

Decide Ahead of Time

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There are countless musical, leadership, and life lessons I learned from Steve Wessels the three short years I had the honor and privilege of teaching alongside him at Cedar Park High School. The lesson I think about most often is this:

Decide ahead of time how you will react to adversity. In doing so, you will be more ready and able to respond to the best of your ability when it comes.

As we enter the Spring semester of our school year, a great deal of excitement, joy, growth, and achievement awaits us. But there will also be adversity. Spending some time this month thinking about what challenges may lay ahead and mentally mapping through those challenges may prove to be significant and pivotal for your students, your band, and yourself.

“Success in life is not how well we execute Plan A; it’s how smoothly we cope with Plan B.” Many hours are spent, both formally and informally, planning for our rehearsals and performances but the truth of the matter is that rarely do our plans come to fruition precisely in the way we imagine. Absences, student preparation or lack thereof, and ever-changing bell schedules are just a few obstacles that cause our best-laid plans to

go awry. *Decide ahead of time to be the most flexible cog in the machine.*

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Inevitably, there will come a point within your preparation for the final performance at which your students will feel as though they have arrived, and the project is complete whereas you will understand that the refinement has only just begun. Whether

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that moment is buried inside 6 repetitions of a rehearsal number or lasts the entire week following your Pre-UIL Festival performance doesn’t matter. *Decide ahead of time to vary instruction in ways that increase individual accountability and understanding of true content mastery.*

“The journey is the reward.” Sometimes the final performances, for any number of reasons, don’t go as planned. Bands, like people, have good days and bad. Even on our best days, sometimes our judges don’t feel the same



way about our performance as we do. What’s most important is how we choose to react to those outcomes. *Decide ahead of time to celebrate successes along the way and emphasize your students’ growth over the final product.*

Our concert preparation cycles, like life, are full of ups and downs. Deciding ahead of time how we will maneuver through adversity with grace and poise will not only allow our students to make more beautiful music but will allow us to better prepare them for the ups and downs that await them far beyond our band hall doors.

I hope the holiday season has brought you time to think ahead along with the rest and rejuvenation needed to keep the promises you make to yourself and the students in your care.