

# Maximizing Student Motivation

Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser

---

What is motivation? The word derives from the Latin, *motere*, which means “lito motor” or “lito move.” We envision the motivated student as one who moves forward in a positive direction. A motivated band is a group of young musicians moving toward a common goal of excellence.

How do we motivate students? Psychology tells us the only true motivation is *self-motivation*. Therefore, it is important to provide an environment in which students choose to move forward of their own volition rather than await some outside force to manipulate their behavior to accommodate the desired results. How can a director *light the fire* in young musicians?

**FEAR:** Fear has long been an effective stimulant to alter behavior. There is no question that it plays on the basic human mechanism of survival. Pain, blame, guilt, and shame

are certain to bring about predictable reactions; however, there are negative residual consequences to be dealt with following these actions. To remove fear as a form of behavior modification is unrealistic; however, a judicious use of this powerful tool is advised. It should be used sparingly and only in extreme circumstances. Rest assured, a time of healing will be necessary for both director and students once fear is purposely injected into the environment. When we are threatened, our natural reaction is to seek safety and choose the path of least resistance to avoid pain or embarrassment. An extreme option for student musicians would be to simply quit the band.

**DESIRE:** Desire does not carry with it the reaction-urgency of fear; however, the long-term pro-action effects are certainly more conducive to harmony, balance, blend, and mutual trust. These conditions serve as a

better foundation for musical growth and development and support the ideals of a positive band experience for students. When students are *motivated* by an inner drive to reach the level of *desired* performance, the rehearsal atmosphere is dramatically shifted. Each student becomes his own source of power, allowing the director to focus that synergy—the combined energies of his students—to increase the pace of the learning process.

Time is not lost in disciplinary measures, but instead devoted to facilitating the path to musical prosperity. Students leave rehearsals enthused about band and are eager to recreate a similar set of standards in other facets of their lives as well as continue their musical journey, whether at home working on their individual parts or in the next scheduled rehearsal.

## Create a Positive Climate for Learning

Being in the band means devoting time to a common goal. It requires participants to relinquish much of their free time and/or fun time and reassign it to rehearsals. While many of their friends may enjoy the social benefits of adolescence, band students are fulfilling the requests of their band director. For a chosen few, the intrinsic payoff warrants the dedication of their efforts and energies. Others, however, seek additional dividends.

All students are not *intrinsically motivated*. But if they are properly approached, they will begin to comprehend a higher level of understanding and wean themselves from extrinsic payoffs and enjoy music for the sake of music. Herein lies one of the most significant contributions a director can bring to any student: leading a child step-by-step to the joy of music. This metamorphosis is almost immediate for some, but requires extended patience with others. Persistence alone is omnipotent in this charge. What classroom conditions best serve this goal?

**All students are not intrinsically motivated. But if they are properly approached, they will begin to comprehend a higher level of understanding and wean themselves from extrinsic payoffs and enjoy music for the sake of music.**

## Maximizing Student Motivation

### Condition 1: Safety

Is the rehearsal a *safe* place to reside? Abraham Maslow's scale of hierarchy is very clear concerning the importance of survival. He states that survival is the basic human need, quickly followed by the need for safety. If the atmosphere of the rehearsal is threatening, students will put a higher priority on survival (avoidance of pain) and safety (maintaining their dignity) than on extending their talents and skills for the common goal of the ensemble. If students and/or the director assume a defensive posture, it is certain to hinder the group's musical objectives.

### Condition 2: Challenge

Learning is exciting. Master teachers are well aware of the enthusiasm generated in an exchange of knowledge where both student and teacher are challenged. There is a fine art to establishing challenging, attainable goals without overwhelming students with a barrage of information. Knowing each student learns at her own pace, the astute music teacher constantly regulates expectations to establish a challenge for gifted students while supporting the growth of those who learn at a slower pace.

Although it is difficult to explain how to establish this important teacher-student communication, it appears to fall in the realm of *intuitive sensitivity*. Experience itself is often the key to mastering this skill. Beware the temptation to focus only on fun and easy material; it is deceptive both to the director and students. Quality begets quality. The mind left unchallenged will search for another source of inspiration.

### Condition 3: Encouragement

To encourage means to bring into the presence of *courage*. Although there are times when every band director must

confront an uncomfortable situation, admonishment or discouragement should not be the theme of any rehearsal. In most cases students choose to participate in band above and beyond other academic requirements. Band often demands more of their time than other classes; therefore, it is important the band director becomes a source of honest encouragement.

Highlighting positive behavior is certain to develop a genuine sense of caring and sharing, and an atmosphere conducive to musical expression. Encouragement is a necessity. It is the fuel students seek in their journey through life, and can often be the deciding factor in lifting them from the depths of rejection to the infinite possibilities of musical mastery. Do not underestimate the importance of encouragement; use it often to unleash the power to move the group forward.

As we all know, there is no ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN or QUICK FIX to creating the wanted synergy to catapult an ensemble to the highest level of musical performance. However, the following quote authored by Calvin Coolidge offers a most helpful road sign to success:

***“Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education alone will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.”***

To that end, have a grand year of music teaching, music learning, and music making!

**...Strike Up the Band...**

*Dr. 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, he 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. Dr. Tim presently serves as Vice President of Education for Conn-Selmer, Inc., Senior Educational Advisor for Music for All and NAMM (The International Music Products Association) and is 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.*