

TOUCHPOINT The Division of Education Newsletter

Conn-Selm

DIVISION of EDUCATION

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A Note from Dr. Tim

Greetings. In this edition of *Touchpoint*, **Bob Medworth**, **Director of Bands** at **Northview High School** in Brazil, **Indiana** gives sage advice about the way in which we view all of the nonmusical aspects of our job that can often be contributors to high levels of burn-out and exhaustion.





Join Mary Luehrson,
Gary Markham, Johanna
Siebert, Beth Sokolowski
and Jim Frankel at the
NAMM Conference in
Anaheim, California.

January 24th and 25th, 2014

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Our Next Issue Featuring: An article by a Conn-Selmer VIP

In Our Last Issue:
A Message for the New Year by
Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser
Click here for the full article

Fix the By Bob Medworth F-Sharp

When was the last time you had one of those days where you went home convinced you could set the world on fire if there was a way to make just a few key personnel changes in your band?

When we have one of these days, we tend to turn the TV to ESPN or some other sports show and wonder how good we would be if band was like professional sports where the director of operations or head coach could put a few individuals on waivers and bring in some new blood. More often than not, the situations that frustrate us to no end, making us consider new careers and resulting in our students being in in the doghouse, have very little to do with making music. Instead, these situations encompass the behavior and character issues associated with boys and girls who are in the developmental stages of becoming men and women.

The typical situations that set us off and have the greatest ability to take the fun out of teaching for all us are usually those dealing with attendance, discipline or attitude problems. For example, just when we think we are going to have a great rehearsal, we look up and realize our first trumpet who happens to be the person we count on as a leader is missing again. Or perhaps even worse, the weak student who is practically single handedly creating our lesson plan sends word he or she is staying home because of a minor sore throat or headache. How many times have we arrived home from a successful event only to find out there was a skirmish on the bus or at the restaurant and those kids we were so proud of are suddenly tainted and not representing our program the way we would wish?

These are the situations that seem to deflate us, zap our energy, erode our enthusiasm and cause the ever popular "burn-Out" or retirement discussions to begin. These precise times are when we become convinced the uphill battle we are fighting is never going to end. It always seems just when we think we are on the right track yet another "non-musical" event or factor seems to punch us right in the gut.

It is during these times of struggle we have to remember to just "Fix the F#." Think about it for a second: We have all done it a million times and it is a never ending source of frustration, but we still walk in the door almost every single day expecting to have to fix the F sharp or the B natural. We also expect to re-visit the phrasing day after day and we are never surprised when five individuals are totally oblivious to any key change. We readily accept all of this as part of our job and are not really offended or upset at it being interjected into our lesson plan.

Unfortunately for us and our students, we rarely take the same approach when looking at the other problems. We do not walk into every rehearsal expecting to fix all the non-musical problems that are so much a part a band directing. We do not think we should be asked to fix the affective components of the band because we were hired to teach music! Too many times we expect and assume all of our students are going to approach our beloved activity with the same passion and responsibility that we bring into the room each day. When the students do not display the same passion as us, somehow in our mind their actions mistakenly become much bigger events than a missed f sharp or B natural. This is exactly where a little shift in OUR attitude will make the bad days a lot less painful and our careers more productive.

As leaders given the opportunity to guide and mold students, we should expect to deal with individual students regarding the affective domain.

We should expect to counsel the student-leaders about the bad attitudes of their classmates, many of whom are freshman. We need to plan on chasing down the kids who cannot put their equipment away or take their tests on time. We need to expect to deal with the kids who do not get along with other students and the sections that always seem to be at each other's throats, who, left unguided, will do everything they can to demolish the precious and fragile group chemistry we have worked so long and hard to create.

As leaders we understand the musical development and technical skill of our students is a continual work in progress and guiding students to the next level is an on-going, never ending process. We cannot forget the same is true when it comes to attitudes and character traits of our students. When musical or technique problems present themselves we do not hesitate to invest the time to improve them. When the lead trumpet skips rehearsal we too often throw our hands up in frustration, or perhaps get in a good yell at the students who are actually in attendance. We must change our own attitudes and behaviors and just put these types of situations on our list of things to fix. Skipping a rehearsal may be more serious than missing a key signature, but at the end of the day it is still just something else for us to fix.

In our profession, it is a given that every day we will invest time in shaping and refining the sound of our band. When we make this investment in our students, we know deep down that we do not have to fix everyone, but that we are just smoothing out the rough edges and encouraging more members each day to buy into the concept of a great band sound. The same is true with our discipline, attitude or responsibility issues. The majority of our band members are probably wonderful, but a few students need frequent attention due to their problem causing . We must be willing to spend a few moments pushing the group down the right path every day. When a student strays and causes a problem, we simply need to fix it. In this process we will find ourselves taking another step toward improving the student and not just the music.

We must also understand that as our group matures throughout a single season or over the years, we are creating a culture that reflects our beliefs and standards. This is exactly what we all want to happen. As the bar raises and our group becomes more mature, we will also expose a few more character flaws in a few more students. It is a lot like cleaning the drill or rehearsing music. The better our group performs on the field the easier it is to spot a bad interval. Likewise, as our band's intonation improves, it becomes much more obvious who is the single trumpet blowing a note sharp. Precisely the same is true with the conduct and behavior of our group. Small infractions that typically slipped through the cracks will now stand out as obvious flaws and better behavior will be required of everyone.

In order to improve, we need to simply add the students' bad or irresponsible behavior to the list of things we need to fix and start chipping away. When individual students are not the "person" we want them to be, we as leaders should not and cannot take it personally. We must understand that this change in our mindset won't be easy and the setbacks will be numerous. In marching band we know that when we "clean" the drill we are really asking the students to change a habit that has quickly been developed on a particular drill move. This concept is even more applicable when changing a behavior. We need to remember the "bad habit" was not just developed in the past few months.

One by one, little by little, day by day we must understand that not only do we need to fix the F#, but we must also guide the affective domain of the student. This in the end is what makes what we do worthwhile.