

# I like, I wish, I wonder. . .

## Introspection and Evaluation of the Marching Season

**Jeremy Spicer**

“Begin with the end in mind” is an educational maxim that has been used for years in helping teachers develop lesson plans to improve the performance of their students. As the 2018 marching season comes to an end, we have a perfect opportunity to put this adage to use. As the season culminates, the question should be asked, “Is this where I want my students to be a year from today?”

It should go without saying, that some distance is necessary and essential. We should all take a week or two to rest our minds and recover. This much-deserved mental “pause” will offer clarity and perspective when making decisions for the future. One of my greatest mentors, Steve Wessels, Director of Bands at Cedar Park HS, would often post, “Decisions based on emotion (elation, sadness, anger, or anything in between) are often not the best choices.”

After a mental breather from the craziness that is marching season, but while everything is still fresh, I would encourage all of us to find time for introspection and evaluation of all aspects of the season so that a thoughtful plan can be put in place to ensure success in the future. I suggest that we take into consideration both the show content as well as the entire instructional process, from summer band to the culmination of our last rehearsal.

Prior to a detailed analysis of the season, I would suggest a simple thought-provoking exercise titled

“I like, I wish, I wonder. . .”. This is one of the best activities I have found for baseline introspection and can be used in a variety of circumstances.

### ***I LIKE:***

- *What are the foundational principals of my program that I do not wish to see changed?*
- *What are the aspects of the marching show that worked brilliantly that I do not want to see changed?*

### ***I WISH:***

*What are the things I wished would have gone differently?*

### ***I WONDER:***

*I wonder what would happen if we did \_\_\_\_\_?*

Although not a comprehensive evaluation of the season, this will provide a foundation for more exhaustive reflection and analysis.

Once this initial activity is completed, we must then dig in to the specifics of the season to determine where growth should occur. Listed below are possible questions to stir the introspection and evaluation process:

## **Show Design Evaluation**

### **■ Musical Score**

- Did the musical score fit the ability level of the ensemble?
- Did the musical score offer a conduit to elevate the technical and expressive performance abilities of the students?
- Did the musical score expose the students to the very best music repertoire possible?

• Did we feature the strengths of the ensemble while providing appropriate tools to develop our weaknesses?

• Did we feature the correct soloists and chamber ensembles?

• Did the musical score offer variety in generating effect?

• Did the musical score provide a vehicle to explore a range of emotion?

• Did the musical score provide thoughtful development, connection and evolution for any events planned throughout the production?

### **■ Drill**

• Did the drill fit the ability level of the ensemble?

• Did the drill enhance or detract from the intent provided by the musical score?

• Was the drill staged so that the appropriate music instruments are in focus when needed?

• Was the drill coordinated between all sections to offer a unified concept presented over time?

• Was there an opportunity for variety in how the visual program developed (structured drill effects and organic development)?

### **■ Production Timeline**

• If a design team was utilized, was the process collaborative and transparent?

• Were timelines adhered to from both the staff and designer perspective?

• Were edits, adjustments and changes welcomed?

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### **Staff Instruction and Student Performance Evaluation**

- Was the summer band schedule set up to maximize the rehearsal time together while not going overboard on the time expectations for the students and staff? Essentially, were we able to find balance between work and play? - remembering that it is important to work “intelligently” as well as “hard.”

- Was our rehearsal calendar (during the school year) conducive to reaching the needs of the students?

- Was the communication within the staff collaborative and team-centric?

- Was the communication from the staff to the student leaders and students clear and transparent?

- Were systems, processes and procedures put in place to elevate both the day-to-day operations of the program as well as the performance abilities of the students?

- Were these expectations clearly communicated?

- Once explained, did the staff continually assess to ensure the students were doing what was being asked?

- Did we balance student achievement with physical and emotional health?

- Did we prioritize the appropriate musical and visual fundamentals to develop the skills necessary to ensure maximum student achievement and excellence?

- Were the students able to perform not only the technical aspects but also the expressive qualities of the music program?

- Did we as a staff expect performance beyond merely that of technical proficiency?

- Contests

- Did the contests we attended provide engaging performance opportunities AND an evaluation process that, over time, elevated the performance excellence of our students?

### **Future Show Design**

- Is there a particular piece of music that I have always wanted to perform with my students?

- What skill sets, both musically and visually, do I want to feature in the future?

- Based on the answers above, what systems and process do I need to put in place this Spring to develop the necessary skills to ensure my students’ success (musically and visually)?

Evaluation, continuous improvement and a growth mindset are the essence of long-term growth and success. The thoughts and questions outlined above are intended as a framework to begin discussions on the marching season, but that discussion should not be limited to the subjects listed above. All facets of the organization should be continually reflected upon to ensure MUSIC is the foundation for everything we do while keeping our programs student-centered and forward thinking.

If you have any questions or if I can help in any way, please do not hesitate to contact me at [jeremy@studentsleading.org](mailto:jeremy@studentsleading.org) or via my website [www.studentsleading.org](http://www.studentsleading.org). I wish you the very best on the continued development of your marching band program.

*Jeremy Spicer is the owner of SASI-The Leadership People, a student leadership education firm that focuses on the inspiration of young leaders. SASI believes that students become empowered to succeed when they are equipped with a deeper knowledge and understanding of people, organizations, systems, and processes. This concept is presented annually to thousands of students nationwide. Mr. Spicer also serves as the Associate Conductor of the Cedar Park Winds. Initially created to provide free concerts to Northwest Austin music students, the band also serves as an outlet for local music educators to continue developing their individual musicianship through performance. In its short existence, the band has grown rapidly in both size and quality and celebrated its 10-year anniversary with a performance at the 71st Annual Midwest Clinic. Mr. Spicer is the former Director of Bands at Vandegrift High School. While at Vandegrift, the staff and students worked to develop all aspects of musical artistry. The Wind Ensemble placed third at the 2013 Texas Music Educators Association State Honor Band Competition. The marching band was named the 2013 University Interscholastic League 4A State Marching Band Champion and was a consistent Class Champion and Finalist in Bands of America Competitions. Prior to his appointment at Vandegrift, Mr. Spicer served as Conductor of the Symphonic Band and Director of both the Marching and Jazz Ensembles at Cedar Park High School. During his tenure, the marching band was a consistent finalist at both the UIL State Marching Contest and BOA competitions, and is the 2006 recipient of the Sudler Shield. Mr. Spicer is active in the United States as a clinician and adjudicator.*