

# Self-Motivation: Finding Your Focus

BY ANDY HARNSBERGER

Let's face it: By now, music has seeped its way into your everyday existence. The choices you make in almost everything are based upon it: when you practice, what you listen to, even what you read in your spare time. You obviously wouldn't have your nose buried in this magazine if you hadn't decided that you want to improve some aspect of your playing. Bottom line: Music is an obsession. Yet somehow, even at this point, many serious musicians still manage to lose momentum.

At any given time on the journey toward your goal, you may find yourself in a negative feedback cycle where the more infrequently you improve, the more discouraged you become. Your brain starts to make excuses not to do the things that you need to do on a regular basis to break out of the rut.

What you need is a good dose of motivation, the same kind you had when you first started playing and practicing. Remember those days? Back then, it didn't take much to get you behind the instrument. You were making improvements, sounding good, and you loved every minute of it. Sure, times have changed and there may be a lot more going on in your life, but in the beginning, practicing was the priority—no matter what!

So what will bring you back to the glory days of gradual improvement and continual musical growth? What will motivate you even when you hit the much-dreaded plateau? The most overlooked source of motivation and inner strength simply comes from the acknowledgement of why you are doing this to begin with.

The word *motivation* seems to be misunderstood at times. The root word *motive* should prompt us to look inward for the reasons we do what we do. All too often, people wrongly look to others to provide them with their own purpose. Others may provide incentives for you or inspire you, but they cannot know your specific reasons for doing something. Many musicians tend to look outward for

motivation and do not take the time to look inward for a clearer focus. Your motives must come from your own perception of what your personal best will bring to you.

It is virtually impossible to commit yourself wholeheartedly to anything without a full understanding of why you are doing it. This question will arise early and often (especially when you have to practice scales on a Friday night!), and it would be wise to prepare an answer before it stops you dead in your tracks. We all have our own reasons for being percussionists, but not everybody is consciously aware of what those reasons are. It's just a matter of digging them out of your head.

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Mental energy is a form of power, and you have total control over it. Thought power is like that of radio waves: You can't see them working, but their effect is real and profound. By enforcing the control you have over this mental force and learning how to channel it into your intended outcome, you can directly influence your performance as a musician.

If you need proof, just ask any successful musicians who were able to push themselves beyond barriers on a regular basis. Even if it wasn't done consciously, they probably had reasons to justify the hard work and dedication. All the power you need to reach your goals rests inside you. It is your job to summon that power from within your soul and allow it to drive you to the next level.

Ask yourself: What is exciting about percussion? What makes it so appealing? Who will you be when you reach your goal? How will you feel? How will others see you? What new music will you play

or listen to? Link it to every aspect of your life—physical, mental, social, everything! This will now become your unlimited source of personal motivation.

You should try to discern at least five benefits you will receive, or want to receive, when you reach your goals. Dig deep and write down what you will ultimately experience when you get there. Putting your purpose on paper and reading it allows you to see, hear, and feel the reasons for your commitment, maybe for the first time. Being able to place direct purpose behind your actions helps form the foundation for true commitment. When definite reasons are linked to practicing, it will become increasingly difficult for your brain to make excuses.

Honesty is vital at this point. Your overall effort is determined by the strength of your motives. Look at your purpose statement again. If you don't get even a little excited, ask yourself those questions one more time. We're looking for reasons a little more useful than “to be good.” If you deceive yourself with weak motives, you can only expect weak

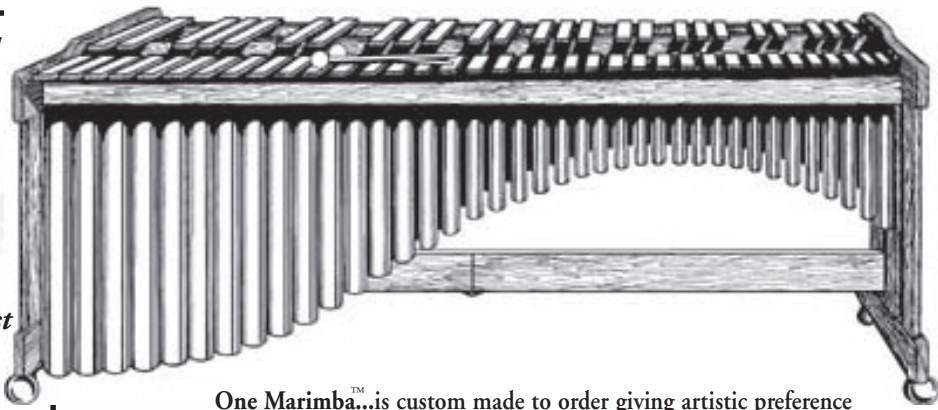
results. If the purpose behind your behavior is rooted deep within, you may expect outstanding results. Strong motives automatically activate strong sustained effort toward the desired outcome.

Musicians who understand this seem to have an aura about them in the practice room. They exude determination in every note they play, and they never seem to stagnate. This is because they have learned to link purpose to their actions, which ensures that every note becomes a significant, meaningful element in the grand scheme of reaching their musical goal.

Another effective way to bolster your motivation is to ask yourself what will happen if you do *not* achieve your goal. What will be lost if you never fulfill your dream? Again, link it to every aspect of your daily life and make another list of five things that you will *not* get if your goals are never met. You can use these negatives to distance yourself from the

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bad habits and thoughts that have sabotaged you in the past.

As you practice, only one or two key words or phrases from these lists will stand out in your mind. Your own character will determine whether you focus on the "possible benefits" and work toward them, or the "possible negatives" and work to avoid them. This subconscious struggle between pleasure and pain will dictate how much effort you put forth to achieve, avoid, or accept.

It may sound crazy to think that just knowing "why" can help you grow musically, but by acknowledging your own reasons for pursuing music, you provide your subconscious with the mental resources needed to effortlessly become more aware of, and carry out, the best cause for your intended effect. You will easily be able to direct yourself to the most appropriate next step, no matter what level you are currently on or where you want to go. In other words, you will have something with which to push yourself beyond your known limits.

Defining your purpose is all you require to break through plateaus, restore your passion for percussion, and avoid stale practice sessions. When you become

consciously aware of your motives, there can be no turning back. Your subconscious will neither allow nor accept it. If percussion is your love, then study your passion. Be true to the reasons behind your quest for your personal best and you will guarantee yourself endless progression and musical satisfaction.

**Andy Harnsberger** earned his Doctorate of Musical Arts in Performance and Literature degree at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, where he also received the prestigious Performer's Certificate. He received his Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees from Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. He resides in Atlanta, Georgia, and is active as a marimba recitalist/clinician and freelance percussionist. Dr. Harnsberger is Director of Percussion Studies at Lee University in Cleveland, Tennessee and is a performing artist and clinician for Pearl/Adams, Innovative Percussion, and Sabian.

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