

On Your Mark, Get Set...

Go! You're off for the start of another school year. Some have likened a school year to a race — not a sprint, but a marathon. While it's important to start well, it's more important to finish well. Those in a race receive their reward at the end of the race, not at the beginning.

Like a race, preparation is the key to finishing each school year strong. It's not only important to work hard, but equally important to work smart. Here are a few suggestions to help you have a great school year:

1. Pace yourself. Plan your school year so that it is balanced with just the right amount of challenges and rewards spread evenly throughout the school year. Don't expend all your energy at the beginning of the school year, for if you do, there will be little energy left at the end of the year.
2. Keep your eye on the goal. Years ago my father-in-law taught me how to use a tractor for cultivating crops. I grew up in "suburbia" and driving a tractor was a new experience for me. My first attempt found me tearing up more crops than weeds. I just couldn't keep that tractor going in a straight line. He advised me to set my sights on the goal (or target) across the field. I was amazed — it worked.

Keeping one's eye on the goal is important whether one is a farmer, a runner, or a band director. But as band directors, what is our goal? We may have many goals. Two of the most important should be to develop our band's musicianship, providing an aesthetic experience to the highest degree possible, and secondly, providing each of our band members with a wonderful, comprehensive music education. Our activities should be consistent with our goals.

3. Remain enthusiastic about our work. I am constantly asked, "How can we keep our students motivated?" Let's not forget that our students are a reflection of us. If they lack enthusiasm, we need to examine our enthusiasm. In order to stay enthusiastic about teaching and band directing, we should regularly re-visit our reasons for entering the field initially—our love for kids and our love for music. We can remain excited about the process of making music by watching our students' eyes light up. Nothing motivates a real teacher more than seeing their students achieve.

Band directors expend themselves daily. Remember, If your input doesn't exceed your output, then your upkeep will be your downfall! One way that we can fill our "musical tank" is by regularly treating ourselves to great music—whether it be live concerts or fine recordings.

If you put these suggestions into practice you will have a far better chance of finishing the race, or school year, strong.