

## **Cultivating Inspirational Dissatisfaction**

by Dennis Winge

“Inspirational Dissatisfaction” means that you’re not happy with the current state of affairs, and you’re motivated to take action. It’s drawing motivation from the fact that you are dissatisfied, not feeling deflated or hopeless. In fact, a little bit of dissatisfaction can be one the biggest if not the biggest source of motivation.

The twinge of dissatisfaction that an artist may feel is what inspires him to move on to his next work. Think of all the master artists, like Van Gogh, Beethoven and many others: they were all generally unhappy with their own work. They definitely weren’t sitting around going “Look what I created! Isn’t this the s\*\*t?”

So the question is: How can we manage our discomfort with our own creative process as musicians while still continuing to forge ahead and not burning out from stress or giving up?

### **1. Raw Passion**

In one example I heard, jazz saxophonist John Coltrane, upon being complimented on his music in between sets at the famous Village Vanguard one night, said something like “It doesn’t sound anywhere close to how it does in my imagination.” He was so passionate about his music! He was obsessed with exploring, refining, and bringing to life his musical vision! Until the day he died he was constantly exploring and breaking new ground.

The sign of an innovator is not that they are simply a genius, it’s that they put in so much work that the rest of us never see. We only see the outcome, and hail the artist as a genius. But the artist knows how many hours, weeks, years, and decades went into their craft. It’s like comedian Eddie Cantor’s saying “It takes 20 years to make an overnight success.”

But what drives them? It’s nothing but the art itself. It’s only the passion for the music itself that will drive you long-term. As soon as you go back to focusing on the music, and not evaluating how quickly or slowly (or well or poorly) you seem to be progressing, then you’re back in a timeless process of pure creativity and the perspiration it induces. Have you ever heard of the proverb about the man whittling a stick with so much focus that he didn’t notice that 100 years had passed and that the world had completely changed but he hadn’t aged at all?

### **2. Mindset**

The only Internationally acclaimed motivational speaker Tony Robbins says “I’ve come to believe that all my past failure and frustration was actually laying the foundation for the understandings that have created the new level of living I now enjoy.” The secret here is that, like many, many successful people, you have to view frustration as a necessary part of growth. You simply cannot stretch yourself and have it turn out perfectly every time! If it did, you’re either not stretching yourself nearly enough or you’re a narcissist. 😊

So make peace with the fact that you at some point are going to feel dissatisfied with your musical progress, or a piece of music you worked hard on, or a performance you put so

much preparation into. Make peace with yourself and talk yourself through it. If you don't, you'll never see the beautiful view that lies just over the next peak on the mountain you're climbing.

### 3. **Patient Persistence**

Persistence goes along with passion.. But sometimes, you do notice that you've been whittling the stick for a few decades (and you're probably hungry by then lol), and you see the big picture. Well, there are thousands of quotes about being 3 feet from the gold (from Think & Grow Rich) and many more that I won't trot out here. But sometimes just reminding yourself of these quotes is enough to see you through on mastering a difficult piece of music.

Always remember, it's not a question of whether you can or cannot play it. It's only a question of how fast or slow you can do it. If you had to play one note of the passage per year, you could surely do it, right? Well then, slow the metronome down to 2 beats per minute if you have to, and play it right. Don't worry about how long it's going to take to reach your goal tempo. It's not a linear curve anyway, i.e. the time it takes to get to 50 beats per minute (bpm) is way longer than it will take you get to 100.

### 4. **Work Habits**

The great book "Peak Performance" by Stulber and Magness not only talks about mindset as mentioned above, but it talks about developing work habits that nurture long-term growth. In particular, the formula "growth = stress + rest" indicates that you must have planned-out periods of stress followed by planned-out periods of rest. This can be hourly (like work for an hour and then take a 10-minute break) to weekly (like take 1 day off per week where you don't even check email or anything related to work whatsoever.) Or it could be yearly (i.e. 2 weeks of vacation per year, etc.) It also talks about cultivating your work environment to be conducive to hard work and creativity.