THE OPTIMIZING PIANISM NEWSLETTER ©

TOPIC: PROCESS

Betting on 15 mins of Hanon

Issue No. 9 · 4 November 2026 · Dr. Cameron Roberts

"I'm not out there sweating for three hours every day just to find out what it feels like to sweat."[1]

— Michael Jordan

Every practice decision is a trade: you pay with time and effort; you hope to get better pianism back. But often we pursue the rewards blind to the risks that accompany them - like fatigue, micro-injuries, boredom and loss of creativity, money spent, not playing the music you actually want to play, and reinforcing bad habits that keep your pianistic development stuck in the slow lane.[2]

Take 15 minutes of Hanon a day. Reward: some finger evenness (perhaps?). Risk: training your movements to avoid musical expression, nurture injury, and 15 mins not spent on fixing your weakest M. And besides, evenness of *what* - dynamics? rhythm? finger action? and what's the point of evenness without musical context anyway? Hanon for 1 hr a week amounts to about 50 hours a year. That's real time. Is it time well spent? Hardly. Better to have spent it on fixing a few of your weak Ms... or just going for a walk...

But Hanon isn't the villain here: **your choice of trade** is - trading your limited time for *Hanon*. Think clearly: why not practice 15 mins of Bach Preludes a day instead? Wouldn't that improve your supposed 'evenness' problems AND musical skills at the same time? Or why not Liszt or Ligeti etudes? And why 15 mins? Why not 10? Is the extra 5 mins spent, useful? Or are you just practising mindlessly with the hope-ium of better pianism? What *is* it that you are trying to improve?

MAKE YOUR PIANISM BETTER

DON'T judge a routine by how hard it feels. Effort is a cost, not a reward. And don't keep an exercise just because you've always done it. Even if it did serve you in the past, it may not be serving you now.

DO a quick value check on your habits (I suggest the 3M self-assessment link below). Two columns: rewards (which M it improves) and risks (time, injury risk, de-motivation, not doing something else). If the ratio of each action is not loaded towards what YOU WANT to improve, change the action. You want to **upsize the upside and downsize the downside** of everything you do, and repeat. It's the maths of process optimisation.

If your practice were a coin with your useful actions on one side and your useless actions on the other, would you want to flip it 10,000 times?

One step forwards... one step ~~backwards~~ forwards...

Cameron

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Next issue: the "I-could-have-if-I'd-wanted-to" pianist, and what they're missing.

What is your most expensive habit? Do you know?

The Book — Chapter 7, "Reward-to-Risk Ratios," prices an eight-hours-a-day routine line by line. **Read ›**

- **3M Self-Assessment** — build the to-do list that helps you bet better (free)
- **Newsletter Archive** — revisit the practice series, Issues 6–8

REFERENCES

1. Levin, M. "The 1 Thing You Need for Success, according to Michael Jordan and Tony Robbins." *Inc.com*, 24 Jul 2017.
2. Roberts, C. *Optimizing Pianism – Evidence-Based Perspectives*, Ch. 7 ("Reward-to-Risk Ratios"; Tables 7.1–7.2).

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