

## Process - concepts for performance success

Learning to be fully engaged in an artistic performance does not come overnight. This process must be studied and practiced on and off the stage. How many times have you worked diligently in the practice room and made significant progress in learning an etude, solo, excerpt only to find almost every aspect of the retention process vanished once in front of an audience.

Many of the "epic fail" moments stem from a false perception of your craft, identity, and self-worth. To live day to day based on the strengths and weaknesses of your latest performance becomes tiring and addictive and is not a measure of your self-worth.

**Thought processes before execution/performance: SFT!**

### **"See It"**

Many thoughts weave in and out of your mind during a performance. A negative thought isn't harmful unless you give it power and dwell on it. When thoughts come, identify them as simply a thought, not good or bad. Don't give them power, just identify them as all neutral. When you don't agree with or like the thought, don't attempt to block it. Instead, let it go and replace it with another.

When you chose to aggressively pursue a thought, this will block other less desirable intruders from undermining your potential.

The first element is to create a masterpiece - **to see it**. Hear the phrase you are about to begin with perfect sound, shape and expressive beauty. Visualizing is not enough - you must use these **three one-word prompts** to bulletproof your process. Make this tangible and sequential. Build in consistency with every opportunity.

**Target**- This is the specific peak or contour of the phrase. Do not jump in from scratch but imagine you are already playing and part of a moving train. Never start a phrase from nothing. Spend a good deal of time picturing the architecture and shape of each phrase - the very first note leads to the second and so on.

**The target is almost never the first note!**

Each excerpt/phrase has a different target - ask yourself "where is the target" on each statement.

**Shape** - contours, accents, rhythm - articulation

Every phrase moves in one direction or the other. The pros typically eliminate spontaneous phrase shaping and have pre-arranged the architecture of each shape. Do the mapping, write in breath marks, arrows and notes to help you outline your course.

Professionals know beyond a doubt where they are leading in each phrase - do not leave this to chance. Learn to practice with musical intent.

To play at the highest level means you must learn to become poised and consistent.

Professional poise is made not born, and to become poised and confident requires volition.

Learn to embrace the variables and dig deep to find poise in performance. What is your go-to strength as a trombone player? Emphasize this strength and learn to camouflage your weaknesses, while you drill them in practice and make them your strengths

**Trajectory** - air speed, tonguing, breath pattern, posture, resistance in relation to phrase structure

When I play Bolero, Zarathustra or Rhenish I am thinking of "compression" and feel of air speed. I always have a forward motion or trajectory with my air and there is a definite "feel" of compression behind the tongue - not tension, just air speed. This impacts my articulation and breathing pattern. When I play Mahler 3, Mozart Requiem, Tannhauser or Organ Symphony - the feeling of flow and air speed is very different. The pattern of breathing before these excerpts is also slightly different. Learn to cue in on these differences and let them become a part of your "See It" process.

*"Shots we don't typically practice are the shots we define as difficult! On the volition scale it comes from "I can't" or "I'll try" decisions." - David Cook*

Each phrase is simply going from point A to point B with potentially secondary peaks and phrase points along the way. There is a target, shape and trajectory that will get it there without over-trying or interference.

*Call your shot!* In tournament golf, the player may give their caddy permission to **not** give them a club until they verbally call their shot, making themselves fully accountable to the shot. Calling a shot means focusing on the three elements above - target, shape and trajectory.

**This process allows each of you to become free from the prison of doubt.**

## "Feel It"

Once you have called your shot, your muscles are starting to interpret the image and tonal soundscape sent to them. You are beginning to feel it. You now step into the phrase and allow the feel of the shot to take over. How does the "feel it" part of the process work?

**Rhythm** - body awareness is critical and tension is released

You are not pulling this etude, excerpt out of thin air. The process cue of tempo, style and rhythmic energy has already begun. You are breathing in rhythm and using process cues to help galvanize your internal sense of time.

**Balance** - you are aware of your posture and feel centered with your weight positioned confidently and assertively on the balls of your feet – not leaning too forward or overly aggressive, not hiding behind the stand or pointed off to the side and not back on your heels. You are relaxed, poised, calm and expectant – seeing yourself play well.

**Focus** • never assume that the feeling of extreme butterflies means that you are about to fail!! Just the opposite - it simply means you are in a super-state and can summons more physical strength with less energy. Reign in you emotions by consciously walking slower, releasing your grip in the left hand horn carriage, being mindful of artistic right hand slide technique, leading with the index finger (painting a picture) and keeping your feet and body dynamic yet grounded ~ Breathing deep, keeping your teeth apart and letting tension drain.

You are only playing the current phrase with direction and shape and not scanning back and forth. Keep your eyes still – assume a “gun-fighter” gaze on the page. *I learned how to do this in the Marine Band as I soloed in front of large audiences on outdoor concerts. There were so many distractions.* The world should fall away as you focus only on the shape of your phrase the expression of the music.

**Patience** - The biggest failure in the "feel it" step is trying to get the process over with!! Enjoy every second of this experience. Time should stand still. Not a single phrase is rushed or a note clipped or a breath is tight. Fast passages seem to have ease and you are in a state of slow-motion bliss.

Play to find the "sweet spot" and to enjoy/relish the moment you are in now! Savor every note! Tell a story and taking every opportunity to convey meaning in your performance. Patience is learned through trial and error but will come if you exercise patience in every day affairs. If you are not a patient person in life, you will never become a great performer. Patience is the single most important part of this process

## "Trust It"

Trust is the freedom to play and let go. Trust comes from working the above process daily (see attached worksheet). This is the moment you release your muscles to do what they have been primed to do. You have seen, you are beginning to feel now it is time to let go and perform. Trust is the trigger to breathe with intent. You will sense trust when you experience freedom from controlling the notes, horn, range, technique and are no longer a prisoner of "what is going to happen next."

Trust is a decision of the heart, NOT based on previous outcomes, It is a decision at a moment in time to let the body freely do what you coached it to do. There are no hitches. You are not guiding or over-controlling the breath, tongue, slide or music. Trust becomes a rhythmic dance of the soul with balance, focus, patience and sheer joy!

To be sure - this is not complete absence of mechanical control, but it is relatively close. In time - you will learn to perform without any knowledge of mechanics in your playing because you have focused on these aspects in the music lab.

**"Swing key"** - or process cue - *a mechanical trigger, or word, or feel*  
- to initiate the start of the phrase

*"On your best days you will dance and not count the steps"*  
*Learn to play the game – YOUR GAME – in front of the ball – off the*  
*page – Brent, you are thinking too much about consequences!"*  
*David Cook*

You will learn to pay little attention to what is happening behind the mouthpiece or on the horn.

Take a moment on write a word, phrase, thought cue or draw a symbol before you begin to help transition your mind into the Trust phase. I draw arrows or a picture of how I want my breath to look. I will often write a descriptive sentence that best captures my story or the color of a phrase.

**Trust is earned by feel, and feel is earned by seeing.** Trust is the open door to getting into your ideal performance state. You will want to move to this trust step with a feeling of flow.

**static = tension**

Keep your feet, shoulders, lower back and neck centered. Never start from a rigid static position.

## **Failure to Trust - the errors of trust**

**Pressing** - *defining the situation as mission critical or ultra-important. Adding anything to the performance other than getting from point A to point B. Once you find the points of the phrase and you have defined the shape and trajectory – you are golden - all else is pressing.*

*"This better be good"*

*"I hope this goes better than last time"*

*"what will they think if I crash"*

*"I have to win this"*

*"The recording is just not good enough – I won't submit it"*

**All of these thoughts undermine trust and cause you to press. This is the opposite of FREEDOM. This is the opposite of passion. This is the opposite of joy.**

**Guiding** - playing away from trouble or difficulty rather than to your target. If your mind tends to speed up or you "gloss over" the technique, range, skips or challenges in your phrase you are guiding or steering away from trouble. You can be the predator of the prey. To play with musical passion and artistic poise requires you to hunt targets - really go for it - not running from poor thoughts.

**Over-aiming** – this is the error of trust that most often happens in auditions. Focusing on just the attack or one "mission critical" high note in Zarathustra is over aiming and erodes trust. Feel is also compromised because your focus is now monopolized by the feeling that there is no margin for error.

**Jamming** - this is the final error of trust that happens when there is too much control happening in the mind. Jamming happens when you over-instruct your muscles rather than painting, trusting the feel process or using your swing key. How many times have you executed intricate passages in the practice room with mindless ease only to lock up in the lesson? This is because your body responds with great "licks" automatically - now, in your lesson, you are suddenly painfully aware of what you might be watching or noticing and that has drawn your attention to a place of analysis rather than performance.

### **Concentration Score Card:**

In this packet you will find a "concentration score card" - you should have this handout and the concentration score card in your binder. The next few weeks should not be outcome based but rather a scoring of how well you went through this process on each performance, lesson, concert etc.

**Take this inventory with you to big events and use the Baylor School of Music to learn this skill.**

### **Mental Toughness Journal:**

I would have this journal in your binder as well and begin to trust this process. The "adversity" column can be anything - competitive audition, pick-up game, quartet rehearsal, ensemble rehearsal, recording session, lesson - whatever you wish. Write down any negative responses you have. Now - write down a mental toughness response. This can be intensely personal. The concept is to supplant all of the negativity with real life positive feedback. This will be the most challenging and transforming exercise you will do. For many of you, it will be the most difficult. Until you can master your own negative thoughts with truth, you will forever fight the battle on stage.

### **Greatest Shots Journal:**

This is an important part of "amping up" the trust factor in your own lives. Write down every successful moment you experience this week/semester/year. Write down in stunning detail how you felt, the pressures you experienced, the internal positivity and joy along with the outcome relative to how you felt. You will build up your trust factor and begin to look at your progress here at Baylor with an informed and documented history of successes. You will learn to run the high-light reel of your winning moments. This will slowly begin to build your "bank of trust" - you will draw on this bank for every performance.

#### End notes:

All of this comes from my bi-monthly meetings last year with David Cook. You have all seen his movie at my ranch and hopefully have begun reading his two books "Seven Days in Utopia, Golf's Sacred Journey" and "Johnny's US Open - Golf's Sacred Journey 2"

The process part of this journey for me was extraordinarily difficult. I worked with David on my approach to life, music, parenting and teaching in detail. I learned more about who I was and why I do what I do. I learned that life is not about the score or an outcome nor is it about what others think of me along the way. We worked on specific worksheets, writing assignments and all of the above items. In addition, we worked on deep spiritual principles that placed all of this in perspective. There are many more facets to this process such as the law of recentcy, the three challenge process, pre-game, game time and course management - all of this relating to music. I would be happy to share more with you if you are interested. Thank you for your time and I look forward to seeing how you all implement these ideas into your practice and performance.

Brent Phillips - presented to the Baylor Trombone Studio on October 11th 2016 and January 16, 2020 - Strength and Hon



