

7 Simple Suggestions for Building Your Music Team and a Culture of Music

By: Mary Sue Wilkinson, Founder of Singing Heart to Heart, Author of *Songs You Know by Heart: A Simple Guide for Using Music in Dementia Care*. Find her book, her CDs and many free resources including sing along videos at www.SingingHeartToHeart.com

Are you feeling like the Lone Ranger out there trying to keep your music program going without any outside help from musicians and music therapists? You are only one person, right? Even if you love to sing and feel totally comfortable using music...there are only so many songs you can sing in a day; only so many people in your care that you can personally reach.

You need a music team and a community culture that supports music.

How do you build that team?

You tap into your most valuable resource. The other people you work with.

Working together, the residents you serve will enjoy the full benefit of the power of music.

Sounds simple enough. But is it?

Let me tell you a true story.

Years ago I was hired to start a new Events and Activities Department at a huge resort that was going through restructuring. The month before they hired me, the resort had fired 30% of their staff, including the concierge who had always planned events. The staff remaining called it Black Monday. Ugh!

Let's just say that despite our sunny personalities and friendly demeanor, the three of us in the new department were not immediately popular. We were looked at with suspicion. Some people literally wished we would fail and made no bones about it. It took time and effort, a bowl of chocolate and even a chocolate fountain party to win them over.

To be sure, the chocolate helped a lot.

But what helped the most was our effort to understand what their jobs entailed and how we could help them succeed.

We went out of our way to learn about what other departments did day to day. And we did our best to introduce them to what we did. We invited them to participate in events. We asked their opinions and sought their advice.

When the other staff realized that our success might actually make their jobs easier (especially the sales department), folks started coming around.

We never did win everyone over. But after a time we became part of the team.

The real winners were the guests at the resort.

Happier guests impacted everyone; from housekeeping, to security, to wait staff, to front desk.

Can you relate to this? Do you see any similarities between my experience at the resort and your efforts to “convince” everyone where you work that they “should” use music?

Have you ever planned a great activity but had trouble getting the residents gathered up to enjoy it because no one was helping you?

Have you ever struggled to get “buy in” from other staff, or budget from management? Maybe they see your job as just fun and games, while theirs is more serious - translation – harder.

Here are seven simple suggestions for how to impact the culture of your community and build your music team.

1. **Show gratitude** for the work of others. I know this may seem like a no-brainer. But when was the last time you literally thanked a nurse or CNA or the kitchen staff or the management for doing a good job. “Thank you for all you do. I know you have a hard job and I just want you to know I appreciate you.”
2. **Show interest in and learn about the day to day jobs of others you work with.** You may be surprised to learn ways that music could make their jobs easier. This sends the message that you care and that you want to be part of a team with them.
3. **Ask others for suggestions and feedback** about your own work. “I’m really trying to use music more throughout the day. Please let me know if you have any ideas or suggestions.”
4. **Find out what other staff members need.** Where are the trouble spots in their day where music might help? Then **model** the impact of music by offering direct support. Do you know a resident who frequently resists bathing? Could you offer to help their care partner by bringing some soothing music in?
5. **Identify music loving staff members.** Is there anyone who plays piano or guitar or just loves to sing? Who are the extroverts that might be comfortable taking the lead on singing here and there during the day? Who are the introverts that might be willing to sing or play music for a resident in their room? Seek them out, acknowledge their gift and tap into their talents; not by adding to their work load or asking them to do your job, but by inviting them to be on your music team.
6. **Keep your “ask” very simple and not time consuming.** “I’ve noticed that Bill is a big fan of Frank Sinatra. I’ve put a CD player in his room with a CD. Could you turn it on for him when you are in his room?” Or, “You have such a nice voice. Helen loves the song *You Are My Sunshine*. Would you mind singing it for her when you are helping her dress?”

7. **Provide some basic resources for everyone to use.** Let the other staff know that it's OK for them to use the CD players and CDs. Work with management to provide money for staff to download songs to their phones. Make songbooks and YouTube playlists available and easy to access. Note: There are numerous CDs for sale in Teepa's online store.

Building a music team and a culture of music can take time and patience. (And some chocolate might not hurt.) But in the end, I truly believe that a community culture built on using music throughout the day is a win-win. Happier staff, happier residents. As Friedrich Nietzsche so famously said "Without music, life would be a mistake."

Want to learn more? Visit my blog at www.SingingHeartToHeart.com for lots more concrete advice and inspiration.