

The Three “P’s” and One “B” of Success

Practice, Patience, and Perseverance and... Belief in Yourself! – by Paul K. Fox

Fox’s Fireside Chat



To inspire greater forward progress and more resolve in meeting our goals, I wrote this “Fox Fireside” back in 1995 for the student, parents, directors, and family members of the South Hills Junior Orchestra (SHJO). This “pep talk” was motivated by reading anecdotes from my favorite series, “Chicken Soup for the Soul” by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen, and begs these three essential questions:

1. “Why were there so many people who “put down” the achievements or aptitude of these historical figures?”
2. “What would have happened if these individuals had received more encouragement and support along the way?”
3. “Are you living up to YOUR potential?”

We are very optimistic about the future! Perhaps if we all “put down” our tech devices (instead of each other) and focused more time and energy on making music together, we can attain new levels of creative self-expression and artistry. Really, all you need is a little **practice, patience, and perseverance...** so let’s make a New Year’s resolution to “play more music,” “attend more rehearsals,” and “share our love of music more!”

Life is full of *course corrections*, not *failures!* Throughout our learning in school or at a job, we face many challenges, some that do not immediately bring us the just rewards for our time and hard work. Every one of us occasionally gets a little discouraged, but we must not give up hope nor fail to commit the resources to continue our pursuits. Consider many of history’s great *geniuses* who faced similar “bumps” along their pathway to fame:

- After **Fred Astaire’s** first screen test, the memo from the casting director of MGM, dated 1933 said, “Can’t act! Slightly bald! Can dance a little!” Astaire kept that memo over the fireplace in his Beverly Hills home.
- An expert said of **Vince Lombardi**: “He possesses minimal football knowledge. Lacks motivation.”
- **Socrates** was called, “An immortal corrupter of youth.”
- When **Peter J. Daniel** was in fourth grade, his teacher Mrs. Phillips constantly said, “You’re no good. You’re a bad apple, and you’re never going to amount to anything.” Peter was totally illiterate until he was 26. A friend stayed up with him all night and read him a copy of *Think and Grow Rich*. Now, he owns the street corners he used to fight on and has published a book, *Mrs. Phillips, You Were Wrong!*
- **Louisa May Alcott**, the author of *Little Women*, was encouraged to find work as a servant or seamstress by her family.
- **Beethoven** handled the violin awkwardly and preferred playing his own compositions instead of improving his technique. His teacher called him hopeless as a composer.
- The parents of the famous opera singer **Enrico Caruso** wanted him to become an engineer. His teacher said he had no voice at all and could not sing.
- **Charles Darwin**, father of the Theory of Evolution, gave up a medical career and was told by his father, “You care for nothing but shooting, dogs, and rat catching.” In his autobiography, Darwin wrote, “I was considered by all my masters and by my father a very ordinary boy, rather below the common standard in intellect.”
- **Walt Disney** was fired from a newspaper for lack of ideas, and also went bankrupt several times before he built Disneyland.
- **Thomas Edison’s** teachers said he was too stupid to learn anything.
- **Albert Einstein** did not speak until he was four years old and didn’t read until he was seven. His teacher described him as “mentally slow, unsociable, and adrift in his foolish dreams.” He was expelled and was refused admittance to the Zurich Polytechnic School.
- **Louis Pasteur** was only a mediocre pupil in undergraduate studies and ranked 15th out of 22 in chemistry.
- By all accounts, **Isaac Newton** did very poorly in grade school.



- The sculptor **Rodin**'s father said, "I have an idiot for a son." Described as the worst pupil in the school, Rodin failed three times to secure admittance to the school of art. His uncle called him ineducable.
- **Leo Tolstoy**, author of *War and Peace*, flunked out of college. He was described as "both unable and unwilling to learn."
- Playwright **Tennessee Williams** was enraged when his play *Me, Vasha*, was not chosen in a class competition at Washington University where he was enrolled in English XVI. The teacher recalled that Williams denounced the judges' choices and their intelligence.
- **F.W. Woolworth**'s employers at the dry goods store said he had not enough sense to wait upon customers.
- **Henry Ford** failed and went broke five times before he succeeded.
- **Babe Ruth**, considered by sports historians to be the greatest athlete of all time and famous for setting the home run record, also holds the record for the greatest number of strike outs.
- **Winston Churchill** failed sixth grade. He did not become Prime Minister of England until he was 62, and then only after a lifetime of defeats and setbacks. His greatest contributions came when he was a "senior citizen."
- Eighteen publishers turned down **Richard Bach**'s 10,000-word story about "soaring" seagull, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, before Macmillan finally published it in 1980. By 1975, it had sold more than seven million copies in U.S. alone.
- **Richard Hooker** worked for seven years on his novel, *M*A*S*H*, only to have it rejected by 21 publishers before Morrow decided to publish it. It became a runaway bestseller, spawning a blockbuster movie and a highly successful TV series (still airing today on cable channels as reruns!).

A Parable for Our Time

There was once a wise woman who lived by herself near a small village. Rumor had it that she could always accurately predict when the rains would come, or help heal a sick child with herbs, or calm angry neighbors and help them to resolve their fights and arguments. People came from all over the land to meet with her and seek her advice on matters both small and great. Her reputation was such that was said she was never wrong — not ever.

Some of the children of the village didn't believe that it was possible to always be right. Surely, she could not know everything! They decided to test her knowledge. First, they asked her to answer questions about the planets, the animals, and the world. No matter how hard the questions, she always answered correctly.

The children were amazed at her knowledge and learning, and most were ready to stop testing the wise woman. However, one boy was determined to prove that the old woman couldn't know everything. Hatching a devious scheme, he told all of his friends to meet him at the woman's home the following afternoon so he could prove she was a faker.

All through the next day he hunted for a bird. Finally, he caught a small songbird in a net. Holding it behind his back so no one could see what was in his hands, he walked triumphantly to the wise woman's home.

"Old woman!" he called. "Come and show us how wise you are!"

The woman walked calmly to the door. "May I help you?" she simply asked.

"You say you know everything — prove it — what am I holding behind my back?" the young boy demanded.

The old woman thought for a moment. She could make out the faint sounds of a bird's wings rustling. "I do not say I know everything — for that would be impossible," she replied. "However, I do believe you are holding a bird in your hands."



The boy was furious. How could the woman have possibly known he had a bird? Thinking quickly, he came up with a new scheme. He would ask the woman whether the bird was alive or dead. If the woman replied “alive,” he would crush it with his hands and prove her wrong. If she answered “dead,” on the other hand, he would pull the living bird from behind his back and allow it to fly away. Either way he would prove his point and the wise woman would be discredited.

“Very good,” he called. “It is a bird. But tell me, is the bird I am holding alive or dead?”

*The wise woman paused for a long moment while the boy waited with anticipation for his opportunity to prove her wrong. Again, the woman spoke calmly, “The answer, my young friend, is in your hands. **The answer is in your hands.**”*

The boy realized that the wise woman had once again spoken correctly and truthfully. The answer was indeed in his own hands. Feeling the bird feebly moving in his hands as it tried to escape his grasp, he felt suddenly very ashamed.

The answer was in his hands — slowly and gently he brought his hands to the front of his body. Looking into the eyes of the delicate bird he apologized, “I am sorry little one,” and he opened his hands to let her go free.

<https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/tales/session11/story1>

Is this fable a little too deep for you? Well, remember the key to all of this: ***the answer is in your hands.***

Only **you** have the power to succeed or fail. Regardless of what others say about your present or future worth, ***it is in your hands.*** You need to trust your mentors/teachers/parents and especially **believe in yourself!**

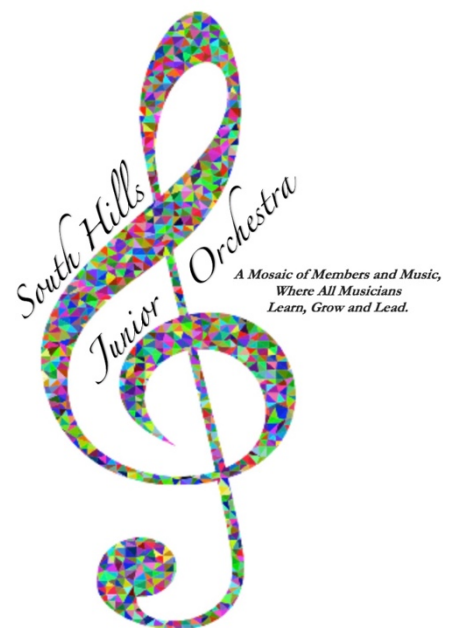
Then, the application of **practice, patience, and perseverance** (never giving up!) will make all the difference!

What are your goals and ambitions for 2019?

Happy New Year!



Paul K. Fox, SHJO Founding Director



The mission of **South Hills Junior Orchestra**, which rehearses and performs at the Upper St. Clair High School in Pittsburgh, PA, is to support and nurture local school band and orchestra programs, to develop knowledge, understanding, performance skills, and an appreciation of music, to increase an individual member’s self-esteem and self-motivation, and to continue to advance a life-long study of music. Members of the Orchestra *learn, grow, and achieve* positions of leadership to serve their fellow members. (For more information about SHJO, please visit www.shjo.org.)

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