

ABC's of Engaging with Music Educators Based on Insights from Kirk Young and others:

“ABC's of Engaging Music Educators”
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“Building a Relationship with Music Educators”
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Introduction:

Do area music educators respond well to your chapter's outreach efforts? If not, rest assured that it probably has little to do with whether these educators have a cooperative nature or whether they like barbershop harmony. Instead, it likely has everything to do with whether you have paid the price to earn the educators' trust.

I have an unusual perspective on this. Not only have I been both a Barbershopper and a music educator for decades, but as a past BHS staff member I visited more than 100 chapters and observed the results of their outreach efforts. I saw various successful approaches, and I've also seen many Barbershoppers who had the best of intentions but the worst of methods.

I've also lost count of the number of educators with whom I've discussed the way Barbershoppers perform outreach. I can tell you that until you earn a music educator's trust, your chapter will be seen as little more than one among many entities vying for their attention. The process that follows outlines how to stand out, build trust, and truly help music educators in their mission to change lives through singing.

"Cold sales calls" do not work with music teachers. Teachers are inundated each week with phone calls, emails, letters, pamphlets and flyers from travel companies, fundraising companies, attire companies, music sales and more. You don't want to become just another flyer to ignore or a letter to be thrown in the trash.

1. Before asking “how,” ask “why”

A chapter has to do some soul-searching before contacting a school or a music teacher. If your end-goal is to recruit young men into your chapter, stop right now. Membership growth is for a different chapter committee doing a different kind of outreach – and definitely among a different pool of candidates. Youth Outreach is about giving *with no strings attached*. Any other motive, and teachers will shut you out.

Be certain that music educators have no reason to infer that your motive is to:

- Recruit their students and/or steal away their best male voices
- use their auditorium for a discount or for free
- compete with the music educator in the community
- evaluate the music education program or alter the curriculum
- "force" this teacher to like and use barbershop in their program

You need not downplay your chapter's love of barbershop, but educators must be confident that your help is unconditional. Yes, they'll get to know barbershop as they get to know you, and high-quality barbershop sells itself. But music educators need to come to barbershop on their own terms. Never forget that your mission is to help music educators change more lives through singing- on *their* terms, with *no strings attached*.

2. Understand the realities of music education

Don't expect much success if you simply show up and say, "We're here to help your program!" Music educators hear that from others all the time, and most have been burned. To stand out as different, you have to *be* different.

Recognize that each music educator already has a vision for their program, and much of it is dictated by state and district curriculum standards. This is not your program to take over. *No strings attached* means that you believe the music educator knows best how to run their program and you will support them 100%.

This process, to be effective, can take up to two years to get rolling. A chapter has to do some soul searching first, before they ever contact a school or a music teacher.

Survey the members and find out what level of interest there is for a YIH program. If there is at least **80%** buy in, proceed.

Pick a YIH team but put everyone in the chapter on it. Someone has to be the chair, though.

The chapter has to decide what type of YIH program it wants to build – passive or active.

- A “passive” program can just be monetary donations to a local school.
- An “active” program requires research, member involvement, traveling, support and logistics and more.

Demographic Research

1. The chapter needs to look around their local, geographic area. How many schools are there within the city they call “home.” Most metropolitan areas have dozens and dozens of schools; even small towns can have three or four.

2. The chapter needs to look at its roster. Are there any connections to any of the surrounding communities and their school districts? Is there a wife of a member who is connected, somehow, to a school district? Does anyone in the chapter know an administrator/teacher/staff in the building personally? Have a professional relationship with the school district? Have students at the school? What connection may already exist within their chapter.

3. Cross-reference the connections in the chapter and the geographic locations of the schools to discover if there is an advantageous situation already existing.

- If there is, this is your target school.
- If there isn't, we need to do more legwork.
- If you didn't find a school that has a connection with your chapter, you need to get some demographic data on your local schools.

DON'T VISIT THE SCHOOL YET. STAY AWAY FROM THE SCHOOL.

Now, find the school websites, and research each high school in your area for an arts department or a music department. Get as many details as you can from on-line sources.

1. What kind of programs are out there?
2. How many students attend the school? Is it a consolidated school or not?
3. How many concerts do they program in a school year?
4. Which schools have a thriving music department? A struggling one?
5. Which schools have more than one music faculty member?
6. Which schools have more than one choir? More than one band? An orchestra?
7. Which schools produce a musical each year?

After you have gathered this data, it is important to narrow your search by cross-referencing your school data to the chapter's intended program.

- In larger, more densely populated areas, you'll need to narrow your field to no more than five schools.
- In more rural areas, there may be only four or five schools.

Once you've narrowed your field, you need to take some road trips.

Field Research

DO NOT CONTACT THE MUSIC TEACHER. The following tasks are to be completed without ever speaking to a music teacher. It is important that you be knowledgeable about the program prior to initiating the relationship. At this point in the process, your chapter still has nothing substantial to offer, and you might damage your chances by pushing the wrong way.

1. Locate a school calendar for each of the schools in your narrowed field. These calendars are usually online, but they can also be attained by contacting the main office and asking for one. Somewhere, these calendars are published.
2. Using this calendar, find the next, upcoming concert for each school; whether that concert is choral, instrumental, orchestral, combined or even a musical. It should not matter whether that concert is choral, instrumental, orchestral, combined, or even a musical. Have teams each attend as a discovery mission.
3. Break your chapter up in to equal teams and assign each team a concert. These teams are to attend this concert as a discovery mission.
 - Do not dress in chapter uniforms.
 - Do not wear membership nametags.
 - Do not bring recruitment materials.
 - All of this comes much, much later.
4. Get copies of all programs, hand-outs, materials. Take copious notes on everything you see, both good and bad, at the concert.
 - Does the school have a music or arts booster program?
 - Equipment and logistics – risers, stands, chairs, choir robes, music folders, stage, curtain, concert programs, sound system
 - Audience – parents, community members, administration from the school, other students, snack table, ticket table, ushers
 - Students – decorum, involvement, attitude, attire
 - Other concerns at you may see them.
5. Leave when the concert is finished. Do not try to introduce yourself to the teacher, and do not hang around trying to talk to the kids or recruit them. Remember, you are on their turf! If educators or parents see some strange person hanging around and trying to talk to the young men in the chorus, this can paint your organization in a horrible light. Moreover, "sales pitches" at a school sponsored event may be a form of solicitation that could be met with legal action.
6. Gather all of the data from these concerts and present it to the chapter. Using the data, cross-reference each concert experience with the kind of program the chapter wants to build and pick the one school that best fits the paradigm.

Let's say that again: **PICK ONLY ONE SCHOOL.** This becomes your "target school" for your chapter's YIH program.

Note: While the demographic and field research steps may be unnecessary in some cases, the "Target School Research" steps are vital – even if the music educator is a member of your chapter! Attend the concerts, write the letters, and do the homework needed to learn how to truly help the program. There's no other way for the chapter at large to gain an accurate picture of the program, and these steps speak volumes to educators.

Target School

Once you have your target school established, you need to refocus your efforts and begin the research portion again. This time, the research is specific to your target school.

1. Using the school calendar, find every single musical event at the school

- Marching band, concerts, choral, jazz, instrumental, musicals, talent shows, fundraising concerts, guest artists student recitals
 - At this stage it is not important what style of music is being performed or the ensemble performing.
2. Assign a team of chapter members to attend each music event at your target school.
 - Do not dress in chapter uniforms.
 - Do not wear membership nametags.
 - Do not bring recruitment materials.
 - Do not attempt to recruit anyone, parents included.
 3. While you're at the concerts, take copious notes, both good and bad, on what you observe. Get copies of all the programs, handouts, fundraising information, upcoming festivals and/or trips, and other materials. Look at the overall health of the program.
 - How well does the school support the program? Did you see the concert advertised in the local media?
 - Does the school have a music or arts booster program?
 - Equipment and logistics – risers, stands, chairs, choir robes, music folders, stage, curtain, concert programs, sound system
 - Audience – parents, community members, administration from the school, other students, snack table, ticket table, ushers
 - Students – decorum, involvement, attitude, attire
 - Other concerns at you may see them.
 4. Leave when the concert is finished. Do not try to introduce yourself to the teacher, and do not hang around trying to talk to the kids or recruit them.

Here's where we head in a different direction.

Once the concert is over and you have returned to your chapter, start compiling your notes into a detailed file about your target school. Keep your observations together and keep the paperwork organized.

Contact the educator in writing

After each and every concert, draft a letter of appreciation from the chapter to the music teacher. Thank them for their efforts to put on such a wonderful concert, and name something SPECIFIC that happened. Citing a specific song or moment from the concerts lets them know you were actually in attendance. Tell them how proud you are to have such a strong music department in your community and how much you appreciate their hard work. Use a colorful closing and have the president of the chapter sign it.

This letter SHOULD NOT INCLUDE a request to come in and sing for the kids. It should not include recruitment information. It should not include your show information. It should not include ANYTHING but accolades and appreciation for the teacher and the students. This letter is about them, their efforts and your appreciation – nothing more.

Remember, you are only beginning to establish trust and intention. Your letters show your knowledge and support of their work. Trying to insert yourself into their curriculum, particularly at this early stage, undermines your intention of trust and shows them you don't truly care what they are trying to accomplish.

Send copies of this letter to the music teacher's department head, principal, superintendent, the local school governing board and the local newspaper that covers this school district.

Continue to send letters like this after each concert throughout the entire school year. By that time, this music teacher will recognize your chapter's logo, president's name and really wonder who your organization really is.

No single concert or season will give your chapter the full picture of what this program is trying to accomplish. That is the perfect position to be in at the end of the school year.

Reflection and Action

Consolidate what you've learned. At the end of the school year, it is time to gather all your information about this school system. Bring together your field research, demographics, visitations and notes so that you can construct a total picture of the school's music program.

Look over all your data for trends, both good and bad. Identify an area where you can assist the school. You've seen each concert event. You know about their strengths and weaknesses. You know whether or not they have choir robes. You know whether or not they have music folios. You know whether or not they have concert programs. You know quite a bit about them.

Put your money where your mouth is. The quickest way into a teacher's heart is money. Period. Nothing else will endear you quicker. Write an end-of-year summary letter to this teacher. In this letter, introduce this teacher to your chapter. Tell them about your mission statement and your passion to support music education. Tell them how much you've enjoyed their body of work this past school year, and that you want to help.

Provide needed resources. Here's the KICKER!!!! Send a big, fat donation check in this envelope, and tell the music teacher that you noticed...

1. ...they're going on a trip
2. ...they needed choir robes
3. ...they're lacking a good microphone for the concert
4. ...the jazz band needed a new baritone saxophone
5. ...the marching band won their regional DCI competition
6. ...they're unable to get a good concert program
7. ...they're sending students to a summer music camp
8. ...ANYTHING that would require money. Give them this donation – NO STRINGS ATTACHED – and tell them to spend it on what you've mentioned or however else in their view (not yours) this money might best support the program. Show them how happy you are to give them this money and be as excited as possible to know your helping.

Use a snappy closing and wish them luck!!! That's it. As with the other letters, this letter SHOULD NOT INCLUDE a request to come in and sing for the kids. It should not include recruitment information. It should not include your show information. It should not include ANYTHING but accolades and appreciation for the teacher and the students. This letter is about them, their efforts and your appreciation – nothing more. Do not send this letter to anyone else.

Share sincere praise with others. Send a different letter to the department head, principal, superintendent, local school governing body and the local media, a letter that details just how hard this teacher has worked, how brilliant the students are, how lucky this district is to have such a fine program and your appreciation as a community musical organization for the fine music education happening with your children and families. Send a copy of THIS letter to the music teacher.

You must work to establish that you're there to support the teacher. There is NOTHING in it for you. It is not about the chapter; it is about your philanthropy and blind advocacy for music

education. The teacher can't feel threatened, moved-in-on, used, or manipulated. You are there to help, no questions asked.

Following this path will allow you to contact the teacher directly the following year. He/she will welcome your contact, if only to thank you for your support.

The Following Year

Schools can change a great deal from year to year. Your approach the following year should be just as you did the previous year. Send a chapter team to each and every musical event, again, as you did before. Gather identical data through identical methods and build another picture of this school for this school year.

This year, though, there is another level. Now that you have established a rapport with the teacher you can offer assistance. Using last year's data, offer something small to the teacher for each and every concert.

1. Create their concert programs
2. Offer to usher at the concert
3. Offer to set up the stage before and clean it up after the concert.
4. Offer to sell concessions and give all the money to the school.
5. Offer 10 guys to be at the beck and call of the music teacher.
6. Something else that is suggested by your data.

After you send this letter/email, wait for a response. Take a breath and wait.

If the teacher responds in the affirmative, that's awesome. If the teacher says "No, thanks" that's fine as well. The most difficult part of this process is the potential that the teacher isn't interested in your help. If that's the case, move on.

Rejection by this teacher means that you will then refocus your efforts on another school and begin with the field research. Choose another school from your original, narrowed field and start all over again.

But I have to say, if you do this right, I can't think of a single teacher I know who wouldn't take you up on your offer. More importantly, this teacher will talk to his/her other teacher friends about you and your support. Pretty soon, teachers will be calling YOU and asking for your help.

Because no strings are attached, music educators will feel safe exploring other potential collaborations that may boost their program. No matter what, you're now a music educator's ally. Educators can discover barbershop harmony at a pace that suits them as you boost their program and help them change more lives through singing.

It is all about the process and the relationship.