

# Striving for Excellence: Keeping a Healthy Perspective

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What will your students take with them when they walk out those band room doors for the last time? Will they take an armful of trophies and medals, or will they take memories and lessons that will help them through their life? We would all like to think we are providing the latter of those two options, but how many of us are guilty of letting the product outweigh the process?

What can we do to insure that concerts, performances, and competitions don't create an unhealthy environment for our students? How do we balance striving for excellence with maintaining focus, perspective, and a healthy lifestyle?

## Why do we compete?

1. Consider ANY public performance, not just contests
  - Anything that is an outside pressure can be a dangerous motivational tool
2. What are the dangers?
  - Outcome of contests are usually beyond our control
  - Students can place too much value on external motivation
  - "Win at all costs" attitude
  - Time and money out of control
  - Never ending spiral of keeping up with the competition
  - One bad result can turn a student away from music forever
3. What are the benefits?
  - The act of performing is integral to the artistic process
  - Feedback from audiences and judges
  - Sharing experiences and performing for each other
  - It is human nature to need a final product or goal
  - Life lessons from success and disappointment

## The journey

1. Process vs. Product
  - Consider the amount of time spent in the process
  - What will the students remember years from now?
  - Education is about the learning process - not the final answer
  - Are you teaching the students to fish?
  - Short term vs. Long term gratification
2. You have the opportunity to create "Positively Life Changing Experiences"
  - No matter what your resources are
  - No matter how "successful" your band is

## Stop and reflect on your priorities

1. Do you allow your students to balance band with school, family, church and social life?
  - Have clear policies in place
  - Does your practice schedule allow students to maintain balance?
2. Money – is it spent wisely?
  - Do you spend money on performances that get the most public recognition?
  - Are you getting the most education for your money?
3. What about YOU?
  - Do you have a life outside of band?
  - How do you achieve balance in your own life?
  - If not, what are the dangers for your band?
    - Band becomes the meaning for your life...and that is NOT good.
    - Band becomes the outlet for your frustrations and anxieties.
  - It is important that you are at the right school for you

### **Striving for excellence – the “Three R’s”**

1. Rigor
  - Challenge your students
  - Have consistent expectations at every level in every ensemble and in every aspect
2. Relevance
  - Constantly relate WHY what they are doing is important
  - Relate the relevance to life lessons outside of music
3. Relationships
  - Show that you care about THEM, not their product
  - Make sure criticism doesn’t become personal
  - Develop a relationship with EVERY student
  - Don’t be afraid to let them see that you are human

### **What you can do to control the beast**

1. Set your limits
  - Know how much is too much for your students (and you)
  - Force yourself to be more efficient with rehearsals, instead of adding more
  - Avoid the temptation to fundraise and spend more and more money – it will NEVER be enough
2. Remember, the band is a reflection of you
  - It will reflect your traits
  - They can read you better than you think
3. Model appropriate behavior
  - How do you handle success?
  - How do you handle disappointment?
  - Choose your words carefully – you send strong messages by using or avoiding certain phrases
4. Teach your students to set healthy goals
  - Make them have goals that they can actually control
  - Focus on goals that are outside of just band
5. Teach your students the difference between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation

- Have them think about and discuss their motivations to achieve excellence
  - Guide them to healthy choices of motivation
6. Establish HEALTHY leadership
    - Teach your students to be unselfish leaders
    - Help your student leadership to maintain a healthy balance in their sections
  7. Set your students up for “success”
    - They need to feel that they accomplished something, no matter what the outcome
    - It’s your job to prepare them for any result – and how to accept it
  8. Every once in a while, just stop and appreciate what you have accomplished
    - Remember, it’s all relative
    - Don’t create an environment of over-criticism

### **Is it possible to have both?**

Yes, it is possible to have a band program that performs at the highest level of the activity AND remains healthy, balanced, and positive. No, it is not easy. The key is creating an environment within your whole program (students, parents, staff, and administration) where excellence is expected and process is held above the product. We have to trust that focusing our efforts on the process and the act of educating the student will actually make the final product better. Band can be a vehicle for students to learn so much about achieving self-discipline, motivation, and healthy relationships. We would be doing our students a huge disservice if we did not push them to be the best they can be. Just make sure that the interests of the students ACTUALLY are at the center of every decision you make.

**PURSUE EXCELLENCE  
AND  
ENJOY THE JOURNEY!**