

Tips to Take Over a Team

by Christie Crummel

Taking over a team can be an exciting, but very trying experience. No director forgets his/her first year with a new team. Even if you are fortunate enough to start a brand new organization, there are several aspects of your tenure that you will want to orchestrate. When putting together your strategy, you must consider every person or group that you will have contact with throughout the year.

◆ **THE OUTGOING DIRECTOR:** Establish a unified relationship with the outgoing director. This is the key to a smooth transition--especially if your predecessor served for many years. You can count on hearing over and over, "last year we did..." Call your predecessor for advice and include his/her on some of those difficult decisions your first year. Invite him/her back to choreograph and teach routines. The team will enjoy the familiar movement. You will gain more respect from the team when they see that you both can work together and respect each other.

◆ **THE OFFICERS:** Establish a unified relationship with your officers--especially if the outgoing director is not available. They can "fill you in" on what did or did not work in the past and, with their help, you can decide what is best for the team in the future.

◆ **THE ADMINISTRATION:** Establish a good relationship with them quickly; you will need them to back you up in those tough parent/student situations. Find out what situations occurred in the past to try to keep them from happening again. Schedule an appointment or talk to them while on duty in the cafeteria or hall. You may have to sacrifice a lunch or planning period, but it will pay off down the road.

◆ **THE FACULTY:** Assure them that academics come first! Ask them to contact you if a team member is struggling or if behavior is not acceptable in their class. Encourage them to set tutoring sessions that don't interfere with practice if at all possible. This can be done by email or at a faculty meeting.

◆ **THE DEPARTMENT CHAIR:** Inquire how your program can support other programs. Having a "Team Player" attitude will go far with your colleagues.

◆ **THE BAND DIRECTOR:** The officers will want to meet with you first thing and get down to the business of planning the year. Definitely meet with them several times before your first Booster Club meeting so that you are all on the same page. And of course invite your predecessor if appropriate.

◆ **THE BOOSTER CLUB:** The officers will want to meet with you first thing and get down to the business of planning the year. Definitely meet with them several times before your first Booster Club meeting so that you are all on the same page. And of course invite your predecessor if appropriate.

◆ **THE PARENTS:** Schedule a meet and greet. Having it at a member's home makes it more relaxed and personal. Parents will feel like they can introduce themselves and get to know you better.

◆ **THE VENDORS:** Get a contact list of all vendors. Again this is where your predecessor can really help with paperwork and dealings of past uniform, fundraiser, summer camp, and contest companies.



◆ **THE ALUMNI:** The former members like to return, reconnect, and reminisce about their experiences in “the good old days.” They want to make sure that what they experienced in the past is somewhat still in place, despite the director change. Try not to change long-time traditions for their sake--especially if the alumni are financially supportive of the dance team. Reunions honoring them are helpful. Have the past director’s contact information readily available and don’t be offended if alumni flock to her. Remember-- she was their mentor, not you.

◆ **THE STUDENT BODY:** Find out what is acceptable to the student body. This is important, especially at pep rallies. Choosing music and style of dance for pep rallies can win over the student body and, in turn, make drill team the “in thing” to join.

◆ **THE TRADITIONS:** It is best not to change anything your first year. Having the mind set of “It’s My Way or the Highway” usually doesn’t go over well. Spend the first year observing and identifying the sacred cows. Survey the team and see what traditions mean the most to them and why. Change is scary to teenagers and must be approached carefully. Include them in the decisions to change something by putting it up to an anonymous team vote. If change is necessary, make sure that your approach encourages them to take ownership in that change.

Finally, remember that longevity and perseverance are instrumental to your success. It doesn’t matter how much previous experience you have or how exceptional you are, your first year as a director at any school will be challenging. The fact is, you’re new and teenagers don’t trust newcomers. You will discover that your third and fourth years will be so much easier than your first two and realize that you really didn’t do much of anything differently. The only difference is longevity. So hang in there, your patience and perseverance will pay off.

