

On a Wing and a Prayer

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I hope your Fall Semester has gone well and you are gearing up for some well-deserved Holiday Cheer! With the Spring Semester just around the corner, I wanted to share with you some thoughts on the importance of planning and preparing.

Have you ever gone into a band rehearsal and totally “winged” it? I know I have been guilty of that many times...especially early in my career. We all know the things in the music that need attention along with fundamental development that we hope to accomplish. Sometimes this can seem a bit overwhelming, and we may not know where to begin. So, we do the best we can as we jump around almost randomly in the music until we realize that we only have a few minutes left in the rehearsal. Does that sound familiar?

I have been very blessed to have had many incredible mentors in my career. All of them have preached the importance of planning and being prepared. The phrase “PLAN YOUR WORK AND WORK YOUR PLAN” is a mantra that I try my best to embrace not only in teaching, but in every aspect of my life. Here are three suggestions to help clip those “wings”.

1. SET GOALS

As Stephen Covey says in his book *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, “Begin with the end in mind.” What is the desired outcome of the task at

hand? This can apply to a one-hour sectional, a week of rehearsals, or over several months as you prepare for UIL. Then, you can work backwards in planning the small steps needed that will add up to the success you are looking for.

You also want to consider SMART goals. This is an acronym meaning goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely.

Lastly, as you begin working on these goals, its important to be flexible and adjust things as needed.

2. WORK SMART, NOT JUST HARD

As Band Directors, we are usually the first one at school and the last one to leave. That’s a testament to the dedication and excellence here in Texas! However, we do need to keep an eye on our work/life balance. Burnout is a real concern, and we want to do what we can to prevent that from happening. Working hard is what Texas Band Directors do...but we can also be smart about the time we are spending at school. Setting a firm “leaving the band hall” time is crucial. There is always tomorrow.

If you are fortunate enough to have more than one director at your school, then splitting up tasks and after hours’ time can help spread things out for you. If you are the only director, then perhaps you can get parent volunteers to help facilitate things in order to make your time more efficient.

Another great resource are your students. Students can be a big help especially if you are the only director for your program. Getting students involved with the inner workings of the program helps create more “buy in” and they feel more invested in the success of the band. As an added bonus, this helps you get to know your students better and strengthen the overall culture of your program.

3. ASK FOR FEEDBACK

When you are putting together your goals and establishing a time line for rehearsals, get feedback from other directors and your mentors. Having a fresh set of eyes and another perspective can help validate your plan or help you find areas that need to be adjusted.

In closing, just remember that if you do not have a plan, you are probably going to be part of someone else’s! Planning and preparing will help avoid living on just a wing and a prayer!

I hope you enjoy some quality time this Holiday Season with friends and family. I look forward to seeing you at the TMEA convention in February and at the TBA Convention/Clinic this summer for our 75th Anniversary.