

# The Parent Factor

By Chris Casteel

Let's face it; your parent group can either be your greatest benefit or your biggest worry. I am quite sure that, as an instructor, you already have an overwhelming list of program concerns on your proverbial plate; it hardly seems likely that you would want to add another concern to the list. Probably the **last** thing you may want to think about at this point in the year is parent communication. However, if you don't consider the parent factor in your program, before you know it, you may be heading for unnecessary distraction and disorder.

First things first, realize that clear and consistent communication is essential. In fact, most parent related issues stem from poor communication. I realize it may not always be your poor communication that is causing challenges. In fact, considering that you are dealing with teenagers...well, enough said!

- **Objective #1:**

Never assume that important information will ever accurately make it home when sent via your students. When I say this, I mean either verbally or in written format. The best way to communicate (in today's world) is through email. When doing this, you need to realize that perception is involved when individuals read messages. Often times, people try to 'read between the lines'. Be careful to avoid this in your writing - be specific and direct in your use of language. Sarcasm does not always digest well in emails. Another suggestion is to set up a program website in which you update information regularly. Parents love this one!

- **Objective #2:**

Plan to be present at as many Booster Club meetings possible. This allows parents to have access to you away from their students. Remember, that it is likely that you spend more time with their children than they do, so it is important that the parents have moments to communicate with you one to one. If you are not able to attend, perhaps you can send a written report on the past, present or future events that your guard has on its calendar. Visibility and accessibility are key in this objective.

- **Objective #3:**

Always be available for a parent conference. Never avoid or ignore a parent's request for a conference. Personal experience with a particular parent may tell you that a meeting has the potential to be negative. In this case, it is best to get together with them as soon as possible. Avoidance will only compound the problems at the inevitable confrontation. Also, stay away from public confrontations with parents. This only undermines the program and the parental opinion of you as a professional. Be sure to keep accurate records. A diary or log of parent communication is advantageous when the first sign of problems start to occur. This will help you to be clear in your actions and the actions of those around you.

- **Objective #4:**

Parents like to know that they are valued. Take the time to get to know your parents. Be familiar with their names, and as many details about them as possible (job, hobbies, etc.). Again, they are trusting you with their child; you need to establish a positive relationship with them. Nothing will achieve this goal more than if you regularly acknowledge them with respect.

- **Objective #5:**

You may have parents that want to get involved with your program. This is fantastic! You need to get them moving in a positive direction. This helps them be a part of their student's success, with the added benefit of helping you. Be ready with a list of tasks for involved parents. I've compiled a short list of ideas to get you started.

- Call a list of businesses looking for a certain prop or costume.
- Build or paint props.
- Ride the bus to games or competitions.
- Fix performers hair and make-up at competitions.
- Bring 'spirit bags' (bags filled with candy) to performances.
- Carry water bottles.
- Videotape practices.
- Chaperone

As I stated earlier, your parent group has the potential to be your greatest asset or your biggest worry. Whatever the case, they are an important part of your program. Their trust in your ability to instruct their student is imperative in order for you to build and grow your color guard. The parent factor is really quite simple; it all boils down to one word....**Communication.**