

# WINNING STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING YOUR MUSICAL BUSINESS

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*Bill Becker*

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eferrals are, of course, the essence of building one's studio. How does one get those referrals? That is the question!

During the course of college music education, I spoke with my professor, the late Dr. Richard Carpenter, and asked: "How do I get students?" I suppose this question is asked by every music major who realizes he or she must find a means of making a living, hopefully with the music degree for which they've worked so long and hard. His response, of course, was: "It's all referral."

*Referral?* I heard that, but it didn't mean the same then as it does now — years later. Now I really "get it!" Yes, initially as a college guy, I thought I understood. Sure, people refer when they're receiving high value and are sold on a product — totally understandable. But that takes time! Meanwhile, bills must be paid, and I don't have time to wait! What I did not see was that, while I was asking for tactics, he was handing me a strategy. But how *does* one go about *getting* those referrals? That was my real question.

When was the last time *you* made a referral? Did you tell someone about a product you

love? Did you recommend a store or a service provider to someone? What prompted *you* to make that referral? Odds are good, whatever it was, that's what is going to make others refer to *you*. Did you find the product fulfilled or exceeded all your expectations? Did you receive excellent customer service? Were you made to feel special? How does that apply to a music studio?

First, let's talk about the product. What is the product? Music lessons? YouTube is full of people teaching music — any instrument you want to learn. You can find very good, detailed instruction out there, for free or very reasonable cost. Perceptive parents know this, and so do their kids. Why should they pay you? Because you can provide something robo-teacher cannot. Your teaching skills, your personality, your core knowledge of the subject, your *passion* for your subject, your leadership, your knack for knowing what music will work with each student, and your ability to motivate and connect with them is all part of the package. When clients/parents

feel they're getting a good deal, they *will* talk about it, and refer.

What does this mean to you? Whenever you are teaching, every interaction with parent and student, every public recital, every time you volunteer for accompanying or interfacing with the community — view this as an opportunity. You have the opportunity to show your *passion!*

You are making an impression — positively or negatively, consciously or not.

Another way of saying it might be: Love what you do. I have found that when people see the passion that I have for what I do, they are attracted, they are inspired, and they are influenced. They start to get a kick out of it, too! When you love what you do, eating, sleeping, dreaming, thinking music, that passion is attractive to people. Everybody loves a lover, especially a lover of music!

I am often described as “enthusiastic.” My enthusiasm, or passion, for what I do comes across in everything I do, in every interaction I have with students, parents, colleagues, friends, grocery clerks, everyone, but most importantly with my students. I love what I do, *and the kids know it.*

Every day I'm teaching, I'm going “fishing.” When I refer to “fishing” I'm determined that through my actions, my attitude, my giving verbal corrections to make the music

reeling them in to a world of making music that is fun! They find out: music is hard fun! “Work” is no longer a four-letter word. Moreover, with a little “hard fun,” they can be very skilled and musical in the world of making music — that's all. Sure, I want a paycheck, but my passion — YOUR passion — for the instrument and for the student is the draw.

Recently one of my students arrived for a lesson and I learned that only three days of practice happened. Most distressing! So I approached the situation like this: I asked, “So what's your favorite dessert?” My student's reply: “Ice cream!” I analogized, “Well, from my point of view, you missed having four days of ice cream because I view making music is sometimes more fun than eating!” I reminded the student of the motto: “*I will only practice on the days that I eat!*” Although this is somewhat corny, it works, and, with a little bit of humor, and seriousness, we move forward. We cannot change the past, but we certainly can create the mindset of improvement, care, and expectations for the following week.



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it better myself! You've done it!” With some students, I have them stand up and we do jumping jacks saying, “I DID IT! I DID IT! I DID IT!” Laughter erupts, parents smile, students think I am crazy, and we ALL beam! In addition, the exercise creates some great endorphins!!! Moreover, they begin to feel special, to feel for themselves the fun, the enthusiasm, the passion for making music.

When the parent sees the quality of the product, my knowledge and my passion pouring into their child, and in turn, their child feeling very special, having fun making music, they see the passion growing. This is what makes them share their good fortune in finding me as a teacher for their child. And that is what leads to referrals.

So, ask yourself: How can I activate some of these ideas in my own studio? 🎵

*Coming up in the next issue of the CMT: Tuition — When and How to Raise It*

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*I will only practice on the days that I eat!*

better, putting my full focus on them (and not answering the telephone — which, needless to say, is a no-no during lessons), I convey to my student that “you are important! In fact, at this moment, you are the most important person in my world. So let's make your music shine like the stars at night!!!!” In this way, I am

Attitude is everything, and it's not just the student's attitude! We hold the power for our success and studio growth. On the days that students come to their lessons and they have indeed practiced and exceeded my expectations, I tell them: “You have made my day! I couldn't have asked for more!” or, “I couldn't have played