

# Deborah Henson-Conant's 7 Strings of Passion Playbook



This playbook is a companion for my “Strings of Passion” program and the following pages serve as a guide and reminder for the principles - and as a starting place for observing these principles, creating conditions in your life and work to help bring them out - and finding ways to engage and practice them. So for each principal in the 7 Strings of Passion, the workbook includes:

- Things to **OBSERVE**
- **CONDITIONS** you can change to bring the principle out
- Ways to **ENGAGE** with this principle

There’s always one page that includes my notes - and then an empty page for your notes. If you print this double-sided starting with this page, your notes will always be on the backside of mine. The advantage of doing it that way is that then you can add additional pages between each string.

**These pages are for exclusive use of the participants in DHC’s “Strings of Passion” workshop experience** (that means you!). You may not always understand the meaning of the notes I’ve written here - but you will once you’ve gone through the program.

Thank you for honoring the confidentiality of these pre-publication pages. Because they form the foundation for a book, it’s essential that you keep them private so please don’t

## Instructions

Watch or listen to whatever version of “Strings of Passion” you have access to. If you’re taking the 10-Week program, this document will become the string-in-the-sugar-water for your own observations (and if you don’t know what that means yet, you soon will!).

Add your observations, ahas and questions in the playbook. Then try your own experiments and add information about what you learned. Add pages if you need to.

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## Deborah Henson-Conant's Seven Strings of Passion

### Basic Overview

#### 1. Impulse

The desire to touch, to be, to do, to create, to discover

#### 2. Structure

The string in the sugar-water - The power of internal structure ~ Creating Conducive Conditions

#### 3. Character

It's the flavor, the scent, the expression - the ineffable that gives meaning to the concrete

#### 4. Roles

Leadership & Followship are just two roles ~ In music, playing the roles of bass, accompaniment or melody allows us to freely improvise together ~ As we fully play each different role, different perspectives are revealed ~ A role, like an archetype, can connect you to knowing what you don't know you know

#### 5. Practice

You have to be bad to be good ~ Knowing made physical - Physicalize to know ~ Don't try to get it - let it get to you

#### 6. Deconstruction

Structure, deconstructed, becomes a framework for new creation ~ Each translation to a new medium, each distillation, each incisive question shows more truth

#### 7. Lift-Off

In the moment of performance, we drop the conscious practice, and trust that part of our practice that has become us. We speak fluently in a language where perfection is irrelevant because all we are doing - in our vulnerability - is revealing one answer to the question of what it means to be human. That's all we truly want to know from each other.

# 1. impulse

- Before we are conscious of our own desirABILITY, we feel the impulse of our own DESIRE
- Desire is power: the desire to touch, to do, to be, to create To PLAY with an object, an instrument, a word, an idea
- Forget about playing correctly and play “with”

Putting aside any questions or opinions  
**observe** you have about whether you are desireable or not, whether your art is ‘good’ or not -- feel your own desire in small things. The way you want your desk arranged, the food on your plate, how you love to sit or stand at your instrument, what sounds or notes you really love. Observe those small impulses of desire. Follow some. Don’t follow some - observe how that feels. Add your findings to this playbook.

## **engage**

Take one risk a day

Walk down the street in a different direction than usual.

Make a decision nobody else wants to make - something simple like what to have for dinner. Then just watch what happens.

What conditions make you feel more impulsive?

What conditions **inhibit** your impulsiveness?

## **conditions**

It was once compelling & fun ... now it’s ‘work.’ Name it. **What conditions changed?**

It was once a hassle and stress. now it’s easy. Name it. **What conditions changed?**

# (impulse)

This page is for *your* findings

**observe**

**conditions**

**engage**

# 2. structure

- Structure creates freedom - flexible, internal structure
- The string in the sugar-water – one simple, unifying idea
- Music is the structure of time
- The performance of music is building structures in time and then playing on them.
- Blues Structure - simple 12-bars = PREDICTABILITY & Freedom
- Homefree. Adventure versus danger. Structuring for greatest adventure and least potential damage to self or spirit.
- Jungle Gym of the mind

Observe the simplest structures around you - the refrigerator, the chair, the table. What's the *flexible internal structural concept* and what's the *external structured design*? What's the

## observe

difference? **Observe how they structure a part of your life.** What freedoms do those give you? Define those

freedoms with words. **Observe how the words may give you added ideas** of how you could change (i.e. play with) the freedom and the underlying structure of it.

**Observe the places you GO - what is predictable** - example: cash registers near the front of the store, windows with sale items in them - this is part of structure. When does it support impulse (and what kinds of impulse) and why? Can you use those findings in your own creative practice?

## engage

Go to your instrument or artform and do absolutely anything for five minutes. Observe how that feels. Observe whether you begin to create a structure & whether that structure leads to more impulse or a sense of inhibition.

How could you change the simple structures around you to give you more freedom or fluency?

## conditions

How can you simplify the structures you already work with? How can you 'psych out' the structure of a piece of music? Knowing how the piece is structured changes the condition of your mind when you play it. How does that change your playing?

# (structure)

This page is for *your* findings

**observe**

**conditions**

**engage**

# 3. character

- Playing the music of monsters and rain
- Dynamics & Expression = Character (forte - pianissimo)
- Dogs of Somerville, Under the Bed ... all character, no virtuosity
- Baroque Flamenco - which is more important - the notes or the character? Can you enhance your ability to add character by simplifying the notes?
- [BurntFoodMuseum.com](http://BurntFoodMuseum.com)

Observe what is “characterful” around you, and which of the characteristics feel like

## observe

they enhance your experience in some way and which tend to inhibit your experience. Why?

Do they really inhibit your experience, or is it because they don't fit some preconceived idea.

Everything has character - even plastic toys or cheap mass-produced furniture. What IS that character? Could you embody it?

What conditions might change the character of a thing? Consider:

what might you change about the thing itself

(like a baked

potato) to change its character?

What might you change about the conditions around it (like candlelight and wine) that could change how you experience its character?

## conditions

Explore changing the character of things in your house. Can you make something that's

## engage

“practical” into something “whimsical” - like, tie a multicolor ribbon around your TV remote? Can you literally frame something differently - like put a gold frame around a piece of unused toilet paper and hang it in your bathroom with a sign saying “Break Glass in Case of Emergency”? How does this

change the character of the bathroom, or the toilet paper?

Try answering the phone with a different character in your voice - you can have fun with this with telemarketers ... but only if they're real people.

# (character)

This page is for *your* findings

**observe**

**conditions**

**engage**



# 4. roles

- Leadership & followship: The Bass Player is always right ... even when he's wrong; Ginger & Fred ... equal value & enhance each other
- The 3 musical roles: Melody (or melodic improv, Accompaniment & Bass
- Taking on a role: embodying an archetype - walking onto stage as my mother; the great harp lesson exchange; imaginary friends who give great advice
- Playing House: setting up rules & roles
- Zum Gali Gali - "You have a voice" - Bo Yabba De Ba - Rounds

Observe ways in which a split-second change in role changes everything. For example: A taxi driver who sings opera. If both driver and rider are willing, roles can spontaneously change that will deeply affect both momentarily - and the rider can become the adoring audience. They each come away changed, moved, expanded & deepened.

## observe

## engage

Embody an archetype and see how that affects your performance in everyday life - or in your art. Try different archetypes and notice the difference. Practice leadership and followship. How you play your role affects how others play their role. How you invest in your role changes your experience. How you *clarify* your role changes the experience.

What conditions enhance the transformational role-shift, and what conditions inhibit it?

How does clarity (clearly defined roles - even writing them out) change the experience?

## conditions

# (roles)

This page is for *your* findings

**observe**

**conditions**

**engage**

# 5. practice

- You have to be bad to be good
- What's the difference between 'practice' and 'A practice'?
- Rounds - half-baked - mudpies
- Create conditions to let IT get to you instead of trying to get IT
- The gear-shift moment of practice - suddenly worse
- Running - making the practice your own - for you
- Harp on way to bathroom

What are your current practices or habits? Which have you consciously chosen and which seem involuntary? Which ones have you successfully incorporated into your life? Which are effortless to incorporate? Which are fun or feel good? Which are challenging to incorporate? Which do you wish you would *stop* doing?

## observe

What practices used to be difficult for you and are now just a part of your life? What practices did you incorporate in your life at one time and you no longer do? How do you feel about all those?

## engage

Having observed what practices you *once* had or that you *wish* you had in your life - and having observed what practices you *do incorporate*, notice the *conditions* that make it easier to incorporate the practices you want -- completely stop trying to use your will-power to incorporate the practice you want and **ONLY** change the *conditions* in a way to make it *easier* to engage in the practices you *want* to engage in. Change one small thing each day in the conditions to make the practice you **WANT** more natural to YOU.

On the other side - make a practice of doing one small thing that feels uncomfortable, to get in the practice of becoming more comfortable with that discomfort.

## conditions

What are the conditions surrounding the practices that are easiest for you to incorporate in your life? Can you add any of those conditions to the ones that are harder to incorporate?

# (practice)

This page is for *your* findings

**observe**

**conditions**

**engage**

# 6. deconstruction

- Blind & Deaf ... we're dazzled by *what we think is there* - and often miss the deeper & more fundamental connections
- Rock Club in Berlin ... the harp is just a big guitar
- Deconstruct 'what is' to explore what 'could be'
- Development of Baroque Flamenco - look where it started & where it is now. What's the same? What's different?
- Hendrix "Star Spangled Banner" is the musical poetry of words

## observe

What have you taken apart and made your own?

Observe, not with eyes/ears but with an internal sense of movement how playing or engaging in your artistic expression affects your body. If you were deaf, what would you see?

## engage

What could you take apart and literally put back together in a

different way? Could you do this in your home, with something you use a lot ... or that you use rarely? What would you learn?

Could you play a piece of music in a different order? Play right hand part with left hand and vice-versa? What would you learn by this?

Could you deconstruct a piece of music and then add a different character to each part? Does that make the structure clearer?

What conditions lead to the ability to deconstruct what we've already "closed off" as true?

## conditions

Substances (ex: alcohol, drugs, caffeine) and physical extremes (ex: sleep deprivation) can affect our openness to deconstructive thinking and its revelations - but these things can also impair our performance and health. What are some other ways we can affect the condition of our minds to make us more open to this kind of thinking without physical impairment? How does reading, writing, adventure, practice, talking to new people, learning new things, doing things you're not good at - how do those things affect the condition of your mind and its ability to deconstruct the 'givens' that can constrict your thinking & playing?

# (deconstruction)

This page is for *your* findings

**observe**

**conditions**

**engage**

# 7. liftoff

- Spontaneous Performance
- The art of doing exactly what you're doing at this moment, exactly as you are in this very moment.
- Rely on what you know you can do.
- The virtuoso window-washer, the splendid bartender
- The time for outfitting the ship is over - you are sailing with what you have and only what you have - do that as gloriously as you can
- Don't do more - hide less
- Lift-off isn't always when we 'achieve' excellence but often when we let GO of needing to achieve some preconceived goal

Observe how things perform -- not how they

## observe

*should* perform, but how they *do*: the appliances in your house, the birds outside, the dish-

sponge. Observe how people perform things - simple things, every day things. Observe the beauty of these performances. Observe when you feel you can't connect with a performer - and observe when you feel deeply that you can connect with a performer. Just observe what happens inside you.

## engage

If you accept who you are and *your* condition exactly the way you are at this moment ,what could you do right now to enhance your performance or experience?

How do conditions affect performance? (This is a huge field of inquiry in sports). How do things like the following affect your performance:

nervousness, **conditions**, relaxation, hunger, sleep, who is in the room, who isn't in the room, weather, temperature, the amount of sleep someone else has gotten, the amount of time you've practiced, the physical shape you're in right now.

# (liftoff)

This page is for *your* findings

**observe**

**conditions**

**engage**



# questions & notes

# questions & notes

# additional experiments

# additional experiments