

WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW

by Barbara Flooding

Among the many pleasures in the life of a teacher is receiving an email from a former student asking, “Want to meet for coffee sometime?” I had that distinct pleasure last year when I met for coffee with Joe Carroll, Edina High School Class of 2003, who was just completing his Bachelor of Music Degree in Cello Performance at Indiana University. With an eye toward practicality, though, he had taken a variety of business courses and interned for a summer with Merrill Lynch in Minneapolis.

A year ago, Joe went through the grueling process of interviewing for a job in the business world—with a cello performance degree. He was granted interviews with Epic Systems, Target Corporation and McKinsey & Company, who went on to hire Joe as a business analyst. So Joe, hired by a top management consulting firm with 80 locations around the world, had to ask: What was it about his résumé and application that stood out?

The answer? His music.

Both Merrill Lynch and McKinsey & Company told Joe that the following things stood out about him. Musicians are:

- Dedicated. Diligent and goal-centered practicing shows a focus not only on details but on the larger picture as well.
- Focused on teamwork and time

management. In other work areas, team members often share in the workload—one team member may be assigned abc while another member is responsible for xyz. Do many team members know both abc and xyz? In a music ensemble, members must not only know their own part but also what they are a part of—at once dedicated to the mastery of individual contributions while being sensitive to the efforts of others, both individual and collaborative, of the larger ensemble—or team.

- Accustomed to personal accountability. Unlike the private lesson, there is typically no class that requires a student to meet with a professor one-on-one during the week to assess individual learning.
- Accustomed to exercising high-level critical-thinking skills. Following a weekly lesson, musicians must make improvements on their own. In the business world, individuals are expected to analyze and seek solutions independently as well as corporately. The expectation of productivity in the corporate setting, as in the studio, is continuous.

In Joe’s senior year of high school I had

the opportunity to share a dinner with him and his parents one evening. The subject of majoring in music came up and although Joe’s parents wanted to support him in his decision to study music, they were concerned about the financial realities of his future earning potential. Let me just say that Joe’s income as a first year member of McKinsey & Company is nearly as high as mine in my 23rd year of teaching.

On a more somber note, the skills that Joe honed as a musician also have helped him in his personal life. During his freshman year at Indiana, Joe’s mom passed away from cancer. Joe’s dad, who had also been diagnosed with cancer prior to his mother’s death, passed away during Joe’s sophomore year. As Joe’s younger sister finished her high school years at Edina, Joe shuttled back and forth as often as he could to meet his obligations as the new head of the family. I’m so proud of him. And I know his parents are as well.

Barbara Flooding currently teaches orchestra at Valley View Middle School in Edina and is on the conducting staff of the Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphonies. Formerly, while teaching at St. Cloud Apollo High School, Barbara lead the Apollo Symphony in New York’s Carnegie Hall Youth Debut Music Series. †