

Words of Wisdom for the Master Teacher

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Having always been a fan of “words of wisdom,” I think we can all benefit by wrapping our minds around the insights of those who have traversed the pathway of success. Their proven template of quality achievement is adaptable to many of our own situations; therefore, we can learn from the high achievers as their understanding relates to our own professional endeavors.

Master teachers have always had the ability to “go beyond the assigned curriculum.” Not only do they present the substantive requisite material in an effective and efficient style, but they also add a difficult-to-define bit of “magic” to the delivery. What is this secret ingredient that separates the exemplary educators from the rest of their colleagues? Many have attempted to quantify it, replicate it, diagnose it, and assess it in a way it can be taught to others, and yet it seems (at best) very elusive. When we observe a *master teacher* in action we know there is something very special about the way he/she “connects” with his/her students; it is far more than an “transfer of information,” rather it is a complete exchange of knowledge designed to improve and enrich the lives of the listeners/students.

We tend to label this contextual gift with such terms as: enthusiasm, expertise, people skills, communication competence, teacher readiness, proficiency, sensitivity, and even charisma. Yes, it is all of these, and more. It is the right combination of personality attributes tailored to the given teacher, and it seems to be as individualized and as unique as the pattern of a snowflake. *Teacher magic*, an intangible.

We have all witnessed incredibly intelligent and well-trained educators fall short in a rehearsal or classroom situation. Likewise, we have observed an uneducated laborer captivate a group of students while explaining a particular procedure to accomplish the task-at-hand. Perhaps the *teacher magic* does not come from the extended study of a certain discipline, but rather it is a manifested reflection of the values of the teacher. If this hypothesis is true, a *master teacher* could adapt his/her instructional skills to a multitude of learning areas. While it is arguable, an exemplary music educator could also be a winning coach; a remarkable youth minister could become a model teacher of foreign language, etc.

There have been many late night discussions bantering the reasons certain teachers enjoy ongoing success while others

struggle to achieve a similar level of accomplishment. Undoubtedly the controversy will continue forever, however there may be a clue to the mystery in the following words of wisdom from the pen of the popular Lebanese actor/comedian, Danny Thomas: “**Success has nothing to do with what you gain in life or accomplish for yourself—it’s what you do for others.**”

Therein lies the common denominator found in all *master teachers*; “what they do for others.” As educators we are measured by what we “give,” not what we have.

As we begin our new year of teaching, rehearsing, sharing, *giving*, let us be reminded the success of our programs, our ensembles, our students, and (yes) even our own careers is outcome of “what we have done for others.” Great teaching is not about the accumulation of various awards, trophies, and superior ratings; it is about creating a positive learning atmosphere for the students so they can understand, experience, and enjoy the language of music. Music education will thrive and prosper when the fundamental priority of our teaching day is based on “what we do for others.”

With this awareness at the forefront of our teaching philosophy, **let the music begin...**