



READY, FIRE, AIM

By Chris Casteel

I realize the actual phrase is 'ready, aim, fire', but for the purpose of this article I've chosen to manipulate it just a little bit to illustrate a point. You see, ready, aim, fire suggests that as an instructor you first plan your rehearsal; second, set goals for the rehearsal, and finally decide how you are going to reach those goals. Basically, it is how the majority of us approach preparing for rehearsals. This makes sense, because it is good, sound, teaching methodology.

However, we are in the middle of March and halfway through the indoor competitive season. So perhaps it is time to change things up a bit and place a little 'spin' on your existing instructional techniques. Once in a while it makes sense to consider the method of ready, *fire*, aim. Let me explain...

Ready:

This part of the equation remains as it has always been. Let's make the assumption that all of you are well prepared to teach your guards at every rehearsal. With that said, I am also quite sure that the artistic vision for your show has developed to a good degree at this point in the season, and the benchmarks of your program are well in place. So really, being ready to teach isn't going to change much.

However, this is the point in the season where instructors should start looking outside of their own artistic vision to the world around them for further inspiration. Sometimes we get so locked into what we perceive for our shows and our programs, that we don't open ourselves up to possible new philosophies or concepts. This is where the next part of my mixed up phrase comes into play...*fire*.

Fire:

Let me forewarn you, I am going to go a bit off the beaten path with this one. Sometimes something comes along that is so different, so compelling, or so imaginative that it would be great to use it in your approach as an instructor or as a component of your show. What I'm suggesting is that there are things so influential that you should try using them even if at first glance they don't seem to fit the way you teach or the content of your show.

At this point in the season, perhaps you and your students are ready for a different approach or a fresh perspective. Often times the inspiration for these moments come out of nowhere and can be a bit of a surprise. Be open to the world around you and draw your creative

and instructional muse from it. I would encourage you to look for opportunities and ideas at all times and in all places. When you find one, take a moment- *fire*- and see if it works for your program. Here are a few examples of this process from my own experience:

There would always come a point in the season where I could finally take a break from the teaching of the show and begin the process of methodically cleaning it and fine tuning its parts. It was always at this point that I began to look outside of my own vision for inspiration. This could be anything from mannerisms to compliment an existing nuance, to a different interpretation of a movement. I often found ideas and perspectives from the performers in the program. During off times or breaks they would inevitably pick up a piece of equipment and begin to perform their part in the show with ‘individualistic interpretation and abandon’. Basically, this means that they were simply goofing around with it. Most of the time, this would be done with great exaggeration, because they were spoofing that section for the comical entertainment of their friends. However, I can’t tell you how many successful ideas I have actually stolen from these playful moments. Perhaps these outrageous movements were not in my original vision of the show, but they warranted a trial with the group. Crazy as it may seem, some of these ideas ended up being in the competitive show.

Let me be clear, I am in no way suggesting a complete rewrite of content mid March based on the musings of your performers during break! It is all about the little things that can be added to the already existing composition. Think added details of texture, color, lines, depth on the existing canvas of your show.

Likewise, I found myself inspired to use a visualization technique that was the topic of an Oprah Winfrey show a few years back. My team, at the time, welcomed a new perspective and exercise to try. It was a bit “outside of the box”, but who said color guard performers aren’t “outside of the box”? That said, the exercise ended up becoming a part of the performance warm up. Who would have ever thought that sitting on a couch watching Oprah could ever influence a color guard warm up? But it did!

Aim:

The teaching process is one that needs refreshment every once in a while. If your students anticipate every move you make, you run the chance of losing their interest. By changing it up just a bit, it creates curiosity which leads to their engagement in the program and/or show. In addition, if you are enthusiastic about something you see or hear; your enthusiasm will transfer to your students. By grasping things in the world around you, it makes your creative process current and relevant to your performers. Lastly, if you happen to utilize one of their moves, well, this is simply a double benefit because it offers a sense of ownership.

While I don't recommend it as a steady diet...it warrants some thought that sometimes...sometimes...ready, fire, aim can be a legitimate and fun method of teaching your color guard. Maybe the middle of March is the time to add some *fire*/spice into your routine?