

Music & Theater Department Blog

A New Beginning

By Catherine Mancuso



January: the month of goal setting and creating a new life. It's a new beginning both on college campuses and in our everyday lives. January brings a chance to start over both personally and academically with a clean slate. Goals are wonderful, but in my experience goals don't always lead to success. What will lead to success is a clearly defined vision.

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines a goal as something that you are trying to do or achieve. Thus a goal is an action step that we are taking and not an end result. These steps are very helpful in keeping us on track but they do not clearly define what we want to achieve. Instead of thinking about goals, we must focus on our vision.

Vision is defined in Merriam-Webster's Dictionary as something that you imagine: a picture that you see in your mind. A vision gives us a clear, tangible picture of what we stand for, what we want, and how we want to achieve it. Take a moment to close your eyes and let your mind show you what you want for this semester. What images come to mind? What does your dream look like? Sit with this vision for a few minutes and then write down what you see.

I myself struggled in my early teaching days. I would set lofty goals of getting through material but I found my work to be mundane and tedious. Once I sat myself down to really understand what my vision was, I could take more effective and efficient steps to producing the outcomes I desired. The results in both my classroom and personal life were astonishing. Work became fun, inspiring, and exciting.

What is the best approach to clarifying your vision? Take a good, hard look at these questions:

- 1 What am I passionate about?
- 2 What are my values?
- 3 What are my priorities?
- 4 How do I see my ideal life?
- 5 What is my purpose in life?
- 6 If I were to die tomorrow, what would I want the world to remember most about me?

Use these answers to shape your upcoming semester and write out what steps you need to take to make your vision come alive. Remember, when your vision is clear success will naturally follow.

Music & Theater Department Blog

Despite living in a time where the artists DIY aspect of their career is visible to the public, whether via Instagram, Facebook, a website, or blog, we see that this model isn't new, but actually well established. While true, musicians and/or composers didn't have social media to promote their work until the end of the twentieth century, this did not prevent them from pursuing, maintaining, and promoting their careers in a way that would be copied by future artists. It is showing this connection when discussing current artists that I see the students truly gain an appreciation for the "older" musicians and music we are discussing. When one sees that an established musician or group of varying styles of music and time periods - from as early as the Baroque Period (around 1600-1750) to the Cool/Modal phase of Jazz during the 1950's - has established themselves as great performers, composers (songwriters), and educators (whether actually giving lessons, or simply giving "tips" on how to become a better musician during a brief conversation with a fan); a connection to a current artist is made because of that same approach to music is now seen. The student, or music lover, not only comes to enjoy and appreciate a music and artist/composer from a different style and time period more, but has a deeper appreciation for the current artist as well. This causes a snowball effect, and before they realize it, this new understanding and appreciation is influencing their listening habits, leading them to discover new musicians, and in some cases, back to older ones, but "hearing" them in a new way.

At the end of the semester, I have a handful of students who come up to me and tell me of their new found love for an artist or style of music they once thought uninteresting. The amazing aspect of the conversation, which is the common thread amongst them all, is that when they suggest an artist I should listen to, it is always backed up by the versatility of the musician, what a great composer, performer, and yes, educator they are. To see that all of these attributes are now being sought for in a musician, as opposed to just a catchy melody, is not only exciting to see, but also exciting for the listener. Having a better understanding of how much work goes into becoming a musician gives the listener a better appreciation for their favorite artists. Instead of someone who "rocks" on their instrument, the view of musicians becomes that of someone with equally interesting varying paths culminating into a multi-faceted artists.