

Three Steps to Renewing Your Passion

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What is the greatest thing about band or musical involvement? Is it winning trophies or contests? Honors? Recognition? I doubt very much that anyone would honestly select any one of those reasons to enter the band program in sixth grade or even pursue teaching band as an adult. Perhaps this plaque in the Palestra, the University of Pennsylvania basketball arena, says it best (though referring to sports). It reads:

***To win the game is great.
To play the game is greater.
But to love the game is
the greatest of all.***

Translated into the musical genre, it might read, “To win the band competition is great. To play in the band is greater. But to love making music is the greatest of all.” Isn’t it the love of music that spurs us on to practice our instrument day in and day out or perfect our conducting skills in order to lead our group effectively?

As a director, I have come to realize I am conducting more than music. If it were just about the music, the rewards (translated “trophies and accolades”) would be the compelling force behind the disciplines required to be great. Instead, we gain extreme

satisfaction from simple acts, such as teaching a fifth or sixth grader how to hold a clarinet and play their first note. Nothing about skill or perfection there, but oh—the great reward of seeing that sparkle in their eye when they “get it!”

You see, it is about passion and delight and something resonating within that makes us feel more whole or alive. The exciting thing for those of us who pursue music education as a career is the double bonus of not only experiencing the personal joy of making music, but also the tremendous satisfaction of sharing this passion with others and seeing them make it their own.

I read a lot of books on business and how to be successful because there are so many little tidbits of information that can be helpful in every area of our lives. As I read these books, it is always so interesting to see how often the number one suggestion for finding

the right job or fulfillment or success, is to identify your passion. This is so true. I’m not arguing with its validity, but I think music educators have slam-dunked this one! Who went into music education because it was lucrative or made your MBA father happy? No, you loved music and couldn’t see yourself doing anything else!

Fast-forward to today. Perhaps, you have been a director for ten years, or maybe twenty-five, and you’re wondering where the passion has gone. You’ve read the preceding paragraphs and wondered if that was really you. Let me assure you;

the passion was there back then and it still is. But where is it hiding? Do you feel like you’re just going through the motions? Can you hardly get yourself out of bed in the morning to go to work?

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the load of cares, responsibilities, failure, weaknesses, and/or internal and external pressures. How can one get out from under such an onslaught of arrows that regularly assault? I can't change your situation. I recognize many of the things weighing you down are beyond your control, but there are some proven paths to renewal. When you look at your situation, you can't change what you see, but you can change how you see it. Make the decision to change, to be refreshed and renewed. Let me offer you these three steps to renewing the passion.

1. Remember. That's right. Remember. Dig out your ribbons from Solo and Ensemble performances. Call up a professor or fellow student from college who encouraged you in your education and talk about "the old days". Go to or plan a band reunion. Remembering fosters gratefulness and gratefulness fosters joy. Allow yourself to remember and the joy will return.

2. Take a blank piece of paper, lay it down with the long side horizontal, and draw a vertical line down the center. On one side list all good things, the reasons you love music, all the students who have pursued a career in music under your tutelage, etc.; and on the other side, list all the processes to directing, leading your band organization, and teaching that have weighed

you down. Simon Sinek has said, "Process helps us get good at what we are passionate about. If we get stuck in the process, however, we may become good at what we do, but we will never be great." The processes are necessary, but don't let them control you. Become great by keeping the passion in the forefront.

3. Stop working on your weaknesses or the weak areas of your program. I can almost hear you gasping for air on this one, but really, why are you "working on your weaknesses?" As John Maxwell says, "Why would you work on your weaknesses...after all, you're weak in that area." Find someone else who loves to do what you find draining and watch that person and that area of your program pick up momentum. You'll also feel a new sense of relief and freedom. Celebrate your strengths by focusing on them and watch the passion soar!

This is just a beginning, but I think you get the idea. It's all a matter of focus. Don't take your eyes off the prize, but remember, the prize isn't a trophy. It is the joy of walking in the center of your purpose. It is the reward of seeing with eyes of gratitude. It is feeling the pleasure of triumph in doing what you do best.

Feel the love. Let the love of music be your guiding passion once again and greatness won't be far behind.



Randy served ten years as a nationally recognized high school band director and assistant marching band director at West Chester University. For over 20 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.