

# The Value of One

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*Strolling along the edge of the sea, a man catches sight of a young woman who appears to be engaged in a ritual dance. She stoops down, and then straightens to her full height, casting her arm out in an arc. Drawing closer, he sees that the beach around her is littered with starfish, and she is throwing them one by one into the sea. He lightly mocks her: "There are stranded starfish as far as the eye can see, for miles up the beach. What difference can saving a few of them possibly make?" Smiling, she bends down and once more tosses a starfish out over the water, saying serenely, "It certainly makes a difference to this one."*

You may be familiar with the above story but its relevance threatened to overtake me the other day as I listened to director after director tell me why their marching season would be less than stunning this fall. They had already settled into a result that was far below what they really wanted.

The road to success may not be littered with starfish but it definitely has its share of obstacles. Too often we focus on the impossibility of the task or all the reasons something isn't going to work, much like the man in the story. He saw only the obstacles, the countless number of starfish, so he did what any

nonsensical person would do. He informs the young woman that her attempts to save the mass of starfish are futile. There are just too many starfish, or in our vernacular; there is not enough time, not enough staff, resources, finances, etc.

What we see are two different standards of measurement. The man in our story leans toward an all or nothing type of thinking (i.e. "If you can't win it all, why bother?") The woman, on the other hand, is totally serene and content to simply do what she can to make a difference wherever she can. When it comes to measuring our efforts on the field, perhaps we need a little of both.

My conversations with the directors revealed a tendency to measure success by an established set of standards. How could they possibly win their division or present a clean show on Friday night with 85% freshmen? What I wanted to remind them of is their role as a contributor. They may be an instructor, but our real

value as band directors, is how much we contribute to the lives of each student we touch. How do we measure a positive word or an impartation of confidence

where there was none before? I am concerned that too often we grow weary in doing good. We settle rather than persevere.

I read an article about the Pike's Peak Ascent, a 13.32 mile race along a narrow mountain trail, ascending nearly 8,000 feet to the top of Pike's Peak, 14,115 feet above sea level. The author had trained for months and had successfully completed the race. Proud of his accomplishment, what changed the author's life was not so much the race, but an announcement made the following day during the Pikes Peak Marathon. Though the Ascent is called America's Ultimate Challenge, a grueling marathon is held the following day, with many "doubblers"—runners who compete in both races. Being in the area, he overheard the announcements as runners crossed the finish line.

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“And coming across the finish line now is Keith Wood, eighty-one-years-young. And he’s a doubler!”

The author writes, “So not only is Keith Wood, age 81, a marathoner, he’s an ultra-marathoner. And he’s not just dialing in his performances; he’s getting better. Clearly Wood believes that the key to a successful life is to run, literally, all the way to the finish line.”

Though the author had considered himself fairly successful for having completed the one run, Keith Wood had been setting records and running for years; never satisfied with his accomplishments or giving in to the obstacles that stood in his way. He persevered. He pressed through the hindrances and went beyond expectations. Inspiring examples of perseverance help us see that what we think is impossible, might actually be possible.

But how do we cross over from the norm into the realm of the impossible? How do we hurdle the blockades and hindrances that cause us to settle for less than our dreams? You may hear the “just do it” mantra ringing in your ears. Though there is profound merit to this philosophy, I’m suggesting we change our measure of success instead.

If we return to our story of the starfish, we realize the woman is not concerned about the success or failure of her mission or what proportion of starfish

survive or perish. She is content and moving in a rhythmic pattern, filled with joy and peace. (How many directors do you know who could be similarly described this time of year?) Not only is the woman at peace, she is succeeding as a contributor. Many are the starfish who live because of her dance. But there is no measurement here, only the story of her contribution. She has created a story that has been told countless times to portray the value of one.

Is this not what happens in successful band programs across the nation? How many of us, as directors, love to get together at conventions and rehash the “good ole days” in this band or that? It is the story that emerges from our programs each year that carries our students out into the world and stays with them through thick and thin. Should we not persevere in creating a story worth telling, no matter the number of trophies or ribbons on our wall? Who really is the one that will be forever changed by your contribution?

*Randy served ten years as a nationally recognized high school band director and assistant marching band director at West Chester University. Over the past 21 years Randy has developed Marching Show Concepts as a nationally known company for quality marching band products and exceptional one-to-one services. Randy exemplifies an expertise and standard of excellence that is well known and respected throughout the music industry. He is an accomplished clinician, adjudicator and drill designer who continues to display his talents in the MSC collection of products and services.*

