**Tips for recruiting staff members by Phillip Caston**

**1. Marketing**

**-Start with very catchy fliers.**Spend a little time designing them in InDesign. Be bold with your message. You see organizations put up some pretty sad, handwritten signs around school. Make yours stand out with a full color, professional look. I like to incorporate my kids into the fliers.

***-*Don't appear desperate.**Avoid tactics that kids find "uncool" like goofy morning announcements or harassing kids as they enter the building. Make it seem like they need you, not the other way around.

**-Aggressively pursue talent based on recommendations from teachers or staff members.**Talk around and find out who has talent. Have your students approach them. Find them one day and have a one-on-one talk. Make it very clear just how talented they are and what they can bring to the staff.

**-Beat the college skills set like a drum.**Make it very clear that your classes prep kids better for college than any other (which we all know). Make sure parents get that message. If your school has some kind of night for prospective freshmen, make sure you have a table set up and push what you have to offer

**2. Exclusivity**

This may be one of the most important aspects of recruiting. You MUST make kids outside your programs jealous that they aren't a part of it.

**-Even if you plan to take all applicants that year, state that space is limited and some won't get in.**The idea that they may not make the staff ups their efforts to get in.

**-Current staff members need to plant that seed of doubt among them.** "Wow, I was lucky to get in last year..."

**-GUIDANCE MUST STAY OUT OF IT.**I put this in all caps because it's a huge problem for student media classes. If guidance is using your class as a "dump class," your programs are not going to thrive. Period. Set up meetings with the head of guidance if this is a problem and make your case. Do your application process early and send them the list of who is allowed to join the class. Keep monitoring their rosters through the end of the year and summer. Let them know when a kid needs to be removed. It must happen. Just one student who doesn't want to be there can bring a whole staff down.

**-When you do fun activities with the staff outside school (you better be doing this!), make sure it is JUST your staff.**No siblings. No boyfriends or girlfriends. No one else. Make that very clear with your current kids. Some examples of activities we've done outside school that are only open to staff members: President's Day paintball, sleepovers (I had a staff of all girls last year, so obviously I stayed away from that), mountain weekend vacation (get chaperones), white water rafting, etc. Make sure the rest of the school knows you're doing it. I brag about it to my regular classes.

**-Cool invitations to join.**When a student is accepted into the class, have your editors for next year bring them something cool to one of their regular classes. My editors bring by a fun acceptance letter and a donut or cupcake. It makes the other kids in the class jealous. No other organization at our school welcomes new people in like that.

If you do reject a student, make sure that you (and only you) write a letter and deliver it.

**-Give em an early taste.**Let newbies get involved before the school year is over. This is pretty easy for yearbook as we have distribution duties and spring sports to photograph. But get them in on your GroupMe messages, get them holding a few meetings to plan for next year, get them to meet with their editors. They'll already start to feel like a part of the family and realize how serious this business is. I also like to take fun pictures of each new recruiting class as soon as we meet with them. That gets them excited.

**3. Application**

**-Make the application somewhat rigorous, even if you don't use all of it.** My applicants fill out a two page application with several sentence answers. They also must submit writing or photography samples and have two positive teacher recommendations. This helps you out and also creates the impression that applying for your class is serious business. The feedback I've received from current staff members is that they really took joining seriously because it seemed so intense.

**-Interviews.**Make sure you and your editors for next year conduct interviews with each applicant. Make them fun but ask some serious questions, too. Make sure you ask how they handle taking orders and instruction from other students. Some kids don't join for the right reasons (like some boys who applied this year because I had all girls). Don't grill them, though. They will be a lot more nervous than you think, so make sure you have plenty of laughing and fun stuff to ask.

A few more points about the interviews:

A. If they show up late or forget their interview, they are not considered for the class. Make this clear.

B. Tell them not to bring any food for you or the editors. It's basically a bribe, and it will be awkward if they don't get in.

C. Instruct your editors to make eye contact and maintain open postures as well as smiling. Don't write things down after the applicant says something. They can frighten those little freshmen if they don't.

D. Morning interviews before school work best. Fewer conflicts. You should be able to do three a day. Don't go over 10 minutes for each one.

**-Strict application deadline.**Accept no late ones. This makes sure they adhere to deadlines. However, make sure you have sufficiently advertised that applications are available.

I did, however, make one exception to this in my life, and that girl turned out to be the greatest editor in chief I ever had. So, you know, trust your gut.

**-Early recruiting and editor selection.**Applications go live at the end of first semester. I give them two weeks to turn them in. By this time, I have chosen my editors for next year. They know no later than first semester exams. Why this early? I want my editors to start planning very early for next year's book. I want them involved in recruiting and interviews. And doing early application not only prevents "dump class" moves by guidance, but it snags some of those talented kids before someone else can.

I know this is not typical, but I strongly urge you to have your editors for next year chosen and announced by January. You will be far more prepared for next year this way.

**4. Perks and Benefits**

Throughout the year, you should be setting up certain perks for your staff members that other students can't get (within school rules, of course). Think of them like perks on the job. Make sure other students outside the staff know about it. For example, we have a back yearbook room attached to my classroom. I make it very clear to my other students that they can't go back there without my permission, but yearbook students can come and go at will. They can overhear how much fun my kids are having back there, too.

**-Unique perks.**In my back room, my kids have a mini fridge, microwave, and coffee machine. Now, your school might not permit that, but you can come up with other methods. I let the kids decorate the back room as they see fit and within rules. I tell them it's their room. And when I let my Journalism I students use it for projects, my yearbook kids get very protective of it!

I brew coffee every morning for the staff. It costs me out of my own pocket through the year, but it's worth it to spend those extra minutes before school starts in the morning talking with them and building relationships. Even kids who don't drink it come by and hang out.

I like to cook BBQ and have done so competitively, so one day during the year, I smoke a pork butt for them and bring it for lunch.

A student not in yearbook comes by to use the microwave? "Sorry, it's for yearbook only."

These little things go a long way. It makes the kids hang out more in your room. And non-yearbook kids see it and want it. You should see the excitement on the faces of some of these newbies when they realize the back room and its perks are now theirs.

**-Field trips.**These pretty much happen on their own, like NSPA trips. We go to SIPA every year and the students love it. So those perks are good ones to pitch to prospective staff members.

**-Parties.**Have a party every now and then. Not allowed? Just say it's part of a deadline celebration.

**-Awesome T-shirts.**This year, we did last names on the back of the shirt with 15 for 2015 book. They were in glitter. That's what happens when you have an all-girl staff. I look amazing in a glittery shirt, too. But it got the school talking.

**-Staff badges and press passes.**If your school won't make it for them, design them yourselves. At my previous school, I did one that had their photo on it and they had a lot of fun with them.

**-End of the year retreats.**One of my girls' parents had a nice mountain house and we all went for a night there followed by tubing down a nearby river the next day.

**5. Swagger**

This is a little more of a controversial aspect to it, but I like my kids to be what I call "stylishly arrogant". I want them to exhibit a sense of confidence and swagger that the rest of the school sees. I want the rest of the school to see them as the top dogs. I know some people may not agree with this philosophy, but in my experience, it has done wonders for both my students' self esteem and their image at the school.

**-Do favors around the school. Enter school competitions and dominate them.**The school needs new photos to go up around the halls? Yearbook's on it. We're raising money school-wide for a charitable cause? Yearbook's going to do it and beat your organization at it. Prove us wrong. Your organization is struggling to get their word out? We'll come up with a marketing plan for you, free of charge. Because that's what we do.

At my last school, I used to say, "If you want something done right here, get yearbook to do it." I recognize the brashness of that statement, but we backed it up. Yeah, it was more work for us and we didn't get any payback, really. But what we received in reputation made up for it.

Recently, the Town of Mount Pleasant hired my staff to create their annual report for Planning and Development. For no money, of course, but that's okay. We plan to do it better than their previous ones, and when people look at it, I want them to see "Created by Wando High School yearbook staff" on there.

**-Boast any and all awards you win.**Make sure they go up somewhere around the school. Make sure they're announced. Don't be modest. You're bragging on your kids. They deserve it.

I understand how some folks may feel uncomfortable about the Swagger portion of this guide, and may be put back by some of the bold statements I've made in it. But this area is so important to your students and bringing in new people. Ultimately, what this does is boost your students' self confidence and their self worth. And that carries over long after they leave your class. It's worth it to me. And the other students at the school see that confidence/swagger, and they want to be like them.