

The Watchmaker of Lilles

A playful professor parable

By David Thomas

There once was a watchmaker known for crafting some of the finest timepieces in the city. The watches he made were elegant, accurate and for those that owned them or wished to, they had a certain artistic soul that made them special.

The watchmaker himself was no one special. He had learned the family trade and taken over the shop when he was a young man. For many years, his routine was the same.

In the morning he woke up and to prepare for the day, he would eat breakfast, get dressed then play the beautiful piano that had been handed down to him by his great grandmother. Running his delicate fingers across the keyboard, then music that poured out the window and onto the streets was a daily source of delight to his neighbors. He played with such beauty and joy that many wondered why he was a watchmaker instead of a musician. And when asked, he only would reply that playing the piano loosened his joints for the long day of watchmaking ahead.

Once he arrived at his shop, his first task was always to locate a record from his extensive collection and place it on the old phonograph at the front of the store. As the sounds of symphonies and operas poured out of the old machine, he would arrange his tools, set his lights and begin to work.

His collection of music and taste in what he chose to draw crowds to his shop. Many customers started as visitors, drawn in by the music and then held by the stories he told of the music and the musicians. The watchmaker made many friends and found new customers through a mutual love of music.

At night, with his tools and records put away, the watchmaker would retire to his home, make dinner and then do the most peculiar thing. Thinking back through his day, the songs he played in the morning and the records he'd listened to throughout the day, he would replay his day in his imagination and dance. If you looked through his window you'd see this solitary figure, in silence, twirling and hopping across his floor, a smile on his face. He would perform his silent dance as a way to appreciate his day, recall his work and relax his stiff body.

One day the watchmaker did not wake to play his piano, to open his shop, share his symphonies or to dance his evening dance. And when the town decided to erect a special tombstone for the famed maker of timepieces, the choice was unanimous for what to place on his granite grave marker.

Not a clock, but a musical note.

Because what he shared in his life came not from making machines that clicked away the minutes and hours we have on the earth, but bringing joy to those moments.

The Watchmaker's Habits

This tale outlines a set of behaviors in a playful professional. The phases are as old as time—before, during and after.

The watchmaker

Performed music **before** work

Played music **during** work

Danced to music **after** work

Your goal is to create your own daily play routine. The pattern is simple

1. What do you do before you teach? How do you get into a playful frame of mind?
2. What do you do while you teach, to stay playful and encourage a community of play around you?
3. What do you do after you teach, to unwind and unpack your teaching?

Process

1. Pick something that brings you joy and happiness. Some ideas:
 - Music
 - Movies
 - Comic books
 - Magic
 - Sports
 - Nature
 - Food
 - Literature
 - Pets/animals
2. Use this selection as your before/during/after guide. Answer these questions:
 - How will I use _____ to prepare for teaching?
 - How will I use _____ during teaching?
 - How will I use _____ after teaching?

For example, you might like use humor and ask these questions:

- How will I use jokes to prepare for teaching?

- How will I use jokes during teaching?
 - How will I use jokes after teaching?
3. Write out your plan for using your selection to create a playful, joyful sequence. This is your personal plan and contract.
 4. Finally, design your tombstone. What will they put on your memorial?