

# Dealing With “It’s Good Enough.”

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*Doesn't the title make you cringe?*

*Isn't the phrase "It's good enough" offensive to your sense of educational integrity?*

*Aren't you tempted to impulsively react in a defensive manner when a student resorts to this worn-out old excuse?*

Why would any musician (or anyone, for that matter) ever claim it's good enough? We know the pathway-to-excellence is never-ending and yet we are constantly searching for teaching techniques that will stimulate our students to reach a higher level of personal achievement, to push them beyond the perceived, "It's good enough."

Without question, every individual has an unlimited supply of undeveloped (or underdeveloped) talent. Even the master performers are constantly pushing themselves to a higher level of skill attainment. If we know we can be more proficient, what keeps us from developing to the next level musical awareness, performance, understanding? Isn't this the same inquiry we have concerning our students? Why don't they practice, invest, commit, dedicate, and enjoy the benefits of their efforts?

The human, by nature, enjoys comfort. Add to that, we are "creatures of habit" and we find

ourselves "repeating behaviors" simply for the sake of fulfilling the requirements of life. In a sense, we do what we do to maintain the status quo or to get to the point of "it's good enough." Therefore our students replicate the behavior by learning what they need to learn to meet the assigned goals, play/sing the chosen music, and complete the requested objectives; but, it is rare to find those who over-achieve, or push themselves beyond the targeted finish line.

Instead of focusing on "What motivates the individual?" (in other words, "What does it take to stir one to push beyond the given requirements?"); perhaps we should ask what holds the person back?

What is it that hinders the forward momentum of our students, ourselves, our race?

The world of psychology spotlights two specific areas that

impede us in our quest-for-quality: #1. Fear of failure, #2. Fear of success.

**FEAR OF FAILURE:** It is easy to understand the hesitation to put oneself in a posture of failure. We have learned to avoid failure at all costs along with the embarrassing emotional pain that accompanies this dreaded outcome. Instead of seeing failure as a stepping stone to achievement, we often see it as a termination point. However, the most successful people we know have all embraced the concept of failure; and, in fact, have even used it as a motivating force to accept, correct, and re-try the task-at-hand. There will never be success without failure,

therefore failure must be reframed in our understanding as part of the formula to help us reach our highest goals and aspirations.

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**FEAR OF SUCCESS:** Why would someone be frightened at the prospect of success? Isn’t that what we are trying to achieve? Isn’t that the pay-off for all of our hard work? Ah yes, but success brings along some companions that are not always part of our comfort zone. For example:

- **More Responsibility:** A successful person will be expected to uphold the level of responsibility needed to maintain the achieved standard.

- **Higher Expectations:** Winners are expected to keep winning. In most cases this means going beyond the level of the initial success.

- **Being in the Limelight:** Successful people are seen and heard by all. There is no place to hide; those who are successful are always being scrutinized by others.

- **The Long Fall to the Next Failure:** When the successful person faces the inevitable failure, the distance to the bottom of the mountain is more severe than for those who do not try at all.

- **Separation from Friends:** The success of one often creates a chasm between the individual and the rest of the crowd. Peer pressure often serves as the deciding factor in whether to push the extra mile or not; stay with the crowd, play safe.

Based on the two expressed fears (failure/success), the most comfortable place to be is “It’s good enough.”

The mind logically concludes, “Do what you have to do to avoid failure, but be careful not to catapult yourself to a high level of success.”

To counteract this reasoning, we, as educators, must be the first to model the benefits of both failure and success. In other words, we must be willing to set the pace by demonstrating our own willingness to push the envelope-of-possibility. Failure (that results from an effort to achieve) needs to be rewarded with guided encouragement to “learn from the mistakes” and then use the newly discovered data as we make a second, third, fourth attempt. Success (resulting from a calculated effort) needs to be acknowledged immediately, followed by the assurance that the value of the learning process was more important than the achieved product/outcome.

***Students will reach beyond “It’s good enough” when they understand there is a personal benefit to both failure and success.*** We, as educators, must reinforce this behavior to insure that positive seeking of higher levels of proficiency becomes an integral part of our students’ behavior habits.

The only time it’s good enough is when we decide to take action on the fact—it’s *not* good enough.

*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).*

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