

I'm putting this on the Adam page in this form as it is not my place to proselytize in place of Mr. Adam's teachings.

However, I strongly suspect this will resonate with a whole lot of you. And I'll add, this is inspired by my interactions with a close friend who is busting his bum to "get it" and running into frustrations, frustrations which are all too common.

Rewind to circa 1975 or so. Having been with Mr. Adam for a year or two... the scenario is, studying with one of the acknowledged greatest teachers on the planet, I am disciplined, hardworking, practiced my a** off, not without some talent, etc., and I could NOT get past about a high C#, for love or money, and that C# was muscled, loud only (if it came out at all!), and only because I practiced many hours per day could I even do it that way -

In a lesson I remember too clearly, for the umpteenth time I failed to get Schlossberg #31 to the high E (high C to high E). Nothing but bad noise came out, AGAIN. Adam would watch me intently, and I could see the "hope" on his face that maybe today is the day that he finally gets it! But of course, no. Same old same old. My frustration was palpable. And for those who knew me then, I literally put my fist through a practice room window; the scars on my knuckles from doing that are still present. I just COULD NOT DO IT!.

I tried to "blow better." Blow more freely. Copy so-and-so who could do it. Maybe my lips weren't right. *Maybe there was something Mr. Adam just did not understand!*

Then at that very lesson, Mr. Adam said, "you're hearing it aren't you?" And I thought about, and said "no." Bombshell.... I remember the look on Mr. Adam's face when I confessed that.

I was putting the horn on my face and hoping. I was NOT hearing that clear beautiful tone as if it were coming out of ME, *and believing it*. I could hear my peers do it, but as soon as the horn was on MY face, the notion of hearing the result was a complete blank, a void.

How many come to me telling me they are doing everything right, there must be something special/bad/problematic about them! But I know: THEY ARE NOT HEARING IT.

OK what's the fix?

Then next memorable scene:

I equally vividly remember warming up for a show, in Plttsburg, with Bob Slack, trading off as we had done dozens of times, where I'd quit at the high C so as to not f*** him up when he was trying to get dialed in for the show, but I heard him do #31 to the high G, and in a brief moment, I MENTALLY had it.. so I asked if it was cool if I tried, and he was patient, looking at me like, OK here we go, more weird noises coming out of Karl in the high range.

But I had a mental grasp of that sound, in the moment, that was so clear, that I put the horn on my face and BANG out came a high E to high G that was pretty close to what Bob was doing! We both about s*** ourselves. OMG what was THAT!!!??? This was a giant leap forward.

The point is, for that moment, I had it in my mental ear, clearly and vividly, as COMING OUT OF ME! Not as a spectator just hearing Bob do it, but coming out of ME. My lips, teeth, jaw, trumpet, mouthpiece, embouchure, were all THE SAME AS BEFORE. What changed? I was HEARING IT in the sense of what Mr. Adam meant by, “are you hearing it?”

That night on the show I kept taking stuff up the 8va from the 2nd chair, totally not cool, but Bob was tolerant... I’ve got it! I was like a kid with a new toy! Finally!

Then on the plane home, I began to forget the thought. I got home, back on the 3rd floor, practicing faithfully as usual, and it was GONE. Dammit!

Later, in a practice room with Bobby Burns, Arban p138, he’s expanding the figure on up, way up, and I was trying to keep up with Bobby. Same deal. Bobby says, “Karl! You’re changing your sound?” WTF?? I’m first chair in the Phil, first chair in Adam’s brass choir? What do you mean?

I had approached EVERYTHING anticipating the perceived difficulty of high notes, versus obsessing on the detail of my tone and just letting that be. Whoa! What!!!??? I consider that night, practicing with Bobby, to have been the real beginning of the changes in thinking that had to happen. That was a 1st step – it wasn’t “suddenly you’re amazing,” but things began to make a lot more sense quickly, and continually.

In short, this was another game changer – hearing my own sound, in detail, in an “ideal,” and keeping that thought right on the bulls-eye.

Fast forward to my professional career: I do not have the upper register of Allen Johnson or Bobby, but it’s pretty darned good, and I owe that to Bob Slack, Bobby Burns, Jim Reed, Greg Wing, Dan Reed, Charley Davis, more, who *helped me get it in my head*.

IT WAS NOT MY CHOPS.

Oh, and was there something Mr. Adam just didn’t understand?? LOL I spent about 2 days feeling sorry for myself on that idea, when it dawned on me that maybe he DID get it, he already TOLD ME what I needed, SHOWED me what I needed, and I didn’t get it.. Aha... I re

evaluated all of that and realized that in lessons, I was not adequately focusing on his model, I tended to obsess on my expectations to fail. Ouch.

I have been telling my friend that the physical things he senses are not relevant. The answer is between the ears. The above story is an effort to explain that.

I suggest that our greatest players are the best at hearing the result as uncluttered as can be. Those who are not breaking through that barrier need to examine their thinking, not their embouchure, hardware, et al. As a Man Thinketh.

Is this easy? It never has been for me. BUT somewhere in there is the truth that Mr. Adam could not do it FOR me, I had to dig it out; dig it out of my own folly and preconceived notions.

Improvement will not happen without change. The change is mental. The change is mental/aural.

Finally, why is it that I always play better if I practice with Bob Slack or Greg Wing? The power of the mind to create is absolutely huge. Go there – see what happens.

Karl Sievers

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