

Focusing on Your Students' Potential

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“Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it.”

—Michelangelo

As directors, it is our responsibility to extract the unique brilliance and potential from each student by helping them to grow as individuals, discover their potential, and attain unbelievable possibilities! Rather than comparing students to one another and ranking them into categories, consider the moment when we approach each one of our students from the perspective of their own potential, uniqueness, and level of contribution. As educators it is truly our responsibility to chip away at the stone that encases each student and give them the freedom to be the most they can be. I encourage you to align yourself with your students' efforts to produce the desired outcome, rather than the standards (hierarchy, competition) that divide and work against them.

We live in a “World of Measurement,” which academia characterizes best. In this framework, students strive for success by hoping to reach a better place, grade, position, etc. However, along with this comes exclusivity, which places dividing lines of separation between students and

can create hostility amongst each other. This causes their placement, ranking, and status to become more important than each other! Almost everything we know, we learned by measurement. In order to learn about each other and about inanimate objects, we measure them through comparing and contrasting. As instructors, we know a child as compared to other children; we know a performance of “Malaguéna” by a junior high band as contrasted with a performance by the Cavaliers Drum Corps, etc.

In the middle of this consuming pressure to be accepted, better than, or simply noticed by somebody, how do we attempt to create harmony, build teamwork, ensure unity, and foster an atmosphere of camaraderie? Can we really build a better team within a system that rewards one person (or band) for being more exceptional than another and sidelines those who don't fit in or measure up?

Focus on who your students are and what they can become! Give them the *Freedom to Fail!* It is much more than goal setting. By

focusing on their potential, rather than were they rank, the students begin to focus on the person they want to become, rather than a skill to conquer. This momentarily silences the voices within that speak of failure.

This is the person you teach every week – the student with hopes and dreams. Be the Michelangelo, and align yourself with your students'

efforts to produce the desired outcome, rather than the hierarchy or competition that divides and works against them. Risk-taking then becomes a STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE, which becomes a **marker** that **provides direction**. The students are either on course or can see where things need to adjust. How does this work in band, where something collective is at stake? This is NOT to suggest that we should expect anything less than their very best each day, but rather focus on their potential and their current ability. By focusing on one's potential, we can express a vision of Partnership, Teamwork, and Relationships (what we have been trying to accomplish all

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along). Rather than feeling like all authorities are out to expose every wrong note or mis-step, students can be confident that the instructor or squad leader is on their side. We are all in this together and we are all giving our best.

I can hear you now, "Mistakes Happen!" Of course they do! However, if you teach your students to expect them, and even how to laugh at them, you will be imparting on them a lifelong skill that will make them a winner no matter what. If you can do this with your students, they will grow up to be strategic risk takers and great problem solvers.

We all want to make a difference, even your students do! The success of this approach is based on the belief that people really do want to be part of something greater than themselves, contribute to others, and make a difference. Call mistakes "opportunities"—an invitation to see what needs attention. Develop a mission statement for your group that your staff and students can adopt and to which they can adhere. Wayne Markworth wrote one of my favorite mission statements. In his book, *Dynamic Marching Band*, he wrote, "Rehearsals will be conducted with a positive attitude in a pleasant atmosphere. Students will be focused, energetic and

relaxed to achieve outstanding results. The director and staff will be organized and efficient, demonstrating careful planning and goal setting. These qualities will make the experience enjoyable and productive for students and staff."

The "rehearsal equals performance" mantra takes on a new meaning when the freedom to relax and take risk in the expression of passion becomes the norm. This is the opposite from the pressure of perfectionism currently associated with performances being produced on the field. We must keep alert to maintain and even multiply opportunities for our students in order to keep them from retreating to the sidelines as though their participation in our groups are inconsequential. This awareness must permeate everything we do in order to keep everyone involved and attain the optimal result. It will soon become apparent that, in order for them to fulfill their personal milestones, they will need to work together for the good of all.

Band camp and rehearsals should be a laboratory of possibilities for a total and complete musical experience. Don't limit your students or yourself. Discover and Focus on their POTENTIAL and attain unbelievable possibilities!

Randy T. Gilmore 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.