

When the Teacher is Ready, The Students Will Appear

Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser

We continue to explore the various avenues of teacher-preparation in hopes of finding the right combination to ensure a healthy learning experience for all students in their life-long relationship with MUSIC. This article reaches beyond the obvious content-requirements of every music degree curriculum. What are the attributes of a successful music educator? Do the students respond to “what” they are taught or “the way” they are taught? While the answer is always “YES,” we sometimes side-step the contextual aspect of teaching methodology. Let us focus on the teacher as he/she relates to the students and discover *When the teacher is ready, the students will appear.*

Teaching Style: Positive or Negative

We would all like our students to evaluate us as positive teachers. It is important not to confuse the word “positive” with “happy.” By definition, positive means “honest and with forward motion.” There are certainly occasions when we are positive things aren’t moving in a forward motion and it calls for some serious candor of an uncomfortable nature. Perhaps we can better understand the question

by determining if we enjoy the process of teaching music. We must see it as an opportunity to bring our students to a higher level of creative understanding and expose them to a universal language certain to benefit every aspect of their lives. Conversely, a negative style would emphasize reaching the given-goal at all costs and justifying it by rationalizing, the extreme justifies the means. This often creates an environment filled with stress, tension, defensive-survival-behavior, and (in most cases) it is counter-productive to what we are trying to achieve.

Motivation by Fear and/or Desire

Is it the fear-of-failure or the desire-for-success that motivates us to excellence? Is it the carrot-out-front or the whip on his back that moves the plow-horse forward?

It is clear we all are subject to both avenues of extrinsic behavior modification. Fear is the quickest way to move or motivate (motor) a person forward. We are creatures-of-survival and, as pointed out, we

will not elevate to a higher level of behavior until we know our survival is ensured; therefore any kind of threat will stimulate an action in an attempt to preserve our very existence. The ever-popular and always effective, “If you don’t do this, I will...” approach to students generates a quick response and, from an outside perspective, appears to be the most efficient way to “lead” the individual or group

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to the established goal. However, the after-effects are usually not as desirable as we might hope they would be. If the student chooses to remain in the class/ensemble following a situation where fear-of-failure is the dominant motivational theme (Many of them simply quit, the path of least resistance syndrome.) then a behavior-habit has been established that will require an even greater fear to achieve the next level of performance. It can be a one-way street to program destruction at the cost of creative artistry.

Alternatively, the desire for success does not guarantee such instant reactions. It requires a

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much longer and more patient style of mentoring. The sense of high-level-accomplishment is often set aside in favor of rest and relaxation. Entropy is a not only a law-of-nature, but also a predictable human pattern. Ultimately we all want our students to study, practice, perform, etc. because of their innate love of music. This will only happen when the student desires to take on the responsibility with the understanding that it has a personal benefit to his/her life.

Master educators use a healthy dose of desire and a judicious amount of fear as they traverse the endless musical journey with their students. Depending on the relationship that has been developed with the members of the class/ensemble, the application of these two extrinsic motivational tools is effectively administered at the appropriate time resulting in more productive work ethic demonstrated by the students. Herein lies the key to quality music education/performance.

The only true intrinsic motivation is self-motivation; therefore our emphasis must always be the stimulation of the individual; to inspire the person so he/she will excel without being threatened or bribed.

Quieting the Ego as it Relates to Competition

Is our quest for excellence-in-music a foundation of our teaching mission or is it a pay-off to feed our personal-professional growth pattern?

According to Webster, "The egocentric person is limited in outlook or concern to an individual activity or need." Are we capable of rising above our individual needs to pursue a much higher goal? Can we give unconditionally without expecting or demanding anything in return? Can we get beyond our own EGO?

These are uncomfortable inquiries and, even as we ask ourselves, our ego will doubt the validity of the question itself. The I-ME pre-occupation with SELF is seen in every aspect of our society. The constant tug-of-war for ownership has not escaped our world of music. Students are sparring over chair-placement, struggling

to beat-out someone else for a seat in the "top group," jockeying for political favor to be the one "selected" as an officer, and on, and on. All-too-often receiving a first place rating becomes more important than making music. When being number #1 becomes a higher priority than the benefit of the playing/singing/creating music, the process alters accordingly to fit the goal. Students may walk off a festival stage thrilled with their performance of "Incantation and Dance," then discover they received a second place

rating which immediately throws the whole group in an emotional tail-spin resulting in tears, accusations, blame, revenge, disappointment, and host of other negative reactions. If the ensemble felt a sense of positive accomplishment in preparing the music, and the members of the group dedicated their time and energy to achieving a new performance standard, then why would an evaluator's opinion override the joy-of-the-accomplishment? If this is the case, the extrinsic award has become more important than the intrinsic reward. In truth the rating is secondary. This is not to say there is not an educational value in competitive forums, BUT the evaluation/judgement only has educational worth when used to help in the preparation of the next performance.

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Agree to Disagree: Harmony is the Key

Harmony, balance, and blend, are common terms we bring to our rehearsal vocabulary. Are they also a part of our teaching pedagogy? Perhaps the solution to quieting the ego is developing the ability to “agree-to-disagree.” The results that come from moving forward in-harmony are generally far more beneficial than struggling with the handicaps of disagreement. It is certainly important to stand-up-for-what-we-believe, but when it is at the expense of the overall welfare of the organization, we have the option to simply agree to disagree. It does not mean giving up our values, our standards, or our ethics; it simply means we support the dignity of the other party or parties and realize the discussion/argument is holding back the progression of the program.

Independently we rely on energy—an individualistic source of natural power. Inter-dependently we avail ourselves to synergy—a cooperative act such that the total effect is greater than the sum of the independent parts. This extensive boost in potential only shows up when we are in a “cooperative mode.” Rather than waiting (and wasting precious time) to find a group of people who are of like-minds, we have the wherewithal to access synergy immediately (with any person/s) by “agreeing to disagree,” thus establishing a sense of cooperation—the key to creative synergy.

Our Mind Leads Us in the Direction of Our Most Dominant Thoughts

THOUGHTS lead to FEELINGS
FEELINGS lead to ACTIONS
ACTIONS lead to HABITS
HABITS establish CHARACTER
CHARACTER determines DESTINY

The equation is an over-simplification of the programming of the mind. We take actions on our feelings; these feelings are a by-product of our thoughts.

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We have all been amused by our fellow music educator (?) Professor Harold Hill, center-figure of Meredith Wilson’s popular musical, “The Music Man.” As you remember, Professor Hill was a capricious con-artist who convinced the people of River City of the need for a band; this would prevent the innocent children from being from being lured to the evils of the local pool hall—a sinful establishment of ill-morals! In the story-line Harold was finally confronted with his eager young musicians (with instruments in-hand) and challenged to “make music” or face the wrath of the skeptical town leaders

who were rightfully suspect of the self-proclaimed maestro. He stood in front of the band-to-be with baton-in-hand and said, “THINK!” Although it was a command of desperation, it was that very action that saved his hide. It was/is also a good lesson for all. “Whether we think we can or whether we think we can’t, we’re always correct.”

It seems we often wait to see what the circumstances are, then we adjust our attitude accordingly. However the sequence is; BELIEVE then BE. With each passing hour we are discovering the power-of-thoughts/beliefs. The ability to manifest our desired conditions is known and practiced by every great teacher. “The mind leads us in the direction of our most dominant thoughts.”

What do you believe is possible for your students, your program, your school, your community? Are there real limits or are there only perceived limits? Are we held captive to our self-imposed restrictions?

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Any successful person will tell you there is more to this than simply “thinking the right thoughts.” The next step is to do the work necessary to complete the goal. It is not, by any stretch of the imagination, a quick-fix, but it is a necessary beginning to achieve the aspired goal.

One Person Makes a Difference. You Make a Difference.

Every person makes a difference. We might want to ask ourselves, “What kind of difference am I making?” We are either part of the problem or part of the solution, but—without question—each of us makes a difference.

We often become frustrated because we feel as though we are alone in our quest. Our daily teaching schedule demands us to be a myriad of personalities ranging from a fund-raiser to a bus driver; and somewhere in the midst of all of it, we teach music. The never-ending list of responsibilities can be overwhelming and as stress and pressure are brought-to-bear, it is easy to retreat to the rationalization of, “I’m only one person and I can’t make a difference.”

However, embracing such a notion violates the very goal for which we are striving. Successful educators, in any facet of teaching, are the ones who see obstacles as opportunities for growth. They are not enticed by short-cut solutions, but are committed to reaching their goals and willing to invest whatever is necessary to achieve the given end. Styles vary, from those who are patiently methodical to those who are enthusiastically leading-the-charge with trumpets blaring. The one commonality is PERSISTENCE—the ability to go on resolutely regardless of any inconvenience or opposition, to continue in spite of resistance.

As we look through history it is evident the only thing that has made a difference is ONE PERSON. Somewhere in our lives ONE PERSON, probably a music teacher for many of us, was a catalyst in helping us choose our life’s calling—MUSIC.

“Our teacher” was ready when we appeared. Now we have the chance to return the favor; we can have a positive impact on the young people who eagerly step into our classrooms, for we know *when the teacher is ready, the students will appear*.

**“We make a living by what we get;
we make a life by what we give.”**

—Winston Churchill

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.