

Endurance

Balance

The most important factor in the improvement of endurance is the matter of balance. Various elements must be brought to a state of proper balance. Most hornists realize that balance is crucial in the training of several other parameters. Even in the early stages of learning the instrument, a hornist becomes aware that developing a solid high register requires a good balance of stress and recovery. Usually, the stress/recovery balance also becomes obvious when the hornist is serious about expanding dynamic extremes. Also, the hornist will have experienced the importance of the stress/recovery formula when the tongue gets "tied up" in the beginning stages of the study of double tonguing, and when using fingering patterns to develop coordination of the finger and hand muscles.

But many hornists mistakenly believe that "more is better" when it comes to improving basic endurance. "More" is only part of the equation.

Balance is the key.

Here is an equation I've developed after many "learning experiences" (mistakes!), using the "trial and error" method.

Good Endurance is the result of having physical, mental, social, and emotional factors in balance.

Physical Factors, Part A are also known as *conditioning, base, bulk, or quantity of training*. These words relate to increasing one's basic strength. All too frequently, this aspect will be the only part of a brass player's endurance equation, which is a poor strategy. Keeping a practice log or diary is the best way to track this part of the equation.

Physical Factors, Part B are also known as *efficiency, doing it better, quality of training, or proper balance of stress and recovery*. Constantly refine the ability to make playing easier, and to get more results for less effort. Experimentation with the use of the muscles involved in breathing and the embouchure during repetitions of natural harmonics, long tones, scales and intervals should improve this aspect of endurance.

Mental Factors are also known as “smarts,” *pacing, planning, having learned from experience or avoiding situations that are not prudent.* Intelligent pacing of rehearsals and performances can be improved by analyzing where to save energy and how to use an assistant effectively (if playing principal).

Mental strength or mental toughness has to be nourished, and closely relates to the “emotional” factors. Making intelligent decisions in several areas can strongly affect one’s mental toughness.

Always consider the effects of sub-par performances upon your confidence. Learn to turn down engagements with insurmountable problems despite whatever you could do to plan for them. Many brass players have heard stories such as the one about a world-class brass player who performed beautifully at a conference in front of 300 brass players immediately after a 25-hour plane trip from the other end of the planet. Can you? Some New York free-lancers can successfully perform a morning rehearsal in New Jersey, an afternoon concert in Connecticut and an evening program in Manhattan. Should you agree to place yourself in a similar position at your stage of development? Yes, there actually is a choice about accepting a gig (and its revenue). Thinking in the long term, if you are not properly prepared, will accepting an opportunity actually have a greater chance to help or to hurt your reputation? It’s equally important to consider its effect upon your confidence.

Use appropriate equipment. Often a hornist will have problems due to improper selection of equipment. If a hornist is hired for a season as a high hornist, the use of equipment optimized for a low hornist will become old fast. Common unwise decisions are too large a bell throat, too large a mouthpiece hole, and too open a right hand position. Those factors must also be in balance with the individual’s capacity. Many hornists with a usable lung capacity of 3.5 liters or less have had successful careers. But a hornist with a below-average lung capacity would be foolish to use equipment that can only be brought under control by somebody with an eight-liter lung capacity.

Social Factors include the wise use of interpersonal skills. Become the type of player that other people will want to help.

All good sections should be a group of musicians who want to help each other. Among horn sections there is a continuum of cooperation, which ranges from totally supportive to totally unsupportive. Arthur Berv, the first horn of Toscanini’s NBC Symphony told me that he was frequently unassisted in their high-pressure live broadcasts. He planned moments of relief by giving a note or two at a critical point in the music to one of the other section members (who happened to be his brothers, Harry and Jack). On the other end of the spectrum, there have been sections where a third or second player may have competed

with the current first horn for the leadership position and lost, and then proceeds to subtly undermine the new section leader. Obviously, that situation described on the negative end of the continuum is most likely to be found in a small-time orchestra.

The acquisition of positive interpersonal skills needs to be honed during one's entire professional lifetime.

In addition to the **Emotional Factors** of confidence and toughness, mentioned earlier under the closely-related mental factors section, is "will power," the desire to endure, overpowering the fear of failing.

One has to have a strong desire to sound beautiful and controlled at the end of a performance, not merely to "survive."

A good thing to realize is that missing a passage in a rehearsal (or even in every rehearsal) does not automatically condemn you to miss it at the performance. Most experienced musicians will remember times when improved concentration, analyzing the part in the practice room, or sheer will power enabled them to overcome any feelings that they were "programmed" to fail.

It is possible to have been tired or sub-par at the end of a rehearsal, but to have learned enough to not make the same errors of pacing at the concert.

Balance Matters

In the improvement of endurance, simply deciding to practice more won't take one past a certain point. Muscles inevitably eventually become tired after repeated use.

Playing intelligently isn't enough, either, if there is inadequate conditioning.

Will power won't mean a thing if the principles of efficient playing are ignored.

The best second, third, and fourth players that I know, realize that one of the key aspects of their job is to make the first horn sound great, ideally even better than they are. Any great section must hold as a goal to be greater than the "sum of its parts."

The highest standard of music-making must be first and foremost in the mind of every section member. We owe that to composers, to our audiences and to the profession.