

Mike Haid for Modern Drummer: On Technique:

1) How you Assess (evaluate) Your Abilities.

Tough one. Usually by keeping as a yardstick some sort of mental idea as to what it is I'm trying to do, or supposed to be doing. Once I have that in mind, all else follows. Broadly, I'm trying in the loosest terms to make a contribution, to drums, drumming, the idea of drumming, ideas of what is and isn't wise /musical /effective on a drum set. I think that's what I'm (we are) paid for, to try to push things along a bit. My abilities, such as they are, exist in the service of that idea. I get an idea, for which I will either have the ability, or will have to acquire it through practice. If I can get my ideas across, I have enough ability / technique. Because my ideas are strong, I never seem to have enough ability / technique, so I need to practise, which is what I should be doing now. I warm naturally to the drummer whose ideas and approach are strong, even if he doesn't quite have the ability to carry them out.

2) Setting Goals (short-and long-term)

See above. How much have I (you) contributed this year, decade, on this CD, in this band? The hardest thing to do in any creative endeavour is to get started, the second hardest thing to do is to keep going. If the only way you think you can contribute is by recording your own CD or by forming your own band, or by leaving the one you're in, so you can offer more somewhere else, sorry, but that's what you are going to have to do. Goals, short and long term, need to be achievable by reaching, but must be kept within reach, otherwise its only going to lead to disappointment. Want to get a publishing deal? If you can play a rhythm, you can probably sing a few bass notes to go with it. Those notes will have some sort of harmonic implication, a chord or two. Repeat it 4 times, a fragment of melody on top, and hey, you're a composer. It was within reach. You weren't one, now you are one. If you are patient and persuasive, your tune might get on someone's CD; now you are a recorded composer in search of a publishing deal. You weren't one, now you are one. One brick at a time, slowly but steadily, but that's just me. I have to labour through this stuff, and I hate bloody geniuses! With music you can be someone tomorrow that you weren't today.

3) How you Stay Focused and Keep Motivated

The Three Terrors of Repetition, Stagnation, and Utter Humiliation usually helps. I only have to think of those three headless horsemen to get right up and start practising. But the devil is seductive and usually comes in the shape of a computer, at which many hours can be spent, answering questions like this, avoiding all meaningful work, while at the same time convincing myself, as I admire my music writing software, that I really am about to start my next CD.

4) Warming Up.

Essential for me. I have to get some blood circulating in my wrists and fingers, or else there is all hell to pay. Pads, phone books, and the bass players head are all fine, but obviously the kit itself is best wherever possible. Sometimes at the pad I hold the sticks in a vice-like (French military) grip, no fingers, all wrists, to make the wrists work. Exaggerate the strokes, and use full arm movements. I usually practice some sort of progressive combinations of rudiments and rolls, but with the emphasis being on all dynamics and big, clean, exaggerated strokes.

5) How To Practice (To get the most out of time spent)

Try incorporating two or three ideas at once; two or three areas that need work can be combined into one single rhythmic exercise, so you get more bang for the buck. For example, suppose you need to improve at playing 4 beats to the bar steadily on the bass drum at varying tempi (difficult). You could just set the metronome, and slog away, which will be eventually boring and (could become) unmusical. I personally make faster progress if I set up another rhythm somewhere else, and concentrate on that, sort of as a diversionary tactic. So let's add right hand swing. Now I'm listening to the right hand swing, and possibly its relation to the bass drum, but I'm not just staring at the bass drum itself (which is now happily playing very steadily). Perhaps turn your attention to varying the right hand patterns against the bass drum, which remains constant, and is as it were *being practised* , in a disembodied, disinterested sort of way, almost despite you, because you are focused on the hand , not the foot. Suppose further you need to improve your left hand swing. Move the right hand swing to the left hand. This is harder, more tiring, but you now have a musical context where you are exercising and practising two crucial areas (bass drum steadiness; left hand ride swing) at the same time. Set up another diversionary tactic (dotted eighths on the snare, with right hand), and focus hard on that. The principle is that that the things that need practising, two or three of them, are embodied in one exercise, and you listen to the whole, rather than stare at the one particular muscular function you set out to practice in the first place. Still with me?

6) Incorporating what you've learned into your playing (how and when)

Ideally the music is dictating what it is that should be played on the kit, not the other way round. In other words, what the drummer is playing is (should be) a direct function of the music's requirements; no more, no less. You exist to serve the music, not the reverse. So, super-imposing your latest lick at every possible moment only serves to attract attention, usually unwisely, to yourself, and away from the music. Better to let you sub-conscious

decide when your favourite lick will appear; it will make a more appropriate decision. I find that it can be a long time between working on something in the practice room, and it popping up in the music. When it does, I'm astonished and delighted, and often don't immediately recognise it. Hello, stranger; where did *you* come from? But that's all in the ideal world, and you can also ignore the above, and particularly in the rehearsal room with other (adventurous) musicians around, I think you should go for it, and crash and burn if necessary.

7) The thought process on the marriage of having prolific technique and being a Musical player.

If I had prolific technique, this might be a problem for me, but I don't, so it's not. I always have just enough to get by, just enough to do what I want to do, with not a flam or stick twirl left over. As I said earlier, any music requires specific techniques from the performers to bring it into existence. If you impose irrelevant or inappropriate techniques on it, it'll probably sulk and go away. The tradition of the drummer as showy-performer-circus-act goes back a long way to Vaudeville and the Music Hall, and when your favourite drummer twirls his sticks about and uses exaggerated techniques he's tapping into a long and venerated, if somewhat outdated, tradition. Personally, I believe the art is to conceal the art, so I try to move in the opposite direction-- maximum economy of movement, minimum of fuss. Understatement, elegance, economy. You know, a *British* thing!