

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

What I Learned From Vic Firth

Over the years I've written about the awesome lessons I have learned from attending events, such as Warped Tour, DCI World Championship and the AARP Convention. This time I would like to talk about the lessons I learned from drum industry veteran Vic Firth — who passed away in July. I was fortunate to have met Vic Firth at The NAMM Shows, visited his factory, and, most importantly, attended many of his private drum teacher seminars with my music lesson teachers. The lessons he taught apply to all teachers, not just drum teachers.



The lessons I learned from the late Vic Firth

With Vic's passing there have been many great parts of his life and legacy written about. Vic touched me through his dedication to the private music teacher. During his sessions, I learned many things about teaching from him, including: teaching is about the student — not about the teacher; accept all styles of music in your lesson room; professionalism as a teacher creates success; be humble and sincere; support music education and develop your music teachers.

During one session, Vic, who was a college-level teacher explained that, "All I do is polish the bumper [when I teach.]" Meaning it's the teachers early on that get the students excited and create the musicians. Beginning-level teachers are the ones that put the bumper on the car. Anyone can polish it. Vic knew that the hardest part of developing musicians is on that beginning level, not "tweaking" those fine points on an existing musician. The beginning teacher can "light the fuse" or "snuff the fuse out" with a beginner student. These teachers are the ones that needed his attention. As an industry we teach more beginners than advanced students in our businesses. He knew the industry needed professional music teachers and wanted to help create them.

Vic invested his resources to raise the bar on private music lessons in our industry. As my friend and fellow drum instructor Dom Famularo, who did these seminars with Vic, said, "The

bar was so low we were tripping on it." If Vic could help our industry teach better, we would create long-term music students and in turn lifetime musicians. In other words, better teachers equals more musicians, which equals more business — a simple but effective formula. Vic knew the usual non-trained "go get 'em tiger" approach to become a private teacher wasn't very successful.

So my question to music retailers is: What are you doing to "raise the bar" in your business with music lessons? Are you investing in the development of your music lesson staff? Are you and your lesson program putting the bumper on the car, or just wanting to polish the bumper and collect your money? If you have better teachers, you will have more business. Now is the time to have your own professional development sessions for your music lesson program and create your own PMT (Professional Music Teacher) training. Let's look at some topics you could include:

1. NEW TEACHER ORIENTATION.

Show your new teachers how things work. Go over everything from the scheduling process to making sure they are ready to teach on time. Don't assume anything; help set them up to