

Fun, Food & Staff Commitment

Principles

- **Being on staff is far different** from being in any other class, and new staff members need to feel that right away.
- Being on the newspaper staff involves little or no traditional “homework,” but new staff members need to understand that there is an **extra commitment**.
- **Pride comes from accomplishment** and hard work, but fun should be mixed in.
- **Consistent quality is not an accident**. Veteran staff members, serving as mentors, pass on the legacy to newbies.

Mentor-mentee relationship

- **Pair up veterans with newbies as early possible**, ideally in the spring of the year before.
- As much as possible, try to **be strategic with pairings**. If a new student is talented but not great with deadline, connect him with a mentor who is. If another new student is artistic but is not strong with Photoshop or Illustrator, then connect him with a mentor who is.
- If possible, **assign a story or at least a small task to the mentee for the last issue of the previous year**, or maybe just have a mentee shadow the mentor and come to a late day. (*More on late days below.*)
- Do something to **involve mentees in the summer**. Bowling? Pizza? Picnic? Anything to help new staffers bond with veterans. Ideally the adviser has nothing to do with this.
- Mentor make sure mentee knows about and comes to the **summer meeting/BBQ**. (*More on that below.*)
- **Mentor is there for the mentee from Day 1** of the school year, sitting alongside, walking through processes, offering encouragement, advice and even an occasional admonishment, if called for.

Summer meeting/BBQ

- A two-hour all-staff meeting about a week before school begins is what we call our “first day of the year.” By having it ahead of time and requiring students to attend, we can hit the ground running on the actual first day of school. (Requiring means that students will get the day off work and/or be excused from practice; however, sometimes a family vacation or emergency will make attendance impossible. We need to know that ahead of time.)
- This meeting can cover a lot, but it can’t do everything. Figure out what is most important and cover that. Students need to understand what kind of commitment is coming. So do their parents — and that is why I hand out to them a parent letter that is to be returned the next week.
- What is the staff’s mission, its vision? There may be no other time to cover this in depth. Make sure students understand what the publication is all about.
- A meeting with just editors precedes our big meeting. For us, that is about four hours.
- After both meetings is the BBQ and bonding time. About two hours for that. Students end the day having a great time playing games, eating food and talking, but they will certainly remember we covered a lot of material.
- Students, after this meeting, should feel fired up and ready to start the year on staff. Or if they feel completely overwhelmed and regretting their decision to join the staff, now would be the best time to reconsider.

Late days/parent dinners

- We have three late days for each of eight issues, or 24 per year. Each late day (Friday, Monday, Tuesday) is from 2:30 to 8. Students come when they can and stay as long as they can. Minimally five hours would be expected from all, more from editors.
- We often have about 24 students on staff. Assuming that is the number, I have each student volunteer their parent(s) for dinner for one of the late days. It should be enough to feed about 18, and it should include something to drink. Ideally it is homecooked and reflective of the student’s culture.
- Many of my students come from poor families. But this is always very successful!

End of year tributes

Everyone has a different way to celebrate the end of the year and honor the departing seniors. Ours is an after-school “tributes” session, in which everyone on the staff, beginning with sophomores and ending with seniors, offers tributes to three staff members. It is not required that seniors be tributed, but they receive most of them. As adviser, I pay tribute to all of the seniors. Great day. Lot of laughs. More tears. And endless hugs.