

Tom Hooten: On Being Curious, and Elevating Learning and Growth Above Ego

Description

Legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden once said “If you don’t have time to do it right, when will you have time to do it over?”

It’s one of my favorite quotes now, but I wonder if I could have grasped this when I was younger, and in the thick of weekly lessons, rehearsals, performances, auditions, and so on.

In the sense that when I look back now, I can see how much of my practice was oriented around simply trying to not sound bad at my next lesson, or rehearsal, performance, and just doing what I had to do to sound presentable at the next thing.?

And what exactly is wrong with that?

Well, someone once said that we overestimate what we can do in a day, but underestimate what we can do in a year.

Meaning, when we are too focused on sounding good tomorrow, it can be easy to neglect to explore new techniques or approaches that might *appear* to set us back today, but actually lays the groundwork for a much higher level of playing months or years from now.

Like continuing to make do with our less than ideal chinrest/shoulder rest setup, because we’re afraid to go through the growing pains and adjustments of a new setup.

Or turning a blind eye to our vibrato, rather than exploring ways to develop a more varied vibrato, even though we know this would enable us to be a much more communicative player in the long run.

Meet Tom Hooten

Tom Hooten is Principal Trumpet of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and has previously held positions with the Atlanta Symphony (principal), Indianapolis Symphony (assistant principal), Richmond Symphony (2nd), and “The President’s Own” Marine Band.

Despite getting serious about the trumpet a little later than most, and encountering his share of challenges along the way, Tom seems to be uniquely capable of putting his ego aside, and focusing relentlessly on learning, growth, and being curious. It’s a mindset that’s ideal for learning and performing, and one that I hope this episode will help you incorporate into your own practice and approach to learning as well.

In this 38-min chat, we'll explore:

- The problem with practicing to avoid sounding bad – i.e. practicing to hide weaknesses vs. practicing to fix the actual underlying problem (though this may take longer). (1:53)
- The importance of having the courage to play the long game, and not feel like you have to prove yourself every single day at the expense of your long-term goals. (6:22)
- How the emphasis he put on playing the right way, and cultivating ease and flexibility are now paying off in his ability to meet the demands of his day-to-day responsibilities with the LA Phil. (8:07)
- The 5 key basics that he came to feel were really important in auditions. (10:38)
- The potential downside of finding a “shortcut” that seems to work pretty well. (12:00)
- How he came to be able to put his ego and pride aside and elevate his commitment to learning and open-minded-ness. (13:40)
- I ask Tom how he cultivated curiosity and his relentless focus on wanting to figure things out vs. proving himself. (18:58)
- A way of conceptualizing knowledge that could help you become more open to learning. (20:54)
- The best remedy for dealing with nerves and ego in auditions. (26:05)
- Feedback about imperfections as nutrients that sustain him and his continued development. (32:58)
- Be wary of information overload; Tom suggests taking one thing and seeing how far or deeply one can take it, rather than moving from one thing to the next, engaging in each on only a very shallow level. (34:22)

Notes

[1] [Tim Ferriss](#) and his book [The 4-Hour Workweek](#) comes up. (9:31)

[2] Tom mentions life coach/speaker/author [Tony Robbins](#) and physicist [Richard Feynman](#) (13:40)

[3] Tom mentions Carol Dweck's book [Mindset: The New Psychology of Success](#), which she speaks a bit about in [this TED talk](#). (17:41)

[4] I allude to Google's “20% time,” which you can read about [here](#). (18:38)

[5] Tom references the [Landmark](#) organization. (20:23)

[6] Tom references neuro-associative conditioning, which Tony Robbins describes [here](#) .

[7] Tom mentions the [Smartrecord app](#) (iOS only), which can slow down your recording to half tempo. If you're an Android user, it looks like [RecForge II](#) has a variable speed feature too. (29:10)

[8] Here's a list of some of the books Tom mentioned at the end. (36:28)

- [How Not to Die: Discover the Foods Scientifically Proven to Prevent and Reverse Disease](#)
- [Elon Musk: Tesla, SpaceX, and the Quest for a Fantastic Future](#)

- [Steve Jobs](#)
- [Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True Inspiration](#)
- [The Talent Code](#)

Hear Tom

Check out Tom's collaboration with John Williams (yes, *that* John Williams!): [Hooten Plays Williams](#)

And if you happen to be in Aspen **TODAY** (Sunday, 7/7), Tom will be in the Festival Orchestra concert at 4pm (Sibelius #5).

Work with Tom

You can learn more about [taking a lesson](#) with Tom, or requesting a [workshop](#).

Follow Tom

And in addition to [his website](#), which includes links to great interviews and instructional videos, you can keep up with his latest activities here:

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/tomhooten/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/tomhooten>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/TomHootenTrumpet/>

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