



WHETHER STUDIO OR ALL STAR, TEAM OR INDIVIDUAL, YOU MUST BE WILLING TO WORK EXTRA OR DO MORE THAN YOUR COMPETITOR IN ORDER TO ATTAIN THE GOALS THAT YOU WISH TO ACHIEVE.



EVERYONE WANTS TO WIN, BUT THE WIN IS MORE MEANINGFUL IF THE JOURNEY TO GET THERE IS A WORTHY EXPERIENCE.

As we transition from the “Season of Giving” to the time of year when New Year’s Resolutions are made, and oftentimes broken, we should take a deep breath and pause to remember what brought us here in the first place - our passion. The competitive year has begun for some, and is just beginning for others, and with it are new challenges and opportunities. How do we as directors, teachers and dancers make this season the best one ever? Just like saying “no” to those leftover holiday cookies when your resolution is to drop 10 pounds, the key to a successful season is in finding consistency and reinforcing group expectations.



5.4.3.2.1 HAPPY COMPETITION SEASON!



BY RYAN SPANICH

YOU HAVE CHOICES EACH DAY. WHEN YOU’RE IN THE STUDIO, YOU CAN CHOOSE 110% OR 75% BECAUSE IT’S WEDNESDAY AND YOU’RE ‘KIND OF TIRED’.

Everyone wants to win, but the win is more meaningful if the journey to get there is a worthy experience. As a dancer and a teacher, I have been exposed to all sorts of different team environments. I have been on teams where no one liked each other and we won national titles, and I’ve been on teams where everyone loved one another and we never won a single trophy. Many would argue that one of those two scenarios is better than the other. Each has its merits and drawbacks but in both, the outcomes were determined by the process taken, not just by the feelings of the people involved. Ideally, we all want to be successful as dancers because, at our core, dance is something we love to do. But, is passion enough? How do you, as a dancer, define ‘success’?

Al Pacino, in the movie *Any Given Sunday*, gives an epic speech about what it takes to be a team. He says dramatically, “the inches we need are everywhere around us. They are in every break of the game, every minute, every second.” These inches Pacino speaks of are the building blocks that all teachers, dancers and teams need to be prepared to be successful in any given competition

season. Whether studio or All Star, team or individual, you must be willing to work extra or do more than your competitor in order to attain the goals that you wish to achieve. You may be thinking, “he is talking about winning a trophy or a title.” While trophies and titles may be byproducts of hard work, earning awards does not tell the whole story.

As a dancer or teacher, you can simplify the world you create for yourself. You have choices each day. When you leave the house, you can choose shoes or sandals. When you’re in the studio, you can choose 110 percent or 75 percent because it’s Wednesday and you’re “kind of tired.” Remind yourself that life is about choices, and the experiences you create are your responsibility. Teachers, you are the creators of destiny, and if the destination is to be a memorable experience for your students, you have the opportunity, and even the responsibility, to do everything you can to make it that way. Take the extra 15 minutes to discover who your dancers really are as people, and you will affect their lives in many more ways than in merely collecting shiny trophies and title-bearing jackets. Dancers, being able to dance is a precious gift, and whether your goal is to dance backup for Beyonce, or just to feel better after a rough breakup with your significant other, give your passion all the effort it deserves.

THE JOURNEY WILL ALWAYS BE MORE IMPACTFUL THAN THE OUTCOME

While winning a National or World title may impress others in a very real way, or seeing a Platinum winning solo on YouTube may change someone else's life, it's the late night studio sessions where you just laughed over that one move that you could not get right that will be the things you never forget. Sure, the end result of winning is amazing, and in many ways is just as unforgettable, but truthfully, do any of us remember every moment that we are physically on stage competing?

FIND A COMMON GROUND FOR YOUR TEAM

Do you all like Rocky Road Ice Cream, or is Zac Efron your favorite actor? When you dance at home is Demi Lovato your album of choice? Whatever unifies you in a positive way, embrace it, even if it seems ridiculous. The best experiences are the ones that are shared, the ones that are inclusive. To be a studio it's important to cultivate a unifying force rather than simply be a name on a jacket or a uniform. Take the time to create a fun chant or mantra that, after a tough day in the studio, reminds everyone "we're in this together."

AIM SMALL, MISS SMALL

What are your goals this season? "I hope we finish Top Five" is too broad, and in some ways represents the wrong mindset. To "hope" allows for the possibility of failure to creep in. Five is just a number, and a number on a paper should never define you. Goals can be small or large, but none are ever unattainable when promoted in the right way. "Today I will point my toes in every single side leap." You are no longer "hoping" here, and the detail level of a toe point is very specific and hard to miss when focused on properly. Goals like this easily lend themselves to ideas of "I WILL be one of the five best dancers at Nationals this season." The goal driven work has been done repeatedly, which promotes the confidence to achieve success. The details are the difference makers, and when precision becomes an everyday activity, the overall impression is much more striking.

ALWAYS ANSWER THE QUESTION "WHY?"

Whether you teach or compete, there should be a plan for every rehearsal. Within that plan, the goal should be to always expect more of yourself and push for greatness in ways that may even make others uncomfortable. This is where the "why" comes in. If a teacher demands, "today we are performing our turn sequence 10 times without timing errors," Callie the Questioner may ask "Why?" "Because I said so," is not the best reason. As a dancer, be respectful of the teacher's direction, and remain inquisitive about what you can do to be a better learner. Be a student of the art of dance in every imaginable way. Do not simply wait to be TAUGHT, but have the drive to KNOW so you can be prepared to teach others. A team is at its strongest when it goes into competition without any unanswered questions.

*LEARNING HOW TO LOSE
WITH GRACE IS JUST AS VITAL
TO SUCCESS AS IS
WINNING WITH HUMILITY.*

MAKE YOUR REHEARSALS COMPETITION FRIENDLY

One of the worst feelings after a performance is when you say to yourself, "Gosh, I wish we had done it as well as we did in rehearsal." There are very real differences between the rehearsal and competitive environments, and there are things you can do to make the gap between the two less significant. Promote friendly competition in rehearsal by taking the time to point out the successes of dancers and pushing others to emulate those characteristics. It is important as a teacher to make dancers aware of missteps along the way, and it is equally, if not more, impactful to recognize the successes of your dancers. As a dancer, it's a fair statement to recognize that there is always someone better than you. That person may be on your team and you may want to be more like him or her, or that person may be an idol in the dance world that you aspire to be like. This realization can be useful when it pushes you towards competitive excellence and growth within yourself.

Your team can't over-prepare for an event, so invite an audience into rehearsal to help create the atmosphere of a competition. Including families and friends not only creates a greater communal feel in your studio, but also helps get out some of the jitters before a major event.

Lastly, never allow a single run through to be enough. Push the concept of back-to-back, full-out routines whenever possible. If two in a row is doable, imagine the strength and passion that can reside in a performance when the adrenaline is pumping hard.

IN EVERY WIN THERE IS A LOSS, AND IN EVERY LOSS THERE IS VICTORY

National Basketball Association (NBA) Head Coach Gregg Popovich has stated, "after a win or a loss we watch the playback tape the same way." Put differently, in victory and in defeat there are undeniable truths to be learned either way. Oftentimes, the greatest lessons in life are taught in moments of despair. Learning how to lose with grace is just as vital to success as is winning with humility. Even if the outcome of your 2016 season is your team winning the ultimate prize, ask yourself two questions: 1) are you passionate enough to do it again, and 2) are you willing to sacrifice a little more than the next guy in order to make a lasting impact on those around you whose lives you might change by your presence on the team?

