

C A R M E N M O R I N

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 3: 5 Mistakes SMART People Make When Starting Music Lessons

Episode 3 Transcript

Hello, everyone and welcome back to the Music Mindset Podcast. I'm your host, Carmen Morin, and this is episode three. So I'm so happy to have you here. I have been so thrilled to be receiving so many messages from students and families. And just to know that we have this conversation rolling about growth, about the learning process, and just the mindset of mastery and high performance in whatever field you may apply these musicians' concepts to.

So if you're joining me today, I would love for you to hit subscribe on whatever podcast platform you listen on so that we can stay connected, so I can reach you with any bonus content and you can always reach me and find all of my show notes and transcripts anytime you need them at carmenmorin.com. That's M-O-R-I-N .com/podcast.

So on our first two episodes, we started by diving deep into the learning process, exploring our own limiting beliefs and building an awareness around what we might experience when we are building a new skill and stretching ourselves outside of our comfort zone. So these topics on mindset and how we can use these tools to stretch our capacity for learning and reaching our full potential will be at the core of all of our episodes and the guests that we end up having on this podcast. And we will also incorporate things at a more practical level for those studying musical instruments as well.

Now, we have had an influx of new students and families, beginning lessons at our school, more in music in these past few weeks and months. And it has been just a reminder of common pitfalls and mistakes that I often see people making when they begin music lessons. And I see these pitfalls made by people who are very smart and very intelligent themselves, which is why I know it's so important to communicate them clearly as much as possible.

Now, I have always believed in the importance of starting off strong, which is why today I'm sharing the five most common mistakes that I see smart people make when they begin music lessons.

So if you are a student yourself, or if you are a parent of a student thinking of these, when you get started can really set you up for longterm success. And if you are a music teacher listening to this, I can promise you from my experience, it is so worth spending a big chunk of your time in your first lesson, or even your entire first lesson if you need to, if you're starting with a new family, to make sure that all of these points have been discussed.

C A R M E N M O R I N

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 3: 5 Mistakes SMART People Make When Starting Music Lessons

Episode 3 Transcript

So I will list my five points here, but don't feel like you have to memorize them all. I have made a checklist that you can use for reference as well as guidance to make sure that you really added a fix to any of these common mistakes. And all of these can be found on my website. The free download is at carmenmorin.com/episode3. So the word episode and then the number three all found on my website for you.

So let's get started. So the number one mistake that I see smart people make when starting music lessons is drum roll, please, number one is not investing in an instrument or a proper instrument. So as a musician and a teacher, I know this seems like such a basic point, but we actually get this question a lot at our school. And I include this point on my list because first of all, no question is a silly question. And as a professional musician and as a music teacher, we can take for granted things that are so common knowledge for us won't necessarily be for someone who is starting out. So it's important to have this discussion.

For example, if I were learning a sport like fencing or ringette or something that I have no experience with or knowledge at all, I'm sure I would be asking questions that to them would be common knowledge. And I would appreciate if I could have further understanding for why an answer may be.

So I understand why people really ask and maybe even sometimes hesitate to invest in an instrument, even when they're willing to invest the time and resources into instrumental lessons. And I get it, I'm a pianist. So piano is my instrument. They're huge. They are a big investment often. They are a commitment of not just the cost, but the space in your home to put that instrument. So we have families that will say they want to try lessons first and see how lessons go, and then they will decide if they want to invest in an instrument from there.

So, first of all, on this note, if you haven't listened to episode two of this podcast, please do, because there's a reference in of just starting to see how things go and then getting committed later. But for this episode, the question is, do you really need an instrument to begin your instrumental lessons? And I can tell you in one word, the answer is yes. But I do want to explain in more than one word, the reason why to help you to better understand.

So first of all, consistency is most important when it comes to not just enjoyment in music lessons, but also motivation and reaching full potential, that daily consistency, as opposed to the amount of time you spend, it's most important that you spend time each day.

C A R M E N M O R I N

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 3: 5 Mistakes SMART People Make When Starting Music Lessons

Episode 3 Transcript

So learning an instrument is so much like learning a language. You need that repetition and consistency, and it has to be something that you are really doing each day to see that gradual improvement. So imagine learning to speak a second language like French, but you only have the opportunity to speak it once a week when you see your French teacher.

Imagine that you are learning to ride a bike, but you only have access to touch a bike once a week. So in these comparisons, it's helpful to be able to understand, but I almost think learning an instrument is even more important to have that equipment and that instrument there because learning a musical instrument is very much a discipline of delayed gratification, which means it's very different to other skills or activities that you may do.

Take for example, if you were starting to play the game of soccer. You might be able to attend a weekly practice, get started to experience the game, understand the rules, build your body awareness, and each time you would go to soccer, you would have a little bit more fun, you'd gain a little bit more confidence, and it would motivate you to come back again to the next practice. See your friends on the field and engage in that even more.

Learning a musical instrument, however, you need to first build the skill to be able to experience it and have that gratification, which means you need to invest that daily consistent work for the gradual improvement so that when you can finally play a piece for your friends or your family, that's when you can really see and feel how you can engage in it.

So sometimes it leads to the question of, well, what if we don't invest in an instrument as we get started? And maybe it'll just take a little bit longer because instead of practicing each day, you'll just practice once a week at the lesson, and we're okay with that. So we might hear a family say that or a student say that.

So unfortunately, no, because the instrument training depends a lot on that skill building, which means that you have to learn one skill before you can build in another layer and go on to the next skill. So let's think of a weekly lesson format and weekly formal lessons are the tried and true format that work consistently well across all styles of learning and ages and levels of development.

So let's take the format of a weekly lesson. What would happen in the lesson is you would reinforce things that you learned previously, but then you would learn a new skill or a new bit of material in the lesson. Then you would have the week to work consistently at refining and becoming confident in that new skill that you learned in the lesson so that when you came back

C A R M E N M O R I N

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 3: 5 Mistakes SMART People Make When Starting Music Lessons

Episode 3 Transcript

to the following lesson from there, you would build on top of that and you would keep stacking on the layers, stacking on the skills until you have this cumulative result that's growing over the weeks and over the years gradually.

So without an instrument at home, you create this frustration where you can't move on to the next step in learning, and you have to keep repeating that same layer. So any progress that you make in your lesson then gets lost throughout the week, and you're stuck doing the same thing again and again at next week's lesson.

So that brings up the issue of you'll need patience, but more importantly, it actually really can stunt your motivation when you're getting started, because the more motivated you are will come from the more momentum you feel in your progress when it comes to playing a musical instrument. The more you can play, the more it propels you to go forward.

Beginner lessons can be a slow process as it is. And since it's something that you've never done before, you really need that forward momentum to stay engaged. So by drastically slowing the process down by working without an instrument at home is just adding a big pile of challenges onto it. It pretty much guarantees that you won't have that progression, and if you're experiencing that, it may also be misunderstood as you not being capable. It wouldn't actually be a representation of what you're capable of, but by experiencing this frustration each week and having to constantly go back and redo things, instead of moving forward, it will add a lot of challenge to the process.

Learning that daily consistency is a key component to the learning style of music lessons. So it would be a huge disservice and also really unfair to anyone having to experience that. So parents who ask if they can start with an instrument, I always say, it's best if you wait until they're ready to really begin and give them a fair shot of a positive learning experience, but there are many other ways that they can become exposed to music if you don't have access to an instrument.

You can join a music program that does not require a daily practice. There are lots of music, activities, and programs that will focus more on faster gratification and instant gratification where you can build skills within that one class, and it doesn't really require the daily practice. Certain choirs and choral groups, musical theater groups won't necessarily rely on you having to practice each day consistently at home to refine your skills, but you can still enjoy moving forward with the group without having to focus on that skill building.

C A R M E N M O R I N

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 3: 5 Mistakes SMART People Make When Starting Music Lessons

Episode 3 Transcript

From there, you can decide if you want to pursue formal training and really start to learn to play a musical instrument. Now, if you're still really set to learn a musical instrument, but you don't have access to one, I believe that there are always instruments available. I have an abundance mindset and I have just seen over the years that if you really want access to a musical instrument, there are many ways to get one.

You can ask around. You can look for donations. There tend to be family members, neighbors, churches, who may have extra instruments, that they are hoping that someone would use and they'd be happy to share. Starter instruments like a small piano that you could get started on playing.

Now, this does not mean that you should use apps and iPad pianos. It does mean that you should still invest in a proper instrument, but you can think of what stage of learning you're on and then determine what level of instrument you need to begin there. Starting with keyboard geography and basic tone control. There are many digital keyboards with weighted keys that you can have access to.

We send our students to Steinway Gallery in Calgary because they have an amazing rental program where you can have access to digital keyboards at a very reasonable price. Most communities and cities will have similar programs like this as well.

So as long as you're clear on what your needs are for your stage of learning, and you get started with this, you can begin with something that will suit your needs now, and then you can upgrade later to an acoustic upgrade. And then from there as you advance your skills, you might upgrade again to a grand piano when you need that dynamic color and range in your instrument. So, however it looks for you, when you are ready to begin formal music lessons, it will be most important and will set you up for the most positive experience if you make sure that you do not make the mistake of not having a proper instrument at home. So the number one mistake is not having an instrument. And I would definitely say that you want to have one to get started.

So next let's go on to number two. The number two mistake that I see with smart people learning... So now let's go on to number two, the second mistake that I see smart people making when they are beginning a musical instrument is not setting a practice routine. So I see this very often. People will be very keen to start. They've done research on the benefits of music lessons. They've determined their why they have a beautiful instrument. They've sought out a highly qualified and educated teacher and they are all set. Now, the mistake they make though is so

C A R M E N M O R I N

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 3: 5 Mistakes SMART People Make When Starting Music Lessons

Episode 3 Transcript

simple, and it is so simple that it is without a doubt, the most overlooked point that I cannot drill home enough. And this mistake is they do not set their daily practice routine of when they will sit with their instrument each day and practice each day.

You'll notice that I'm not saying anything about what's happening in the practice. I'm just talking about that action of getting to your instrument every day. So you understand when I explain why consistency is so important. But this one action of finding where your practice belongs in your daily routine is such a simple step that too often it gets skipped. So skipping this step leads to practice battles, slowed progress, decreased motivation. So many things can be traced back to skipping this one simple step, I promise.

Music lessons are unique and that the success you experience has so much more to do with what happens at home, away from your teacher, which means that learning to play an instrument is a lot more about learning how to learn and learning how to practice. If you are new to lessons, there will be, and there should be a little bit of a hump to get over at the beginning of when you start the learning process, because you're adding something new to your daily routine, but you incorporate your practice each day at home, the same way you've incorporated many other things that you don't even think about.

We have so many habits that are truly routine, which means we don't even give them a second thought each day, we do them. When something is truly routine, it means you start the action without much effort. You don't think about whether you should or you shouldn't. No energy really goes into fitting it into your day. It's just something that you do each day. This is what you want to get to as soon as possible when it comes to home practice. And the mistake that I see happen commonly is that this gets delayed and isn't prioritized because it just seems too simple to be important.

So what often happens is that people begin their lessons and they do commit to practicing daily because they understand why it's so important, but they skip this one step of finding where it belongs in your daily routine. So what happens is some days you practice and some days you don't. Some days you can fit in before bed and other days you find time before breakfast.

You are always working on fitting it in because it doesn't really have a place, a home in your daily routine. And because of that, it will be the thing that gets bumped, and it will be the thing that takes so much energy to fit in each day. Think of the things that truly are routine and how easily they come to you. Parents think of the things that are routine for your children and notice that they don't try to negotiate with you about them.

C A R M E N M O R I N

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 3: 5 Mistakes SMART People Make When Starting Music Lessons

Episode 3 Transcript

They don't negotiate with you if they will brush their teeth at night or read a book before bed. If it's something that they do every day, it's just something that gets done. When it's not actually part of your routine, what happens is you are always working to fit it in, and this is work in itself. You're not only creating extra work and stress for yourself each day, having to find out where you'll fit it in, but you're also setting yourself up for it to get bumped and for you to feel overwhelmed and behind when the week inevitably flies by. So I will give you a secret.

When I speak to families at our school who are struggling with motivation, lack of progress, not wanting to practice, not reaching their goals, resisting practice, not feeling musical, any of the common struggles that can come up, I can tell you that 99% of these can be greatly alleviated by doing this one simple step.

I will meet parents and students who will join learning workshops. They will read every book I recommend, but still skip this simple step. So I used to recommend that people practice at the same time every day, but I've changed my language around this because I've learned that if you have scheduled yourself to practice at 4:00 PM every day, and then something happens as it inevitably does in life, then what happens is you can feel overwhelmed or you've already lost if you don't get to the piano right on time or get to the instrument right on time.

So what I say now is that you don't have to practice at the same time each day, but instead you do have to attach your daily practice to a routine habit that you have each day. So that is attach it to something that you already do automatically without really thinking too much about it. So for example, every morning, I know I will have a coffee. If there's one thing I won't miss, I won't miss my morning coffee. So if I know that I'm going to have coffee in the morning, I attach my practice to being right after my coffee each morning.

For my children, they come home from school each day so hungry and they go straight to have an afterschool snack. And every day they have an afterschool snack without us talking about it, thinking it to planning it. So when they come in the door and they have their afterschool snack, I attach their practice to that bit of their routine, which is their afterschool snack.

Attach it to something that you are already doing on autopilot. And once they sit down, once you sit down the practice isn't on autopilot, it's the action of getting to your instrument and taking that step each day. And that's really, what's going to set you up to be ahead. So whatever it may be, attach it to something that has become routine in your daily life and watch how easily things fall into place from there.

C A R M E N M O R I N

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 3: 5 Mistakes SMART People Make When Starting Music Lessons

Episode 3 Transcript

Mistake number three, not knowing your why when you get started. So I know that people talk lots about discovering your why these days. And honestly, I'm quite glad that they do. As I spoke about in a previous episode, finding this clarity seems to be especially important when it comes to learning a musical instrument. No matter what your intentions were for the reason you decided to begin lessons and begin learning, you are going to experience many other feelings and many other things throughout the process.

It is so important to have this clarity as your guiding star, as you embark on the process so that you are prepared and aware of what the learning process will be like, and you can really anchor in why you pursued this in the first place. So I find this exercise and this point so important that I started with this in episode one of this podcast.

In the clarity episode in episode one, which I'll link to in my show notes, I walk through an exercise that not only helps you to pinpoint why you want a musical education, but it helps you to connect the dots between the benefit you're pursuing and compare it to where you currently are in the learning process and what you may be experiencing.

This episode is complete with its own worksheet, and I've seen parents and students use this worksheet and reference it five years later when they're later in the process of their learning. It is worth the time to do on the front end so that when you get started and you have that awareness around the growth and learning process, which will be so integral to your success as you move forward.

Mistake number four, that I see smart people having when they start their music lessons is having unrealistic expectations or timelines on the process. So I'll tell you a story. Last year, we expanded our studio location and we had an influx of new families starting beginner lessons again. And this was a good reminder for me because we were about five years old with our first location.

So most of our students and their families and their parents were really in a routine. They had the ball rolling in their lessons. They knew how to practice. They knew what to expect. And so it was very helpful to go back to basics and to be working with a large number of beginners again, the way that we did when we first opened our school.

So we aim to do a healthy amount of education and parent education when families start lessons, but I will never forget this one family. They were one of the new families who came to

C A R M E N M O R I N

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 3: 5 Mistakes SMART People Make When Starting Music Lessons

Episode 3 Transcript

us when we expanded our location and I received a call from them three weeks into their lessons, and they were terribly concerned. So after three weeks of lessons, which is three lessons for their seven year old child, they thought that their child would be playing several pieces on the piano. They thought that their child would be practicing daily without their help and have independence.

So even though we felt we had communicated what to expect, and their teacher had been working at communicating this with them, they were still expecting an instant gratification experience. I know that this example is an extreme one, but as director of the school, I always aim to take complete responsibility if someone is not fully informed or if they're not clear on the process. And I look at how I could have been clearer for them to understand what they might experience in the learning, which is why this is my point number four.

It is very good to be goal oriented. I think it's healthy to strive towards playing a certain piece or to have a certain timeline that you're working towards, but especially in a skill or a discipline like musical training, more important than attaining any goal is always that act of striving towards it.

So although we should absolutely set goals and work towards them, it's most important that we don't let the goal that we're chasing to be at the expense of the really fruitful parts of the process and the experience, making sure that we are staying clear on the learning process and all of the areas of growth that you can experience throughout is really the process that we want to attach to.

So we want to attach to the journey as opposed to the outcome. Still strive towards your goals. Absolutely. And your teacher can give you some ballpark on what to expect, but I always encourage students and families to attach to that growth experience and stay realistic in what they had in mind for the process and for the timeline.

So for example, and you'll see a space for this in the worksheet that I have available on my site. For example, instead of saying, "I want to be able to play at least 10 different pieces within the first two months," instead you would attach to it, "I want to build confidence to be able to read new music each week."

So you can still keep track of how close you may be to those 10 pieces, but in that slight change of language and messaging, you're focusing more on the skills you're building and the process of getting there, as opposed to just chasing that deadline or that outcome that you may have had in mind when you got started.

C A R M E N M O R I N

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 3: 5 Mistakes SMART People Make When Starting Music Lessons

Episode 3 Transcript

And lastly, let's go to mistake number five that I see smart people making when they begin music lessons, and this is working without a framework or any feedback. So I 100% believe that the early stages of musical training are the most important to invest in and also having a clear framework for how you will progress through these early stages. These early stages of when you are a beginner and really laying the foundation for future learning, can really set the tone for your own learning, but also the momentum that you'll have throughout the rest of your learning process.

I meet all the time, people who believe or have chosen that they will start early musical training in something more casual, maybe something more about entertainment to get started, and then when students advanced, they plan to find a more qualified teacher and to look for more feedback in a formal program.

So as a teacher, I can tell you that quite the opposite is true. And if you ever ask any qualified or advanced teacher who has experienced a transfer student who is really lacking in foundation, it is so challenging to help them to break poor habits and to go back into relearn and to have a strong foundation in their training.

This is not just in their playing and their technical ability, but this has lots to do with what they've established as their pace of learning. If they've become comfortable and accustomed to building on new skills, and if they know what it feels like to have challenges and push through them.

People who say they've been learning for three years, for example, but if their focus has been mainly just playing many pieces and learning many songs working in books, but they haven't really been pushed to progress, they've been focusing mostly on quantity of music, it's very hard to take that background of learning and then try to progress and develop skills to move them forward.

So very often I meet people who have said they have been learning for a certain amount of time, but it's so important to know that this is not quantity based. So it's very important that you are working with a framework and with feedback from a professional that you can have guidance from. So the same way that you would in any other area of education, it is so important to educate yourself so that you have a framework of learning and someone to work with, with feedback.

C A R M E N M O R I N

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 3: 5 Mistakes SMART People Make When Starting Music Lessons

Episode 3 Transcript

So for example, we'll see families who have had their children or adult students who have learned through learning apps and these apps treat learning a musical instrument a lot like a video game.

So as long as you're pressing the correct keys or pressing the correct buttons is the expression that people joke about, then it makes you believe that you're learning how to play the instrument. But there is so much more to it than that in the skill building. So by moving through a program where you didn't have that feedback or working with something like an app where you didn't have that framework or that human feedback and guidance, you are actually setting yourself up for more work and struggle later on, when you try to finally develop the skills that you need to propel yourself forward.

So taking the time to really learn the difference between exposure to music, as opposed to skill building and training is educating yourself so that you know the difference and having a professional that you can ask for feedback and make sure you feel confident with how you are investing your time and your resources is invaluable and so important to do at the beginning of your journey as opposed to waiting until later on.

So those are my top five, my five mistakes that I see smart people make when they are getting started in music lessons. Considering these when you begin are sure to help you get off on the right foot and to be in a position for a positive experience and long lasting enjoyment and learning.

As I mentioned, you can download the checklist of these top five mistakes on my site, carmenmorin.com/episode3. The word episode and then the number three where it includes a step by step checklist and also some guidance to help you to really see if you've addressed the issue, and you can feel confident that this isn't a mistake you're making as you get started.

So again, thank you so much for being here and for listening. I would love for you to subscribe if you haven't already on whatever podcast platform you listen on, and I look forward to staying connected with you on your journey towards mastery and whatever you are using this music mindset for.

Next week, I want to dive deeper into education. What does that word educated really mean, and what I believe it means when it comes to having a music education. There's a lot of conversation that can be had around this topic and around this word, so I look forward to exploring it with you and hopefully hearing what you have to say about it as well.

C A R M E N M O R I N

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 3: 5 Mistakes SMART People Make When Starting Music Lessons

Episode 3 Transcript

So until next time, thanks so much again for listening and I will talk to you again soon.