

Secrets from the Aural Tuning Toolkit: Attitude and Atmosphere

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Thirty-three years ago my friend Tim Gallwey wrote *The Inner Game of Tennis*, a book that would become the largest-selling sports book in history.

Here's the book's essential message:

there's two parts of you; let's call them *Self One* and *Self Two*.

Self One is the part of you that absolutely knows how to do things you're good at, like tuning a piano, and can do it effortlessly, "in the zone," without much thought at all.

Self Two is the part that constantly talks to you, doubts your ability to do the job, inundates you with habitual self-critical dialogue, and doesn't trust your body and its abilities.

Gallwey found that most good tennis players self-sabotaged their game under external or internal pressure, or both; they gave their attention over to negative mind-talk, and then tried to think their way out of their self-assessed poor performance... to no avail. Then, adding insult to injury, they lacerated, judged, and tortured themselves for "messing up."

But when Tim asked the players to *just concentrate their attention on the seams of the ball* as they played, there was a magical transformation: their game became effortless. The players uniformly described an experience of being, again, "in the zone," effortlessly and pleurably observing themselves playing at their highest level.

The shift of attention was small, and simple, but absolutely crucial. *Watching the seams of the ball* became a metaphor that my friend successfully used in countless trainings and business coaching assignments, and in writing four more *Inner Game* books---in a real sense, it made his entire career.

As artisan piano tuners we have an amazing, powerful analog to *watching the seams of the ball*: listening with all our calm attention to the note we're tuning.

The master piano tuner sits comfortably straight; the muscles are relaxed. He or she knows what muscle group tends to become tight, and consciously relaxes those muscles many times during the tuning.

This tuner's attention is easily and lightly focused on sound and feel, and not much else. The mind always wanders, but the lure of what's happening in the present moment---*the sound of the piano and the feel of the pin*---is strong. The artisan tuner knows that lavishing relaxed, pleasurable attention and craft on this piano, just giving one's best efforts, will make a radical positive change in the way the piano sounds. By tuning this way we distinguish ourselves as someone special to our clients, and also to ourselves. Precise, musical, custom, rock-solid aural tuning is an intensely challenging, highly sensitive and extremely rewarding task.

Tuning is a body craft; it's not a cerebral exercise. Using the whole body as the most powerful tool to sculpt a tuning that's balanced, beautiful and stable is exciting, not tiring.

Please don't think I'm picking and choosing which pianos to lavish this attention and focus on: it's *every single one*. It's true that, at this point in my career, most of the pianos I tune are good grands, but my tuning standard applies each and every time I sit down to tune: spinet to concert grand.

Careful, musical, intuitive whole-body tuning can make a little or humble piano sound better than it ever has---and you are an instant hero. Clients *can* tell the difference. I see that they can with every new client, each one delighted and moved when they hear their piano after I have tuned it.

For some, tuning can be a huge drag, a tense, angry encounter, a mindless, repetitive, automatic task with your thoughts wandering all over the universe---even a slightly boring, mildly distasteful means to an end (shop work or other piano-related, "fun" tasks.) If you don't like to tune, you shouldn't do it full time---or at all. Do something you love.

For others, tuning can be a relaxing, energizing, interesting, pleasurable way to insure a loyal, ever-expanding client base---and, much more important, it can allow YOU to become, in your own eyes, a highly-skilled artisan and an elegant, respected professional.

What you do, the level of your craft excellence as applied to your daily piano work, has a lot to do with your success. Please allow

yourself to consider that *how you are*, the way you're being, the atmosphere you bring to the job, matters just as much.

If your internal atmosphere is filled with impatience, prickliness, resignation, doubt, or worry, that will manifest itself in your work, and in your relationship with your clients. The atmosphere and attitude you bring to the tuning makes all the difference--to you, and to the increasing success of your career.

So:

- *Relax*, and keep consciously relaxing all through the tuning.
- *Listen* with your full attention---treat the note/s you're listening to like watching the seams of the ball.
- *Breathe*; we tend to hold our breaths or breathe very shallowly when we listen intently.
- *Be grateful* for the chance to get paid for doing healing and energizing body work: meditating on beautiful sounds, sculpting and creating balance and beauty.

One last, short story about doubt: I've tuned about 27,000 pianos so far in my life, with about 10,000 of those tunings concert, gig, recording, or "serious use" types of work. I constantly get the highest positive feedback and praise for my tuning work; my gift in this realm has opened many doors for me, and is a big source of personal pride and pleasure.

Yet, even so, when I make a mistake, or mis-hear something, or take more time than usual to set the temperament, a voice will say: "See? You don't really know much. This is the piano your system will fail on. You actually are a charlatan...you're a loser..."

Even in the face of all evidence to the contrary, the voice of doubt will still try to defeat you. It's not real; it's a pernicious habit, an

old tape loop, that you've indulged in countless thousands of times. *You have the power to turn your attention away from the doubt, and put it on the note you're tuning.* You have the power, and the absolute right, to let that doubt go. Try it: as an act of will, of internal discipline, and of faith in yourself. It feels great.

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