

**Chip Averwater Acceptance Speech
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I'm sure all of us in this room occasionally ask ourselves how and why we got into this field. You know, like "What were we thinking?!" I remember a few situations that influenced me.

I remember, at about age 12, working in the music store. Don't tell the Labor Dept. I was actually a highly-paid executive, doing important work like cleaning dirty trumpets and organizing the clarinet reeds. And I watched as parents came in with their kids to get that first instrument. You could sense the excitement. They couldn't wait to get that instrument home and make those first horrible sounds. I remembered that excitement myself. And I thought, I could talk to them about that; and there are some things I'd like to tell that kid.

Well, in a couple of years it dawned on me that the instrument was a commitment. It wasn't just a toy you play with for a week or two and put down. It was your companion for hundreds, if not thousands, of hours of practice and hard work. And that commitment was probably the biggest decision of their young lives.

And then as I got close to college I began to realize what that decision meant. You know all that propaganda we put out about music makes you smarter, playing in the band teaches hard work, persistence, teamwork, and all that? As it turns out, some of it's true! I believe band experience plays a major role in forming character – it makes us the adult, the parent, the citizen that we became.

Now, at 66 and at the end of a long career, I ask myself that inevitable question that we all have to ask: What did I accomplish? Was it worthwhile? Did I make a good career choice?

And I have to say, No, it wasn't a good choice ... it was a great choice. I got paid to talk to the people about something I wanted to talk to them about anyway.

I love it when someone tells me I helped them with their first instrument. They say it with much more enthusiasm than if it had been a bicycle or a video game; their band experience is something special in their lives.

But of course, the hero of this story isn't the guy from the music store. It's the men and women:

- who go find those students in the school;
- who fill their classrooms with young people, most of whom had never even considered making music;
- who patiently guided them from those first horrible sounds, not to perfection – there is no such thing in music – but to beauty and order;

- who spent more time with them and exerted more influence on them than anyone but their parents;
- who, perhaps most important of all, taught them music – the most beautiful of all the arts.

I believe we shortchange music-making when we focus only on the life skills music-making teaches – persistence, hard work, teamwork – all valuable in life, to be sure.

But music is the embodiment of beauty; and when we get an understanding and appreciation of music, we take that beauty with us all our lives.

The emotions that we create when we make music are the basis of our humanity. They give us human understanding and compassion. A person who never experiences those emotions will never be a complete human being. They weave themselves into our social and moral fabric and when we're lucky, become part of our culture.

Our critical link to this music making and this cultural treasure are the music teachers. If we don't have talented and dedicated music teachers spreading the word and the musical abilities, this treasure is lost to a generation. Would we ever recover it?

So, my heroes are you, the men and women who teach music as a profession. Nothing happens until you do your thing, and everything happens when you do.

Thank you! This means a lot to me. Thank you for what you do for the kids, for music, and for the world.