



Making The Phone Your *Student Value Amplifier*

article by Michael Smolens ©2009

Among musicians a central concern has always been, “How can I amplify what I’ve already got?” Consider how the earliest portable organ began at the size of a small TV set and grew into the earth-rumbling modern pipe organ. The romantically pear shaped Middle-Eastern *oud* (the predecessor to the Western lute) centuries later became Jimi Hendrix’s stratospheric electric guitar sound of the late ‘60s. Chances are very good that a typical 17-piece big band started out as a much smaller unit, owing to the bandleader’s fascination with arranging.

This holds equally true for teachers wanting to make a bigger difference for their students, as well as for enlarging their student base. Clearly, enriching your teaching background, enlarging your performance experience, and producing recordings and articles will all help to position yourself more powerfully in the marketplace. But just as often, referrals from your current students can also be a potent source of future students. And what generates consistent referrals? A central factor is the amount of excitement that you help to create for each student in their musical journey.

We as teachers know that musical development does not appear magically and dramatically like it is portrayed in mass culture. Nearly every student I’ve ever worked with has had one or two areas that developed much slower than the others. *So in the face of this learning dynamic, a key ingredient to generating excitement for a student lies in creating value for them at every interaction you have with them.*

When a teacher works with a student in a lesson, they are creating value in a myriad of ways. Here are just a few examples:

- uncovering the style(s) of music that most excites them
- developing a system of efficient practicing
- designing the right balance of projects
- communicating to the student’s most developed area of intelligence
- assisting their transition into performing, composing, teaching, or recording

Teachers are familiar with the advantages of this direct, one-on-one interaction for generating excitement because the verbal and non-verbal response that a student offers are big clues. When a teacher gets more experienced at picking up on those cues, more referrals are bound to happen.

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An often-overlooked opportunity of creating value for the student can be found in your interactions with them on the phone. Let's illustrate this with three phone calls that correspond to three different phases of your work with them – your initial intake phone call, the follow-up call after the first lesson, and when either you or the student is making a request to reschedule a lesson.

1) Initial Intake Phone Call:

- pose questions to elicit new forms for their musical expression.
- offer suggestions as to where they can rent or buy an appropriate instrument.
- make recommendations for more generalized listening to inspire a beginning student, or specific artist recommendations for a more advanced student.

2) Follow-Up Call After The 1st Lesson, ask if:

- all of their assignments make sense.
- the suggestions to optimize their practice environment are moving forward.
- the times that they're practicing are really working.

3) When Making/Answering A Request To Change One Of Their Lesson Times, point out:

- what aspect of their last lesson showed the most improvement.
- what assignment will likely be the most entertaining.
- an upcoming concert by an artist of interest.

This practice of brief, yet on-target phone consults is the cornerstone to my “Unlimited Support” teaching and marketing strategy. Contrary to what you might imagine, I have found that this does not, in fact, take that very much time. It does, however, clearly communicate a genuine interest in helping each student make rapid progress in their musical journey. This generosity will come back in the form of more enthusiastic students, and through that, more referrals for future students!