

**We're All Students: "What If"**  
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One of the greatest things about being a teacher is learning; and one of the most important things I've ever learned is *HOW* to learn. As a teacher, my primary goal is to teach my students to become lifelong learners. This is not just a skill that will help you with drumming, but with most other things you'll encounter throughout life. World-renowned musician Herbie Hancock said... "A great teacher is one who realizes that he himself is also a student, and whose goal is not to dictate answers but to stimulate his students creativity enough so that they go out and find the answers themselves."

I believe some of the best drummers are not the ones who have been *playing* the longest, but the ones who have been *learning* the longest, and who continue to learn throughout their entire career.

So, what does this all mean to you and how can this help you as a student (remember, we're all students)? This article is Lesson #1 in How to Learn, and focuses on keeping an open and creative mind to explore the infinite possibilities and combinations of things. It's titled "What If." This simple phrase is what I use in every lesson, in every rehearsal, and every class in order to challenge students to examine ways in which they're thinking that may actually be holding them back from realizing they're full potential.

This lesson is not so much about a specific idea in drumming, but how to take all other drumming and musical ideas, lessons, and concepts and help you to really learn and apply them, and make them your own by understanding, examining, exploring, finding, analyzing, creating, synthesizing, building, evaluating, and turning things upside-down and inside-out. Learning music is less about judging, critiquing, and trying to be better than someone else, and more about evaluating, assessing, being open, and trying to be better than yourself.

So, here I'm not going to talk about *how* to play the drums, or *what* to play, but about the *infinite possibilities* of how and what to play. We can *never* exhaust all of the combinations of sounds, rhythms, accents, patterns, feel, styles, groupings, phrasings, and interpretations that can be created. And, when you combine all of these with the sonic potential of the choices of tunings, drums, cymbals, heads, sticks, and brushes the resulting combinations are

immeasurable. We all have an incredible potential every time we play, and our greatest limitation is not a lack of blazing technique or shortcomings of our equipment, but the breadth of our imagination.

I'll give you an example...I believe that one of the biggest myths in drumming is that 'everything that can be played has already been played'. It's easy to line up people on both sides of that argument, but instead of giving you my opinion, let's have a little fun with math to help support my claim that...we will never exhaust all of the possibilities for *what* and *how* to play, so let's think more creatively about what we're doing.

Let's start simple - with 8<sup>th</sup> notes in 4/4 time. There are 256 different combinations of 8<sup>th</sup> notes and rests in one measure of 4/4. When you add just one level of accents (so you can play each note with, or without an accent) the possibilities now increase to 6,651. Let's now add a third level of volume (soft, medium, and loud) and one other drum, say a small tom. Now we have 390,625 combinations, and we haven't added our feet - bass drum(s) or high hat, and we're still only looking at one measure of 8<sup>th</sup> notes. Now, if we calculate the same options for one measure using 16<sup>th</sup> notes instead of 8<sup>th</sup>s, we come up with 152,587,890,620 possible combinations - that's 152 billion in just one measure! Just how many is that? It would take 414 drummers playing 365 days-a-year non-stop for 70 years (no food breaks) at 60 beats per minute to play all of the combinations...in just one measure! So, when you consider of all of the possible combinations of rhythms, accents, interpretations, etc. in a 4-minute song, the possibilities are unending.

So, what does all this math prove, and what point does it make about learning? Simply this...keep an open mind and constantly explore new ideas, and don't just accept anything as 'fact' especially in music and drumming. True innovation and developing our own unique and special musical voice is easily within all of our grasp through simply applying the simple 'What If' phrase to all that we do and think.

As you prepare to come to KoSA, and while you're here, and also after you've gone and continue to venture down your road of learning and becoming a better drummer make sure to keep an open mind to explore your endless capability for expression through the drums, and remember to take your best learning friend with you to keep you fresh, creative, unique, and a student for life... 'What If'.