

Good morning, and welcome to the 2016 VMEA Conference

Today, we're going to discuss process, because process determines outcome:

When we hire, design, train, teach, and even learn, we develop a process for each, often creating these processes out of our knowledge base, our comfort level, and our prejudices. Our hiring, designing, training, teaching, and learning processes determines the outcome of our fall season. The process each of us uses is usually one with which we are comfortable. This is often a mistake. If you are happy with your end of season outcome, then by all means, continue within your chosen process. However, each of you has differing expectations for your end of season outcome, as, in this activity, we serve many masters; administrators, athletic directors, judges, the VBODA Assessment process, competitions, parents, and the local community. These competing interests can easily derail a band's design process. There are bands that compete without thought to assessment or performances for high school sports teams. They focus solely on competition, and perform the competitive show at games. Conversely there are bands that are primarily concerned with community support and halftime shows, or solely focused on Assessment. It can be difficult to adjudicate or assess a series of bands when all the designs are geared for different venues, different functions, and different outcomes. And yet, the judges do just that at Marching Assessment.

Concert bands in the Commonwealth (generally), however, serve a single master: the VBODA Assessment. Unless you're taking your band to the Bands of America Concert Band Festival, Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic, or some other event of that magnitude, your spring is dominated by Assessment. The performance at Assessment serves no other master; it is a single focus for a single goal.

The competing interests of a fall season can frustrate a director and their staff. My advice is to know what you want your outcome to be, and educate your administration, your parents, and your community in ways that make clear your goals, and make clear how their requirements impact your program's success.

There are three types of goals:

Institutional goals – external, set by others (boosters/AD) (sports events, parades)

Organizational goals – internal, set by you (which shows you attend)

Functional goals –set by the parameters of competition, assessment, community, and families, both internal and external, and are logistical in nature

We all want to meet our goals. If you're in attendance today, you either want to improve your process, and by extension, your band's quality, or you just want to see what crazy stuff comes out of my mouth. I don't plan to disappoint in either capacity. Let's consider the five processes, and how they impact your goals:

Hiring Designing Training Teaching Learning

I understand that many directors in this room, while desirous to have a better program, feel as if they are at the end of their financial, temporal, or personal ability to improve. You feel as if you have no more money, time, or ability to spend. These are all problems to solve, certainly, but the first step is to **want** a better program. It was told to me, many times, that a Northern Virginia band director once said, "Marching band is a disease for which there is no cure, except November." If that is your opinion, then I wish you the best of luck in the future, and I wish your students all possible success. Your students already know if you're into this activity or not. They know who you are, the way you act and talk about marching band. The "better" part of every program starts with you and me. All students deserve a better experience, and they deserve to know that the time they give to this activity is well spent. Your attitude towards that time is important. Here is how to spend it well. It starts with you and your staff. An educated and motivated staff can move mountains and change the world for your students.

1. Hiring:

You can't do this alone. Marching band is a team sport for performers, and requires a team of funders, trainers, technicians, parents, and designers. Regardless of your geographic location, there are opportunities to hire a staff. And regardless of your financial situation, there are opportunities to hire, as well. Often, these trainers, techs, and designers come with qualifications that exceed your own in the marching activity. We should embrace the concept that our staff has so much to teach us about vocabulary and training, while we teach them about maturity and music. In some communities, you may have to travel some distance to ferret out the college students who are willing to help, but it's worth

the effort. You have too many responsibilities as a program owner to live without the ability to delegate.

The responsibilities of:

Program Coordination

Designing for Winds

Designing for Percussion

Designing for Color Guard

Designing your Visual Program

Marching Training

Dance Training

Brass Pedagogy

WW Pedagogy

Percussion Pedagogy: Battery/Keyboards/other front ensemble

Ensemble Rehearsal Skills

Electronics management

...are beyond one person.

If hiring a large staff is beyond your budget, start small, and start with your visual program. There is a measurably and quantifiably better return on your investment by increasing the quality of your visual program than by music. As a band director, quality of sound is already your purview. Once that is covered (assuming it is), put other resources towards your visual training and design.

Even former students will be willing to help before they leave for college in August. Ask some to help at camp. I recommend they be at least 2 years removed from your program before being utilized.

Often, band parents or other teachers in your school were once in band. We had a math teacher that was our guard designer for several years. Ask around.

This journey you take with your staff is not directive (you don't dictate all things); it's complimentary. You all learn together, you grow together, and you become focused on unified goals. It's important that you work as a team.

Include your staff in daily/weekly/season-long goals. Make plans and set milestones for design, training, and teaching. Assess your staff's skills

periodically, evaluate their ability to communicate with students appropriately, and ask for their input. Make clear your expectations regarding their improvement and training. Encourage them to see other bands, and experience art in all forms. Growth is required of us all.

You and your staff will train together. If you are unsure about what marching technique to use, or how to incorporate dance into your brass and WW visual vocabulary, the internet has vast resources. WGI has a series of training videos, which, while not free, are truly worth the cost, and even Youtube has training resources for you. Ideas are free. Watch what other band programs do, how they pace their show, how they orchestrate and choreograph. Communicate with your staff how your band can benefit from more conventional or exotic design and training.

The best resource you have is each other...other band directors. If you don't know something, ask. Odds are, other directors have been where you are, and have asked the same questions.

YOU are a hire by your school. Your growth is also required. Part of your, and your staff's, growth is exposure to art. Get out of the house and go see some great bands, drum corps, winter guards, or indoor drum lines. Regardless of where you live, go watch other teams rehearse. Other staff's love an audience, I know I do; it focuses the students' attention admirably, knowing they're being observed. Some band directors aren't into having visitors, so ask first.

Here are some bands/guards/drum lines to visit in varying geographic regions:

West: Bassett (Trey Harris continues to put state on the map nationally)
Liberty Christian (amazing training and visual design)

North: James Madison (Michael Hackbarth)
Westfield (Alan Johnson best writer)
Rock Ridge (Justin Radcliffe and Martin Blount best trainers)

Capital: Deep Run (wonderful clarity of orchestration, clarity of thought)
Powhatan (drum line, again, won't believe what they can do)
Colonial Heights (excellence and design, logic in all aspects)

VA Beach: Hickory (David Enloe: scope/scale of their ideas, quality of winds)
Princess Anne (John Boyd: training and attention to detail)
Frank W. Cox (Mike Lane: ambitious ideas, better every year)
Kings Fork (excellence and physicality of visual program has no =)

When you hire a staff, or visit another band's rehearsal, observe the priorities of their staff, the priorities and pace of their rehearsal, and the manner in which they speak to their students and each other. Will they rep the show another time, or break down a 10 count phrase for an hour? Do they train longer than they rehearse the show material? Ask questions. Be committed to bettering your process by observing others practice theirs. Better yet, why wait for next year to ask? Every educational resource you need to succeed is in this room.

I know a lot of you here today, enough to know that some of you don't like each other very much. I also understand that some of you know I'm trying to change the world, and that doesn't sit well with some. We all need to move past our personal prejudices about other directors and other programs. You may not have voted for Hillary Clinton, but she was right about one thing: we are stronger together. The states, counties, and cities that dominate marching band activity nationally are Indiana, Oklahoma, Texas, Raleigh, NC, Cobb County, GA, Kansas City, MO, and Cincinnati, OH. They all have one thing in common: the directors, trainers, designers, and judges all work together to make the bands great.

These areas have judging associations with a staggering amount of depth to their training process. There is Chief Judge and an educational director who develops a philosophy of each caption. Each caption has a caption manager (often the Chief Judge) who is accountable for the commentary and philosophy of each judge within that caption. These guys listen to a LOT of commentary. That commentary should match the vocabulary in the philosophy, and reflect the score, profiling, and sub-caption integrity. These judges will experience regular feedback, and be expected to hone their skills over time. The craft of adjudication is no different from the craft of band directing. It takes years to learn, and a lifetime to perfect.

The staffs from the dominant regions often work for a variety of bands. The directors know that their band is stronger WITH competition than WITHOUT. Avon and Carmel are a great example, as well as Cleveland, Cape Fear, Panther

Creek, Cary, and Green Hope, NC. They share staff, willingly, gratefully, and experience growth and cross-pollination of ideas. We are stronger together, so let's start working together, to improve the process by which we teach, design, adjudicate and train judges.

All the analysis captions deal with both design and quality, which we call Composition and Excellence. Let's examine how you think about design.

2. Designing

When designing a show, we have to remember that there are three stages:

- a. The Show We Think (the idea stage)
- b. The Show We Write (the technical stage)
- c. The Show We Teach (the physical stage)

All three shows are very different. Sun-Tzu once said, "No battle plan survives contact with the enemy." Well, for us, some ideas don't survive contact with logistics, and vocabulary doesn't survive contact with the students training. Some ideas become impractical, some become financially burdensome. We often have misconceptions about what makes a band successful. Don't try to make a plan where you succeed by being big or by being loud. No circuit judges by size or decibel level; we judge "the imaginative use of design elements." So, be imaginative. Imagination costs nothing, but requires study, artistic intent, and ambition. The only cost of studying, being artistic, and having ambition is your loss of mediocrity. It's worth the trade-off.

Your show should be "about" something: perhaps it's about the music, as in "Pictures at an Exhibition" will have pictures or frames around the field, and you play that music. (Or Enigma) It contains a concrete subject that people recognize. That's called a "Programmatic" show. It's about something currently known. Or, you could explore a concept, perhaps calling your show "Conexus," and playing any appropriate music while showing things that connect. It contains an ephemeral idea that must be resolved both musically and visually, about which the audience is generally unfamiliar. That's called a "Concept" show. Either works.

Design a show that incorporates the three components of the General Effect triad: Adrenal Effect, Intellectual Effect, and Aesthetic Effect.

Adrenal Effect determines how exciting your show is (usually through velocity and changes in effort such as dynamic shape, layered body, extremes in dynamics, and kaleidoscopic or contrary motion).

Intellectual Effect determines how intriguing or thought-provoking your show is (usually through variety in mood, orchestration, guard integration, and soloistic effort).

Aesthetic Effect determines how beautiful your show is (usually through color orchestration, overall sonority and guard design).

Excitement, thought, and beauty...you should have them all.

When we consider adrenal effect, remember that we don't judge by how loud a band plays, nor do we judge by how much space a band takes up. We judge "the imaginative use of design elements." If that hasn't worked for you in the past, then maybe the judges forgot that size shouldn't win, or that decibel level doesn't determine the excellence... (LU show: Bassett, Cox, PA, Deep Run, Lib Univ)

If the judges at VBODA Assessment wrote "Great field coverage!" which values size, or "Huge sound!" which values volume (and make no mistake...we at James Madison got both this year), then the system is at fault, not your design choices. Imagine if you got those comments at concert assessment..."you really filled up that stage!" or "you shook the rafters, bravo!" Its nonsense inside, just as its nonsense outside.

DIY/Outsource your design? Only you know best. If you believe that the most cost effective, educational, and competitive way to write your music and drill is to do it yourself, then do so. Just remember, all designers have a dual process: 1) make art and logistics meet in the middle, and 2) provide opportunity to display the criteria on the sheet. By that, I mean:

Does the score provide opportunities for students to display dynamic contrast?
Does the score provide opportunities for exposure to each section (Br/WW/Perc)?

Does the score provide opportunities for soloists and small ensembles?
Does the score provide opportunities for variety in tempo and meter?
Does the drill/staging provide opportunities to explore all areas of the field?
Does the drill/staging provide opportunities to explore variety in velocity?
Does the drill/staging provide opportunities to feature and integrate the guard?
Are your transitions fully orchestrated with logic and artistry into and out of every stage?

Opportunity is your best design watchword.

IF you design by yourself, frequently have someone you trust evaluate your work. Frequently. Never trust your ideas until verified by an outside source, usually several outside sources.

Some advice if you DIY:

- i. Don't be afraid to sustain an impact or arrival point: it need not be loud. The pay-off has to be worth the buildup. (Joss Whedon)
- ii. Pacing wins shows. Make the audience's journey magical. Surprise them from time to time.
- iii. Winds, percussion and guard must consistently work together (like band directors), not apart, both visually and musically.
- iv. Drill is only a third of the visual sheet...understanding and exploring movement and staging are key to your success.

You could, of course, hire a professional designer. If you outsource a designer, agree on a price, and make sure you sign a contract that protects you both. Set up a payment schedule. Set up a design completion date.

PRICE and CONTRACT must come with penalties for missing design deadlines and with penalties for late payment by you. It's only fair, and protects both parties.

PAYMENT must always be on time.

DESIGN COMPLETION must always be on time.

Be professional about your relationship with a designer, and demand the same from them. We all know each other...don't burn bridges. Talk over your concerns before they happen, and as they happen. Talk it out.

The single most prevalent factor that limits a band director from hiring a quality designer is money. Your program DOES have money, but it's already allocated to other things within your budget. No one lives with an overage, or makes a profit. So, budget for design. Explain to your boosters why that component of process is important (it's half of each analysis sheet in VBODA).

When designing, develop a script, or narrative, that exist within a storyboard. Each caption manager should ask for wants/desires/staging ideas about each part of the show. Designers, in this manner, can more fully give the customer what they want, and the band benefits from developing form and function at every stage. Planned events are a hallmark of quality design. Your storyboard will reflect your ideas, so talk frequently with your staff and those tasked with design.

3. Training

Most directors are willing to hire a staff and outsource design, but training a band for today's artistic vocabulary may actually be outside the scope of their skills. Every week that I'm out either judging or competing, I hear and see bands whose skills fail to match what is asked of the students: brass players who can't make a characteristic sound, woodwinds without technique, movement vocabulary that is inappropriate, uncleanable, or requires a physicality that the students don't possess. You see and hear it, too.

Most program coordinators struggle with the balance of vocabulary and training. We want our bands doing amazing things, but are we willing to take time away from teaching to focus on training? Consider this: the former principle horn of London Symphony, Barry Tuckwell, was asked, "If you had only one hour to prepare a recital, what would that hour look like?" His answer was: Long tones, articulation, scales, dynamics, arpeggios, range exercises, and quality of sound, for 59 minutes. The last minute would be spent on the actual music, as everything in the previous 59 minutes was already in the music. His only restriction was strength and stamina, as those can never be the focus on a performance day.

We, as teachers, are so singularly focused on *teaching* the show, *cleaning* the show, and *repping* the **show**, that we fail to allocate time to, or adequately plan for, **training**. But without proper, and uniform, training, one more repetition of

the material only solidifies error. You are building error into your system. I will spend a week at camp on nothing but training. We won't even read the music, learn one step of drill, or learn one count of choreography without training the skills first.

Many directors are proud to have finished their show at camp. Typically, that means one of two things: 1) your show lacks depth, and early success gives way to low composition scores when other bands are complete later in the year. You cannot recover from lack of depth in design and vocabulary. 2) You are not trained properly for the material, and each repetition of vocabulary creates error. The show is uncleanable in the time you have left.

Take your time:

- A. Train properly for strength, stamina, cardio, flexibility, range of motion
- B. Train properly for range, articulation, quality of sound, balance, blend
- C. Train properly for posture, ankle/knee articulation, leg line, orientation
- D. Train properly for stance, focus, level/layer changes, dichotomy changes (bound/free, quick/slow, heavy/light, loud/soft, and gradations to each)

The scope and scale of a physical training process is beyond the time frame we have today. Attached to your VMEA App is a 25 page paper on a variety of subjects, including understanding and building the student base you need to succeed, and understanding design and adjudication. Within that paper are many components of training. It's pretty technical and overly philosophical...but stick with it. It's like reading a car repair manual for music.

As process owners, we have to move past our prejudices about a new process, or about anything we've never done before. It can be scary, building a new future, exploring what Shakespeare called "The Undiscovered Country." Some of the training components we are unwilling to tackle can include:

- Cardiovascular Endurance (running, stamina, breath control)
- Strength Training (core, legs, shoulders, arms, back)
- Concentration (discipline, immediacy in response, recovery skills)

It is true that students, with their lack of context and understanding, will wonder why you're making them do all of the above. If the show requires cardio,

strength, and concentration, then you have to train for it. The band director does not perform the vocabulary, so it's not necessary that you train with your students, but it sure helps if you do. I train with my students every rehearsal. I do everything that is expected of them, and I'm 51. The ease with which they buy into the system is predicated on my involvement in the training process. Your trainers should be capable of performing the vocabulary, not just for the sake of clarity and example, but to show that it's possible.

Visually, you must build the foundation before adding the second floor. Start with posture, body line, feet position, and focus. Then you can move to a single step, with straight leg line, your choice of foot/ankle articulation, and weight between the feet (a step is a change in weight, as well as direction and velocity). Then you can tackle forward march, backward march, and starts and stops, with the resultant discussion of inertial effort. From there, slides, upper body orientation (turning from the thighs/hips with torsion rotation), and Follow the Leader moves. Then you move to toe step, jazz run, jazz walk, flutter, and postural and level changes within moments of staging. Incorporate dance vocabulary within the training process. Without ALL of that, you can't effectively teach the show.

As you train, consider varying your routine:

Do you march in a block or do you train in sequential lines?

Do you warm up in an arc as a band, or warm up in separate locations, Br/WW/P?

Does your guard instructor train your winds to move?

Do you vary your step sizes and tempos in visual and musical warm up?

Walk before you run; train before you teach.

4. Teaching

When you're finally comfortable with your students' progress in training, it's time to start teaching the music, movement, staging, role-play, changes in effort, layered events, and the relationships between them all. We've seen many different processes succeed over the years, but today's vocabulary is different from what you may have experienced as a performer. Today's velocity in our activity certainly exceeds what has come before. Today's range of expression and physicality from modern designers has more depth than ever before. There are

expectations in vocabulary that exceed previous efforts. No longer can a simple orientation change, lunge, or horn lift be considered the extent of your layered efforts.

To manage so many layers of responsibility requires a slower pace of rehearsal and a slower pace of putting the material on the field. If your goal is to have all the material completed at camp, then success may elude you. We've already established that, if you work towards that end, you will either lack depth in design, or be untrained for the vocabulary. Work slower...all the good bands do. When I say "good bands," I mean Avon, Tarpon Springs, Flower Mound, and Carmel. If you want to be them, then adopt their process.

The band director is usually the music caption head for his/her band; not always, but usually. If you're not winning music, then reassess your process. If you're looking for a process that improves your band's quality of sound, balance, blend, and overall sonority, look to your left and right. The people in this room have the answers to your questions. This year, I've heard Bassett, Westfield, Hickory, Rock Ridge, Thomas Jefferson, Deep Run, Princess Anne, Grafton, Liberty Christian, Frank W. Cox, Battlefield, Fairfax, and Patriot. All of these programs develop a great quality of sound on the field...and their directors are sitting in this room with you. Ask them how they do it.

This collection of directors from across the Commonwealth is not your only teaching resource. Some of those who retired from your ranks are still active and abreast of current trends and tropes. I'm sure that Scott Lambert or Carl Bly would love to help your band. We bring him in every year, and it's the best rehearsal we have, bar none.

Consider, also, that part of your teaching responsibilities includes equipment. Which instruments do you choose to use in the fall:

- All piccolos or flutes with 1 or 2 piccolos? (talk about it; always hear all parts?)
- Rico or Van Dorn reeds for your clarinets/saxophones?
- 7C mouthpieces for trumpets or 5-1 ½ C mouthpieces? (talk about it)
- Mellophones or marching horns? (talk about it and adapters)

- Shoulder mounted tubas or sousaphones?
- All pit or small battery?
- Pit placement?
- Battery tuning/muffling?
- 5 ½ foot flags or 6 foot?
- Weapons? (talk about trusting the guard staff)

All of these choices are yours, but do some research, find out how bands that you respect approach these subjects.

To lecture this august body on the pitfalls and prejudices of teaching music to marching bands would reek of hubris. You are, first and foremost, musicians. But because your standards are high, you desire quality at every stage of training and teaching. That's just not a plan for success, though. The first time your snares play a triplet roll, it will be bad. The first time your freshmen guard members toss a flag, it will be bad. The first time your new members march at 160 bpm, it will be bad. But all of that has to be bad *first* so that it can be good *later*. Your winds are no different. Don't be afraid to play across the volume boundary of quality sound. Play loud badly, play soft badly, play high or low badly, so that it can be good later. When you train, you expand your boundaries. Every day, every rehearsal, you should push those boundaries further away from where you started. For instance, your brass should, like all weight lifters, work to the point of fatigue each day of camp. Build strength for those for whom strength is required. Build technique for those for whom technique is required. Please warm up your woodwinds and brass separately. They are as different as flutes and snares. You can't train a brass team with a woodwind warm up.

There's a popular adult cartoon called "Adventure Time," in which Jake (a talking dog) says to Finn (the last surviving human of the Mutagenic War), "You have to suck at something before you can be kinda good at it." The same is true for us. Be willing to have your students be bad while they explore a new range, a new tempo, or a new idea. Experience all dichotomies with gradation of effort. This is about growth, and growth can be painful. (talk about Lisa)

Some of us teach the same way we taught upon graduation from college. Some of us are expanding our repertoire of skills constantly. I am an advocate of exploring new ways to teach, as today's students are very different from the students of

1990. Technology has had a major impact on the way students learn, and their schedules are becoming more burdensome. The time they spend with us is in competition for soccer, swimming, homework, and family. If we don't teach in a way that renders the process and the material valuable, we lose those students. And you can't fool the students; they know if you consider this activity valuable. So, find a way to value it, and make it of value to your time-stretched students, if you don't already.

5. Learning

The time we spend teaching exhausts us, and the renewal process includes rest, family time, and, if you're a band director, alcohol. But as we exhaust our artistic reserves, we must also refill them. I encourage you to listen to music, see plays, hear musicals, see paintings or sculpture, experience architecture, watch dance, or simply experience nature. All of these are components of design in marching band, part of our process. Marching band is great for its ability to combine the most disparate elements of art into a cohesive and cogent whole. You should see the layers and combinations, experience each of these elements separately, and judge their value. If you have the time, study orchestration, learn the vocabulary of ballet, and read the WGI Rulebook, for its philosophy, clarity, and granularity.

As we experience art, we grow. As we grow, so our band grows. Growth is not exclusively about size; while it is true that we all want our band to grow in numbers, size is immaterial to success, as Adair County, KY, Jackson Academy, MS, and Rock Ridge, VA can attest. Quality ideas, quality training, and the imaginative use of design elements are all that we need. Well, one other thing...

Desire. You have to WANT to get better. That starts with our attitudes about marching band. Professional authors and writers have a mantra: Write what you know. It is by writing what you know that your voice is authentic and knowledgeable. If you've ever been on the receiving end of my judge's commentary, you know that I've been trained. It is by the quality of each of your bands that I can see how much you know. No band director can hide in marching band. It is an unforgiving landscape that assesses our value as designers, trainers, teachers, and artists. It's easy to see how a negative attitude can develop towards an activity with which we are generally unfamiliar, yet in which we are required to participate, whether by state mandate or administrative dictate.

But if we have to do it, don't see it as a chore. If you love art, there is much to love about marching band if you make it artistic. Write what you know. If you love Beethoven, then program Beethoven. Make your program a reflection of the best you have to offer. And as you learn, you'll have more and more to offer. Every student deserves the best we have, and that starts with your attitude about an activity in which they are engaged. Make it meaningful. Make it magical. Show them art. You never know how much a student desperately needs a home, or a friend, or a safe place. For so many students, your program is that home they need, so make the fall part of your season as worth their time as the spring. For many students, you are literally saving their life with marching band. Some kids need a reason to get up in the morning. Be their reason.

The change you're going to experience next year in marching band starts here, today, with you. The attitude you bring to the hiring, designing, training, teaching, and learning processes will determine success at all stages. It is through collaboration and encouragement with colleagues that this is possible. It is through an improved system of adjudication and adjudicator training that this is possible. And it is through your determined growth that this is possible.

There are things I don't like...I don't like mushrooms or celery. And some people just don't like marching band. But perhaps it is also true that I haven't found a way to prepare and cook mushrooms to match my culinary palate. Perhaps you haven't experienced marching band in a way that is artistically meaningful for you. Sit down with me, call me, email me, and we'll find a way, together, to help you understand what marching band can be within the bounds of your tastes. Each of us invents the activity every year. Nothing is strictly compulsory: make this what you want it to be. Invent what motivates you.

You should know, already, that there are many directors in Virginia for whom the VBODA Assessment has little value. There are 133 counties in Virginia. There are 462 high schools in Virginia, of which 327 have marching bands. In the last 6 years, the average number of bands performing in VBODA Assessment is 148. That's just over one band per county. More than half the bands in our Commonwealth don't attend Assessment, when averaged over the last 6 years. This is not encouraging. Many of you have discarded Assessment for something you consider more meaningful; Band of America, US Bands, or the new Virginia

Marching Band Cooperative. We can't realistically believe we're offering a service that the majority of band directors value. Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that bands serve different purposes during the fall, and a parallel Assessment/Competition/Circuit is needed to include more students in the educational process, and to include more directors in the feedback process.

These, however, are not replacements for an Assessment: they are competitions. The value that we place on competition is not unfounded. If Assessment is meant to RATE exclusively, then consider that competitions both RANK and RATE, with more meaningful adjudication by extension. And by that, I mean commentary and rating are bolstered by numerical profiling and sub-caption ordinals. We more clearly understand our place in the world and our abilities when compared to others. There is no comparison process in VBODA. We merely assess bands by and against the criteria. However, we simply get more feedback through competition than through assessment, by the very nature of each.

Many of you are adjudicators for VBODA, and as a designer with many horses in this race, I thank you for your willingness to serve. Let's focus for a moment on a process with which most of you have little input: judging. I judged at a VBODA Assessment for the first time this year, and I have some questions about judge training, and I know you do, too, because many of you have asked me about it.

Judging organizations across the country use a variety of training techniques and attributes, so let's examine a few.

Judge training, philosophically, has many components:

Balance: A judge must be able to balance the commentary between positive and negative (complimentary and critical), and the "what" and the "how" (composition and excellence).

Accountability: A judge must be accountable for the score/ranking/rating, by way of application to some fixed criteria, by feedback from a caption manager, and with input from our customers...the bands.

Commentary: A judge must be able to verbally articulate, in real time, depth of design, compositional value/artistry related to the criteria, performance quality, and the value of the students' training through the vocabulary.

Knowledge/Philosophy: A judge must be able to articulate the philosophy of the sheet, the rubric on which the score will be based, and a working knowledge of the sub-caption criteria.

Exposure: A judge must be regularly exposed to current trends and tropes in composition/design, both musically and visually, training, artistry, pacing, and general effect. We have to remain abreast of what the rest of the country offers, in marching band, drum corps, winter guard, and indoor drum line.

Numbers Management: A judge must be able to both rank and rate within a caption to create meaningful spreads, profile information, and understand the WGI philosophy regarding "the value of a tenth."

Discernment: A judge must be able to discern the scalar and linear placement/ordinal of a band within a given criteria or philosophy. This is inextricably linked to knowledge/philosophy and exposure.

(By the way, this produces the acronym BACKEND)

Here are some of the questions that you have asked me over the last month, since I judged at a VBODA Marching Assessment:

Who develops the criteria, philosophy, scoring ranges for Assessment?

Who is accountable for the quality of judges' commentary?

By what process is a judge trained, and what does that training look like?

Who are the caption managers for Assessment?

What tools are made available for training and growth among judges?

You, as band directors, deserve the best commentary in Assessment. You, as band directors and adjudicators, deserve better training, support and encouragement from your colleagues, and they deserve it from you. You deserve more information about design, education, training, placement, rating, ranking, ordinals, sub-caption integrity, and profiling, for these are the mechanics of

improvement. You deserve a system in which we can all grow, and remain accountable to each other. We can all hire, design, train, teach, and learn, as a team. We are stronger together. I hope to discuss many of these subjects with you in the coming months. Thank you for your time and attention.