

The Artistic Importance of Cooperation in a Competitive World

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We are a society that thrives on *competition*. We *compete* in school for grades, we *compete* in our professional lives to achieve positions and titles, and we *compete* in our daily life-patterns for everything from a faster lane on the freeway to a winning number in the local lottery. We like to win, to get ahead, and to maneuver ourselves to a better vantage point. Perhaps Darwin's proposed theory in his popular writing *Survival of the Fittest* clearly evidences our competitive spirit—our ongoing, ever-present, striving to get to the front of the pack. It is powerful motivational fuel for the human, but like any energy force, competition can be used in a positive and/or negative fashion.

The athletic community has very successfully embraced *competition* as a traditional outgrowth of the physical education curriculum. Football games, basketball tournaments, track and field meets, etc., have become mainstays of every institution. School themes are built around a string of victories or a state championship; the winning team often becomes the flagship of community pride. Though it is a gross generalization, we see *winning* as good and *not-winning* as not-so-good.

Observing the enthusiasm generated by *competition*, other disciplines have quickly jumped on the bandwagon. Our schools now have science fairs, 4-H shows, debate clubs, essay contests, and music festivals that recognize the achievements of an array of talents ranging from a flute solo to a 400-piece marching band.

All of these organized *competitive forums* have created much excitement; however we must be clearly aware there can be a downside to the *win-at-all-costs* attitude. As responsible teachers the cautionary responsibility rests directly on our shoulders. Take heed, for the instant gratification of first place can become a haunting detriment when it alone is the only measure of accomplishment.

When we ask students to “go the extra mile” by committing their valuable time to the art of making music, we must focus on the

intrinsic benefits they will gain as a result of their investment, rather than the *extrinsic rewards* that come as a by-product of their dedication.

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If “getting first place” is more important than the joy of an inspired performance (regardless of the outcome of the adjudication), then it is time to do some philosophical re-prioritizing. Is the goal to add more trophies-of-achievement to the shelves in the rehearsal room or is the goal to stretch the students to a new level of artistic communication?

The musical growth of the student(s) must stand as the top priority in every instance.

Over the years the ongoing debate about the value of competition (in our musical world) has caused many music educators to avoid any aspect of adjudication/evaluation. Much like the ostrich with its head in the sand this may be an over-reaction or escape; it

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may also be an unrealistic approach to preparing our students to address the realities of life. At the same time if everything from chair placement to a solo audition is couched in a competitive framework, the need to overtake the fellow musician takes precedence over the personal growth and development gained by a solid practice program of healthy self-discipline. The key to a successful balance is achieved through the careful guidance of the teacher, the band director, YOU. Instead of dangling the proverbial competitive carrot in front of the student(s), we might be better served if we rewarded and recognized their success-habits/patterns.

For example:

1. Resolving a problem. Many students are quick to recognize or identify problems, but there are few who will come up with a resolution. Those who do should be put in the spotlight and given responsibilities within the program.

2. Being a quiet, innovative student leader. Identify those silent few who are always finding ways to make things better. Discover the student who, without a hint of fanfare, is willing to help others and requires little or no personal attention for his/her efforts. This is a role model worth his/her weight in gold.

3. Making decisions and taking action. There are many who “wait to be told what to do,” then do it remarkably well. Look for those who go one step beyond and are willing to take a stand, make a choice, and follow-through on their decision(s); herein lie the leaders of tomorrow.

4. Loyalty. In today’s world loyalty is a treasured attribute. Competition is the test of one’s loyalty, not when we win, but when we lose. To avoid the “If we can’t win, I quit!” attitude, reinforces the character strength of loyalty. *Together we stand; divided we fall.*

5. Cooperation. Nothing is impossible when a group of individuals chooses to make *cooperation* the theme of their working atmosphere. Alternatively, it is almost impossible to move any group forward when they are constantly competing to gain the upper hand on their fellow performers.

It is apparent we needn’t beat another person (or persons) to WIN; we simply need to improve ourselves to experience the intrinsic victory that is a result of learning, growing, *becoming*. To this end, we must strive to support one another in the ongoing exploration of artistic expression and realize the value of competition is merely a stepping-stone for our students to witness others who share a similar passion. When all is said and done, we must *band together* if we ever hope to attain TRUE VICTORY.

Tim Lautzenheiser is a trusted friend to anyone interested in working with young people in developing a desire for excellence and a passion for high level achievement. His career involves ten years of successful college band directing at Northern Michigan University, the University of Missouri, and New Mexico State University. Following his tenure at the university level, he spent three years with McCormick’s Enterprises working as Executive Director of Bands of America. In 1981, Tim created Attitude Concepts for Today, Inc., an organization designed to manage the many requests for workshops, seminars, and convention speaking engagements focusing on the area of positive attitude and effective leadership training. Over two million students have experienced his acclaimed student leadership workshops over the last three decades. He presently serves as Vice President of Education for Conn-Selmer, Inc. In addition, he continues his rigorous travel schedule touting the importance of arts education for every child.

His books, produced by G.I.A. Publications, Inc., continue to be bestsellers in the educational world. He is also co-author of popular band method, Essential Elements, and is the Senior Educational Consultant for Hal Leonard, Inc. Tim is the Senior Educational Advisor for Music for All, and NAMM (The International Music Products Association).

Tim holds degrees from Ball State University and the University of Alabama; in 1995 he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the VanderCook College of Music. He is presently an adjunct faculty member at: Ball State University (Earl Dunn Distinguished Lecturer), Indiana-Purdue/Ft. Wayne University, and Butler University. In addition, he serves on the Midwest Clinic Board of Directors and the Western International Band Clinic/American Band College Board of Directors.