

## **“Developing Musicians or Directing the Band?” 6 Survival Tactics for the Middle School Band Director**

### **“Traps” in the Daily Life of a Middle School Band Director**

You may be familiar with the adage, “He couldn’t see the forest for the trees.” If we were to reverse the wording of that expression, we have an accurate description of what happens to many middle school band directors.

Middle school band directors are often responsible for as many as 300 or more students each day—sometimes with little or no assistance. It is easy to understand how being surrounded by dozens of middle school students can cause our mind to be automatically thrown into the “crowd control” mode, which can often us to overlook the needs of the students in regards to the development of their individual musical growth.

The chaos that comes with a room full of 12 and 13-year olds create demands the director’s immediate attention and we forget that the individual members of the group are each at different skill levels. The technical and musical growth of the individual takes a back seat to the necessities of crowd control as our day devolves into a game of “whack-a-mole” as we resolve one problem after another. *Link: Read More...*

### **6 Common Reasons or Excuses for Not Taking Action**

The most common statements by those who become frustrated and discouraged tend to be:

1. “I’m all by myself. I have no help.”
2. “We don’t have the budget for extra help.”
3. “We don’t have private lesson teachers.”
4. “Our kids can’t afford private lessons.”
5. “My students simply don’t practice!”
6. “If I ask for help my principal will tell me that I complain too much.”

### **6 Survival Tactics That Can Give YOU the Advantage!**

Whatever the reason, if we allow any of these issues to stifle our desire to grow and help our students develop musically, the result for the middle school band director is the failure to establish the individual musical skills and concepts necessary for their success.

The following list contains six suggestions that can provide opportunities for the middle school band director to become a more affective educator, gain confidence in the classroom, and experience immense growth as an educator:

1. **Seek out a Mentor:** Regardless of your situation, there are options available. You may have to spend time asking questions and making phone calls but, chances are, there is more than one older director—perhaps in retirement—who was successful and willing to spend the time to help.
2. **Develop a Relationship with a Consultant:** this can bring about the greatest growth for a director at any level of experience because the consultant will come to your school, observe you, your students, and your rehearsal.
3. **Visit and Observe Successful Director:** Ask your campus administrator for permission to take a day to visit a successful band program.
4. **Don’t Allow Yourself to Become Discouraged:** This is another reason to bring in a consultant on a regular schedule. It can be easy to become discouraged when observing successful programs or attending feature performances at state conventions.
5. **Learn to Enjoy the Days of Growth:** keep in mind that there are only two scenarios when a music educator stops learning: 1) becoming completely overwhelmed with frustration; and 2) being hit by a bus! Try to view challenges in terms of improving your skill set-what you are learning rather than criticizing yourself for not knowing what to do.
6. **Develop Your Support Systems:** Again, this is where a lasting relationship with a consultant you trust can be most beneficial. Chances are, if they have reached the place professionally where they are being sought after for guidance, then they have had to develop their own systems to depend on. *Link: Read More...*

## **6 Practices, or Survival Tactics**

You may think, “I simply don’t have the time or financial resources for this.” If so, try this--ask one the more experienced educators that you know and trust to meet with you in a comfortable setting away from school to brainstorm. Take just one afternoon and leave your campus as soon as your students have left. I look back on when I did this and, many years later, I find it interesting that what I learned from my “Starbucks” experience was not so much about rehearsal tactics or pedagogical ideas as it was about learning more about myself and how to maintain a healthy mental outlook. So, consider the following 6 concepts that I learned during my journey. I remember each of these by associating them with one of my favorite quotes by Theodore Roosevelt.

**“Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.”**

1. Don’t waste your time by wishing you were somewhere else-somewhere better. Most of the “icon’s” of our profession started out in places you have never heard of or perhaps no longer on the map.

**“Nobody cares how much you know, until they know how much you care.”**

2. You do more than direct the band. You are the person who ultimately establishes the culture for your students and for your program. They will be more likely to “buy in” to your standards if they see you determined and committed to their success.

**“It is only through labor and painful effort, by grim energy and resolute courage, that we move on to better things.”**

3. Remember the importance of consistency—not giving up when discouraged. Discouragement comes along with the job—its unavoidable at times. Always remember, “this too shall pass!” Never give up.

**“The only man who never makes a mistake is the man who never does anything.”**

4. Be willing to go outside of your personal comfort zone and do not fear mistakes. If you are truly working to improve yourself, you will occasionally do both.

**“It is far better to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure... than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy nor suffer much, because they live in a gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat.”**

5. Be courageous. Be willing to try new ways of doing things. When you discover what works for you, it’s yours—and your students will reap the benefits.

**“Nine-tenths of wisdom is being wise in time.”**

6. Don’t ask for or expect a quick fix. There are no magic pills to produce instant wisdom. You wouldn’t be human if you didn’t experience frustration from time to time.

Remember that your two enemies are often FEAR and SELF-DOUBT. “Steel sharpens steel,” so make it your goal bring in someone you can learn from—regularly. And finally, be prepared for the question, “why do you create so much work for yourself?” The following brief passage reflects one such question that was posed to me by other directors on several occasions during my career. It doesn’t seem as if it would be a major issue, but it represents something that I believe is crucial for success:

*I remember directors asking, “why do you waste time with practice records? Most students, and evens their parents, will not be honest in reporting practice time.”*

*First, I truly believed that many of my students and parents were honest with their practice records. I also believed that if my students recognized how much I valued the concept of consistent practice by seeing my relentless commitment in taking them up every Wednesday, grading them, and returning the next day, it would a positive influence on their attitude. The change didn’t happen overnight, but it happened.*

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