

The Ten Habits of Highly Inspiring Teachers

Nehama Patkin

INTRODUCTION

During the past two years I have attended the weddings of three former students, and in the past ten years there have been many more weddings of students that I had a lot to do with in their formative years. Now I teach THEIR children!

Many of the students I have taught have gone on to do music courses in tertiary institutions, and in many cases it was the last thing I would have expected them to do. I have been delighted and somewhat surprised, when a student has shown a great interest in becoming a piano teacher, in particular a Suzuki teacher as that is the philosophy I follow and the approach they have been used to. But with no “prodding” or “pushing” from me! Two I can think of were in fact transfer students around the Grade 8 level.

I don’t doubt that many other teachers have had very similar experiences. Does it give you a good feeling to know that you must have had some influence in their decisions?

As for the weddings – well to witness the poise of these brides and one groom was awesome and very beautiful! And it has been very gratifying indeed to have been told that a lot of the self assurance, poise and confidence building began in their early years when they were given many opportunities to perform in a positive, comfortable environment, constantly building up their skills – not just the technical and musical ones, but skills that involve communication, being sensitive to others and of course many more that I will talk about.

TEACHERS are a unique breed of people, whether in the classroom on a daily basis or in the position of communicating one-on-one. And whether we are swimming, tennis or music teachers we have a huge responsibility, as we can play a huge part in molding and shaping the lives of young people.

We are similar to Prime Ministers and Premiers and other leaders in that we must have **VISION**.

And we should know what is happening around us and be “in tune” and “in touch” with what is going on in daily life in order to be effective in our job. We must be able to deal effectively, appropriately and sensitively with people and communicate our ideas and desires with knowledge and understanding. I am as aware as anyone else that there are students who

“get it” and those that look blank which can make you think: “Why am I bothering? Why am I using up so much of my energy for what seems like no response?”

Yes, it can be exasperating. But, who knows? The response we are hoping for might just take a little longer.

Now, I am a real sucker for any books on the SELF HELP shelves in bookshops and many times I will open a book because the title has fascinated me, read one paragraph, and find that it is something I already know and do. This is so reassuring that I buy the book and when I take it home I avidly devour some chapters for more assurance and find, much to my horror that according to this author there are many habits I must change if I am to be a successful human being. Then I don't like reading anymore of this book!

Many people are probably familiar with authors/lecturers such as Deepak Chopra, “guru to the stars,” Wayne Dyer, Anthony Robbins and many more “teachers” of life skills. Stephen Covey is yet another one and on the front of his book, *“The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People”* it says: *“A Wonderful Book That Could Change Your Life,”* a quote from Tom Peters, author of *“In Search of Excellence.”*

So, needless to say, I was compelled to buy it!

It didn't change my life but there are many paragraphs in the book which I read that made me become more aware of many of “life's issues.” The problem is that until new thoughts and ideas **become habits** one must continue to read and re-read words of wisdom and advice.

And now for my own advice for teachers....

The 10 Habits of Highly Inspiring Teachers

1. **Continue to grow and seek knowledge**

⌚ Attend concerts, workshops and conferences and mix with like-minded people

⌚ Read books and be open-minded to different and new ideas

⌚ Attend masterclasses for instruments other than your own

⌚ It is important as music educators to constantly be in touch with the language of music in all its forms as do dentists, doctors, architects etc.

2. **Be a role model in more ways than just musical ones**

- ⌚ By showing respect for the music we are playing, the instrument and people around us.
- ⌚ Having an open mind and in order to achieve excellence we must demonstrate dedication and commitment.
- ⌚ Show poise in performance as important as the dedicated moves of a Taekwondo participant
- ⌚ Encourage independent thinking that there are several ways to approach technique and interpretation.
- ⌚ Attend “live” performances to show that nothing can replace its spontaneity and immediacy.
- ⌚ Make music from the heart

Remember that influences often happen without an immediate awareness.

3. Have an attitude, both mentally and physically

* The word “attitude” is often coupled with *positive* or *negative* and these words can be linked with *winning* and *losing*.

* Think of a *healthy* attitude.

For example, dealing with errors when playing the piano can be approached with a negative attitude, however these are a part of life and successful people can make the best of every situation.

Practising the piano is linked into this particular habit. Our attitude should be that we are practising to PREVENT errors rather than to fix problems!

4. Be tolerant and patient

⌚ Learning to draw that fine line between BEING FIRM and GIVING TIME.

⌚ Instructions need to be given clearly so that every student can understand and some students take longer to process information than others.

⌚ It is necessary to understand the many different learning styles and which ones apply to our own students.

⌚ Parents often have much to answer for concerning this habit.

5. Allow your sense of humour to be a Passport to success

⌚ No matter what the age, LEARNING is a serious business, whether it is learning about: Good manners, New skills or Playing an instrument.

All can be achieved with a sense of humour, especially if the teacher is creative and imaginative, for example, making up stories about the music:
‘Teacher “faints” on piano keys because student (of a young age) played a phrase very beautifully!’

Ask a student to play a Minuet in other ways, for example, like a robot or a clown.

6. Be sensitive to the feelings and the needs of even the youngest child

⌚ Avoid talking to a parent about the child in the hearing of the child.

⌚ Give a shy child time to “thaw out” if necessary, before going to the piano or picking up the instrument for the lesson.

⌚ Avoid humiliating older students in front of younger and more advanced ones, especially if lessons overlap.

⌚ Avoid discussing exam results or competition successes in front of a sensitive child.

Slow learners OR impatient teachers?

We are all aware of children with so-called “behavioral problems,” and it has been proven that usually these children are restless because they have not grasped a crucial concept which in turn halts the learning and understanding.

It is important to see each child in terms of his /her uniqueness and that there are layers and layers of that child’s potential that can be realized at his

/ her own pace. We have all enjoyed watching these human butterflies emerge from their cocoons at one time or another!

7. Make the best of every situation – be creative and imaginative

⌚ Several scenarios can be presented here and they do not all need to be morbid!

⌚ Praise publicly but criticize in private.

⌚ Student arrives at concert in wrong clothing – perhaps some can be borrowed quietly and with no fuss!

⌚ Student arrives at lesson feeling very sad due to death of family pet, so maybe talking and playing suitable music for a memorial service could be discussed and demonstrated.

⌚ This habit is great for teachers also – when being kept on the telephone on HOLD, read a music magazine or catch up on daily papers!

8. Be prepared for suggestions and changes

⌚ Try out ideas you have heard at a recent workshop or masterclass and change the ideas to suit your own situation. After sometime the “borrowed” ideas take on new ownership.

9. Be a giver and a taker

⌚ We must never be afraid to share what we know whether it be with students or with colleagues.

⌚ As teachers we give out our knowledge in the best way that we know how. Similarly we can take ideas from students and use them creatively and imaginatively.

⌚ Any opportunity to work with people who have knowledge and wisdom is an opportunity not to be missed. We can take this information and use it in our own way.

10. Aim to make a positive difference in the life of each student

⌚ We can show that we are unashamedly passionate about what we do about playing music, about listening to music and about LIFE itself.

⌚ Let's celebrate each and every successful step achieved by a student.

⌚ Let's open the hearts and minds of students.

⌚ Let's give students an appetite for learning.

⌚ Let's give them confidence and assurance.

⌚ Let's be happy and joyful about all our endeavours.