



Mastering Recovery

Rooted in the Steps • Growing Through Connection

With Barry Lehman

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Finding True Grit

● Surprising Recovery

As I said last week, I was at my annual Trumpet Camp experience. For ten years it has been one of the touchstones of my musical life.

it helped launch a renewed journey with the trumpet. Since then, that journey has only deepened.



This year I was reminded of an old insight about the difference between an amateur and a professional.

Not by the teaching.
By my own experience.

For ten years I have dealt with the same issue whenever performance time arrived.

A stress-related extremely dry mouth.

It never matters how prepared I am. It has never mattered how much I had

practiced.

It didn't matter how well rehearsals had gone.

When the pressure increased, the dry mouth showed up.

This year was no different.

The dry mouth showed up.

The stress showed up.

The performance pressure showed up.

But this year something else didn't happen.

My sound didn't crack.

My playing didn't fall apart.

I wasn't playing perfectly. But I was playing well.

Afterward I realized something important.

For ten years the anxiety had shown up.

This year it showed up again.

The difference wasn't the anxiety.

The difference was me.

That's when I remembered a quote I had read recently:

The grit that matters most is learning to be your best when you're at your worst.

(- Josh Waitzkin, <https://fs.blog/brain-food/june-14-2026/>)

From Early to Long-Term

That's part of the difference between maintaining and growing.

Many of us assume growth means that fear disappears.

Or that anxiety vanishes.

Or that life becomes easier.

But often growth looks different.

The pressure remains.

The challenge remains.

The discomfort remains.

Yet we respond differently. That's how we know practice is working.

Not because conditions improve.

But because we do.

That is true in music.

It is true in recovery.

The Heart of the Week:

For years I thought growth meant becoming less anxious.

Instead, I discovered that growth meant becoming more capable while anxiety was still present.

The amateur asks:

Can I do it when conditions are right?

The professional asks:

Can I do it when conditions aren't?

Recovery eventually asks the same question.

- Can I practice honesty when it is uncomfortable?
- Can I practice humility when my ego is wounded?
- Can I practice gratitude when life feels disappointing?
- Can I practice recovery when recovery doesn't feel easy?

Those questions are not about talent.

They are about practice.

They are about capacity.

They are about who we are becoming.

And perhaps that's one of the deepest surprises of long-term recovery.

The pressure doesn't always disappear.

But little by little, we become the kind of people who can meet it differently.

The real art in learning takes place as we move beyond proficiency, when our work becomes an expression of our essence.



A Closing Thought

If I hadn't been learning and becoming a musician in deeper ways, I wouldn't have been able to perform, even with the familiar stress.

If musicianship hadn't become part of who I am and how I live, I probably would have cracked under the pressure, just as I had in previous years.

And the wonder of what happened would have passed me by without my even noticing.

The pressure doesn't always disappear.

But little by little, we become the kind of people who can meet it differently.

As I look back over this past year of Mastering Recovery, I find myself returning to a simple theme.

Recovery grows the same way musicianship grows.

Not through occasional bursts of inspiration.

Not through trying harder all the time.

But through practice.

This year we've explored
humility, forgiveness, grace, connection, hope,
and the surprising ways recovery continues to deepen
long after the crisis has passed.

Again and again, we've come back to the same discovery:

Maintenance keeps recovery alive.

Practice helps recovery grow.

And *growth* slowly changes us.

Next week we'll complete this year's journey with one final lesson from the trumpet. Sometimes when things feel stuck, the answer isn't more effort, more meetings, or more trying harder. Sometimes something deeper is creating resistance.

And sometimes growth begins when we stop asking, "What do I need to do more of?" and start asking, "What needs to be adjusted?"

That question will become one of the starting points for Year 6.

Because beginning in July, we'll explore what it means to move beyond maintaining recovery and into living recovery—practicing the principles not simply as ideas we believe, but as ways of life that gradually shape who we become.

A musician never finishes musicianship.

A person never finishes recovery.

An elder never finishes wisdom.

The practice simply changes.



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Relevant Recovery.

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