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Foreward

Like many of you, my journey into arts administration and teaching began with a love of making music, a passion for mastering an instrument, and a love of learning. While playing an instrument offers several applicable skill sets, my music education did not include marketing tactics, developing a vision, or other key skill sets required to build a studio or business. Most importantly, it offered few opportunities for me to get crystal clear on why my work mattered to me and what was most important to me. We're often several years into running a business before we stop to ask how we got here, why we spend our time the way we do, or where to focus our time and energy.

In my first conversation with Eric Branner, we discussed some of the key challenges our community of teachers faces. On any given day, teachers in our communities are asked to meet a growing diversity of student needs, to be excellent artists and performers, and to meet the expectations of parents, whose time is stretched thin, even as they ensure their student is ready for their lesson. In more extreme circumstances, some have experienced significant disruptions to learning, including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate crises, and a constant threat of shrinking funding and support for arts education.

This list of demands from our environment, our students, their parents, and ourselves will only continue to grow. There will not be a shortage of opportunities for how we spend our time, and while we cannot hope to solve every issue, I hope this introduction and the rest of this book offer you a reminder to come back to what is most important to you.

It was about fifteen minutes into the rabbit hole above that Eric and I landed on the word intention, and its importance in our lives. The only cure for a growing to-do list is to accept that the list will not get shorter. The cure lies in repeatedly asking what is most important

to you, and the challenge is to ensure it remains your focus. Of course, what Eric does so skillfully in all of his work is help you get clear on why, and to use the key skill sets he outlines to help you better reach your goals.

While this book will not help you solve every challenge we listed, it will help you center your work on your intentions, along with the tools, skills, and frameworks for making decisions about your business and your mission. It will also allow you the opportunity to reflect on the skill sets you may be missing, and I hope, take on the challenge of addressing them, just as our students show up to take on the challenges we present. Dr. Shinichi Suzuki, the founder of the Suzuki Method™, said it best in *Nurtured by Love*, “We all have unlimited shortcomings. Yet one way of seeing things is to consider our lives as a time frame that allows us continually to work at changing our weaknesses into strengths. This, I must say, is an intriguing task.”

I did not go to school to learn how to operate a business, yet I’ve found that leading one has afforded me the opportunity to do things I care about most: learning, building a thriving education system, and ensuring young people have the opportunity to learn, connect, and grow. I look forward to learning about what building your business offers you and your community. Whatever the reason, you wake up to the challenge of building your work—whether it’s growing your studio, scaling it down, or creating something new, I know we share in the daily challenge of turning weaknesses into strengths. May each day present another opportunity!

— Angelica Cortez

Executive Director of the Suzuki Association of the Americas

Introduction

Being a music teacher is a wonderful career. You can make as much money as you desire while making the world more beautiful, musical, thoughtful, and cultured. I've seen it thousands of times. Teaching music is often the most consistent source of income and direct impact for musicians. Every community needs music teachers. Your skill set is uniquely valuable; all you need is the intention to do great work and the willingness to turn that work into a prosperous business.

The difference between successful and destitute creatives is rarely talent; more often, it's a lack of curiosity or a willingness to learn how to manage a business. If you are a musician, you are a business owner ... embrace it! The truth is, most music education programs don't do enough to acknowledge the reality that you'll eventually graduate and then need to support yourself. Business skills development should be a part of every music program!

I wrote this book to encourage you, wherever you are on your journey, toward feeling confident that you can create a worthwhile career that supports you well and that is dearly appreciated by those you serve. The following are the most important lessons I've learned about business, entrepreneurship, marketing, sales, and everything else it takes to earn a great living ... while feeling great about it (no smarmy tricks here).

Here's to more music. The world needs you!

There are specific tasks and requirements that all businesses share. These are functional areas of business. The classic business school model of nine functional areas of business includes Leadership, Operations, Marketing, Sales, Human Resources, Customer Service, Product Development, Tech/IT, and Finance.

For the sake of this book, we’re going to focus on the most critical areas for building and operating a private lessons business: Leadership, Operations, Marketing, Finance, and HR.

Leadership	Operations	Finance	Marketing	Sales	HR
Mission	Teaching	Revenue	Word of Mouth	Prospecting	Wellness
Impact	Scheduling	Debt	Ads	Lead Management	Health Insurance
Vision	Billing	Pricing	Social media	Offers	Vacation/PTO
Offerings	Pricing	Expenses	Outreach	Closing	Retirement
Products	Communication	Taxes/ Licenses	Partnerships	Customer Relationships	Personal Dev
	Policies		Content	Retention	
	Studio upkeep		Performance		
	Recitals		Pricing		
	Equipment				
	Technology				

Functional areas of business are the categories of work that all businesses need to handle.

This may seem like an impossible list of things to understand, maintain, and manage. The beautiful thing is that you can focus on the areas you’re interested in or attracted to. Even if all you do is sit on the street corner with two chairs, a sign that reads “lessons \$25,” and a guitar ... you’ve started the business.

Everything else you do, each operation you optimize, all the systems you create, and the strategies you execute can be explored additively over time as you grow. Don’t feel overwhelmed.