

Motivation and Learning Strategies

The best drummers love learning new things. Whether it is something strange or common, useful or abstract, new ideas interest them and they love every step of the learning process. If you want to play drums, if you want to learn, then you must become a student. I don't mean a literal student – enrolled at a music school or conservatory – I mean having a genuine interest in gaining knowledge and skills.

Students learn. Drumming students learn. The moment you stop learning, you aren't behaving like a student, so you aren't behaving like you want to play the drums. Drumming is a passion for drummers, and passions are a commitment towards a continued renewal of interest. If you keep your passion alive you will always want to play and you will always want to learn.

Being a musician requires learning how to be a student. You have to listen, be willing to change, take praise -and criticism- you must always desire to be better - the best you can be. Sometimes it hurts to know how much work there is to be done, and it definitely hurts to know how far off you are, but you are not in this alone. You are no different to any one else (sorry if you thought you were special!) because even the best drummers in the world started with a first lesson. They progressed day by day, and so can you. It is never too late to start. There are drummers who began drumming later in life than you did, and they went on to do great things, and to mean a lot to many people. So why can't

you continue step by step - as they did - to be your best?

There is no secret except for lots of *effective practise*. All the professional drummers have done lots of it. It has to be done to see results. Learn well: there is no secret, just lots of effective practise. Hours on the drums can be ineffectual, in which case, a few well spent minutes may be much more effective. Only you can limit the pace of your own progress. Dave Weckl said at a clinic (Perth 2014) that the best way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time - and that man can play! So get a routine that has all the skills you want to improve on, and start at one exercise at a time.

Work on your weakest points first so as to make the most noticeable improvements soonest. At any one point in your development, identify your skills and weaknesses, and adopt to the exercise so that you are doing effective practise. Awareness is one of the first and most important skills of any musician. Always ask yourself if you are completing an exercise well, and your awareness will grow over time.

The *natural* musician is some one who loves creating sound. Using your body to create a sound (via a drumstick for example) is extremely rewarding. The natural musician is first and foremost motivated by this reward rather than accomplishment, fame, fortune, or accolades. As a natural musician you will be rewarded during the process of learning (practise and performance). Simply

creating a sound will inspire you; you will enjoy practise; you will get results and, naturally, success will come to you. My job as a drum teacher is to guide the natural musician so they can learn at their peak potential.

There will always be people who you can learn from, and people who can learn from you. Keep this in mind because awareness of your place is healthy. You will always have more to learn from someone; and hopefully you can help others who are not yet at your level. Never take any one perspective as gospel – just store it away as something you heard and use it if it is helpful. I remember believing that my first teacher was flawless in his description of technique and methodology of practise. I learned many years later that what he said was not gospel, it was practical; it was suited to my level. I learned many years later, as a drum teacher myself, that he was not wrong, but rather allowing me to glimpse insights that I was ready for at the time. I am sure that when he omitted or presented ideas as black-and-white it was done from experience with care and concern for my ultimate development: not malice or disregard.

Always be open to new ideas. You must persevere with new ideas until you can use them. Often the most valuable idea will seem pointless until you have it mastered. Suddenly everything will make sense and you will be glad that you persevered. Be humble as a student; don't say, "I don't need to do this exercise," because often when a teacher gives you an exercise, it is because *they know from experience* that it is essential for you to 'get it' in order to

progress. In your practise sessions strive to uphold the 80:20 rule – practise 80% new material (expanding your abilities) and 20% revision (maintenance and refinement).

You might hear a perspective that is completely different from another but find both useful. I've heard great drummers tell me conflicting opinions on specific issues. No doubt they can both play, but they both have their own styles. I took both their advice to work in different situations that I can identify, this works for me and I feel it is a privileged position to have being lucky enough to learn from both. This happens a lot in music; be ready for many different perspectives in drumming that all work. Be careful not to be closed off to new ideas.

Always try something before dismissing it. Try to appreciate what it is, how it works, and how it can help you, even if you do not see the need for it yet. You will discover that the best things in life are not going to be given to you on a plate – you must discover them for yourself! A teacher showing you something new is a lot like bringing a horse to water; the horse must still bend down and drink for itself. Have you heard the saying, “if it were easy every one would do it”? It is true for drumming. How many times have you heard some one say, “I want to learn to drum/play guitar/speak French/et cetera”? They might even take a lesson or two, but ultimately most people give up. You must strive to be better than that. Anything worth doing is going to take hard work.

This is what will separate you from others. There will be twenty guys standing at the bar who once played drums, but you will be the one on stage playing the gigs. That's if you practise.

The harder you work, the luckier you will get. I've found this to be true. I don't believe in karma, but coincidentally, every time I have sat down for a few months and worked on my drumming and seen progress, it has coincided with greater and greater opportunities coming my way. Certainly by practising I haven't clocked up universal karma goodness to be cashed in for future opportunities, however if I hadn't been ready, opportunities wouldn't have stopped to give me a ride. There are opportunities out there, don't deceive yourself. You can make drumming your living if that is your goal. Conversely, you can live for drumming which may be an even better situation to find yourself in. It all depends on how much you enjoy drumming.

If you want to cut corners and just rock out without paying attention to playing music well, then you are best just to muck around on your kit by yourself.

Really, I can offer no criticism to this, if it makes you happy, then great.

However if you want to take your interest to a higher level, in a potentially life changing way, you must say, "I am a drummer, this is who I am, this is what I do, I am open to everything about drumming; I will support others who love

what I love, and if I do my practise, in time good things will come my way.” If you desire to get more out of drumming, recognise that you must first put in the effort. If you want more, but wont put in the effort, that is when I will say that you are letting yourself down.

My teacher had a sign on his wall that read, “If you want to become a rock star, that's your business; if you want to become a musician, that's my business.” I didn't understand the sign while I was with him, but now I do. Well said, Kim.