

## **Greg Chako Statement About Teaching Philosophy**

I favor student-centered, constructivist teaching methods in which students are actively involved in the learning process, as opposed to being passive recipients of information that is lectured “down” to them. I seek to stimulate student’s critical thinking by encouraging dialogue, debate, and brainstorming in class. If I am teaching entrepreneurship to musicians for instance, I will ask open-ended questions such as, “What is entrepreneurship? Why should artists care about it? What steps need to be taken to be successful?” What do my students think of business and its relationship to the creative arts world? Do they, as I used to, view the business world with an element of distaste? It is my duty to fill any gaps in my student’s understanding of what is expected of them in business compared to what is expected of them in music. In order to successfully market their creative efforts they need to appreciate and respect business principles.

Often the answers for questions like that will vary depending on the socio-cultural context and perspective, and that too, is something well worth exploring with in-class discussions. For instance, what constitutes an entrepreneur in America like Bill Gates has a different model in Japan where, rather than bold individuals shouldering all the risk with no guarantee of job security, the entrepreneurial spirit is exemplified within the cocoon of larger corporations that funnel research and development funding to groups of entrepreneurs that are given the freedom to experiment and innovate without the fear of losing their jobs. Then, successes become company ones instead of individual ones. Similarly, business mores differ significantly when perceived within a different culture. In America, we can generally tell who, among a group of suit-clad businessmen, is the leader, because the leader will be “leading,” probably in the front and likely the most vocal of the group. In Japan, it is just the opposite: the leader will be the one trailing inconspicuously in the rear of the group who never says anything. If I can impart to students not only basic business principles, but also some awareness of how these principles can vary from culture to culture, then they will be better equipped to manage all of the interpersonal interaction necessary for them to achieve their professional goals.

The same characteristics of clarity and organization that are vital to creating a superior jazz solo or musical composition should be evident in each student’s scholarly output; therefore, I strongly emphasize improvement in *all* their communication skills: written, verbal *and* artistic. Adequately organizing their thoughts and expressing their ideas effectively will help them in every aspect of their lives, but these are also necessary skills for any successful business negotiation and presentation. These skills can be practiced in class through writing assignments, in-class presentations, and working in small groups (or teams) on problems and projects under conditions that assure both positive interdependence and individual accountability. For instance, I might ask them to write a grant proposal to obtain money for a project they would like to see realized. Can they conceptualize, itemize and forecast a budget, describe implementation, quantification methods, project worthiness, and summarize it all in a 2 to 4 page proposal of compelling prose? Excerpts selected and displayed (anonymously) in class could be used to prompt comparative analysis. The best proposals could be discussed in separate “committees” working as teams to determine how to best “market” their proposal to the class (their “corporate” audience). The key point is that, while theory has its place, I believe that students learn best by actually “doing,” therefore, as much as possible, I will help to facilitate a practical, “hands-on” learning

environment, supporting my students, in and out of the classroom, to formulate and realize their goals.

Various forms of media are valuable to my teaching. I expect students to make full use of the Internet and to integrate YouTube video excerpts into their presentations when appropriate. Books will introduce important perspectives to my students, and I will expect students to prepare essays and participate in in-class discussions on assigned readings. Books dealing with the music business that can stimulate a lively class discussion might include Kot's *Ripped* and Anderson's *Free*, because those books outline the impact of the digital revolution and key changes in today's entertainment business models. I will show selected TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) videos in class, particularly that of musician Amanda Palmer's *The Art of Asking*, which powerfully and succinctly deals with the same subject matter as the two books referenced above. I might ask students to prepare their own "TED" talk on a subject of their choosing and present it to the rest of the class, with analytical discussion to follow. My aim is to introduce students to some of the historical implications of the digital revolution while also prompting them to fully accept it and learn to utilize Internet technology for their benefit.

No single attribute, such as knowledge, experience, eloquence, or initials after my name, in and of itself, will make me an effective teacher. I will, however, identify and emulate the examples set by my own best teaching mentors and the leaders from other disciplines I have had the pleasure of knowing and admiring. They all shared the ability to offer solutions to problems in positive terms; for instance, rather than tell a student that something is not good, I will suggest ways to make it even better: attack the problem, not the person. While it is necessary to address the weaknesses in students' work, it is not advised to address *only* their deficits, because to do so runs the risk of "taking the wind out of their sails" and demoralizing them. Instead, I will always advocate the continued pursuit of their proven successes; for instance, if student's have issues with technique but demonstrate eagerness for composition, I will prescribe that a portion of their practice time be devoted to improving technique and a similar portion of time be used to further advance the skills they already possess, to both make them acutely aware of areas that need improvement, and to firmly reinforce their strengths and inspire their passion. I am highly adaptable to changing circumstances – if one lesson plan is not working – I will keep trying another until we discover what *is* working. I try to exhibit a good sense of humor while still functioning earnestly. I have learned well from my professional sales experience that it pays huge dividends to listen well *in addition* to talking well. Creating trust and rapport with students is imperative.

Becoming an excellent player is often not enough to ensure a profitable and successful career in music. I believe one needs to develop a full palette of skills in a broad array of disciplines, starting with a willingness to embrace change and versatility with an open, flexible mindset. Today's successful artists need: Internet savvy and presence; good interpersonal communication skills; mind and body health consciousness; emotion intelligence; market knowledge; basic skill in finance and bookkeeping; and some competence in sales, advertising and promotion. A positive attitude and a good sense of humor are *big* pluses. These are skills and personal attributes that I have developed through 30 years as an entrepreneurial artist, and they have refined my ability to transcend the role of a mere teacher into that of a true mentor to students.

It is useful to describe the importance of studying the history and traditions of whatever art form

or discipline we are teaching, the idea attributed to Bernard of Chartres in the 12th century and popularized by Isaac Newton when he wrote: “If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.” When teaching music for instance, I support the creativity that springs from a sound understanding of the traditions established by its master architects. Thorough historical study and analysis can help students learn to *reinterpret* the musical language by developing their own individual “voices,” rather than feebly attempting to reinvent a “*brand new*” language to supplant it.

Most broadly speaking, my teaching philosophy is aligned with my moral values and spiritual aspirations in that I try to be more concerned with the needs of others than those of my own. I hope to be an equanimous and empathetic anchor of resources for my students, colleagues, and the community at large, recognizing that *how* one disseminates knowledge may be more valuable than the knowledge itself. I wish to cultivate and enhance capability and confidence in thought, communication, and action; to facilitate and promote the student’s imagination, creativity, intellectual and emotional growth; and to encourage and model interpersonal and intercultural awareness, tolerance, and understanding.