

# Mentors and Mentoring: The Key to Professional Success

**Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser**

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**YOU CAN DO ANYTHING IF YOU ARE WILLING TO PAY THE PRICE.**

Most would agree the “college years” are not only a critical part of the intellectual journey, but also a major influence in the development and reinforcement of every individual’s philosophical perspective. Many people base their university choice on the mission statement of the school, or because it has a particular church affiliation, or it is recognized for a certain degree program, etc.

Music students, on the other hand, often make their college selection based on the relationship (or anticipated relationship) with an individual—a studio teacher (who actively recruited the young artist) or an ensemble director (who met the high school student while guest conducting) or via a recommendation by the student’s high school music instructor. While others will link their college years to a particular institution (“I’m an Ohio State grad.” “I’m proud to be a Longhorn.”), the music world tends to identify with their mentors (“I’m a John Paynter student.” “I studied with Himie Voxman.”). Not only is this a unique aspect of our profession, but it also amplifies the importance of carefully reviewing and selecting the right teacher/professor. There is more to being a music educator than simply “going to school and completing a degree program.” Musicians create lifelong relationships with their colleagues, teachers and

MENTORS. We all seek the mentor who will support our future goals, for we know of the vital importance of this professional and personal connection.

Not all teachers are mentors, but certainly all mentors are teachers, whether by intent or by simply being role models. To be specific (by definition):

**TEACHER: A person who teaches or instructs, especially as a profession; an instructor.**

**MENTOR: A wise and trusted counselor or teacher; an influential senior supporter and sponsor.**

Perhaps we never truly appreciate our mentors except in hindsight; how could we? Their above-and-beyond-the-call-of-duty investment in our futures is often lost in our own eager anticipation to reach our personal goals. Then we look back to see our mentors were there opening doors-of-opportunity that otherwise would not have been recognized by our own limited viewpoint.

**PERSONAL STORY:** It was the fall of 1965 and the notion of leaving our small farming community to enter college was ominous. Walking into the first marching band rehearsal at Ball State University provided an even more frightening wake-up call; it was the most incredible sound my ears

had ever experienced. I knew at that point I was in way over my head. On top of this came a curriculum with a

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new complicated language called “music theory” along with the challenge of ear training. Of course, this was all wrapped in the humbling realization many

of my freshmen colleagues were well versed and proficient in all these areas. Needless to say, the “fight-or-flight” instinct kicked in immediately. The steep learning curve seemed insurmountable and the idea of simply admitting defeat and heading back to my father’s furniture refinishing shop appeared to be a logical choice, perhaps the only choice.

After a week of collegiate “baptism by fire,” the only thing that kept me on campus was my inability to come up with a defense mechanism strong enough to offset the embarrassment of returning to the predictable response from those in our everyone-knows-everyone community: *We told you so! We knew you couldn’t last!!*. Dejected, defeated, and in a state of hopeless unknowing, I walked into the music building to attend another class where I would once again be reminded of my inadequacies as I watched my dream of being a band director evaporate right in front of my eyes.

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Whether by coincidence, providence, serendipity, or just pure dumb luck, I opened the outside door to enter the hallway and there stood EARL DUNN, the Director of Bands. He smiled and asked, “How are you doing?”

Caught off guard, I managed to nervously respond, “Just fine, Sir.”

He put his hand on my shoulder and inquired, “You’re one of the new people in the band, aren’t you?” (I couldn’t believe he remembered me!)

“Yes, Sir...and it’s a great band, Mr. Dunn. It’s better than anything I’ve ever heard. My high school band wasn’t anything like your band. I just hope I can keep up with everyone.”

He looked me dead in the eye and said, “Of course you can keep up. YOU CAN DO ANYTHING YOU WANT TO DO IF YOU ARE WILLING TO PAY THE PRICE.” He spun around and headed to his office.

I stood motionless as his advice echoed LOUDLY in my mind: YOU CAN DO ANYTHING YOU WANT TO DO IF YOU ARE WILLING TO PAY THE PRICE. His wisdom served as a lifeline to one who was drowning in a sea of educational desperation. My assumed conclusion of not being able live my dream was NOT the issue. The real introspective question was: *Would I PAY THE PRICE to live my dream?*

The next five years (undergraduate and graduate degrees) were spent working with and learning from MY MENTOR: MR. DUNN. His *desire for excellence* stood second only to his *demand for excellence*. Both on and off the podium, Mr. Dunn created quality experiences for all those who were part of the program. He never faltered in his quest to achieve the highest standards possible...once attained, he would then invite us to reach even higher. He never made excuses or accepted excuses; they were not allowed as part of his *payment plan*.

Who gained the most from this experience? Was it the MENTEE or the MENTOR? The answer is: YES.

Teachers come and go, but MENTORS become part of our fabric, members of our families, and their thoughts are evident in every decision we make.

Here’s to successful mentoring for all; it’s certainly worth PAYING THE PRICE!

“...Strike Up the Band...”

Hear more from Dr. Tim—  
“It’s About Time”  
on Thursday, July 25  
at 1 pm

Following his tenure in the college band directing world, Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser created *Attitude Concepts for Today, Inc.*, an organization designed to manage the many requests for teacher inservice workshops, student leadership seminars, and convention speaking engagements focusing on the area of effective leadership training. To date, some three million students have experienced one of his popular sessions. Tim presently serves as Vice President of Education for Conn-Selmer, Inc. He is a nationally recognized voice 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 community. Tim is also the Senior Educational Advisor for Music for All, and NAMM (The National Association of Music Merchants). He holds degrees from Ball State University and the University of Alabama. In 1995 he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the VanderCook College of Music. He continues to teach as an adjunct faculty member at Ball State University, Indiana-Purdue/Ft. Wayne University, and Butler University. In addition, he is a member of the Midwest Clinic Board of Directors and the Western International Band Clinic/American Band College Board of Directors. He is presently the Chair of the National Association for Music Education Music Honor Society (Tri-M).