

20 TIPS FOR THE ASPIRING TENURE-TRACK MUSIC PROFESSOR

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As a music faculty mentor in academia, the question I hear most often is "How do I get tenure?" The short answer is "Be the best at your job". The long answer begins with rephrasing the question to "How do I EARN tenure?"

As I enter my 23rd year (and looking forward to many more) as a clarinet professor at the university level, I reflect on having progressed from being the youngest faculty member in the music department to being the longest standing professor in the woodwind division. Had someone told me this in 1986, I would not have been able to visualize it, let alone believe it.

My experience with academia has been extremely positive and as a result, I gradually sharpened my mentoring tools to help others say the same.

Here are 20 tips to help junior music professors attain their goal of reaping the most out of their career and eventually earn tenure.

1. Remember that getting the job is one thing. Keeping it is another.

Musicians who become college professors ultimately win their jobs because of their superior performing and teaching skills. However, they most often *keep* their jobs thanks to their proactive nature, organizational skills, and by proving they are long-term assets to their employers. Also, because of the artistic nature of the job, musicians can sometimes lose sight of the fact that they are employees hired to enhance the quality and productivity of an institution rather than as full-time performing musicians. This point of view reminds us that versatility, vision, and work ethic are keys to staying employed.

2. Have a plan.

As soon as you step through the doors of your new office or studio, launch a career plan from day one until tenure or promotion. Tenure usually takes about six years, so the plan must be solid and well thought out. Begin by meeting with your Chair or Director to find out the requirements for tenure in your discipline, as they can differ for performers, composers, educators, conductors, theorists, or historians. Make a list of important steps to take and gradually fill in the blanks as you achieve them. For example, divide your tasks into different categories such as "international, national, and regional performances" or "research, teaching, and service" and fill in the blanks as much as possible before seeking tenure. Right before applying for tenure, have an important achievement (such as a major publication or recording) to increase the overall impact of your dossier.

3. Start liking paperwork. A lot.

A comment I hear from time to time from colleagues who seek me out as a mentor is "But I'm an *artist*, I don't want to waste time on paperwork!" Unfortunately,

avoiding paperwork can easily result in losing a chance at tenure, so my answer remains the same year after year: "Do you prefer being an *employed* artist?"

4. Document your accomplishments and professional activities right away.

Each year, a written annual "report of activity" is expected by the employer. This report is helpful in determining how the tenure track is progressing as well as deciding the amount of a merit raise. Instead of piling up papers (such as programs) in a folder and waiting until the end of the year to write your document, create a *Word* template and fill in the blanks a day or two after each event takes place. This is easy because it is done in small increments. Another way to minimize the work is to ask willing and generous colleagues to email you their past reports and emulate the one that works best for you. This way, you can avoid the overwhelming task of creating a document from scratch and have it ready long before the deadline.

5. Deadlines are created for people who cannot meet deadlines.

When you are given a deadline for anything, make sure to turn in your project ahead of time. When I serve on search committees and see an "overnight air" application sent at the last minute to meet the postmark deadline, I cannot help being skeptical of the candidate's commitment to meeting deadlines. Even though the applicant might be thinking: "Great! I met the deadline. I'm in!" I tend to assume that if they push something so important as a job application to the last minute, it seems more likely that they will miss deadlines once they have the job. In a world of fierce competition in a tight job market, why take the chance and do things at the last minute?

6. Seek a mentor.

After being at your new job for a while, you might notice which colleagues inspire you to achieve great things. Faculty mentoring programs are increasing in popularity, however if your institution does not yet provide such a program, see if one of your esteemed colleagues would agree to mentor you. Meet for coffee (you buy!) and pick your colleague's mind to find out how they achieved success and how you could design a plan for your own success. There are many path possibilities and the trick is to find the one that suits you best.

7. Find out what makes you unique and indispensable.

Do you have a special talent or attribute that could accelerate the recognition of your skills in your field? One way to strengthen your tenure-track plan is to find a niche that will make you desirable in your field in a relatively short amount of time. Are you a star flutist who has a strong knack with technology? Do you have ancestry that would enhance or tie into your research path? Did you come up with a high-yield recruiting plan? Are you fascinated by a field in the sciences that would complement your performing research? The idea is to find a research field that has not been overly tapped-into so that you can become published early on as a junior faculty member. Publishing inevitably solidifies your tenure document, but most importantly,

it helps garner high-level invitations at conferences or university programs that want to be the first to showcase your new findings.

8. Take advantage of your institution's training programs.

Institutions of learning strongly encourage their faculty to stay at the forefront of their disciplines and often provide training programs to help them achieve success. Examples include workshops for the improvement of teaching, faculty learning communities, technology training, brainstorming sessions, and grant writing.

9. Get grants.

Most research projects require some form of departmental or external financial support. Proactive junior faculty members are usually known to secure substantial internal funding, which is a great way to enhance visibility on campus as well as move forward with research projects. Ambitious faculty members in the arts find ways to pursue funding from *external* sources, resulting in gaining more research credibility from the upper administration, which in turn may lead to more in-house funding down the line. Scientists spend a huge amount of their time writing proposals for very large external grants. In music, however, winning even a modest external grant is a tricky task and a well-regarded bonus. Seek the guidance of your research office, as they provide grant-writing workshops and can assist you in finding funding sources and filling out special external grant forms.

10. Manage your time.

Time management reduces anxiety and procrastination, allows for efficient planning, and eliminates doing things too fast and at the last minute. Here are some ways to use your time judiciously:

- Make to-do lists and cross out items as they are accomplished
- Close your office door during important projects to avoid long conversations with pop-in conversationalists, and use your "hallway" time wisely
- Create a file for each and every project right from the start
- Know how to delegate and when to say "no", and offer recommendations for replacements when you must decline a request
- Create time-saving file retrieving systems for your documents, recordings, scores, books, and equipment

11. Seek service at the national level.

One way to increase momentum in one's career and strengthen a tenure dossier is to do some significant networking at national and international conferences. Probationary faculty members are required to develop a strong record of research, teaching, and service. Ultimately, applicants need to demonstrate that they are recognized on a national and/or international level. Years of successful networking at conferences often result in receiving invitations to perform, teach, lecture, or conduct as a guest artist at high-level settings, as well as to serve in the organization's

administrative personnel or board of directors. Being sought out for our expertise on a national level is concrete evidence of our value as professionals and demonstrates tenure potential.

12. Deliver the goods.

Be dependable and do what you say you will do. Show up on time. Answer your email in a timely fashion. Never accept commitments without writing them down in your calendar because if you forget them, this is where the real trouble starts.

13. Be visible online. Very.

Come time for the upper administration to review your tenure dossier, chances are some committee members will turn to *Google* to verify your level of activity and recognition in your field. These days, professional statues can be measured on how many links come up under your name. High-level reviewed performances, recordings, publications, and general accomplishments in your field result in your online presence increasing each year. That is a positive thing. But what if your presence is negative? Yes, I am talking about blogging. Whether or not you fall into the "for" or "against" blogging category, make sure that anything you write online will not undermine your credibility or scholarly reputation. Winning an "argument" online may be satisfying, however it is best to avoid getting the wrong kind of attention.

An attractive and professional-looking website is essential, but of little value if potential viewers are unable to find it. One efficient way to increase visibility is to add your URL to a service such as *Submit Express* (www.submitexpress.com) that allows you to enter keywords and choose which search engines will include your website.

14. Follow procedure.

Failure to follow procedure can curtail the best intentions. When receiving guidelines related to committee tasks, read the fine print and avoid skipping any steps. The same is true when giving out directives; write detailed syllabi that give students clear expectations and instructions.

Stay clear of politics. Remain cordial at all times, no matter what. Stop conflicts before they start and own up to your mistakes.

15. A clean office--The beginning of a beautiful thing.

The appearance of your work environment can say a lot about your work habits, not to mention that an organized office allows for more efficient use of time. Eliminate out-of-date papers and damaged wall decorations, and get rid of the clutter on a daily basis. Holding office hours in an inviting and neat updated space inevitably sends an array of positive messages that leave a good impression on your colleagues and student visitors.

16. Teach with Tech.

Naturally, teaching methods will vary depending on the discipline. Many theorists and musicologists routinely use technology in the classroom. Applied music instructors can also take advantage of technological developments. Examples are to post videocasts on *iTunes* or *YouTube*, create online learning objects or games, install the *SmartMusic* interactive accompaniment system in the studio, use a webcam and mp3 recorder in lessons, assign students to email you assessment videos using *QuickTimePro*, use *Wikis*, and make use of online teaching platforms such as *Blackboard* or *WebCT*. Sharp instructors keep track of emerging new technologies available to musicians on a yearly basis.

17. Recruit, and then recruit some more.

Recruiting is the bread and butter in any music school. Well-planned recruiting endeavors directly impact the quality and future of each studio. Although applied faculty members do the majority of the networking and legwork in this area, successful recruiting is the result of everyone in the department working together, including the administrative assistants who receive requests from prospective students on a daily basis and theory professors greeting visiting families in the hallway to see if they need assistance. Obviously, high visibility on the Internet, the concert stage, the conference circuit, and the written page can boost your recruiting outcomes. Creative recruiting techniques are getting more and more sophisticated and it is paramount to stay abreast to today's college students' preferred ways of communicating. Yesteryear's email is yesterday's instant messaging, today's texting, and tomorrow's Facebooking. Good, old-fashioned telephoning is almost considered a luxury nowadays and should not be overlooked.

Other than the school website, consider creating a profile for your studio on networking sites such as *MySpace* or *Facebook*. Most importantly keep track of all incoming students by creating files after they visit your studio so you will still recall them when they come to audition six months later. Better yet, ask if you can snap a picture with your cell phone camera. Including parents in the photo makes for a fun atmosphere, and the student's name can be quickly and conveniently entered on the mini screen. Inviting parents to sit in a complimentary lesson allows for on-site questions and completes the equation.

18. Be a high-yield, low-maintenance employee.

When you experience a challenge in your job, try finding proactive solutions before reporting to your employer. Never go to higher administration with a problem unless you first clear it with your immediate superior. When meeting with your employer, stand out by offering something prior to presenting your list of needs. Best of all, keep a positive attitude and show pride in working for your institution.

19. Books and journals: keys to the tenure door.

To be more competitive in the work place, musicians and educators can benefit

by borrowing ideas from the corporate world. Business workers have access to countless "self-improvement" books that contain valuable strategies to become a highly regarded and productive employee. These books help gather fundamental psychological tools to implement tenure-earning strategies.

Self-help books.

a) *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff at Work: Simple Ways to Minimize Stress and Conflict While Bringing Out the Best in Yourself and Others*, by Richard Carlson (Hyperion, 1998).

This book provides priceless advice for the workplace. It teaches ways to modify the only things we can control: our own outlook and behavior. It describes the positive effects created by better understanding our work environment. Also, in his *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff 2009 Boxed Calendar*, Dr. Carlson offers an inspiring reminder on the "January 1st" page: "Achievements and accomplishments are important but they can take you only so far. In the end, what really matters...is the type of person you are and the type of role model you become."

b) *Who Moved My Cheese? An Amazing Way to Deal with Change in Your Work and in Your Life*, by Spencer Johnson and Kenneth Blanchard (Putnam 1998, 2002).

I believe that two of the most important qualities to have in today's workplace are *vision* and *flexibility*, or the ability to adapt to change. This is a most unusual and helpful "best-seller" that addresses this in less than 100 pages. Although at first, one may think the presentation of subject matter is simplistic (the font is large and the book includes drawings, much like in a children's storybook), a closer look reveals an amazingly clever story about modifying attitudes toward change in life, especially at work. Change occurs whether a person is ready or not, and it can be very positive.

Borrowing books from the business world

One of the best ways to increase job security is to enhance our value and work ethic and productivity, which can lead to being tenured and promoted. Two inspiring books on the subject are:

a) *How to Be the Employee Your Company Can't Live Without: 18 Ways to Become Indispensable*, by Glenn Shepard (Wiley, 2006).

b) *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, by Stephen R. Covey (Covey, 2004).

Topics discussed in both books are:

Becoming a problem solver

Proudly representing the organization or institution for which we work

People Skills

Constantly updating our skills

How to correct mistakes

How to be proactive
Anticipate future trends
Develop or improve leadership skills
Organizational skills

Books for professors: advice on tenure

a) *Preparing for Promotion, Tenure, and Annual Review: A Faculty Guide, 2nd ed.*, by Robert M. Diamond (JB - Anker Series, 2004).

This guide provides techniques to plan ahead by learning the rules, getting organized, developing a line of research, and fostering interpersonal relationships. It gives advice on documenting one's work in all areas of teaching and scholarship, managing changing guidelines and policies, and using annual review materials as the foundation for professional portfolios. It includes resources, examples, references, and a practical checklist.

b) *Mentor in a Manual: Climbing the Academic Ladder to Tenure*, by A. Clay Schoenfeld and Robert Magnan (Atwood Publishing, 2004).

This detailed book elucidates departmental politics, offers advice on teaching, research and publishing, and offers practical suggestions to create tenure dossiers.

Chronicle of Higher Education

This weekly newspaper is a great news and job-information resource for college and university faculty and administrators and is well worth the subscription cost. It contains articles aimed at mentoring pre-tenured professors as well as information on national teaching trends, academic job markets, technology in the classroom, and an array of other topics. The website <http://chronicle.com> contains forums for discussion, job listings, and archives of back issues.

Peeking into the employer's mind

A wise strategy to earn tenure is to tap into the employers' world by reading books targeted directly to them. Even if these are meant for readers from the corporate world, I find it enlightening to apply the principles to a music professorship and figure out exactly what employers expect in general:

a) *What Your Boss Doesn't Tell You Until It's Too Late: How to Correct Behavior That Is Holding You Back*, by Robert Bramson (Fireside, 1996).

This short book aims to help recognize destructive behavior at work and the importance of paying attention to subtle feedback given by others. It also offers helpful techniques for personal image repair.

b) *Indispensable Employees: How to Hire Them, How to Keep Them*, by Martha R. A. Fields (Career Press, 2001)

This book helps organizations think about how to hold on to the best employees, and how to hire the most competent, motivated, and diverse people possible. Transposing such advice to academia will give junior faculty members an edge when the time comes to apply for tenure and promotion.

20. Career-planning exercise.

In my book, *Clarinet Secrets--52 Performance Strategies for the Advanced Clarinetist* (Scarecrow Press, Red. Ed. 2006), I offer a career-planning exercise to help musicians define short-and long term- career goals.

Naturally, it is important to know ourselves well so personal goals can be set wisely and judiciously. I find the following list-writing technique very helpful to identify priorities and plan for the achievement of tenure. For maximum benefit, the lists should be written in the following chronological order:

1. Write a list of 10 important goals you wish for in your life. The exercise specifically requires that you write 10 items instead of fewer, even if you seem to run out of ideas at first. The extra brainstorming is the key to getting to know yourself more profoundly.
 2. List 10 important goals you have achieved in your life. This helps to identify what has been important to you so far. It also allows you to reflect on past achievements and plan your future goals.
 3. Write a list of 10 ways you achieved the 1st item on list 2.
 4. Write a list of 10 ways you achieved the 2nd item on list 2.
 5. Write a list of 10 ways you achieved the 3rd item, and so on.
- Again, this is a valuable teaching tool to get insight on the way you accomplish things in general.

After you are finished writing lists 3-12, prepare for a new set:

13. List 10 ways you could achieve the 1st item on list 1.
14. List 10 ways you could achieve the 2nd item on list 1.
15. List 10 ways you could achieve the 3rd item, and so on.

When you are finished taking quality time to write these 24 lists over the span of several days, put the lists aside for a while. In time, your ideas will develop subconsciously and sooner or later, there is a good chance that many items on list 1 will become a reality.

Coda: Positive attitude and tenure.

A note to those who already earned tenure: I believe that earning tenure is best regarded as the start of a great thing rather than the end of a challenge. One could choose to regard the tenure process as a series of "hoops to jump through", however a person with positive attitude prefers to see tenure as a valuable box of tools that is designed to help learn the job and propel their career forward. Tenured music

professors with a positive attitude will have learned to use these tools so well that they cannot help but continue to utilize them and honor their discipline by being invaluable members of the profession.

I hope these tips will inspire tenure-track professors to cross the finish line and most importantly, to continue the fascinating journey beyond.

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About the Author

Michele Gingras is Professor of Clarinet at Miami (OH), where she was named *Crossan Hays Curry Distinguished Educator and Distinguished Scholar of the Graduate Faculty*. She published one book, *Clarinet Secrets* (Scarecrow Press, 2006), and 160 articles and reviews for international publications. She performed worldwide and recorded over a dozen CDs, and also performs as a klezmer musician. She is Past-Secretary of the International Clarinet Association (ICA) and is an Artist Clinician for Rico International and Buffet Crampon USA. Subscribe to her free *ClariNET* Vcasts on *iTunes*.