



PRESIDENT ELECT'S MESSAGE

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Models, Mentors and Gettin From Here to There

“Getting from here to there” is a great theme for fall when teachers and students alike are buzzing with the exhilaration of a new school year. It’s also a great time for teachers to think about their own professional growth and development and one of the best ways do this is by being an active member of IMEA. Our organization is dedicated to serving our needs as music teachers and musician-learners of all ages. IMEA has a place for every music educator. But how does one get involved in the organization? I would like to focus on two pivotal parts of the process: 1) observing role models—those people who are already involved in the organization, and 2) listening to mentors, both fleeting and long-standing, who are willing to provide feedback and point us in the right direction. IMEA is brimming with fabulous role models and wonderful mentors.

When our journal editor, Bill Froom, asked me to write about this theme, I thought it would be fun to describe how I wound up as president-elect of IMEA. Doing this was harder than I anticipated since I never aspired to the position. In fact, having attended an out-of-state high school that was never involved in state activities, I was clueless about IMEA and its board when I arrived in Illinois in 1980. My involvement in IMEA started from ground zero when my graduate school mentor, Cornelia Yarbrough, encouraged me to attend the national MENC meetings where she introduced me to role models who were engaged in a professional life that looked enticing. As a mentor, she alternately led and pushed me into situations in which I discovered people doing interesting things that I had not done before. One of these was their involvement in their state music education associations.

After moving to Illinois, I decided to attend IMEA—my first visit to a state organization. My point of entry was having a poster to present at the research session, but the pleasure of the meeting came from the performances, presentations and displays (along with the chocolate, pizza and cookies). It was also nice to break out of the routine of school, observe music teachers in action in a variety of situations, have a nice dinner out, and meet with friends and colleagues. I went back the next year—and the next, and the next. Each time, I felt a little less alone and met a few more people. One day I received a letter asking me to be on the research committee. I don’t remember who it was from but I thank that individual for helping me get involved. Then Margaret Kelly asked me to be on the higher ed committee. She became a mentor, slipping into my life and nudging me into situations in which I observed people a little smarter, a little more experienced, and a little more involved. They seemed to enjoy the process of dealing with problems and trying to figure out their answers. The next thing I knew, I was asked to run for the state higher ed vice-president position. Again, I never aspired to be in this position but because I had observed the process and someone I trusted gave me a push to do it, I gave it a try.

This pattern has been the story of my life: somehow an interest in one thing led me to people who introduced me to situations in which I saw people doing things in ways that were new, attractive and sometimes downright alluring. For example, it all started with playing the clarinet. Like many kids, I idolized my handsome clarinet teacher who mysteriously appeared at our school once a week. His life seemed wonderful: playing clarinet in the park band! on TV on the weekly Jim DeLine Show! teaching in the somewhat dank, spooky church basement! And he, too, stuck out a metaphorical hand and alternately led, cajoled and pointed out paths to concerts, contests, camps, more lessons, music school, and eventually to the place where I sit today, writing, in my pleasant backyard, married almost 30 years to a guy who loves opera, sang in the New York Oratorio Society and doesn’t mind listening to me blow on the clarinet (or so he says).

What's the point? We are all observers and we are all compulsive copiers. We copy lifestyles, decision-making strategies, problem solving techniques. We watch people fail, sometimes in very big ways, and either pick themselves up or not. We emulate and empathize. We also can learn some very, very bad habits in exactly the same way, which is why quality mentorship is so desperately needed. We need great mentors to help us clarify our vision and set goals.

So, here is what I distill from my own experience and from watching others about how to get "there" (to the IMEA board and other places) from wherever "here" might be:

1. Get involved as a participant and watch what's going on.
2. When the time is right, volunteer and get your hands dirty with responsibility. Follow through.
3. Watch those who are a few steps ahead of you. Be especially mindful of how they set themselves up for success, solve problems, and handle themselves when they make a mistake. Focus on those who live happy, fulfilled lives.
4. Treat every human being with unconditional dignity and respect.
5. Say yes when asked to take responsibility.

Here I am, as president-elect of IMEA and you can bet that I am thinking a lot about you, Randy, Rex, Bill, Kent, Rick, Mike, John. You are amazing role models. Thank you so much for your inspirational leadership and your gracious mentorship. I am so fortunate and honored to be part of this terrific organization.



TO SECRETARY OF EDUCATION ARNE DUNCAN - BEST WISHES! Tom Batiuk

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