

It's All About Time!

Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser

Time management, now there's a subject worth some time. It's *time* to discuss this important element of success?

Do any of these phrases sound familiar to you?

- Just as the rehearsal starts to develop some momentum, we ran out of *time*.
- The fund-raising project could have been so effective, but we didn't have enough *time* to really do it justice.
- Studying the musical scores is a great idea, but when would I find the *time*?
- The administrators never take the *time* to really understand our program.
- I have organizational skills, but I don't have the *time* to really put them into practice.
- The concert was O.K.; it could have been fantastic if we just had a bit more *time*.

... and on, and on, and on, until the end of - you guessed it - *time*.

The one equalizing factor in this world is *time*. We all have twenty-four hours in the day; no more, no less. Successful educators are masters at managing *time*. They have just as much to do as everyone else, but they (somehow) are able to complete their agendas in the given amount of *time*. What's their secret? Many of us have come to associate

"busy" with "productive." It is certainly true, we can be busy and productive, but are we sometimes "busy" doing the tasks that are best suited for our talents? Do we prioritize and assign ourselves the teacher-only responsibilities or do we get caught in that undertow of *escape* activities?

There is one person in your organization who must-know-the-score (no pun intended). YOU are the designated individual; therefore rehearsal preparation must be at the top of your to-do list. Stuffing folders and setting up the chairs and stands for rehearsal can be accomplished by a student manager or a select group of student leaders. Consequently if you catch yourself using your *time* to do something that could easily be assumed by your students, simply STOP and review your priorities. Take the *time* to teach someone else the "right way" to prepare music folders and properly set up the equipment for the upcoming rehearsal. The benefits are twofold; the students embrace more ownership of the ensemble's success, and YOU are now free to focus your *time* on

learning-the-musical-score.

If it is such a simple process, why don't we apply it to every aspect of our profession? Why do we often find ourselves in a state

of urgency, or always rushing to meet the given deadline? Being a full-fledged member of the *not-enough-time* club, I have devoted *time* to the research of

time management. After much study it is painfully clear; the problem is me.

According to the experts we sidestep effective prioritizing for two basic reasons:

1. *Doing the less-challenging duties helps us avoid the disappointment we experience in unknown territory.* In other words (to stay with our score-study example), it is more comfortable and less taxing to stuff folders and organize music stands than it is to analyze the thematic material of a new composition. We aren't as likely to fail or feel as inadequate; it's a shallow attempt to feed our sense-of-accomplishment, but the impact is short-lived. Avoidance is a human condition; it's not that we don't know what to do, it's that we don't want to do it, so we look for



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opportunities that will divert our focus and still keep us busy. Our fear-of-incompetence will convince us we would be wasting *time* if we committed ourselves to a lengthy examination of the compositional aspects of the musical score. As a result of this rationalization we end up with a group of people sitting attentively in a rehearsal, with chairs and stands neatly in place, using up valuable *time* because the conductor, lacking a workable knowledge of the music, is not prepared to “lead” the ensemble.

2. If we complete all the work there is to do, we become dispensable...we aren't needed; therefore we must ensure we have a long list of responsibilities yet-to-accomplish. Psychology 101: “A basic human desire is to feel a sense of need.” If we finish everything, what will we do? Maybe we won't be

needed; therefore if we continue to add to our list or responsibilities while refusing to address the present problems, we increase the security of our position. Subconsciously we really fear completion for it jeopardizes our very existence. Of course the irony is, the moment we finish one project, two new ones appear instantly. Every master teacher knows, *the more we do, the more there is to do*. It is impossible to arrive at the finite-end simply because we continue to create more during the process-of-completion.

The review of these two described conditions suggests we are at the effect of our own choices. If so, we then have the wherewithal to shift our emphasis and dedicate our time, effort, and energy to areas where we can have a more beneficial impact on our programs.

Acclaimed author and time-management consultant, Stephen R. Covey, offers several suggestions we can easily tailor to our teaching forums. The following check-list is adaptation designed to accommodate the music teacher in the positive administration of a healthy program. Before investing your personal *time* in any future activity, take a moment to review these important questions. It will be a valuable use of your *time*.



1. What needs to be done right now? What has to be accomplished immediately to meet a deadline and avoid a crisis situation?

2. Does the task require personal attention or can it be assigned? If it can be delegated to a responsible person, do so and move

ahead to the next responsibility.

3. Is the energy being used within a personal sphere-of-influence to produce a positive result?

Beware spinning your wheels; don't waste *time* if you don't sense forward motion.

4. Is there an alternative way to create better results? Beware the “we've always done it this way,” pattern-of-thinking.

5. Does it feed the mission-of-excellence?

If it does not, don't do it.

No, this *prioritizing-template* will not solve every problem, but it will clear up much of the confusion that prevents us from making logical choices about the investment of our *time*. It is also brings with it a tone-of-honesty so we aren't tempted to believe we *don't have enough time*.

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During my college years I was earning some extra revenue by playing with a jazz quartet with two of my music-major friends and an older gentleman who was an innately gifted pianist. His many years of “playing on the road” provided a library of fascinating mentoring material for the three of us. While he imparted priceless wisdom during those much anticipated breaks between sets, his best advice was his predictable mantra, “*Time! It’s all about time.*” It was, it is, it always will be.

Dr. 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.