



Fearless Philosophies: “Make the Decision Easy for Them!”

by Jeff Nelsen

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I enjoy hearing good music being performed well. Whether I am in the audience listening or on stage performing, I have my best experiences when I lose track of time, place, and purpose, and my intellect disappears for a while. All that exists is my fellow musicians and audience members, me, and the music. This magical place exists when our thinking stops. Blaise Pascal said, “All reasoning ends in surrender to feeling.” This beautifully explains why there is such an important place for music in society. We want to ‘surrender to feeling.’ Music provides a potential escape away from our thought-filled days into a place of thoughtless feeling.

‘Feeling’ is the raw emotional state of human nature. There is, however, a subtle link between thinking and feeling. I feel happy because somewhere in my mind I think I am happy. There are books written about emotional intelligence, the study of how we really do think before we feel. We can also train ourselves to think *better* before our feelings are determined. Shakespeare wrote, “There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.” I agree. If I think something is good, somewhere along the line, I’ve made a decision that it is good. If I disliked it in some way, that feeling comes from a decision I’ve made. We are always free to make this decision between good and bad, loved it or “eh, not bad”, must hire or don’t hire. As

performers, it’s our purpose, responsibility, and opportunity to make our listeners easily decide, “This is good!”

Whether I’m in an audience or on an audition panel, there is always a huge mix of likes and dislikes running through my mind. Some sounds can make me say “oohhh!” and then the next note can create an “arrgh”. The time taken for each mini-judgment is a fraction of a second. Yet there are thousands of bits of sensory information being tunneled through thousands of strands of opinions that filter what information gets to our conscious mind. There are also not just “ohhhs” and “ahhhs”, but endless middle ground “hmmms” along the way.

The nuances of the *process* of deciding whether we come to this artist’s next concert, or hire that audition candidate are endless. This process is not simple, but it is easy. The “ahhs” and “ouches” usually become clear quite quickly, and *easily*. This potential for easy decisions by our audiences is what I like to plan to take advantage of in an audition or performance.

To best leverage the listener’s choices in our favor, I use what I call an “Inspiration Sheet”. This sheet has many sayings written on it that...you guessed it...inspire me! Every time I go to cross the magic line between back-stage and

on-stage, I read the sheet. After my ten-second walk to the music stand, I pull the sheet out and read it again.

I respectfully call this “idiot-proofing”. The fewer things one has to remember, the more mental energy we can put toward connecting with our audience by making wonderful music. We want to have everything taken care of so we can just walk out there, and think about how we’re spinning this incredible melody. Everything else is either a habit that happens automatically, or written on the music. The audience has been idiot-proofed as well, because their choice has been made easy -- to like what they hear and see.

We spend hours a day taking care of all the things that have to do with playing the right rhythms, fingerings, styles, pitches, dynamics, etc. We should also take care of all the inspirational things that help keep our creative juices flowing, and flowing so strongly that they drown out our fears. While I was backstage, I once told a friend, “They want you to play well!” He said he played so much better because of it. He now always uses inspirational sheets.

When I read “make the decision easy for them,” it reminds me that I have an opportunity to move the audience into deciding I am a musician they’ve *enjoyed* hearing. The more beautiful I sound, the more enjoyable their experience, and thus the easier the decision is for them! Especially in today’s auditions, we must aim to make the decision easy for them. The choice of who is hired is no longer determined by comparisons. Being better than everyone else isn’t a guarantee of audition success. You might be the best person at the audition on that day, and they still may not hire anyone.

Why not just be so incredible from your very first note that the panel’s decision of whom they want to hire is idiot-proof? They don’t have to reason or discuss things at all. You were number

seven, and after hearing everyone, their unanimous feeling is, “We would love to hire number seven!” Next time, picture this happening when you read, “Make the decision easy for them!” Then smile, and walk out onto the stage intending to do just that.

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