaching and polishing would be in the form of a Choreography Project. Candidates choreograph (8) eight counts to the same music and then teach their routine to a select group of three (or more) girls: one with high dance ability, one intermediate dancer, and one beginning dancer. They have a set time to teach and polish their routine, usually two days. At the actual officer tryout, the group performs with the officer standing by (not performing) and is scored by judges. The similarities between method one and two are obvious. Smaller teams will be limited to method one while larger teams may employ either method. The advantage of method two is that it parallels more closely the day to day practices of a team. The candidate is given an opportunity to teach the routine, help members with any difficult sections, and polish the choreography. The dancers assigned to each group must be determined by the ability level criteria designated above. With parity among the groups, the performance of each group fairly represents the teaching and polishing ability of the officer candidate as well as his/her choreographic skills. The judges score this portion of the audition on a 100 point scale which, again, is 20% of the total officer tryout.

PART FOUR: FACULTY EVALUATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Teacher recommendations and evaluations are very important in completing the picture of the total person trying out for an officer position. However, two things are very important if you plan to utilize faculty evaluations as a 20% of your audition score.

First of all, you must design a one page form for the teacher to complete which is quantifiable. It might be advisable to design a score sheet for the faculty which asks each teacher to rate the candidate on the following criteria: (1) attendance record (2) work habits (3) leadership abilities and (4) interpersonal skills. For your convenience, a comprehensive score sheet has been included for your review. Special care has been taken to include the qualities and characteristics that would be most important to an officer’s success. Each caption on the Faculty Evaluation Form is valued at 25 points for a total of 100 points or 20% of a candidate's audition. Once all of the forms have been distributed to the appropriate faculty members, care must be taken by the director to strongly encourage teacher participation. Although you cannot guarantee anonymity, the fact that a student’s score for the Faculty Evaluation is the average of the total scores submitted by all of his/her teachers, indicates that no one teacher’s score will be singled out. Directors should have each of their officer candidates complete the top part of the Faculty Evaluation form for all of their teachers. Directors should then collect these forms and either personally give them to the appropriate faculty members or place in their mailboxes. Care must also be taken to have the forms returned to the advisor or placed in his/her mailbox. Student candidates should never be involved in the actual distribution or collection of these evaluation forms. If faculty members take the time to complete the evaluation, the scores given could be very revealing about a student’s potential to serve as an officer.
PART FIVE: THE TEAM MEMBER EVALUATION

The team vote is one of the best indicator's of a potential candidate's success as an officer. More often than not, the composite team vote corresponds remarkably close to the opinion of the professional panel of judges. Exceptions to this rule usually arise when newly elected members vote and have only two weeks experience working with the candidates. Even so, it is amazing how close the team “hits the nail on the head”. My only suggestion in this portion of the tryout is to make the ballot distributed to the team members more professionally designed. For example, list all of the officer candidates in alphabetical order with lines after their names. The directions at the top of the ballot might read: Of the ten officer candidates listed below, indicate the 5 individuals you would like to receive these positions. Place a “5” by the individual you wish to vote as your top choice, a “4” for your second choice for officer, a “3” for your third choice, a “2” for your fourth choice, and a “1” for your fifth choice. Have a place at the bottom of the ballot for the team member’s signature. Anonymity is unacceptable. If a student expects his/her vote to be counted, he/she must have the courage and confidence to be identified with that ballot. This procedure maintains the integrity of the democratic process. Also, insist that team members vote for 5 choices. Explain that voting for any number less than the number of officers that will be selected is unacceptable and will result in the invalidation of their ballot. Mathematically, this improves consistency and reliability of the team vote.

In most instances, the candidate receiving the majority vote is the team’s choice for Captain, the individual with the next highest total their second choice, etc. At the end, all ten of the candidates need to be given a total team vote score. On a 50 point scale, the highest scoring officer candidate should receive 50 points, the second place candidate 45, third place 40, fourth place 35, and fifth place 30. If you can determine the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth places, give them scores of 25, 20, 15, 10, and 5, respectively. Again, although seemingly cruel at times, the composite vote of the team members is quite revealing and must be considered.

PART SIX: THE LEADERSHIP PROFILE QUIZ

In my opinion, you should replace the traditional officer notebook with a problem solving quiz. Assemble all of the candidates together and give them 30 - 60 minutes to complete a series of 10 different issues valued at 5 points each. It would be interesting to see how each student solves different problems under time constraints. The director should grade these quizzes and give a leadership profile score which is valued at a total of 50 points or 10% of the audition. These quizzes could also be given to the judges for use as additional questions asked during the interview. The following represents some typical situations and issues that make good problems for officer candidates to discuss.

Written Scenarios/Questions for Officer Tryouts

1. Many of the students in the school think that the dance team is an elite/snobby clique. As an officer, what would you do to remedy this problem?
2. The band members are mad at the dance team because the band has to learn extra music and spend extra time during marching practice to rehearse with them. They think the (dancers are all prima donnas. They are talking about speeding up the music. As an officer, how would you handle this situation?
3. A team member comes to a game and you know she’s been drinking alcohol. As an officer, what plan of action would you take?
4. Several team members want to quit. As an officer, how would you handle turn this negative situation into a positive one?
5. Your director has chosen music (costumes, choreography, etc.) for a competition routine and many of the girls, including you, do not like them. As an officer, what are the first three things that you would do to remedy the situation?
6. You witness a fellow officer cheating on a graded assignment/test. What would you do?
7. Your best friend cannot make a required team event. She lies (and you know it) to avoid getting
demerits (or getting kicked off). As an officer, what would be your approach to this issue?
8. The school has drastically cut the budget in many areas for the coming year. This means little
travel, no new uniforms, a small-scaled spring show, and limited contest participation. Give me
three ideas you have for keeping team members upbeat and at least one new idea for getting
more funds in the budget?
9. “Dance team is taking too much time,” grumble many members. “With practices, performances,
fundraising, social events, I don’t have time to study and I’m failing.” As an officer, what would be
your suggestions to remedy this situation?
10. You are performing at a basketball game and the tape breaks or CD skips. As an officer, what do
you do?
11. A fellow officer makes a mistake in front of the whole team (teaching, giving information, etc.)
How would you handle this situation?
12. Several members on the team have negative attitudes. As an officer, devise a solution to this problem.
13. You are writing the advertising campaign for this dance team. What would your slogan be and
how would you sell this group?
14. If you could change one thing about your director, what would it be?
15. Rank in order of importance (in your opinion): appearance, grades, dance ability, team vote,
leadership ability, teaching ability, director’s opinion, and teacher recommendations.
16. What are the members’ biggest complaints about the dance team? How would you resolve them?
17. List the main benefits you have gained by being on this team.
18. List 3 traditions of this team that you like. List 3 traditions you would like to change.
19. The school principal is new and not a real big fan of dance teams in general. He thinks that drill
teams are a waste of time and just cause more parental problems. What might you do to convince
him otherwise?
20. Your director is new and the parents in the booster club are “eating her alive”. In other words,
the “inmates are running the asylum”. What would you do to resolve this situation?

You, as director, could add many more wonderful questions to this list. It might be interesting to ask
each candidate to submit three questions they would like to see the other prospective officers answer.
This will build your battery of questions. Again, either hand-pick or randomly select 10 questions for
them to answer valued at 5 points each. Hand-picking the questions from year to year or randomly
selecting them prevents any candidate from knowing the questions ahead of time. It also discourages
candidates from passing down information from year to year. If they never see your original list and
are not privy to the questions each year’s candidates submit, they have no idea what their leadership
profile quiz will entail.

This completes this 6 part Officer Tryout designed by M.A. Dance. It is impossible to comprehensively
cover all of the aspects of an officer audition in the space permitted. However, the information
presented thus far should more than provide you with the tools necessary to conduct an audition.
Finally, a few rules of thumb for conducting Officer Tryouts must be followed to limit negative
repercussions.

All officer candidates should receive a tryout packet 6 weeks prior to the audition which includes the
following:
  * Audition Application Form complete with Officer Contract signed by member and parent
    (agreeing to additional responsibilities of officer and agreeing to abide by decision of judges)
  * Tryout eligibility requirements for candidate and parents
  * Schedule of all phases of tryouts along with deadlines, if applicable
  * Detailed list of various phases for officer tryouts with:
    Requirements for every phase of the audition

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• Sample scores sheets/evaluation forms for each segment
• Helpful hints for prospective officers
• Yearly schedule of team activities and events
• Detailed itemization of Officer costs above team costs
• Officer minimum dance skills list
• Emergency information form

For your convenience, a sample Audition Application with Officer Contract and a Dance Officer Requirement Form complete with clinic schedule have been enclosed. Again, these forms should serve as excellent guidelines and can be tailored to fit any program.

In closing, besides utilizing professional judges and well-designed score sheets for your audition, here is an additional list of MUST FOLLOW commandments:

1. Thou shalt have a school administrator present during all of the actual scored phases of the audition. He/She is needed to verify that the tryouts were professionally conducted without bias.
2. Thou shalt utilize a professional panel of judges with credentials no parent can question.
3. Thou shalt always be organized and have all written material approved and ready to distribute to officer candidates.
4. Thou shalt always notify school administration of all relevant dates, and double-check for conflicts with school calendar.
5. Thou shalt make sure that parents have a copy of all written material and have agreed to the demands stated therein.
6. Thou shalt not allow parents to watch phases of your tryout. They are convinced that their daughter/son should be selected. This is especially true when some of your candidates are fabulous soloists and questionable leaders!
7. Thou shalt never allow students (managers, assistants, current or former officers) to sit near the judges or assist with the scoring. Make sure they are not present should any discussions among the judges, director, and/or administrator need to occur. As much as you think you can trust them, you cannot - they’re just kids!
8. Thou shalt double check all scores before making any announcements, and be able to justify results, if questioned.
9. Thou shalt announce the results immediately, if possible. Do not allow any suspicion about tampering with the results to arise by delaying the announcement of the new officers.
10. Thou shalt take a deep breath and, after doing all you can do, have peace with the results. Things usually happen for a reason.