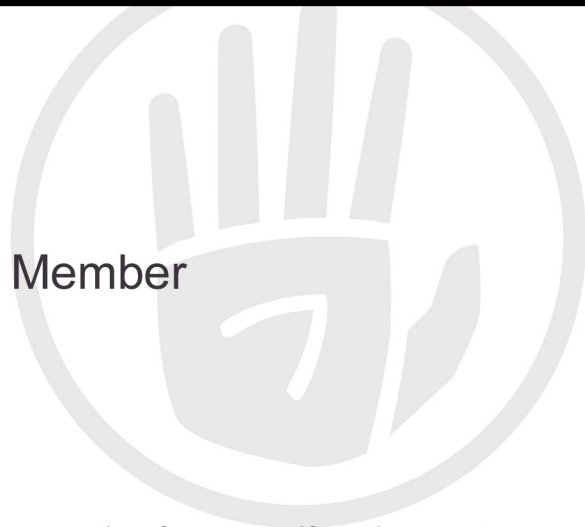




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How to be a Beast

We have all seen them; performers or clinicians that blow us away with their abilities and performance aptitude. The kind of players we describe to others as being “monsters” or “beasts” on their instruments, leaving us with feelings of both ineptness and inspiration. While there is a certain amount of innate talent involved in becoming a fantastic player, hard work and preparation should never, ever be overlooked or minimized.

Contained in this acrostic are disciplines and habits I have either gathered from my colleagues, other articles, or have created for myself while witnessing greatness on stage. These tips have helped me tremendously through my years as a working percussionist and I hope they inspire us all to be better!

B - BE PREPARED, BE ORGANIZED, BE ON TIME

E - EXPERIENCE / EXPOSURE

A - ATTENTION TO DETAIL

S - SCHOLARSHIP

T - TIME MANAGEMENT

B - BE PREPARED, BE ORGANIZED, BE ON TIME

- Keep a calendar and follow it. Don't book anything unless you have it open. (see “time management”)
- Plan to be better every time you play or practice... every time.
- Set goals and make them realistic. These can be organized into short range goals (for a 30 minute practice session) or long range goals (what I want to do after I graduate.)
- Take more equipment than you need for a gig and

create a reputation for yourself as the most prepared person in the ensemble.

- Be on time for every rehearsal, every performance, and every practice session.

E - EXPERIENCE / EXPOSURE

- Teach anywhere you can (band camp, private lessons, community drum circle, neighborhood improvisation)
- Perform anywhere you can (nursing homes, community organizations, library, schools, civic functions, festivals, fairs, weddings, create a band and march in a parade, etc.)
- Summer workshops are great opportunities to learn something new.
- Study with visiting artists / teachers, even if it's not one that teaches your instrument.

A - ATTENTION TO DETAIL

- Your metronome is your friend, and your lie detector. Use it and trust it.
- Zoom in on problem spots and devote practice time for those areas.
- Keep a record of your practicing statistics. How fast can you play sixteenth notes? Will you be able to play them faster (or for longer) this time next week?
- Challenge your brain with new combinations during practice sessions. How complex can you make a scale? Can you play in quintuplets in your right hand while playing triplets in you left hand?
- Make sure you can count all your rhythms out loud while tapping your foot. It always helps to know your music inside and out.
- Learn more music than what is written on the page. Play difficult passages longer or faster than is written in a solo or ensemble piece.

- Incorporate musical challenges from a solo piece into your warm-ups. This enhances practice time efficiency.
- Outside of class, medical students study, law students study, biology students study, history students study... **MUSICIANS PRACTICE!** While every other major is chained down to reading books for their field, we get to **MAKE MUSIC** when we study for our field. What a pleasure! Make it worth your time when the practice room door shuts.

S - SCHOLARSHIP

- Outside listening will improve your musical interpretation. Listen to more than your instrument.
- Be a nerd! Read articles. Go to lectures. **WRITE** articles, **PRESENT** lectures! Dig, dig, dig for more information.
- Push yourself! No musician, athlete, world leader, or entrepreneur achieved success by doing the bare minimum. Raw talent gets you only so far; to be successful you have to push. That does not mean it will be easy... but it will be rewarding!

T - TIME MANAGEMENT

- Organize and prioritize your time as it applies to your life (calendar) and to your playing (metronome.)
- Use Google online calendar, paper calendar, sticky notes on your wall, phone app, etc. Choose the system that works for you and implement it. Don't agree to gigs without having your calendar in front of you. This will let the asking party know that you care about your craft and will honor your commitments.
- Keep a timer in the practice room. It helps keep you honest about your time management.
- Make to-do lists if you find yourself forgetting appointments or missing opportunities.
- Keep balance in your life and factor in time for fun. All work and no play makes for a dull person.

Joshua D. Smith is currently the Assistant Professor of Music at Bethel University in McKenzie, TN. His responsibilities are for all aspects of percussion, including teaching applied lessons, directing the Percussion Ensemble, and directing the marching drumline. Smith also conducts the Wind Band, serves as the assistant director of the marching band, and teaches academic classes within Bethel's Division of Music. Smith received his Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of North Texas, a Master of Music Performance degree from James Madison University, and a Bachelor of Music in Music Education degree from the University of Kentucky.