

# *The* Saxophone Diaries

STORIES AND TIPS FROM MY  
30+ YEARS IN MUSIC



JAMES DIVINE

# **The Saxophone Diaries**

Stories and advice from my  
30 years in the music business

James Divine

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## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all the music teachers who touched my life and impressed upon me the importance of doing one's best. Special thanks to my beautiful wife Susan, who encouraged me in all my dreams and goals.

## GUIDE FOR USE

This book may be read chronologically, but feel free to jump around. Some chapters are instructional in nature, while others are meant to be inspirational. Go back and reference chapters as needed.

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## **I ALMOST DIDN'T JOIN 6<sup>TH</sup> GRADE BAND**

### **The Early Days**

Wow! Thirty years in the music field, and still feeling young and looking so good! You know all Italians are good-looking, right? Cuteness aside, in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I almost didn't join band!

We had a choice of choir, drama, band, art or just remaining in our homeroom class to read. Since I loved reading, I chose to do the latter. There were only about three of us who remained in the class reading. After a couple of weeks it became boring...just me, two book worms, and a 60+ year old teacher who said "huh" very loudly when she couldn't hear us, which was often.

My band friends told me how great band was, so I decided to give it a try. The band teacher – Mr. Derrio – was very welcoming. He told me it looked like I was built to play clarinet, so that's the instrument I chose. Was I really built for clarinet, or did he just need more clarinet players?

I excelled on the clarinet. Although I can't say I practiced every day, I did practice regularly.

It was the first day of 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and that's when I saw her across the room. She was waiting for me in the back of the room. She beckoned. I slid on over to her. Oh the curves she had on her. She did smell a bit musty, but I was in love and she was sexy before I knew what that meant. I switched to alto sax and haven't looked back. I wish I would have continued practicing my clarinet, but we didn't meet again until I was thirty years old.

In eighth grade, through a program funded by the Norfolk, Virginia school district, I was able to start taking lessons with

James Hester of Norfolk State University. Even though his teaching was foundational to my career, I temporarily hated Mr. Hester. He made me learn all the scales – full range of the horn – major and all three minors. Later I was very grateful. Thank you Mr. Hester!

I thrived at playing the saxophone. It tremendously helped my self-esteem, which was low as a child because of abuse that I had suffered (read my biography, *Forgive: One man's story of being molested*). I was usually first chair in band. Mr. Hester expected and demanded excellence. I had also grown up with a choir teacher at church who expected and demanded excellence in our performance as well. This gave me a good foundation upon which to build my skills.

### **High School**

In tenth grade, I auditioned for all-region band, which included Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Hampton and Chesapeake. It was nerve wracking to say the least. On audition day, all of the saxophonists warmed up in the same room. It seemed that everyone was playing the required etudes much faster than I was, and they were all good. There must have been 40+ saxophonists trying out.

Mr. Hester had me prepare my songs with vibrato and lots of phrasing and shaping. For some reason my peers were under the assumption that one would be marked off for using phrasing. I was never quite able to perform the music full tempo and played mine slower.

I made first chair in all-region band as a 10<sup>th</sup> grader! My theory is that the others – who tried to perform at full tempo – went in and made mistakes at the live audition while I performed at my much slower tempo playing the notes perfectly. I repeated this in 11<sup>th</sup>

and 12<sup>th</sup> grade, making first chair each year. By 11<sup>th</sup> grade I knew I wanted to be in the music business as a career. I never made it into all-state band, but I did make first alternate my senior year. The competition – especially from northern Virginia – was pretty competitive in those days.

### **The Army Band**

When musicians join the Army Band, they are first sent to a course at Little Creek Naval Amphibious Base called the United States Army Element School of Music, or The School of Music (SOM) for short. We sometimes affectionately called it *The Pool of Mucus*. It is a decent school. Students spend six months studying theory, harmony, jazz, and marching. They also play in several ensembles each day: concert band, jazz band and combo. The afternoons were spent doing physical training, military training and practicing. Since I was newly married, I studied hard and advanced out after four months, two months early.

After the SOM, I was stationed in Fort Lee, Virginia, with the 392<sup>nd</sup> Army Band. The atmosphere and working conditions were great most of the time. We had group practices all day and usually had several hours a day to practice individually. We performed at several graduations each week – Fort Lee was home to the Army Quartermaster School – and performed in at least 20 parades each year – and at least 40 formal concerts a year.

I began to hone the gift God had given me. I took lessons from Dr. James Holden at Virginia State University. The band often traveled four to five hours away, performed, and traveled back home the same day. These made for some long days, sometimes leaving at four in the morning and returning at ten in the evening.

Richard Sadler was my first band commander. He had worked his

way through the ranks as an enlisted soldier, and then I believe he became the first black warrant officer in the band program. The Army seemed to be his family. He was one of the first warrant officers to be awarded the rank of CW5. When he retired, he had put almost forty years of service in the Army band.

He had some unusual rehearsal techniques. We would start a song one rehearsal number or letter from the end and play it through. Then we would start again two rehearsal letters or numbers from the end and play it through. If "S" was the last rehearsal letter, we would rehearse from S to the end, then R to the end, then Q to the end, etc. You can see how this would become tedious for the band members.

We frequently played for the post retirement ceremony. At the end of the ceremony, the band would sing this chorus:

*Old Soldiers never die  
never die, never die.  
Old soldiers never die.  
They just fade away.*

On the bus ride home, we would sometimes sing our own lyrics...

*Old Soldiers never die  
never die, never die.  
Old soldiers never die.  
They just smell that way*

It was cheesy but different and fun.

Like most Army bands, we also played at change of command ceremonies. I remember playing for a change of command for the base general. Because it was such an important commitment,

they actually made us rehearse outside the day before. This was in Virginia. Summers in Virginia can reach temperatures in the 80s and 90s with humidity upwards of 90%. The ceremony was planned for 8:00 am the next morning.

After the rehearsal, I happened to be strategically near where the Sergeant Major (the highest enlisted guy on base) and some of the First Sergeants of the units involved were standing. The Colonel in charge of the ceremony told the Sergeant Major that since this was such an important ceremony, instead of the 15 minutes early the troops were usually expected to be in place, he wanted 30. He told them to be standing in place by 7:30 am. The Sergeant Major told the 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeants he wanted to see everyone in place by 7:15 am. This info still had several more layers of bureaucracy to go through. By the time it was over, we were all standing there ready for the 8:00 ceremony at 6:45!

Mr. David Sanek followed Mr. Sadler. He demanded and received great musical quality from us. He had been a clarinet player in one of the Army select bands in the Washington D.C. area.

Fortunately, he had a different style of rehearsing. Mr. Sanek also knew how to stand up for the band. Many people outside our organization tried to control our schedule. Because we worked odd hours, we were awarded “comp time”. We might work Saturday and Sunday performing, then receive Monday off. The band would receive requests to play on a scheduled day off. Mr. Sanek stood up for us, even though it meant he received some flack. He wasn’t trying to turn away gigs, but sometimes the gigs were silly. We once played at a tree planting ceremony. How many organizations get a 40-piece band when they are planting a tree?

Before Mr. Sanek arrived, discipline in the band was a little lax.



Most road trips on the way home were drinking contests in the back of the bus. Even though several of us didn't participate, we had to listen to and watch all these people getting drunk on the trip.

On one trip, a brand new soldier, who had never been away from home except for basic training, was encouraged to continue to guzzle alcohol. He ended up throwing up severely. He probably should have been brought to the hospital. Someone stayed with him all night in the rehearsal hall to watch over him. I hope he never drank again. I regret that I didn't have the guts to do something more than just be a silent observer. Being bold and courageous is something you get better at with practice, just like playing an instrument.

I spent from 1986-1989 at Fort Lee, Virginia. I learned many things at Fort Lee and was becoming a better improviser. I started playing tenor sax regularly in the jazz band. Jazz had not previously been a strong area for me. In 1989 I moved to Japan.

Japan was a great experience. It is such a different country from the United States. I feel like I learned more by living in another country than I did in college classes.

Over the years I have learned many leadership lessons by observing both good and bad leaders. My commander in Japan was a decent guy. He treated everyone fairly. He had one major flaw; he was an alcoholic. He was never drunk on the job, but the joke in the band was that at quitting time, just point him in the direction of the club and let him go. I think that is a sad existence.

I was able to see more of Japan than most Japanese people do. We traveled all over the Tokyo metro area with several concerts every weekend. In addition, we usually traveled out of town for 3-

5 days a month with concerts and a parade in our host city. There was occasionally time for sight-seeing, but there were many days we left the base at 3:00 am, traveled all day, got to our hotel about two in the afternoon, then loaded the bus for an evening performance. We were well received everywhere we went. My picture is in hundreds of Japanese family albums. It was cool to be an “ambassador” of the United States.

We often flew to Hiroshima and performed there. The museum dedicated to those who lost their lives in the atomic bomb explosion is very sad to visit.

Every January we went to Sapporo, Hokkaido, which is the northernmost island in Japan, and played for the snow festival. The performances were held on ice stages with the temperatures below freezing. Valves would freeze and ice would cake up on saxophone keys, but it was still fun. We also traveled to Okinawa, usually to play for the Army Birthday Ball in June. The weather was warmer there. We had a chance to fly to Okinawa during Christmas one year for a family vacation and stayed at an air force resort on the island.

I had the chance to work with and learn from some really outstanding musicians in Japan. After our tour in Japan was over in 1992, we had wanted to go back to Virginia. Colorado was the closest we could get, unless we went to Fort Bragg, which was not a desirable option for us. We chose Colorado, thinking it would be a maximum of three years. We have been here 23 years now. We weren't sure what to think of Colorado at first. I knew that I wanted to get out of the Army. It had been a great opportunity and I learned a lot about music and myself. I had always been somewhat of an entrepreneur and thought I wanted to be self-employed, so we started a personalized book business. To build

the business, we would often go to craft shows and flea markets on Saturdays to sell our books. That wasn't meant to be and it didn't work out.

There was a pervasive attitude in the Fort Carson band that "it's good enough for government work," an attitude that did not sit well with me. Out of the four Army bands I was a part of, this was the one of lowest quality. (Side note, a few years ago I heard the band and was really impressed with the quality...I am referring to the early 1990s and what we had at the time).

I had a chance to see firsthand the waste there is in government work. I recall times at Fort Carson when we would have 4-6 weeks at a stretch of showing up at work with no rehearsals and no commitments; we sat there all day "shooting the breeze." I completed some college courses and wish I had done more of that.

Band members often had an additional duty such as supply, transportation, or administration. I began working in the Operations department, which handled the details of our gigs. One of my earliest responsibilities was typing acceptance and denial letters to organizations that requested our band. After seeing us deny so many requests when we had these times of not doing anything for weeks at a time, I inquired of my commander why we were turning these opportunities down. The answer I received was that if we said "yes", then the organizations would expect us to be able to do those gigs every year.

I guess my boss did not like me stirring the waters because for a couple of months after that, much of my typed correspondence was sent back with notes as to how I typed it wrong. There is an Army regulation for correspondence and it specifies how many

spaces after periods, after commas and other details. This was in the day before word processing, and I had to type these – and retype them – and retype them – and retype them – by hand.

My immediate supervisor taught me a lot about leadership – specifically how not to act as a leader. Once we were on a field training exercise – yes the band did these too, we were tasked with security for the communications center – and my squad had been on midnight guard duty. After the duty we were getting some much needed sleep. He woke me up to tell me one of the ropes on our GP medium (a large Army tent) was loose and could I get one of my soldiers to fix it. I told him that since I was awake now, I would just do it myself. It literally took ten seconds. It had taken him more time to come and wake me up than it did to complete the task. None of us were slacking off; we had been on midnight duty.

On another occasion, I asked him if I could take more responsibility in the Operations Section, maybe work on the details of one of our gigs rather than just typing our correspondence. He said that was a great idea and gave me a gig to work on. I had many questions for him, since I had never done one or had any training in that area. He told me not to worry; it's best to learn by jumping in and doing it. So far so good and I could agree with all of that. However, as soon as I made my first mistake, he wrote a negative counseling for me that would go in my "file."

He was someone who liked to write negative counseling statements. He wrote several a month. Everything in the Army has a special form, including counseling statements. The Army form can be used for both positive and negative counseling. For a time, when this supervisor would write a negative counseling for

someone, I would write that same soldier a positive counseling for something he/she did and make sure that was placed in their file too. Today, I try to maintain a 9 positive to 1 negative ratio in my interactions with my students.

We had the opportunity to perform in many small towns throughout southern Colorado. In the summer, we often had to take part in up to three Change of Command ceremonies a day. These were tough because we had to stand at attention in the summer heat and listen to the same boring speeches (I bet there's an Army form for that, too).

In anticipation of getting out of the Army, I made my first recording and began scheduling gigs for after my May 1996 departure. Ironically, after wanting so desperately to be assigned to the band in Heidelberg, Germany for almost my entire ten-year career, I received orders to go to Heidelberg. This was a tempting offer and Susan and I debated the pluses and minuses.

Since I only had a few months left on my Army contract, I had to either reenlist or sign what's called a "Declination of Continued Service" statement, which basically means that by not accepting the orders and not reenlisting, I couldn't change my mind later. Ultimately I chose to get out of the Army and began my self-employment years.

### **The 101<sup>st</sup> Army Band**

After leaving the active Army in 1996, I joined the 101<sup>st</sup> Colorado National Guard Band. By far it was the best Army band I was involved in. This is ironic because in the National Guard, we only met one weekend a month and two weeks in the summer, so

technically we had less time to practice than the full time bands did.

The 101st did not have a spot for a sax player, but they invited me to join them as a clarinetist. I agreed and began to practice clarinet after not having played it since sixth grade. It was a challenge. One of the first pieces we performed was Armenian Dances, a very challenging song by Alfred Reed. I eventually did better on clarinet and was able to hold my own.

We traveled throughout the state of Colorado each summer on our two-week tour. Two highlights were spending a week at the Adams State College campus when Dr. Reid was there and spending a week as the rehearsal band at the CU-Boulder Conducting Symposium. I learned a lot about conducting by watching one of the best, Dr. Alan McMurray.

I played saxophone in the jazz band and Dixieland band. Dixieland is a blast. Our leader was Lance Christensen, who had a ton of sheet music and great banjo, trumpet and singing chops (at least singing in a Dixieland band, which is different than singing in other groups). From 2000-2005 I had the opportunity to perform with the band at the [Sacramento Jazz Jubilee](#), a great event for jazz aficionados. You put together thousands of people who love jazz, great outdoor venues, great musicians who show up to play and find a professional sound guy ready to assist them and you can't go wrong. I recommend you go if you haven't already.

That's also where I met Dr. Ed Cannava, who was there with his Dixie Dawgs from Arapahoe High School, where Ed taught for many years before retiring. Ed has been a mentor to me as I have developed as a teacher. He continues to teach a high school level Dixie band even in retirement.

One year at the festival, a 94 year old man was introduced who had been at every festival since its inception. He shuffled very slowly to the stage with someone on his left and right holding his arm and guiding him. He sat down on a stool. Someone else handed him his clarinet. He proceeded to blow the roof off the venue with three high speed songs. His clarinet was on fire. He was on fire. The roof was on fire.

I thought it was a miracle and I knew he was going to come running off the stage! He finished playing, handed his clarinet to someone, then shuffled off the stage with his two assistants. Music is something you can do your entire life, even when your body begins to fail you.

The best thing about being in the 101<sup>st</sup> was the great people I had a chance to make music with. They were dedicated to their craft and many have become life-long friends. A few years ago, the 101<sup>st</sup> had a reunion concert where retired members were invited to come and perform with the band. One young soldier commented that all of us retired guys seemed to be smiling (I retired from the group in 2006).

We replied that it was a great opportunity to get reacquainted with some old friends, make some great music with outstanding musicians, and we didn't have to load the truck after the concert. That's about as close to heaven on earth as you can get.

## **IF I CAN JUST GET MY CD “OUT THERE”**

I left the Army in 1996 and embarked on a career as a self-employed musician. It was an exciting time filled with lots of learning and reliance upon God. It was a difficult time in many ways, but I have no regrets because I learned so many things, many of which are included in this book. My hope is that you are able to get a jump-start on me and bypass some of the difficult learning.

Dan Miller – author of *48 Days To The Work You Love* – says that we should all consider ourselves self-employed, even if we work for someone. In many ways, my self-employed time started when I was about six years old. I remember sitting in front of the Base Exchange in Naples and selling my old comic books.

When I would finally, reluctantly, with great hesitation, fear and trembling finally pull a loose tooth out, the tooth fairy would give me 25 cents. It's not that she was cheap in those days, just that things were cheaper, and 25 cents went far. I would buy a comic book and a candy bar and still have five cents change. When I grew tired of the comics, I would sell them.

I started earning my own money at the age of eight by taking out trash in the apartment complexes near where I lived. Most people paid me a quarter. I also babysat and did yard work. I was never without at least a couple of dollars in my pocket.

I started teaching my first private lessons on the saxophone at age 17. I was like Wal-Mart on steroids. Not only was I the cheapest lesson provider, but also I would actually meet at the student's house or wherever convenient. Every musician needs to find his or her niche. Maybe you're the guitar player who travels to



people's homes to give lessons. Maybe you give a training seminar on how to prepare for the all-state audition (works better if you actually made it into all-state for several years). Maybe you form a new group in your area, such as a clarinet choir or sax quartet – something that no one else is doing. I guarantee that if you try different things and experiment, you will find something that works.

Real life example – as a teacher I receive many flyers in the mail regarding lessons. To be honest, I throw those in the trash. I don't know the people. I don't know their skill level or if they are trustworthy to work with my students. On the other hand, if I meet someone and have gotten to know him or her, if I know they give lessons too, I am more apt to recommend them. Some of those people who send out flyers are sulking at home with no students when what they really need to do is find a different way to market. You don't know what's going to work, so try 5-6 different things and maybe one of those will work. If not, find 5-6 other things to try. Persist!

I no longer travel to people's homes for lessons. Now I am the highest charging lesson provider in my area. I'm ok with that.

About six months before I left the Army, I recorded my first cassette (no eight tracks for me). Like most musicians, I rushed through this project. We musicians are afflicted with this terrible disease. It affects our every thought, consumes us, and takes over our lives. Unfortunately it's not true. This is what goes through our minds...

*If I can just get my music "out there", then people will want to buy it.*

I see it in young musicians all the time. I try to give them advice that I didn't have. In the first six months of my cassette being out,

I sold three copies. I think I could have spent just a little more time getting it right.

Many musicians go to the opposite extreme. They work on getting the CD perfect – or the guitar lick perfect – or the flyer perfect and NEVER market it or get it out there. Avoid both of these extremes! At some point, you just need to go with it even if it's not perfect yet.

Saxophonist Kirk Whalum, one of my idols, once stated that he hated listening to his own recordings because he could always tell where his mistakes were. You make mistakes in live performances too, but then they are gone and you can revel in the applause. In a recording they are there forever!

Back to that original recording that I wasn't completely happy with... I have sold approximately 2,000 of those CDs over the last 17 years. At an approximate profit of \$10 each, that's \$20,000 that I made. It hasn't made me rich, but it definitely made me some money (and continues to do so). Here's a challenge for you. Find older artists you really like. Listen to some of their recordings from 20+ years ago. You will discover they weren't as polished as they are now. Non-musicians probably can't even tell a difference. You can because you are a musician.

Listen to the original "My Girl" recording, which has sold millions. When the trumpet fanfare begins after the first verse, listen to the tuning. The trumpets are extremely sharp. I didn't even notice that until I was in my forties.

I decided my niche would be churches. I started contacting churches to schedule a date. It was difficult at first. Pastors wanted to know where I had been (nowhere at the time) and who would provide a reference for me (nobody at the time).

I often felt disillusioned, rejected and disheartened. It was during those times I learned to rely on God. In any field where you are self-employed, there's a lot of rejection. Here's the process I used for scheduling churches.

1. Call 20 churches to get the name of the person responsible for scheduling music.
2. Send them all a letter of introduction.
3. Follow-up a week or so later with a call asking if they would like a CD.
4. About ten of them want the CD; send the CD.
5. Call back in a week or two and ask if they want to schedule a date.
  - a. One of those ten would schedule right away;
  - b. One or two others would schedule after following up some more, sometimes even a year or two later.

You can see that you get one yes for 19 nos. I still follow this process today, although most of it is accomplished via email and my website, saving me tons of money.

One of my mistakes was not really thinking about the cost of everything involved when I set my fee. I eventually ended up with 125-150 gigs a year scheduled; I was working about 60 hours a week but only made about \$12,000 that year. That pace cannot work in the long term. Looking back now, I would be a little pickier in what gigs I chose and I would charge more. What if I had only done 50-60 gigs – but charged more and was pickier? I may still

have made \$12,000, but with less than half the time commitment. I could have devoted more of that time to recording or giving lessons.

After that year, I did take on a lot of private lessons. I had about 18 students and added another \$12,000 or so to my income (my income doubled). If you are good at teaching, private lessons can be pretty lucrative. I know of a flute teacher who does nothing but private lessons. There are a myriad of piano teachers who do the same.

With the struggle of being on the road and my discovering how much I loved the teaching aspect of music, when an opportunity opened for a half-time band teacher at The Colorado Springs School, I jumped at it. It was just two classes and was something I could do and continue my self-employment too.

I thought I would never teach band. Many of my Army Band buddies were former band teachers and they always talked about the difficulties they had. Anytime someone talked about the possibility of teaching, these guys would talk them out of it.

I realize now that they were never meant to be band teachers. If the position at CSS had been full time, I wouldn't have taken it. Within a week of being there, I found that I loved to teach! The teaching job grew from two classes my first year, to three classes my second year, and then looked like it would grow into a full-time job. The performing opportunities and income as a self-employed musician were also growing. I had a decision to make. I chose the teaching and cut way back on performance.

I am still partially self-employed, playing and speaking 10-20 times a year at churches, schools and community events. For now the balance between a full time job of teaching and part-time self-

employment seems to be working.

## THE BOOKING PROCESS

You aren't going to get any gigs if you don't develop some process and spend some time on it. That is going to vary by what you want to accomplish and what your goals are (see goal-setting/goal-getting chapter). I know many musicians who are MORE GIFTED than me who hardly ever gig, although they will tell you they want to. Do you know that although talent and skill are much needed, there is one trait even more important than these? Persistence! When you get 19 no responses for a yes, you need persistence. When people tell you what they think of your music (negatively) – which is personal to you – you need a tough shell and persistence. When you're driving 300 miles to a gig, you need persistence.

You also need to treat this as a business. One of my early mistakes was not doing that very thing, but more on that in another chapter.

Here's a booking process that worked for me for many years and continues to work although it has been updated somewhat. This worked well from 1996-2001.

- 1) Compile a list of venues I wanted to perform at that fit my target audience and size. Send an introductory letter to the person responsible for scheduling music. The letter is just a short introduction of who you are and states you will follow-up in a week or so with a phone call.
- 2) This is important! Call when you said you would. This is a low-pressure call simply asking if they would like a packet with more information. If they say yes, get it in the mail to them that day (a packet with CD, promo materials, etc.).

- 3) This is important! Include another letter in the packet saying you will call in a couple of weeks to see if they have any questions. Then call in a couple of weeks. Try to get the decision maker on the phone. Be persistent but not annoying. If he is out, call back once or twice a week until you reach him. Be kind to the secretary/receptionist. Ask if he/she received your materials, if there are any questions and if they'd like to go ahead and schedule a date.
- 4) At this point, you will receive a lot of nos. That's ok. If you are an excellent musician and have created some decent materials and have properly focused your marketing niche, you WILL get some positive response, but you need PERSISTENCE.

These were my stats using this process...

- Send 20 introductory letters to decision makers
- Follow up with a phone call
- Ten wanted a complete packet with CD, etc.; mail those out
- Follow-up with a phone call
- Out of those ten, one would schedule me right away, 3-4 would say not right now, and the rest would say "No."
- With the 3-4 "not right nows", I would continue to call monthly until I either scheduled a date or received a no. Usually one of those would eventually schedule a date, sometimes a year or two after I sent the packet!

You can see that out of 20 contacts I would get one gig, sometimes two after much persistence. Believe it or not, that's a decent rate of return, and it was at a time when the quality of my music product was not as high as it is now with 20 extra years of practice.

I made a decision that every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday I would make ten new contacts. After about a year of doing this, I had to take a little break from it because I had 125+ gigs lined up. That sounds like a lot, but because of poor marketing, pricing and business strategies, I didn't make much, even though I was working my butt off. For example, sometimes I drove 500 miles for a gig that I might earn \$300 for. That might be ok if I had 5-10 gigs in that area, then came home, but it was usually the only gig I had and was followed by another long drive to another area. Learn from my mistakes and it will mean fewer mistakes for you.

By the way, don't expect a booking agent early on. They usually will not look at you until you are so busy you can't handle things on your own.

The booking process has been updated for me. I rarely send out letters anymore. Most of this process is accomplished via email. Warning about email; you will not find much success if you just send out email blasts to a large group of anonymous people. Target and tailor the email to the decision makers. Have a good website with all of your materials. Have documents created that you can link to your website and attach to emails. You can see my website at [www.jamesdivine.net](http://www.jamesdivine.net).

PERSISTENCE IS KEY!



## **I'VE GOT MY SINGLE ON WORLDWIDE DISTRIBUTION ON ITUNES. WHY IS NOBODY BUYING IT?**

Here is what most musicians think...

"If I can just get my CD out there (it was cassettes back in the day for me) then I'll be good to go."

I used to believe this fallacy.

I rushed to get my first cassette ready to go. I recorded it, sent it off to manufacture and finally had 300 copies in my hands to sell! I finally made it...smooth sailing from here. Guess how many I sold in my first six months? 100 copies? 50? 20? No, I sold a whopping three copies in my first six months.

Let's do some musician math. Six cassettes sold for \$10 equals \$60, minus the cost of approximately \$2/each equals a profit of \$48 in six months. I think I could have taken my time with recording resulting in a better product.

The great news is that – if you are a musician today, you no longer have to wait to be discovered and have a CD financed by a major record label. The bad news is that every other guy has this same opportunity. The truth is – in most cases – you will only be able to sell CDs to the fans you make at your live shows, but don't let this discourage you. I usually sell a CD to at least 10% of the people who hear me live. Let's do some more musician math:

Let's say you perform at 100 gigs a year with an average audience size of 100 and you sell CDs to 10 of those people. That's 1,000 CD sales a year, an attainable figure. If you sell each CD for \$12 and the cost to you is \$2, that's \$10 profit. 1,000 CDs X \$10 equals \$10,000. I know I'd like to have an extra \$10,000 in my pocket,

wouldn't you?

Where to get started? I suggest investing in some decent computer based software and interface like Cubase. I prefer a stand-alone system so I use a Tascam Digital Portastudio with 8 tracks. The quality you can get from these is probably close to the quality that was only available with expensive studio time 30-40 years ago.

The quality you can obtain from a home studio is NOT going to match what's available in a professional studio, but sprout where you are planted. As you gain more success and make more money, you can spend more of it for studio quality recordings. My whole set-up for recording cost me about \$600. Computer based set-ups are even cheaper.

I would like to recommend a visit to CD Baby ([www.cdbaby.com](http://www.cdbaby.com)). For a low initial cost, they will host and sell your physical CDs and digital downloads. As of this writing entire albums are \$49 (one time fee) and singles are \$10 (one time). When an album is purchased, 91% of digital download sales go to you. All except about \$3 of a CD sale goes to you. And they handle distribution to iTunes, Amazon and dozens of other outlets. However, don't depend on iTunes bringing you success. It's good to have your songs available there, but it won't make you rich. I make about \$10 a month from digital sales through iTunes and other outlets.

CD Baby also has its own manufacturing of CDs available. You can expect to pay about \$2.25 per CD if you have 100 made at a time. You can have as little as 30 made, but they are pretty pricey and almost cost as much as having 100 made. You can have 1,000 made for less than \$1 each, but the upfront cost is a lot more and you might find yourself sitting on unsold CDs. Gigging mostly part-

time, I have sold about 3,000 CDs in the last 15 years, probably half of those in the last five years.

You definitely need to be doing live gigging if you want to sell CDs. I did hear of one group that does not perform live and still sells CDs, but they spend a lot of time on social media advertising themselves and creating videos. To give you an example of what worked for me, I perform in a unique concert where I share my story of abuse growing up. I wrote a book about my experience and started offering the book at my concerts. Since I already have gigs lined up, I had an outlet or platform to sell the books and sold about 100 in my first three months of having it available (profit of \$12 per book). Having a CD to sell can be a great asset in your music business and part of an overall marketing plan to Make It In The Music Business.

More music math

100 gigs at \$200 each	\$20,000
100 CDs sold at \$10 profit each	\$10,000
10 private students each week at \$30 per lesson	\$15,000
TOTAL	\$45,000

Still not a great living, but I am trying to use figures that are possible for someone starting out. In Colorado Springs, you could live on this amount if you had a roommate and continued to work on building and expanding your business. In New York City it might buy you a parking spot.

## MYTH OF THE OVERNIGHT SUCCESS

We often see someone - in the entertainment or sports industry especially - that people describe as an overnight success. Michael Bolton, a singer who mainly appeals to middle-aged women, became an “overnight success” in his forties. In reality, he performed in smoky bars and small venues for over twenty years perfecting his craft and stage presence. Overnight success is a myth! Here’s why...

One is successful - or a failure - not overnight, but as a result of a series of choices made over many days, weeks, and years. The successful musician spent many years practicing daily, making the **choice** to not watch television or spend several hours a day on social media or missing out on some other activity. The successful athlete spent many hours training and eating right. The successful businessperson has made the same sacrifices, especially early in their business.

The student who fails a test didn't just fail at that one moment. He failed to study over the course of the semester, which resulted in an F on the test. Marriages rarely fail over a single event...it is usually due to many years of neglecting to build that relationship. Good marriages are invested in and built up. I love being married!

There were two times during the course of my marriage when we were on rocky soil. Both times were due to neglect on my part to spending time building the relationship. We worked through those times and deliberately chose to set a weekly date night to make sure we spent time together.

As a musician, you probably will not become an overnight success. Whether you become a success at all can sometimes be

determined by your definition of success.

Do you want to play in packed stadiums 100 nights a year and make millions of dollars? Very few musicians attain that level, and many who do find their lives to be empty.

Do you want to make a decent living, have a family, and be known in your circle as a gifted and talented musician who always does his best? Your chances of being a success at this are much greater. One of my goals right now is to be someone that my granddaughters can be proud of.

You may not make millions... That's ok.

You may perform to audiences of 50 your entire life... That's ok.

You might teach music in a rural district with 100 kids... That's ok.

These are all options that still allow for success.

The choice is yours. Put in the hard work, make the sacrifices and you will be successful.

## **A SAXOPHONE, AN ITALIAN MOM AND UNDERWEAR**

I feel really blessed to have had a mom who supported me in my dreams to be a musician. She was a single mom, yet she sacrificed to buy me a Mark VI Alto Sax (cost in 1982 \$2,500; replacement cost today \$8,000+). She did require a promise from me...

"I pledge allegiance to this pan of lasagna, of the united cities of Italy, and to Neapolitan food, for which it stands, one lasagna, under mozzarella, with spaghetti and meatballs for all. And I do solemnly affirm that – from this day forward – realizing that you gave up shoes, stockings and possibly underwear to make this happen – that I will play my saxophone for you whenever you ask me to, without complaint and while groveling at your feet." Then I had to sign it in blood! (I might be exaggerating just a little bit).

And mom does ask, usually when she has guests over.

It has made for some interesting situations. Mom likes to have guests over for dinner. After they have eaten and enjoyed her hospitality, she often says, "Hey, my son plays the saxophone. Would you like to hear him play?"

Now imagine you are a guest at someone's house and they tell you their grown child plays an instrument. You're not going to say no! You're their guest. You are not going to be overly excited about the performance either. Mom's guests nod in agreement. They don't know that I'm a professional.

It's cool for me to see their faces after I begin playing. They often comment afterwards that they didn't know what to expect and they tell me, "Hey, you're pretty good."

Mom always asks me "Did you wash your hands?" Washing your

hands is good advice for a musician. It will reduce your chance of illness. However, I don't really need to be reminded anymore.

Ever since I was a kid, Mom stressed the importance of making sure I had clean underwear. I am always questioning things, so even as a kid I would ask "Why". The answer, "In case you are in an accident."

Now picture this. You've been in a horrible accident. You're mostly okay but you have a cut on your face, which seem to bleed more than others. You know this if you have children...several of my kids lost gallons of blood from a pinprick to the face.

You're in the emergency room with blood-soaked clothing. The nurses and doctors are treating you and get you into one of those fashionable hospital gowns. Some of the hospital staff is off to the side giggling. The conversation centers on, "Look, another one with dirty underwear."

Be thankful for parents who bought you instruments and paid for lessons.

Wash your hands AND MAKE SURE YOU HAVE ON CLEAN UNDERWEAR!

## **PERFECTION IS OVERRATED**

In my garage sits one of the early desktop computers that my wife and I had acquired in the early 1990s. It has no value, but I just can't bear to throw it away. I doubt that I could get it to work since we stole the keyboard off of it when one of our other keyboards stopped working.

If we fired it up, the operating system is Windows 3.1. Remember that one? Remember when there were frequent updates (3.0, 3.1, 95 etc.)? I think the updates came on 6-8 3.5-inch disks (wow, that was a long time ago...I think my first modem was 1200 baud, which today would be like filling a lake using a straw). Each version was improved over the previous versions with newer and faster features.

What if Microsoft had waited until they developed Windows 7 before sending it out on the market? Would they have disappeared into oblivion?

Many of us operate our professional lives like this. We are immobilized in moving forward with ideas and plans until we have perfected them. This prevents us from learning and improving upon the gifts God has given us. When I look at the recordings I did in the mid 1990s, I am almost embarrassed by them, but thousands of people have bought copies of those recordings and are blessed by them. I continue to work to improve my craft and reach the potential God has for me.

I published my first book recently. Are there mistakes in it? You betcha! I listed one of my kids' birthdays wrong! What kind of dad would do that? However, it is selling and blessing people's lives. I



don't even think the affected son has read the mistake yet.

I started a podcast for music educators. Is it as polished as podcasts by others? No. Am I glad I started it? Yes. Is it getting better each episode? Yes. Take a listen at [www.themusicedpodcast.com](http://www.themusicedpodcast.com).

Is there something in your life you are waiting to be perfect before you start? Quit waiting and start.

## **THE PERFORMANCE STARTS THAT MORNING AND SOMETIMES THE NIGHT BEFORE**

People often make the presumption that how they act or what they do outside of their professional lives doesn't make a difference in their professional lives. There has been a lot of public debate about this, especially in regards to leaders and presidents.

I disagree with that premise.

Every action we take or fail to take has an impact on other parts of our lives. Do you cheat on your spouse? What would keep you from cheating on your taxes or reneging on a contract? Are you rude to employees? What will keep you from being rude to your friends?

If you are a teacher, how you act in the local Safeway can and does have an impact on the students you teach. It can impact them for better or worse; the choice is yours.

If you are a traveling musician, treat the waitress you come in contact with great respect. Leave a nice tip AND maybe some free tickets or a free CD. Treat everyone as if he or she were your employer. This isn't the reason to treat others nicely, but you never know when someone may have more influence than you think. I have heard about employers asking the receptionist for his/her impression of the job candidates. Who do you think will get the job? The one who was nice to the receptionist or the one who was rude?

A little preparation can make for a better day. Teachers who are in the workroom making copies for a class THAT STARTS in three

minutes always surprise me. I know emergencies come up where you need something on short notice, but these are teachers who should know better. In my first year of teaching, I was just like that. Now I usually make copies I need a week in advance. It reduces stress.

When preparing to dress for a concert – or even just my workday – I usually lay out my clothes the night before. No surprises about wrinkled shirts or missing pants.

On concert night, I have a routine that includes eating a good, healthy meal.

Advice for concert meals...

1. Don't eat too much.
2. Don't eat too little.
3. Stay hydrated, but not too much too close to concert time.
4. Eat something you usually eat.
5. Eat early (a couple of hours before the concert).
6. If the hosts take you out afterwards, be careful what and how much you eat.

I was once VERY uncomfortable on stage after eating something unusual that was messing with my body. Let's just say it didn't help my performance.

Preparation is key! Prepare ahead of time and performances go smoother, the day goes better, and you get more done. The copy machine failing won't ruffle you. The traffic on the way to work or the gig won't faze you. You will be glad to talk to that student who needs a listening ear. You'll be able to do that if you have margin in your life.

I recently finished a book called "Margin" by Richard Swenson. He talks about the need for unscheduled, unfilled time in our lives (and in our finances). On any page of a book, up to 40% or more is white space, empty. It makes it easier on the eyes.

Many people's lives look like this. They have no margin at all. When something goes wrong or a friend just needs to talk, they are unavailable.

Much better when our lives look like this.

I try to have margin in my life. Sometimes you just need to hear someone's story. Sometimes you just need to hang out with a little child and watch the ants work. If you have margin, you can do these things.

## **DON'T WASTE YOUR TIME ON NEW YEARS RESOLUTIONS**

New Year's resolutions are a waste of time! Most of the resolutions don't last beyond the end of January. They are bound to fail. Resolutions are often not thought out, have no action steps and are rarely written down. They often lack specificity.

I want to lose 20 pounds by summer

NOT I want to lose weight

I want to earn \$12,000 more each year by December

NOT I want to earn more

I will spend every Friday on a date night with my wife

NOT I want to spend more time with my wife

Did you know many gyms sell about 30% more memberships than the capacity of the gym? They know many people are not going to follow through on their desire for fitness.

There is – however – a way to achieve and exceed your goals.

### **Write them down**

When I was young, I had goals and dreams like everybody else, but I didn't write them down. For some reason, when we write our goals and take actionable steps, we are more likely to achieve them. I have goals in seven areas of my life:

#### **Spiritual**

#### **Physical**

**Financial**

**Intellectual**

**Work/Career**

**Family**

**Social**

Goals give you a starting point and destination. They are going to change as you grow and as you figure out what's important in your life.

John Acuff, in his book *Start*, talks about how he has been able to write several books and also help build two schools in Vietnam. He didn't write that down on a whiteboard several years ago, but as he progressed through his goals those opportunities became available.

Five years ago, I would have never believed I could be writing my fourth book.

What are some of your goals? Would you like to schedule 20 gigs in the next year? Would you like to finish your master's degree in the next three years? Do you want to find a spouse and be married with kids in a couple of years? Do you want to move to a better job that fits your skills and talents? These are attainable and will be different for everyone.

EVERYTHING you've done – even things you didn't like – have made you who you are today. For me, the military band was a great experience. It is where I developed my chops. It was my

music education. Being self-employed was difficult, but it helped make me who I am today. I learned a lot about marketing, about pricing, about what my audience needs and wants...all things that help me even in teaching.

There are many good books about setting goals. One of my favorites is Dan Miller's *48 Days to the Work You Love*. My seven goals are adapted from his book. Get a copy of Dan's book and work through the goal-setting process. Also read anything you can find by Zig Ziglar on goals.

In late November or early December, I create my goals for the following year. These big but specific and measurable goals are then translated into action items. I create a to-do list on my iPad mini and prioritize the items – always remembering to leave margin in my life.

Most people use a daily to do list. I am a much more global, big-picture thinker and find that a weekly list works better for me. On the iPad, I am able to reprioritize the items quickly each morning as needs and urgency change. Some people like to write their items on a list. Others use their phones. Whatever system you use, find something that works for you.

EVEN WHEN I DON'T FEEL LIKE IT, I begin to tackle items on my list. Sometimes just starting a task is the hardest part. Sometimes just getting started practicing is the hardest part. Sometimes starting a resume' is the hardest part.

**JUST START!**

Put away all distractions. Turn off your email notification. Turn off your phone so you are not distracted by every text message that

comes in.

### **Multi-Tasking**

Did you know that multi-tasking is a myth? We work at only 80% of capacity or less when trying to multi-task. When it's time to book some gigs, write some music, practice, prepare my lessons or another important task, I turn off my cell phone, close my internet browser, shut down my email, get off of social media and get some focused work in. My rhythm – maybe because I am a public school teacher – seems to be about 45 minutes; then I need to take a short break and stretch or get some water. Others find that two-hour blocks work for them. Others prefer to work in intense 20-minute bursts. Find your rhythm.

Think of the short and long term goals as being a plan for your life. For example, if you want to lose 6 pounds in six months, that's the big goal. The to-do list becomes the action steps necessary to meet that goal. In this example, you might get up thirty minutes earlier to exercise, prepare your lunch before you go to work so you're not tempted to eat out, and buy some exercise shoes. Those are your action steps.

The goals that work best are:

**Specific**

**Measurable**

**Attainable**

**Realistic**



## Timely

If you can't reach the goal, you will only become discouraged. If you are 200 pounds overweight, to lose that much weight in one year is probably not attainable. If you had zero gigs this year, deciding you want 300 in the next year is probably not attainable. If you have **no** college education, setting a goal of finishing your master's in 18 months is probably not attainable. Here are some examples of good goals:

- I want to lose five pounds in the next six months.
- I will call five venues this week and every week.
- I will book five events this summer paying \$200 each.
- I will save \$2,000 this year by saving \$200 per month.
- I will save \$50 a month to purchase that new instrument in 20 months.

What are your three-month goals? Six months? One year? Five year? Spend some time writing them down. Sometimes I set aside a half day Thanksgiving weekend to develop my goals for the next year. When I have acquired an early start, sometimes I have accomplished 10% or more of my goals before the New Year even begins.

## **EAT, DRINK AND BE MARY TAKING CARE OF YOUR NON-MUSICAL SIDE**

I grew up going to church. Sometimes people at church say confusing things. For example, they may say they love people, but then don't treat them with love. They may say they are serving God and then not follow His commands.

There are things people say that are just comical...

**"What church people say" (What they really mean).**

"Let's get together for some fellowship," (Let's pig out).

"I'm telling you this in love," (I'm about to say something mean, but if I mention love beforehand, that makes it ok).

"Let's pray for sister so and so. She's going through this right now," (We're not supposed to gossip, but if I mask it in prayer, it's ok).

One of the quotes in the bible that you will hear entire sermons about is "Eat, Drink and Be Merry, for tomorrow we die." It refers to someone who thinks fatalistically, that this life is all we have, so we might as well enjoy it. A modern version of that is "You Only Live Once," (you young people who can write 130 words a minute using only your thumbs may recognize that as YOLO).

The quote is rightfully intended to show the futility of this type of thinking. As a kid, I heard it as "Eat, Drink and Be Mary" and thought to myself, "But I'm James...why would I want to be Mary."

Be yourself. Not Mary. Not James. Not Yolanda. Not Gertrude. Unless – of course – your name is one of the above. (I thought of running for president – but before running changing my name to “None of the Above.” I think I would have a good chance of winning).

But don’t be content to be yourself. Strive each day to make a better version of yourself.

### **A Dress**

Unfortunately, I had to move away from Kindergarten in the last couple of weeks of school. My favorite teacher in the world – my Kindergarten teacher – oh she deserves a special place in heaven, as all Kindergarten teachers do (sorry, I don’t remember your name), said something to me about sending a dress. For many years, I was troubled by this and turned it over in my mind. At the tender age of 12, after six years of torment (that was half my life at the time), I finally realized she said something about sending an address! Whew! I don’t think I would look good in a dress. Would it help if I shaved my legs?

### **Prosecuted**

Looking back on my 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade years I was a pretty brave boy. We lived near my elementary school. I could cross through an undeveloped wooded lot as a shortcut to get there. Signs were posted everywhere...

“Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted!”

In church we talked about the early believers being “persecuted” which often involved them being killed or hung on a cross. I

thought it was the same word but crossed the field anyway. Would you take the shortcut knowing it might result in your death? I was ready to run as fast as possible if I saw the persecutors coming. Brave boy I was!

### **Take care of yourself**

Eat, Drink and Be Healthy, for we have a chance to live.

I think it was George Burns who quipped, "If I knew I was going to live this long, I would have taken better care of myself." The choices we make today can have long-term impact on our lives and hence our careers.

When I turned 40 I went in for a physical. The results were dismal. I weighed about thirty pounds more than I do now. I was easily winded. I had little energy, and the doctor said my triglycerides and cholesterol were through the roof. He wanted to start me immediately on medicine. I knew exactly what the problem was...2 bags of M&Ms each and every afternoon!

I asked the doctor to give me a couple of months. I cut out the M&Ms, increased my jogging and immediately lost 15-20 pounds. My levels went back to normal and I have kept the weight off. I feel better now than I did at the age of 30. We can improve our lives by taking better care of ourselves. More energy means more bookings means more gigs means reaching more people means more money and fulfillment.

We need to take care of ourselves physically by eating right and exercising. A proper amount of sleep is also important. You can't burn the candle on both ends in the long term with no consequences on your health and relationships. Plus, creativity

tends to flourish more when rested. We need to take care of our minds by thinking positive thoughts, reading...I have averaged a book a week since about age 9, going to conferences and doing other things to learn and improve.

Emotionally we need to care for ourselves too. Tragically, I had a father who was abusive to my mom. After we moved away at the end of my Kindergarten year, a friend of the family molested me over a period of several years. You can read more of that story in my book [\*Forgive: One man's story of being molested, and God's redemption\*](#). I needed emotional healing. If you have been through something tragic, get some counseling to help you emotionally.

Another neglected area is our spiritual side. I make no effort to hide my faith in God and Jesus Christ. Of course I believe that is the ultimate truth. You can agree or disagree, that's okay. I do urge you to seek truth because I believe if you do so honestly, you will find it. Take care of your spiritual side.

## **High IQ**

Musicians have what I like to call a high emotional IQ. We feel and sense things more deeply than others. It's one of the reasons why music teachers often have kids hang around our rooms for hours after rehearsals and events.

Sometimes it's just because their parents haven't picked them up.

There was one student of mine who didn't get picked up until an hour or two after football games. She always said her parents were on their way. I looked up her address and discovered she lived less than a mile from the school. One time I called her parents. Her parents and I discovered that she was telling them a

much later time so she could hang out with the boyfriend she wasn't supposed to have. I think I ruined her weekend plans for a while with that call.

A high emotional IQ is great for dealing with people, but it also means we are more easily hurt by things that others let slide. How many times do we feel hurt when a student quits our class? How difficult is it to deal with twenty rejections for every yes when trying to schedule concerts? How trying is it when we get a bad review from an administrator?

I have been through all these things and cried over all of them. It's okay. Don't be ashamed. Your high emotional IQ has a downside, but I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world. You can have a big impact on the world because of it. That impact can be either good or bad. The choice is yours.

## **SAY NO! SO YOU CAN SAY YES!**

Many people miss out on the great things in life because they are doing so many good things. They are not in tune with what the Creator has made them to do. I have been guilty of this many times. Sometimes it's a matter of learning how to say "No" to all those good things. Believe me, it's not easy...

So many people want to put you on a guilt trip when you say no. My own mom is the master of the guilt trip. My sister and I went around the world several times on guilt trips, and they didn't cost us a thing (except for damage to our psyche, but that's such a small price to pay for travel).

Don't let people put you on these kinds of trips! Decide in advance what's important to you and stick to that. Will life circumstances and what's important change over time? Of course it will.

Practice with me for a moment...

"No."

Try it again. "No."

Several times now, louder each time.

No

No

No

NO

**NO**

**NO NO NO**

It feels good, doesn't it! This is not a rebellious "No" like a toddler might say. Remember, this is a no so you can say yes.

Practice...

Repeat daily, with a metronome if need be.

Say NO so you can say YES

Say NO to overtime so you can say YES to your family

Say NO to overeating so you can say YES to a better quality life

Say NO to going out to eat so you can say YES to your retirement account

Here are some real NOs I have said...

I said NO to helping in the musical so I could say YES to conducting



a community orchestra.

I said NO to playing at coffee houses so I could say YES to spending time at home.

I say NO everyday to the candy bars so I can say YES to size 32 pants.

I said NO to teaching lessons so I can say YES to writing and practicing music.

I said NO to the snooze button so I could say YES to reading my Bible.

I said NO to Starbucks so I could say YES to a cruise with my honey.

Say NO today so you can say YES!

## **STAYING FAITHFUL TO YOUR SPOUSE**

Life on the road – or even as a teacher – can sometimes bring temptations our way that have the power to totally destroy our lives if we succumb! I am not kidding. One act of indiscretion can destroy a marriage. One act of indiscretion can destroy your relationship with your kids. Not married? Don't have kids? One act of indiscretion can tie you to someone you may not want to be tied with for life.

### **A Controversial Statement**

This next statement is somewhat controversial, but I challenge you to study it. Look up the details and find out for yourself. Don't base decisions off emotions or what you think. Study and show yourself approved.

Sex is best when saved for marriage between a man and woman.

You can disagree. You can choose to do things a different way. That's your choice. I can still love you and we can still be friends even if you disagree with me.

Our society is dysfunctional when it comes to this. If someone tried to tell us cigarettes were safe, we would laugh at them, but this is exactly what people try to do with sexual matters. This isn't a book about that subject, but I do want to give you some tips if you are someone who has determined to remain faithful.

### **Tips for Staying Faithful**

The best book I have read on this subject is *Hedges* by Jerry Jenkins. It is about loving your marriage enough to protect it and gives practical advice and tips on how to do that. Through reading that book, I developed a couple of routines and predetermined

plans in my life to protect my marriage...

I don't spend alone time with friends of the opposite sex. I know that seems harsh, but it is there to protect something important to me; my relationship with my wife. We hang out as couples.

I don't meet with women alone. A group of three or more people in a public place is usually okay.

I don't counsel women. I am glad to talk to anyone. Sometimes, while talking to someone after an event, I realize they really need marriage counseling or they need to talk to another woman. I steer them in that direction.

I usually keep the TV off when traveling. To be honest, there was a time I struggled with TV porn and it seemed to always be available in hotel rooms. When I lived in Japan, it was especially prevalent. For many years, I took drastic measures to eliminate the temptation. I would disconnect the cable and turn it in to the hotel front desk. Was it embarrassing? You bet! Am I glad I did it? You bet! My marriage is worth it.

You see, nobody gets up one morning and says, "I'm cheating on my wife today," after years of being faithful. The unfaithfulness comes in small steps. Maybe for a long period of time they don't invest in their marriage. Maybe they cross the boundary of not sharing marriage troubles with someone of the opposite sex. Maybe they listen when someone of the opposite sex is sharing their troubles. Then the day comes when it leads to an affair.

I have seen this happen time and again. I have seen people destroy their marriages and careers over an affair. I want you to protect yourself.

I have a 30-year investment with the love of my life. That is worth more to me than any amount of money or any gig or job. That is worth more to me than what people think of me. I have offended some people with my rules above, and I am fine with that. Integrity is gained over many years and can be lost in an instant.

## EQUIPMENT AND SOFTWARE

You can make one million dollars as a jazz musician? I know one or two who have. Do you want to know how? Start with two million!

I think sometimes as musicians we overrate the importance of equipment. Don't get me wrong. You need decent, high quality stuff that will last you, but you don't need everything right away, and you don't need to spend a million dollars.

When I was in eleventh grade, my mom sacrificed to buy me a Mark VI Alto Sax by Selmer. The Mark VI is the best sax ever made! In the early 1980s, there was only one new one left on the east coast and the store was asking \$2500 for it and only taking cash. My mom bought it for me! She made me promise that I would play it anytime she asked.

In high school, I went through a period when I thought the mouthpiece would magically make me play better. I was wrong, but I spent hundreds on mouthpieces that after a few weeks sat in a drawer for decades. Those were some expensive drawer decorations.

My tenor sax is a very old Conn, about 90 years old. I bought it at an auction for \$200, which also included a flute and French horn. I sold each of those for \$100 each, so in actuality got the tenor for free. I don't like the key work on the sax but I love the sound.

For the longest time, I used the Army band's soprano, but when I retired I needed to get my own. Sopranos are expensive! I found an inexpensive one through *Woodwind and Brasswind* for about \$600. I was very skeptical, but they did have a money back

guarantee. It plays as well as the expensive Yamahas I used with the Army band.

It is a *Woodwind and Brasswind* brand. Rumor has it that often the big companies like Selmer and Yamaha will sell instruments to some other manufacturers and let them put their own name on it.

Whatever you do, be careful of the \$50 instruments for sale on eBay. I belong to a group on Facebook for Band Directors. They refer to some of these items as ISOs (Instrument Shaped Objects). Steer clear of ISOs.

For mouthpieces, I use a Couf Artist on alto and soprano and an Otto Link 7\* on tenor, with Vandoren reeds all around. Don't pick mouthpieces and reeds based on what I use. Find what works best for you.

I love Rovner ligatures. I met the owners at the Midwest Band and Orchestra conference in 2015. Nice people dedicated to quality products, and always on the cutting edge of new technology.

I have an inexpensive sound system. It consists of two Behringer powered monitors, speaker stands and a simple, inexpensive mixer. With the powered monitors, I could have even skipped the mixer, but I like having control close by. The whole set-up was less than \$500. You could start with one powered monitor and no speaker stand for about \$150. I recently bought a 30W speaker that I use for some gigs in very small venues. It cost me \$99.

I also have a small effects processor that I bought in 2000 and a wireless mic system for my sax that I bought circa 2002. Start small and add things as you have the money. Don't go into debt to buy the latest gadget. It will only make a minute difference in your

playing.

I have a Jam Man stereo looper that has been in the box for two years. I have finally scheduled some time to play with it and decide how I am going to use it. I record on a Tascam DP-02 digital recorder, mixing and mastering right on the unit. I tried a hard drive recorder with interface, but it just wasn't intuitive enough for me. I like having the knobs and sliders. The hard drive units with interface are cheaper if you already own a computer.

Sibelius software handles my music writing and arranging needs, as well as creating lessons and worksheets for school. I have heard that Finale is equally as good. I use *Band in a Box* to create most of my accompaniment tracks, iTunes for music downloading and listening, and purchased an app for \$0.99 called "One Track Mind", which lets me play one track of music at a time without having to go to my IPAD-Mini to press pause.

I like the IPAD for live performance, as it is easier for me to see than an IPOD. I may experiment soon with using my iPhone. My set list is right there in front of me and I can change it with a tap. When I need to edit the length of a track, I like to use audacity. A new app I am experimenting with is called Acapella. It allows you to multi-track right on your phone. That is pretty much it when it comes to equipment and software.

My dream is to get the BOSS system for solo musicians. I'd also like to get an anvil case that can hold both my tenor and alto for when I am flying to an event. Get good quality equipment. Save for it, don't go into debt. Sometimes you can find someone who wants to trade with you. Spend wisely. If you're not careful, all your profits can disappear into equipment.

## **IT'S A BUSINESS DUMMY**

Musicians often feel guilty for getting paid. I think it comes from having a job we enjoy so much. So many people don't enjoy their jobs.

### **Lifetime Career**

From 2000-2005 I had the opportunity to play at the Sacramento Jazz Jubilee with the Rough Riders Dixieland Band. It is a great jazz festival to play at. We typically performed three gigs a day, which can normally be an exhausting pace. At this festival, we would just walk up and there were professional sound people to help us out. We called it "Plug and Play" because that's what we got to do.

Once while waiting our turn to perform, we were watching the group before us. The group leader announced that someone who had been at every festival since it started would be performing next. It was a man in his 90s. Two people helped him shuffle SLOWLY onto the stage. He sat down on a stool and someone handed him his clarinet. It was looking to be a very sorry performance.

Oh the sounds that came from his clarinet, and the speed and accuracy of his delivery of the fast-paced Dixieland jazz song. It was wonderful. It was musical. I thought the Lord himself had arrived and blessed this man with a new, young body. (I believe that God is always there when good music is being played...especially saxophone music). I expected the man to dance in the aisles after his song was over. Instead, the same two people went to help him shuffle SLOWLY off the stage.

Music is often something people never retire from. Retired NBA



stars don't dribble down the court in their 90s. They wouldn't be able to! But this man could still play his horn and enjoy it.

### **Play For Free, But Never Play For Free**

Your time is valuable. If you are reading this book, you have probably spent many years perfecting your craft WITH NO PAY. Now it's time to be paid. Never play for free. You can play for free and still never play for free. Here's what I mean. Play for free, but...

- Sell CDs, t-shirts, books, etc. in the back of the venue. Have someone there representing your group who might hand out flyers and business cards if you don't have any products yet.
- Have the group asking you to play for free have someone taking photos of your group that you can later use on your website or on the cover of your CD. This also works for video.
- Use the free session as an opportunity to work on new material.

### **If you don't think of this as a business, it will be hard to succeed.**

When pricing yourself, take everything into consideration. There was one year early in my self-employment where I earned about \$12,000, but I worked my tail off. I was working close to 50 hours a week. My mistake was not pricing myself correctly. That was the year I had 120+ gigs. You can see I earned an average of \$100 per engagement (I was getting paid about \$200 per engagement but I had expenses of travel, hotel, etc.). I don't know about you, but it was difficult for me to live on \$12,000, even in the late 1990s. I had to pick up a part-time job to survive.

What if I had priced myself at a more realistic \$400 per engagement? My profit would have been \$36,000 if I had still had 120 gigs. I could have done fine on that amount in the late 1990s.

Here's what you need to consider when pricing yourself...

- Actual time spent on the gig
- Travel time
- Travel cost (the IRS allows over \$.50 per mile deduction. Do you think they're being generous? No, that's what it costs to operate a vehicle; gas, tires, brakes, insurance)
- Set-up, tear-down time
- Rehearsal spent specifically for the event

Recently I charged \$500 to provide music for a local wedding. The day of the wedding – including set-up, teardown and travel – I spent about 10 hours. I also spent ten hours or so practicing specifically for this event. Non-business minded people look at what I was paid and think I earned \$125 per hour since I only played for four hours. Business minded people realize that I actually made \$25 per hour. Not bad, but at my phase of life and experience, I want to earn more than that. Next wedding my price goes up.

### **Carnegie Hall**

You may be just starting out and you are happy to play at a local nursing home and earn \$25. We all have to start somewhere and gain experience. You are not going to begin your career at Carnegie Hall, however...

Every performance should be your own Carnegie Hall. Whether your audience is three or ten thousand, your performance should include your all, your entire heart and soul, as if it were

performed in Carnegie Hall. Don't hold anything back. Perform as if God Himself were there in the audience. By the way, He is, especially if it's saxophone music.

If you are in the backyard playing for your sister's "Best Reader of Third Grade" celebration ceremony, and the audience is rowdy third graders with BBQ sauce on their faces and vanilla ice cream in their hair, play as if you are at Carnegie Hall. If everyone is talking so loud you can't hear, play as if you are at Carnegie Hall.

### **Are You Stealing Gigs?**

If you agree to play at a gig below your ability, you might be stealing that gig from someone who is at that level. Here's what I mean. There are gigs out there that might pay \$10 per hour of playing. My high school kids would jump at an opportunity like that. I would have when I was in high school! Now, I'm sure the organizer of the event would love to have me come and play for \$10, but if I do that, I have just stolen that opportunity from one of my high school kids.

### **Making Money Your First Or Last Goal Is Wrong**

Everyone knows intuitively – even if they ignore it – that making money your most important goal usually leads to poor choices. It means you set the value of others and their relationship to you based on what it can get you. It means you might cut corners on quality because you are after nothing but profit. It means you might be dishonest in your dealings with people to try and make more. It means that if you have contracted to perform from 7-10 pm, you will probably pack up and leave at 10:01 with no thought to the needs of whoever you are working with.

But did you know that making money your last goal is just as bad? I was guilty of this for many years. Think about it for a moment. Although we should have a great work ethic, would you really work as hard for an event where you are making \$20 as one where you are making \$1,000? If you promote yourself as a four-piece band, will you really be able to hire the best musicians if you are paying them \$50 each?

### **Taxes and Record-Keeping**

I am not an expert on taxes, so please consult your accounting friends for professional advice in this regards, but here are a couple of items you need to think about...

- 1) Have an account for your business that's totally separate from your personal account. If you belong to a credit union, you can often get a business account for free. Deposit everything you make into this account and pay for everything that's business related out of this account. It makes it easier to see if you are making money and will make it easier to file your tax returns too. When you pay yourself, do this out of the business account with some notation that you are paying yourself.
- 2) Store all receipts in a folder marked with the current year. Mine says, "Business receipts Year." Every year I start a totally new one.
- 3) Open up a "Square" account. It allows you to take credit cards and is totally free. When you use it, they take a percentage (I think about 5%) and then deposit the remainder directly into your bank account.
- 4) Keep track of every expense, but realize that every expense means less that you make. You would be amazed at how ignorant people are about this. I have had people comment, "Oh, it's great that you own your own business. Now you can deduct the cost of your music equipment as

an expense.” Yes, that’s true, but if I earn \$500 from a gig, then spend \$500 on a piece of equipment, guess how much I have left to take my wife out to dinner? NOTHING! Get the equipment you need, and do have a plan for upgrading, but remember you are spending your salary.

- 5) Keep track of your mileage and where you are going. The IRS allows you to deduct more than 50 cents for every mile you drive in business. The actual amount changes every year, so look it up every January. This is often my biggest expense!

### **Some things you can claim as a business expense**

- Equipment and instruments you need to perform
- Dues to professional organizations like the union (see later chapter), jazz societies, etc.
- A phone if it is used exclusively for business (I don’t bother claiming mine since it is also my personal phone, but some people have two phones).
- A home office/recording studio. WARNING. The IRS is really strict about this. The room has to be used 100% of the time for business. This is another one I don’t bother with because I know I only use that room 97% of the time for business. The IRS has a multitude of free resources that can help in this regard, including a publication that tells you what you can deduct.
- Conferences, workshops, books, coaching that you pay for to specifically help your business (including the purchase of this book). These must be business related, and remember the rule about spending your own salary mentioned above.
- Insurance, for example for your instruments. For many years I was uninsured due to the expense, but I found inexpensive insurance through one of the organizations I belong to.

You have spent many hours honing and perfecting your craft. You deserve to be paid. Remember that you are in a business. Use your pay wisely. If you are in debt, I recommend you focus on getting out of debt. It really frees you up to do what you want to do and worry less about money. I recommend Dave Ramsey's *Total Money Makeover* if you want to get out of debt.

## **CAPTURE YOUR CREATIVITY...WRITE DOWN YOUR IDEAS**

Ideas are a dime a dozen. How many of you have had people tell you their good ideas AND they themselves are someone who has never implemented an idea? A good idea is worth \$1, a really, really great idea may be worth \$10. What gives the idea wings and has a multiplying effect is implementation. You do need a good way to get your ideas down otherwise they will fly away.

Here are a couple of ways I use to capture my ideas. There may be something that works better for you. Use it! By the way, I try to capture every idea, because I simply don't know which ones will work. The best idea people have a ratio that looks like this:

**10 Ideas = 1 good idea + 9 worthless ideas**

Those good ideas – when implemented – are worth gold.

### **Here's How I Track My Ideas**

- 1) Many of my ideas come to me while jogging. I carry my iPhone with me and will stop to enter a note when I get an idea. I used to carry a small spiral bound notebook and pen.
- 2) I am often sending emails to myself when I need to remember something, especially from home to work.
- 3) When the idea needs an audio reminder, I will call myself and leave a voicemail. This is usually when I think of a melodic idea. I have even left myself a saxophone voicemail (a sax mail?) when I've been practicing and come up with something that seems cool. Many times when I listen later, I think the idea was pretty lame, but

many ideas have developed into songs. I also use the Voice Recorder on my iPhone.

- 4) Many people use an app called Evernote. It allows you to capture notes, audio, clip things from the web, create notebooks, and many other functions. I have not delved into that yet, so I defer to my friend [Kent Sanders](#) on that one.

Great ideas WILL come your way. Great ideas are more likely to come when you are properly rested. I rarely get great ideas during marching band season as I am usually working more than 65 hours a week. Capture those ideas, weed out the bad ones and IMPLEMENT the good ones with hard work and persistence.



## MUSICIAN MATH: E+R=O

Recently I came upon a principle through [Kent Julian](#) that was original to [W. Clement Stone](#). This principle is so simple yet has the power to change your thinking and bring more success in your life. Musicians especially need this message because of our high emotional IQ. The downside of that high IQ is that our RESPONSE to EVENTS in our lives can sometimes lean towards the negative because we feel things personally.

### E + R = O

An **EVENT** takes place – you lose a job, have to move, find out about health issues, get in an accident, have bad parents or no parents, have a loved one die, midlife...basically life happens.

Plus your **RESPONSE** to the event – do you become depressed, get motivated to look for a better job, channel your grief into something helping others, start living healthier, make the most of your surrogate parents, change the course of your life, take college courses, look for opportunities amidst the challenges.

Equals the **OUTCOME**

Many people have suffered in this life. I am not downplaying suffering, and when we have a loss, we should grieve. But then we need to have a positive response to that loss. Many of you know my [story](#) of being molested as a child. But my story didn't end there. With God's help and a positive response to the events that happened to me, I have become a successful husband, father and teacher (and grandfather). W. Clement Stone lost his father at the age of 3. His father left the family with gambling debt. Stone became a successful businessman and gave away over \$275

million to charity!

What will be your response to the events in your life?

## **GETTING ORGANIZED AND FOLLOW-UP**

I have worked with musicians for nearly three decades. We are very organized and disciplined when it comes to honing our craft, practicing and getting better at what we do musically.

Unfortunately, we are often some of the most unorganized and undisciplined people when it comes to the things related to music outside of the actual performing ability. I know! I have been there, and I have worked hard to be organized. Here are a couple of tips that have worked for me.

### **Keep Your Work Area Clutter-Free**

Only what you are currently working on should be on your desk. Everything else should be out of sight, with a reminder on your to-do list or calendar to get back to it. If you have it written down, you won't forget. When our desks are cluttered, it takes up creative space in our mind. Every time we see the clutter, we think, "Oh yeah, I need to get to such and such soon." If we have it on our to do list, we can then focus on whatever we are working on. Multi-tasking is a myth! Look at the research.

### **Keep Your Email Inbox Clutter-Free**

Many people use their inbox as a sort of to-do list. Not only is this inefficient, but it clutters your mind. I know a lady who has 1,000 messages in her inbox! She is often stressed and feels like she will never get everything done. I would feel that way too!

Only check your email a few times a day. Turn it off when not checking email, or at least turn off that little flag that pops up. If you can handle the email or provide an answer in a minute, do it

right then. If it requires a longer time, add the task to your to-do list and store the email in another folder. If it will take more than a day or two, respond to the person with, “I’ll get back to you” and add it to your calendar for the day when you plan on getting back to them.

### **Take an hour to organize your files**

I used to have papers flying all over my office. They were meant to remind me of things I had to do. Some were things I needed to research, or music I had to order, and some were paperwork I needed to get to at a later time.

Now when I get paperwork, it goes into a file. If it’s something I need to take action on, it goes into my action file, with a note in my calendar to remind me. I have a file for articles I want to save, a file for things I want to investigate and a financial file for check requests. It took me an hour to set these up, but doing that has saved me dozens of hours in productivity EVERY YEAR! At the end of the school year, I take another hour to go through the files and get rid of what I no longer need.

### **Follow-Up**

Many musicians lose opportunities simply because they don’t follow up. Many years ago I met a drummer who is the best performer and educator I have ever met. He took a student of mine who was always distracted in class and helped get him focused. The student was on his way to becoming an outstanding young drummer.

However, I will never call this drummer again! He didn’t do anything immoral or illegal, he simply does not operate with a

business mindset.

I hired him to come and do a drum circle for an hour and a half class. He was 45 minutes late. The 45 minutes we had with him was awesome, but we had contracted and paid for 90. I'm a forgiving guy, so I let it go. Shortly after that, he was supposed to play drums for a gig of mine. He called me about an hour before and apologized, saying he had double-booked and needed to commit to the other gig since he had agreed to that one first.

At that point he lost my business. I ended up using another local drummer who was always on time, prepared with enough materials for students, and treated things in a business manner.

Recently there have been two other people I have contacted who expressed their desire to do business, but when I contacted them saying, "Here's the project I'm working on. How much do you charge?", there was no response from either of them.

Are you losing business because of lack of follow through?  
Someone once said that if all you do is show up on time and do what you're supposed to do, that puts you in the top 5%. Even if you work FOR someone, treat the job as if you are self-employed.

## THE JOB SEARCH PROCESS

I am in my second teaching job, so I am by no means an expert in this area, but I simply share my experience, hoping that it will benefit you in some way in your job search.

I “found” my first teaching job by “accident” (I don’t believe in coincidence. Did you know ancient Hebrew does not have a word for coincidence?). I was performing full time and wanted to give teaching a try. I would not have sought out a full time teaching job. Money was tight and I had started delivering pizzas part time to make ends meet.

The principal of a local private school lived across the street from me. We could have bought any house in Colorado Springs. He could have bought any house in Colorado Springs. The fact that we were neighbors was no coincidence!

We weren’t friends, but his daughter babysat for us and he knew I was a musician. When the band teacher job opened up, which was only part time (2 classes), he asked if I was interested. I said, “Yes.” He scheduled an interview for me.

The day I showed up for my interview, there was chaos everywhere. At the time the school functioned with a “let’s put out the latest fire” style of leadership. I never was interviewed. I observed a few classes. Afterwards, they asked me if I was interested in the job and hired me on the spot.

I mentioned that I wasn’t quite done with my bachelor’s degree yet – I needed three more classes – and they said that was fine as long as I finished that school year. Yay! I was able to quit delivering pizzas.

A few weeks after being hired, I went to fill out paperwork. The former band teacher showed up wondering why she didn't receive her July paycheck. That's when she found out she was being let go. Not a good style of leadership.

A week or two later, I tried to cash my first paycheck. It bounced! It turned out to be a clerical mistake. The payroll account was short by a couple of cents, but it did leave me wondering what kind of place I was working for.

To sum it up, my first teaching job...

- Did not require that I have my bachelor's degree
- Was part-time
- Did not pursue an interview with me

It was a great learning experience for me. I quickly realized that's what I was called to do. I love teaching! I love performing! I was able to do both.

My second year the position grew to 3 classes. That was the year I had 120+ gigs. I was somehow able to keep up that pace with a lot of coffee and many late night drives to get home from a gig. Because of that, I wasn't in the best of health.

As my third year approached, I could see the teaching would grow to full time. I was torn. I knew I could not keep up the pace I had been maintaining while teaching full time. I pondered over this for a long time and decided that the bulk of my time would go to teaching while the performing would become part time. I believe you can do both. I believe many of you are called to do both. The mix between the two will vary by each individual and where you are in life.

I settled into teaching and perfected my craft. I had lots of enthusiasm, but not much experience in classroom discipline. I became a disciple of classroom discipline and now know a lot. About my fifth year of teaching, I knew I had grown as much as I could in that position and it was time for a change. I had one small problem: I did not have a teaching license.

When I would talk to professors at music schools, they all answered my query the same way...if you want to become a licensed teacher, quit your job, come to our school and in two years you will be a certified teacher. That simply was not an option for me with a family to support.

I found a program through Western State College that allowed me to teach full time while earning my teaching license. I applied, the Colorado Department of Education accepted the Army School of Music as meeting the music credits I needed, and I earned my teaching license during my 7<sup>th</sup> year at the private school. That leads me to the job search process I used for my current job.

### **The Job Search Process**

I looked for job openings on school district websites, searched music education job websites, networked with friends, looked on local job search sites, and basically did everything I knew to find out about jobs. I applied for 25-30 job openings. Sometimes it was slow going...there were weeks when nothing opened up!

Eventually, I was called for six interviews and received two job offers. They were not the right jobs for me. One was at a private school in Ft. Meyers Florida – a move that my wife and I were not ready to make – and one was at a school in northeast Colorado.



The program was a good fit, but the town did not offer any job opportunities for my wife.

After turning down the second offer in early May – and having already notified my school that I was planning on leaving – the job market seemed to dry up. This was when I really had to call on my faith in God! Nothing happened for the next two weeks.

Finally there was an opening at Falcon High School. I applied and was called in for an interview. One of the parents of a student of mine at the private school I taught at was a math teacher there. He put in a good word for me.

At the interview, one of the questions was, “It’s the day before the concert. The students are totally unfocused, running around the room, acting crazy. What would you do?” I pondered this question for a minute or two and answered, “I would not have allowed it to get to that point.” There was some laughter from the interviewers and they responded with “Great Answer.” I was offered the job about three weeks later (they were a very sloooow district).

I was the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> band teacher in as many years. The position had become a revolving door. There seemed to be no future there. Many of my colleagues asked, “Are you SURE you want to go work at Falcon?” I decided to give it a three-year commitment. That was 2005 and I am still there!

Don’t let a program’s history affect your decision to work with it. Was it hard work? You better believe it! Were there times when it was discouraging? Definitely! Has it been worth it to see the program grow to one where we are seeing success? You bet! Are

there still trying times? There will be wherever you go.  
Persistence is key.

### **More Musician Math**

25 Applications  
+ 6 Interviews  
+ 3 Job Offers

= Success!

What if I had given up after applying to five schools? I may have had no interviews.

What if I had taken that first job? It may have put a strain on my family.

What if I had taken the advice of some of my colleagues? I would have missed a great opportunity.

### **Ideas to Help Your Job Search**

It may be time to get creative! Why wait for your ideal job? Why not create your ideal job? In the course of my job search, I heard about many small towns that eliminated their music program because they could not find a qualified teacher. What if you were to offer your music teaching services as a contractor? You could create the job you want AND be self-employed. Maybe the school district pays you \$15,000 a year to just teach band – or just teach orchestra – or just teach general music – or just teach guitar – you get the idea. What if you put 5 of these positions together? You could pull in \$75,000. What if you wrote a book about how you did that?

Not everyone is meant to be a full time teacher. Maybe you want to perform AND teach. There are many private schools or small districts that would be willing to hire a half time teacher.

Be aware.

Sometimes these half-time positions can be full time jobs with half the pay.

Do you like teaching music AND theater? You might consider a small town where they are looking for someone to teach music AND something else, both subjects half time. It's not for everybody, but might be for you.

Focus your search and your goals. I interviewed at one school that wanted to expand their band program. The position called for teaching K-12 music **and** expanding the band program. I knew that I would not take the job as presented. It seemed destined for failure. So I presented the hiring committee with this proposal.

Let the music teacher focus on building the band while providing lesson plans for the K-4 teachers. The premise of my plan was that I would train and provide lesson plans for K-4 teachers to teach music, I would teach the kids recorder in grade 5, and in grade 6-8 they would all have to be in choir or band, which I would also teach. The committee rejected this plan. That school district **still** struggles with teachers leaving and no real band program.

Don't be afraid of teaching guitar! That was one of the requirements of the job at Falcon. I thought I would eventually want to get rid of it. Instead I expanded it and really see the value of it growing other areas of music education. Some students – after taking beginning guitar – want to learn a band instrument,

orchestra instrument, or want to take choir. As you can see, that does not detract from band and choir, it adds to it! Those students would have remained uninvolved with music.

### **Two Guys And An Instrument**

I have two friends who almost didn't make it into music. One was 18 years old when he decided to learn the saxophone. He toured for several years with a group throughout the country. He never learned to read music until about ten years ago, and even now only reads a little bit (he's over 70 and still performs regularly). He's got great ears!

Another friend joined the Army during the Vietnam War. To join the band, you have to pass an audition. With recruiters getting people in left and right during the war, somehow Wayne got sent to the school of music, despite not knowing how to play an instrument. The authorities put him on hold until they could get the paperwork straightened out. While waiting, he asked if he could borrow an instrument and start practicing. When they decided to get more serious about sending him to another school, he asked if he could just remain at the School of Music. They agreed IF he could pass the audition. He did, and spent many years in the Army band. He has since retired and is now a dedicated music teacher.

You never know where life will take you!

## **A BIG GREEN CAR, CONTRACTS, UNIONS AND RAY CHARLES**

We all make mistakes in life. Make many mistakes, just not the same ones! If you take calculated risks, you will make mistakes.

### **A Big Green Car**

When we lived in Virginia and found out we were moving to Japan, we had about \$4500 of equity in a car that was paid for. That's not much now, but was a lot more in the late 1980s. We wanted to take a road trip, so I had this great idea that we would sell our car and buy an \$800 car, using some of the money for our road trip. My wife was against it, but I was able to talk her into it. Side note...guys, if your wife is against something, listen up! God gave women an intuition that is different from a man's.

We sold our car and bought this incredibly ugly, green, old fashioned station wagon. I think it even had the faded wood paneling running down the side. We called it the Incredible Hulk, but although it was a Hulk, it was not that Incredible. It was one of the biggest financial mistakes I ever made. Not only did it drink oil like Kool-Aid – it used 1-2 quarts per tankful of gas – but small things kept breaking down on it. When we sold it about 8 months later, we got less than we paid for it and had sunk a couple of thousand dollars into it. Good-bye car equity. Do you know my wonderful wife never rubbed that mistake into my face? I really got a diamond in that marriage deal!

### **Unions**

Another mistake I made was joining the teacher's union. It was during a time of discouragement where it seemed like admin was

against the teachers. I had my only bad review in – at that time 9 years of teaching – by an assistant principal who visited my classroom twice for less than 10 minutes. What did he know about me? Not a darn thing! I cried over that review because it made me feel like a bad teacher.

Out of fear – always a bad way to make a decision – and out of a desire for protection – another bad reason to make a decision – I joined the teacher's union. If that wasn't a bad enough mistake, I then sought out leadership within the union. I saw a side of the union that was not pretty to look at. Everything was negative. Everything was a conflict. There was no encouragement to work together to create a great learning environment. I understand the importance of unions at a certain time in our nation's history, but the reason we even have unions is that there is a breakdown in communication, understanding and shared goals. That's what we need to fix, not the number of minutes we spend in lunch duty or the size of classes.

I stayed on as a leader for only a couple of months. I decided that I did not want to surround myself with all of that negativity. I stayed with the union itself for about three years; there is some benefit with liability protection and legal representation – two things the union actually does well. I finally found an association that offers those two things WITHOUT the lobbying and political things the union does for half the cost and joined that organization instead.

I have never been part of the musician's union. When I first started my performing career, I looked up the union in the Yellow Pages – that's how we used to get phone and address info before the Internet – and saw a full-page ad for the union. A portion of

the ad read, “Need musicians? Call us and we will get you exactly what you need.” I called because I had a paid gig to offer a group of musicians. No response. I called again a few days later. No response. About three weeks after I called, I finally received a return call – after the date of the gig I was looking to book – and received a response along the lines of, “We just don’t have time or resources to man the phones.” My thought is, “Then why do you have a full page ad seeking business?” At that point I decided they would get neither my time nor resources.

In some areas, you are required to be part of the union to get some professional gigs. If that’s the case, then join and consider it a cost of doing business. For me personally, I just seek out the gigs that don’t require that.

## **Contracts**

Contracts are an important part of doing business. You don’t need a lawyer to set these up. Think of a contract as an agreement about the details of the gig, or your expectations for lessons. I don’t even call mine a contract. I call it an agreement. Some details to include:

- Date, location, time of event
- How long the event will be. Will there be breaks
- Time that will be needed for set-up and sound check
- Who is providing the sound system and what are the requirements (3 mics, 2 XLR inputs, sound engineer, etc.)
- How much of a deposit is required
- What happens to the deposit if the event is cancelled
- When the final payment is due
- A table or area for product sales (and maybe people to help)

- For lessons, what is your payment policy, cancellation policy, make-up policy, etc?

We all think we can remember these details, but each event will be different. You do want to go above and beyond in everything you do, but you also need to be able to price yourself according to the needs. If you set a price for a wedding reception based on playing from 5-8 pm, go ahead and play extra, going until 8:30 or maybe even 9:00 as an added service if people are still hanging around. If you have 5-8 pm in your agreement, everything is good and it's clear you went above and beyond. If there is no agreement, the bride may think that she asked you to play until everyone left. What happens if the reception goes until midnight? You will either work twice as long as what you had thought or you will leave a bride very mad at you...not good for future business.

### **Ray Charles**

Ray Charles (1930-2004), a blind singer-songwriter who fused soul with rhythm and blues, had been taken advantage of at one point in his early career. As a result, for a long time he insisted on being paid with dollar bills. He could count the money to make sure he was paid correctly. A dollar bill has a distinct feel to it. I think he probably discontinued that practice when he was making big bucks.

Stay with the positive. Clearly spell out details. Learn from your mistakes. Trust your wife!



## **SOME BEATS NONE. ADD VALUE. BE ACCESSIBLE.**

### **Goal Setting Revisited**

What if you followed the goal getting strategy listed earlier, read Dan Miller's ideas on setting goals and set some high ideals, but you don't reach all of them? Have you been a failure or a success?

In the old model, you would be considered a failure.

You wanted to lose ten pounds this year, but you only lost eight.

Failure.

You tried to schedule forty engagements this year but only scheduled twenty.

Failure.

Change your thinking!

Author Jon Acuff has a statement:

### **SOME beats NONE!**

SOME weight loss beats NONE!

SOME gigs scheduled beats NONE!

SOME resume's sent beats NONE

Dan Miller – author of 48 Days to The Work You Love – sets high goals every year. He rarely makes them, and says that if he does, he probably did not set them high

enough.

You aimed for earning an extra \$40,000 this year and only met half your goal, \$20,000 extra.

You aimed for recording 20 songs, but only recorded 12.

You aimed for reading one book a week, but only read one every two weeks.

THIS SOUNDS LIKE SUCCESS TO ME!

Stop thinking in the old way and start thinking the new. There was a Seinfeld episode where the psychologist was giving advice to one of his patients. The expensive advice he gave her was, "Just Stop It!"

Set high goals and rejoice when you are making progress.

### **Add Value Wherever You Go**

Recently, I attended Kent Julian's *Speak It Forward* boot camp. Kent talks about and demonstrates how to add value to people's lives without expecting payment. He added value to mine and helped me be a better speaker and teacher for two years before I ever paid him a dime.

How can you add value? There are so many ways that will be unique to you. Here are just a few of mine.

- Many people that I am in touch with are offered a free download of one of my songs – even if they don't want to do business with me.
- I offer a free first lesson to private students. Many end up not taking lessons with me. I have added something to their lives.

- I coach and mentor people nearly every month.
- As a teacher, I go above and beyond what's expected of me.
- I hand out free download cards to people I meet.
- I create free sheets and downloads of tips and ideas.
- I share lesson plans and strategies with fellow music educators.
- I appreciate students and talk to them whether they take band or not.
- I produce a Music Education podcast that is free, [www.themusicedpodcast.com](http://www.themusicedpodcast.com)

Remember boundaries even as you seek to add value. If you have a life mission and purpose, it becomes easier to say no when you're supposed to and yes when you're supposed to.

### **Be Accessible**

Related to adding value, make yourself accessible to your fans. Be available for photographs – I'm in the family album of about 200 Japanese people from my time there. Sign autographs. Make it easy for people to get in touch with you. After a performance, make your way to the front and talk to people. It means a lot to them.

Some of you may reach a point where you are no longer able to do this. That's understandable. When your fans reach millions in number, you will need to set boundaries.

As a teacher, I have always given students and parents my cell number. Could it potentially create a problem? Yes, if you base your life in fear. I do set boundaries. I have only had a problem once. That was my third or fourth year of teaching. I had a parent call every night to give me an earful about how I was messing up her

daughter's life. If I had known how to set boundaries, I would have nipped that in the bud.

Students occasionally text me to ask about their grade or something that isn't urgent at the time. I always answer, "Check back with me during class." They learn my boundaries and when it's ok to call or text.

## WHY I USE A PAPER CALENDAR

Technology is great...if it improves your life. Technology should be used...if it makes things easier for you. For some people (me) in some instances (my calendar) technology would make my life more difficult.

I am a global, high emotional IQ, big perspective kind of guy. I see the big picture, the overall effect, the universe. My oldest son is totally opposite. He sees the smallest details and can photographically recall a lot of events. It served him well playing chess. He could replay an entire game after returning from a tournament. After he sees a movie he can recite most of the dialogue word for word. After I see a movie I can tell you it was about a boy and his dog. Most of you creative folk probably think like I do.

I didn't keep a calendar until I was 30. I wish I had kept one sooner. Do you pride yourself on remembering every date, time and detail of your future? That's great. I empty my brain to make room to work on bigger and better ideas.

For a while, I had a *week at a glance* calendar. If that works for you, keep using it. It's really all about what works and what doesn't. Week at a glance didn't work for me. I once scheduled an 11:00 am event on a Monday morning in Colorado Springs. The week at a glance I had showed Monday-Sunday. It wasn't until I was leaving on Saturday for an event Sunday night – in Salt Lake City, Utah – did I realize that I had about 15 hours to drive to an event that was ten hours away. Luckily the weather held out, but it was a long drive.

I bought a month at a glance calendar. I need to see the big picture, a month at a time. In fact, my to-do list is a week at a time; most people have daily to-do lists. When I bought my IPAD mini, I started keeping my to-do list in the reminders app. It works well for me. I can move tasks around and check them off when completed. I have a different task list for ideas that pop into my brain, and a task list I call “not right now” for things I need to get done but aren’t urgent.

A friend of mine is a total Geek. He’s a computer science professor AND at one time had formed a band that I was a part of – a jazz combo – that he called *Geeks Bearing Riffs*.

This friend called me and said – I’m not kidding – “My phone is telling me we have something going on later this week.” He had input into his phone a reminder for a rehearsal but he couldn’t remember the details.

If I had been smarter in my early days of self-employment, I would have scheduled more things together. Sometimes I played one weekend in Salt Lake, and then was in Kansas City the next weekend, then back to Salt Lake on the third weekend. Would it not have made more sense to have back to back weekends in Salt Lake and stayed there rather than drive from Colorado Springs to Salt Lake twice?

You be the one to control the technology.

## **MULTIPLE STREAMS OF INCOME MORE MUSICIAN MATH**

Many people make the mistake of only focusing on one thing for their career. Sometimes that one thing – if it's all you did for 40 hours a week – could possibly get boring. There are some people who make a full time living touring, but most piece together several related things. I stress the related part, because you also don't want to be pulled in too many directions.

When I first started as a self-employed musician, my wife and I had a personalized kids' books business. We earned a couple of thousand dollars a year. It was very seasonal; popular for about 5-8 weeks leading up to Christmas, and ultimately was a distraction from the music business. Maybe – if it had the potential of pulling in \$10-\$15,000 in 5 weeks – it would have been beneficial to pursue, but it probably could not have reached that level.

Here are some possible ways to make money as a musician...

### **Touring Musician**

Duh! Isn't this a major portion of what the book is about? Those who make a living completely from touring usually have to go on the road for months at a time, with concerts nightly, with maybe one day off every third or fourth day.

I recently had the chance to meet Chad Jeffers, Dobro player for Carrie Underwood. He says that touring is great. When the tour is over, he often has a lot of time on his hands before the next tour begins – with no pay by the way – but the time touring is extremely busy and rewarding.

When I was performing full time, I typically had 2-3 gigs a weekend and would drive to the location I was performing, then drive back home. I was putting 50,000 miles a year on my vehicle. It was sometimes a very boring existence – the driving part. I decided that lifestyle was not for me. I had four small kids and a wife and didn't like being away from them. I started bringing one of my kids with me each weekend after they turned about five or six. As adults, they tell me that these were fun experiences for them. They helped set-up my product table and helped sell when they got older.

### **Lessons**

I thrived on giving lessons. Sometimes I brought in more money giving lessons than performing. There is little overhead cost. Performances had the cost of travel. I could do lessons in my home, so it was less time away from family.

If you have many years of experience on your instrument, share it with others. At its largest, my studio had twenty students. I do know people who have made giving lessons a full time career with 30-50 students. If you don't have the heart of a teacher, stay away from lessons.

### **Teaching**

A full time teaching career is obvious, but there are many opportunities out there – if you have the right credentials – to teach part time. For K-12 schools, it can mean teaching one or two classes. At some private schools, you may not even need a teaching license.

If there is a college in your area, you may be able to teach a class



or two.

### **Seminars**

Some business-minded musicians in my area have offered seminars on how to prepare for the all-state audition for specific instruments. Think of these as a group lesson. If you advertise and get a decent turnout, you can make some money.

### **Studio Musician**

There are pockets in the country where some are able to do this full time. If you live in a big city, there will be some studios that will occasionally need people to play or sing for recordings. The more instruments you play – you don't have to be an expert – the more valuable you are. Bonus points if you can also sing.

### **Recording, iTunes, CD Baby**

I own a digital recorder that I use to record at home. Is there a loss in quality from what I could accomplish in a professional studio? Yes, there is. But I can record anything at decent quality and it costs me nothing. An hour in the studio would cost me about \$100. Through CD Baby, I can make that song available to iTunes, Amazon and dozens of other companies. It only takes a few days for it to be available once I send the file to CD Baby.

However, this is not easy work. The recording and submitting are not that hard, but just because a recording is available, doesn't mean people will buy it. You have to work to create an email list of fans, work to advertise your digital file, and keep promoting it. Can someone do this full time?

I heard of a music group that works hard to create wonderful music videos that they post on YouTube. They have managed to build their fan base with intense marketing and earn a full time living from mp3 downloads. Another guy records a hymn a week and has subscribers who purchase that hymn. For most people, this will supplement other earnings you have.

### **Create an online course or DVD**

If you search on YouTube for guitar lessons, you will find a ton of free lessons available. The best videos offer several free lessons, and then have an option to buy a DVD or video download for the entire course of instruction.

### **Lead Worship At A Local Church**

Many churches are looking for someone to help lead worship on Sundays and lead the choir rehearsal one night a week. This usually requires having some proficiency in singing and sometimes playing the guitar or piano.

### **Other**

I have tried or am currently implementing most of these ideas. Here are some ideas I haven't even tried yet. I offer them to you for free. See if you can make them happen.

- Write a song that is for a specific person. Find out their likes, dislikes and other things about their personality. Offer this service as a special anniversary or birthday present.
- Offer to serenade people on special occasions, birthdays, anniversaries, Valentine's Day. Go to their home or business, or meet them at a restaurant.

- Record songs where you are playing all the parts. I have seen this done on YouTube. Not sure if they are able to make any money.
- Purchase ten guitars, and then offer your services to businesses. You arrive each week at an agreed upon time, and the company sponsors guitar lessons for ten of their employees.
- Be a street musician. I'm not in the right area for this, so I haven't tried it extensively. In some places in LA and New York, I have heard of musicians doing this full time.
- Create theme music for a podcast. You might even do it for free with the expectation that the podcast advertise for you.

### **More Musician Math**

Here are a couple of scenarios of how you could piece together a career. The possibilities are endless and are really based on what you enjoy. The amounts listed are yearly.

#### **Musician #1**

##### **Stay-At-Home Mom**

Teach 10 lessons a week	\$12,000
Lead worship at a local church	\$12,000
	\$24,000

#### **Musician #2**

##### **Guitar Player**

Teach 10 group lessons a week	\$24,000
Perform at nursing homes 5x/month	\$8,000
Perform at 20 weddings a year	\$10,000

Sell ten albums a week	\$5,000
	\$47,000

### **Musician #3**

#### **Singer, Teacher**

Teach 2 classes at local private school	\$20,000
Lead worship at local church	\$12,000
Perform at 20 weddings a year	\$4,000
Teach one seminar per quarter	\$10,000
	\$46,000

### **Musician #4**

#### **Band Member of a Touring Group**

Perform 100 times a year	\$50,000
Record as studio musician 5 hours a month	\$6,000
Sells 1,000 CDs a year	\$10,000
	\$66,000

### **Musician #5**

#### **Multi-Instrumentalist, Electronic Music**

Records one new song a week, promotes relentlessly, sells 100 downloads a week	\$35,000
Teaches two classes at local college	\$15,000
Sells 1,000 CDs a year performing during Christmas season at local mall	\$10,000
	\$60,000

These are just hypothetical examples to get you thinking. Some of these are possible even while working full time. You decide what's important to you. You decide how much time you have to invest. None of these possibilities are easy. You can't just record a CD and then expect it to succeed. You have to spend time marketing, advertising, using social media, etc. And you can't expect immediate results.

## **BE A TORTOISE IN A WORLD OF HARES**

Our culture has become used to the instant. Instant coffee, instant oatmeal, instant fixes in our relationships, instant ability to amaze and inspire. Some things like food and drink are acceptable to have instantly – though they often are not as good as the alternative that takes time – but the things that really matter in life – relationships, a successful career, joy, good health, financial stability – cannot be had instantly. They are brought on by persistence and hard work.

I am reminded of the story of the tortoise and hare by Aesop. The hare challenges the tortoise to a race. Of course the hare can easily beat the tortoise, but the hare stops to rest along the way. The tortoise persists faithfully through the race. When the hare awakens, it's too late; the tortoise's persistence has won him the race.

When I was in high school, I auditioned for all-region band my sophomore, junior and senior year. It was a tough audition piece, with a suggested tempo that I never quite could reach in my practicing. In the warm-up room were many of the other saxophonists auditioning. In their warm-ups, they COULD reach the suggested tempo. I thought I had no chance of making all-region band.

In my audition, I played it at a slower tempo and played it as well as I had done in practice. When the results were posted, I was first chair all three years. I can only speculate on what happened, but my theory is that many of those students played the piece too fast. When faced with the nervousness that comes with auditioning, they did not play the song technically clean. I did!

There have been times when I was the hare. Early in my career, I borrowed several thousand dollars to create my marketing materials. They were beautiful, and I still use some of them now. However, I should have waited until I had the cash to purchase the materials. I was the hare and should have been the tortoise.

Be the tortoise.

## **DON'T CONFUSE BEING FAMOUS WITH MAKING MONEY**

Many people set their aim on becoming famous, thinking that's the path to earning money as a musician. It's not. There are famous people who make money, but there are many musicians you probably have never heard of who make \$75,000 a year or more plugging away in their local community.

I have a friend who ran a band that played at weddings and parties in Atlanta. He was making a lot of money. He said it was really hard work. He owned the equipment. He booked the events. He paid the musicians. In short, he operated his band like a business. He was never famous but made a tidy profit.

Setting your heart on fame may be fleeting. If you set your heart on money – and that's your main focus – in the long term you will be dissatisfied. If you set your heart on adding value to people's lives, you will make an impact on the world.

Become excellent at what you do. Maintain a positive attitude.

$E + R = O.$



## **PART TIME MUSICIAN, MICHAEL JACKSON, LINDSEY STIRLING AND WEDDINGS**

One of the mistakes I made early on was using all the money I was making immediately for my family's needs. I didn't really set aside any extra to grow/expand the business. I knew when we moved to Colorado that I was going to get out of the Army in May of 1996. It wasn't until about the fall of 1995 that I started to grow my business. I should have started in 1992 when we moved here.

It's great to have the dream of being involved in music full time, but I also know many people who hold other jobs, continue to perform and give lessons regularly. In some ways, these people are often more relaxed about their music. They typically don't take events they're not interested in. They're okay with not playing for free because they don't need the "exposure" that the event organizers promise. That's a descriptor that makes me laugh. Can you imagine reading this ad?

House Painter wanted. No pay, but we will post your signs in our yard, which is on a high traffic street, and also let you pass out your business card to our neighbors. Great opportunity for exposure.

Or how about this one, which is close to some actual ads I've seen on craigslist?

Wedding musician wanted. We don't have much in our budget after spending \$1,500 for a dress, \$2,000 for the photographer, \$5,000 for the caterer and \$2,000 for the venue. We are looking for someone with the vocal skills of Pavarotti, the dance moves of Michael Jackson, the M.C.

abilities of Bob Saget. We'd also like you to provide music at the reception. We prefer a live eight-piece band that can play country, jazz, classical, rock and pop styles from the 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s, and include some violin solos in the style of Lindsey Stirling. Reception runs from 4pm-midnight. We have \$50 budgeted for musicians, might be able to stretch that to \$75 if you can clean the reception area afterwards. All the free food you want. We just ask you wait until after the guests leave before eating. To be considered, please send three CDs, a list of the places you've performed at in the last decade and your actual social security card. We have a cousin who accidentally employed an illegal immigrant. Thanks for looking.

Dig deep into your calling and goals and decide if full time music employment is really what you want or if you might be better served performing part time and saving some of the money to build your business. The tortoise always beats the hare.

## MUSIC FESTIVALS

Music festivals are great, aren't they? Days and days filled with nothing but music, more music, food, then even more music. Music is often scheduled from early morning to late at night. They can be opportunities for performing musicians to have a very motivated audience.

### **Sacramento Jazz Jubilee**

One of the best festivals I have played at was the [Sacramento Jazz Jubilee](#). I had the opportunity to play with the Roughriders Dixieland Band from 2000-2005 in Sacramento. They provide professional sound with a professional sound guy. All you had to do was "plug and play." We typically played three times a day throughout the whole weekend with a special Memorial Day performance.

Our first year was to crowds of 50-100. We packed the place! Our second year they put us in slightly larger venues. We packed the place! Our third year, we were warming up in a 500-seat venue wondering if we could fill it. That's a scary feeling. A venue that seats 50 with 10 showing up is not too bad. A venue that seats 500 with 20 showing up is downright scary. We packed the place!

However, attending music festivals does not necessarily fill my musical soul. I go to study what other bands are doing, to pick up some great ideas, to observe some things **not** to do, and to meet some new musicians. For me it's like attending school. I take a notebook with me. It's hard for me to relax at an event like that. Do I wish it wasn't like that for me? Yes, but it's just how I'm wired.

### **Great Advice from a Professor**

One of the best pieces of advice I have received is from Dr. South of [Southwestern Oklahoma State University](#). He told me that he often goes home and puts on some beautiful music to remind him of why he entered the field of music education. I started doing this several years ago. I find a spot in the band room where no spit valves are emptied and lie down on the floor with some classical music playing. I crank it up and close my eyes. THIS fills my music soul.

Do something often to fill your music soul.

## **HE NO LOOK GOOD...PHYSICAL APPEARANCE**

Ollie decided to sell his horse – for cheap! A customer called him and came to take a look. He liked what he saw but could not believe the price the man was asking.

“How can you sell this horse so cheaply? Is there anything wrong with him,” asked the prospect.

“He no look good” answered Ollie.

“Well, he looks fine to me,” said the customer. “I’ll take him.”

Within hours the customer was back. “You sold me a blind horse! What do you have to say for yourself?” he asked. “I told you he no look good,” answered Ollie.

Physical appearance is important. It shouldn’t be. If you are a person of faith, you are constantly hearing about how we shouldn’t judge by the external appearance and how matters of the heart are more important. All of those things are true! However, the fact of the matter is that people do judge.

I was full of questions as a kid. I once asked our church choir director why the choir wore robes. He answered that when everyone singing is dressed the same, then people focus on the music and not on what someone might be wearing (or in some cases what they might not be wearing).

I had a pastor admonish me – in a nice way – about having shoes that were unpolished. I was young and wanted to argue that looks weren’t important, but he made the point that it was to some people. I am there to serve them. They are the ones paying me.

Shine your shoes. Brush your teeth. Comb your hair. Wear some deodorant.

I usually wear the same thing for every event, but I do change it up a bit.

### **Tips For Dressing**

Here are a couple of tips for dress and appearance...

- Buy something nice that is easy to care for.
- Dark colors work best. You can't go wrong with black. That's why that has been a musician staple for a long time. Black also makes you look thinner.
- Flashy colors might be okay if that fits your image. Have you ever seen some of the old Lawrence Welk reruns? His band wore really bright colors. It looks cheesy now, but the show ran from the 1950s into the 1980s, longer than the Simpsons. The Simpsons have the advantage of not getting older or dying.
- Make sure nothing detracts from the performance. Just like having your fly open would be a distraction, so would earrings that dangle and hit your face, a hairstyle that keeps falling in your face, or a tie that is too short on a large body. All these things could be distractions.
- Shine your shoes.
- Wear socks long enough so your leg doesn't show (mostly advice for guys).
- Check your teeth for spinach.
- I know it sounds gross, but this is what my mom really called it...check your eyes for eye poop (you know the stuff that sometimes accumulates in the corners).

## **A Car Without Hubcaps is a Jalopy**

I used to drive a really old car with no hubcaps. The same pastor who spoke to me about my shoes mentioned the hubcaps. I bought some really cheap ones at AutoZone. Believe it or not, what I was paid actually went up, the number of CDs I sold went up, and overall I felt better about myself.

I'm NOT saying to go out and buy a new car. I'm just saying make the best of what you have. Wash your car. Replace the missing hubcaps. Do all the little things you can do to make yourself look good.

Not everyone is as blessed with handsome genes as I am (just kidding). I'm not saying to have plastic surgery done. You need to feel comfortable with how God made you. I didn't always feel that way. I had very low self-esteem as a youngster. Some of it was due to the abuse I went through. Some of it was due to not having a good father figure in my life. Some of it was due to being a little overweight.

I guarantee you that if you exercise and take care of your physical side, if you feel the same low self esteem I once had, the physical activity will help.

## **BOUNDARIES ARE IMPORTANT**

This MAY be the most important chapter in this book. You need to learn to set boundaries around your personal and professional life. Some boundaries will change, but others will remain the same throughout your life. It depends on what you are accomplishing by setting the boundary. Here are some of my boundaries.

### **Boundary #1: I'm never alone with a woman**

I am never alone with a woman who isn't my wife or a close relative. My marriage is too important to me to risk putting it in jeopardy. This sometimes means I give up music opportunities, either because they are not good situations or because I have offended someone by telling them this boundary. Sometimes I get a response of, "Don't you trust me?" It has nothing to do with trust and everything to do with respecting my wife and our marriage. I promise you that no opportunity is worth risking your marriage for. Other opportunities will come along.

For this same reason, there are other things I won't do. I don't take gigs at bars or nightclubs. These places typically attract a crowd that is lonely and looking for someone. Combine that with the effects of alcohol on one's judgment and you can see how it can spell disaster.

### **Boundary #2: I don't accept events that don't pay**

I personally don't accept events that don't pay. Money is not my most important motivator, but it is necessary to support my family. Money also represents my time. If you make \$10 an hour and spend \$10 on a fast food meal, that meal represents one hour



of your life. Was it worth it? Sometimes the answer is yes, and sometimes no.

I used to play at coffee houses all over town. The organizers would pass a bucket for donations to the musicians. Often the amount came to \$5 or \$10 for three hours of my time. I decided I would rather spend those three hours with my wife, or recording, or with my kids, or even just hanging around doing nothing. There was a time when I needed that practice, and those events are great for some of my students who are just starting out. Decide where you are at and set a boundary, and don't feel guilty for telling people "no." Do it nicely, but without guilt.

I think the majority of the population is ignorant in this area. You can't call a house painter and ask him to paint for a donation. You don't go see the doctor and pay her whatever you want. Yet people seem to think this is acceptable for musicians, who are just as skilled and trained as doctors and house painters.

### **Boundary #3: An empty calendar doesn't mean I'm available**

An empty calendar doesn't mean you are available when someone calls. This really applies to life purpose and mission and is different for everybody. Have you given thought to what your purpose and mission are? If you have – and if you have set a clear mission – it becomes easier to say no to the wrong things and yes to your mission. Become super laser focused on what you want to do. It's better to be too narrow than too broad.

### **Boundary #4: Be specific with work and rest times**

Set work times and times where you are off. You can allow for some flexibility in case you get an offer you can't refuse, but for

the most part be strict about this. I go through my calendar every month or two and make sure I have scheduled some down time, some time to record and write, and some time to go to conferences and learn and refresh.

Every Friday I have a hot date with my wife. Every Sunday I turn off my computer and don't check email or voicemail. In the summers and during school breaks – when my schedule is more flexible – I schedule the days my wife has off as my days off too so she and I can do something together. If you can, it's better to have a separate phone for business, or have times when you turn the phone off.

### **Creativity and Inspiration**

Don't wait until you feel inspired or creative! Set times – maybe the same time each day – where you are going to compose or write. Sometimes you will feel inspired, sometimes you will become inspired, and sometimes you will just stare at an empty page or computer, but you will get a lot more done this way than waiting until you are inspired.

The key to all of these boundaries is to work smarter, not harder. Most people waste a lot of time. On the other hand, don't be lazy either. Most weeks, I work at least 50 hours. Some marching band weeks exceed 65 hours, but I know it's just for a season and I have deliberately scheduled some down time.

## **THE LONGEST FOURTH OF JULY EVER**

Our bodies and mind can tolerate high levels of focus, concentration and even lack of sleep FOR SHORT PERIODS OF TIME. In 1995 I was in the Army Band and had my longest day ever, but it was tolerable, because right afterwards we had four days off.

The morning started pre-dawn with a bus ride to the base of Pikes Peak in Colorado Springs, where we were playing the national anthem for the start of the Pikes Peak Hill Climb. Afterwards we hopped on the bus to the airstrip and took a Chinook helicopter to Cheyenne, Wyoming for a noon parade. Back to the airfield for a flight to Fort Carson, where we had a short dinner break and then set-up and performed for the crowds coming to see the fireworks. It was a busy yet rewarding day.

## WHAT'S BEHIND THOSE SECRET DOORS? YOU DON'T WANT TO KNOW

When I started in the Army band, we took classes at a joint military school run mostly by the Navy and located on Little Creek Naval Amphibious Base. The place was called *The School of Music*, or more specifically *USAESOM* for *US Army Element School of Music*.

If you're not familiar with navy rank, an E-7 in the Navy is a big deal, and is described as a Chief Petty Officer (CPO). They have their own clubs. They have their own dining facilities. I'm surprised they don't have their own ships!

I thought "If I ever make it to that rank, that's when I'll know I've made it, I've arrived, I'm a success." What a dummy I was!

When I went back for the advanced army school in the summer of 2002, I had finally "made it"; I was an E-7 and could visit those facilities. The CPO mess hall! It was nice...tablecloths on the tables...you didn't have to clear your tray...someone to come around and fill your water glass. The food was still lousy!

The CPO club that I had longed for since I was a kid? I walked in and looked around at the decrepit Formica, the tobacco stained chairs, the aging wait staff. I turned right back around and left. That didn't define success. If that's what you were aiming for, you were going to be really disappointed!

Life is like that. We think we want fame. We think we want women throwing themselves at us. We think we want money. These are all just decrepit Formica, stained chairs and aging wait staff.

The things that are important to me...

God

Wife

Children

Grandchildren

Health

People

The rest of it pretty much doesn't matter.

## **THE GENERAL IS COMING! THE GENERAL IS COMING!**

When I was stationed in Japan, we only had about 1,000 soldiers on base, yet we had a 3-Star General. This is usually unheard of on a base that small, but our base had a battalion, which would grow exponentially if troops were deployed to that area. We saw General Woodall frequently. He was the best high ranking officer I have ever known.

I was at the officer's wives thrift shop looking into some weights to buy. An older lady saw me shopping and said "Oh, don't buy those weights. We have a set at home that nobody is using and I'll just give them to you." That sounded good to me. I was saving some money and would get to work out. She took my number.

A few days later I received a call.

"SGT Divine. This is General Woodall. When would you like me to drop off the weights?"

"Anytime sir," I nervously answered.

General Woodall came by at the appointed time and helped me carry the weights to my house, down three flights of stairs (our house was located down from our parking spot).

What a humble guy! All leaders need to remember that they are there to serve their minions, I mean employees.

General Woodall also showed up occasionally to our men's Bible study. He shared a story about how he saw someone with what was then a new technology – a cell phone – and he casually

remarked that they seemed cool. The next day his executive officer handed him a cell phone and said, "Here's the phone you requested sir." General Woodall emphasized that he never asked for the cell phone, he just thought it was cool.

The General's office informed ours that the General would be stopping by for a visit in a few days. All practicing came to a halt. All other activity came to a halt. We proceeded to spit shine every wall, to polish every urinal, to clean dirt where we didn't know it existed to be ready for the General's visit. On the appointed day we were in our dress greens. Nobody was allowed to sit down because it might cause a crease in the back of our pants. Nobody was allowed to use the bathroom because it might become dirty.

General Woodall walked about two feet into our building, spoke with a few young soldiers for about 3-5 minutes, then thanked us and left. If he had known all the false work that went into the visit, it would have made him upset. He informed us of his visit out of courtesy and not to make us jump through hoops.

Jumping through hoops happened a lot in the Army. It was a waste of time and manpower and accomplished nothing. There might have been some power hungry leaders in the Army, but most weren't like that. I doubt you make it to the rank of Colonel and not realize that people will get creases in the back of their pants when they sit down. Thanks for showing me how a leader should act General Woodall!

## **I'LL PRETEND I DIDN'T SEE YOU**

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the base on Japan was small, so we saw our leaders. SGM Pita (not his real name) was the highest-ranking NCO at Camp Zama. He was a decent leader, but had a weird trait that I have never been able to understand.

SGM Pita lived in my neighborhood on base. Japan does not follow daylight savings time, so in the summer it would start to get light at 4:00 am. By 5:00 am it was very bright. That's about the time I would head out for a jog. Many mornings, I would pass by SGM Pita also out for a jog. I would greet him with a loud good morning. We were the only two out on the road. No cars. No people. Just one person and a SGM.

"Good morning Sergeant Major."

No response...not even a glance or nod.

The next day a little louder,

"Good morning Sergeant Major."

Still no response.

By the third time and every time after that, I knew he had to hear me,

**"Good morning Sergeant  
Major."**



People were peeking out their doors. The base siren went off. Tokyo news crews were reporting the sonic boom that came from this one soldier greeting the SGM. No response! It became almost like a game to me.

I don't know what the deal with SGM Pita was. Maybe he had been in artillery and was deaf and partially blind. Maybe he just did not have much self-esteem. Maybe he is writing his memoirs right now about the crazy soldier who just would not let him get his quiet morning time.

Talk to those you lead. Develop relationships with them. Be nice.

## **WHEN I'M WITH YOU I FEEL ALL COLD AND FIZZY**

Some people are heart-warming to be around. They make you feel good. They lift you up. You feel like a better person just being around them. On one occasion Ron, who I worked with in the 101<sup>st</sup> Army band, made me feel the complete opposite.

Oh Ron was a nice enough guy. We were hanging out on a Colorado summer band tour and went out to eat at a Taco Bell. It seems in America that the drinks just keep getting bigger and bigger. Ron and I both had the super duper size drinks that hold 4 gallons each and come with their own luggage cart. We were thirsty!

We take our seats and are ready to eat when Ron accidentally tips his drink over. The entire four gallons spills onto my lap. Not a single bit stuck to the table...it just rolled right off onto my lap. You would hope that it was a diet drink. Nooooo. It was regular Mountain Dew with a pound of sugar. I began to hit a sugar and caffeine high just from what my skin was absorbing.

Ron and I are still friends and we talk about this when we see each other, which is just once every couple of years now. The walk back to the hotel that evening was not fun, but the memory of this experience with Ron is a lot of fun. It sends shivers down my spine.

I could have gotten mad at Ron, but this was an accident. I could tell by the look on his face when it happened that he felt REALLY bad, that he wondered what I would do. I'm glad that we have events in life that we can enjoy the memory of.

## **IF YOU DON'T WANT TO BE HERE, JUST LEAVE**

Ah, the Army's sense of timing. Always wrong. Always inconvenient.

When I was about to leave Japan and move to Colorado, I KNEW I was getting close to needing to attend a mid-level management course in the Army band that we call BNCOC. Since the course was held in my hometown and we were planning on spending two months there on our way back from Japan, I requested to be able to attend the school en-route. It would extend my entire family's visit in Virginia and enable me to be with my family during the schooling (I always hated being away). The Army said no. It was October of 1992 when we left Japan and December when we settled into Colorado.

In May, I found out I would be going to BNCOC from August to November of 1993. I knew it! Just after I got settled. I had two small kids and a beautiful wife I did not want to be away from. In the BNCOC course we had 2-3 weeks where people from all jobs were taught together about leadership, then those of us in the band went to a different base for our own course specifically about music.

I arrive in Fort Eustis, Virginia for the general part of the course and am greeted by the humidity and sticky feeling of that part of the country. We are sitting in a hot classroom. I have never been a conformist, and I am extremely hot in my BDUs, so I take off my jacket and just have my brown t-shirt. This was allowed at the time, especially in a working environment when it was hot.

Now mind you, I am the ONLY one brave enough to remove my

jacket in this stifling classroom. One of the instructors comes in and addresses all thirty of us. "Don't remove your BDU top unless instructed to do so. If you have removed your top, place it back on." He never once made eye contact with me.

Here's what I was thinking..."Hello! I'm right here in front of you. I'm the only one without a top on. Could you have maybe come over and made a comment directly to me?"

I don't do subtle too well.

A few minutes later the school Sergeant Major (SGM) came in to greet us. He opened with this statement...

"Ladies and gentlemen. You are professionals and are about to embark on a course of study that will teach you how to become better soldiers, better leaders, better people. I am here to help you in this journey. Welcome to this great school."

That's not really what he said. I wish this is how the Army would treat professionals, but he didn't speak to us like this at all. He seemed to hate us. He seemed to wish we weren't there. His talk was more along these lines...

"This is my f\*\*\*ing academy. You better not screw anything up while you're here. If you're overweight, we're going to get your a\*\* out of here on the next flight. It's my way or the highway. In fact, if you don't want to be here, raise your hand and we'll get your sorry a\*\* out of here right now."

I am 100% serious when I say that it took all of my willpower to NOT raise my hand. I still feel like I wasn't true to myself that day because I didn't raise my hand. I guess the SGM could feel some

satisfaction because 100% of the enrollees “wanted to be there” but I know there were others who didn’t want to be there.

What if we had raised our hand and taken the courageous route? I know it would not have ended well, but it might have been fun for a moment just to see the SGM’s reaction. I can see it now, the red rising from his neck to his ugly face and finally to the top of his shaved head. Then the volcano erupting out of the top as we all duck and take cover.

Thank God I restrained myself and didn’t raise my hand. I don’t think we saw the SGM again during the three weeks we were in that portion of the course. I don’t remember learning anything, but two things do stand out.

We were in a class on communication, and our instructor proceeded to read to us out of the book we had in front of us about proper communication. You can’t make things like this up. He was reading this to us – out of a book – the same book we had in front of us.

“When communicating, make sure you don’t read from your notes (which he was doing). If you need notes, use them as a guide and make eye contact with your audience (which he wasn’t doing).” At first I thought it was a joke because he was doing everything he was reading to us not to do, and not doing the things he was reading to us that it said to do.

At one point, we had a locker inspection, with an award going to the person with the best locker. I was never into this sort of thing and didn’t care about the recognition, but I had become a master at doing what the Army required without going into overdrive.

When it came to my job of being in the band, I always gave 100%. I'm talking about the trivial things the Army sometimes felt was important.

The guidelines for the inspection were given to us. Every single one of my uniforms was pressed and creased (well, really just the left sleeve because that was the one that faced out). All of my school buddies knew this, and knew that I was the "least likely to care that I won the inspection." The winner was announced and it was ME.

All that did was make me see the futility of this event even more. But now I had a new fear! Several of the people in the class DID care about winning, and they had put so much effort into the inspection. Would they rat me out? Would I be found out that my entire uniform wasn't pressed? Would this mean I would have to visit SGM "I Hate Life"? Nobody ratted on me. I completed the course and went on to the School of Music portion.

There we were greeted warmly by the commandant. We were treated as professionals and overall had a good time. Even though I was away from my family, I was able to visit Evelyn Bartlett, Susan's grandmother, several times a week. She and I developed a really close relationship during that time, which I will always remember.

On the day I returned home, we all went to Taco Bell to celebrate. At that time we only had Christine and Josh, who was just shy of his 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday. The amazing thing is that Josh can remember going to Taco Bell that day. I was so glad to be back with my family.

## **SKUNKS STINK AND OTHER SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM THE ARMY**

I completed basic training at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Skunks proliferate that area, and many times there was a skunk that was run over. The smell lingers for weeks. If we do skunky things in our lives, the results can stick around for a long time, just like the effects of King David's sin with Bathsheba (see II Samuel 11).

In basic training we ran or walked everywhere in formation. We frequently sang "Jody Calls": The platoon leader yells/sings a phrase and everyone else responds. It does get one's mind off the drudgery of marching everywhere.

However, some of the Jody Calls were nasty and inappropriate. Ephesians 5:4 says, "Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving." When there were inappropriate Jody Calls, I refused to repeat them, often suffering the wrath of the drill sergeant. Most of the time - when I explained that I thought the verses were degrading to women - the drill sergeant would leave me alone. Stand up for the right thing even when everyone else seems to be against you.

Sometimes we need a refuge, and chapel service was a refuge from the rigors of basic training, and they didn't scream and yell at us like the drill sergeants. Because going to chapel often meant getting out of a little duty, the drill sergeants would often accuse us of going to chapel to get out of duty. I am sure that some did this, but I went to worship the Lord. Sometimes when we do the right thing, people will judge our motives.

In basic training, we usually went to bed at 11 or midnight and were up at four in the morning. The Army motto was "We get more done before 9:00 than most people get done all day." Those of us in the Army sometimes changed that to, "The Army wastes more time before 9:00 than most people waste all day."

Getting up early can often help you to accomplish your goals. There was a lot of training packed into 8 weeks of basic. Can't find time to read your Bible, exercise, write that book...wake up 30 minutes early every day to accomplish your most important goals. Just don't waste that time.



## **SHE PICKED ME OVER CHUCK NORRIS**

When we were dating, Susan went to a party where Chuck Norris was making an appearance. This was when Chuckie was at the height of his career. Most young ladies would love to be kissed by him. Susan was rather shy, but he asked her to dance with him and kissed her at the end of the dance. That qualifies me to make this claim...

Susan kissed Chuck Norris and me, and SHE CHOSE ME!

## **YOU'RE SO LUCKY YOU'RE SELF-EMPLOYED**

I spent about three years being fully self-employed. It had a lot of advantages, but most people don't understand how hard it is. One of the advantages was the ability to plan my schedule. For example, I would schedule concerts in the St. Louis area so I could see my sister and her family.

She once remarked, "You're so lucky you're self-employed and get to set your own schedule." What she didn't realize was that not only did I get to set my own schedule, but when I was visiting her on my "vacation," I was checking emails every day, making phone calls to earn future business and doing other things so I could hopefully eat, but nobody was paying me to do those things. My pay would hopefully come later.

Self-employment can be very worthwhile and rewarding, but it does come with its pitfalls.

## **IT WAS THE FIRST TIME SHE WORE A DRESS**

Erica was in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and was learning how to play clarinet. Erica adored me. I adored Erica. She was bright, talented, fun and creative. As far as I knew she had rarely worn a dress.

It came time for our first concert. I informed the kids about the concert dress requirements: black and white, dress shoes, no jeans.

“Do I have to wear a dress?” Erica asked.

“You don’t HAVE to wear a dress, but I bet you sure would look pretty in one,” I answered.

On the day of the concert, Erica pranced in wearing a beautiful, long black dress. From the shoulders up she was bright red. It wasn’t sunburn, she was blushing.

“You look beautiful,” I said to Erica.

Our words can have great impact on others, either for good or for bad. Make sure your words have a positive impact on everyone you meet.

## **BAAAH HUMBUG**

When I was with the 296th Army Band in Camp Zama, Japan, we were able to do a lot of traveling and saw more of Japan than many Japanese people do. The band had a great time performing for them. We were always well received.

For many of these trips, we had to leave very early. On one occasion - if the Japanese people didn't think Americans were strange before - they certainly did if they met us in Tokyo that morning.

We left the Army base at about 2:00 am and had a several-hour drive to Tokyo, where we were to catch the bullet train for our trip. We wanted to arrive early so we could get seats and not have to remain standing for the trip. Our Operations NCO was leading us. He knew where he was going in the train station, but the rest of us just followed along blindly. We had no idea where we were going. We followed like sheep.

One band member started mimicking sheep. The rest of us went along with it.

Imagine you are a resident of Tokyo in the train station for your morning commute and you see 40 Americans “Baaaahing” through the station!

## **THREE WAYS PARENTING MAKES YOU A BETTER PERSON**

Being a parent is hard work, but the joys are worth it. As a parent of four, I know firsthand that my kids have made me a better person. Here are three ways:

1) No sick days - We all have to fight the impulse to take a sick day when we're just a little sick. You can't take a sick day from parenting. You have to stick it out and do the best you can. Unless you are infected with something contagious, this is usually the best option for work too.

2) There's something humbling about having to wipe poop off a butt or getting thrown up on. It makes you realize that you are human, no matter how nice the suit you have on. I remember one of my kids - I won't name him in public - lifting a butt cheek off the toilet seat and saying, "Wipe my butt." What can I say...sometimes the job stinks and isn't all it's cracked up to be, but I'm getting behind in my writing now.

3) You definitely become better at time management. You have to prepare food and warm clothes for someone depending on you. You have to do this while still getting your own job done and your own needs taken care of, often on less sleep a night.

My kids taught me about the Father heart of God. I finally began to understand how God can love me when I thought about it in terms of how I love my own kids.

What are some ways being a parent has made you a better person?

## **WHY I'LL NEVER HIRE THE BEST DRUMMER I KNOW**

Many years ago I met a drummer who is the best performer and educator I have ever met. He took a student I had who was always distracted in class and got him focused on becoming an outstanding young drummer, but I will never call him again...

No, he didn't do anything bad per se, but he does need work on the business side of his dealings. For example, I hired him to come and do a drum circle for an hour and a half class I had. He was 40 minutes late. The 45 minutes we had with him was awesome, but we had contracted and paid for 90. OK, I'm a forgiving guy, so I let it go. Shortly after that, he was supposed to play for me at a gig. He called me about an hour before and apologized, saying he had double-booked and needed to commit to the other gig since he had told them yes first.

At that point he lost my business. I ended up using another local drummer who was always on time, prepared with enough materials for students, and treated things in a business matter.

Recently there have been two other people I have contacted who expressed their desire to do business, but when I contacted them saying, "Here's the project I'm working on. How much do you charge?" there was no response from either of them.

Are you losing business because of lack of follow through? Someone once said that if all you do is show up on time and do what you're supposed to do, that puts you in the top 5%. Even if you work for someone, treat the job as if you are self-employed.

## WHAT'S IN YOUR TREASURE CHEST

Suppose you are walking along the beach one day and stumble upon an old treasure chest. Your mind is filled with a sense of adventure as you remember stories from your childhood of pirates, lost treasure and gold. You try to open the chest. It's fused shut from years of salt water. After much effort, you are finally able to pry it open and find it full of sand!

Where's the treasure? Where are the gold coins you dreamed of finding as a child? Unless you're a seller of landscaping supplies, sand isn't going to do you any good!

You notice someone walking towards you on the beach. You think you recognize them. Is it President Obama? President Bush (pick either one)? Dave Ramsey (he wants to help you get out of debt with the treasure)? Barbara Streisand (something about not bringing her flowers anymore)? No, it's Bill Gates himself! (Hey, it's my story...I can pick whoever I want).

Bill offers to fill your treasure chest with real treasure! For free! And you can do whatever you want with it. However, there's no room in the treasure chest because it's full of sand.

### **We all have a treasure chest in our lives...**

Talents and gifts God has blessed us with.

Opportunities to pursue our dreams (we live in the land of the greatest opportunity in the world).

Family, friends, health!

But sometimes we have filled that treasure chest with sand...

Un-forgiveness

Bitterness

Jealousy

Lust/adultery

Hatred

God - who is richer than Bill Gates even - wants to fill your treasure chest with real treasure, treasure greater than gold.

Love

Joy

Peace

Patience

Kindness

Goodness

Faithfulness

Gentleness

Self-Control

What do you need to empty out of your treasure chest?



## **EGG-SHELLS AND OTHER CRAP FOR BREAKFAST (A PARABLE)**

Jill was cleaning her son Billy's room, putting ALL the clothes in the hamper because – if you've had a boy, you know their clean and dirty clothes co-mingle. They know what to wear after giving it the sniff test. She tossed the pizza boxes from under the bed into the trash. She found the five missing forks and two plates from her grandmother's china collection there too, as well as a dead banana and some dried up mud. But what she found next appalled her.

Hadn't she and Dan raised Billy with good morals? Didn't they go to church each week? Dan made sure to spend quality and quantity time each week with all three of his kids. Dan and Billy even took a church camping trip in the mountains of Colorado where the dads led the sons through what it meant to be a man of God and how to remain sexually pure. The trip included fishing and hunting. Both Dan and Billy described it as the most impressionable week of their life. So when Jill found the girly magazines, she was shocked, embarrassed and surprised. What would she do?

Jill threw the magazines in the trash, but didn't mention anything to Billy. Billy noticed they were missing and wondered what would happen to him. Was his dad waiting for the right moment to wring his neck? Would he face years of restriction? Would his car be taken away? He didn't want that to happen: He had a date with his girlfriend.

That weekend, Jill called everyone to dinner. The house had smelled of fried chicken for the last hour or so. Jill knew how to make fried chicken. She got the recipe from her grandmother, who used real bacon drippings for the frying. Billy came to supper with anticipation. Jill brought everyone their plate and set it down

lovingly in front of them. She had made a special plate for Billy. Instead of getting ready to devour his food, Billy almost barfed.

Where was the delicious fried chicken? Why had his mom, who SUPPOSEDLY loved him, placed a nice heaping platter of egg shells, bacon drippings, carrot peel, potato peel, the dead banana from his room and the sweepings from the kitchen floor, in front of his face.

“Mom, why are you giving me trash to eat?” he asked.

“I figured since you were feeding your mind that sort of garbage, you would also want to feed it to your body” she replied.

When you put pornography, gossip, and impure thoughts into your brain, it’s like eating egg shells for breakfast. What kind of gross things are going into your mind? What can you replace it with now?

(Although this story is fictional, it is based off a real mom I read about who did this with her son. It cured him of his desire to view pornography).

## **THEY WERE SECOND IN THE STATE YET STILL WENT HOME CRYING**

It was the 2007-2008 season, and the Falcon HS football team was making it happen on the field. The first game of the season was awesome. They smashed the competition. The opponent-crushing continued throughout the season. The last few games were close, often being decided in the last couple of minutes, with Falcon coming from behind. Our stats were 3-0, then 7-0, and we made it through the playoffs undefeated! We were going to State!

The preparations for state included extra practices, extra strategizing and an extra bus to bring Falcon HS fans to the game. It even meant extra practices for the marching band as we supported them throughout their journey. The final game was close, the team played hard and well, but ultimately the state championship went to the other team. Half the people left the stadium sad.

The players were dejected. Some of them cried. They were all depressed. For some, that was the final game of their high school football career. The taste of defeat was in their mouths, drowning out the taste of victory which they had savored twelve times. Many were dejected the rest of the school year.

But why? They were the second best football team in the state of Colorado. That's a proud achievement.

A few weeks later several of my students were part of the Colorado Springs all-city band. There were students from 15-20 high schools participating, many of the schools arch-rivals. There were no fights. There were no arguments. Yes, there was school pride, as could be seen by the many letter jackets, and there were renewed friendships from previous all-city events. The directors - rather than being in competition - were working toward the same goal of making musicians out of these young people. There was a

concert, of course. Everybody went home from the concert happy. The music was awesome. The clinicians were inspiring.

Once, when the Denver Broncos were playing a game, I was conducting a community orchestra concert. I don't feel like I missed anything. The musicians and conductors gave their all and everyone went home happy to be a part of it.

The world is a better place because of music. Have you thanked your music teacher today? Do it, even if you are 50 years old and your music experience was over three decades ago.

## **I'M A QUITTER AND PROUD OF IT**

"A quitter never wins and a winner never quits."...Napoleon Hill

"A man is not finished when he is defeated. He is finished when he quits."...Richard Nixon

We have all heard quotes like this and similar ones. To be honest, they are really quotes about persistence and pushing through. That advice is great, but the quotes seem to imply that it is never good to quit. Sometimes the BEST thing to do is quit, yet many in our society are afraid to. Here are examples of two times I've quit...

### **I quit the Army Band**

I spent ten years in the Army band. Loved the first seven! It became time for a change, time for a new challenge, time for something different. Many of my colleagues said - if you leave now, you've wasted ten years...you can retire in ten more years. Yet many of those colleagues trudged through ten more years, then finally retired and put their instruments down forever. I have over three decades in the music business. Everybody - except my wife and also my good mentor Dr. Wilcox - said I was making a mistake. It was the best decision of my life to quit the Army band (well, besides marrying the lovely Susan Divine).

### **I Quit Teaching at The Colorado Springs School**

I am so grateful to CSS. They allowed me my first full time teaching opportunity. I was able to grow and learn there as a teacher, but as I finished my 6th year, I knew it was time to move on. In February of my 7th year, I let them know I was leaving. All of my colleagues said I was making a mistake letting them know before I had another job lined up, but I knew it was time and wanted to give them time to find a good replacement. The amazing thing is that - my new job at Falcon High School (11+

years as we publish this book) was just the right fit for me AND the new director at CSS took it to much higher levels than I had been able to.

Many people keep working in jobs that they feel they have outgrown. Many are just doing it for a paycheck. Our time on earth is short! Nothing is worth doing for just the pay. Where's the joy, the sense of calling, the looking forward to a job well-done? Sometimes quitting can be advantageous.

**Have you ever quit and found it to be a good thing?**

## THE BEST 20 MINUTES OF MY DAY

Do you ever wish you had more time in the day? We all get the same 1,440 minutes in a day. Scientists tell us the days are actually getting longer! However, it will be hard to notice as it is by milliseconds per century.

How I spend 20 minutes of that day makes an impact on me mentally, financially, spiritually and emotionally. It may not make sense, but **spending** time even seems to **save** me time.

Is this time spent on exercise? No. That is an important part of my day, but this is even better. Time with my wife? She's the most important thing in the world to me - and she's beautiful - but this even surpasses that. Eating? You know we guys like to eat, but this 20 minutes even outperforms that.

So what is it that is so important? Reading some from the Bible. The Bible gives me advice that improves my finances, makes me a better husband and father, helps me be a better teacher, gives me guidance in almost every area of my life, not to mention it holds the truth for saving my soul for all eternity!

Many people - even those who are Christians - neglect this important area of their lives. They think to themselves, "I go to church...that's where I will be fed spiritually." That is like sitting at the Chinese buffet on Sunday and trying to get the nutrition you need for the entire week by gorging yourself one day a week. It would not be healthy.

"But I don't have time to read the Bible."

Here are some tips for you.

- Turn off the TV. It is one of the biggest time suckers in our culture. I'm not saying to throw it away, just turn it off for a while.

- Get the Bible on CD, or better yet, load it onto your mp3 player. You can listen while driving to work, jogging, cooking or doing housework. There is a podcast in iTunes called *The Daily Audio Bible*. It is a 15-20 minute reading of the Bible available in several languages, and it's **FREE**.

- Load the Bible onto your tablet or smart-phone and read while waiting in line at the grocery store, in the waiting room at the doctor's office, during a break at work, while waiting to pick up your kids from soccer practice...you get the idea. There are apps that let you download the Bible, and they're **FREE**.

You don't even have to start with 20 minutes. Start with a verse a day from Proverbs. A good section of the Bible to start in is the book of John. John - the author - was in Jesus' inner circle.

### **The 30-Day Bible Reading Challenge!**

I challenge you to start today and continue to read for 30 days. If you don't think your life is better, you can quit, but I know you will find yourself in better shape financially, physically, spiritually, mentally, emotionally and relationally.



## **A LOVE LETTER INSPIRED BY THE BEATLES**

Good Morning, Good Morning. I love you, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah. Not just Yesterday, but Eight Days a Week. I'll give you All My Loving because Love Is All You Need. Keep your money; it Can't Buy Me Love. When you walk into a room, I say Here Comes The Sun!

How do you do it? I just don't understand. In spite of all the danger, I just want to hold your hand. I've got a feeling it won't be long. Just let it be.

Can anyone help? Hey Michelle! Hey Jude! Please Mr. Postman! We can work it out with a little help from my friends.

Let's take a cruise, maybe on a Yellow Submarine.

From Me To You,  
James Divine  
P.S. I love you

## **ARE YOU LIVING FOR RETIREMENT**

When I was in high school, all I ever wanted to do was perform music. Joining the Army band was a great opportunity for me. I got a great music education and got to do something I enjoyed. But by about my seventh year, I knew it was a time for a change and started planning my exit strategy. We were in Japan at the time. I knew it would not be wise to get out there, so I reenlisted for another three years and we moved to Colorado.

By the time my service was up, I had ten years in the military. You could retire at half pay with twenty years. Most of my colleagues told me if I got out, I was wasting ten years of my life. It wasn't a waste! I learned a ton, had some great experiences including living overseas, and was paid and was able to support my family during that time.

I know of many people who spent twenty years in the military doing something they hate, and then got another safe job – usually with the government – doing something they hate – just for the safe retirement. Many of them, when retiring at age 60 with a comfortable amount of money, live boring unfulfilled lives even in retirement. They have conditioned themselves to take the easy way out. Muscles are developed with resistance. Our lives are developed during the difficult times, the struggles, and the situations that demand all our attention.

When I was a full time performer, there was one week where my mom took our kids and Susan was able to join me for a week of concerts. We stayed with one couple in Utah who were retired. They had played it safe with their jobs and in their lives and were well off. They were in their early 60s and in good health. The meal and conversation with them went something like this...

Us: So what do you do to enjoy your retirement?

Them: Oh, we have a leisurely morning, enjoy a leisurely breakfast, putter around the house, then eat lunch, take a nap, sometimes go out to dinner and then go to bed.

BORING! Does not sound exciting to me. Lunch seemed to drag by. It was like watching slugs race.

A week later I had a concert in an inner city church in Aurora, Colorado. The pastor and his wife were in their 80s. This church could not seem to get anyone to serve, so they stepped up and delivered. The lunch conversation that day was exciting! At one point we looked at our watches and really had to go, but we didn't want to.

Are you retired? How are you using the gifts God has given you? Are you investing them in people? Here are two examples of people I know who are still making things happen.

One man in my church named Victor Nussbaum was retired, but he became our church's building and grounds director. He oversaw and did the work on many remodeling and repair jobs that were sorely needed. Since we did not have any labor costs, these jobs were well within our budget. If we had to pay someone to do what he did, it would have cost our church 80 to 100k a year.

Another man named Jim Auburg has often filled in as administrator, something God has gifted him in. During one much needed season at our church, he was there full time helping get our church's finances and admin in order. Did I mention Jim is in his 80s? Jim is one of my mentors and someone I look up to.

It's not wrong to spend some of your retirement doing fun things like traveling, visiting grandkids, etc. But did God call us to just live a life of leisure. Billy Graham's latest book – and in my opinion his best (Finishing Well) was written in his 90s.

There is a season for everything. How are you spending the season you are in?

## **A GIRL, A PAPER BAG AND A POT BELLY**

Say this with a nasally voice, "Sticks and Stones May Break My Bones, But Names Will Never Hurt Me." Oh how I wish this were true. It's good to learn to let words slide off your back, but they DO hurt and they make a difference for good or bad.

I knew a girl who was one of the nicest young ladies I knew (most of the time). She came home from church one day and disappeared. When her mom called her to lunch, she showed up wearing a paper bag over her face.

"Why are you wearing a paper bag over your face?"

"What do you mean you're ugly? You are not!"

It seems that a teenager at church - who she thought was one of the cutest guys ever - had said something about her being ugly.

Well this young man was stuck on himself and was spoiled rotten. Everything was all about him. In one casual moment of being mean, he caused this young lady - who is very beautiful - to despise and be ashamed of how she looked for a long time.

Words hurt! Sometimes for life!

Even though we have not seen this young man for many years, we heard through the grapevine that by his mid-twenties he had Dunlaps disease (his belly dun lapped over his belt) and was mostly bald (this was before bald was cool).

The girl? She's my sister and gets more beautiful every day!

Use words to build people up, not tear them down. What you say makes a difference today, tomorrow and for eternity for good or bad.

## DEPRESSION...EASY TO SINK INTO

It was right before spring break and I was having one of those weeks every teacher dreams of...

My top band had just performed a wonderful concert for a school in our community. Kids were clapping and shouting for more. My students had the time of their lives. We all wished we could do that every day!

The next morning my jazz band met (some of them the same kids). This group meets once a week in the morning, **before school at 6:40**, the kids get no credit or benefit from being in it except for the love of jazz music. Every week it warms my heart to see them show up for practice. We had tried a new song and within 20 minutes, they almost sounded as good as my full time jazz band from 5 years previous did after a semester of working the song!

After school, I had another rehearsal with a sax quintet - kids who were there voluntarily and who also warm my heart each week.

### **But I went home depressed that day! Why?**

One student acting stupidly had broken a music stand on purpose when I had a substitute teacher in my class that afternoon.

I drove home fuming, wondering why a student would do that, and even doubting my calling as a teacher, all OVER ONE EVENT!

Fortunately, I have been training my mind by reading the Bible and works by Zig Ziglar and others.

**I was the stupid idiot** for letting one student ruin my day after we had just had a run of great things happen. **I was the stupid idiot** for letting one student get me down when I had another 189 that were great.

I have a half hour drive home, and by the time I got home this event had gone away and became the one gnat that showed up at a terrific picnic on a cool summer's day.

How about you? Is there one thing that you have allowed to bring you down? Dump that gnat from your mind now.

## **I FELT LIKE A ROCK STAR**

One day I received the wish I had had since I was younger...to be famous. It wasn't like what you think, but afterwards I felt like a rock star!

I once taught grade 4-12 band at a small private school. Because of a bear sleeping in a tree on the playground (that's another story), all Kindergarten through 5th grade students (more than 200 of them) were out on the quad for recess. There were students sitting and talking, some running and playing tag, some just sprawled out on the grass as kids are prone to do when outside on a warm day.

I walked by carrying my saxophone. A couple of students called out, "Mr. Divine, would you play us something?" A performer never gives up a chance to be in the spotlight, so I obliged.

As soon as I started playing, the wind stopped, the clouds stood still, the bear fell out of the tree, the earth shifted on its axis (these are exaggerations but this next part is true); over 200 kids stopped playing and ran in my direction. As I finished my song, I was surrounded by students asking me to play my saxophone some more, so I did.

On that day, I realized that in the eyes of those cute, snotty-nosed kids, I - James Divine - was a Rock Star! It's too bad that elementary age kids don't have money to throw.

May your day be filled with the desires of your heart!



## BIG BERTHA IS WATCHING

You're playing (or speaking, or teaching) your heart out, pouring everything you have into it! People are responding, applauding, shouting "Amen", throwing money, and showing you all kinds of appreciation. But you let ONE PERSON affect you negatively, and she's sitting in the third row.

It's **BIG BERTHA** and she ain't happy. Her arms are folded across her chest. She is wearing a frown as if it were a new sweater. Everybody applauds except for her.

In the middle of your presentation she gets up and leaves the venue. Instantly there is a change in the venue, but it is not from the 199 people remaining in the audience; it is from the person on stage. He becomes worried, his brow furrows, he wonders what he is doing wrong and becomes focused on Bertha (if that is your name and you are reading this, I am sure you are one of the nice Berthas).

Why do we do this? 199 people are enjoying themselves, but we are focusing on Bertha.

Sometimes we just need to let Bertha go. We don't know what she is going through. Maybe she dated a musician many years ago and now hates all musicians. Maybe she is just extremely ill and her furrowed brow and early departure have nothing to do with our performance; it's just gas. Maybe she is just a negative person.

What is your Bertha story? Just let her go and focus on doing the best with the gifts God has given you. There are 199 grateful people watching.

## **THEY CALLED ME SISSY (AND WORSE)**

There once was a boy who had all the dreams and desires of boys everywhere...

To play

To eat

To play

To marry his mom

To play

Then he became a teenager...

His body almost doubled in size, as did the hair under his arms and on his legs. He craved pizza all the time. His face broke out into pizza.

Because he had a high emotional IQ - not unusual for artistic boys - he was called sissy, faggot, homo and other horrible names, often by the "popular" kids.

When this boy became a man, he realized many of those popular kids had FAILED

Their marriages FAILED

Their careers FAILED

Their good looks FAILED

Their charm...well they never had any.

The things of high school fade. Who likes whom, who you dated, what others thought of you...all those things become unimportant.

How you treat others, the person you become, what you accomplish with the gifts God has blessed you with...those things become more important.

That young man still loves pizza, he still loves to have fun and play, but he is way more comfortable in this shell he calls James. (His mom, sister, niece and nephews call him Jimmy)

**Enjoy the shell called YOU!**

## I TURNED DOWN BOSTON UNIVERSITY

I have always been a life-long learner. While parenting my kids and working full time, I earned my bachelor's degree at the age of 32. I finished my master's degree in 2012 at the age of 45. I thought maybe my next step was to earn my doctorate, so I applied to Boston University, was accepted, but turned them down.

Here's why...

The cost would have exceeded \$50,000. We as Americans tend to measure things monetarily, but there is a cost beyond that.

- Time given up - No matter how rich you are, you can't redeem lost or wasted time. I'm not saying the time would be wasted, just that it's a huge investment.
- Projects given up - There are about 10 other big things I want to accomplish in the next 5-7 years. Devoting myself to school would mean postponing those projects. Here's what I have planned, Lord willing...
  - Develop and present a Forgiveness Workshop
  - Develop and present a How To Make It In The Music Business Workshop
  - Record a jazz album titled "Fellowship of the Swing."
  - Record a Christmas album
  - Write another book and develop a workshop around that
  - Visit my grandkids
  - Take a cruise (or several) with my wife

I place great value on education. It just doesn't always come in the formal way. I read 50+ books a year, I attend conferences and workshops, and I have several mentors who pour their wisdom into my life, so my education won't be stopping.

## **CAN AN ITALIAN LUNCH FEED 5,000**

I am half-Italian. Mom is from Naples, Italy. The boy who had the fish and loaves that Jesus fed the 5,000 from was Italian. Here's proof...

- 1) No Italian mother would send a kid anywhere without lunch, even if he is just going across the street. If he is going across the street and the other mother is also Italian, the lunch will be even bigger and better prepared.
- 2) There was probably enough to feed 5-6 people. This in no way takes away from the miracle; it's just so you know how much food Italian moms send with their kids. All serving utensils, a cloth napkin, and possibly a folding chair would be included in the luggage the boy would be carrying.
- 3) When he got home and told his mom what had happened, she probably scolded him for not inviting the other 4,999 people and Jesus to their home for dinner. Afterwards she would have sent a plate of meatballs to Mary to show appreciation for what Jesus had done.
- 4) You can be sure the boy was wearing clean undergarments, just in case he was in an accident.

## BIG GIRLS (AND BOYS) DO CRY

Remember the Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons Song [Big Girls Don't Cry](#)? It's a cheesy old song with a slightly annoying Cry-Aye-Aye refrain, and it just simply isn't true. Big Girls and Boys DO cry.

I was told growing up, "Only sissies cry." Being a sensitive guy, this made my young life much more difficult.

Some of you - artsy people, Italians - have a higher emotional IQ than others. You feel things more deeply. You laugh more. You cry more. When I am sharing beautiful music like Yo Yo Ma's cello playing, my students tease me because I cry.

I don't trust a man who is ashamed to cry. When the 1991 Persian Gulf War was near its end, General Schwarzkopf - a four star general - cried as he was interviewed by Barbara Walters.

Walters said, "Generals don't cry."

Schwarzkopf replied "Grant, after Shiloh, went back and cried. Sherman went back and cried...and these are tough old guys...Lincoln cried." See an excerpt of that interview [HERE](#).

The shortest verse in the Bible is "Jesus wept."

Do you think men should cry? Why or why not?

## GET OFF YOUR BUT

We are often immobilized from taking action to get things done. Often just beginning a new project is the hardest step; once we begin we have the motivation to go on. Sometimes we are immobilized by our "buts".

But what if others don't like it

But I don't have the right talent

But I've got a doctor's appointment next week

But Thanksgiving is just a month away; I'll exercise after that. (Too much of this can cause problems with the other butt).

Or the BIGGEST But of all

But what if I fail

Several years ago, I taught the K-6 group at my church on Sunday mornings. There were some older adults who expressed interest in getting involved, but didn't want a weekly commitment.

That gave me an idea...what if the adults shared their experience in a 10-15 minute session with the kids? No regular commitment needed, just telling the kids about your life experience. I talked to several people and got a positive response from all of them. The first person came to speak to the kids. The kids and the adult loved it! Success! Time to schedule more of these sessions.

I went to person number two...

"But I can't make it down the stairs"

"That's ok...we will meet you in the lobby"



"But..."

I went to person number three...

"But I have a doctor's appointment coming up in a few weeks, maybe after that."

Not quite sure what a doctor's appointment during the week had anything to do with talking to kids on Sunday.

Switch channels to teens at school...

"But I don't have TIME to get my homework done"

"I noticed there were 20 social media posts on the night you had no time."

You and I have all been guilty of using "but". There is a legitimate reason for telling people no... I'm busy with other priorities... It's not something I want to do...

What are some "buts" that have immobilized you? Do you have ideas to help people get off their "buts."?

## **\$7 CAN BUY YOU A CAR**

You're thinking, "There's no way \$7 can go very far in today's economy." You may be surprised.

It was the last week of school before Christmas break and my son's school was having a dance. Cost \$3. I said,

"Son, are you going?"

"I don't have any money."

"What happened to the \$7 you earned last weekend?"

"I spent it."

"On what?"

"School lunches and junk food. Anyways, it's ONLY \$7."

"Did you know \$7 could buy you a car?"

"Nu-uh."

"If you earned \$7 a day six days a week for a year and saved it, you would have \$2100 at the end of the year. Would you rather have \$2100 or spend money on junk food and school lunches?"

"\$2100. I guess I never thought of it that way."

And neither do most adults!

Are you spending your car or retirement money on double shot lattes? \$2100 saved a year from age 20 to age 60 and invested wisely would become a fortune!

## NEVER PLAY FOR FREE

I'm not saying that one should never play a free gig, but most of the time it's overdone and sets the bar low. NEVER play for free, even when you play for free.

Huh! Have you lost your mind James? That doesn't make sense.

I have often made a counteroffer to someone who wants live music but doesn't have money to pay. Sometimes the counteroffer is accepted and sometimes it's not. Here are a few ideas on how to never play for free:

### 1) Ask for travel costs

If you are driving 200 miles round trip, it is reasonable to ask for \$100 for travel costs. Did you know the IRS allows you to deduct 56 cents per mile as automobile cost? Do you think the IRS is generous? This is what it costs to buy and maintain a car in the long term.

### 2) Get free video or audio

Need video/audio of you playing for a website or social media promotion? Ask the venue to shoot or record for you, with the stipulation that you get a free copy on DVD. This can save you \$300 over having a professional shoot it.

### 3) Pre-sell product

Maybe the venue can't or won't pay for the musicians, but they may have money in another area of their budget to purchase a CD for everyone. You could even offer this at a discounted rate. If there were going to be 100 attendees and you sold CDs for \$8 each, you could easily earn about \$500. As an added bonus, sign all the CDs.

#### 4) Promote yourself

You might play for free if the event is willing to provide publicity for you. For example, maybe you are playing at a festival and can have your band name and website advertised as part of the print and radio ads going out for the festival.

#### 5) Use the gig as a practice opportunity

No, I am not suggesting you miss notes and think that's acceptable. However, if you have put together a new set of songs but haven't played it in front of an audience yet, a "free" gig may be a good opportunity to do that. Everything should still sound great and be performance ready. Now you are seeing how a live audience will react.

Whenever you perform, "free" or paid, always have business cards with you and CDs to sell or give away to someone who might want to hire you. Better yet, get their business card and YOU follow up with them if they are interested.

## LASAGNA CAN PREDICT MARRIAGE SUCCESS

My mom is from Naples, Italy.

When I was dating, I would bring girls home for dinner and to meet my mom. No Italian boy would dare skip this essential step in a relationship!

No matter how nice I thought the girl was, mom would respond after she left with:

*I don't like her.*

or

*She's not the one for you.*

As a rebellious teen musician, I would set out to prove her wrong. In the end, I would discover mom was right (now mind you, she maybe could have told me in a nicer way and I wouldn't have set out to prove her wrong).

When I was dating my beautiful wife, mom said

*She's the one.*

Naturally, I was under the impression that she was going to say she didn't like any of them. I was intrigued!

"Mom, how can you tell she's the one after just meeting her once?"

Italians everywhere will understand her response,

"She asked for seconds at dinner."

## WINGING IT IS GREAT...IF YOU'RE A BIRD

We have become a nation of birds, and I'm not talking about ostriches that hide from the truth and stick their heads in the sand, although that is sometimes the case in our culture. This is something much more pervasive that holds us back from truly being excellent.

What I am referring to is "Winging It." I often hear that expression from people in the performing arts. They have good intentions. What they mean is they are going to improvise when the time comes, but even improvisation is within certain limits.

When I improvise in jazz, I have a set of chords - a framework or map if you will - that I improvise within. In a Dixieland band, you get 8-10 musicians improvising, but we are all using the same map. At first this may sound limiting, but it actually allows you more creativity.

I remember listening to an album by Braxton Hicks – 60 minutes of improvisation with no accompaniment and no form. In my opinion it sounded like he was warming up. The album was terrible.

Winging It - as most people use the term - **DOESN'T WORK**.  
Improvisation - when incorporated into much practice, whether in the arts, sports, or while giving a speech - brings out greatness.

## **I'VE WORKED MY DREAM JOB FOR THREE DECADES**

Many of you are searching for your dream job. I have worked my dream job for three decades.

I have always gone against the grain. Many of my friends in high school decided to pursue something other than their dream because it paid better. I was fortunate to have a mom who encouraged me to be and do whatever I wanted. She had confidence in me.

If I said everything was always perfect, I would be lying, but when I look back, the difficult times were often due - as Zig Ziglar would say - to "stinkin thinkin".

I joined the Army band right out of high school. I had a blast until the Army moved me to Japan and I was away from my family for four months. That's when I started my "stinkin thinkin" and was not a fun person to be around. It had a negative effect on me and my family (thanks to my sweetheart for putting up with me).

I was in the Army for ten years and knew it was time for a change, so I became a self-employed touring musician. Times were tough, mainly because of poor decisions I made and not knowing how to price myself.

I delivered pizzas about twenty hours a week just to make ends meet. When a part time band teacher position opened up, I took it so I could quit pizza delivery.

I liked my previous jobs but I was PASSIONATE about teaching. That eventually went to full time, so I had to cut back on the performing.

There are sometimes difficult times when teaching in public school, but most Mondays I am raring to be back at work, teaching music to young people. There is nothing that I would rather do.

When I talk to my friends - most of whom hate their jobs - I realize how fortunate I am to have a job I love. I have started to realize that many of them made the wrong choice as teenagers. The choice to give up something they loved to do something they hated...all for money.

Once you start making that choice, it is harder to come back to something you love. God created work, and it was around before the fall. God told Adam to work and care for the garden. Somewhere in our history, work has turned into a dirty word.

Find something you love to do, do it with passion and as unto the Lord.



## SWALLOW THE FROG

If you have something difficult to do - like swallowing a frog - make that the very first thing you do. That way you are not dreading it all day.

Tackle the hardest, least desirable thing on your to do list. **Swallow the Frog** unless that's what you like, then save that for last.

## **TREAT SOME PEOPLE LIKE A DOG MIGHT TREAT THEM**

We once had a special guest in our home...Remy. Remy is a breed of dog called the Carolina. They enjoy being part of a pack and are known for being gentle and social. They are a pariah breed, meaning they developed naturally in the swamps of South Carolina rather than being bred. (Side note...my daughter and son-in-law were also visiting...it's their dog, but this is about Remy).

Remy is one of the nicest dogs you could ever know. There is not a mean bone in his body. He loves you when you stink after a jog - in fact I think he loves you more. He loves you in the morning when you have morning breath. Remy even loves cats, and that's where we can learn from him.

The cats hated Remy, but he was so pure and gentle with them, that even when they hissed and pawed at him, he thought they wanted to play.

He would run back and forth - forward and backward - trying to draw them out of their corner.

In life, there are going to be a lot of cats hissing and pawing at you. Some of them are known as managers. It would be so easy to walk away with our tails pulled down in despair, but that's not what Remy did! He continued to love those cats and was just his good-natured self.

Let's do the same.

## TAKE TIME TO SMELL THE MUSIC

Life is so busy and it gets busier every day!

However, you WILL do whatever you decide is important. After all, have you ever heard of someone who died because he was too busy to eat?

Dr. South of [Southwestern Oklahoma State University](#) told me and my music master's degree classmates we needed to take time out each day to listen to some beautiful music, to help us remember why we were in music education - especially if we were having a bad day!

Five to ten minutes a day to feed your music soul - whether you are a musician or not.

Try lying down and closing your eyes for a few minutes while listening to one of the great classics.

I've been doing this for three years. I don't lose time and productivity...I gain it.

What's your favorite music to listen to?

## **EVEN IF YOU COULD WORK 168 HOURS THIS WEEK, YOU COULDN'T GET IT ALL DONE**

Does a long To-Do-List mean we need to work longer hours?

Newsflash...Even if you worked 168 hours, you still wouldn't get everything done, but you'd feel exhausted.

Four Gigs...I was exhausted...made little

I once spent a weekend doing four gigs. I drove five hours west for a gig late Friday night, came back home early Saturday morning to watch my son's soccer game, went two hours north for a Saturday evening senior dinner, drove another hour north for a Sunday morning service, an hour south for a Sunday evening service, then back home late Sunday night. Lots of effort, made \$200.

Effort does not always equal success.

Now I can finally get it all done!

One year David had wrestling practice at school every evening for three and a half hours. Our school is a half hour drive from home, so I stayed each day and planned on getting a lot of things done. I thought, "I'll finally get caught up on my to-do list."

I still didn't get it all done! In fact, I get more done now in less time than I did then. Here are a few tips for you.

1) Know when to say no (my Know-No rule)

God has a unique calling for you. Know when to say no when something doesn't fit your calling. This bears repeating...

Know when to say, "NO."

I frequently receive calls requesting me to play at various coffee houses and other events. I thank them and tell them “No” most of the time.

[Kent Julian](#), motivational speaker, says that when we accept something below our level - in other words not within our calling - we are in fact stealing that opportunity from someone else.

As a professional musician with 34 years experience, if I take that coffee house gig, I am stealing that from someone who is just getting started in the music field. If not careful, we can miss the GREAT while pursuing the GOOD.

## 2) Prioritize your to do list.

I plan the next week on Friday afternoons. Some people plan out the day the previous evening. Some do it Sunday night. Find a system that works for you and prioritize your to-do list.

You might even decide to cross some items off the list. If possible, delegate. Since you can't get it all done, do the most important things.

## 3) Maintain a good life balance.

I LOVE my work. I have often felt in the minority because our culture has a "Thank God It's Friday" mentality. How about "Thank God It's Monday?"

However, we do need balance in our lives.

My life is not all work. I plan time to exercise, to read, to spend time with family, to hike and to do nothing at all sometimes. Sunday is my no technology day, no email, no web surfing. If you call me on a Sunday, you'll probably get my voice mail. That is my recharge day. For you, it could be another day of the week. I also plan longer recharge times.

For more info on setting priorities and maintaining life balance, check out [Dan Miller](#).

Spend an hour thinking about where you might be working too long. Think through a plan to achieve balance.

## DON'T BE A FAKE DONUT

A boy wrote the following story about his visit to the Donut shop:

### The Fake Doughnut

*You know what I think is weird? Fake doughnuts...aka plain ones. I mean you just stroll into a Dunkin Doughnuts, and you see all the different flavors and types like glazed, strawberry, Boston Kreme and chocolate frosted. And there, just sitting there among all the wonderful flavors, acting like it belongs there is Plain. Right there, laying on the pink and orange tissue paper, with the little shiny silver walls of the crate it's in surrounding it, just like all the real ones. But it's not! It's not one of them! It has no frosting, no sprinkles, no glaze, no cream, no fillings or toppings at all! It shouldn't even be called a doughnut! Or a pastry of any kind! It's just a BAGEL! A BAGEL!*

You have been created as a unique individual, with different talents and gifts than anyone else. Look at people you admire, to emulate them, take ideas from them and then make them your own.

Our education system seems to value sameness and conformity. There is a time and season for conformity, but not **all** the time. If all the world were Boston Kremes, it would be boring. If everyone were a frosted chocolate, there would be no excitement.

In a world of donuts, a glob of uncooked dough is not good. It's useless. It's ready for the trash. It's tasteless.

Don't say, "I'm an uncooked glob of dough, but that's who I am. Take it or leave it. I'm not improving myself."

The cooking is what makes the glob of dough better...into a doughnut. The frosting or filling is what makes it unique. Get cooked properly and then let your uniqueness shine through.

## **THE BOY WHO WANTED TO BUILD A TREEHOUSE TO SAVE HIS MOM**

Kids are so funny and creative when it comes to solving problems in their lives. When I was five years old, I thought I could tackle a huge problem in my life by building a tree house. I thought bringing the ladder up behind me would solve my problem.

At the time, I was known as Jimmy, and I had a dog - a beagle - named Snoopy. I played with my dog every day.

My best friend Manny lived next door. We would play outside in the large backyard with Snoopy. When it was time to eat a snack or lunch, we could be found together in either of our mom's kitchens eating something delicious.

When it was time to go pee – much to our moms' consternation – we could be found behind a tree in the backyard. What little boy would take time off from play to go inside!

One day my father loaded Snoopy and me in the car and drove to a remote location. Snoopy was no longer wanted by my father, so he dropped the tiny dog off in the woods. I was confused...

"How will Snoopy eat? Where will he sleep? Why is my father doing this to Snoopy? Will I be dropped off in the woods if someone gets tired of me?"

As much as I loved Snoopy, I loved my mom even more. There were many nights after going to bed that I would hear banging and beating and screaming. Mom was screaming at dad.

"Please don't hit me anymore. You're hurting me. You are going to wake the kids."

Too late, the kids were already awake. It was hard to sleep hearing what was going on in the next room and seeing the



evidence of abuse on Mom the next morning. The knots in my stomach tightened. Finally there was an escape to relatives.

George came into my life. George was the husband of one of mom's friends. Finally, a father figure who listened, who cared, who spent time with me.

One day George was watching all the kids: his three, my sister Mimmy, and me. A fight broke out amongst the kids. George intervened and told me he needed to speak to me in the bathroom.

"But I'm innocent", I protested!

George said, "Don't worry. I know you're innocent. I just need to talk to you."

George locked the bathroom door behind us. He removed my pants. On that cold, hard bathroom floor he violated me in a way that no six-year-old boy should be treated.

The pain, confusion, guilt and shame cannot be described. I loved George. Why would George do this to me?

The abuse continued until the age of eight when George moved away.

As I stopped being Jimmy and became James, I began to understand more of what happened, and a rage began to ignite within me. A rage that grew into murderous thoughts by the time I was 16.

Meanwhile, the knot in my stomach was all twisted and churned. If only I could somehow kill George then things would be better.

That's not the way I had been taught by my mother.

Didn't I do some horrible things at times?

Didn't God forgive me for these horrible things?

Wasn't this un-forgiveness just hurting me rather than George?

At the age of 16, I began my forgiveness journey. It wasn't easy. It's still not over. I realized that un-forgiveness was holding **ME** back...

holding me back spiritually...

holding me back emotionally...

holding me back financially...

If I was to live in fullness of life, I HAD to **Forgive & Live**.

If I wanted success in relationships, I HAD to **Forgive & Live**.

At the age of 30, I began to share this **Forgive & Live** message to audiences all over the United States. I'm now a successful husband, father, grandfather, teacher, musician and speaker thanks to a **Forgive & Live** approach to life. I want to see everyone start his own **Forgive & Live** journey.

The real tree house remains un-built, but the figurative tree house in my heart and spirit is in place.

Read more of my story in my book, [Forgive](#).

I'd love to share my **Forgive & Live** journey with your group. Get in touch with me [HERE](#).

## 8 LIFE LESSONS I LEARNED ON A CRUISE

In 2014, my beautiful wife and I had the opportunity to celebrate our 28th anniversary with a cruise to the eastern Caribbean. We went to San Juan Puerto Rico, St. Maarten, St. Kitts and Labadie (a peninsula on the northern side of Haiti). My in-laws joined us. We all had a wonderful time.

I learned eight life and business lessons on that cruise.

We started our trip at Denver International Airport onboard Spirit Airlines. We will probably not take that airline again. They are a no frills airline.

Lesson 1, You get what you pay (or don't pay) for.

Spirit had the cheapest rate, but you had to pay extra for everything.

Want to check a bag...extra

Want to bring a carry on...extra

Want a sip of water...extra

Want oxygen at 18,000 feet...extra

(only one of these is made up...can you guess which one?)

The airline is great for someone with no bags who just needs a cheap flight, but it isn't the one for us. Plus, if you're taller than 4'8", there is no leg room (but this seems to be standard on all airlines unless you fly first class).

We arrived in Fort Lauderdale early in the morning. Breakfast consumed, we took a water taxi around Ft. Lauderdale. It was a great tour on beautiful water with a beautiful lady.

We had lunch at an Italian deli in one of the shopping districts. This deli had great sandwiches and the best tiramisu according to Susan. We had to pick just one dessert! In heaven will we have to choose?

The water taxi included tours of many multi-million dollar homes that were right on the water. Some of the homes were tiny but were expensive because of the water view.

Lesson 2: The price of real estate depends on where you are.

Waterfront homes on St Kitts were about \$60,000. The homes were small - maybe 800 square feet - but had a gorgeous view.

Lesson 3: The Golden Rule is a great rule.

Cruise employees really know how to serve!

Our cabin attendant was attentive to all of our needs. Every special request we had, she was there to fill it.

"Do you know where I can find a pen?"

..."Here, take mine"

"We are trying to find "\_\_\_\_\_."

..."Let me make a call for you."

The wait staff in the restaurants were the same. One made iced tea for me when iced tea was not available.

What if we were all to treat each other like this?

Wouldn't the world be a better place?

This idea of serving each other was given as a commandment by the world's greatest leader. No 200-page guide. No three-hour course to attend. Simply treat people how you want to be treated and take on the servant role.

#### Lesson 4: Cruising is a wonderful vacation

Everybody knows that, right.

- Relaxation
- Great food
- Fun activities
- See the world

But there are other benefits too:

- The cost is reasonable. It was about \$100/person per day, but when you figure that everything is included - lodging, food and entertainment - the cost does not seem high anymore.

#### Lesson 5: Most middle class American families can afford a cruise!

James, you don't know what you are talking about here. There's no way we can afford a cruise!

In 2006, Susan and I took a cruise. One of my coworkers and I had this conversation. We will call her Cici...

Cici: ...with snootiness in her voice, It must be nice to be able to take a cruise?

Me: Yeah, we have been saving up for awhile.

Cici: I wish we were able to save up.

Me: What if I told you a way you could take a cruise in a year from now?

Cici: That would be great. How?

Me: I see you with a Starbucks coffee almost every day. Does your husband get one too?

Cici: Yes, we gotta have our Starbucks.

Me: If you made your own coffee for a year, you could save \$200/month and in one year have enough to take a cruise.

Cici: There's no way I'm giving up my Starbucks.

If you want to cruise badly enough, you will trim your budget and make it happen. It also helps to be out of debt. Go to [www.daveramsey.com](http://www.daveramsey.com) to get free advice on how to get control of your finances.

Lesson 6: I'm proud to be an American.

We saw some great sights! Old San Juan in Puerto Rico had a cool fort and awesome, well-preserved vintage homes and streets. Everywhere I go, I love to visit churches and schools. Not sure why, it's just something I like.

I visited a church, but it wasn't on positive terms. You see, there were no public restrooms in Puerto Rico - at least none that I could find. We get spoiled in the US because a bathroom is always easy to find.

I was starting to consider finding a tree but had these terrible thoughts of being arrested in a foreign country. I was sweating bullets!

I finally ducked into a church that was having a potluck, found their bathroom and found relief. I must have looked suspicious because someone followed me to the bathroom. I was just washing my hands when he came in. I folded my hands and said, "Gracias" at least five times. I think he understood.

Thank God for bathrooms in America.

We also visited the Labadie peninsula of northern Haiti. It was gorgeous! The handiwork we saw from some of the artisans there was simply stunning.

#### Lesson 7: Our welfare system doesn't work.

I'm not an economist - nor do I play one on TV - but I do know our system of welfare is broken.

Only 10% of every dollar the government takes goes to help poor people. The rest goes to fund the bureaucracy.

On the other hand, every dollar I donate to my church that is designated to help people goes to those people.

My mother-in-law...a cruise specialist...told me that the people in the Caribbean don't understand our welfare system. In their system, food that grows on public land is available for poor people.

Think about this for a moment...food is available for them, but they have to work some to get it. Nobody brings it to them.

Sounds like a great system for encouraging work and a positive self image that comes with work.

How did work ever become a dirty word in our culture? Could it be from lack of purpose?

## Lesson 8: Pay Now or Pay Later.

We did LOTS of walking on this cruise, and I ran almost every day.

However, it wasn't enough to burn off all the calories from the delicious food we consumed! I gained at least 5 pounds. Sometimes I ate two or three desserts a day.

On the last day of the cruise, I saw a lot more people than normal working out in the gym. Payback for overeating had arrived.

Now one week of overindulging is not going to kill you, but a lifetime of poor eating and lack of exercise will cause you much harm, if not now, later.

This pay now or pay later philosophy affects every area of our lives.

Lack of savings now can make retirement difficult.

Lack of investment in your marriage now may result in divorce.

Better to pay now!

Do you want to take your own cruise vacation? I highly suggest Skip and Marilyn Eliason at [Holiday Travel Network](#).

Not only are they cruise professionals, but they are my mother and father-in-love.

Where do you want to go on your next cruise?



## SOME PEOPLE WASTE 18 MINUTES ALL DAY

We have a limited amount of time and can't afford to waste any. **However, some of us waste it without even realizing it.** Studies have shown that when our brain has to shift its focus, it takes us eighteen minutes to get back into focus.

Think of what happens when there is a fire drill at school; it takes eighteen minutes for the students to get back in gear. Many of us waste this time voluntarily. If you have the email notification flag operating on your email program, you may be productively working when you see that flag and go to check email.

It takes you 18 minutes to get back into focus...

Maybe you are a stay at home mom who is also trying to write a novel. If you write when the kids are playing nearby, you may not get much done.

It takes 18 minutes to get back into focus...

If you are a musician trying to practice but keep your phone nearby to check text messages...

It takes 18 minutes to get back into focus...

Multi-tasking is a myth. It might appear we are getting more done, but really everything is taking us longer.

Go ahead, check social media, use email, text your friends, but set aside specific time to focus on homework, your spouse, your kids, writing that book and practicing that instrument. You'll get a lot more done!

## THANK GOD I'M BORING

When I was in high school, I always felt like I needed to be "dating" someone. I had low self-esteem. When the girl I was dating would break up with me, I always wanted to know why.

The answer was usually

"You're boring."

Do you know that this bothered me all the way to my early 40s? Then I figured it out!

Boring meant I was absent the drama that surrounded some other guys. These guys seemed to lead girls around by a string, toying with their emotions and feelings and not seeming to care if they caused pain (it was all about how they felt). It does make life interesting.

At age 40, I decided that I liked boring. By those early girlfriend definitions, boring meant I have remained faithful to my wife, boring meant that early in my career I often stuck with jobs I didn't like because it was the best thing for my family, boring meant I stuck to my commitments and can be depended on. Many of those exciting boys from high school have left broken families in their wake of pursuing what they want.

Now that I'm older and more mature, I in no way think of myself as boring, but going by those silly high school girls' definition...

THANK GOD I'M BORING!

## **IF I DON'T MAKE IT ON AMERICAN IDOL, MY LIFE IS OVER**

The lottery mentality has become pervasive in our culture. It strikes across all ages and in other areas besides finance. Someone thinks,

"If I can just win the lottery, all my troubles will be over."

This thinking often results in inaction!!!!

Rather than work hard, study and improve, some people will do nothing and "play the lottery" in all areas of their lives, including teaching.

Take "America's Got Talent" or "American Idol" for example...A young person says,

"I have put all my heart, soul and dreams into making it on this show. If I don't make it, all my hopes are dashed."

Get real...your life isn't over if you don't make it.

Put that same passion into working on your craft outside of the show. There are many musicians - most whom you have never heard of - who make a decent living doing what they love. They're not rich and famous.

Overnight success is a myth.

Maybe we should call it "American Idle." Instead of idling, rev those engines, get to work and avoid the lottery mentality.

## WHO CUT MY FUEL LINE

It was 1997, and I had promised Josh, my oldest son who was 6 at the time, that I would attend his field day. I was too focused on my music career, so when an opportunity came up for a music networking event, I told Josh that I was sorry, but I would miss his field day. Now kids are resilient and he was probably okay with that, but I had promised him I would be there!

I loaded my car early that morning and was headed to Denver for the networking event. Just as I was about to enter the interstate, I ran over a small branch, maybe about three feet long and as round as if you create a circle with your forefinger and thumb. (I have run over worse things in my lifetime).

Immediately the car died! I pulled over to the side of the road to take a look. The small branch had made a clean slice through my fuel line. I think, "I'm going to be late to the networking event."

There was an auto parts store about a half-mile away. I started jogging towards it, muttering and complaining under my breath the entire time. When I finally reached the store and described my problem, the staff was very helpful and pointed me towards a tiny plastic contraption that would allow me to easily join together the two pieces of the fuel line. It cost me less than \$2.

By now I had calmed down a little bit. On my way to my car, I realized this was God's way to help me remember my promise to my son. God doesn't usually speak to people in an audible voice. In fact those who claim he does usually scare me! But he does speak to us through circumstances, through the bible and through other people.

I fixed the fuel line, jumped in my car and turned around headed to the location of the field day Josh was involved in. We had a great day and I learned an important lesson...

My promise to my kids is WAY more important than any gig or networking event could be.

## **THE FIRST (AND ONLY) TIME I PICKED UP A PROSTITUTE**

It was October of 2000, one of those rare, grey drizzly days we sometimes get in Colorado. I was on Nevada Avenue near downtown Colorado Springs when I saw her. I pulled my van to the side of the road and picked her up.

Flashback to earlier that week...

I was in my third year of teaching band at The Colorado Springs School. The mom of one of my students – I'll call the student Annie – had passed away unexpectedly. Now Annie would be without a mom. Now Annie's dad would be a widower. It was such a sad time for that family.

The viewing was on that cold drizzly day I just mentioned. At the viewing, we – meaning faculty, students and other families from The Colorado Springs School – came together around Annie's family like extended family. We were sharing stories about Annie, about her dad and about her mom. I could feel the presence of God at the viewing. I left and hopped in my van.

As I was heading down Nevada Ave., I saw a lady all hunched over in the drizzly rain. She wasn't much to look at, maybe in her 30s but she had the look of someone who had a rough life and appeared to be in her 50s. She had her thumb stuck out to hitchhike. I don't usually pick up hitchhikers and don't recommend it to you, but as I approached her, I distinctly felt God was telling me to pick her up.

It wasn't an audible voice...

“James....pick this lady up.”

It was more of a voice within my spirit.

I obeyed and stopped to pick her up. She told me where she was going, a location about two miles away. As we were headed there, we made some small talk. I then asked her “Where do you work?” She hesitated, squirmed a little, and then answered, “I’m working the streets.”

By now, we were at her destination. I looked at her and said, “Honey, I think God has something better for you than that.” Tears began to flow down her face as she exited my van and shut the door.

I wish I knew what happened to this lady. I wish I could say she left that life, went to college and became successful, helping others who had been through what she had, but that was the last time I saw her. I do know that I was supposed to pick her up and tell her God had something better for her. When you hear that small voice telling your spirit something, do what it says.

## HE PULLED OUT HIS GUN AND SAID THIS TO ME

I was out for an early morning jog, pre-dawn. I'm used to the "dangers" in my neighborhood, which are usually either dogs that have gotten loose or dogs that can't be controlled by their owners. At the time, I was jogging so early, about 4:30 am, that I would beat even the dogs. Once or twice a year, a shadow would pass a few blocks away, a shadow that was a coyote or fox who was more afraid of me than I needed to be of them. I carry a small, heavy piece of metal just in case I have to fight back against a dog.

Occasionally there are other joggers out, so when I saw a man running towards me, I thought nothing of it. When he was about twenty feet away, he stopped, reached into his waistband behind his back and pulled out what looked like a gun. I immediately stopped running, put my hands to my side slightly raised (like you might do for a stickup), palms facing towards the guy with the gun. Amazingly, I didn't feel afraid at that moment.

"What's going on," I asked.

"Someone stole my truck tires, and when I saw you running, I thought you were the one who stole them," he replied.

You could almost see the adrenaline coursing through his body. He was tense, had the gun pointed slightly away from me, and was breathing hard.

"You can see I don't have any tires. I live in this neighborhood too," I replied. He began to calm down a little, brought the gun down to his side. He actually apologized. I lectured him about



pulling a gun on someone and asked him if he had called the police. He hadn't. He continued to apologize profusely. He went on his way.

I was about two blocks from home and walked back on wobbly legs. The significance of this event was starting to hit me. I then became angry, thinking of what could have happened in this situation. What if he had pulled the trigger? What if I had a gun and decided to shoot him to defend myself?

When I arrived at my house, I called the police. They questioned me and told me they would go look for the man so they could also warn him.

We don't know how much time we have on this earth. Even in my safe neighborhood, something like this can happen. Needless to say, I quit jogging so early in the morning, until I went to an event called Life-Plan, where I realized that God knows everything, including when I am going to die. I had gained weight because of the lack of exercise, went back to jogging in the mornings, but ultimately cleared out some other things in my life so I could exercise in the early evening.

## SHE COULD HAVE BEEN COVERED IN MUD AFTER HER BEATLES SOLO

It was football game night and nearing halftime. The marching band – of course – is the main attraction of the evening. We always appreciate the pre and post show field demonstrations that the football team and cheer squad do for us.

It had been a wet week. As the band got ready to perform, one of our cords was shorted out. For those who don't know how this works, the band has a limited time to set-up, perform their show, and then leave the field. If something isn't working, you have to improvise.

Vickie – our guitar soloist – usually performed her solo in the middle of the field, from the hash mark closest to the home stands, but because of the short in the chord, she had to run up to the sidelines for her solo.

The moment came for Vickie's guitar solo. She started running from the hash mark to the sidelines. On the way, she hit a muddy patch of ground.

All of a sudden, everything  
moovvved  
innnnnnnnnnn  
slooooooooooooooooooooooooooooow  
moooooooooooooooooootionnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn

as Vickie comically was sliding all over the mud, just like you might see in a movie slow motion. I was expecting her to take a face plant in the mud with her guitar.

She recovered, performed her solo and returned to the spot in the center of the field. It was the most comical moment I have had as a marching band director.

## WHAT KIND OF LEADER ARE YOU

We were right in the midst of marching band season, when directors everywhere have a full time job on top of a full time job, so yes, we can get grouchy sometimes.

My student band leaders asked to speak to me privately. They then told me I was pushing too hard, I was being grouchy and that many of the band members were getting discouraged and wanted to quit! That made me mad! I briefly started a self-pity party in my own head...

“Don’t they know how much I’m doing for them?”

“What do they mean pushing too hard? They’re just being lazy.”

My leaders took a bit of a tongue lashing from me, and gave me a little back.

I NEEDED IT!

I had lost sight of the main goal...PEOPLE.

**People are always more important than the task.**

**People are always more important than winning.**

Although it may not always seem like it, teens are people too, and I was grouchy and pushing too hard.

Once I calmed down, I realized my leaders were right. And although this happened in September 2014, I still thank these student leaders for being brave enough to confront me. I am thankful that I had developed a culture where they could do this.

The worst thing you can do as a leader is create a culture where your followers fear you! You will fall down into a pit.

## THE OLD MAN AND THE C

It was May of 2000, and I was performing with the Rough Riders Dixieland Band at the Sacramento Jazz Jubilee, a great long-running jazz festival. A 94 year old man was introduced. He had been performing at the festival every year since it had started.

After a very long round of applause honoring this man, he took the stage to perform for us. It was very slooow and painful to see him, aided by a person on each flank, wobble up the three steps to the temporary stage. He took a seat on a stool and someone handed him his clarinet. How could this feeble old man possibly play anything worthy of this great jazz festival?

The drummer and bass player kicked into an upbeat trad jazz song and the old man entered on his clarinet. His fingers soared over the keys, improvising and making music with the bass player and drummer. Wow! No wonder he had received such a warm welcome. This guy was great!

The second song was even better. There was no stopping this guy! He rose to his feet to a warm round of applause. I half expected him to leap off the stage healed of his infirmity after his display of energy through his clarinet.

Alas, someone reached for his clarinet and his two aides helped him off the stage, one on each flank as before. They almost had to carry him off.

Music is such a wonderful gift. The college football star probably put away his cleats in his 40s. The pro tennis player retired his sneakers for good in his early 70s, but this musician...he is able to play until the day he takes his final breath and plays a high C.

## **THAT'S MY ORCHESTRA TEACHER!**

Some teachers prefer to remain anonymous. They don't like to go to the grocery store and see their students, or maybe they just don't like their students to see them in normal life, hair messed up, clothes dirty from jogging, buying a plunger at the hardware store to unclog a toilet.

I don't mind seeing my students. It makes my day.

One day I went into a gas station in the town I teach in. Chelsea was behind the counter, but I almost didn't recognize her. Teens change a lot in five years.

"Hi Mr. Divine," Chelsea said.

"Hi Chelsea. How are you?" I replied.

Chelsea proceeded to tell everyone in the store – coworkers, customers, even her boss – that here was Mr. Divine, her orchestra teacher from high school. I only had her for one year!

You may never know the effect you have on a person. Love them, share life with them, and pray for them. For every Chelsea telling the world about you, there are at least ten who you may never know about.

## LEAD OR GET OUT OF THE WAY

I once got in trouble in Japan for doing what I thought was the right thing. It sometimes seems that is the story of my life.

Thursdays on the Army post in Japan were sacred, reserved for training. Everybody in every office trained from 7:00 am to noon.

I was stuck there in Japan hoping for my wife to arrive soon. There was just one small problem. Base housing was not available yet.

One day we had a little free time, but it was a Thursday morning. The base housing office was just a mile from the band room, so I asked my squad leader for permission to go check on my housing status. Since we weren't training, he said it would be no problem.

While I was gone, he was chewed out for letting me go to the housing office during training time. When I returned, he was waiting for me, along with my section leader and platoon leader. Three of my leaders ready to take my head off. I was just a lowly Specialist. These guys were Staff Sergeants and a Sergeant First Class.

"Specialist Divine, do you know Thursdays are sacred training days?"

"Yes, why?" I responded.

"Then why did you go to the housing office?"

"We were done with our training. I asked SSG H (my squad leader) if I could go. He said it was fine."



“Well it’s sacred training day. You shouldn’t have gone.”

“That’s why I asked.”

Shouldn’t SSG H have been the one to get in trouble? Wasn’t asking the right thing to do? Isn’t it fine to accomplish something – even when the time is reserved for something else – if that time is not being used for what it is reserved for?

There were many cases of frustration like this when I was in the Army. A leader who makes a decision, even a small one like letting someone go who has asked, should stand behind his decision and stand behind the soldier.

There’s no room for wimpy leaders.

Lead or get out of the way!

## **GOD MUST HAVE LIKED OUR HALFTIME SHOW**

It was one of those chilly September football nights. The sky had been grey all day, dark grey, threatening rain grey, and the temperature hovered in the 40s. A light mist hung in the air.

The band was excited about our halftime show with a Batman theme. We didn't get many chances to perform during those early days, so we relished every opportunity.

"Please God, don't let it rain" was the prayer on my lips and that of several band members.

The clouds got angrier as halftime approached. Lightning could be seen in the distance. Finally, the last two minutes on the clock before halftime, the two minutes that seem like hours, ticked to zero and it was our turn. \*

The band marched on and began our performance. As we were playing the last chorus, the heavens exploded with lightning and cold rain. The band finished their performance and marched straight into the rehearsal room, slightly wet but unharmed.

The game was called off and we all went home early that night. If only every halftime show could end like that.

\*We appreciate the football team and cheerleaders performing on field demonstrations before and after our show.

## **WHAT SHOULD WE DO WITH A DRUNKEN SAILOR**

There it was in black and white.

Every month.

The names of those caught DUI on our small base of about 1,000 soldiers were published in the base paper, along with other crimes. DUI was a pretty serious offense. Publication of their names was often followed by dismissal from the Army. The Colonel enforced a zero tolerance policy on DUI.

One day the name publishing ceased to happen. And the Colonel suddenly decided to retire. The rumor was that he had been caught DUI. The story...he had left an Army dining-in (kind of a big party but everyone wears their uniform). As he approached the sentry to gain entrance to the base, the sentry suspected that he was intoxicated and proceeded to retain him.

“Do you know who I am” the Colonel allegedly proclaimed to the sentry.

Within a week or two, the Colonel left the base. It was stated he had decided to retire to spend more time with his family. There was no public punishment. There was no publishing of his name in the paper.

Many soldiers had lost their careers for making the same mistake the Colonel had. There was no mercy for them. No thought for their family’s needs. I’m not saying that the Colonel should have been stripped of his retirement pay, but shouldn’t he have faced some consequence for his actions? Maybe a reduction in rank, a

retirement sooner than he wanted, and a warning to the soldiers on base that, no matter what rank you are, DUI will not be tolerated.

The Colonel had shown no mercy, yet mercy had been granted to him. Perhaps this is a picture of what God does for us. We don't deserve His mercy, yet he showers it upon us.

Before we judge the Colonel, perhaps we need to look inward too.

When I arrived in Japan in October of 1989, Susan and Christine were not able to come with me right away. A coworker adopted me for Thanksgiving. I drove to his house and hung out with his family.

This coworker was a heavy drinker. He offered me some type of drink before we ate our meal, then we had Thanksgiving dinner. Afterwards he offered me eggnog with some type of liquor in it. I figured two drinks, with a large meal between, there was no way I was intoxicated. I had never been in my life.

I left for my barracks. On the drive back, I felt a little funny, like the road just wasn't right. I chalked it up to being tired. However, when I arrived at my barracks and thought about it more, I realized that by Japanese standards – a strict 0.05% - I was probably intoxicated. My friend, the heavy drinker, probably made the drinks twice as strong as normal, so I probably had the equivalent of 4 or more drinks, not two.

If I had been stopped on my way home, I may have been listed in that newspaper.

I may have been dismissed from the Army.

I may have ruined my life, and who knows where it could have gone from there. Is it hard for someone with a DUI conviction to become a teacher?

Thank God for mercy. Thank God for grace. No, Colonel, I don't judge you. May God have grace on you and me.

## A BAND DIRECTOR WITH A COOL NICKNAME

My name is James, but when I was growing up, everyone called me Jimmy. To my closest family, I am still Jimmy, or Uncle Jimmy to my niece and nephews.

As a small child, I even thought my sister was named Jimmy, but it didn't come out right. Instead I said "Mimmy." She has been Mimmy ever since.

But the coolest nickname I have ever had was "Scary Larry." And here's the story of how I got that nickname...

In orchestra class, I kept getting Ashley and Stephanie mixed up, usually calling Ashley by the wrong name. Of course she protested.

"What if I called you by the wrong name? What if I called you Larry," she exclaimed.

"That would be scary," I replied.

Sam, another orchestra student, picked up on this and started calling me "Scary Larry." I of course had to one-up her and started calling her "Hammy Sammy." Because we both had such great respect for each other, we started writing on the whiteboard, in a way that hopefully couldn't be found easily, that one or the other of us was greater. It looked like this...

SL > HS she would write (Scary Larry is greater than Hammy Sammy)

I would then reverse it to SL < HS.

Thus began a several year-war.

I think I am winning.

HS > SL

Maybe we are both winners. We have cool nicknames and now Hammy Sammy is one of my marching band percussion coaches.

## I THOUGHT I WAS GOING TO JAIL

The summers of 2010-2012 I was driving every week to Weatherford, Oklahoma to work on a master's degree in music education. The trip took me through the Texas panhandle.

The panhandle gets its name because there's a thin stretch of land in the northwest corner that – when combined with the rest of Texas looks like the handle to a big ol' fryin' pan, you know the kind I'm talking about. They weigh about 57 pounds and are made out of cast iron. When not used for cooking, they have alternate uses as doorstops and behavior modification for wayward husbands.

The panhandle is also flat. It's so flat that you can see anthills in the distance rising out of the landscape. The road is so straight that I once set the cruise control, lashed the steering wheel into place and climbed into the backseat for a nap.

The thing about the panhandle is it seems that nobody lives there. Oh, you see the occasional cow, the occasional road kill, and vultures. Vultures everywhere, sometimes tearing into road kill that seems like it hasn't even cooled down yet. You hope and pray that you don't get a flat tire because you'll be changing the tire with one hand while fending off vultures with the other.

Did I mention that it is also hot! With air conditioning on, it sometimes felt like the interior of the car only cooled to 85 degrees or so.

I was driving along the panhandle on my way to Oklahoma when I passed a state trooper on the side of the road. Now, it was sometimes tempting to speed along this stretch, especially since I



was making this drive every week, but as I mentioned, you could see for miles in any direction and I knew I wasn't speeding at that moment.

The state trooper pulled in behind me. There was no traffic in either direction! We were the only two cars on this four lane divided highway and he was tailgating me. I carefully checked to make sure I was on target for speed. I even racked my brain to try and remember if I had been speeding.

The trooper on my tail continued for 3-4 minutes.

Finally, much to my relief, he pulled out from behind me, scurried over to the left lane, and passed me very quickly. Relief! He was really beginning to make me nervous.

My relief was short-lived. He immediately pulled in front of me and slowed down rather abruptly, causing me to tailgate him. I hate being too close to a car. Why did he pull in front of me like that? I was still worried about my speed and checked to make sure that remained steady. I did not have cruise control in this vehicle. It was easy to end up with a lead foot, especially when I was tired.

After another minute passed, I was tired of tailgating the trooper, so I pulled over into the left lane, still being cautious about my speed. The trooper remained in the right lane, about two car lengths ahead of me. We continued on like this for 3-4 minutes. I was nervous the entire time. It just seemed odd to me that this trooper would remain so close when we were on this big expanse of highway.

Finally, the trooper slowed way down, but wait! He pulled in

behind me in the left lane and turned on his blue flashing lights.

Great, not only am I being pulled over by a state trooper, but now I'm going to have to rescue him from the vultures too!

The state trooper sat in his car for a looong time behind me, a very long time, a very, very, very long time. My nervousness was reaching a peak and my air conditioning was working overtime trying to keep my car cool. Was the sweat dripping down my face from nervousness or heat, or maybe a combination of both?

The trooper exited his vehicle and approached mine with both hands on his hips, with more swagger than a policeman in a Clint Eastwood movie. There were no witnesses out here in the panhandle. Was I going to be beaten? Were drugs going to be planted in my car? I thought for sure I was going to jail.

It seemed like everything was moving in slow motion. Maybe it was just the heat waves shimmering on the blacktop. The officer approached my car. The swagger had left his hips and risen to his voice.

"Ya know what I pulled you over for partner," he drawled.

"No sir, I have no idea," I answered.

"Ya was drivin' in my blind spot back there. If I hadda needed to pull over to the lef' lane, I mighta hit ya."

"I'm sorry sir, I didn't realize that," I answered.

Here's what I really wanted to say...

“You idiot. You were tailgating me, and then you pulled in front of me causing me to tailgate you. I moved to the left so I wouldn’t be tailgating anymore. Why were you doing that when we have all this highway open?”

Fortunately I held my tongue and didn’t say anything. Remember, this was the panhandle and there were no witnesses. It was not my day to become vulture food. I can see the newspaper report now...

*Colorado man found eaten by vultures on the side of the road in the Texas panhandle. The foreigner had no idea when he stopped to pee that he should have had a shotgun in one hand while taking care of business here in the panhandle. Outsiders beware! We don’t tolerate disrespect for the law in these parts.*

The officer returned my paperwork and instructed me to have a good day.

Have a good day?

Have a good day?

For the rest of the summer, I drove about 5 miles under the limit through that entire section of my commute to college.

Maybe I’m being too rough on this trooper. With the exception of the occasional road kill and once every decade when a truck filled with cocaine was discovered, there wasn’t much happening in his part of the world. I drove this section of road twice a week for three summers, for a total of about 24 times. He drove it EVERY DAY!

He could have just stopped me, told me he was lonely and then we could have driven to the next small town and chatted over bad coffee and tasty tacos at the local diner. He could have shared about his dream to become a Texas Ranger and how he ended up in the Texas panhandle. I would have listened. I love Texas Rangers, especially Walker, Texas Ranger.

## **WHEN SOMEONE REQUESTS AN ENCORE, MAKE SURE THEY REALLY MEAN IT**

I loved being in the Army band. It's where I got my training for what has been my life-long career, teaching and playing music.

But there were times, especially in the 80s and 90s, when an "It's good enough for government work" attitude prevailed, and I hated that.

This attitude prevailed for a time with our jazz band in Japan. We were invited to perform at a jazz festival. In fact, we were given the honored headliner position and were last on the program for this particular night.

I am going to put this in as gentle a way and using kind, easy on the psyche words...WE SUCKED.

We were unprepared, didn't play what we were capable of, and didn't do well. It was one of only a few times I was embarrassed to be part of the Army band. It wasn't due to lack of ability, just lack of preparation.

To make matters worse, we all knew we sucked, but our leader seemed to be blind to it. We received a standing ovation, but it wasn't one of those due to an audience being moved, but a very polite one that was due to the Japanese culture, which is always very polite. Perhaps it was even a standing ovation of gratefulness that our performance was over.

We did have an encore "prepared", but the band members were practically begging our leader to please NOT do it. He did anyway, so we trudged through another non-spectacular music selection.

People are at different levels and different abilities, but I strongly believe that you must perform whatever you do to the best of your ability. Our performance was painful!

Remember the Boy Scout motto...Be Prepared.

## THE BEST GRANDMA EVER

My grandparents died young. I never got to know them. I was jealous of all my friends who still had grandparents around.

We were at a Chinese restaurant with the Thomas family. The Thomas' had two children who were about the same age as Mimmy and I were. Their names were Rene and Tommy.

Rene and Tommy were enjoying their Chinese meal AND enjoying their doting grandmother. She seemed really nice and – even though I was only about nine years old, I mentioned to her how sad I was that I did not have a grandma. I couldn't believe what she said then. She told me she would adopt me as her grandson and Mimmy as her granddaughter. She already had a ton of grandkids!

From that day forward she treated us just like her own grandkids. We went to see her regularly. She was a writer and had written several booklets of poems herself, way before the time when self-publishing became popular. She was a published author and often received small royalty checks of \$50-\$75 for her short stories and poems that appeared in magazines. She created homemade chocolates for Easter that were delicious and works of art.

When I grew up, married and had my first child, we brought Christine to see Grandma. She loved us until the day she died!

Grandma didn't ask for anything in return. She adopted us and treated us like family. We loved her. What she did can't even be measured monetarily, but it made a huge impact on my life.

As a band teacher, I now have the opportunity to be a surrogate

dad to many teens.

Is there someone you can be a surrogate dad, mom, uncle, aunt or grandparent to? Love them unconditionally. Ask God to help you see them how He does. I guarantee it will make a difference.



## TROMBONES SHOULD BE IN BACK

If you've ever watched a parade, you'll almost always see the trombones in the front. Nobody wants to be poked by a trombone slide.

It was the early 90s and I was with the 296<sup>th</sup> Army Band in Japan. Our bus arrived at the parade site. In the Army you are always early, so our operations people told us what time we needed to get our equipment off the truck and get ready for the parade. We were on break.

Our break ended abruptly a minute or two later when the operations sergeant nervously told us we needed to line up NOW. We had gotten the wrong start time. We hurriedly put our instruments together and lined up just as the drum major gave the signal to step off and begin playing.

We rolled into our favorite parade song, the march Bravura, short a trombone player. Pete drove himself to this gig and was not there for the notice about the time change. All of a sudden, we could hear strains of Bravura from a stray trombone in the **back** of the band. It was Pete himself. He had arrived, saw us lining up and quickly joined us. He remained there in the back for the rest of the parade.

## **WHAT DO GENERALS KNOW ABOUT TROMBONES? NOT MUCH.**

Dave Sanek was my favorite bandmaster in the ten years I was in the Army band. He was a bold leader, always willing to stand up for us when we needed time off and to get us proper resources. He also had a great sense of humor. Before he became a bandmaster, he had been a musician with the Washington D.C. band.

Mr. Sanek shared a story with us about his previous band. The band had just performed at a retirement ceremony, the bread and butter gig of Army bands everywhere, when the General of the base came up to offer his congratulations. The General just had one complaint. The band sounded great and looked good, but the trombone players' slides did not match. Mr. Sanek told the General he would take care of it.

From that day forward, all the trombones played the first part. Now all of their slide positions matched. Problem solved.

## **SOMETIMES CHANGE COMES SLOWLY**

In 1990, I had to attend the Army Band mid-level training course affectionately known as BNCOC. There we learned conducting, four part arranging and how to lead a sectional rehearsal.

Like most Army schools, this one required being away from family. But there was one plus for me... My mom and dad lived in the same town the school was located.

Every weekend I attended church with Mom. I met a very talented piano player named David. He and I shared a love for jazz and became instant friends. This was also a treat for the small church. They usually did not have special music. David and I prepared a special song for them each week.

At the beginning, David asked me to tone things down a little. This small church was not quite ready for improvisational jazz. Each week we jazzed up the old hymns a little more. By week 10, when it was almost time for me to return home, we were riffing the congregation with angelic jazz licks and choruses, and they loved it!

Sometimes you have to introduce change slowly. Let people taste it. Change 10% at a time, not the entire routine.

It's all about bringing them to a new way of thinking.

## **WE NEED MORE LEADERS LIKE MO**

I had some terrible leaders in the Army, but I also had some really good ones. I learned from both.

The very best leader I had was SGT Muhamid Muhajid. None of us could pronounce his name, so we all called him SGT Mo.

SGT Mo was my first leader when I joined the Army Reserve in 1985. It is hard to pinpoint what made him the best leader, but I will try.

- SGT Mo was humble. He realized he needed to learn and improve. He set the example at all times and never thought he was above the rules.
- SGT Mo never cursed. The Army has a cussing culture. To me it's annoying, immature and turns me off. SGT Mo didn't use inappropriate language.
- SGT Mo never raised his voice or became angry. In fact, when you did something wrong, he would take you aside for correction, out of view and hearing of other people. He would speak so softly that you had to strain to hear him. It was always with an air of assuming you were trying your best and he was providing some feedback.

I never wanted to disappoint SGT Mo. Even though he would correct me privately and without raising his voice, and even though he NEVER expressed disappointment in me, I hated the fact that I may have disappointed him.

We need mo' leaders like Mo.

## WHERE ARE THE CHICKENS?

Touring in Japan was different. We rode buses everywhere, but before the buses in the states had these amenities, Japanese buses had VCRs and TV. They were almost a necessity as we often sat in traffic for long periods of time.

Camp Zama had a main gate, where buses and trucks entered and exited from, and also a smaller gate that led to the train station. The street leading from the smaller gate was barely big enough for two cars to pass each other, much less a bus. It hailed to the days when the traffic in that part of Japan was mostly on foot.

We left for a gig on a heavy traffic day. The base was small. When exiting the main gate, the road curved around and went by the smaller gate. It took us over an hour to make that curve. If only we had known, we could have arrived an hour later and walked to meet the bus before proceeding to our gig.

Doug Brunelle, a clarinet player in the band, really took to bike riding. One day we had an overnight gig in Tokyo, about 30 miles away from our base at Camp Zama, and Doug decided he would bike there. Doug left about the same time the bus did. The bus took the expressway, which in Japan meant that you might be able to hit a top speed of 20 mph, but still often had stop and go traffic, just not as much as on the regular road.

The bus and Doug arrived in Tokyo almost at the same time!

I hate sitting in traffic and became an avid bike commuter when we moved to Sagami Depot, a housing area about 6-8 miles (but a half hour drive) from where I worked. I loved it. It was often faster than driving and helped me stay in shape.

The main road from Camp Zama, where I worked, to Sagami Depot, where I lived, was nicknamed "Chicken Farm Road" by the Americans. In the late 1980s, this area was already highly developed into 5-8 story apartment buildings. There were no chicken farms in sight. They had all disappeared in the 1970s.

Recently I met an Army soldier who had just returned from Camp Zama, Japan. We were sharing stories and I asked him about the road. Still the same name!

## DEPRESSED AND DIDN'T KNOW IT

I arrived in Japan in October 1989. My lovely wife and toddler daughter were not able to come with me right away, and we had no firm date of when they could come. This was before email, texting, the world-wide-web, Skype, and even the pony express.

I stayed busy with work, took on a part time job as a cashier, and spent part of each weekend taking short train rides to the surrounding neighborhoods and exploring. It kept my mind off how much I missed my family. I could often be found in the library reading. We could only afford one ten-minute call a month.

December arrived. Oh how I wished I could be home with my family. We still had no set date of when they could come. It was all based on when housing would become available, and there was a housing shortage at that time.

Christmas Day came, but I had nothing to look forward to. All the other barracks rats had flown home for Christmas, so the barracks was empty. We had four days off of work, so that couldn't keep me occupied. Even the exchange, where I was working part time, was closed. I wandered around the base looking for something that was open. I even wandered around off base. Everything was closed. Everything!

To top it off, it was pouring down rain, a cold, freeze you to the bone kind of rain. I had no TV, no friends, and nothing to do. I was walking around in the rain crying, mad at God, mad at the world, mad at the Army for doing this to me. I know now that I was depressed. That depression turned into bitterness, so that when my wife and baby finally did arrive, I took it out on them with hurtful comments and a bitter view of the world.

I felt like I just wanted my life to end!

But how did I get to this point? Why didn't I take control of the situation? I had people I could have called. I was part of two churches. What if I had asked someone in my circle – either at church or at work – the following?

“Hey, I’m feeling really lonely being away from my family during this time. Can I hang out with your family on Christmas?”

More than likely I would have found someone. My day would have been better and their day too. Who knows, maybe I would have made some life-time friends.

When you are depressed, reach out to those around you. Don't do like I did and wallow around in the rain feeling sorry for yourself.



## THE UGLY DUCKLING TURNED INTO A SWAN

It was the start of the 1998 fourth grade band season, and students filed into the band room to get their first instrument lesson. Exciting times full of joy, wonder, and pain to the ears of beginning band teachers everywhere, but we do it because we know the delightful sounds that will come forth later!

Carolyn - a sweet precious 4th grader - really struggled on the clarinet, but she worked hard and came for help as often as she could. If I had chair placement in beginning band, she would have been last chair. Alas, in some ways she was the ugly duckling of the band (more on that later).

Carolyn worked tremendously hard and practiced almost every day! By the middle of 5th grade band a year and a half later, she was THE TOP band student of the 30 kids in the class. She noticed and the other kids noticed too! In fact, she was the one who referred to herself as the "former ugly duckling" of the band.

The ugly duckling had become a beautiful swan, a musician even at the age of 11. She performed at solo festival and did so with great tone, technique and musicality. She continued to play the clarinet and made it into honor bands throughout her school career.

Carolyn kept in touch with me until she graduated from high school, despite moving at the end of 5th grade.

Do you think music had an effect on her life, on her self-esteem, on her future? You know it did!

## **YOU COULD NEVER DISAPPOINT ME**

After I discussed our first playing test of all 12 scales in one of my high school classes, a student of mine came to speak to me a few days later...

"Mr. Divine...I've been working hard on the 12 scales and wanted to let you know that it's possible I might not pass them on this first try." (I allow multiple retakes). "I didn't want you to be disappointed in me."

I felt like my heart was about to break. Here's an outstanding student doing her best and her worry was that she would disappoint me.

I said, "Honey, you not passing your scales would NEVER disappoint me. I only have grades and give playing tests because I want everyone to improve and I know you are going to improve."

She left class with a smile, came back the next week and aced her 12 scales.

I share this story because - as teachers - our words have tremendous impact! I know we can get caught up in the 5-10% of students who give us a hard time, but most are hard working and want to please.

What message are your words sending to your students?

## I WASN'T ALWAYS THIS WAY

I wasn't always this way!

People look at me – 50, getting better looking each year, married to my high school sweetheart, parent of four, grandparent of 3, successful band teacher, author, speaker, musician – and they think “Wow, James is so confident and sure of himself. Life has been good to him. I wish my life was like that.”

I wasn't always this way!

I struggled, really struggled with self-esteem for many years. I know it was related to having an abusive father, being molested and all the damage that did to my psyche. I ALWAYS felt like I had to be dating someone, and my self-esteem plummeted when a girl would break up with me. I would beg her to come back, to give me another chance, to tell me where I failed. By the way, this is the worst thing to do. I should have said, “OK...I was thinking the same thing.”

My friend Amy – after hearing about the umpteenth time of a girl breaking up with me and how sad and lonely I was – she was one of those people who got to the point quickly – confronted me about why I felt like I needed to be dating someone all the time. I don't think she even realized the impact of her words. It caused me to think. It caused me to change my behavior. I decided to stop being worried about finding the right person. Maybe I needed to focus on me, on becoming a better person! Becoming more Christ-like.

The interesting thing is that when I did that, that's when I found my soul mate, my life-long lover, my best friend. I started dating Susan soon after that talk with Amy. I knew in about a week that Susan was probably the one. (By the way guys, after a week is not the time to mention this, even if you know deep in your soul).

Even after I started my adult life, got married, joined the Army band and was a successful husband, dad and musician, my self-esteem was still rock bottom.

I wasn't always this way!

I am the typical people-pleaser. At first glance, a people-pleaser seems to be a really nice person. Everyone can count on them. Need cookies baked, call a people-pleaser. Need someone on a committee, call a people-pleaser. People-pleasers can't say no.

Ultimately for me, this desire to please grew out of a fear of rejection, which had its roots in not being close to my father due to his abuse of my mom. I felt that those close to me might reject me if I didn't do everything they wanted.

Although I started killing off the roots of what caused me to be a people-pleaser, I didn't totally sever the roots until I went to LifePlan in 2015. LifePlan is basically two intense days of physical, emotional and spiritual counseling. In the course of the two days, you uncover your roots – patterns and behaviors that have contributed to how you act or react to things – and sever a lot of those roots (the bad roots). I learned to leave those people-pleasing tendencies behind.

I wasn't always this way!

So when you see me – successful, self-assured, confident, willing to disagree, making sure I have my priorities straight – I want you to realize it wasn't always like this. It is a journey, a process, sometimes hard work that takes you from one point to another. You may have the same doubts, struggles and lack of self-esteem.

I overcame and...

Now I am this way (but I wasn't always this way).

And I like that I'm this way...the only one I truly have to please is God.

And He's pleased with me because He is making me into His image.

By taking care of me first, it has given me more time.

By focusing on my mission and calling, it has made me a better person.

And believe it or not, I love others more than I ever have.

So don't look at me and say, "I wish".

But look at me and say, "If he could do it, with God's help I can too."

I love you.

I'm proud of you.

You make my life rich.

\* James is first and foremost a son of the King. He loves that he gets to teach band and orchestra at Falcon High School. He is also a musician, speaker and author of "Forgive: One man's story of being molested." Find out more at [www.jamesdivine.net](http://www.jamesdivine.net). Find out more about LifePlan at [www.chrislocurto.com](http://www.chrislocurto.com)

## **FROM WELFARE TO WOW...HOW BAND SAVED MY LIFE**

Life was tough for me in the early 1970s. I believe joining band saved my life!

My father abused my mom during a time when it seemed everyone looked the other way. We left him and were on welfare for several years. Life on welfare can be "interesting." I went to see a free doctor once. All of us kids were in a large room sitting on bleachers waiting our turn. The bleachers faced the opening to a hallway.

When it was my turn to see the doctor, I first went into one room down the right in a hallway where I had to take off everything except my underwear. Then I had to pass the opening - where everyone in the bleachers could see me and would laugh - on my way to the room where the doctor would perform the examination. Whether this was some cruel joke or set up by someone who just didn't have a clue is something I'll never know.

With no father figure in my life, I was drawn to men who could fulfill that role. One man I adored was a friend of the family. His wife was best friends with my mom. He would often watch me and my sister and his three kids when my mom and his wife went shopping. I loved George. He paid attention to me. He spent time with me. He filled that role of father in my life.

One day George did something to me that no adult should do to any child. He molested me. The pain and anguish go beyond the physical. My spirit was damaged. My soul was crushed. Why would he do this to me? I knew it was wrong. Probably the worst part was the shame I felt.

Because of this abuse and the other events in my life, I had very low self-esteem and have struggled with it for most of my life. I

finally overcame it almost completely a few years ago at the age of 45!

The bright spot in my life was band class. I found out early - from the most wonderful general music teacher whose name I don't remember - that I had aptitude in music. She used to teach us theory and give us tests on AB form and other listening exercises (using a record player at the time). I always scored high on these tests.

When I joined band, I excelled and quickly rose to first chair. I wasn't good at sports, but I was good at music and came to really love it. In tenth grade I made 1st chair in all-region band (and in 11th and 12th too). That's when I first started thinking this could be a career for me. My high school counselor told me I was wasting my time with music (be careful counselors), but I went against her advice and pursued my dream. I auditioned for and made it into the Army band at the age of 18.

It was a good run. I had the chance to serve in Virginia, Japan and Colorado, but decided to give it a try on my own. I left the Army band in 1996 and spent three years as a self-employed musician. I got into teaching part-time and found that was my calling, eventually moving from performing full-time to teaching full-time (and still performing).

Music saved my life! Along with my faith in God and God's help with forgiving my father and George, music gave me self-esteem. It kept me from drugs. It has been my career for three decades.

What YOU do makes a difference in kids' lives. Who knows how many others like me you will touch on a daily basis. You don't know what is going on in the lives of those you encounter each day.

## IS ALMOST BEING FIRED A BAD THING

I love my current school and job. My principal is the best I've had in 19 years (and she is my 10th). Two others were pretty good, and seven were evil (ok, only one was evil, the other six did not have the courage to stand up for what is right).

But there were two times I was almost fired! Is that bad?

It wasn't for doing anything immoral or illegal. In fact, one time was for doing the right thing! Here are those two times and what I learned from them...

### Informing a parent of sexual activity

It doesn't really matter where you stand on the current issues in debate about sexuality in the national news. I think we can all agree that sex in the teen years is too early (see [Dr. Meg Meeker's book](#) on teen sex).

We were taking a trip and a female student came to me and said, "Mr. Divine, I don't feel comfortable with two girls who are dating sharing a room on the trip."

I called both sets of parents and explained the situation to them (just like I would want to have done). I didn't moralize or pass judgment...I simply told the parents the facts.

One mom was glad that I had called. Mom #2 told me that it was none of my business. She filed an ACLU complaint, which ended up in the office of the district lawyer.

Panic set in amongst the "leaders". I was persona non grata and was asked to sign a counseling statement that would go into my personnel file. I refused! The statement was an admission that "this was none of your business and you should have left it alone"



(my summary of the statement).

I was troubled the entire weekend and spent several hours poring over district policies and procedures and found that I was in the right. In the policies, it was very clear that teachers are responsible for much more than just the content in their classes. They are also responsible for the students' physical, moral and emotional health.

I crafted a 2-3-page email and sent it to all the powers that be. I felt justified in my actions, especially since as a parent, I would want the same phone call. The leaders made a retreat. After telling me that it was none of my business and that I should have left it alone, I was now told that my mistake was in mentioning girl #1's name to mom #2.

Wow!

Wow! That was my reaction.

That wasn't the reason for the reprimand or the ACLU complaint.

My lesson learned is that doing the right thing takes courage and may result in backlash; however, you can find policies that support your decision. Write out a rebuttal but leave the emotion out. It's ok to refuse to sign a statement, or to ask for more time before signing. And if you're fired, perhaps you may have your own ACLU complaint (that would have been interesting).

Taking things into my own hands when we had a failure in policy

There was a time at my school when our financial system was not working. If you needed to pay a vendor, it could take months to get a check to them. It had been like this for several years, and I did the WRONG thing by taking things into my own hands.

I had a bunch of cash from a fundraiser - and it was right before spring break - so I knew that between spring break and the length of time it would take to get the check cut that my payment to the vendor would be late.

I deposited the cash into my personal account and sent a check right away to the vendor. Somebody in accounting found out and a meeting was set for AFTER spring break (which was two weeks long). Here's what I was told. And by the way, leaders, this is not the way to tell someone they might be fired...

Supervisor: "Mr. Divine, we have a meeting set for after spring break to discuss what you did with the money. Since we are going on spring break, I wanted to tell you before."

Me: "Does this mean I should be looking for a job during spring break?"

Supervisor: "Mr. Divine, we have a meeting set for after spring break to discuss what you did with the money. Since we are going on spring break, I wanted to tell you before."

I don't like reading between the lines, but this repeat of the statement left me no choice! I was worried for most of spring break, then decided that I would quit worrying and just go into the meeting telling the truth and look for a new job later if I needed to.

I had the meeting with the accounting people. They knew about some of the problems we were facing, but didn't condone my way of handling it. They asked me for several items of paperwork, including copies of my bank statements, and initiated an investigation. After a week or two, they determined that there was no theft involved and asked me to sign a statement of reprimand stating I knew that was the wrong procedure to take and that I would not do that again. I signed the statement.

I learned more lessons in this instance when I DID do something wrong. Here are the lessons I learned (and that I hope you will learn too)...

- Don't take matters into your own hands. I made the mistake of letting my frustration build over several years.
- Do take things up the chain of command if you are not getting satisfaction at the lower level. Since we had money seem to disappear or go into a wrong account (not due to theft, simply mismanagement), what if I took my frustrations up a level, and then up another, and up one more? It may have changed our system sooner.
- If you are being investigated for something you DID do wrong, be totally transparent and honest.

Have there been times you were almost fired? That's not always bad, especially when you are being courageous and standing up for what's right, but try to eliminate the situations when it's from your own stupidity like my second example.

## **THE TOP 8 MISTAKES PRESENTERS AND TRAINERS MAKE**

The worst training I attended as a teacher was one organized for the whole district, over 700 educators. The school district was bringing in an expert on a certain topic at a cost of \$5,000. The presenter proceeded to READ HER SLIDES to us. You could hear an audible groan at about the third slide. Several teachers got up and left. The rest of us stayed and were tortured almost to death.

I have been that presenter before (minus the \$5,000 fee). Like you, I want to get better and learn how to present an interesting, informative and entertaining session. Here are the top eight mistakes I have seen made (sometimes myself) in nearly three decades of attending presentations.

### **1. Too Much Information**

You simply cannot present everything you know about the subject in a 20-minute presentation, a three-hour workshop, or even a three-day conference. You do have to tailor it to your time limit. In a 20-minute presentation, perhaps you cover one point. Go deep rather than wide.

### **2. Too Many Words on a PowerPoint**

Most people won't even be able to read the words if you place a whole paragraph onto the PowerPoint. The advice I have found to be the most helpful is the 5x5 rule, no more than five words across and 5 rows down. If there is something important that you want attendees to take with them, provide it in the form of a packet to take home.

Can you find an image that gets the same message across?

### **3. Reading Your Presentation**

The example I gave above is extreme where the presenter read aloud her PowerPoint slides to us. However, it is just as bad to memorize your presentation and just recite it to your audience. It feels cold and heartless.

On the other hand, you must be prepared (see point 6).

### **4. Overusing PowerPoint**

PowerPoint should enhance, not BE your presentation. If the technology should fail, your audience shouldn't even notice...you simply move into plan B. Even slide transitions - when overdone - will detract rather than enhance.

Be prepared in this area too. I have seen trainers show up a minute or two before their presentation, plug their computer into the projector and then become angry and flustered with the tech people when it's not working right away. Come early and be prepared for technology to fail.

### **5. Not using a microphone**

Teachers especially are guilty of this one! Just because you are used to speaking to a large classroom, that doesn't mean you won't need a mic. It will save your voice AND ensure that those in the back of the room can hear you too.

### **6. Winging it**

Practice...practice...then practice some more. Even if it is a subject you are familiar with, you need to practice your presentation several times. Sometimes what we have written on paper doesn't come across our tongues the right way. We find ourselves with a speed impeachment.

I always thought great speakers were just naturally that way. I started practicing my presentations just like I have always practiced my music. The result has been **greater impact** on my audience.

### **7. Being Chained To the Podium**

This is normal, but not acceptable. It usually stems from not feeling confident. Move away from the podium. As [Tom Jackson](#) teaches to performers, divide the audience into five zones that you speak to equally. In some locations, you might even move into the audience at times.

If you watch a live TV production, you'll notice that there are usually 3-5 cameras. The image you see changes as the camera view shifts. You want to create that same effect.

### **8. Speaking For Too Long**

If you are going to err, lean toward being too short rather than too long. The error in this often occurs toward the end of your presentation. Give a clear call to action. Don't belabor the point.

## COACHING AND TRAINING

We've already talked about the importance of furthering one's training. Sometimes this is through formal education. Sometimes it is through conferences.

### Conferences

Every year I attend the [Colorado Music Educators' Conference](#). I write down about 100 new ideas and then pick three I'm going to incorporate. Most conferences are like that, where you really have to narrow down the ideas you have picked up or you will feel overwhelmed. I also attend the [Colorado Bandmaster's Association](#) Summer Conference. Your state probably has similar conferences. I've attended the Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic twice.

For performers who are already excellent at their craft and want to take their live performance to the next level, I recommend [Tom Jackson](#). Start with some of his books and videos before considering hiring him. He is expensive, and you can learn a lot from his books about how to make your live performance better.

If your performing includes speaking like it does for me, I recommend you look into [Kent Julian's Speak It Forward Boot camp](#).

### Coaching

Three or four times in my life, I have hired a coach. The first time was back in 1997 when I started as a self-employed musician. That was also about the time I went from about 20 events a year to 125+. I learned a lot! My brand – or image – improved a lot. Your

brand is just as important as how you sound musically.

What does a coach do? A coach gives you advice, kicks you in the butt to get you moving, suggests ideas and most of all is truthful and honest about what you are currently doing. Friends and family can often give great advice and encouragement, but they may not always tell you the hard things you need to hear.

If you would like to hire a coach contact me. I have a limited number of spots available. If you are interested, please contact me at [www.jamesdivine.net](http://www.jamesdivine.net).



### About the author:

James has been in the music field since 1986, performing and teaching, composing, recording, speaking and writing. In his current position at Falcon High School, he teaches band, orchestra and guitar. Although teaching is his first love, James still finds time to perform and speak at churches, schools and businesses.

#### James' Education:

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- St. Joseph's College of Maine; B.S. Business Administration
  - The Army School of Music; all kinds of music performance and theory
  - Western State Colorado University; teaching license
  - Southwestern Oklahoma State University; Master's in Music Education
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James and his wife have four beautiful children, two of whom are married. He married his high school sweetheart. She is a dental hygienist and occasionally strums a few things on guitar. They have two granddaughters.

James is a member of the Colorado Music Educator's Association, the Colorado Bandmaster's Association, The Pikes Peak Jazz and Swing Society, the American String Teacher's Association, the SPCP (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Percussionists) (this one isn't real). ☺. He is also a member of the Colorado Italian Musicmaster's Association (you have to be a musician and 50% Italian to be inducted). James' life-long goal continues to be to act his shoe size, not his age (9 ½ for the record). Find out more about James at [www.jamesdivine.net](http://www.jamesdivine.net).

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[www.jamesdivine.net](http://www.jamesdivine.net)

**Contact James to have him speak to your group!**

**Other books by James Divine**

***Forgive: One man's story of being molested...and God's redemption***

***40 Ways To Make Money As A Musician***

**For pricing for multiple copies, please contact James.**