



ADVISER

CREATE A STAFF RECRUITMENT PLAN

BUILDING A TEAM

Don't tell anyone, but yearbook advisers are really more like coaches than teachers.

Like coaches, yearbook advisers provide training in fundamentals and skills, they motivate and challenge, and they stress teamwork. They arrange schedules and plan for "practices." They evaluate their personnel and assign positions based on talent and skill-level. They fret over obtaining and maintaining essential equipment, and they are always worried about funding, budgets and receipts. Some even take their "team" to summer camp.

Yearbook advisers might enjoy what they are doing more and stick with it longer if they would think of themselves more as coaches. When coaches don't have the talent they need, they go out and look for it. In other words, they recruit (for our purposes, we will assume they follow the rules!). In the long term, implementing a carefully planned, deliberate staff recruitment plan can make the yearbook adviser's job much easier and improve the overall quality of a publication. By recruiting and then retaining a multi-talented and diverse group of students, an adviser can build a yearbook staff into a yearbook journalism program.

Recruiting begins with an application process. Each adviser's situation is different, so the process will differ from school to school. Our recruitment plan begins each year in late February or early March when I send teams of yearbook and newspaper students to our feeder middle school to make presentations to all the eighth grade language arts classes. The students explain the benefits of studying journalism and working on a publication staff. They show off our publications and emphasize the real-life skills that students gain from working with the latest desktop publishing equipment, from meeting deadlines and doing interviews, and from collaborating with a variety of other students. It doesn't hurt that they talk about our trips to national scholastic journalism conventions and the opportunities for recognitions and awards to put on their college applications. We have a Quill and Scroll honor society chapter as one way of recognizing scholastic journalists. We also enter a number of competitions at the state, regional and national level to provide opportunities for students to earn recognition for their work.

In my early years as an adviser, I only had my students make presentations to honors-level classes at the middle school, but I soon realized that this strategy did not result in the diversity that I wanted and that my staff needed. There are enough jobs to be done in creating a yearbook that it is counterproductive to have 20 high achievers who all want to have their own way. A room full of creative geniuses might come up with cutting edge ideas, but they might never get the work finished to meet a deadline. A staff of really popular athletes and cheerleaders might not have any difficulty doing interviews, but they might not have the time to stay after school to get their work done.

After I collect the applications from the eighth grade students, I send recommendation forms to their teachers. I ask the teachers to evaluate the students on their creativity, their



writing ability, their maturity level and their ability to work with others. When I have a large number of applicants, I sometimes do interviews before I can make my final decisions. Over the years we have made it so special to be selected for a high school publication staff that the eighth graders eagerly await the day when the lists are posted.

At the same time I am taking applications from the rising ninth graders, I start announcements encouraging students already at the high school to come by the staff room to pick up an application. I talk to my fellow English teachers, our art teacher, our guidance counselors and our business teachers, asking for the names of students I might want to recruit personally. I send these students an application with a personal note telling them that their teachers have told me about their special interests and skills that they might want to contribute to our yearbook staff.

Diversity is important in several respects. I want students from every grade level so that we will know the interests/opinions of all the different age groups in our school. I want top academic students who have strong writing skills, and I want students who like to work hard completing the many small jobs that make a big difference in whether or not our yearbook is completed on time. I want popular students, but I also want thoughtful, creative students who have time to make a commitment to our program. I want students who understand the "big picture," but I also want students who can focus on the details.

Having a diverse staff pays off. Yearbook sales improve when the yearbook is inclusive — when we include as many students as possible in the book through photography, copy and alternative copy. A diverse staff can produce a publication that more closely mirrors the diversity of a student body. Coverage is inevitably better when we have a wide range of interests and backgrounds represented on the staff.

Many of my students remain on staff all four years of their high school career. I retain these students by providing new challenges and leadership opportunities and advanced skill development. As their skills and commitment increase, they take ownership of their publication. We know from practical experience as well as research that the students who get the most out of high school are the students who feel like they "belong." After a year or two on staff, my students know that the yearbook room is truly where they belong.

Recruitment is important to coaches and yearbook advisers because both rely on the commitment of participants to produce a team effort. Both need a variety of talents and skills in order to succeed. Yearbook advisers don't have to count wins and losses, but they do need support from school administrators and the community. Yearbook advisers could sure use a whistle every now and then when the staff room gets a little out of control, but thank goodness they don't have to wear sweaty T-shirts and polyester stretch pants.

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