

## TAKIN' CARE OF BUSINESS

### Starting Out

BY BETH GIGANTE KLINGENSTEIN

*Editor's note: This first article is for the beginning teacher—whether in college, just emerging from college, or making a new career choice.*

One of the most rewarding and potentially lucrative careers for a professional pianist is that of the independent music teacher. In order to operate a truly successful studio, you must have top-notch musical and pedagogical skills, but you must also develop top-notch business skills.

If becoming an independent teacher is your career choice, it's necessary to acquire the professional skills and attitude you need to make such a business a success. One of the first steps is to get rid of any outdated stereotypes.

#### The independent piano teacher is *not*

- ◆ a little old lady
- ◆ a part-time teacher earning a bit of extra money
- ◆ a mom with little kids at home
- ◆ someone who had lessons as a child, but no other training
- ◆ an “amateur”

Today's independent piano teacher is highly trained.

#### The successful piano teacher

- ◆ is of any age, either gender
- ◆ operates a professionally run studio
- ◆ thinks like a businessperson
- ◆ is capable of earning a substantial salary
- ◆ usually has a Bachelor's degree in music
- ◆ often has advanced degrees

Any businessperson does a great deal of planning before starting a new enterprise. So must you if you expect to open an independent studio. Start with a plan.

#### Many decisions can be made in advance.

- ◆ Choose an appropriate and functional space for your studio
- ◆ Investigate all laws affecting small businesses, such as local zoning, tax, and business license requirements
- ◆ Research the cost of similar services in your chosen geographic location before setting your own prices
- ◆ Plan a budget that balances income and expenses
- ◆ Organize a professional-looking studio
- ◆ Determine all business policies that will affect students and parents
- ◆ Develop attractive and carefully worded written materials
- ◆ Devise a system for record-keeping
- ◆ Develop a long-term plan for acquiring necessary inventory
- ◆ Think how to market your business
- ◆ Network with other professionals

If any of these areas seems foreign to the idea of establishing an independent studio, think again. What would happen if

some were eliminated? No budget could lead to unexpected financial difficulties. No marketing plan could limit the number of students. No preplanned policies could lead to endless headaches with attendance or collecting payments.

These areas will need continued attention and adjustments as your business progresses, but a great deal of thought must go into the business side of your studio before you teach your first lesson.

#### Once your business is started, project a professional image.

- ◆ Dress appropriately
- ◆ Keep the studio space organized and clean
- ◆ Describe your expectations in professional language
- ◆ Handle all communications in a businesslike manner
- ◆ Separate home activities from business hours
- ◆ Project real pride in your skill, experience, and position

There are many benefits to being an independent teacher. You have personal control over work hours, rates, student selection, program development, and artistic direction. A hardworking, musical, and well-educated pianist can enjoy a lifetime of personal growth and achievement. Success, however, does not rest on artistic and pedagogical abilities alone. A well-organized and businesslike studio is essential if you are to reach the many musical and personal rewards of running an independent studio. ■■■

Beth Gigante Klingenstein is nationally known for her work on business policies for the independent music teacher. The author of *A Business Guide for the Music Teacher*, she taught as an independent music teacher for 28 years. Klingenstein is presently on the music faculty of Valley City State University (North Dakota) and is the Founding Director of the VCSU Community School of the Arts.

## Smiles from the Studio

Every piano teacher can “tell tales.” Here are two from the editors' albums.

Knowing the value of orienting a student to the lesson topic, I began Mollie's piano lesson by saying, “Today we're going to talk about eighth notes.” To which Mollie replied, “Okay. You start the conversation.”

Nate ran excitedly into the studio. “We set a new record! My soccer team just set a new school record!” I acknowledged with an enthusiastic, “Wow, that's great!” To which Nate replied, “Well, it's not actually great. We just set the record for the most games lost in a season.”

You, too, have experienced some studio “smiles.” Why not share them with us?

Send them to [muszler@pianoteaching.com](mailto:muszler@pianoteaching.com)