

My View: Everything I need to know, I learned in music class



Music education isn't just learning Mozart, Andrew Schwartz writes: "It's about learning how to think, rather than what to think."

By **Andrew Schwartz**, Special to CNN

Editor's note: Tuba player Andrew Schwartz holds a bachelor's of music from the University of Hartford. He did graduate work at The Manhattan School of Music and is working on an MBA at Georgia State University's Robinson College of Business, where he is president-elect of the Graduate Business Association. He is an intern at Atlanta-based music startup [Tunefruit](#). Schwartz's story first appeared on [CNN iReport](#).



(CNN) - It's no secret that education in America is broken. We can't define a good school, let alone figure out a way to measure success. Yet when money is tight, as it is right now because of the forced budget cuts, the first thing to be cut is always the arts. And that's a tragedy.

[I spent six years in music school before making a switch to business school.](#) I was

convinced that I was going to be a musician. I loved music. I was good at it, and I was willing to do anything to get to the top. But then I realized that, even at the top of the music game, the job security isn't there. So I dropped out of grad school and am now earning an MBA.

But through that transition, I've realized why music needs to be a cornerstone of education. Music is an art and a science, and it's one of the best ways kids can learn creativity and those mythical critical thinking skills. The focus of the curriculum isn't forcing everyone to learn about Bach or Mozart. It's about learning how to think, rather than what to think.

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That "how" is the holy grail of education. It's exactly what makes a good scientist, a good entrepreneur or a productive member of society. I don't play the tuba anymore, but I think the lessons I learned from it are actually more ingrained into me now that I have some distance from the actual medium I learned them in. Here is just a portion of the many life lessons I learned through music:

Work hard and it pays off

This one came early on in my short-lived musical career. I wasn't a very good musician when I first started out. It was obvious why: I only practiced an hour a day. But Katie down the street practiced four hours a day. My solution was to kick it up to six hours a day until I was just as good as she was. I had to make up for lost time, and I soon overtook her.

Make it happen

An amazing musician once said to me: "Make it happen."

There will always be obstacles in your way. My junior year in college, my quartet was making a recording for an international tuba competition. (Seriously.) It seemed almost impossible for us to get together to record, but we found one time: 10:00 p.m. on a Thursday. We had all been in class since about 8 a.m., and I had a serious sinus infection. It might have been the coffee and more meds than a doctor would recommend, but I'm convinced that these simple words cleared my head and allowed me to power through the pain and exhaustion. We made the semifinals.

Know where you stand

My teacher in grad school was fanatical about controlling variables. (Hey, a business

school lesson!) This meant everything from designing your own instruments to recording everything that you play. But it didn't stop there. What about your diet? Your exercise regimen? Everything that could have an impact on your performance needed to be taken into account. In music, and in life, to make decisions or move forward, you need to have as much data as possible about current conditions.

Do your research

A piece of sheet music doesn't tell you exactly how to play everything. In fact, it's just a general guideline. You would play a staccato note differently in Shostakovich than you would in Mahler. It's important to fully understand context, and the only way to do this is to do some serious research. Read a biography, read what the composer wrote, talk to the composer if you can, look at several different versions of the score and listen to different records to figure out exactly what you need to do. If you don't have accurate or complete data, you can't make a decision, right?

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Make connections

Before I went to business school, my classmates and I always related the music to something else. Wagner's intense "Ride of the Valkyries" is a waltz, which makes it fundamentally no different from Diane Birch's "Photograph," except that you're more likely to hear Birch in the background at a coffee shop. What you know about one thing can apply to the other. The deeper you go, you can make different links. Everything in life connects.

Work with others

In business school, everything is a group project because in the "real world," you work in teams. Great. That's what music school was. Put five people in a room together, all with different ideas on how a piece of music should sound, and you need to figure out how to make the best music that you can. There is no escaping these people; you have to work together because you can't just eliminate an instrument. If your French horn player gets mad because you didn't eat the cookies he brought and walks out, *you can't perform*. It's better than the lesson that came from business school – please, if a team member's work isn't up to snuff here, I can do it myself.

Be responsible for your work

When you're performing music, you can't cheat. You can't say to the audience, "You don't

get it." If they didn't understand it or like it, you failed. You are completely responsible for your product being well-received.

I recently spoke to a recruiter from a large tech company and was told that two of the most important traits they look for in new hires are their ability to think like the customer and taking complete responsibility for their work. It's a sense of responsibility that has to be learned, and I learned it as a musician ... in high school.

I'm not advocating for everyone to go to music school. I am saying that we, as a nation, need music education to teach everyone these lessons and more. It's what will help prepare students to join the workforce, whether they're part of an orchestra, a lab or a startup. Keep kids involved in the arts and stop underestimating the inherent value of music education.

The opinions expressed are solely those of Andrew Schwartz.

What life lessons did you learn in music class - or maybe biology, calculus, English, gym, or even underwater basket-weaving? Share your story in the comments!