

# Seeing “The Big Picture”

By Darby Boyd

I have been the director of two dance teams at two schools in the DFW area. Just like most directors, I have had highs and lows in my career. I work long hours and deal with typical drill team problems, with little compensation. Both schools where I was director were lower income schools. The students I taught had little or no dance background. I received VERY little funding from the district. None of these points are special or unusual, so why, you might ask, I am I writing this article? What possible insight do I have that stands out? In light of adversity, however, at both schools I was able to build award winning programs with 300+ students and dance teams with 70+ members. I tripled my numbers in just a few years by simply focusing on the “Big Picture.”

How did I do it twice? I was recently asked to reflect and answer this question, something I honestly have never done. I weighed the common factors about both schools. I asked myself, “How DID I rebuild and rejuvenate my programs?” Here is what I came up with; a list of things I have done and continue to do daily.

- I constantly evaluate my programs and make adjustments. I consider the future, the past, and the present. I visualize what I want and then figured out a way to make it reality.
- I focus on the environment of the classroom first, and dance second. I utilize my social officers in creating a family-like environment. I try to break up cliques and if “drama” is brought into the dance room, I immediately address it. For example, if two friends are fighting, I make them sit down in my office and work it out. I always put this above anything else. The result? A close, bonded team that is only there to work. Then, we can focus on dancing.
- In both programs, I lowered costs. Dramatically.
  - The results are amazing. I spend hours and hours playing with figures, deliberating what items are necessities and what are expendable.
  - I pin pointed what we really needed as opposed to what we wanted. I was even pleasantly surprised by the reaction when I cut things. For example, I recently put my team into an all black practice outfit and they LOVE it! They don’t have to think before they pack their dance bags, and they receive fewer demerits.
- I treat my dance class students with the same love and attention as my dance team students. They are the future. If kids love dance class, they tell their friends. Happy dance kids tryout for the dance team, plus they tell other students to sign up for the class. The result? Large numbers in both.
- I am “real” with my students.
  - I talk to them about things other than dance. We have many talks about being classy and living our lives with self-respect. We talk about boys, and other social issues.
  - I ask them about themselves and mean it.
  - I make jokes and have FUN with my students.

- I tell them I care about them at the moments I truly feel it.
- When I want to make a major change, I let the entire TEAM help me decide. If the kids have ownership in decision-making, there is virtually NO resistance to change. I give them options and let them vote. Let's face it, it is much better to be asked your opinion instead of being told, "This is how it is!" I know I appreciate it.
- I am constantly working on the team's public image.
  - My teams are VERY disciplined and, believe it or not, the kids like it! When I am teaching, I expect to be able to hear a pin drop. If there is talking, I stop. A group with that level of restraint gets noticed. Everyone wants to be a part of something better – something special, something above average. Group decorum sets the tone. We always get complimented on our stand behavior at the games, their behavior at school, and guest teachers are amazed by their classroom etiquette.
  - We always strive for better. After every performance I tell them what they did well, and what they could have done better. I motivate them and try my best to light fire in their bellies. I tell them the value of achieving their goals.
  - Drill team is "cool". At both schools my goal was for girls to pick drill team over cheerleading. At both schools, eventually, they did. I even had girls quit cheerleading to be on drill team. How? Think basic PR. I take their image and promote it. YOU build the excitement and YOU can control the mindset on campus.
- I explain everything, and I mean EVERYTHING!!!
  - I don't assume. I tell them why it is important to stretch – to practice – to perform well – to be disciplined – to work as a team. Don't just say it, explain it.
- I show NO fear.
  - Say what needs to be said! I can't tell you how many times I have heard other directors say, "I wish I could tell them what I really think." I ask, "Why don't you?" The response is, "I could never do that! I would be crucified." Well, the truth is, you WON'T be crucified. It's all in the way you deliver it. Being straightforward helps them more than skirting around the problems. As long as you are not abusive and use appropriate language, telling it "like it is" earns their respect. The results are unbelievable.
  - I stand my ground and flex my strength. Students smell fear, as do parents and administration. Have the mindset of, "I am the Director, hear me roar! I never back away from confrontation; In fact, I am usually the confronter when situations arise. Problems NEVER solve themselves. Immediately address them and show NO FEAR!
- I never make exceptions to rules – ever, ever!!!! Consistency builds trust. Once you have the kids, parents, and administration's trust, you have their respect and their admiration.
- Have tryouts after Spring Show. Spring Show provides so much exposure and excitement to your program. It is my #1 recruitment tool.