

Life Skills Enhanced Through Playing Music

by Dennis Winge

In “How Champions Think” by Dr. Bob Rotella, he says, “scores of games are soon consigned to dusty record books. The lessons we learn in sports are supposed to be what endures. We are supposed to learn from coaches who demand excellence from us, that we are capable of more than we think. We are supposed to learn about perseverance, commitment, and confidence and then apply those lessons to the rest of our lives. That’s a bedrock principle in my philosophy.

“It saddens me when I see athletes graduate from college and then demonstrate that they can’t transfer what they learned on the field to their lives after sports. It’s one of the great blemishes on American sports that this happens so often. I wish I could sit down with every coach in every sport and talk about how to make sure his athletes are transferring what they learned from him to other activities.”

Fortunately, the skills learned in playing music seem to almost automatically transfer to the rest of a musicians’ life.

1. **Physical coordination.** This is perhaps the most obvious one. Musicians learn to not only get their two hands to synchronize, but also to coordinate their hands with their eyes, while reading music, and their ears, while hearing the sounds they and others are making.
2. **Ear training.** Many beginners don’t really study ‘ear training,’ and generally only the more advanced players really fathom the importance of it. However, developing an ear for music is something that is enhanced just by the sheer doing of it. Surely, students of all levels learn to appreciate music in any genre better simply by their attempts to play an instrument. And for those who stick with it, it gets much easier to hear and appreciate great music over the years.
3. **Structure.** World-famous guitarist Jim Hall writes, “Just knowing what music is and how it works gives you inside rewards: a feeling for the balance of things...” It is interesting that he put this attribute first. There is some subconscious absorption on the part of the musician to appreciate the structure of the pieces they play. This can include how certain sections compare and contrast with others, how fast and slow notes balance each other, and many other ‘structural’ components.
4. **Creativity.** Re-creation, i.e. playing music written by someone else, which is what most beginners play, is also a form of creation. They are creating sounds from which none exactly like that ever existed before nor will they again. And obviously, if the student learns to compose and/or improvise, the opportunities for creativity are compounded exponentially.
5. **Working well with others.** Just as in sports, music is mostly a group activity. Even musicians who mainly play as solo artists learned their craft by also playing with others. There is teamwork in staying together, covering for each other when necessary, working out problem areas, and much more.
6. **Perseverance.** No one learns to play music in just a few minutes, hours, or weeks. It takes months and years to really begin to make music that others genuinely appreciate. There are short-term advantages in showing off what one has learned, but the deeper one goes into learning an instrument, the more apparent the long-

term benefits become.

7. **Self-discipline.** Learning an instrument is never 'easy,' and this is a good thing because everything the student learns, he earns, and gets to keep for a life time. The self-discipline involved in learning an instrument is a rewarding process that pervades all the other areas of a musician's life.

These just scratch the surface. See if you can come up with your own list of ways that playing music has enhanced your life skills. When you do, drop me a line as I'd love to hear them.