



Pushing Through the Performance Plateau

By Chris Casteel

First, let's take a look back in time.....

At the beginning of our season instructors and performers alike are passionate about the concepts that they are working toward. The music is new, the colors and equipment are new, sometimes the costumes are new as well, and we are engaged and excited by all of these items. At this early juncture, it is relatively easy to generate enthusiasm and interest in our performers; both in the rehearsal and performance venue.

Now, fast forward to the present...

Welcome to the month of April! While there is no doubt that we are on the homestretch towards championships, it is definitely *not* the time to stop the forward momentum of performance in your shows. However the initial enthusiasm that we reflected upon in the previous paragraph may not be as strong from the perspective of the performer and instructor alike. You may have even used the terms 'peak' or 'plateau' as you analyzed your guard's attitude or performance capabilities.

It is important to recognize that if you are currently dealing with a 'plateau' or 'peak' situation with your performers, do not take it personally. What you are dealing with is a very real human response that occurs in our everyday lives in a plethora of situations. The best analogy that can be utilized to illustrate this point is that of a personal relationship. At the beginning of a relationship there is an excitement and captivation that exist by virtue of its *newness*. This is fueled by the continual discovery of a new individual. However, as time passes and we see that person continuously, our perspective changes a bit. We may find ourselves not needing to put our 'best foot forward' because they have seen us so many times. They know us. Once this happens, there is a comfort level created that can work against us at this point in a relationship. The dynamic, ecstatic high that we experienced earlier in the relationship slowly begins to dissipate.

This same dynamic has the possibility of occurring over the course of a competitive season. The *newness* of introducing a show to an audience and judges may have dissipated a bit. Performers may be dealing with a comfort level that is working against them. This can be identified as a 'plateau' or 'peak'.

So, how do you deal with this situation and push towards the next and higher level of accomplishment and excitement in your program?

To overcome any plateau in color guard performance or life, you must strive for new perspectives. At this point in the season, make them manageable and realistic (we only have 3 weeks left!). Remember, we react in a very positive way to the concept of 'change'. Visual changes that include the performer can be successful, such as; costume detailing, hairstyle change, makeup change. The addition of minor props or setting elements can lead to further detailing and change of perspective. In each case, the performers will be given the new challenge of connecting these elements into the show and communicating the change in persona to the audience.

Also, change may come through revisiting the initial thoughts/premise of your show or program. Discuss motivations from the beginning of the season, and revisit those early conversations of development. Find ways of weaving the individual thoughts into a consensus. (Suggestion - use a whiteboard to write all their thoughts as you briefly reflect upon each one; the visual impact will be strong). Often times, we get so caught up in the building of our concept and the development of performance that we forget the early thought processes and reasons for doing this in the first place. They are trampled upon by the reality of completing the show. SO, bring them back to this point in a conversation. Identify those first aspirations. *Why* were they so compelled at the beginning of the process? *What* was it that was so exciting about introducing the show to an audience in January? Reconnect your performers with those early motivations and utilize them for a change in perspective.

Pushing through the performance plateau can be as varied as we are diverse. However, there is a common element that we all share by virtue of our involvement in this activity; that is the passion, joy and excitement that comes when we are moved and appreciate the art of performance through color guard.

I hope this helps! ☺