

## {Intro Music}

This is the Institute for Music Leadership.

**Stephen:** Hello hello hello. Welcome to another episode of *Create. Inspire. Lead.* I'm Stephen Biegner. And you may have noticed that we haven't exactly been putting out any new episodes lately. Well - a whole lot happened, but the biggest thing is that I went out on paternity leave - a little sooner than I expected - and so I've been home with my wife, my 3 year old, and our new daughter Penelope - we've been calling her Penny (sounds of Penny cooing?) - And that's meant I've been away from all things podcast for almost three months. And listen, I had elaborate plans of creating a big bank of episodes that could be released while I was away. There's a whole folder of half finished, partially edited episodes just waiting to be completed. But alas, it didn't work out that way.

And so, we're jumping back in now, and I'm starting with a big folder full of interviews with Dr. Blaire Koerner. We had a few conversations before I went out on leave about a variety of career topics: gaining experience, networking, applying to graduate schools, how to become a faculty member, and on, and on. And the idea behind these particular conversations was that we'd splice up the interview into smaller segments and make little... minisodes, I guess. Mini-episodes that would run maybe 10/15 minutes at the most, and just be a little career bite, an entrepreneurial nugget that you could listen to quickly - maybe while you're taking a quick break in the practice room, or while you're waiting for your coffee to finish brewing - whatever.

So, I thought that for the first of these minisodes, I'd share the conversation Blaire and I had about gaining experience, because, it seems like the most basic thing, but there's a lot to it. And in a lot of ways it makes up the foundation for a lot of the other topics we'll talk about later.

Now, it seems straightforward - experience is, like, stuff you've done. Like, job-stuff that people who are hiring want to see on your resume. Right?

**Blaire:** Most people don't realize how much information they can put on their resume. There's this assumption that you need to get paid for it to go on your resume, and that's 100 percent incorrect. Experience is anything that's going to contribute to your skills, your knowledge, finding other individuals, that will help you pursue whatever career that you're interested in.

**Stephen:** That feels important. Let's hear it one more time:

**Blaire:** Experience is anything that's going to contribute to your skills, your knowledge, finding other individuals that will help you pursue whatever career that you're interested in.

**Stephen:** *Anything* that's going to contribute. Blaire gets into more detail and fleshes this out a bit, so let's get back to her.

**Blaire:** So for performing, obviously, that is not just the orchestras and ensembles that you're in at school, but ones outside of it. Yes, festivals, but also competitions, also local gigging and opportunities in the area to get to know more individuals, et cetera.

If you're interested in going into teaching, that means private teaching. That might mean shadowing and TA-ing. That might mean even applying for a summer camp and being a counselor because you're around students of appropriate age and developing crafts and other experiences that you can build and understand how to work with, you know, different types of groups of individuals. And teaching can also go to adults as well. So no, don't just push it into an age group.

It can be very expansive.

**Stephen:** There are lots of ways to gain experience through these seemingly indirect methods. If you've ever had to do any training at school or work - that counts; maybe you were in charge of a group of people; it can be formal training, like the workshops the IML offers at the Eastman Leadership Academy; or it could mean creating your own experiences - make your own music, start your own band, create a podcast, volunteer. All of it's good.

**Blaire:** All of this falls into it. And then it just is about how you tell that story on your résumé and where it's appropriate to tell and you just pick and choose what's going to be appropriate for whatever you're applying for. And then that's how you build the experience to just become a stronger candidate for whatever you're looking to apply or obtain down the road.00:04:29

**Stephen:** Now, one great way to gain experience, especially if you're interested in teaching, is to start your own studio. Even if teaching isn't your main focus, running a studio can give you a lot of entrepreneurial experience, because:

**Blaire:** First and foremost, to run your own studio, please, 100 percent understand that you are running your own business. So you need basic business skills and knowledge. How do you budget yourself? Where are you physically going to be located? How are you going to ask for payments? Is it a weekly thing? Is it a monthly thing? If people don't show up with your payments, what do you do or do you ask them...? They get one week follow-up or do they just not get an extra lesson? How do you make up lessons? When is it on you? When is it on them?

**Stephen:** There's a lot in there. And those all come with further considerations, like if you teach out of your apartment - do you have room-mates? Where are parents or people waiting for their lesson going to hang out? And of course, there are financial things to consider - and some of them are weird. Like, what you can and can't deduct as business expenses on your taxes.

**Blaire:** ...believe or not, toilet paper is one of them, because if people are using your bathroom... It's just a weird thing that you don't think about.

**Stephen:** And these are all things that you'll need to think about. And if you just want teaching experience, you could try to work at a community music school, or a place that handles all of those other considerations for you but, depending on what you ultimately want to do, or what you want to learn, starting your own studio can teach you a lot of different skills and gain you a variety of experience you may not necessarily get if you just show up somewhere and teach lessons.

Blaire mentioned that we actually have a bunch of resources on the IML website that deal with both pedagogy and logistical concerns of starting a studio. I'll link to that in the show notes.

Now, another thing you'll need to do is grow your studio. But, how?

**Blaire:** ... It's really about making connections. If you can build a strong connection with a local school or a local music store or any other place where you might find parents or students, you can build your studio at a more authentic and faster rate because they see who you are as an individual and they're engaged with that. So when you're thinking about building your studio, it's going to take time.

**Stephen:** Keep in mind, this isn't the sort of thing you can quickly pivot to and expect to rake in the money. If you think you're going to start a studio a few weeks before the summer and use that money to pay your rent...mmm...maybe think again. Especially if you play sort of an obscure instrument.

**Blaire:** OK, as a bassoonist. I know for a fact that filling a studio with like 16 students is not legitimate in my area or even in most areas, right. So you have to really consider that too. So if you're an obscure instrument, you also might need to pair that with music theory or musicology or piano even just so that you get more students in your door. I've done that. I've done a piano/bassoon thing for a while when I was in college because I could get more students that way.

But you have to build these authentic connections. You have to think about the people who have students or the age that you want to teach. You have to reach out to other people that are actually teaching as well, because if their studios are overflowing, they can send people off to you or if they need someone to step in for a little bit or if they are going to be away for the summer and they have a student that wants to continue, you can actually do a role like a partnership. So sometimes, you know, it is a competitor thing, but if you build strong relationships with them, you have a chance of actually continuing to build that studio because they will hand that off to you or something along those lines.

**Stephen:** And of course, you have to prep for some feast and famine during your time teaching. Sometimes, a student will just stop taking lessons. Or one semester, you may end up with a waiting list for your studio, and then all your students graduate and move away, and your studio size is cut in half.

**Blaire:** So you have to take that into consideration in the long run of how many students can you take, and if you were to hit a minimum of this, this is when you start to feel it financially. So that means you may have to do more marketing or that means that you might have to do other things that continue. But it does take a while to build that studio, to be consistent enough to know that even if you fluctuated a little bit, you're gonna be fine in the long run.00:09:25

**Stephen:** Ok, so, Blaire talked about making connections. And connections are one thing that will help you build your studio and can often lead to various experiences you can then add to your arsenal. Now, we're going to talk in depth about networking in another episode, but it certainly does apply here. Mainly, we're going to focus on how you can reach out to other teachers, schools, or music stores to build your studio. So...do you just, like, blindly email people telling them you have a studio now?

**Blaire:** I mean, you could just send out that message. I mean, I wouldn't do...

**Stephen:** Ok, so like, you can cold email. And sometimes another teacher in your area might be full, and they may recommend students to your studio. Or your email might reach a school that just had a position open up for after school lessons. But it's not really the best method.

**Blaire:** It's not necessarily going to guarantee a good turnaround rate. And so instead. And this is important in general. Whether it's for private or whether it's just because you want to gain more experience teaching, period. Build an authentic relationship with them. What do they need help with? Offer up your time and volunteer. And that might mean that they have a bunch of NYSSMA stuff coming up and they just need more support with, you know, in-person sectionals and lessons. So great. Could you come and help with that and, you know, do that for a few days?

**Stephen:** There are lots of ways to get involved. Like, maybe you play for a school musical one year. That's experience. The next year, the director might notice that you're back, you know the ropes, and so now they ask you to lead some sectionals. That's new experience. And it can snowball from there - maybe you pick up some students, or are asked to play in a pit for a bigger show - outside of the school. All of that builds experience, and can help you make a name for yourself, which can help you grow your studio...you get it. But remember, this is just one tool you can use.

**Blaire:** And obviously, you can't do this with every school. So you have to pick one or two. But the authentic connection is where you can build more relationships and more opportunities, because then you are now known in the school as well as maybe the local area as someone that's available and you become a familiar face rather than just someone that's marketing their wares. So just be mindful of that and think about how you can build those authentic connections in the school district.

{Outro Music}

**Stephen:** Special thanks to Blaire for talking with the podcast. Remember, this is the first in a series of minisodes, so be on the lookout for more of these soon. Blaire will be back before you know it with a whole host of tips and super helpful advice.

Remember, you can follow our podcast on SoundCloud or find all the episodes on the IML website. We'll have links in the show notes. And of course, if you've enjoyed the episode or find the things we cover on this podcast helpful, it would be a huge help to share on social media or pass along to a friend or colleague. You can also follow us on the IML's Facebook page to hear about upcoming episodes.

Today's minisode was mixed by me, and I also provided some of the incidental music and intro music. And the outro music was composed by Alexa Silverman. Thanks also to Emma Gierszal and Frances Inzenhofer for helping to prep a lot of the content for these conversations. Contact info for the show is in the show notes, as well as a full transcript and helpful links. And as always, if you have an idea for episode, any comments, complaints, kudos - let us know.

Now, go out. Make art. Do good work. From the IML, I'm Stephen Biegner. Until next time.

**EPISODE (Gaining Experience) 1 END**