

Cooperation Creates Victory

Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser

We are a society that thrives on competition.

We *compete* in school for grades, we *compete* in our professional lives to achieve positions and titles, we *compete* in our daily life-patterns for everything from a faster lane on the freeway to a winning number in the local lottery. We like to win, to get ahead, to maneuver ourselves to a better vantage point. Perhaps Darwin's proposed theory in his popular writing, *Survival of the Fittest*, clearly evidences our competitive spirit; our ongoing, ever-present, striving to get to the front of the pack. It is powerful motivational fuel for the human, but like any energy force, *competition* can be used in a positive and/or negative fashion.

The athletic community has very successfully embraced *competition* as a traditional outgrowth of the physical education curriculum. Football games, basketball tournaments, track and field meets, etc., have become main stays of every institution. School themes are built around a string-of-victories or a state championship; the winning team often becomes the flagship of community pride. Though it is a gross generalization, we see winning as good, and not-winning as not-so-good.

Observing the positive enthusiasm generated by *competition*, other disciplines have quickly jumped on the bandwagon. Our schools now have; science fairs, 4-H shows, debate clubs, essay contests, and music festivals that recognize the achievements of an array of talents ranging from a flute solo to a 400 piece marching band.

The good news is: all of these organized *competitive forums* have created much excitement; however we must be clearly aware there can be a downside to the *win-at-all-costs* attitude. As band directors the cautionary responsibility rests directly on our shoulders. Take heed, for the instant gratification of first place can become a haunting detriment when it alone is the only measure of accomplishment.

When we ask students to "go the extra mile" by committing their valuable time to the art-of-making-music, we must focus on the *intrinsic benefits* they will gain as a result of their investment, rather than the *extrinsic rewards* that come as a by-product of their dedication. If "getting first place" is more important than the joy of an inspired performance,

(regardless of the outcome of the adjudication) then it is time to do some philosophical re-prioritizing. Is the goal to add more trophies-of-achievement to the shelves in the rehearsal room or is the goal to stretch the students to a new

level of artistic communication?

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Over the years

the ongoing debate about the value-of-competition (in our musical world) has caused many music educators to avoid any aspect of adjudication/evaluation. Much like the ostrich with its head-in-the-sand this may be an over-reaction or escape; it may also be an unrealistic approach to preparing our students to address the realities of life. At the same time if everything from chair-placement to a solo audition is couched in a competitive framework, the need to beat the fellow musician takes precedence over the personal growth and development gained by a solid practice-program of healthy self-discipline. The key to a successful balance is achieved through the careful guidance of the teacher, the band director, YOU. Instead

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of dangling the proverbial competitive carrot in front of the student(s), we might be better served if we rewarded and recognized their success-habits/patterns. For example:

1. Resolving a problem. Many students are quick to recognize or identify problems, but there are few who will come up with a resolution. Those who do should be put in the spotlight and given responsibilities within the program.

2. Being a quiet, innovative student leader. Identify those silent few who are always finding ways to make things better. Discover the student who, without a hint of fanfare, is willing to help others and requires little or no personal attention for his/her efforts. This is a role model worth his/her weight in gold.

3. Making decisions and taking action. There are many who “wait to be told what to do,” then do it remarkably well. Look for those who go one step beyond and are willing to take-a-stand, make a choice, and follow-through on their decisions; herein lies the leader-of-tomorrow.

4. Loyalty. In today’s world loyalty is a treasured attribute. Competition is the test of one’s loyalty, not

when we win, but when we lose. To avoid the, “If we can’t win, I quit!” attitude, reinforce the character strength of loyalty. Together we stand, divided we fall.

5. Cooperation. Nothing is impossible when a group of individuals chooses to make cooperation the theme of their working atmosphere. Alternatively, it is almost impossible to move any group forward when they are constantly competing to gain the upper hand on their fellow performers.

It is apparent we needn’t beat another person or persons to WIN, we simply need to improve ourselves to experience the intrinsic victory that is a result of; learning, growing, *becoming*. To this end, let us continue to support one another in the ongoing exploration of artistic expression and realize the value of competition is merely a stepping-stone for our students to witness others who share a similar passion. When all is said and done, we must *band together* if we ever hope to attain true victory.

Let the music begin...

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Tim Lautzenheiser is a well-known name in the music education world as a teacher, clinician, author, composer, consultant, adjudicator, and above all, a trusted friend to anyone interested in working with young people in developing a desire for excellence. His own career involves ten years of successful college band directing at Northern Michigan University, the University of Missouri, and New Mexico State University. Following three years in the music industry, he created Attitude Concepts for Today, an organization that manages workshops, seminars, and convention speaking engagements focusing on the pathway-to-excellence. Tim presently holds the Earl Dunn Distinguished Lecturer position at Ball State University. Tim is the Executive Director of Education for Conn-Selmer, Inc., and he serves as the national spokesperson for MENC’s “Make a Difference with Music” program. His books The Art of Successful Teaching, The Joy of Inspired Teaching, Music Advocacy and Student Leadership, and Everyday Wisdom for Inspired Teaching are best sellers. He is co-author of Hal Leonard’s popular band method Essential Elements - 2000.