

Consider these ideas as the director of a small marching band:

Musicality

- Ensure each student has a strong playing foundation. The smaller the band, the harder it is to hide.
- You do not have to be the Phantom Regiment. Wow your audience with quality rather than quantity. You will probably not blow the audience away or even have a 'good' sound if you do. Work for a tight, clean, and fully supported sound throughout the ensemble...no excuses.
- Play to your strengths. Showcase your stronger players without picking music that is beyond the reach of weaker or younger players. Rewrite if necessary...the judges and the audience do not have a copy of the score.
- Teach note lengths and how they apply to the sound outside. When on the field you can not bounce a note around 4 walls to help sustain length, so each member of the ensemble must play to the end of the note and ALL must release together. This will ensure that your ensemble will maintain a 'full' sound throughout the phrase.
- The smaller the band, the more exposed tuning issues become. Find your pitch center during warm up and throughout rehearsal. If you don't practice listening in rehearsal then they will not listen in the performance. Overblowing will destroy that center...again don't try to play beyond your size. Teach your small band students to tune early.
- Dynamics! Don't let your percussion overplay the band. Teach them to play within the ensemble sound and that a softer dynamic can be just as exciting and musical. It is easy for a small band to try to sound big by playing loud and louder. Teach the band to play at controlled dynamics.
- Don't cover up your woodwinds. You are a marching band, not a drum corps.

Marching

- Enforce fundamentals. You can't teach a band to play as well as move if they can't even stand at attention. It is easy to sacrifice fundamentals due to time so plan your time accordingly. Keep in mind: They can do it if you can teach it!
- Know when you have too much for your band based on the time you have to put your show together. Know when you have too little.

- You know your students! You know their ability! Whether you or someone else writes the drill make sure it fits your band. There are certainly great drill writers out there, but you know your students and their ability better than anyone. When writing drill just remember, you have to start somewhere and you will probably make mistakes at first.

- Move your band as much as you can, but keep it tight. It is harder to keep a tight ensemble sound when each student is getting further away from each other. Decide from the very beginning just where your marching boundaries are. Will it be from 30 - 30 and to the first hash mark? Further? Closer?

Beyond music and marching

- You ARE a marching band director so be 'into' your job. The students will know quickly whether or not your heart is in it.

- Teach leadership early. Your band students need you, you need them, and they need each other. Poor leadership qualities will sink your program in a hurry as well as provide you with many ulcers. Buy leadership books and/or DVD's for your students, take them to leadership classes or seminars, and practice leadership every day. Sit down with your leaders often and make sure they are moving in the right direction.

- Teach your band to respect other bands and learn from them. Ask your band to study the other bands. Ask your band what the other band did well and what they need to work on. This is not a comparison of who was better.

- Talk to other successful band directors often. Find out what works for them and what doesn't. Be as open minded as possible and don't be so ready to shoot down ideas with numerous reasons as to why something doesn't work.

- Learn from your judges. They may not always be wrong.

- Success comes from making mistakes...usually a lot of them. Learn from them and don't make the same mistakes year after year.