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# SHIPS MAINTENANCE GUIDE FOR PIPE MAJORS

(AKA: CARE AND FEEDING OF PIPE BANDS)

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2007

ATHOLL HIGHLANDERS PIPES & DRUMS  
OF STONE MOUNTAIN

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# Pipey's Notes on Running the Band

PM Evan Kohler-Camp

## First Off: Who Is the Pipe Major?

The pipe major is the person who cares the most about the band and can direct the band toward the band goals or set a course that is supported by the band.

The Pipe Major has overall operational responsibility of the band. Probably the most important aspect that produces success is leadership. My leadership style is simple, yet direct. Oversight in administrative functions, music selection, training pipers of various skill sets, to command decisions on the field, are just a few facets that must be balanced with great care.

My goals for this band are accomplished by executive decision, committee (business meetings) vote when appropriate, and by the support staff as outlined below. The needs, wants, and concerns of all band members are always factored in and given due consideration. However, the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few. With that in mind, Ye Auld Pipe Major is the final authority.

## Second: What Does the Pipe Major Do?

The 'Pipey', in our band, is responsible for:

- ❖ All Band performances
- ❖ All Music Selection
- ❖ All Practice sessions and training for the band, from beginners up.
- ❖ Working out playing sets with the Drum Section
- ❖ Record keeping and paperwork
- ❖ Maintaining communication throughout the band.
- ❖ Appointing Drum Major, Drum Sergeant, Pipe Sergeant(s), Pipe Corporal(s) and Quartermaster.

The pipe major must have good communication skills and be able to encourage efforts from other band members as well as understand their motivations. This position is not necessarily held by the best "player" in the band.

Administrative tasks should be kept under control of elected members for support duties like: **Business manager, Band secretary, Treasurer, Librarian, Quartermaster**, etc. The selection of these offices is dependant on our by-laws as a guide.

The band is not controlled by one individual. It is *directed* by the Pipe Major, who is also the CEO in our organization. It is really not possible for any of these offices to work against band members decisions. Let's say that the treasurer says, "I won't pay for it" when the entire band wants it. The CEO would have to write the check and then address the treasurer issue. The business manager cannot say, "I refuse that gig, they're not Republicans!" The CEO would have to take it from there.

## Do we need a military structure for the band?

Originally, pipe bands were military organizations, but today only a few of the pipers in the world are in a band associated with the military. In fact, none of the winners or major players at piping competitions have included a military band since 1950. The British Army did save pipes in its own, strange little way and Pipe Majors and Drum Majors originally were creations of the British Army, but I think we fixed their wagons at Yorktown.

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I have no wish to play soldier, but we have to balance marching practice with appearance, and you have to lean far more towards the music. As I've mentioned before, "If you look good, you sound even better," is just a maxim, there are audiences that know the difference between good music and crap. Polish does not replace practice. It's a combination of both with a heavy emphasis on musical ability and skill.

We tend to go to those venues that know the difference. I've heard the Black Watch sound like a novice band, and even though they looked good, you could hear the Glasgow audience voice disapproval at their playing.

We're all mostly civilian bands nowadays, made up of volunteers who give of their time and energies for all sorts of different reasons; reasons that you have to shape, mold, encourage or sometimes restrain in the case of runaway egos.

Just as the best player is not always the PM, the best player doesn't always make the best band member. It's the ego thing. That's why I'll not always have the same piper do "Amazing Grace" solos and try to rotate responsibility whenever possible. That's why I insist that any PR media show the entire band.

### **A Little History**

I wound up as Pipe Major after a series of spirited email and verbal arguments concerning where our band should go.

As a band member, I had worked with getting an outside instructor for the band to help improve quality and playing, setting up the original band web page with the donation of web space by Jim Thompson and getting an email group going. I'd get the band practice going and gigs going when the pipey wasn't able.

Discussion among the band members began at this time about band goals. Some thought the band should be pure competition – no beginner training. Others wanted pure 'kilty', no new tunes. I argued that you could do both, play some competitions AND play the kilty gigs but that new tunes had to be learned in order to grow, but you could still be friendly to all. Doing a minimum of five competitions a year might even bring in new, serious players.

So the old pipe sergeant asked me if I'd run for office and I did. I was elected in and started running the band. When I took the position, there was no guidance or help, so I had to talk to other 'pipeys' and 'drummies,' use my memory of pipe bands in other regions and figure out how to lay in our course. That's why I created this with inspiration from Steve MacLeod, EUSPBA workshops and R.T. Shepherd.

### **Determining Band Goals**

Determining the goals of the band can only be done with the blessing of the band itself. You have to set music before them and then listen to their feedback and set a quality goal for the band to achieve. You can only achieve this with the help of the band – they have to practice and put the time in to achieve the goal. All this is based on consensus, because it's very rare to get full agreement.

You have to pick music that allows musical growth and you have to constantly listen to the band. This means an environment that keeps all communication lines open and not a dictatorial one. Act like a Napoleon, and you'll lose people. Have a band officer that acts like a Napoleon, and you'll lose people as well. People that like to play 'military' think it's all just barking orders and shiny buttons.

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It's actually a matter of having a plan and a goal. Our band is not a military unit; our goals MUST engage the band members and cannot be based on just a desire to command and meet my unspoken goals. We've got to get band members to grow. You can't have the "We're building this because the CO asked us to." It's more like: "The CO wants us to build this so we can learn jigs and strathspeys."

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## **Rule 1**

### ***IT IS NOT POSSIBLE FOR ONE PERSON TO EFFECTIVELY RUN ALL ASPECTS OF A BAND.***

A successful civilian band requires some structure to support the delegation of duties and responsibilities that help the band function. It also forms a base for continued growth. It can base the structure on a military, business or any other organization that will meet members needs. Of prime importance is that the goals of the band are clear, communicated and supported by all members by consensus. Those in the leadership positions need to have strong skills in organization, music and in 'people.'

If you have only one person handling images, news releases, business contacts, mailings, etc, you'll be in trouble if they leave. It's best to have information saved and stored for use by all. There are those that feel information belongs only to 'them,' but we have to save this information for 'The Band.'

### **Band Positions/Titles**

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#### **Pipe Major (P.M., PM, P/M, "Pipey") - Elected**

Leader of the band musically. Leader of the pipers in general. Responsible for music selection, performance, practices and record keeping.

#### **Treasurer - Elected**

Responsible for tracking payment, purchases, expenses and providing a quarterly report to officers and members. Maintains checking account for the band.

#### **Business Manager – Elected**

Handles contacts, follow-ups and negotiations on gigs. Maintains customer relations.

- 1. Members should send potential patrons/customers to Business Manager first. Members should not speak personally for the entire band.**
- 2. We cannot commit the band till we have replies and feedback from Pipe Major, Pipe Corps, Drum Corps, Drum Major (if required for gig) and Business Manager.**
- 3. For any personal gig, see Business Manager first**
- 4. Timely notification is critical.**

#### **Secretary - Elected**

Responsible for news and media releases, maintaining media contact list and checking web biographies. Works with business manager, PM and other officers as required.

### **Appointee's and their roles:**

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#### **Drum Sergeant (DS) *Appointed by PM***

Leader of the drum corps musically. Leader of the drummers in general. Often writes all scores and teaches. Works closely with PM on practices and music selection.

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**Drum Major (DM, “Drummie”) Appointed by PM**

The Drum Major (or ‘Drummie’) is responsible for leading parades, band marching drill (*in coordination with the Pipe Major*) and band appearance. The capability of flourishing, tossing and, most importantly, **catching** the mace is an added bonus. DM John Rodgers displayed that ability had a flair for that.

**Pipe Sergeant (PS) Appointed by PM**

PM's right-hand person. Normally assists in tuning, teaching, etc. Fills in when PM is absent.

**Pipe Corporal (PC) a.k.a. Lance Corporal Appointed by PM**

First level of supervision over "regular" pipers and drummers. Looks after any small jobs; assists in tuning and teaching.

**Quartermaster (QM) –Volunteer Appointed by PM**

Responsible for the safety and accounting of the band's equipment. Arranges orders of new supplies as necessary. Can make available to the members a list of the minimum items and potential sources for those items needed to be in uniform. Attends all band officer meetings. Reports to the other officers.

**Librarian (PROPOSED)– Volunteer Appointed by PM**

Coordinates with PM on music library updates. May also handle CD/DVD library.

Appointees should not be control freaks, you have to have someone capable of balancing power and responsibility.

Someone at one of the past business meetings wanted officers to at least attend regularly. Actually, that’s a sound idea but really not an issue because if you have an attendance, drinking or attitude problem with any appointee as PM you only have to revoke their appointment. No business meeting is required.

However, removing a member from the band does require a vote by a majority of the quorum. Appoint only those that attend regularly, have the skill and work well with the band.

We haven’t anyone voted out of the band yet though it did come close on one occasion.

We do have some people listed in the “flying wing-nut squad” of the directory that caused some problems before and are not welcome back after they left. Members that appear, disappear, quit, and then rejoin multiple times, would require a band vote on whether or not to reaccept them. I hold it at three resignations myself. After three, it takes a band vote to bring them back in.

**Uniform**

While we’re talking about Drum Majors and Quartermasters, let’s talk about uniform.

Khaki shirts or white shirts, neither one has won a dress or deportment award at any game in record. The public always refers to our shirts as “Boy Scout shirts” no matter that they’re actually Army battle cloth. Our climate is too hot for doublets and feather bonnets.

Khaki and white shirts also convey the image of starter bands. Brand new bands tend to go for those, while older, established bands will settle on something else. Spats are worn by some bands but most will go for a brogue or Ghillies. Our band has a majority that

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want to get away from the spats at some point. Cost is the limiting factor, but there are comfortable Ghillies out there with vibram soles, and there are brogues.

At some point, the uniform will change. That's just the nature of life. Members have expressed an interest and see more and more of other bands at games and know that there is a choice in appearance. This is a good sign of band growth and maturity. It doesn't mean that you can then forget the military tributes we play; the heart of the band is always the same no matter what the outer covering.

As an interesting note, our sister bands do not wear the same uniform. The Scottish parent band wears the formal doublets. The Swedish and South African bands wear kilted jackets, shirts and ties. The 10<sup>th</sup> Duke was never that particular about our uniform and you should have seen it at that time in 1983.

One thing that needs to be checked is the red sash. According to the Regimental Drum Majors Association manual, DM Joe MacDonald and other sources:

**“The Pipe Major and Pipe Sergeant wear the sash from left shoulder to right hip.”**

I'd noticed this in Edinburgh in both civilian and military bands and at a variety of other massed bands here in the States. It makes sense with cross belts.

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## **Rule 2**

***THE PLAYING AND PERFORMANCE OF THE BAND SHALL ALWAYS BE UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE PIPE MAJOR AND LEAD DRUMMER.***

### **Practice**

Your first priority for a successful pipe band is organized and effective band practices. The Pipey is always in charge of all practices, practice announcements, etc. For full band practice effectiveness there should be at least three band leaders: A pipe major, sergeants or corporals and lead drummer. **To build up the pipers there should be a MINIMUM of 30 minutes playing on pipes.**

The order for handling a practice is the following: Pipe Major, Pipe Sergeant, Pipe Corporal, Drum Sergeant and the last is Drum Major. In the case of my absence, the Pipe Sergeant would handle the practice, and so on. The Drummie is after the Drum Sergeant because we have all active musicians first. The Drum Sergeant will know what the band is working on and want to try out some items. The PM can also call any outside instructor, such as Henry, to run the practice.

Although not always necessary, a Drum Major can be added to practice the marching and discipline aspect of the band for public appearances. They should always coordinate with you on requests for drill. The Pipe Major is responsible for the practice, and you cannot have last minute changes by other members unless you have the time or have achieved YOUR practice goals or it works into your practice goals. I don't recommend deviating from your plan because the assumption will be made that you can always be overridden.

You must engage every one at practice. NO ONE must sit back and just watch. That's why we've had people drifting our way, John Mohr and Atlanta won't work with them.

You may want to read “The Language Of Music” by the RSPBA ([www.rspba.org](http://www.rspba.org).)

### **Practice Factors To Consider For Controlled Development:**

1. Fix rigidly the duration of practice time; I recommend 2 hours.

2. Have enough material to last 2 hours for both chanter practice and pipe practice.
3. Consider known weaknesses of players in selection of material for each practice.
4. Be ready to develop a schedule for the bad attendee; find out the reasons for non-attendance. Consider pressure of work, school studies, family commitments, travel etc.
5. Insist on a telephone call or email from any member who cannot make a practice. This will allow you to adjust your schedule/program if needed and to also help provide better communication.
6. Ensure the time allocated for the practice is **strictly** kept to. Always meet your start time and the stop time. This helps the band members maintain their own busy schedules.
7. Do not spend too much time on maintenance of any individual's instrument, especially late arrivals. Arrange a separate session for constant late arrivals.
8. Try to build in some breaks in practices. In our band, it is Easter and Christmas; family time for our players. Some bands take the summer or winter off. Our group requires more practice than that.

“If you look good, you sound even better” is just a maxim, audiences know the difference between good music and crap. **Polish does not replace practice.** It's a combination of both with a heavy emphasis on musical ability. ***I really hate that phrase.***

**Why?** Because It is the catch phrase of the pipe ignorant and I have encountered idiots that say, “As long as I look good, who cares how I sound?” I try to kill those with a silver reed or a drum stick through the heart. **They drag the entire piping community down and give pipes and drums a bad name.**

***Make every practice a worth while investment of time for every player.***

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**Concepts Phrases for PM to know:**

<b>Letters of the alphabet</b>	syllable's	<i>note notation</i>
<b>Words</b>	rhythmic patterns	<i>musical motives</i>
<b>Incomplete sentence</b>	punctuation	<i>phrase / cadence</i>
<b>Diction / pronunciation</b>	emphasis	<i>grace notes</i>
<b>Articulation and Expression of words</b>		<i>rhythmic definition</i>
<b>Style of speaking</b>	style and interpretation	<i>melody line</i>

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**Effective Practice Should:**

- 1. Create and maintain interest with new music**
- 2. Strengthen old music**
- 3. Improve finger technique**
- 4. Let band members learn to play together**

Furnish each player with a copy of the tune with the motives/words and phrases marked.

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1. Have players in a circle according to their ability and confidence or call them based on ability. This will allow the weaker piper to gain confidence and develop his/her technique.
  2. Foot tap on the BEAT/PULSE, by calling out Numbers “1, 2” Never stop on a connecting note, you may stop and breathe on the interrupter line (imaginary or drawn line directly after a dotted note.)
  3. Establish the rules. The first Player would play the first phrase, followed by the next player and then he next and so on, until all Players have **correctly** played the chosen phrase.

*Ensure that all other pipers, are fingering the phrase silently whilst waiting their turn. This allows the least confident piper to have extra chances to hear and practice the individual phrase before being asked to play, The Pipe Major should take the opportunity to conduct the accuracy of the note values using the monotone ( spoken phrase breakdown of the movement i.e. ‘Dah – de dah – Dit’) and describe the “structure” of the rhythmic patterns e.g. Ascending, Descending, repeating itself, single play, etc.*

5. The exercise would be repeated, but this time with either two or three players playing collectively. Soon the players involved will develop their sense of playing together and will eventually be able to highlight their on problem areas. Awareness is key.
6. The above procedures would be repeated playing the second phrase/motive, then the third and so on until the phrase is complete. When building up the number of phrases, allow the weaker pipers to develop at their own pace.

Sometimes the phrase/motive will also have to be broken into syllables “comparing the musical motive to a word, the connecting notes act just as a word with one or more syllables” - Language of Music

7. With the Pipe Major making use of the monotone, the pipers would be encouraged to play 2- motives continuously, followed by 3-motives continuously and so on, until the complete phrase is accomplished with a degree of competency and unison playing.
8. Make use of the metronome to encourage steady beat. Make sure to start low, anywhere from 40 – 60 beats per minute.

### **Potential Practice Achievements**

1. Enjoyable practice with each player performing at his/her own level of competence
2. Playing together comes naturally
3. The melody will be memorized much faster
4. Individual faults identified, especially note values and embellishments.

### **Practice Instructors**

- ❖ Must be above the students in skill level
- ❖ Be able to motivate, not just tear down
- ❖ Have desired goals and a plan communicated to the student
- ❖ Consistently have the same student if possible
- ❖ Have the patience of Job

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Criticism of technique does not hurt a student but will allow you to give them proper exercises, correction and practice goals. The goal is to improve and meld them with our band.

I've heard people blurt out 6 items they thought students were doing wrong, then stalk off. This has been observed by Henry, myself and others, and the criticisms were not accurate. There were only two real problems in these observed instances and the criticisms seemed more out of a desire to hurt rather than help. That's not the proper technique of piper building. You don't help anyone that way. You sit down and calmly work with the student. Let's call it the "Al McMullin" technique.

You have to take the most blatant problem and work it first; otherwise, students may feel overwhelmed or a total failure. Correct the problem; inform the student.

### **Outside Instructors**

It does not hurt to have outside instructors in piping or drumming. It can only help the band as a whole. If it can even be offered as a seminar to other bands, then so much the better.

Do not try to undermine the instructor; this happened with Val Duff. The powers at that time insisted that we wouldn't do what she was asking us to do, so no benefit was seen. If you have a well-known instructor, they will not try to "take" the band from you. I let Henry have free reign up to a bit and carefully consider his suggestions.

In fact, Henry has informed me when others have made suggestions that should really go to me or to Konrad. A good instructor is just that, a good instructor.

### **Attendance**

The biggest problem we encounter is attendance. Most of us work and cannot always make practice and don't play or practice enough at home (Which brings up the blowing problem as well), so we don't really advance as quickly on tunes as we could IF everyone worked on them outside of practice.

You cannot force attendance in a group like ours. Not if you want to keep the group; it requires motivation and fun.

But if you do not regularly attend, you really don't have as much say as the regular attendees.

### **Marching & Practice**

That's why I keep the practices to mostly pipe and chanter playing (Konrad has the drum section covered) and bloody little marching. I try for a 95/5 split, 95% chanter and pipes with 5% marching, though that can vary based on need by new people or sloppiness.

I have asked Ron Volz to do a special night on marching to locate problems. He's been teaching marching for over 20 years and has some experience in the matter. Dennis has volunteered to video it for critique and learning later. Use band resources to the fullest.

Marching is important to look good but is not the be-all of the band. We're musicians first.

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## Parade Marching

You must choose tunes that are melodic, forceful and capable of being played *repeatedly* by band members. On an extremely long parade you might go for a single play, no repeats but frequent tune calls. Remember, you're also trying to build up band piping strength for those that won't play enough on their own.

If the gig needs strong piping and you have a majority of weak blowers, you'll have to opt for fewer tunes with no repeats. You must strengthen these weak blowers later though.

If the Drummie forgets to call off a tune, you'll have to call it off. Make sure you've worked this out with the bass beforehand in practice. The music choices or selection of music is the pipe major and drum sergeants worry.

Marching is a moveable feast; you can play less tunes but for more people since you are on the move.

Try to have at least a couple of parades without a drum major if possible. It sharpens the band's skills, and there are many occasions that you'll play without them. If you are playing a gig with 4 pipers or less, a drum major does look rather odd, like overkill. Informal playing does not require one and actually, a drum major is not a requirement for any music but they do look good to the public.

**There will be no slow marches on broken ground;** I had to declare that at Loch Hartwell after some near disasters. I may still veto any usage of it on even road or ground conditions. I added the slow tunes for melody and set emphasis only.

Read the Band Parade Manual by Don Bogue and the MacDonald and Regimental Drum Majors Association manual. Do note that some of the PM hand signals are not practical for small band or small groups. I signal with head to the bass on parade and with my body for the most part before I resort to hand signals. A small group cannot afford the loss of one musician.

## Band Formation

Our band forms up with the PM on the right front rank and PS on the left. I'll place a strong player on the rear piping ranks to keep the bass tied in musically. The diagrams in the parade manual do not reflect this, so modify them to match. Stagger strong players in diagonals to help 'broadcast' fingerings to any weaker players.

If someone has the wrong hose or shirt on or are a visiting guest player, we can place them in the middle of the formation.

## Calling Back Tunes

Even though we assign tune numbers to hand signal back to the drummers, it has been found that the tunes still need to be called back due to forgetfulness of some members. Besides that, there is actually those crowd members that will hear the tune and possibly remember it.

## In the Circle

In the circle is another matter though. You cannot repeat tunes – the audience will notice. You **MUST** have music variety to challenge the pipers and drummers to learn and to please our audience. **Never let anyone say, unchallenged, “But it’s bagpipes; they don’t know pipe music, they cannot tell.”** Remember the venues

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we play at – Highland Games and Festivals; someone can tell. Even the uneducated can detect God-awful.

You have the same considerations: Blowing strength, tune capability (that’s knowledge, memorization and playing ability) and crowd. Obviously at a Fourth of July Parade you want military and patriotic sets but want something different at Highland Games.

You have to work out a strong introduction, then an air or slow tune to counterpoint and sooth; a contemplative tune (3/4 or slow air), then a stirring tune, another air type, followed by an echo of your intro on the exit. There must be a flow, not just a blast of music with unchanging time signature or tempo.

**It’s never just straight 2/4, 3/4, 4/4 or 6/8 tunes. Strive for the melodic.**

The drums augment the music, make counterpoint, echo and assist the pipes. Konrad is an excellent drum sergeant and will come up with a matching drum score. He is severely restricted in resources and time, though, and I hate asking him to do a standard 3/4 massed drum setting on “Lochanside” because it’s not musical and kills his soul and mine. However, I have to keep the pipers up on it, so will ask for the massed bands setting till Konrad can get the score he needs.

**First Example (15 minutes):**

Scotland the Brave/Rowan/Johnnie Scobie  
100 Pipers  
Amazing Grace  
Green Hills of Tyroll / Battle’s O’er  
Flower of Scotland  
Lochanside  
Murdo’s (Twice Through)

**Second Example (15 minutes)::**

High Road / Brown Haired Maiden  
Wha Saw the 42<sup>nd</sup> (Twice Through)  
Skye Boat  
Cockney Jocks / Bonnie Lass O’ Fyvie  
Highland Cathedral  
Scotland the Brave/Rowan/Johnnie Scobie

**Third Example (15 minutes):**

Scotland the Brave (Twice Through)  
Air Force / Caissons  
Anchors Aweigh / Marine Corps  
Wearing O’ the Green  
Amazing Grace  
God Bless America / Grand Old Flag

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### **Rule 3**

**ALWAYS TUNE – NEVER USE “THEY DON’T KNOW THE DIFFERENCE” AS A REASON NOT TO.**

### **Tuning**

Always tune, even at practice – don’t accept a bad sound. Noelette and Alan have very good ears for tuning. Alan, however, takes a bit longer trying to tweak just one reed, but has difficulty with drones; Noelette handles both fairly quickly. Develop your ear and make the call yourself when possible. Use one ear plug to help cut some of the sound level. I’m serious; wearing one cuts down on outside noise if it’s on the ear away from the pipes. Don’t forget the elf ears.

Pipe members should play at least 5 minutes to warm up, 15 if the pipes have not been played this week. Pick a chanter, either yours or one you like better sound-wise, as the master chanter.

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Once you've tuned your sergeant or corporal where you want them, get them tuning other band members. Make sure they know to move off a bit so you can continue tuning others. Having someone fire up next to you just makes tuning difficult.

Make sure everyone is trained to carry extra reeds, hemp or Teflon and tape. You can tell when you've reached that point quite easily. Ask for tape or hemp and see how many responses you get.

In situations where someone appears late after you've tuned a majority of the band and demands everyone tune to them – invite them to go enjoy the action of coitus. Late is late and you cannot make everyone redo things for one person.

If you're the one that's late and tuning has already started, you're going to have to tune with whoever set the master pipe. The goal is a **timely** warm up.

***Noelette's "The Secret Art of Tuning" is the best resource for tuning followed by Shepherd's and Chris Hamilton's booklets.***

### **Tuning and Maintenance**

If someone is having difficulty blowing up to tune, it could be leaks or reeds. Also by adjusting and watching them during tuning, you will get a feel for how well a member maintains their pipes. Pick a troubled pipe, and use them as an example on what to do. Let everyone feel the joints or see areas needing maintenance.

The chanter stock is a more difficult call. It shouldn't pop out, yet it shouldn't be immovable. Only experience will tell you this. As long as it resists the urge of pressure to sail out of the stock and shatter on the ground, it's good. Some people want them far too tight for high humidity conditions.

***Check my band manual on pipe maintenance or any acceptable book on maintenance.***

#### ***Check for Leaks***

Air Bag?

Joints, check hemping.

Cracks in the stocks?

Uneven hemping failing to seal the bore stock?

Check that the blowpipe valve?

Check that the blowpipe is not restricted.

Check any other restrictions like water traps, Ross canister hoses, etc.

#### ***Check Reeds***

Leaking drone or chanter reed takes to much pressure and reacts to small changes in air pressure

### **Tuning and Reeds**

If a reed doesn't exactly match, it may be that it is too dry or has not been played enough. It could also be that a simple adjustment to the bridle, adding a rubber band to change the lips or shaving may be required.

***Don't let the player throw the reed away unless it is dead! Too many pipers will destroy what can be a good reed if given proper attention!***

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I like to start beginners on weak reeds. As they develop, they will over blow the reed, and it's easy to tell that it's time to move them to a harder reed.

The reeds that work best are the TBS and Shepherd reeds for now. Some players have the MacCallum adjustable chanter, but there's no rush to get those at this time. A properly hemped reed will do the same thing. Try to avoid the mad rush to play too sharp as exhibited by some bands.

Remember the phrase "***never stick anything sharp in!***" In other words, if they sound sharp to your reed, they need to move the reed **out** or **up** to flatten it. A reed flat to your chanter, must be sharpened by moving it **in** or **down**.

#### **To Make Reed Weaker And Raise Pitch**

*A: Squeeze the top 1/3 of the reed*

*B: If reed is slow to respond and in particular if "f" is flat, squeeze more strongly midway above the wrapping on the staple and the blade tip.*

*C: Finally, and only if the reed is not responding to instructions A and B, remove cane from the sides and box, but never the lips, using a sanding stick.*

### **Tuning and Drums**

As snares developed from the metal-shell drum of the sixties to the carbon-fiber drums played today, the pitch of the drum became higher and the tone thinner. Compare the size of drum sections today to bands from thirty years ago, and you'll see they've almost doubled.

Tuning a band includes tuning the drums to the pipes- bass to bass drone, tenor to tenor drones, and snares to chanter. As the snares became sharper, the chanter had to be pitched up to match; otherwise a band isn't really in tune. Snares are tuned to the high A of the chanter. The bass and drum sergeant will take care of this for you.

### **Tuning with "Pressure Variation"**

Establish a true octave A-high A (chanter and drones), with the help of a tuner such as the CA-30, or by ear. Tune your drones to the chanter.

When tuning the chanter note to the drones **without a tuner**, it is an advantage to be able to "***slightly increase or decrease your blowing pressure***" to determine if the chanter note is "sharp" or "flat" to the drones.

If you have to increase your blowing pressure on a note to harmonize with your drones, this would indicate that the note is flat.

If you have to decrease your blowing pressure on a note to harmonize with your drones this would indicate the note is sharp.

This technique is known as "*pressure variation*". Varying your pressure is a useful skill to develop either as an individual for tuning chanter notes to the drones or tuning your chanter for solo play.

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## **Rule 4**

### ***BAND GOALS AND INFORMATION MUST BE COMMUNICATED TO ALL.***

#### **Communication**

“Civilian bands that use a military structure or fall in the "One God, One Pope, One Pipe Major" category are sometimes prone to problems related to a lack of effective communication or leadership skills in the Pipe Major. Although these skills are taught in the military, they may or may not be present in the civilian piper - even if a good player.”

*Steve MacLeod*

This is why communication is so very, very important. A military background does not always guarantee communication I've found. That's why I recently appointed one person as main contact point for all newcomers' information.

Materials written should have input from all sources if they affect other groups. In other words, I won't write a manual that tells Konrad how to be drum sergeant; he won't write one telling me how to be a pipe major.

Any materials going out to the public must meet band approval or Pipe Major's approval.

We had information disappearing with this person, with that person, appearing only in this person's email, etc. Now it gets added directly on-line to our roster for everyone to access.

All band information, tunes, newsletters, minutes, letters should be available for all members. There should be review periodically of news releases, biographies and all band information.

#### ***Secretary***

One of the reasons I've elected to revive the Secretary position and will have all news releases coming from a band member with a BAND contact list, duplicated on the band server and backed up. Too much information has disappeared in the past. We have to make sure that the band manages its resources for the future and that everyone has access to this information.

#### ***On-line Sign up***

That's one of the reasons I asked Nolette to go with the on-line sign-up. Anyone can see attendance in the future or past. Records are available to everyone in the band and don't disappear onto individual Excel spreadsheets or notebooks.

#### ***Newsletter***

The Newsletter is also one important source of communication to keep everyone focused on goals. It doesn't have to be eight pages in length, and it can even be just two, as long as band goals and path are voiced. I put a lot into it, but some sort of mailing, web spot or newsletter will let the band know your goals.

#### ***Email***

Email groups are great since most people have email. It all depends on how often they check it. Emails do get ignored after a while, especially when they are used to spread jokes. There's nothing wrong with jokes, but there really needs to be a separate personal email group so others don't wind up ignoring important messages

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and band information. And never forget the technology challenged who need phone calls and letters instead of emails.

Band emails can be a problem if overused. People will ignore multiple messages from the same source after awhile. I try to get people to give me information or take my information, such as tune sets, changes, etc, and incorporate them into just one message, but it hasn't really worked out yet.

### ***Band Performance (Gig) Sheets***

The band performance sheets must be readable whilst driving, font size greater than 10, contain a tune list, gig location, times and uniform of the day. Header should have picture of the band.

### **Confidentiality**

Communication and member health is very important as well. I've had situations where individuals told me about important medical problems in confidence that needed treatment NOW. I kept the confidence but had them stand-down till they had medical care and treatment. I've had people tell me "They really shouldn't be playing, I can't tell you why though," and I then asked the person to stand down. I've never asked why; I just say "I understand you really shouldn't be playing...stand down."

Full attendance is not worth a dead band member or friend, even ***if they insist on playing***. If we had someone die or develop ongoing health problems because someone couldn't say "I can't tell you why, but don't let so-and-so play." I'd do my damndest to remove the person who couldn't tell me, or remove them from a role of responsibility.

At the business meetings, if someone wants to submit a proposal but is too shy to back it, I'll bounce it out there for consideration. It might fly or it might get shot down or they may stand up and argue for it, or not. We do have those members who get too wrapped up in "Who proposed that? I want to talk [yell] at them!!"

I won't give on the confidentiality point; it's the only way to engage as many members as possible, and besides, I don't take kindly to bullies or brats.

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## **Rule 5**

### ***THE DRUMS ARE THE HEARTBEAT OF THE BAND.***

#### ***Bass Drum & Drum Sergeant***

The real heart of the band is the drum section, especially the Bass. If the Drummie or I all get excited and call off a tune too fast or too slow, a good bass will adjust the tempo. When I talk to Konrad, I explain how I want the sound at parts. Do I need an echo from the drums during a low section by the pipes? Do I want a stirring or a muted sound? You have to have the music in your head and listen to many, many albums and not just of military or competition winning bands. You have to also listen to small bands as well; sometimes they push the envelope. Be prepared to play it for the drummers and others.

You must get to the point where the bass will understand what you want with a nod or hand signal. Jim, Noelette and I have used some of these to speed up or slow down a tempo – even on the march.

A good bass drummer is worth their weight in gold. Steady tempo and good musical emphasis are what make Jim and the Noelette the best we've had. I believe Jerry can learn that as he gets more comfortable, and Lisa Deering is spot on with tempo.

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## **Rule 6**

### ***LISTEN TO THE BAND MEMBERS***

Always be open to listening to everyone. It's not just bellowing orders. Do you want to yell at something? Get a parrot.

Be able to listen with a straight face to what you may consider silly issues; focus intently on serious concerns. Listen to the band members and don't blow them off, though it may be tempting to do. Be sincere on all responses and always follow-up.

People will come to you if you're open to communication and skip people that do not listen to them. Be prepared to listen and take notes if needed.

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## **Rule 7**

### ***THE PIPE MAJOR AND LEAD DRUMMER ALONE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MUSIC.***

#### ***Music Choices***

Choosing band tunes can be difficult. You have to pick a path to lead to other tunes. I'm choosing 6/8's for the most part to lead into reels and strathspeys. Our band seems to do well with the pulse.

I do entertain suggestions from all of the band when it comes to tunes, but I have to make a choice based on various points. Points like: sound, pulse, existing repertoire, working it into a set, and tune complexity for our players.

**Suggestion Examples:** "I heard this tune on a CD" (Yes, but it's still considered 'cheesy' in piping circles today), "Field Marshal Montgomery plays this tune" (And we can play it too...in 5 years maybe.), "Atlanta uses this as their signature tune" (So? We need to copy them because? Will people think we're them? I don't think so.) Etc.

Take suggestions with a grain of salt and think them over. Henry and I agree that "Amazing Grace" 1-1-1 really only works well on a CD when it's been through the sound enhancer. It's better with a full band on all parts, with seconds and thirds added to it. Those members that go to Henry with suggestions instead of me, will find that he relays that to me since that is my job.

Also signature tunes are 'branding.' My long term objective is to have people know it's us when they hear "Atholl Highlanders" played well.

Some tunes will never work. "Wild Blue Yonder" and "Anchors Aweigh" just don't cut it on the pipes. "Air Force Blue" and "Eternal Father" have both been suggested but are both too weak for a parade tune and will not be used on the march.

#### **Tune Objectives**

- ❖ When assessing the suitability of a tune to learn, the Pipe Major must have a preconceived idea of the standard he/she would like to achieve.
- ❖ The objective of a pipe band performance should be to uplift and stimulate the listener who may not necessarily be a piper or drummer. (This is why having a good drum score on "Lochanside" is so important. Using a massed band 3/4 is NOT melodic. It's a **temporary** stopgap.)
- ❖ The Pipe Major has to consider how best the selected melody will involve and obtain a full emotional response from the audience.

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- ❖ A prescribed “Style and Interpretation” (Manner of Performance) coming from the rhythm, melodic patterns, and drum presentation with dynamics and influence should be planned.

Not everyone will like the choices, but that cannot be helped. This is one thing you’ll never win; trust me on this.

You must broaden the band’s music knowledge by having a tune library or by listening to other bands. That’s why I’ll stay behind on occasion when the band marches back after competition; to listen to other bands, not because I find playing soldier stupid.

Involve harmonies whenever possible. Remember that one piper on the main tune and one playing harmonies does not work or sound right with 99% of the tunes. Have **AT LEAST 2** other pipers besides the harmony player.

Drums are an important part of the overall ensemble. If we could get some alto tenors, along with the others, it would be great! The typical “mix” is one side drummer to every four pipers, but that depends on playing strength of all players and drum heads.

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## **Rule 8**

### ***AUTHORITY IS EARNED NOT GIVEN.***

Authority is earned. We’re dealing with volunteers and not military by any stretch of a lucid imagination. You must understand band member’s motivations for being in the band and understand their personal goals. First form them into a **TEAM**; that’s when you’ll have something to be very proud of.

The “ego monsters” never really get this. You will encounter them. I have had to soothe feathers and calm fevered brows because someone decides to haul their ass on their shoulder and blast away, decide everyone else is doing it all wrong. I always wonder how only one person can get it right.

You may remember the “I’m the only **REAL** piper in this band” comment that caused such a stir, stink and resentment. The only way to handle that was either vote the member out (which actually had a majority in favour at that time because of that and other actions) or make fun of them. I chose the latter to defuse the matter. Wrong or right, time will tell. Still, it was my call; I own it like I own the “We don’t need no stinkin’ rain capes” episode. You’ve also have to be able to laugh at yourself.

Being an “Old Timer” does not convey authority unless you’re putting in the time, working with beginners and helping at a majority of practices. If you’re not doing these, you are **RETIRED**, whether you want to admit it or not. You’ve all heard the negative comments from the band when non-involved old-timer shows up late and starts telling everyone how to do it. Some new people have no idea who some of these old-timers are. If I constantly started showing up at 8:30 because I had to work either the pottery or the graphic design company, I should let someone else take over and either assist or shut my mouth. If Jerry or Rocky got them tuned and going, my comments would be useless. I’m no longer a part of the active band at that point; I’ve joined the retired myself. I can go then and tell tales at the pub. I do personally invite all old-timers to come and **help** though at 7:00 PM.

Being a Band officer does have heavier responsibility. If you have complaints made against a band member by our audience, you must take action; it can affect our playing

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of that venue again. If you have a member staggering around drunk in massed bands, in front of the public, you have a bigger problem on your hands; you'll have to ask them to stand down NOW for the sake of the band. It's not fun, but you do have the band image and pride to consider. Band membership can be brought up for a vote if it's an ongoing problem. Appointees can also be placed on probation or have rank removed.

Always focus your energy and thoughts on the band objectives that the **active** band has agreed on. Always keep the short and long term objectives in your mind and planning. The band members will help you as long as they see that you are working toward accomplishing band goals.

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## **Rule 9**

### **NEVER LOSE FOCUS**

We are musicians who want to improve our music. We are friends who want to have fun together, learn new tunes, improve technique and make good music. We are not here just to march, though we will march for practice and appearances sake.

#### **A Band's Biggest Problems Are:**

1. Attendance at practices
2. Degree of playing technique/skill.
3. Maintenance of instruments.
4. Unsteady blowing.
5. Limited Repertoire
6. Treatment of Beginners / new learners

It takes time with our group. You have to have a fixed repertoire, musical, tonal goal and keep plugging after it; week by week; month by month; year by year. There are times that I've despaired of getting any new music because of attendance, fingering, drum scores, etc, but I do note the improvements both small and large and keep plugging away.

There have been times when we've had the group hit the music dead on but be unable to attend again for a couple of weeks and you've dropped back two steps. So you start again.

"The reason most people fail to reach the finish line is that they confuse a setback with a failure...A setback isn't a dead end, it's just a learning curve on your journey to success."  
Russell Simmons

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## **Rule 10**

### **EDUCATE THE BAND, THE PUBLIC AND YOURSELF**

Either by library, newsletter, emails or just listening to other bands; educate the band on music and technique. Have additional music they can learn.

We also must educate them and the public on the history of the pipes, drums, the Highlands, Lowlands, the kilt, Ireland, etc. Basically we're teaching everyone about all the Celtic Nations and customs.

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### ***Library***

This is where the band library plays a major function; maintain it. Make sure to have a 'morgue' of our music and sets as well as tunes that a person may want to work; copies of "The Voice" or "Piping Times"; Self-help books and CD/DVD.

Point out good pipers as well as bad, so the band can tell the difference. Listen to Piping CD's: "World' Championship" and the "Piper's of Distinction" series are excellent sources. Add books, DVDs and CDs members find interesting to the library.

### ***Burns's Night***

Burns's Night is a time of education as well as camaraderie. It should always get as many participants involved as possible in the program and setup. Invite local guests or a sponsor. **Material should be readable in a low-light environment with at least font 12.** I've volunteered to do the **2008** Programme 4 page booklet and set it up as a template for future use by the band secretary.

### ***Read***

Share books that inspire or teach with the band library. Keep copies of "The Voice" for members to read.

### ***On the Web***

Maintain the web page as a vehicle for outside contact, band information and Celtic Culture education. Make sure that the Band and not one individual controls it. Remember the old web site episode.

Ask responsible people to report and keep you aware of web, newsletter, library and Burns's Night developments or progress if you are not also involved.

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## **Rule 11**

### **AVOID OUTSIDE AND INSIDE POLITICS WHEN POSSIBLE**

There are people who want to play politics internally or of the outside type involving Libertarian / Republican / Democratic type. That's not why were here. Outside politics can be reserved for beer call. In this band, we're neutral.

Internal politics can be difficult. Some people will not attend a practice but will attend a business meeting and whine and moan the entire way about how everything is done. Some people will tear down others constantly. Remember that communication thing? I hear about it whether it's of the "He said / she said", "he's about to leave", to "they think so-and-so is a Napoleon and a martinet."

If it's rumor, you have to squash it. If it's jealousy, you need to try to defuse it. If it's a fire, put it out and quickly! If the information is true and affects the band, you have to jump on it.

You have to let the band decide direction, but avoid it being pipers vs. drummers; solitary hold out vs. band; old-timer vs. new band; Pipey vs. band; Drummie vs. band; etc. There is no 'territory' anyone must 'defend'; **it's all band territory and the band members make the choices.** You provide direction. We're all on the same ship, mate.

It's not easy to steer a course, and you have to know motivations. There are those who want to be in charge but will not devote the time; those who want to improve the band;

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those too shy to bring up a topic; those who belong to the bagpipe gizmo of the week club; those of the “let’s play Prussian Army” ilk; etc.

You may make an error. I have, it happens. I’m correcting mine by working up replacements from the ranks. They’ll eventually make sergeant, and I’ll replace their corporal positions with 2 others band members.

You will encounter people on occasion, who refuse to communicate, listen to others or work as a team member. They want their own little fiefdom in the band. That’s not possible in a band like ours. They should not be allowed to run things on their own if they cannot deal with being a part of the band. If they perform a function, move the items they hoard into general band functions under control and maintenance by the band as a whole.

Personally I’m trying to give away photo updates to the web page and have band members pick up the newsletter and Burns’s Night. Noelette is looking for an assistant on the server. These items belong to the band itself.

You’ll never satisfy 100% of the people in the band. Every choice will have a critic, just expect it and make the correct choice anyway.

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## **Rule 12**

### **DO THE PAPERWORK**

There is paperwork to be done, and the PM has responsibility for this. Some of this can be handled by the secretary in the future perhaps.

- ❖ Prepare EUSPBA Roster and band form before January First.
- ❖ Competition Games usually require sign-up two - three months prior with EUSPBA number and EIN number. Treasurer handles 501 (c) 3.
- ❖ Make sure Business Manager has games/gig paperwork done.
- ❖ Do follow up letters to clients not just emails. Phone calls are personal and effective as well.
- ❖ Answer all correspondence immediately.
- ❖ If the treasurer is out of town, deposit the gig money.

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## **Rule 13**

### **TRUST THE OTHERS TO DO THE WORK**

You do have to monitor some people. They’ll make unilateral choices without asking anyone else because, “they know best.” There are the others will happily do what’s required and give you a status when required or just keep you updated. They’re in it for the band. Don’t micro-manage, just find out what’s going on to avoid surprises.

Know who can work well with others, who can keep on track and who will get the job done to specifications. Keep as many members as involved as possible. Thank them for their work, no matter how great or how small.

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## **Rule 14**

### **KNOW YOURSELF**

I actually have a temper and anger when someone, anyone, damages or tarnishes the image of the band. Especially band members that should know better.

I have to sit on that and have people like Jim, Noelette, Rocky, Jerry, and Geno proof this and other materials to make sure I don't start venting about some of the egotistical, idiotic, martinets that need to have their face rendered concave, multiple stabs with a dirk and their b...oops, see what I mean?

Know your weakness whether it's anger, ego or whisky, and manage it. When you want to kick someone who won't listen so hard their crotch will be right below their chin, take a walk and cool down or discuss it with friends first.

Know your strengths as well. If it's communication, patience, capability to listen, to teach, to organize or appoint those that can and defend the principles of the band like a Rampant Lion, you're probably in the right place.

My other biggest weakness is that I'll not say something at the first instance of a problem but will wait. "Surely a person can't be that stupid" I'll tell myself, giving them the benefit of the doubt. By the time they've added four or more items to the list; I'm really, flaming mad at that person. My own decision recently was to turn that around and correct things first occurrence. Though, that means that a couple of people still have some catching up to do.

Know when it's time for fresh thoughts and blood to come in and revitalize the band.

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## **Rule 15**

### **BE READY TO REWRITE THESE RULES**

Bands grow; things change. Other wise; the band will die. You may have to rewrite rules to match or meet new demands based on change. These rules are pretty standard to most pipe bands and are a guideline to avoid the head-scratching I had to do. Just pick multiple people to teach the rules to.

### **Recommended Reading:**

"Secret Art of Tuning" – Noelette Stout

"Atholl Highlanders Pipe Maintenance Manual" – PM Evan Kohler-Camp

"Atholl Highlanders Parade Manual" – DM Don Bogue

"EUSPBA Ensemble" - 2005

"MacDonald Manual V 2" – DM Joe MacDonald – 8 time DM Edinburgh Tattoo

"The Language Of Music" by the RSPBA ([www.rspba.org](http://www.rspba.org).)

"Encyclopedia of Tunes for the Great Highland Bagpipe" -

"Pipe Major's Handbook - How to Tune & Maintain Bagpipes" - Royce Lerwick

"RDMA Drill Manual v25" – Regimental Drum Majors Association

"Rhythmic Fingerwork" - James McGillivray

"Piper's Helper - Exercises for the Highland Bagpipe" - John Recknagel

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### **To Sum It All Up:**

*You are the Captain, skipper, commander of a proud ship, our band. You have to direct the helm and set the course and the watch. You make sure that ship's maintenance is kept up, holds full, rigging sound, decks clear, and you have to listen to the crew. Your appointee's are the watch; your drummie may be the figurehead on the bow. The wind in your sails is the music of the pipes and drums. It's great to be making headway and music.*

*You also have to know when to let go and turn the helm over. If all you can do is steer the band into storms, conflicts or wind up in the doldrums without a trace of movement; it's time to let someone else captain her. If you are tired of all the crew's squabbles, are ready to hang a few from the yardarm or make them walk the plank; you need to become maybe the ship's cook, carpenter, able-bodied seaman or get your own schooner and go sail solo. You don't want to be the one that runs her aground or up on the reef.*

*Right now, we're putting on sail; the waters are clear, deep and the winds are freshening, and our ship's compliment is a good one. Thank you Jerry, Geno, Noelette, Rocky and Jim for your input and taking time to proof and read this.*

*Our destination? New tunes, new waters, new friends and landfalls, but it's always forward and the second star to the right.*

*Evan*



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*(The following was sent to me by RT Shepherd and is pretty accurate.)*

## **DUTIES OF THE BAND LEADERS**

### **PIPE MAJOR:**

is the primary authority of the band and his or her appointment ought to be sustained by the membership. This is usually accomplished by a vote of some sort.

Qualifications should include if possible:

- ❖ A basic knowledge of the Theory of Music
- ❖ Knowledge and experience on the care and maintenance of the instrument
- ❖ The ability to organize and give leadership to the band
- ❖ The ability to give guidance to the Drum Corps to achieve a musical performance
- ❖ The basic duties of the Pipe Major would include,
- ❖ Overall responsibility for band performances
- ❖ Preparation of practice and training schedules for the band including teaching beginners
- ❖ Communicating the music interpretation to the Drum Section

The Pipe Major should also keep up with the new developments in the Pipe Band world, such as: Publications, music, recordings. This sometimes can be achieved by listening to other bands live or recorded. The pipe major should also try to keep up to date with their manufacturers and their products. In other words be aware of modern trends, before making personal assessment.

“If you want to know what the best is.....listen to what the best are playing” !

### **PIPE SERGEANT**

Best chosen by the Pipe Major as consequently would have to work together and will have many overlapping tasks, e.g. Should be able to conduct the chanter practice, thus allowing the Pipe Major to spend time with the Drum Section, the novice or learner pipers or whatever has priority.

When the full band is playing the Pipe Sergeant should be able to take command, allowing the Pipe Major to conduct and/or listen to the ensemble effect etc.

### **LEAD DRUMMER**

Must work with the Pipe Major to understand the “Style and Interpretation” of the chosen music and be responsible for arranging all drum scores and conducting the drum section practice. If the band is large enough or has a lot of learners, further deputies can be added


## **What are a Band’s biggest Problems?**


1. Varying attendance at practices
2. Various degrees in the standard of finger technique.
3. Badly maintained instruments.
4. Unsteady blowers etc.


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## RAYER FOR THE PIPE MAJOR.


 ord, give me the words to explain to everyone else the lofty purpose of this wonderful organization, the Pipe Band, even though no one else seems to know that either.


 ive me the charity to make some sense of the rules that came with the chanter of office.


 ay I always have the patience to bear the opinions of those band members who do nothing until I have done something, and then tell me how I should have done it.


 elp me to keep both feet on the ground, and in step with the band, even when I don't have a leg to stand on.


 rant me the tact to make a point without making me an enemy.


 ord, you know I can't balance my cheque book, but help me read financial statements like an economist.


 hen the people holding the purse strings won't let go of them, may I have the persuasion of Moses and the wisdom of Solomon. And, when no one has a clue where the money to meet our expenses is going to come from, give me the faith of Abraham, who didn't know where he was going either, but went anyway.

 elp me to forgive those members who never show their faces, or fail to practice; and to tame the "lions" who ferociously guard "their" territory.

 ay I always know when to threaten, and when to cajole; when to suggest, and when to drop to one knee and plead.

 ake no mistake about it lord, I am the pipey. I'm not always sure how I got here - or why I ever accepted the position. But in your great mercy, give me all that I need to do the job well.

 nd when I have finished my term, give me the grace to let the next person take over.

 nd, keep my mouth shut!

 men