

# Developing Positive Practice Habits

## *...The Pathway to Quality Music Making...*

**Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser**

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Remember the first time you tried to ice skate, or water ski, or roller blade, or PLAY A CLARINET? Can you recall how awkward it felt, how awkward YOU felt? We all know mastering any skill requires time-on-task. (Aside from those choice few individuals who we have labeled “naturals.”) Can you remember your college curriculum requiring “the learning of other instruments” and the struggle you experienced trying to become proficient at performing a long stroke roll or developing an acceptable sound on the bassoon?

What is it that puts some people ahead of others? Certainly “talent” plays into it. Some people have an innate ability to throw a football and/or play a piccolo, but—for the most part—it is a matter of embracing the fundamentals of practicing. Doing the same thing over-and-over to map the mind so the given process begins to feel “natural.” To date we have found no substitute for repetition, so the key to developing greater expertise lies in the willingness to invest personal time-and-energy with a disciplined desire to accomplish a higher degree of competence.

Having enjoyed the opportunity to observe some of the finest professional musicians in action, it

is always interesting to learn about their off-stage habits. What do they do that others do not do? All of these wonderful players are firmly entrenched in a rigorous practice schedule; nothing deters them from this important aspect of their daily activities. And what are they practicing? They are playing those same exercises we all learned in our various methods classes in college. Their execution is nearly flawless, but they do not deter from the ongoing repletion of those tried-and-true basics that have served many artists throughout history.

You probably recollect the popular old anecdote about the young trombonist who visited New York City to hear his favorite musical hero in concert. As he made his way through the streets of NYC he got lost, so he walked up to an elderly gentleman sitting on a park bench and inquired, “How do I get to Carnegie Hall?” The old

fellow looked up and responded, “Practice, man, PRACTICE!” There is more truth than humor in the shared answer.

There is no shortcut to playing a trumpet; it is a matter of putting the instrument to the lips and beginning the endless journey-of-exercises. Once the mind accepts this reality, it is a matter of DEVELOPING POSITIVE PRACTICE HABITS and being true to the on task time commitment. Thirty to forty-five minutes

each day can (and will) produce a measurable difference within a month; within six months it is dramatic, and after a year it can be astounding. Buying a new trumpet won't do it; buying a new technique book won't do it; talking about playing the trumpet better won't do it. There simply is not any instant success back doors to better trumpet playing.

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What's the point? We live in a fast-paced society and often our eagerness to get-to-the-destination blurs the requisites of-the-journey. While every student would love to open-the-case and have the wherewithal to play whatever music is put on the stand, it simply doesn't work that way. The very best understanding we, as teachers, can bring to their lives is the understanding of the priceless value of DEVELOPING POSITIVE PRACTICE HABITS; it is a GIFT that will serve them throughout their lives.

**....Strike up the band....**

*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.*