

Ask Mike!

Stressed about an upcoming gig? Work got you singing the blues? Columnist Michael Goode can help!



BY MICHAEL I. GOODE,
LOCAL 47 MEMBER

In my last column, in May, we talked about getting your students to play with more expression, playing while sick, and keeping your emotions from going out of control on the job. Today, we are going to talk about the importance of waiting, forgiving yourself when you screw up, and being proactive about injuries that could affect your playing.

Q: You know Mr. Goode, I have been working on my transposition for some time and it seems like I am not making any progress. This troubles me. I feel like an idiot. What can I do to learn faster?

A: Sometimes, things just take time to develop and we have to wait for the result to come. One of the most important things that we can learn as musicians and something that we need to constantly remind ourselves of is the fact that occasionally, it simply takes time to perfect a new skill on our instrument, whatever it is - transposition, faster or cleaner multiple tonguing, greater range, more expressive playing,

etc. The goals and the challenges for us never end, especially if we really enjoy what we do. It is very easy and very normal to get frustrated with the learning curve on whatever we may be working on at the time. Understand that even great players work on the same etudes for years! My teacher Adolph Herseth is no exception. Working on something over long periods of time is normal; it doesn't mean that you aren't talented or that you can't do it. It simply means that learning and perfecting a new skill in our business takes time. That's all. Don't fight it. If you need help, check with a trusted teacher in the area you are working on.

Writing an anger letter about the subject as explained below, starting with the sentence "I am angry that it is taking so long to learn how to transpose..." is a great start and will clear any emotional blockages to learning transposition and your learning curve will go faster. You'll get there!

Q: Geez, Mike, I had a gig the other day and I was awful. Everybody was really polite about it and nobody said anything. Even the contractor who I've played for a long time said to me, "Don't worry about it, we have all had one of those days." He also told me that he is hiring me back for the next job. I know I got lucky and will still be working but now I am really, really angry at myself. It's almost hard to get this off my mind when I am playing and I am practicing. How do I handle this and calm down so I can focus again?

A: As musicians, we live in a tough, perfectionist business where everything needs to be just right all the time. The great thing about that is that it is a challenge and is really satisfying when we finish a job, gig or a concert knowing

we've done a great job under pressure and connected to either a live or future audience that will hear the recording of a quality product. It's a good feeling and one that can give us a lot of satisfaction. The bad thing is when things don't go right and sometimes the result is not good and we don't keep our job. We don't want that to happen, ever, and fortunately for you, your employer was not as upset as you were and knows how well you play, so he cut you some slack and your job is secure. The problem is that you cannot afford to get down on yourself for things that might go wrong when you play on the job. You certainly can notate in your mind what went wrong and correct it so that habit is no longer in your playing or onstage demeanor, but never get down on yourself. We all have worked too long and too hard at our craft to rip ourselves down emotionally if we do something wrong on the gig. Besides, getting down on ourselves is a trap. It doesn't make us play any better, it only clogs our mind with negative information that gets in the way of playing great and keeps us from focusing on the music at hand.

We all get distracted by things outside of music and if you ever have a sense that you are not feeling like yourself emotionally, write one of the anger letters I have recommended many times in this column. I would write one now regarding getting so negative on yourself so you can drain the negativity off and start thinking about playing great in a more positive way. Write something like, "I am angry that I have been so down on myself..." and finish the sentence with whatever comes to mind. Keep the letter private, uncensored, and tear it up when you are done. You will feel relief, or recall something else that upsets you, or you might feel numb after the pen leaves the paper. If you feel

relief, great, you've drained the negativity that was getting in your way. If you feel angry about something else after writing, keep writing until you feel relief. If you feel numb after writing, this means you are hitting a big emotional issue for you that is blocking your playing from being at your absolute best. If you do feel numb, write an anger letter that starts with, "I am angry that I feel numb and have no reference point..." and you will recall a memory or topic that you can start writing about as an anger letter until you feel relief. This will help your playing and your approach to life will become much more positive!

Q: Hey Mike, I have got some tingling sensations in my lip that haven't gone away for the past three months and seem to be getting worse. What should I do about this?

A: Any kind of prolonged pain or sensations that are not normal and persist for more than a few days should be looked into. Especially for wind players, any embouchure issues should be attended to right away. I would check with your doctor and your teacher to make sure something is not terribly wrong with your physiology and your technique and get it checked and corrected right away. Don't wait. Little problems can become big ones. This goes for string players with arm problems. Don't tough it out. Get help. You will be glad you did.

Send your questions to: Ask Mike!, Trumpetworks Press, P.O. Box 11574, Marina del Rey, CA 90295 or you can check out my website at www.trumpetworkspress.com and see information on my book, "Stage Fright in Music Performance and Its Relationship to the Unconscious." All names are confidential and will not be published.

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