

## **Ask An Expert**

### **Stacy Rowe**

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2014 USASF Dance Coach of the Year

Stacy answers questions submitted by USASF members.

### **Team Building / Marketing**

#### **How do we get kids outside of the cheer gym to join our dance program?**

In my opinion, word of mouth is the best way to draw interest outside of your cheer program. Kids want to participate in things that look fun to them. Taking your dancers to perform at local festivals, parades or movie nights is a great way to get your athletes in front of live audiences to show your community what a great program you have. You can also offer an incentive to currently enrolled students offering a discount or free month of tuition for any students they bring to join the team.

#### **How do you build the next season's team enrollment when starting a program this season with a few dancers that may not have much dance experience? *(If you don't start out winning)***

In my opinion, people come to learn from the teacher/coach. Sure they want to win, but truly everyone is looking for a total package. If you believe your program won't grow because you are new, then you are right. If you believe your program will grow because you LOVE dance, and you are excited about the places the program will go in the future...then it will grow. Whatever you believe is what people will see and feel. The teachers need to be warm and caring, but fiercely passionate about what they are doing. They need to be able to TEACH the dancers. If the dancers are learning new things each week, improving their skills, and excited to dance they will want to come back and bring friends because they will KNOW that if they stick with you they will grow and become a winning team.

### **Competition Based**

#### **How do you create winning routines with a small number of dancers who lack experience?**

The biggest mistake I feel that people make is trying to force dancers to do a routine or steps that they have seen the previous year from a winning team. Whether your team is beginner or advanced you need to tailor your routine to the kids on the team. Give them something they can connect to and have fun doing. If they don't look good doing the moves, then find different moves that look good on them. Using ripples and visual pictures are also great ways to hide your weaknesses and focus on your strengths. I personally prefer themes or story telling in the routine, because I think regardless of how good the dancing is you can entertain the audience with your story. Instill a passion for dance in your athletes and they will want to practice all the time. Encouraging the kids to take pride and accountability for their movement will encourage them to practice more often and help the team to get better.

#### **What are some ideas for transitions/costume changes or anything that would need to be a surprise when you don't have anyone to hide a prop or costume change?**

If there is a will there is way. Try to think outside the box. If it is something that really enhances the choreography or theme, I feel that there is always a way to figure it out if you are willing to put in the time and creativity. Sometimes it might not be the obvious answer...and sometimes it is the simplest answer, but if you truly want to include it in the routine there has to be way. I suggest trying the concept and using a video to review several times. This may reveal how you might be able to create the element of surprise you are looking for. Often you don't always need to cover something up you just need to draw the audience attention elsewhere while you change garment, etc. It's kind of like a magic trick! Brainstorm ideas with friends or other coaches until you find what works.

### **What are ways to build a team/program to be competitive at The Dance Worlds?**

In my opinion I feel it is extremely important to start with your babies. You need to make sure that all of the kids are trained properly from tiny through senior. You want to grow the talent in the program from within. Create a certain level of expectation among your program. You have to put in the time and commitment it takes to build the trust of your athletes and parents. Once you have the trust the rest comes a little easier and you can demand more from your athletes, push them harder and expect more from them. And the best part is that they do it because they trust you. The decisions that you make early on begin to build that trust or to break it, so make sure you have a solid goal for your future.

Also know your core values and the values that you want your program to stand for. Don't deviate from that! Make smart choices and show care and concern for your athletes. Build their trust and they will follow you anywhere. Every coach wants to succeed, but in my opinion the most successful coaches are the ones that have the most trust from their program. Your job is to know your craft and teach it well. Instill passion and love for dance in your students!