

# Balancing Your Band and Your Life

Fran Kick

I don't know about you, but life seems to be tossing all of us more spinning plates—both at home and at work—than that famous plate-spinning circus act. You know? The one they used to bring out between two big acts during the circus—always musically accompanied by Aram Khachaturian's "Sabre Dance."

Now unless you're a plate-spinner extraordinaire like Erich Brenn (the most-famous, Austrian-born, plate-spinner to ever appear on *The Ed Sullivan Show*) or David Spathaky (the current Guinness World Record holder who spun 108 plates simultaneously in 1996), I bet you've got some wobbling plates in your life. Both at home and at work perhaps?

Band directing demands that you spin lots of plates. Maintaining balance in your life might even make you more effective at maintaining balance in your band. Mentally, you need to "be there" when you're there. Whether that means at work or at home. When either one (work or home) interferes with the other, your ability to keep those plates spinning is severely diminished. Ultimately, you'll find yourself running from one wobbling plate to the next wobbling plate... Wondering why you're even spinning all those plates. Rarely enjoying the process of spinning those plates. Fearful that if you ever

stopped to consider *why* you're spinning all those plates, they'll just crash to the ground!

Balancing your band and home life challenges even the best-of-the-best in the band directing profession. Quality-of-life issues for the modern band director were probably *not* discussed during your undergraduate, graduate, or even post-graduate education. Most mentors for young directors focus more on the musical or logistical nuts-and-bolts of making a band better. But, making a personal relationship better? Making a marriage better? Making a family better? Those are plates we just didn't learn to spin very well especially as they relate to *also* being a band director.

As Scott Rush and Jeremy Lane pointed out during their 2011 North Carolina Music Educators Association In-Service session: "As we were learning to become band directors we learned how to do our jobs very well. We did not learn how to do our jobs *in relation* to other things very well." It's those other things that sometimes challenge us.

My guess is that you could easily add to this list of challenges. We all deal with the quality time vs. quantity time issue that Bob Bryant, Executive Director for Fine Arts in Katy ISD mentioned during his interview. How you deal with that quality vs. quantity issue might be the very key to successfully spinning all your plates—because we know this isn't really an either-or issue. It's both! "It's quality time with whatever that quantity of time is."

So how can you make the most of the time you have with the people who are most important to you? Regardless of whether you're in a relationship with someone significant, dating, married, or just trying to maintain quality friendships with people who may or may not be in the band world, here are some strategies to consider:

**5 to 1.** Psychologist John Gottman (who has studied more relationships, over a longer period of time than perhaps anyone else on the planet) found that there's a magic ratio that impacts the quality of relationships. That ratio is 5 to 1.

*(continued)*

Listen to a few of your professional band-director colleagues, along with their spouses, share what challenges them: [http://youtu.be/7cKko5Bda\\_0](http://youtu.be/7cKko5Bda_0) or just scan this QR code to watch on your phone right now.



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In other words, you must have at least five times as many positive moments vs. negative moments if that relationship is to be stable.

*Please note:* that doesn't mean you can just repeat "I love you! I love you!! I love you!!! I love you!!!! I love you!!!!!" for each time something negative happens in that relationship. Sorry. Actions do speak louder than words. When you only use words to express your care or concern for others, you'll miss out on maintaining the magic balance needed between 5 to 1.

**5 People.** Both kids and adults need at least five people (beyond their parents) that they can count on to be their mentors, guides, friends, confidants or advisors. Can you list your five right now? These are the people you could call, email, meet with, and relate to in a constructively positive way whenever you need some "outside perspective."

**5 Things.** Relationships that are close (as in family, friends, significant others, spouses, and children) depend on you knowing each other well and what is currently important and/or at issue in each other's lives. Clinical counselors use this "list of five" many times to see how in-tune two people are with each other. Here's

how it works; each person in a relationship writes down two lists:

- Five most-important things currently going on in *your life*.
- Five most-important things you know are currently going on in the *other person's life*.

Now compare your lists with that other person. You might be surprised how many things "they get for you" and "you get for them." If not, it's a

great conversation starter to catch up on what is currently most important and/or at issue in your lives.

### **Christmas is the same date every year.**

The calendar controls more of our life than many of us would care to admit. If you believe family is important, or a relationship is important, or a friendship is important; does your calendar reflect that? Sure you work for a school that requires you to be at certain places on certain dates. Yet are there other dates on your calendar you hold dear, or are important, or even sacred? Are they marked on your calendar big and bold!

*Full disclosure:* I actually missed our first three anniversaries as a

young married band director who was also involved with the Music for All (then Bands of America) Summer Symposium. In my defense, we *both* decided to "celebrate

our anniversary" on a previous weekend each year. We even changed the dates on our calendars to make it a big deal and something we'd never forget. Now 25 years later, we still look back fondly on those early pre-

anniversary celebrations!

*The point is:* make the calendar work for you vs. you always working for the calendar. Prioritize what's really important in your life and share those dates/times with others in your life who are really important to you!

Certainly the annual Texas Bandmasters Association Convention/Clinic could be on your calendar as well as your spouse's calendar. What a great way to actually share your band-director world with them and enable them to interact with other spouses—both male as well as female BTW. The mentoring and support—professionally and personally—could help both of you when it comes to better understanding each other.

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Now, if you are married and/or have a family with children, here are some other ideas from a few of your professional band-director colleagues and their spouses: <http://youtu.be/uzR4v8q3fyI> or scan the QR code below to watch on your phone right now.



John Gottman, who wrote *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail* shares that most couples really want just two things in their relationship—love and respect. If you're going to make a significant commitment to make any relationship work, it's ultimately going to take some work. Our

human need for significance largely depends on three conditions:

1. To be listened to.
2. To be taken seriously with respect to feelings, thoughts and ideas.
3. To be genuinely needed as a contributor.

BTW, these three conditions are true for *any* relationship regardless of how many plates you are spinning. Interestingly, when these three conditions are not met, individuals in a relationship don't believe, think, feel, or see themselves as significant to the other person—no matter how many times you *tell* them they are.

Since “actions speak louder than words” make sure you've got your fives: 5 to 1, 5 people, 5 things, and put your calendar where your mouth is! Making sure the most important people in your life believe, think, feel, and see themselves as significant to YOU!

### References:

*Why Marriages Succeed or Fail: And How You Can Make Yours Last*  
by John Gottman  
ISBN 9780684802411

*Quality of Life Issues for the Modern Band Director*  
with Scott Rush and Jeremy Lane  
[http://www.ncbandmasters.org/images/QOL\\_Clinic\\_Handout\\_NCMEA.pdf](http://www.ncbandmasters.org/images/QOL_Clinic_Handout_NCMEA.pdf)

*Making a Difference with Your Dash*  
by Ray Cramer  
Teaching Music through Performance in Band: Volume 4, Chapter 2  
ISBN 9781579992026

*Marriage, a History: From Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage*  
by Stephanie Coontz  
ISBN 9780143036678

*7 Strategies for Developing Capable\* Students (for Parents and Teachers)*  
*\*Responsible, Respectful, and Resourceful*  
by H. Stephen Glenn and Michael L. Brock  
ISBN 9780761513568

*Fran Kick presented at the 2014 Texas Bandmasters Association Convention/Clinic for the TBA Student Day, the TBA Spouses Luncheon and a TBA director's clinic. Utilizing some active research, during the Spouses Luncheon Fran asked spouses to write down the one question that they would love to ask their band-director spouse, but never would because it might seriously impact their relationship. Spouses then prioritized the questions and Fran used those very questions during his director's clinic the next morning. If you would like to see a copy of those questions, just email [frankick@kickitin.com](mailto:frankick@kickitin.com) and put “TBA Spouse Questions” in the subject line. Don't worry, no names were associated with and of the questions. You can find more information about Fran Kick at <http://www.kickitin.com>.*