

It's Your Story...Stick With It!

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Even though the Olympics are behind us, I can't seem to keep the vision of gold medals and world records from jarring me into the recognition of my own aborted dreams and sometimes less than adventurous lifestyle. Perhaps you also found yourself lamenting for long forgotten dreams and visions. Where (and why) did we lose sight of our goals and settle for so much less? It may not be a gold medal in fencing that makes your heart palpitate, but we've all had dreams of our own; areas where we excelled to a certain degree and wondered, "Could I be the best?"

It seems that one of the major features of the Olympics is the overwhelming emphasis on the triumph of the human character and skill, rather than our usual obsession with exposing everyone's shortcomings and failures. It seems to exalt the drive for greatness that is in all of us. We all know we were born for significance and purpose. The Olympics tells us it is possible. However, if you can recall asking yourself the question above, you may also remember someone pointing out your "weaknesses" and enumerating what sounded like valid reasons to put your effort elsewhere in order to succeed in life.

Your closest experience with the five colorful rings of the Olympic symbol may be your TV screen or a

Wheaties[®] box, but the principles that take Olympic athletes to the podium are the same principles that will cause you to excel and be the best at what you're doing with your band program. **The key is to focus on your strengths; those things for which you have a natural talent or simply enjoy.** Sure, we have to shore up our weaknesses and increase our skill and finesse if we wish to be the best, but at this stage of the game and, for us, this time of the season, now is the time to go for the gold.

I recall a news reporter cornering Olympic swimmer, Natalie Coughlin, during the recent events and asking about her tendency to veer dangerously close to the ropes. It would mean disqualification, if she were to accidentally brush the lane boundary. Coughlin calmly replied, "It is one of my weaknesses; I've been working on it. But, to tell you the truth, I'm not thinking about it. I'm just trying to swim my best." Coughlin perfectly expresses the secret to success; not only hers, but yours and mine, as well. Work on your weaknesses, but don't think about them. Focus on your strengths and you'll do your best, just like Coughlin who later achieved another Olympic gold medal.

Tom Rath, in his bestseller, *Strengths Finder 2.0*, puts it this

way, "At its fundamentally flawed core, the aim of almost any learning program is to help us become who we are not...From the cradle to the cubicle, we devote more time to our shortcomings than to our strengths."

So, what are YOU focusing on? Did you select your field show to minimize your weaknesses or accentuate your strengths? As you prepare for your contest season or UIL, are you continuously harping on the things that are wrong in your performance and virtually ignoring what is great? You and your students are full of potential and unlimited possibilities. Finding and exposing your strengths is what sets you apart from the "me too" competitor vying for the attention of judges and/or your audience.

Think about what you do BEST. Developing, identifying, and incorporating your unique strength into all you do will give you distinction and an advantage over everyone in your competitive class, but also the hot chocolate stand and the kid throwing water balloons at half-time. Therefore, it is important that you not rush your search for this precious gold. Take your eyes off your shortcomings and look at your strong points.

Perhaps you've been commiserating all season about the size of your group and feeling

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small (translate “insignificant.”). Whether it is your intention or not, this sense of inferiority is passed on to your students. Where is your focus? Have you forgotten about the trumpet soloist that knocks everyone’s socks off? All your efforts to create a program that excels in musicianship must not go to waste either. How can you use these strengths to your advantage?

Smaller groups have the unique ability to create an intimate atmosphere that draws the crowd in like a magnet. This relationship with your audience provides opportunities to cultivate certain qualities that may be more difficult, or even impossible, for larger groups. With this in mind, build a show that is highly achievable with your particular group of musicians.

Well-written musical arrangements with a strong storyline or theme will go a long way in setting you apart from the competition. Not only that, carry your storyline or theme to the max and you’ll see the unity in your group exponentially multiply. We all know this type of unity is a major factor in any group’s success. Like slipping your hand into a familiar, well-worn, work glove, the unity and camaraderie of your group will put your well thought-out and perfectly tailored show over the top.

All this, coupled with the well-founded assets of any award-winning executed performance, such as good tone and balance, an engaging use of props, a dynamic and well-executed color guard, an attention-grabbing cadence or sudden cymbal crash, contribute to the telling of your story. “. . . a story must start with a status quo, have conflict or some challenge that must be overcome and/or resolved, and end with a different status quo—something has changed, something new has been learned, and/or a problem has been solved.” (Chris King, professional storyteller)

What is your story (show)? Are your strong points being communicated? What makes your group, or show, or performance unlike any other? Use your uniqueness to your advantage and watch the interest soar, both on and off the field.

Have you ever noticed how the brief biographies of the Olympic athletes generate enthusiasm for an individual who was virtually unknown the week before and heighten the competitive atmosphere around an event you hardly ever see? How do they establish this emotional tie with the viewer? It’s there in an instant when the story being told makes a connection and somehow resonates with your own. This connection is also YOUR key to success. It is your uniqueness defined and related in an understandable way that will secure an emotional tie with your audience and create a memorable performance. **Tell your story well and you will find yourself in the awards circle.** After all, it’s your story. Stick with it and be YOUR BEST!



Marching Show Concepts is a full service marching band supplier for ALL your bands needs. Whether it is music, drill design, choreography, shoes, flags, apparel new set of dynamic warm-ups, or visual ideas to enhance your show, MSC can help you DO WHAT YOU DO BEST – TEACH!! Owned and service by music educators, MSC provides you with the solutions to be as successful as you can with any challenges you may be facing. Here for YOU!!

Randy Gilmore served ten years as a nationally recognized high school band director and was also the assistant marching band director at West Chester University. Over the past 21 years Randy has developed Marching Show Concepts as a nationally and globally known company for quality marching band field shows, indoor shows, music arrangements and teaching resource products along with exceptional one-to-one service. Randy exemplifies an expertise and standard of excellence that is well-known throughout the music industry. He is an accomplished clinician, adjudicator, drill designer and program coordinator who continues to display his talents in the MSC and Center X Productions collection products and services.