

Judge Tip—Rick Shaw

Can't See the Forest for the Trees

How many times as a director do we get stuck focusing on those few performers that day after day continue to struggle staying in step, the trumpet in the ballad missing that G above the staff, or the guard member that is behind in every sequence? Sure these are things to address and not overlook but, when this happens, you run the risk of having precious rehearsal time derailed in a blink. For this reason, it is critical that you plan your rehearsals carefully. If there are fifteen bands in the contest then there are probably fifteen different rehearsal schedules that go along with that. You know your program best but try to keep the following things in mind.

Plan your rehearsals carefully: It is important that you strategically prepare for rehearsal and make a rehearsal plan for every time you have kids in front of you. Make sure your staff is aware of the plan and assign someone to be your time management person. Let them know you are okay with them telling you it is time to move on. Be comfortable moving on to the next important task knowing that what you are leaving must be planned into a future rehearsal OR deliberately prioritize what is left on the rehearsal and decide if what you are working on trumps the plan. REVIEW FESTIVAL EVALUATIONS and prioritize those comments. Let those key elements drive your lesson plan. This is data that drives instruction. VIDEO RECORD YOUR REHEARSAL and isolate the key elements to address. Remember that many times the real problem is prior to where you are recognizing the concern.

Don't forget the basics: Basic performance issues both musically and visually stem from a lack of preparation in the fundamentals. Revisit your basic program from time to time. Almost every program has a basics routine that is launched during the summer training but is just as quickly aborted once the first set of drill is handed out. Find time a couple times a week if not daily to run basic fundamentals. Evaluate, review and polish both visually and musically.

Move around the ensemble: Once the music is recognizable and the closer is on the field, too many directors are guilty of setting up camp on top of the building until the snow pushes them off. It is absolutely critical that you spend as much as 50% of your rehearsal time on the field, in the sets, and on the sideline. This is where you will recognize the problem quicker and will arrive at a solution that is relative to what the students are experiencing. Don't forget to help those kids in the back of the band. Stand behind the show once in a while and check those intervals, transitions, and sounds.

Music rehearsals need relative context: I hear far too many performances where the band sounds great in the stagnant set or in close forms however, the minute it is time to move or the form opens from 20 to 20, it is a very different story. If you haven't already done so, it is the time of the season to ditch the concert arc. When running music rehearsal, put the band in an open drill set for that piece and work the music from that set. Concert arcs are great when space is limited or for indoors but will give you a false sense of security related to the quality of the band's balance and sound. It is also a security blanket for the kids who are still weak with their individual performance. Plans should include separate sectional time to check music memory, posture, music fundamentals as students move through drill.

Continuity vs. Clarity: Plan for time dedicated to cleaning and time for confidence building. I have experienced both sides of this problem. Scenario one would be the band that cleans to the finest of

detail but struggles in performance because they have not dedicated enough time to run-throughs. The other side and the one I see more often is the band that spends too much time just running the show. This is the band that starts the season pretty strong and peaks really early. In your rehearsal plan, prioritize the areas that need attention the most, know what needs to be fixed and how to fix it. Don't try to fix too much in one rehearsal (develop a five day plan), and always save time for the full run-through or multiple runs of the section you are targeting that day.

In the education work of Richard DuFour, his PLC model of targeted learning objectives reflects on three key questions: "What do we know?", "What do we need to know?", and "How do we know we know it?" These three questions can help you refocus when you feel like there are problems flying at you from all directions.

- 1) Remain grounded on what you know as your group's strengths and weaknesses as well as the musical/visual program you are trying to deliver.
- 2) Use the information you are gaining from festivals and your own focused evaluation to define what you need to know in planning every rehearsal?
- 3) Find time in every rehearsal to step back away from those individual trees and take a look at the forest. This is that opportunity to not only check for understanding and see if your approach to rehearsal time is having a positive effect but, it gives you the pleasure of seeing your kids reach a new level of achievement.