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INTRODUCTION

(or if you prefer: 8 bars out front...)

If I don't practice for a day...I know it.

If I don't practice for two days...the critics know it.

If I don't practice for three days...the world knows it.

No one is sure who originally said this (some say Heifetz, others attribute it to Horowitz, Starker, or Paderewski) but regardless, it resonates with all instrumentalists, especially brass players.

We all know what it's like to lay off the horn for several days and then come back with a case of holiday chops, feeling stiff with a lack of endurance—but what if you have to stop playing for several weeks, months or even years? How will it affect your chops? Can you ever rebound or make the time up?

There are many players who have a passion for music but simply can't practice every day because of work and/or family. Perhaps they only pull the horn out for their church orchestra, a reading band, or some play-along CDs on the weekend. How can trombonists such as these maintain their chops?

Maybe you played in college, but life just crowded the horn out altogether for the last 20 years. Your son is doing well in band and this has inspired you to dig your axe out of the attic and put music back in its rightful place in your life. Can you get your face back after all this time or should you just make a lamp out of the horn?

If you find yourself in a similar situation, this book is for you. No matter if you're a weekend warrior or a professional player on an extended hiatus, the road back is basically the same—you just have to get on it! Take comfort in the fact that you are not the first person to stage a comeback; I have had to lay off the horn on three separate occasions, once for an entire year. I found encouragement in the fact that there are many fine players who have taken time off for various reasons and returned to a rewarding career and life in music.

On the following pages you will find a common sense approach to rejuvenating your chops after you've been away from the horn. The concepts in this book are not particularly new or groundbreaking; you probably already utilize these principles in other areas of your life to some degree. With patience, perseverance and a plan, you *can* get your chops back and become an

even stronger player in the process. In addition, you may discover a renewed appreciation for music and its importance in your life.

Interspersed throughout the text are musical exercises and etudes designed specifically for each stage of progress. While I have tried to be as original as possible in writing the musical exercises, the goal of this book is not to reinvent the wheel with some new-fangled or radical etudes; there are already plenty of books available which cover these areas. What you play is not as important as following the principles outlined in the text, so experiment with the playing activities until you find what works and stick with it. Most of the examples are easy and fairly accessible; however, some require a certain amount of advanced ability. If a particular exercise is beyond your present ability *skip it* and add it to your list of things to practice *after* you get your chops back.

The musical examples are written primarily for tenor trombone without an F attachment in order to accommodate as many trombonists as possible. Players with F attachments and bass trombonists should feel free to adapt the exercises to suit their particular registers and needs.

Finally, it's important to *read through the entire book **before** you play a single note* so you can get a good grasp of the concept and adopt a plan that's right for your circumstances.

I am indebted to those marvelous teachers who took time to convince me that playing an instrument with no buttons is really a very noble thing after all. Dee Stewart is one of the most inspiring and supportive teachers with whom I've ever had the privilege to work; his influence permeates my thought and teaching on a daily basis. Dr. Jay Hildebrandt spent many patient hours with me as a young trombonist and kept me grounded on the horn. I also owe a great deal to Dr. Brad Edwards, Jim Decker, Ben Hall, Bill Zehfuss, Lloyd Ross, Katherine Brooks, and my parents.

I would also like to thank Dave Vining for his support and patient guidance along the way. He has inspired so many of us not only with his playing and contributions to brass pedagogy, but especially through his own remarkable comeback.

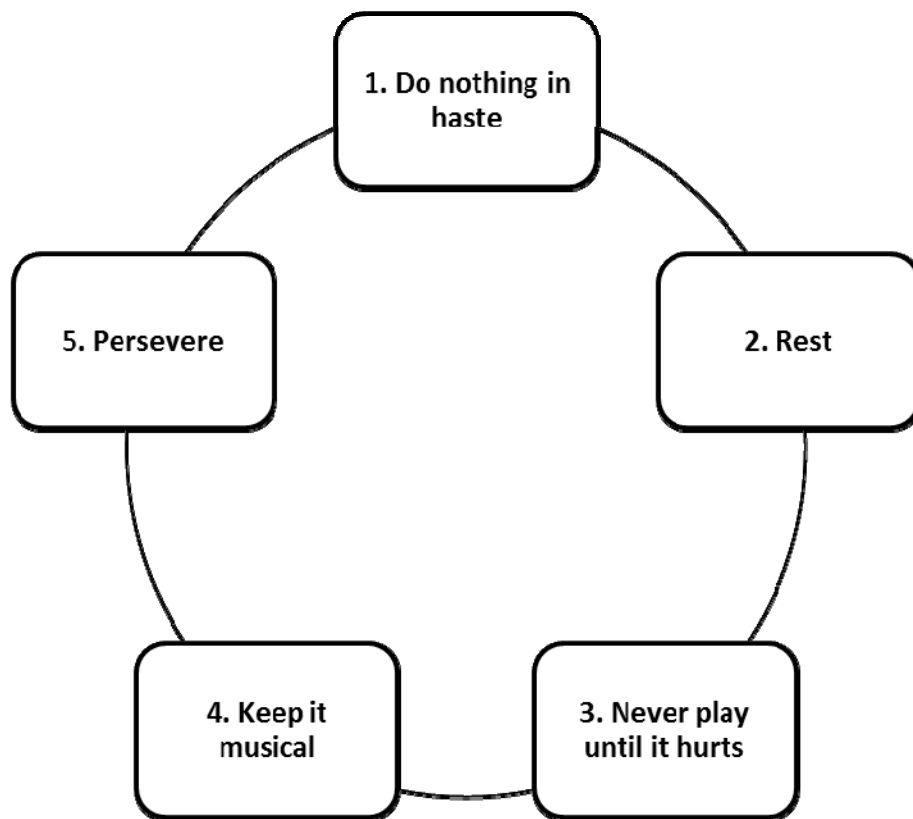
My wife and children are a constant source of support and joy—and very patient through the years with gigs, deployments, writing, arranging, and a lot of practicing after bedtime. I think at times they might have actually been glad when I had to lay off...

Ken Ebo
Virginia Beach, 2012

APPENDIX ONE:

COMMON SENSE FOR COMEBACK CHOPS IN 60 SECONDS

The Five Rules:



The Five Stages:



Stage description:

Stage 1:

Long, low, slow tones in short sessions with a lot of rest between sessions.

Stage 2:

Gradually add mid-range work and keep it lyrical. Simple, short melodies in short sessions with plenty of rest between sessions. Incorporate lip slurs with intervals no greater than a perfect 5th.

Stage 3:

Add articulations mixed with lyrical excerpts. The excerpts are still relatively short, but the sessions are longer. Increase the intervals in the lip slurs. Maintain adequate rest and pacing.

Stage 4:

Add more difficult flexibility exercises and increase the range. Use slightly longer and more difficult excerpts and increase the session time.

Stage 5:

Add range extension to upper limits and increase difficulty on all levels. Increase time to essentially routine practice length. Transition into regular practice and gigs. Chops are “back and better.”

Guidelines:

- The session times and total daily practice times are suggestions. Be conservative, rest MORE than you think you need and take your time.
- Each stage can last as long as you desire. Ideally, you should not be pressured to have your chops back by a certain time; however, if this is the case, first decide on your timeline then try to estimate when the stages will be.
- Use stages 1-3 for the first 65-70% of your timeline and use stages 4 & 5 in the last 30-35%. Once you decide on a routine to fit your schedule, stick with it and adjust it according to your progress.
- Plan at least three to four weeks to implement this method. The central idea is to use short sessions with a lot of rest in between over a relatively long period of time.
- Appendix 2 includes an “emergency” 10-day plan should you need to come back quickly (although this is not the optimum recommendation).
- Always start with some breathing exercises before you play. Use breathing and buzzing as tools throughout your comeback sessions. Continually use with long, low and slow tones and

keep your early sessions short. Add increasingly more difficult skills (longer phrases, increased upper range, flexibility, technical work, faster tempos) only when you are comfortable at your present level.

- Use all available skills or techniques as a part of your comeback routine to broaden your approach and prevent monotony.
- This book is not intended to replace a qualified brass teacher, one with knowledge of healthy brass pedagogy who genuinely cares about your development. Any comeback regimen should include such a teacher who can guide your efforts in conjunction with the principles laid out in this book.

