



The Key To Learn The Violin

A proven formula to learn the violin
from the inside out

Rubén Camacho
Basic guide level I (included)

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BY
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THE KEY TO LEARN THE VIOLIN

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PREFACE

This book that you now hold in your hands, or that you're reading on the computer screen, and all the information contained therein, is the result not only of my years of practicing and living with the violin, but also it is the product of an inspiration, of an intention.

When I celebrated my 40th birthday a couple of years ago, I realized that I had already dedicated 34 years of my life to music and to the violin. Obviously, throughout all these years my focus and my ideas about music had evolved. During these years I changed the focus from that which I had learned, that which most people know about music; and I moved toward a completely different approach.

This new approach toward music allows me to reach my goals faster and more effectively. Also, it is a much more enjoyable way to focus on music, in contrast with the learning paradigm that has dominated the classical music culture for centuries.

This new approach is the result of a process, just like all of life is a process. It has been a process of wonderful experiences and learning curves, throughout which I was accompanied by individuals who have served as models for me to follow. The intelligence and inspiration of these special people have illuminated my path toward this new way of seeing music, the violin, and overall, life itself.

Just like it happens with a lot of other people, for years I was an active participant in the traditional classical music paradigm, that perspective from which it seems learning to play an instrument is more of a sacrifice than a joy. For years and years, I would spend hours and hours practicing, with very little progress to show for it. Naturally this was extremely frustrating for me.

Nevertheless, from the moment I started to relate and understand the way the mind learns things, the way the universe works, things changed for me in the way I worked with the violin and music, 180°.

It's true that we musicians tend to isolate ourselves from the other arts, especially since the beginning of the 20th century. This has been a disadvantage of us, and in these other arts we can better see and more easily reflect on the creative and learning processes.

This book contains an approach that's completely different that will help you to more easily and more joyfully manage the change from where you are to where you want to be in terms of playing the violin. If you're looking for a book that explains a new way of thinking and that helps you to open and expand your perspective, not only with the violin but with other aspects of life, I suggest then that you read this book not only once, but several times. Each reading will bring new insights to help you. It will also serve as a reference you can use whenever you need it.

To conclude, I want you to know that you are an unlimited being, one with abilities that you probably aren't even aware of and that you're capable of reaching any goal or achievement you desire in your life. On the next few pages you will embark on a completely new journey, one which will surely leave an impression on you in the first reading. This is why I invite you to put these principles into practice before you can be tempted to disregard them because they're so different from what you're used to. Perhaps the results you can get will even surprise you, when you know what it is you really want.

Rubén Camacho, Caracas, 2010

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL, PEDAGOGICAL
AND SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF TEACHING VIOLIN

*"Our only limitation, within reason, lies in the development
and use of our imagination."*

-Napoleon Hill-

THE MYTH OF TALENT

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, "Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world."

- From Nelson Mandela's presidential inaugural speech, quoting Marianne Williamson's book *A Return to Love*

Admit it. For years you've lived thinking that some people are more talented than others, that some individuals are more blessed than others with superior talent for playing the violin, or really for any activity. Given enough time, this belief has developed in you and now it has become your reality. This happens because in so many situations and in different ways you have tried to reach various goals, but up until now, they remain beyond your grasp.

In the world of music, each time there is something beyond your reach, you resolve this dilemma with a highly-irresponsible saying that has come into existence: *I don't have talent, or other people are more talented than I am*. I'm not saying that this way of thinking and believing is your fault, but without a doubt it is your responsibility each time you participate in sustaining this belief in your life.

What is going on? Why does it seem so clear that there are things you learn easily, but not everything you want? Why does it seem easier for some people to pick up something, to learn a skill, for example, than it is for others?

Even if it's the first time that you hear this, and even if it seems the strangest thing, I'm telling you that the way you play or learn your instrument is nothing but the way, up until now, that you have wanted to do so. The only difference now is that, before you weren't aware of this choice. Now you are.

To play or learn the violin differently from the way you *want* to learn or play is impossible. In this very moment you may be asking the most logical question possible. "But I don't choose to learn or play like that? This is not the way I would like to play, this is not how I want to sound?" Let me tell you that, "Yes, you do."

The thing that perhaps you are not clear about is that your mind has its own programming, and this programming has a purpose. For most of your life is guided by this great memory bank that is your subconscious. Your subconscious mind is the part that really rules your daily life and it reacts to the most of the stimuli that you encounter every day.

However, the good news is that once you understand how this system works, this programming that runs your life, you can change it and begin to learn or play the way you want to.

But no one has spoken to you about this before now. Your first reaction or your teacher's reaction to why you're not playing the way you'd like to or why you haven't reached a certain goal is, "*each person has his limitations.*"

This sentence, this answer, this belief is also irresponsible! The only limit to the way you can experience playing the violin lies in the realm of your intentions, whether these are consciously or unconsciously chosen.

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Getting the understanding that all limits and blocks that you experience are mostly in the province of your subconscious mind, is the key to liberate the immense potential that you possess, just like any other person possesses.

Nevertheless, to understand this concept you need clarity. Clarity is essential, not only to play well, but to reach any goal that is important to you, to transform any dream you have into your reality.

The essence of clarity is that state in which your conscious beliefs are aligned, or congruent with the beliefs sustained by your subconscious mind.

But how do you achieve this?

This is precisely the purpose of this book. Throughout these pages I will be with you, speaking to you and guiding you so that you can achieve the things you want.

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If you're completely honest with yourself, you know that you have experienced difficulties on many occasions. You've tried to learn a certain way, you've tried to achieve a certain sound, and you're still not where you want to be. And you've tried not once, but many times.

If you're at an advanced level of playing, surely you have spend hours upon hours practicing and still, you're not happy with your results, with the way you sound. You've also experienced frustration, lack of motivation, or perhaps you've even resorted to that selection of words that is somewhat comforting at times: *I'm just not that talented.*

You feel like a victim of this thing called talent, of this gift that wasn't given to you, or perhaps you blame those around you for not having the talent or the abilities you think you lack.

But you've never thought that the reason for *not* achieving what you want could lie inside yourself. You've never thought that not only are *you* the reflection of the problem being projected but also, that *you* are the cause of that projection. Maybe you've always hit your head against a wall and blamed the wall, instead of moving away from it.

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In this book I'm going to tell you about another proven way to reach any goal you can set for yourself. The place where you find yourself right now is nothing more than a current reality, a reality that is neither permanent nor definite. In this book I'll talk to you about the way to achieve anything you want.

Through this book you'll see that everything you want is close than you think. You'll realize that everything you want can truly be found in your own hands.

THE BENEFITS OF LEARNING MUSIC

*There is a force stronger than steam, electricity and atomic energy;
the will."*

-Albert Einstein-

The will

Did you know that there are numerous studies related to the benefits of practicing a musical instrument? Are you aware that there are many positive results for those who practice playing a musical instrument?

If you have ever had the marvelous experience of playing a musical instrument, you have certainly realized that it is impossible to play without centering and focusing your mind and your energy. Playing any musical instrument requires you learn how to focus, center your energy and your attention all in the same direction.

Nevertheless, this happens quite naturally as you are learning a lovely melody, song, or any musical piece. Yet for the most part, you are not even aware of this process as it is going on.

In contrast to your education at school, musical education usually takes place in a one-to-one context and it is usually the student's choice to study music. Children often ask their parents to allow them to learn to play an instrument and in some cases, the parents put their child in music instruction to see if the child likes it. In both bases, the element of choice, of deciding that you want to do this, makes the difference. It's an essential factor in the learning process and yet one that has received precious little attention in our current educational system. If you look at this closely, you can see that a child rarely chooses to attend school, and when he or she does, it's usually a choice motivated by social reasons, the desire to be with one's friends.

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As Einstein put it so eloquently in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, the overwhelming factor that moves the human person is desire, or the will to do something. That's why I believe that the will, the desire, the love, or wanting to learn should be the basis for any educational system.

If a child wants to do or participate in something particular, it's because this activity or goal calls his attention more so than the alternatives. There is something in this activity that reaches out to him or her. This curiosity that the child feels, this desire, is really a *value*. It's a value that normally we pay little or no attention to in our society.

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Every single thing that you see in your everyday life is the result of this curiosity, this desire and wanting. This is the reason why for generations upon generations human beings have always created. Everything hinges on this, on the will, the intention, the desire, and this will, as I already stated, is a value. It's a value not only worthy of conserving, it's a value that is worthwhile to develop.

If you observe a child, you'll see how curious he or she can be toward everything around her. These qualities that children naturally demonstrate around certain objects, a curiosity, an energy, an emotion and this marvelous ingenuity, all contain a great lesson for adults.

The faculty for paying attention is born in this moment, it's born in the moment a child or young person places *his or her interest* in something that attracts him or her. Getting interested in something, to direct your attention in something that attracts you, is what awakens your curiosity. This state of being interested is an early lesson in learning to get centered, to focus on something. That's why from the moment a child decides to learn to play a musical instrument, from the moment he or she wills himself or herself to learn something, from this moment on, the child is already learning.

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How to achieve your desired dreams....

If you already have a child who studies music, or if you yourself learned how to play an instrument when you were a child, you've already realized that the learning process includes several steps. You already know that whether you want to achieve some goal, to learn to play a piece, to be able to play it, to present it before a group or even to write music, there is an essential process involved. It's a process that is unavoidable.

This is a great lesson for anyone, since life is just that, a process. Perhaps you've never thought of it that way, but through this book you can take the process of learning to play the violin as a process for achieving your goals life in general.

I'm going to explain it to you this way. For a long time I've been a big admirer of Leonardo Da Vinci. His work and his life have always fascinated and even inspired me. That's why during those years I lived in France, I was not about to miss the chance to get to know *Le Clos Luce*, which is the name of the house where Da Vinci lived in France after leaving Italy (for political reasons.) While visiting Le Clos Luce, I unexpectedly found one of Da Vinci's writings in which he wrote about *his discovery of a formula for creating masterpieces*.

I am certain that this surprises you, just exactly like it surprised me when I first read it. At first I thought this was arrogant of him to write this, which demonstrates that my mind was obviously not prepared for this moment, to accept this concept. Nevertheless, as time passed and things changed for me, I became more open to seeing clearly that Da Vinci was absolutely right about this. There really is a specific way, a recipe to achieve any goal that you propose to yourself and for which you feel a passion for in your life.

It is this type of teaching that this book will talk to you about and illustrate, what this way is, this manner of reaching any goal that you or your child desires. Using music as a marvelous tool, you can get to learn how it works and become aware of what the necessary steps are.

If you've ever read the book, *Think and Grow Rich*, by Napoleon Hill, you can see that this author, just like Da Vinci, talks to you about how to reach any goal you have. Over the years I've dedicated myself to learning this process and sharing the results with my students. I've proven that what I read in France and as several wonderful authors have written, this process, is only this: the truth.

Now, as a father and as teacher of your children, I suggest that you ask yourself these questions: What other lesson could be more valuable for your children? What other teaching could be better so that you and your children experience freedom? The answer is obvious and that is precisely the purpose of this book.

Developing the senses

Music can teach us so many things! One of these is developing the body senses. One of these senses is that of hearing, developing the ability to distinguish among different tones, textures, timbres, melodies and sounds. Developing the ear like this is an asset to any child or young person who wants to begin the study of music. Learning this quality is enriching, as is the ability to present oneself on stage.

Think about this: how many times in your life do you have the opportunity to be in front of an audience, and to learn how to manage an audience? When can you learn to present yourself before an audience and in an almost spontaneous way address the people in an audience? Imagine being able to learn from such an experience as a child or young person.

Surely you have not thought about this before because all these elements are so integrated, which in a way, often goes unnoticed. But yes, all of this is happening even if you are not aware of it. All of these lessons can benefit a child or young person who learns to play a musical instrument.

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A benefit to society

Another marvelous advantage for a child or a young person who studies music is the benefit generated for the entire community.

Having been born in Venezuela and having been exposed from the beginning to maestro José Antonio Abreu's Program of Children's and Youth Orchestras (aka *El Sistema*) gave me the opportunity to see the great social impact that classical music can have on our communities.

Even though for centuries classical music was something considered to be the exclusive domain of a cultural elite, to a specific sector of society, I can tell you that right now this has changed. This change is evident in the 35 years of the System of Children's and Youth Orchestras in Venezuela, which has attracted worldwide massive media attention.

If you were to attend a concert in Caracas, you would realize that most of the people who go to these concerts are young, and in many cases, children and teenagers. This creates a marvelous emotion and energy evident in each concert that permeates both the music and the audience.

The acceptance, joy and excitement that children from any social stratum in Venezuela relate to music in general, and specifically to classical music, demonstrate its universal appeal. Such results show that classical music can become a natural form of expression for each child and young person on the planet.

THE LAW OF ATTRACTION

"This concept of the universe as a world of pure thought throws a new light on many situations we have encountered in our survey of modern physics."

--Sir James Jeans, physicist, mathematician, astronomer--

You attract what you want and also what you don't want,

If you have a ball in your hands and you let go of it, the most likely outcome is that the ball falls down. As soon as you do this, even without realizing it, you are putting into practice one of the laws that rules our lives, the *Law of Gravity*.

However, just as the law of gravity exists, there is another law that is not as well known but that also rules our lives: the *Law of Attraction*. Both of these, the law of gravity as well as the law of attraction are laws that are constantly acting in our lives, regardless of whether we are conscious of their existence.

Both are only laws, which know nothing of good and bad as they are not able to judge any kind of situation. So it happens that if a person slips and falls, even though we don't wish that to happen, the law of gravity has been activated, without any discernment of the situation.

The law of gravity does not discriminate. Likewise the law of attraction acts. When we attract disagreeable situations or undesired ones into our lives, what happens is simply that the law of attraction is working.

Fortunately today more people are aware of the law of attraction. This is a foundational law in the discipline of psychology that posits, *what you get is what you focus your attention on*. The problem is then that people tend to focus more on what they don't want, than on what they really do want.

If you've been asking yourself what possible relationship there is between the law of attraction and learning to play an instrument, I think that the concept that I've just explained will clear up your doubts and questions.

Any person who wants to learn or achieve something in his or her life, must be cognizant of this law, of this fundamental principle of psychology. To see the achievements of people like Michelangelo, Da Vinci, Beethoven, Einstein and many other avatars of our civilization you will realize that they knew about this law.

. . .

Let's take a look at this principle more closely.

In this universe in which we live we are surrounded by vibrations, waves and energy; in this very moment that you are reading these words, there is a number of waves and vibrations around you that you can neither see nor feel. There are numerous sounds that you are unable to hear, that are beyond the reach of your hearing. One proof of the existence of sounds the human person can't perceive, is the fact that some animals can hear things that we are unable to hear.

Another example of all that is around us that we are unable to see is the existence of waves picked up by electrical devices such as cell phones, radios, or wireless networks. All of these waves, all of these vibrations are constantly around us and only in certain cases are we aware of their existence.

But it doesn't end here. Just like we are not able to perceive the waves that communicate to a cell phone, a microwave oven or a high sound that a dog can hear but we can't, in this same way our thoughts produce waves that we don't see.

Just like a radio or television broadcast signals, your thoughts are constantly generating waves and vibrations that you are not aware of. This is why our thoughts have a much more powerful effect on our lives what you can imagine.

Because of this, you can consciously want to achieve many different things in your life without realizing that, unconsciously, you have your attention on the things you don't want.

Emotions and the law of attraction

Now I will talk to you about something important: the effect of your emotions on the law of attraction.

Imagine that your emotional system is a thermometer that measures your capacity to manifest your intentions, or not. Thus when you are feeling well and right in your thinking, you are literally creating better conditions to reach any goal that you set for yourself (that's why it's said that happy people reach their goals faster).

Surely no one spoke to you of these things at school or at the university, but your emotions are the energy with which you color any intention or purpose that you decide upon. Even though you never think of this, you probably know already that it's impossible to have positive thoughts that fail to prosper, just like it's impossible to hold on to negative thoughts that don't produce after their own kind.

The universe, of which you are a part, is like this immense sea of waves and vibrations and each one of your thoughts set this sea into motion. Your thoughts put everything into movement and generate all the outcomes that occur or don't occur.

Now, have you realized the power that your thoughts have to achieve anything you want?

Your education, like mine, never focused on knowledge as important as what I'm sharing here. Nevertheless, through books like this one, you now have the opportunity not only to learn this and leverage this valuable knowledge, but also to share it.

Even though you haven't perceived it before, children manage a significant part of this information in a completely unconscious manner. Nevertheless, when you become aware of this, you can contribute to and help develop this knowledge so that it doesn't get corrupted.

In short, you can see that you have much more power and you can have even more influence on the development and education of the world, more than you used to think possible. The way you feel, and the way you present the material can be decisive factors for a full and free development of education.

INTENTIONS

"In the universe there is an immeasurable, indescribable force which shamans call intent. And absolutely everything that exists in the entire cosmos is attached to intent by a connecting link."

- Carlos Castaneda -

The power of intention

Right before writing this chapter I was speaking with Elizabeth, director of the Caracas Centro Mozarteum, where I teach. She reminded me of the number of things that happen in my life that she considers miracles. I took advantage and I repeated a phrase to her that I learned in *The Course in Miracles*: "miracles are natural and are happening all the time, it is we who block their free manifestation."

Among the many stories, Elizabeth reminded me of one about Dalina, one of my students (you can see a brief clip of her playing at www.rubencamacho.com.) When Dalina was about 11 years old and after taking a class, I commented to her and her mother that she really needed a better quality violin.

At the moment I made that comment it didn't seem it would happen because her parents did not have the money, at that time, to buy her a better instrument. Nevertheless and having experience with how the universe works, I decided not to pay much attention to this remark. Each time Dalina would come to class, I would make the same comment. Not to be obstinate about it but because it was the normal reaction when I would hear her play.

A few weeks later, according to the dynamics at Mozarteum, a well-known professor from Germany came to give some master classes at our school.

Everything flowed well, and after finishing the classes with the guest professor, I asked him if there was any possibility that Dalina and other students could attend an upcoming festival that he was organizing in Germany that summer. He was quite receptive to the idea and said he would send the information as soon as he got back to Germany.

In any case, each Friday when Dalina would come to her classes, I would always make the same comment: "It would be fantastic if she could play a better instrument." But this was no longer just a mere comment, it was beginning to become what I call *an intention*.

I had also told Dalina's mother how good it would be for her daughter to attend this festival in Germany. Her mother would always respond in the same way as before, that they didn't have the money to pay for such.

Everything possible was done to get sponsorship and other help with the expenses for attending the festival. Even so, like a trap of the ego, Dalina's father became unemployed just a few weeks before the festival was to begin. Things did not look positive nor very hopeful for her.

Nevertheless, when you set an intention you begin to become immune to many of the things we think rule the world. They looked for funding and got only promises, no commitments. The week before the festival arrived and still only promises. A couple of days before her departure, a sponsor gave a positive response and agreed to pay her expenses and the airline also agreed to collaborate to lower the price of her air travel so that she could indeed travel.

During this festival in Germany, everything went well. The professors were all very happy and satisfied with Dalina's work. On the last day of the festival, as part of their tradition, the teachers organized a closing concert in which they recognized the most outstanding students.

This being one of their last days before returning to Venezuela, Dalina and her mother took advantage and went shopping to buy some souvenirs for family and friends, and got back just in time for the final concert.

When they began to give out student awards, great was the surprise when the organizers called Dalina's name, and announced the *unanimous decision of the jury* to give her an extraordinary violin.

Recording a CD

Once I got this idea of recording a CD of meditations to help people accelerate their learning process. I was really happy with this idea, but frankly the only things I knew about this kind of project were: 1) the benefits of practicing meditation and 2) I would need to use a recording studio. These were the only factors in my favor so right away I started to look for someone who could help me with the electronic instruments necessary to create the sounds I wanted to include in this recording.

Right away I met this friendly composer who got me started. I was happy to meet him and delighted that he was willing to help me. After several interviews during which he got to know what my project was about, he told me how much it would cost to make this recording.

Honestly, it was a lot of money for me at that time. Right away I thought to myself, *how fantastic it would be to find someone who could help me to this for less money.*

I continued to work on my project and thought that if that was the budget for it, the money would come. I kept working on it and one day at the school where I taught I “coincidentally” ran into a colleague who asked me how I was doing and what I was up to.

Logically I answered him. Once I told him about my recording project, he immediately gave me the phone number of someone who owned a recording studio and who had a great deal of experience with this sort of work.

I was not that excited about looking for another person with whom to work, nevertheless I had already declared my intention, *how fantastic it would be to find someone who could help me for less money.*

I called this person and made an appointment. I explained what I wanted to do and everything about my project. To my surprise, he was excited about it and from the beginning of our conversation he told me about all the technical resources that are available to create special effects and record this type of audio.

A few days later, we met again and I took advantage to ask him how much he would charge to work on this project. His answer right away surprised me; he said that he was quite interested in my project and that he would not charge me but rather it would be his pleasure to help me.

I could hardly believe it and I asked him if he was really sure about what he was saying. He repeated what he had said before; I simply raised my head and said, *Thank you!*

But the story doesn't end here. As time went on, Guido, this sound engineer, and his wife ended up becoming close friends of mine.

.. . .

I'm going to tell you what's happened ever since I discovered the power of intentions and how this can help shape your way of playing the violin, or any musical instrument.

Instead of continuing to practice your instrument like I had always done, almost by reflex or because it was necessary in order to play well, I began to practice my violin because I wanted to reach specific and precise objectives with my sound. I began to have specific and precise intentions in mind, even before I would start playing.

In this way I began to shape my sound, to know what kind of sound I wanted to create, the texture, the form, the color and the intensity of my sound. I realized that if I didn't have in mind the kind of sound I wanted to make, it made no sense to keep practicing. If I didn't know where I wanted to go, which direction to go, then my practicing would not yield any result except to make me tired.

This is why the sound, or any musical quality, depends mostly on the musician, and not on the instrument. But that doesn't mean, of course, that a Stradivarius doesn't possess certain qualities found in very few violins.

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Wanting to play your instrument well is not a clear or well-defined intention. Like I always tell my students; "Who says you're not playing your violin well right now?" It's impossible to know! This all depends on who is listening to you at any given moment and that person's perception.

Now, if you have a clear intention about what you want to achieve, that's different. Do you know exactly what you want to create with the sound, the intonation, the speed, the rhythm or the interpretation, to name just a few musical variables? Once you already have a more clearly-defined direction, a more precise decision about where you want to go, you're well on your way.

However, the power of intention is not limited to this way of practicing only. I have used this power of intention with my students and I can tell you it works. Of course it depends on the age and the maturity of each student.

One student can be guided to where gradually he or she can define and know himself, or herself, for example, what kind of sound he or she wants. With other young students the same thing happens but with a different strategy.

With these students, it's so fun because the leadership role is largely assumed by the teacher. With young students you can begin to describe yourself what is the desired sound, form, and beauty and invite the child, little by little, until this description begins to reflect the child's actual way of playing.

As you can see, in what I've just written I've only used the example of the sound, but can you see yourself now using your own imagination how you can begin to do the same with your own intonation, interpretation, rhythm, hold, speed or anything you want to achieve with your music?

HOW DO YOU BUILD A SKYSCRAPER?

"It's a curious thing about life, if you begin to refuse to accept anything but the best, you very often get it."

--Somerset Maugham--

You are surely aware that the higher the building you want to construct, the more important is the foundation. This principle applies to everything in life. Nevertheless, the question you may ask is, "How do you build a solid musical foundation in a child without making the learning process dry or lacking creativity?"

Here is where I think many professors and educational systems have failed. In Leopold Auer's book, *Violin Playing as I Teach It*, this great pedagogue comments on the great number of Russian young people, from the beginning of the 20th century, who experienced tremendous frustration, and in many cases were traumatized by the professors' excessive use of pressure and their lack of using solid pedagogy. Nevertheless, something similar is going on right now in a lot of music instruction, although with different nuances.

On one hand, there is the question of how demanding to be with children, how much to expect from a child. On the other hand, there is a lack of focus and discipline. All in all, the result is that fewer children and young people are able to develop a completely satisfactory music education, in comparison to the number of students who begin the study of music.

What to do?

How to get the desired results without either oppressing or coddling the student?

The answer is simple: *falling in love*. Love is the beginning of everything. In Einstein's quote that appears earlier in this book, he describes the force and power of the will, but the will is nothing but a consequence of love. It follows that your focus on music, or on anything you want to do or take on, should be based on love.

I do the same thing with my violin. I almost never focus on it from any perspective that is not my love for music, even while I'm learning or teaching highly-technical pieces of music such as those by Paganini or Ysaÿe.

Getting results through other means that are not love creates sacrifice and resistance. If you think about it, you'll realize that for Michelangelo, Da Vinci, Beethoven or Mozart, just to name a few, creating great masterpieces or playing musical instruments was not a sacrifice for them.

Perhaps you're thinking, "What on earth does all this have to do with learning to play an instrument, or teaching a child music? Let me explain.

The process begins at an early age. From the moment a child begins to work with a piece, a melody or a certain rhythm, you can associate a positive emotional link between the child and what the piece of music expresses. This way you're creating a foundation from which to base all future practicing. Because of this connection, the child does not practice in an abstract way or just because the teacher said so, but rather the child is already forming a relationship with the piece of music and how he or she will express that music.

If you look carefully at this, these two viewpoints are completely different, even though the actions taken may be similar. This applies not only to children and young people, but also to adults.

In my studio, I have adult students and children as young as 6 years old and I can tell you that I never have to ask any of them to practice: neither the small ones nor the grownups.

We have built a relationship based on love for the music and love for what they want to do. The work we do is based on what they want to achieve, and my purpose is simply to remind them of what they want, to remind them why they came to class. Of course this approach varies, depending on the age and the level of the student. If the student is not yet in love with his or her instrument, and is only curious about it for right now, then the work is different.

The results you get when you establish this type of relationship between the students and the music are extraordinary. And I'm not only speaking of the emotional result, of the commitment to learning to play the violin (or any musical instrument,) but also for the high technical result you can achieve.

Currently I have students who travel from different parts of the country to take classes with me. Many of them have to travel all night on a bus to arrive the next morning, take their class and get back on the afternoon or evening bus to return home. It's not uncommon for some of them to travel 10 hours each way. The most extraordinary thing is that these students not only achieve a high level of playing proficiency with their instruments, but also they never complain about all they have to go through in order to take their classes. This is the result you get when you love what you do.

Why is it important to develop love in everything we do?

If you look around you, you'll see that most people complain about whatever it is they're doing. Studies show that 95% of people are unhappy with their jobs, even though, ironically, they fear losing these same jobs. This shows you that, overall, there is a high level of dissatisfaction.

Why does this happen?

Most people have been initiated into a system in which little value is given to what people want or don't want, or their deep desires. Most high school students are waiting to graduate in order to find out what they want to do with their lives, what direction to take. Nevertheless love and desire for an activity can be cultivated from an early age.

If you observe, many people end up doing better in those activities that are only hobbies for them, compared to what they studied and prepared to do professionally.

AUTOSUGGESTION

"There is something that you know but you don't know you know it. As soon as you find out what it is that you already know, but you don't know, you know then you can begin."

--Milton Erickson--

In Napoleon Hill's book, *Think and Grow Rich*, you find described one of the best examples of autosuggestion. In this book the author relates how he guided one of his children who was born deaf, from a very early age, toward success. Eventually the child was able to hear. It's a beautiful story, but one with a great lesson.

You probably don't realize the power you have over yourself and over the education of a child or young person, and consequently, your influence on their success.

Dr. David Hawkins is famous for his research on the hidden factors affecting human behavior. In his book, *Power vs. Force*, he cites studies that show that the human brain processes 400 billion bits of information at the same time, and that of those 400 billion bits, we're only conscious of around 2,000 bits of information. The difference between what enters our brains and how much we're aware of is huge!

So if most of the information lies in our memory, in this database that is our subconscious mind, it follows that our attention or our education should be primarily focused on programming this subconscious mind.

Since I was a young boy, I grew up hearing a number of beliefs that really didn't support me in taking me where I wanted to go. I grew up hearing that playing the violin is difficult, that it's necessary to practice a lot, and that one had to sacrifice oneself in order to play well.

Without a doubt, if these were the beliefs that guided me in life, that directed my life, then everything I wanted to do could not be considered outside this context. Everything I wanted had to be within this framework of my beliefs. Also my teachers were in charge of transmitting this message to my parents, and they, in turn, perpetuated it. So it happened that for years I grew up thinking and affirming that playing the violin was difficult, which in turn became my reality.

Nevertheless, thanks to many people, books and other valuable information I came across, I began to change things in my life.

Through these various sources I learned about the power we hold over our own lives and over our own destinies. I began to change things in my life that I didn't like, but these changes did not include my relationship with the violin.

Since I was little I had grown up with several health problems, including severe allergies. These ailments did not allow me to live freely and progressively they became true limitations. Thus I began to seek solutions outside traditional medicine. I had gotten some degree of relief and improvement through traditional medical treatments, but they really didn't eradicate the problem and even worse, I developed dependencies on these medicines.

That's how I began to read so many books and get other information about the power of the human mind over the body and literally over everything around us. To make the story short, the results in my life were so radical that it made me stop and reflect.

If all of this worked to improve my health, then I wondered if it would work with the violin or with anything else. Could I get the results I wanted with the violin the same way I did with my own health?

From this point on I began to change my approach toward music and most importantly, to get the results I wanted. I began to feel much better with my instrument. Everything began to flow easily. I began to have a different attitude toward my playing and practicing the violin.

The results were obvious and radically opposed to what I had previously experienced. After some time observing how this process worked, I began to use this new approach with my students.

These results were also surprising. As in my own case, I began to make suggestions to my students with phrases that would guide them to where they really wanted to, to get the results they really wanted.

Throughout this experience, I began to restructure my vocabulary and my intentions toward the things I wanted and I began to focus more on my purpose, and not on what I didn't want.

Instead of continuing to think of the violin as difficult, I began to affirm that playing the violin was easy. That playing the violin was fun, and that music was a blessing, that playing fluidly and freely was simple. Each negative assumption I had about playing the violin changed by 180° into a new intention that served my purposes. But things didn't end here. Once these affirmations became my reality, there was then no other way for me to see the violin, and this is the approach my students have inherited.

Literally we have the capacity to mold and shape our universe to suit our preferences and this is a power that you can put into practice starting at this very moment, right now, or with any child or young person who wants to study a musical instrument.

If you want to reach any goal that you desire in your life, you must begin by acquiring the thoughts that will take you to the achievement of these goals. You can replace old thoughts with new thoughts, introduce new information to your mind that will take you where you want to go, and not in the opposite direction.

You personally allow the creation of beliefs in your subconscious mind through the most predominant thoughts in your mind. This is how you go about building the necessary database of memories and thoughts that support you in achieving the success you want to reach.

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You should know that you can always start again. There is always an opportunity and you can always go back and choose differently. Keep in mind the real value of being able to restructure, re-educate and reprogram your thinking.

From the moment you decide on a direction you want to take, inevitably you begin a learning process. If you already knew exactly how to reach what you want, surely you would have already done so. So when you take a new road, you're also taking a new path of learning.

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The best of all this is that you can always go back and choose. It does not matter how many situations you have experienced in the past, what is important is that you decide what you want to experience from now on.

Remember that everything can be used correctly or incorrectly and that the most important element of all this is that whatever you may have experienced in the past, now you can choose what to experience in your present.

I invite you to replace the negative thoughts in your mind with positive thoughts that are connected and aligned with your deepest and truest intentions.

...

LISTENING

"Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do."

--Goethe--

Creating musical consciousness

As you have realized, one of the purposes of this book is to create musical consciousness and one of the best ways to do this is through examples. The first example for the student is his or her teacher, but this example alone is not enough to create a musical consciousness. It's important that the student attend concerts and listen to recordings, of which there is no shortage!

It's crucial to choose the type of repertory that's best and most appropriate, especially for a child. We have this huge repertory of marvelous masterpieces that can awaken and develop the child's taste in the beauty of music.

At the beginning it's usually not a good idea to expose the child to musical pieces recognized for their deep intellectual and emotional content. To do so is to risk the child rejecting music. Fortunately you have a plethora of musical pieces from which to choose.

Perhaps works by Vivaldi and Bach are among the best known, but there is a beautiful and enriching whole body of works suitable for children. Think of pieces by Prokofiev, Debussy, Beethoven or Tchaikovsky, among others, from which you can select fragments or movements to share with children. The most important thing is to identify and establish emotional links between the musical works and the children listening to them.

Selecting a recording simply because you think it's a good one for the child is fine, but you can get even better results when you choose pieces that you personally consider beautiful, or happy, or fun! This is what really contributes to the development of the child's musical consciousness and love for music.

Listening is an art

I can tell you that the way most advanced or professional musicians listen to recitals, concerts or recordings is probably not the most effective. Most of the time professional musicians are listening to a recording or a concert, they're focusing on exactly what should not be done, or what they think could be done better or differently. This way of perceiving the music tends to create a barrier between what one is hearing and the authentic sound being produced.

It's best to put your attention on the actual sounds being produced. Listening really is an art. And listening to yourself is the same and even more so. When you listen to an artist, your attention should go to the expression, to what the artist is saying and how that is being communicated. Your attention should be centered on the interpretation of the piece from an emotional perspective, and on the aspects of the music you're hearing that you really like.

How many times when you're leaving a concert or after hearing a recording, do you hear people comment on how incredible the performance was, how perfect it was, how fast it was played, to name a few common comments.

It's rare to hear someone say, or even to think yourself, how much they love, say for example, Beethoven, if he were the composer of the music just played. Most of the times you hear things that are not the music itself, and you often think the same things when you're practicing.

When you listen to an artist, most of the times you tend to idealize that person, and you lose all contact with reality and you stop listening in a real and objective way to what is the most important: *the piece*. When this happens you distance yourself from the essence of the music, from the artistic expression. You also lose the opportunity to learn.

If you've been immersed in the world of music, you know that most people go to listen to a soloist, or a director, but rarely to hear a certain piece of music. Nevertheless, when your perception breaks out of this limited way of listening, you enter a superior dimension that is the piece of music, the dimension of the content, its significance. From this point on you begin to hear the interpretation from a more objective point of view. You begin to get the idea of what the music wants to transmit and you begin to find convergence (or not) between what you're listening to and what the piece of music really is.

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Normally when you practice you focus primarily on the technical details, as if that were the true end or purpose of the piece. However, these details can make sense only when you have the idea of what the piece of music truly wants to express. In my experience, I've seen how most of the technical problems develop because of the absence of a musical approach.

One proof of this is the existence of standards established for the level of sound, the vibrato, the glissandos and the interpretation, among other variables, as most musicians think these are the end (meaning the purpose) and not the means to an end.

Especially for violinists:

If you think about it, listening to any contemporary violinist, it's fairly difficult to distinguish or recognize which one is actually playing. In contrast, if you were to listen to one of the great violinists at the end of the 19th century, or the first $\frac{3}{4}$ of the 20th century, you would almost immediately be able to recognize who would be playing. Yehudi Menuhin expressed it best when he said, *before, there were few violinists and many great violinists. Today there are many violinists playing marvelously well but few great violinists.*

When you begin to identify with the works being played from an emotional and musical perspective, you realize that practically each work requires a different type of articulation, vibrato and sound, just to mention a few musical elements.

Another important aspect of listening

Ask yourself this question. How many times do you put your attention on what is being played well when you listen?

When you begin to focus on the positive aspects, on what you want to achieve, you begin to separate yourself from judgment, judgment of how others play, and how you yourself play.

I can promise you that there is always, absolutely always something positive to listen for or to perceive in anyone to whom you listen.

In my master classes I always ask my students to comment on how the other students in the class are playing and the result, so far, has always been fascinating. The vast majority of students who tend to see the mistakes their classmates make, to criticize or judge the others, are usually the same students who experience the most fear and stage fright.

To me the reason is obvious. You begin to listen to the mistakes others make, or see problems in the other musicians, it's because your mind is focused on mistakes so much that when it's your turn to play before an audience, your mind jumps to the conclusion that others are acting the same judgmental way toward yourself.

SECOND PART

POSTURE, POSITION OF THE VIOLIN, POSITIONS OF THE
LEFT AND THE RIGHT HAND.

*"Our biggest glory is not in never falling but in getting up after
each fall."*

--Confucius--

TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF POSITIONING

“Opportunities don’t just randomly appear,
but rather they’re the result of work.”

--Tonatihü--

POSTURE

To start off this second part I want you to know that the simpler and more natural the posture, and the way of holding the violin and the bow, the easier and more fluid is the process of musical development and learning to play the instrument.

You've surely heard this before, but the more simple and direct you are, usually the faster you get to what you want and this also applies to learning to play the violin.

I first heard this principle in a master class given by Isaac Stern while at Juilliard School. After some time, I became even more convinced of how true and important is this affirmation.

Also my teacher in Paris, Jacques Gethem, helped me understand that one of the most important principles and key classes that you can have, are the *first* lessons. This makes so much sense; it's much easier to teach than having to correct.

To get started

I put a lot of attention on one particular aspect of teaching the violin: the student's posture from the very first class. Being able to stand in the correct position plays a crucial role in the student's future and yet having good posture, as I just mentioned, should not be anything complicated. A student's posture should not be elaborate nor feel artificial. No one needs to stand at attention like a soldier to hold up the violin. On the contrary, standing straight and keeping the feet a bit apart is all that's necessary.

Now is a good time to clarify something. Each person has a particular physiognomy and there is no value in holding to inflexible or rigid principles. Each principle can be adapted and respect the individual's particular physiognomy.

HOW TO HOLD THE VIOLIN

From this point on I'll explain what I do to hold the instrument properly.

- Identify the level clavicle (or collar bone.) As you can see, here there is a fairly flat surface which is the perfect place where to rest the instrument:



- The next step is to place the left hand on top of the right shoulder, as you can see in the following photograph. Now you are ready to let the instrument rest on your left collar bone.



- Now locate on your violin, the back part of the chin rest. This is exactly the part that needs to rest on your clavicle. Now place that part on your clavicle.



- Turn your head slightly toward the violin and place it lightly on top of the chin rest. Now you should have the correct basic position for holding the violin.



At this point it's important to know that the chin should not put any pressure on the instrument. Remember you don't actually grasp the violin, you simply support it.

Even though you may not realize it right now, this principle is foundational for the easy and fluid development of any young violin student's musical education. Many times we don't take enough time to make sure the child has a well-established good posture and way of supporting the violin.

Not getting this solid foundation – a good posture and position for holding the violin may bring limitations and difficulties in the future. Also the sound produced will be affected if the child thinks about grasping the violin, rather than simply supporting it. In addition, incorrect posture and positioning can cause problems with tension and intonation.

It's important to take the time necessary to repeat this exercise as often as you need in order to feel like you have the violin in the exact place.

Do not rush when teaching and learning these foundational principles. I recommend that you alternate this teaching with other activities. For example, you can teach the child to sing a song (singing only,) with the help of the piano or your own violin.

The main idea is that you imagine your collar bone as if it were a base or platform on which to rest your violin. *It's the same way that the floor supports the instrument for a cellist – providing a place on which to rest the instrument.* This way of supporting the violin, on the clavicle, will allow the musician to play the violin with ease and mobility.

In my experience, one of the problems with the position of the instrument, is wanting to affix the violin to the body and thus render it immobile. This type of position not only causes problems with tension but limits the production of sound.

On the other hand, with the violin stays in a relatively loose position when supported by the left hand, then you have the correct positioning of the body and the instrument.

Furthermore, I've had excellent results with students who don't use any sort of shoulder rest. In some cases I do recommend that my youngest students use an elastic band below the violin, especially when they're first starting out.

It's been my experience that using other accessories often leads the student to want to grasp the instrument, thus generating tension.

- At this moment the student should be ready to simply place his or her left hand on the neck of the violin.

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Before continuing with the positioning of the left hand, repeat this exercise until you confidently feel the instrument is in a solid position. Only after this is attained should you continue. I usually repeat this exercise throughout several classes, alternating with other material the student needs to learn, like the parts of the violin, note reading and songs.

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POSITION OF THE LEFT HAND

Just as I explained in the beginning, the position of the violin should be simple and adapted to each student's physiognomy. The same thing applies with positioning of the left hand.

To begin, I always suggest making two small marks on the left hand. One goes in the middle of the nail of the index finger, as you can see in the following photograph.



The second mark goes on the base of the same finger:



It's important that this mark is placed right before the small bump of the bone.

When the left hand makes contact with the violin, this mark should be the point of contact so that when you place the first finger on the A string, the A string and the mark (which is a line) are aligned the same thing should happen with the E string and the D string. The only exception is the G string.

It's important that the fingers of the left hand do not touch each other at the base. If you can manage this habit from the beginning, it will be enormously helpful in achieving ease and lightness in playing the violin.



This is what I recommend to my students: that they do several exercises with the first finger placing it on and lifting it off of the A string repeatedly and slowly, without plucking or using the bow.

I believe that this is enough material for the first few classes. As I commented earlier in this book, it is so important not to rush through this foundational material because doing so will cause you to spend more time down the road correcting and dealing with the consequences of poor left hand positioning.

As you can see it's fairly simple but what often happens with some music teachers or teaching systems is that they fail to take the time to get these basic elements down. Remember that being able to do something correctly a few times does not mean it's a solid habit. Learning really only takes place when you make a strong habit of each aspect or principle that the student is learning.

Once you feel the student has acquired the habit of placing the violin in the exact right spot, then it's no longer necessary to keep repeating this exercise (of placing the left arm on the right shoulder.) Now you can do the placement directly as you can see in the following photographs.



EXERCISES FOR THE LEFT HAND

Once you feel the positioning is becoming a habit, you can introduce some exercises to reinforce this lesson.

Begin by doing the following exercises without sound and once the student has the habit of good positioning, then do the same exercises with plucking.

The image contains four musical exercises for the left hand, each on a single staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The exercises are as follows:

- Exercise 1:** A sequence of eighth notes starting on G4. The first measure has a finger number '0' above it. The second measure has a '1'. The third measure has a '2'. The fourth measure has a '3'. The fifth measure has a '4'. The sequence continues with G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F6, G6, A6, B6, C7, D7, E7, F7, G7, A7, B7, C8, D8, E8, F8, G8, A8, B8, C9, D9, E9, F9, G9, A9, B9, C10, D10, E10, F10, G10, A10, B10, C11, D11, E11, F11, G11, A11, B11, C12, D12, E12, F12, G12, A12, B12, C13, D13, E13, F13, G13, A13, B13, C14, D14, E14, F14, G14, A14, B14, C15, D15, E15, F15, G15, A15, B15, C16, D16, E16, F16, G16, A16, B16, C17, D17, E17, F17, G17, A17, B17, C18, D18, E18, F18, G18, A18, B18, C19, D19, E19, F19, G19, A19, B19, C20, D20, E20, F20, G20, A20, B20, C21, D21, E21, F21, G21, A21, B21, C22, D22, E22, F22, G22, A22, B22, C23, D23, E23, F23, G23, A23, B23, C24, D24, E24, F24, G24, A24, B24, C25, D25, E25, F25, G25, A25, B25, C26, D26, E26, F26, G26, A26, B26, C27, D27, E27, F27, G27, A27, B27, C28, D28, E28, F28, G28, A28, B28, C29, D29, E29, F29, G29, A29, B29, C30, D30, E30, F30, G30, A30, B30, C31, D31, E31, F31, G31, A31, B31, C32, D32, E32, F32, G32, A32, B32, C33, D33, E33, F33, G33, A33, B33, C34, D34, E34, F34, G34, A34, B34, C35, D35, E35, F35, G35, A35, B35, C36, D36, E36, F36, G36, A36, B36, C37, D37, E37, F37, G37, A37, B37, C38, D38, E38, F38, G38, A38, B38, C39, D39, E39, F39, G39, A39, B39, C40, D40, E40, F40, G40, A40, B40, C41, D41, E41, F41, G41, A41, B41, C42, D42, E42, F42, G42, A42, B42, C43, D43, E43, F43, G43, A43, B43, C44, D44, E44, F44, G44, A44, B44, C45, D45, E45, F45, G45, A45, B45, C46, D46, E46, F46, G46, A46, B46, C47, D47, E47, F47, G47, A47, B47, C48, D48, E48, F48, G48, A48, B48, C49, D49, E49, F49, G49, A49, B49, C50, D50, E50, F50, G50, A50, B50, C51, D51, E51, F51, G51, A51, B51, C52, D52, E52, F52, G52, A52, B52, C53, D53, E53, F53, G53, A53, B53, C54, D54, E54, F54, G54, A54, B54, C55, D55, E55, F55, G55, A55, B55, C56, D56, E56, F56, G56, A56, B56, C57, D57, E57, F57, G57, A57, B57, C58, D58, E58, F58, G58, A58, B58, C59, D59, E59, F59, G59, A59, B59, C60, D60, E60, F60, G60, A60, B60, C61, D61, E61, F61, G61, A61, B61, 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How to pluck or pizzicato: place the tip of the right thumb on the corner edge of the fingerboard, then with the index finger lightly pluck each string.



While the student is learning the positions and how the crossing strings movement works, I recommend teaching the students pieces from the Suzuki method, but only singing them. Doing it this way the student can learn a new song in each lesson.

This way you go about introducing these songs to the student's subconscious mind and once he or she can pluck the tunes it will be much easier to play them with the bow.

I always recommend teaching each hand separately – one at a time. Begin with the violin and the left hand and don't add the right hand until the habit of positioning each hand is solid. It's important to plant these seeds of learning from the beginning of the process.

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POSITION OF THE RIGHT HAND

As I wrote earlier, the easiest and most natural way of supporting the violin is the way that will get you the best results with the instrument.

- First make an oval using the tip of the thumb and the first joint (from the top) of the middle finger, like you see in this photograph:



- Then turn the hand until it's in the position you would have if you were looking at your watch:



It's important that the elbow stays at a height that's similar to that of the nut of the bow.

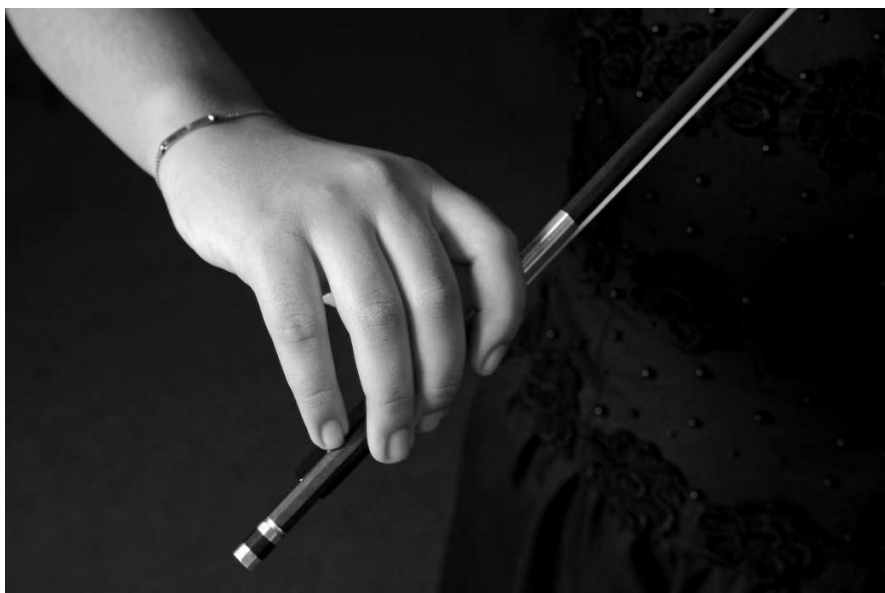
The forearm and the hand should be in a soft straight line, just like the normally relaxed position of the arm when it's at rest.

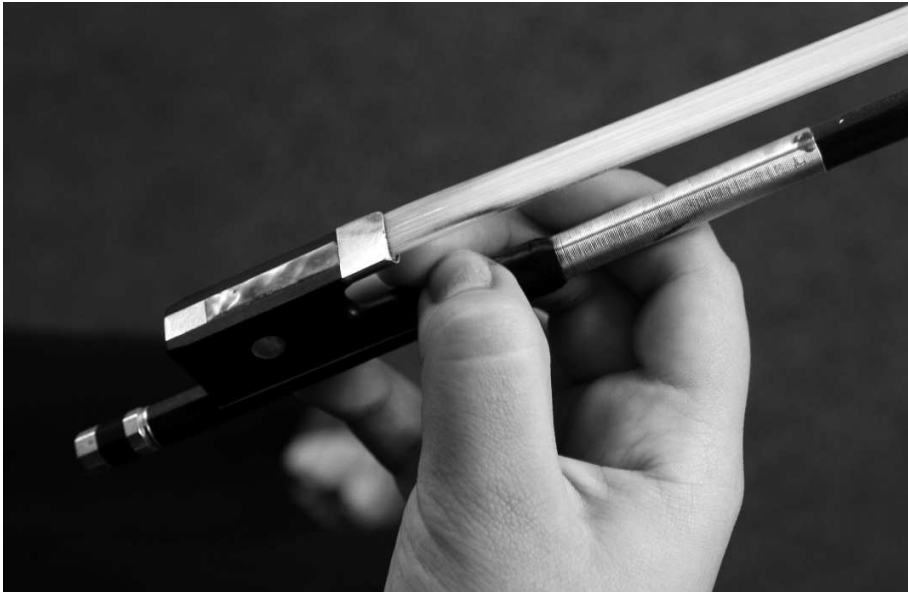


Now you have the basic position for the right hand and to complete this simply hold the bow between your fingers and your thumb.

It's important that when you pick up the bow you tilt it slightly so that the stick of the bow is held toward the fingerboard.

The pinky finger does not go on the top surface but the one before, toward the student. This aspect of the bow hold has been misunderstood for generations. Actually the best way for the bow to penetrate the strings is with the stick slightly tilted, as you can see in the following photographs.







EXERCISES FOR LEARNING HOW
TO USE THE BOW

Begin by marking the bow in three equal parts (you can use tape for this:)



Begin the following exercise in the middle of the bow and once you, or the student learns this step correctly, go on to doing it on the top part of the bow (at the tip:)

The image shows four staves of musical notation, each representing a different starting point on the violin bow. Each staff is in 4/4 time and contains four measures of music. The notes are quarter notes, and the bowing is indicated by 'V' above the notes. The first staff starts on G4, the second on A4, the third on B4, and the fourth on C5. Each measure contains a quarter note followed by three eighth notes. The exercise concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

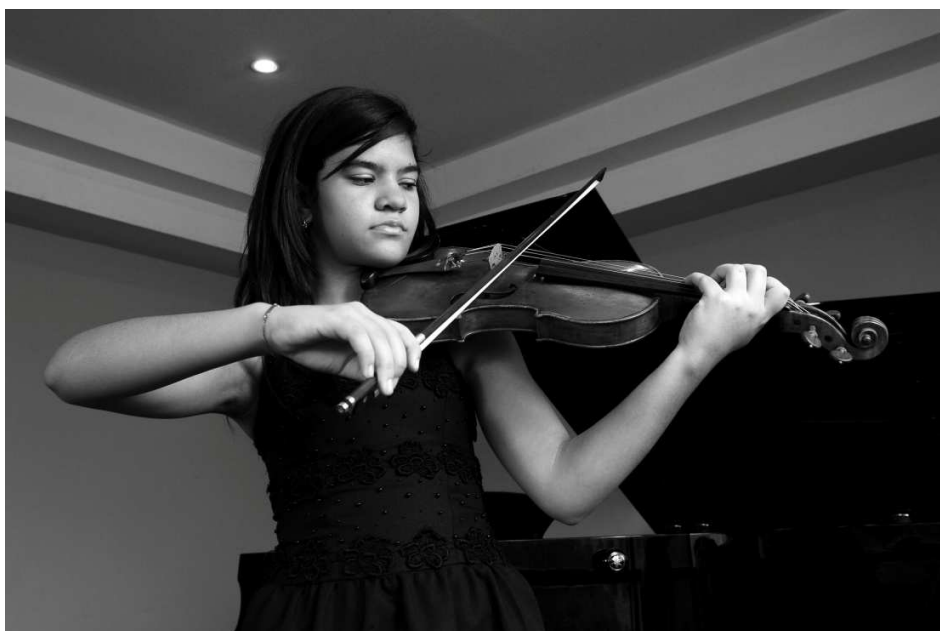
The bow movement, in the middle and at the tip, should be done primarily using the forearm.

It's important to remember that the elbow and the nut of the bow should be at the same height, and that changing strings takes place from the elbow so that the arm functions as a whole system:

ON E STRING:



ON D STRING:



ON G STRING:



Once the preceding exercises have been practiced enough to become a habit, start doing them at the frog of the bow. The frog is the part of the bow that requires the most attention.

It's important that the wrist follow the same direction as the bow (forward,) since there is a definite tendency to raise the wrist. Raising the wrist results in insufficient contact with the string and tension in the arms.

It's also important to pay attention to make sure that the right shoulder is always relaxed and in its proper position.

The shoulder should **always** be relaxed. Never raise the shoulder.

Sometimes the student has the tendency to raise the shoulder and has trouble understanding how to separate the movement between the arm and the shoulder. The following exercise helps with this:

Place the student's hand on the shoulder, right at the joint between the arm and the shoulder. Have the student raise his or her arm as if he or she were changing strings while holding the shoulder in its position. This movement will help the student feel the joint and become aware of loosening the shoulder.

It's important to realize that an incorrect understanding of positioning or using excessive pressure in holding the violin affects the quality of the sound production, fluidity, intonation, shifting and the speed of the hands, among other qualities.

You should understand that one of the secrets that will help you get the precision you want in playing the violin, is *flexibility*. Flexibility is essential to playing the violin well.

Both arms should work like great big rubber bands; both need to be flexible. This way you will be access the ease and necessary skill to play the violin marvelously well.

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Next I will briefly describe what I do when these previously-articulated principles have gradually transformed into habits.

As you have no doubt realized, I teach the positioning of each hand separately. I don't have the student use both hands together until the student feels secure with the position of each hand separately. Teaching both hands simultaneously often disperses the student's attention and energy, which increases the likelihood of learning inappropriate habits from early on.

This is why I prefer to center the student's attention on each objective separately.

As I work with each hand's position, I alternate that with other material that's important for the student. This material includes songs (orally,) parts of the instrument, note reading, and others. This way the student can alternate learning the positioning of the hands and focus on each hand better.

As a result of this teaching dynamic, the student ends up learning several songs by memory and several principles of note reading while forming strong habits in the positioning of the hands.

After these principles are established, then I begin to teach playing songs on the violin, but only with plucking. This way the child is able to completely focus on how his or her fingers hit the strings and the intonation of each note.

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As I mentioned earlier, when the teacher encourages the student to sing and to learn the songs orally, this process eliminates, or sharply reduced problems that occur with intonation.

With my young students, I use songs from the Suzuki Method, Volume I. These pieces are nice and short, which makes it easy for the students to learn them by memory.

Personally, I use the first volume of the Suzuki Method as a tool, not as a method of teaching. Therefore, I only use the first volume and then I introduce other pieces which I believe contribute to a superior development of the student's musical ability.

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Another important aspect of the learning process is the use of music recordings. My experience, after years of teaching, is that teaching students to play through repeated listening to a recording is not recommended.

In my experience, I've gotten the best results when I teach the student to sing the songs, and with the help of the piano, go about forming the student's intonation. This way I can introduce the songs at a slower tempo, which allows them to pay more attention to each detail of the piece they are learning to play.

When the student has solid habits of correct hand positioning, and when he or she is able to pluck some songs, then I teach the first scales, in one octave only.

This first stage may seem slow to you, but according to my experience planting the seeds for a solid foundation guarantees that the rest of the learning process flows more smoothly and quickly.

Don't be in a rush. Be enthusiastic. Music is a wonderful art for a child to discover in an exciting way and with the curiosity that goes with learning something for the first time. When the teacher encourages enthusiasm from early on in the learning process, this guarantees that the student will continue to learn enthusiastically.

THIRD PART

HOW TO SYNTHESIZE
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL, PEDAGOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL WITH
ACTUAL TECHNIQUE,
FOR SUPERIOR RESULTS.

"The body is the materialization of the mind."

--Lester Levenson--

Why practice?

This question may surprise you, or you may be thinking that the answer is obvious, but the reality is that most of the time we live and operate more by reflex than by consciously reflecting on whatever it is that we're doing.

The same thing happens with music. From our first classes on, we constantly hear that we must practice, even though we're not really sure what this means nor why it's so.

Practicing is an art. Practicing is the art of getting the results you want in the fastest and most direct way. Practicing does not even make sense if you're not fully and consciously present during that time you're doing it. In fact, in this case it's better that you not even practice.

Practicing is the art of resolving situations, the art of executing actions, movements, thoughts and ideas in the *correct* way until these all become solid habits. If you think about it, playing the violin, marvelously well, or whatever your instrument is, should become a habit.

Your practice is your destiny in creating and developing habits. This is why it's indispensable to practice only the things that will take you where you want to go. One of the worst things you can do, the thing that will complicate your improvement and make it take longer, is practicing the wrong way.

The mind is like a recorder, which doesn't discriminate between true and false. Because of this, when you practice correctly, your mind is recording this information, but it's also recording when you practice incorrectly.

The mind is a marvelous tool that can be used correctly or incorrectly. When it facilitates your achieving your goals, then it's being used correctly. Otherwise, if it's complicating your progress, your mind is being used incorrectly.

Many times I hear young people assure me that they practice a lot, but unfortunately they're not getting the results they want. The reason is obvious. They've been practicing actions, movements, thoughts and ideas in a less-than-ideal way. Instead of helping them get closer to their objectives, their practice has actually reinforced their incorrect habits.

This is why you must practice with clear and precise intentions about what you want to achieve, even if you're just beginning to play the violin, or another instrument. The sooner you learn to practice well, the faster you'll reach your goals.

It's necessary to have clear intentions. If you are not clear about what you want, you'll end up going around in circles a lot more than you'd like to.

Here's an example: if you enter a music store and simply start looking for a recording, you're going to spend a lot of time going around and around without finding what you like. On the other hand, if you go in and ask for a recording of the Concerto for Violin and Orchestra by J. Brahms with Jascha Heifetz playing with Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, you'll immediately find what you want and spend less than 10 minutes in the store.

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Before you begin to practice it's important that you know what you really want to achieve during that time. That way you avoid simply repeating the same thing over and over.

Let's look at this in closer detail. If, for example, a child is beginning to play the violin, the teacher or the parent can have a clear intention for him or her to learn how to hold the instrument correctly. Once the student masters holding the violin, then you need to be attentive until holding it the right way becomes a firm habit.

The more often you do something the correct way, and in a fun and exciting way, the faster you'll have the habit of holding the instrument the right way.

It's not necessary to spend hours and hours practicing, especially if you're a beginner player. On the contrary, what's really important is the quality of your practice and how effective it is.

Results never lie, so the best way to know if you're on the right path is through the results you're getting.

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When you want to use your hands to make figures with their shadows, where do you direct your attention? To the shadow or to your hands? Obviously you focus on the shadow! It's only by looking at the shadow that you can see if what you're doing with your hands is giving you the result you want (i.e. making the figure you want.)

The same thing happens with the violin or any other instrument. Actually, it's the same with whatever we do in our lives, *only by seeing the results* that we know if what we're doing is effective or not.

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You've probably heard that you need to practice for hours and hours. But if you're doing this and not getting the results you want, then you're only wasting time in your practice. In many cases with the violin, children practice for hours, but in a way that is neither effective nor helping them reach their musical goals. This naturally leads to frustration and getting discouraged. Many students quit at this point.

This is because you've simply been told to practice. But without knowing *how* to practice, without guidance and direction about how to practice, and above all else, with only a general intention to play better, your energy gets splattered around the general goal of *practice to play better*, instead of being laser-focused on specific results.

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Practicing to play your instrument better is neither a clear nor precise intention. Your practice needs to take place in a context of clear intentions, such as holding the instrument in the correct position. Practicing to achieve a round sound, or a more velvet sound or louder or more fluid, or more brilliant, are all examples of more clear and precise musical objectives.

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What happens when you practice incorrectly?

When you practice incorrectly you not only fail to reach your goals, but you put yourself further away from them.

I often hear young musicians practicing and spending hours on the same part, which is so frustrating and even disastrous!

Think about it this way: if the way you've been practicing has not worked, if the way you've dealt with a situation has not brought you to your solution, then it's time to take a different approach and practice in a new way, with another focus, from another point of view.

If you haven't gotten the results that you wanted in the first place, it's time to try again, but with a different focus in mind. And if this new approach doesn't get you the result you want either, then you keep looking for different ways until you reach your goal. In any case, don't keep practicing the same way over and over again if it's not working well for you.

You should know that the more you repeat a section in the wrong way, the more you are reinforcing this incorrect way of playing it. Your mind is recording this way of playing because of the repetition.

Surely you've never thought about it this way before but from this moment on, you will have discovered why there are pieces and sections that come out quickly and fluidly while others don't.

Your practice should be experimental.

If you already knew exactly what it is that works for you, you would probably already be playing the way you want to, so any time a fragment, a passage, or a movement is not working properly, it's time to start experimenting.

What I recommend to my students is that they consciously begin to make changes in how they're practicing. For example, if the problem is with a shift that doesn't sound right, then you can start experimenting. Maybe the finger that shifts is too tense or perhaps you're pressing down too much when you change, or putting too much pressure on the fingerboard, or if your thumb is too stiff, and so forth. Keep trying different things with your fingers until you get it right.

Each time you go to practice with your intention clear in your mind, you will avoid repeating mistakes needlessly.

Nevertheless, what I find is that most students take the opposite approach; they almost mechanically keep repeating and repeating the same passage or fragment of what is not working, hoping that at some moment it's going to sound better. Unfortunately this way of practicing is not productive and takes up enormous quantities of energy and hours of time.

One principle from the discipline of psychology posits that whatever you focus on is what expands. So, imagine what happens when you keep repeating your errors over and over.

This way of practicing is what has created so much frustration in so many young musicians and even among professional musicians.

The tempo and rhythm for your practice depends on whether or not you're achieving your goals.

My students often ask me, “At what tempo should I practice this piece?” And my answer is always very simple: *the tempo at which you can play it correctly*. The correct tempo is the one at which you can introduce this new information to your mind (both the subconscious and the conscious) the correct way.

When you learn a piece or really anything in your life, what you are doing is programming yourself. The more clear and confident your programming becomes, the better your results.

Many times this tempo is slow, but as you practice and the piece becomes a habit for you, you can increase the speed. In these cases, you feel confident in upping the tempo because everything begins to flow in your mind and in your hands.

Everyone has a different pace of learning, but whether your rhythm is faster or slower, the important factor is putting in the time that the piece requires – for you.

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When to practice?

It is important to develop the discipline of practicing anything you want to do in life. It's not only a matter of how you practice, but also your consistency is what takes you to success in any endeavor. Finding some time each day to practice is important, but it's not recommended that you lock yourself into a rigid schedule for practicing.

In some cases it also happens that you do not feel like practicing at all, but if you have an intention, if you have decided on a direction you want to focus on, you'll quickly, perhaps in a matter of minutes, regain your desire to practice.

Although having a practice routine works, it's also good on occasion to have a practicing alternative. Most of all, you want to practice on a regular basis.

Quoting the words of the great violinist, Yehudi Menuhin, "playing the violin should be the same as it is for a bird to fly." You have to do it every day. This may sound unrealistic for a child, but with time and love for music, practicing will become a habit. Once you are clear about what you want to gain from practice, the path gets much easier, more direct and enjoyable.

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How to practice?

Just like building a house, you have to practice each piece or work of music you want to play. And even though you're constantly gaining experience and reaching your goals more quickly, you cannot avoid taking time to practice.

Most young musicians tend to practice at a faster speed than what is best for them. Consequently, these young students have to repeat what they're playing many times.

When you're learning, in general your practice should go slowly, but slowly doesn't have to mean boring or dry. A practice can be slow and very exciting and inspired.

This point is very important. Most young musicians see practicing slowly as something boring and aggravating. This is a mistaken idea, one perhaps inherited from our professors.

What I normally establish with my students is an exciting and inspiring practice, even though it's being played at a slower tempo than what's written in the music. This is what I called *practicing slowly to play at tempo*.

The idea is that you should practice a work at a time when you can focus on each detail the music requires. I always recommend that my students practice as if they were going to give a concert, as if they were to perform, with the only difference being that the tempo at which they choose to practice allows them to listen to all the details, which is getting them closer to their goals.

This way you can practice like you were on stage, as if you were performing before an audience. You should practice with all the emotion the piece can inspire in you, with all the desire to play this piece in an auditorium, but slowly, at a rhythm at which you can flow and get through all the situations that show up in the music.

This way you can practice with all the emotion, the desire, musical intention that you would have in a concert, while practicing slowly. This guarantees you will achieve your goals, that you will avoid needless repetition, and more than anything, that your practice will be very exciting.

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Another important factor in this way of practicing is that you play slowly with the goal of playing at tempo. For most children, who are just learning to play an instrument, they normally have so many basic elements on which they need to focus their attention, like the position and intonation, just to name a couple.

However, in the case of more advanced children or with young musicians, they are already able to work on several different things within the piece at the same time as they're learning a piece or preparing for a concert.

I can work with my students on everything from intonation on, to all the elements involved in performing a piece in public. So, right from the beginning of a new piece, we can talk about musical direction, the composer's interpretation, the speed of the vibrato or the bow, among many other aspects. This works because the students practice at a pace that's slow enough to give them time to pay attention to all these details.

Of course, some things will change when you increase the tempo, but the foundation for what you're learning will be solidly planted already.

As your practice gets you closer to the results you want, you will reach your goals faster.

The violin repertory is extensive, as it is for classical music in general. As your learning process becomes more direct and reliable, you'll have more and more opportunities to enjoy playing.

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At the early stage of learning to play the violin, what I really do in class with my students is practice with them. This way they can know exactly what to do in their practicing by themselves, at home. But this only works up to a certain level, since they're constantly getting better and as the quality of their practice improves; the teaching flows more easily. This allows us to elaborate on other musical aspects, psychological or emotional perspectives.

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Another important factor to keep in mind when you're going to practice is keeping a steady tempo.

Many times I hear students practicing in a disorganized fashion, with different tempos for almost each measure of the piece. This does not allow them to build, in an organized way, the piece or work they're learning to play.

Keeping a steady tempo and structuring a work this way is fundamental for the quick and fluid learning of any piece you're learning.

Remember that the mind is constantly recording. So, when you're practicing in a disorganized way, with a variety of tempos, your mind is also registering this lack of order and consistency.

I recommend to my students that they practice at a steady tempo. It's helpful to keep the tempo where you can work with details of the music and your instrument, until it sounds the way you want it to. Consequently, there will be fragments that you play at a fairly brisk tempo while other parts you play more slowly than you need to, but keep in mind that you're working the entire piece and not just these fragments of it. This is how you get the whole picture of the work.

The idea is that your mind begins to register the work as a whole, and not a collection of segments.

Nevertheless, in some pieces you will find passages that require special attention, especially once you begin to learn more complex works. In this case, I recommend that my students consciously work on these passages at a tempo that's slower than what they're using for the rest of the piece, when that's appropriate.

One of the functions of practicing is resolving the issues that show up.

As I mentioned earlier, it's important to practice in a way that's as close as possible to what you want the final result to be. That way you'll save time and more important, you'll save your energy. It's not worth it to practice differently from how you want the end result to be. In my opinion, it's the easiest, fastest and surer way of reaching your goal, that is going the direct way.

In some cases, I also recommend using a metronome. The metronome has been somewhat controversial for some musicians, but I see the metronome as a useful tool and not an end unto itself. When you use it as a tool *to help* you maintain a steady tempo, it works quite well. The tempo, and more precisely the pulse is something you want to integrate into yourself; the pulse is something you should feel within you.

THE WAY FOR PARENTS TO PARTICIPATE

"Nothing great has ever been achieved without enthusiasm."

--Emerson--

The parents' participation is essential to a child's learning to play a musical instrument. Personally, I only work with children who have an adult to accompany them through this process.

Learning to play a musical instrument is important enough to deserve the attention of both the child and of his or her parents. The ability to achieve important results requires team work; normally this is not something a child can do alone. According to my experience, the task of learning to play violin is one that involves several people.

Nevertheless, and in contrast to what some methods suggest, I don't think the parent or guardian needs to learn how to play the violin, or any instrument, in order to help their children. Nor do I think this relative or guardian needs to correct the child on things so specific like the position or intonation.

If you think about it, learning to play the violin, or any musical instrument, involves a thorough and detailed knowledge that takes years to acquire; there is so much to learn that no parent can gain proficiency in a short time. Nevertheless the presence of a mother or father or guardian is essential in the learning process.

I'll explain how I do it. Students enter the class without any adult and we do our work together. Later, during the last 10 minutes of the class, I ask the parent or adult to join us so I can explain what we've done and show that person the fundamental points in which he or she can help the student to *remember* for the next class.

The function I assign to the parents is that of accompanying the student, that of helping the student to remember, and helping him or her to focus. The role of the parent is not to correct the student.

When a student leaves class, the most important thing is that he or she has learned how to get the desired result, or how to correct a habit. This is what I look for in each class, making sure myself that the student understands what I'm talking about. Once I achieve this, the next step is to make the student remember where to focus his or her attention.

At this point I give all the necessary reference points so that the student can remember what to do, and working together with the parent, they put all of this into practice. In my studio, one of the roles of the parents is to help their children remember what they've learned. That way, for example, if we've been learning the position of the left hand, I will show the parent which are the key points to help the student remember, without having to intervene directly. The intention is that the parent is not correcting the positioning of the hands or showing the child how to hold the instrument, and of course not teaching him or her how to play, unless the parents happen to be professional musicians.

For example, if a child still has the tendency to put his first finger of the left hand too close to the second finger, at the base of the finger, even after I've explained the correct position and he or she has succeeded in putting his fingers in the right places, what the parent can do is observe the child practicing and reminding him or her of what the teacher said about the first and second fingers. If the parents and the student are clear that this is something that requires attention, there is no reason for any misunderstanding among them. The parent cannot take the place of the teacher, just like the teacher cannot replace the parent.

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Having parents present is also indispensable for an appropriate pace of learning and keeping the motivation level high. It's a labor of love; in the best of cases the students gradually begin to love what they are doing musically.

This requires teamwork. What sometimes happens to students is that they become unmotivated because of their becoming too isolated. This is another reason why it's good for the parent to get involved with what their children are doing, with what they're learning, and paying attention to the multitude of details the learning process requires. This way the student feels supported by both the parents and the teacher.

Parental involvement in getting ready for a recital, concert or audition is also vitally important. Ideally, everyone involved - students, teacher and parents - forms a type of family. As sort of a family, the students participate and observe and motivate each other.

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For generations many parents have had the tendency to get over-involved in their children's education, projecting onto the children their own frustrations or ambitions. Sometimes these parents develop an unhealthy relationship with their children to the point that the parents are more interested in their children playing well and have some kind of brilliant career than are the children themselves. I've seen various ugly cases of this type of situation and I can assure you that it always ends the child's affection for and interest in music.

The pressure and expectations some parents have for their children can degenerate into a serious problem between them and their children. This type of relationship is not healthy and is certainly not a relationship based on love for music, or the violin or any musical instrument.

A student should be developing his talent in tandem with his desire to play better, the role of the teacher and of the parents is to provide all the possible resources and support to guide and help the student develop his or her interest.

Even when the young musician doesn't know what the next step is, it's important that the teacher make it clear that he or she has complete free will in deciding whether to keep progressing musically. The music student decides what he or she wants to do.

This is important because many students start learning at a young age and keep at it until they're almost at the professional level, while still very young. It's impossible for a young musician to know what is involved in or required for a professional musical career and this is where many parents, in their enthusiasm for the reflected glory from their children, make the mistake of putting too much pressure on the child.

There is also the opposite case. Some young musicians never develop their musical potential because of a lack of support and enthusiasm from either the parents or the teachers. There exists a point of balance between these two extremes that is found in love, love for the music and the instrument.

To sum up, what I want to leave clear is the important of the parents in accompanying the young musician in throughout their journey of learning to play their instrument. Up until the age of 11 or 12, and depending on the child's level of maturity, the parent needs to be there with the child, keeping close contact with the teacher with each class.

This habit should continue until the child reaches an age at which he or she can decide the direction he or she wants to take. At this point there is less need for constant contact between teacher and parent. The parent-teacher relationship, changes to focus more on activities like competitions, festivals, concerts, recitals, recordings and auditions.

ATTITUDE

"Take the opportunity to learn from your mistakes: find the cause of your problem and eliminate it. Don't try to be perfect; just be an excellent example of being human."

--Anthony Robbins--

Maybe you've already heard how important it is to have a great attitude toward anything you do and take on in your life. Of course if you're learning to play the violin, or any instrument, this case is no exception. Nevertheless it seems that many people are not clear about this principle in relationship to learning to play or teaching a musical instrument.

Having a positive attitude is essential to learning to play a musical instrument. My experience is that correctly managing both one's attitude and one's language (I'll explain what I mean by this) is an indispensable ingredient for getting good results.

Over the years I've discovered that certain phrases, like *out of tune, sounds bad, that's ugly* or *what you're doing is anti-musical*, among others, are words that, instead of bringing me closer to my goals, creates more distance between me and what I want to achieve.

If we operate from the psychological principle that what you put your attention on expands, then you can see that the fruits of using such phrases similar to these: *it's out of tune*, *you're not listening* and *you have no ear*, are not helpful in achieving your musical objectives, but rather are useful in taking you in the opposite direction.

You should also know that saying something is out of tune doesn't even make sense, because in the end, how do you define what it is to be in tune? Being in tune, the distance between one sound and another is rather relative. Nevertheless, it is not my intention in this book to describe and explain the different methods of measuring the space between one note and another.

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When you tell children or young musicians that they are out of tune, you're not really clarifying their intonation, nor are you helping them find the place where the note should be situated. Instead, what you get with this type of comment is the developing of a circumstantial act of not having one note in tune in this particular moment.

When my students play a note out of tune, what I usually do is to stop them in that moment and ask them to pay attention to that note. Sometimes, in other cases, I ask them to sing that note, which helps them quickly locate and correctly play that note.

With beginning students, I give special attention to their singing the notes first and helping with the piano. This usually accelerates the process of training the ear for students not yet able to locate notes and it reinforces those students who already know their notes.

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As much as possible, I generally try to avoid mentioning the word *no* in my classes. Instead I focus on the positive side, especially with children. This approach has brought me numerous benefits, especially in building a good relationship with the children and gaining their confidence. The teacher's function is to teach, and not to judge.

This principle is not an obstacle for creating a responsible relationship with the students. If the learning relationship is based on love for the music, toward what one wants to learn, it will always be solid enough to build and reach very high levels of both musical and technical mastery.

I never tell students what they are doing is bad, for the simple reason that I don't want to reinforce what they are doing incorrectly. This is what I do instead: I put my energy on what I do want and show the students what is written in the music and then tell them what I hear. This is how I go about guiding them.

The purpose is to help students learn how to recognize their own errors in what they're doing.

With children who begin with a correct position, they are already able to work easily and fluidly with their attention on the sound they're creating. These students are able to listen to themselves and the learning process becomes practically a natural process. As the students grow and take up more complex pieces, their playing develops in a fluid manner without major difficulties or delays.

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Another important factor that you realize when you take an open and positive attitude toward teaching is that there really isn't any kind of students you can say is a *bad student*.

How many times have you heard a teacher talk about good and bad students? In the halls of traditional educational institutions, you hear so many of these stories. You hear stories about good students and bad students, and nevertheless, any distinction you make about a student that isn't positive, when anyone speaks of the student's qualities that are not positive, that comment should have no validity for you.

Complaining is one of the simplest things we do that blocks our progress. Complaining tends to develop exactly that which we're complaining about.

I often observe how those teachers, who complain the most about their students, are precisely the ones who tend to have more students to complain about.

This makes perfect sense. However, if you change your focus and start looking for the good in each student and go about planting seeds of responsibility, the results will certainly be different.

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All relationships are generated and powered by interests. So when there is no interest in, or the love for the music and for the instrument has yet not been developed, the relationship with the instrument tends to disappear.

Love for the music is something to develop in each class. The students' relationship with their instruments is what enables them to reach the goals they set for themselves.

So it is that the foundation for teaching is based on love. The violin is such a marvelous means for self expression that it's difficult not to love it.

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As I was telling you, the language that you use when you teach a student to play an instrument, or any other thing, has a direct impact on the results you get.

The way you can change your language is simple and I will explain how I do it with my own students. The idea is to convert everything I want to see and hear in their playing, into a clear intention, not a complaint.

So each detail that you wish to change or improve in the student becomes an intention. Each aspect of the student's playing that is not correct, you make a change of 180° and transform that into a positive intention, and you will get better results.

For example, I would never tell a young musician that he or she has problems with his or her position. What I do in this case is to give all the reference points possible so that the student can correct his or her own position. When a student plays a note incorrectly, I will stop him or her and ask the student to sing the note. If the student needs further support, I help out by playing the note on the piano for guidance.

To conclude, what is important is to give solutions, to give tools to resolve any situation that the student encounters. This is how you can support the student and create the habit for the student to develop solutions.