

Isaac Sadigursky

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Random Notes

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### Every Day Needs

No overhead

2% interest

Buy common concern items in bulk for future resale, such as Howard's finish, caster cups, lid hinge pins, cleaning steels, metronome weights, cloth key covers, etc.

Things to use tubing for.

Back-up set of tools in shop.

Itemize all tools in case stolen.

Tapping down bridge pins: sometimes pins are too deep and need to be pulled up

Modifying tools

Dedicated tool cases, e.g. stringing kit, lubrications, etc.

Fix other things: timpani sticks, music stands, statue, etc.

Use a brush rasp on a handle to removed crusty bass dampers.

Fix piano benches with clamps, glue, dowels, WD40 for moving parts.

Keep little loose things in pouches, like soft lunch boxes. Kids throw them away at the end of the school year, and the school custodians have a pile of them. The beauty of them is that they are different colors.

Cosmetic bags also make good containers.

"How much would it cost?"

The answer is: "This is the problem. This is how to fix it. At \$ later it will be done."

For cleaning, use two hoses: blow & suck at same time. Attach a plastic tube to the blower for cleaning under the plate. Place a damp rag at the far end of the soundboard to catch what is blown. Drape a sheet over the raised grand lid to catch dust. Also place a fan on the lid to direct the dust. Use white gloves to avoid leaving fingerprints.

Vinegar will stop the clicks in loose hammer heads.

Carry long screws and a bolt cutter to cut them to length.

For tuning pianos in locked auditoriums, carry long extension cords, lights, bolt cutters to cut lock.

Use elastics to hold plastic boxes closed.

Carry a variety of screws, a tap and die to rethread after a screw is cut.

Buy a 100 parts at a discount and sell the part to the customers at full single price.\

All mechanics have special tool belts and cases.

Ivories pop off as the wood shrinks and expands. Steinway cut slots in their keys to accommodate this change.

Carry food in the car and eat during driving. Carry munchies, sandwiches, vegies, fruit, etc.

Make people laugh a little and it's all forgiven.

A crow bar gives enough pressure to lift a piano against a wall for getting caster cups underneath. Place a small wooden block under the pivot point to protect the floor and to provide more leverage.

Vinegar & baking salt loosens shanks for drilling out.

To remove broken plate screws, use an extension.

A lot of Kawai short case consoles don't have enough key stock to keep the breadth of the capstans, so the wood breaks off there. Buy 100 wood cones for a couple dollars, use a conical drill bit, add some saliva to assist the glue. Once the insert is set, re-drill and reinsert the capstan. You can also repair fall boards, bridge pins, and other cabinet repairs.

Luggage handles can be purchased inexpensively for attaching to boxes and cases to slide out easily.

Doing little extra things increases one's reputation. Isaac carries drywall plugs for re-hanging pictures.

The most important thing to do is to solve all the little problems.

Tune quickly and spend time doing extra jobs.

"Ever since I fixed this it doesn't work."

Use pinblock material to make missing leg blocks.

The guy went to the doctor and said "I'm sick and I want a second opinion."

The doctor said "and you're ugly, too."

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There are a number of little details that distinguish each piano model.  
 Carry a damper rack for site repairs of damper upstop rails, guide rail bushings, damper felts, etc. For having a good feel of the damper set screws, use a tiny short-handle screwdriver.  
 Cut a tiny notch in the flange screwdriver for replacing springs at the same time.  
 Fist-to-chin explains cheating jacks.  
 Truckers have the highest rate of bladder cancer because they drive too far without stopping to go to the bathroom. Remember to pee and to drink water.

Diplomacy*The Diplomat*

Yes = maybe

Maybe = no

No = NAD (not a diplomat)

*Lady*

No = maybe

Maybe = yes

Yes = nah

*Japanese*

"I might consider"

*Rush*

Remodel

*Military*

"You have two choices: yes or yes."

"You deserve a better piano."

Isaac labels his keys to various institutions in Russian.

Floor pattern of a Steinway grand for the room decorators.

Build a piano horse for holding up the corner of a grand for removing, connecting and repairing legs.

Use a stair roller for loading pianos into vans and up stairs.

Buy vacuum cleaner bags at the Salvation Army.

PRS = post-refinishing syndrome. Cheek blocks suck up moisture and the screws can rust. \

"Do not feel totally responsible for

A moto-tool with a light touch can quickly make hammers look new.

For ivory work insert a small tooth pick, insert glue, clamp using a piece of molding to protect the key.

Attach sash chains to the bulky spinet lids in music rooms.

Keep the pattern of number of coils when restringing. Two coils of number 20 wire will equal four coils in the treble.

Install all new cabinet buttons, especially on refinished pianos. Use countersinks and customized paddle bits to accommodate the button shapes.

"Why don't emergency repair jobs ever come on slow days?"

"So many mistakes, so many excuses."

Use a three-way clamp for accidental repair.

Put a blanket on the bench and a car jack on the blanket and jack up a grand piano.

When gluing on a new hammer, use masking tape as a spacer, for nursing fresh glue, and for keeping alignment. Rubber bands hold blacks to the keys while gluing.

Keep a collection of three-quarter-sawn dowels. When a piano is being sprayed, shoot some dowels the same color.

To remove a spinet action, place a blanket over the keys, drop it in, pull the action out and lay it on the blanket without needing to remove the keys.

Wet the carpet on a dolly so the piano won't slide.

For fastening lights to lids use a metal clamp with plastic tubing on it.

To construct a missing key up-stop rail, attach felt to a strip of wood, & mark for proper drilling.

Crimp the end of the spring latch on the bottom board so students can't open it.

Carry professional insurance in case of a car accident or if everything is stolen.

Instead of using toothpicks, use shoe pegs for shimming or plugging holes.

### **Pedals**

Use back-check leathers for pedal rod pads. Glue in, no more squeaks.  
 Why replace just leather on back-checks when you can replace the back-checks in much less time and with much higher quality by buying new ones.  
 Snip cloth punching and insert under pedals.  
 Place a broken screw extractor in an electric drill to remove the guide in a grand action with sticking keys.  
 Clamp, drill out hole, glue in dowel, drill out, install screw with VJ Lube, cut off screw head, file & sand.  
 Use self-centering bits to drill out old bushings. Match felt thicknesses to replace. Use Titebond in field, hide glue in shop.  
 Always label the dowels and pedals before removing them.  
 Shim stripped holes and loose joints with bushing felt, damper cord or dental floss.  
 Always label the name of the customer on the piano part.  
 For rusty pedals, when the rusty screws break, keep the parts to measure the size for a new screw.  
 Pedal springs are not polished they heat up the leather.  
 Oxidation will form on the tops of the brass pedal rod nuts if the piano is not played much. Polish or buff these points to get rid of friction.  
 Make sure the right side of the grand action is smooth for the shifting pedal spring.  
 If the pedal center pin is bent, don't touch it. If you try to bend it straight it might break. Be prepared to replace the pin.  
 Use a plate, cup or container for keeping all removed screws. Label the containers.  
 Crayola cheap school glue uses a plastic nail in the cap to keep the hole open, a hook on the cap for hanging it on the wall, and a slot for hanging the cap while using the bottle. Give the glue away to someone and use the bottles.  
 If you see a lot of leather shims, that is an alarm that the pedal lyre is separating. The square holes are glued so well that you might wreck the finish. Cut around the joint to keep the finish from splitting.  
 Japanese houses use no nails. They use dowels. They build dry, then as the moisture enters the joints they swell up and hold tight.  
 When gluing and clamping parts together, label the sections with masking tape to keep track of what goes where.  
 If there are no support dowels, make some because diagonal rods are the best way to make a lyre secure.  
 Regular dowels do not work because they flex. Metal is best.  
 Steinway and Baldwin make the best pedal lyre support stick systems. Steinway needs to be measured.  
 One way to measure is with a telescoping car antenna.  
 When doweling, use a blind wedge. Cut a notch with a Japanese saw. The wedges can be pre-manufactured with a saw & a file.  
 To separate the lyre from its top, use a car jack.

### **Business**

The best investment Isaac has made was to marry his secretary. She can make more working for him than from a regular job. If he tunes 6 pianos a day and makes \$600 a day and pays his wife \$100 for answering the phone and keeping records. So with all the money he is making, how much could he sell his business for? Can he sell it at all? His customers liked Isaac for who he was.

We as members of PTG have the younger branch and the older branch. As the older ones die off, the new ones are ready to blossom. When talking about experience we are talking about how many units or jobs a day we are dealing with. In our profession we need to know a lot of different skills. It takes about ten years to learn the skills, another ten years to master the skills, and another ten years to make it look easy. Survival is very low in our profession. Learning from books, a correspondence course or by tinkering is the path to failure. Hanging around a shop and apprenticing is the step to experience. It is not worth charging someone to apprentice because it sucks time answering "how does this work? How do I do that?" The best way is to join PTG, attend conventions, and to learn how to do things from scratch by

hand. If the apprentice helps the tuner it is a fair exchange to then guide the apprentice. You do \$400 of work for me and I'll give you \$400 worth of knowledge.

The good guys are my friends. The bad guys are my best friends, because I follow up their work correcting all their mistakes. Socializing after PTG meetings is the time to learn, network and find out who is good at what. Later you know whom to refer for which jobs.

The music scene can be both an outlet from work and can be a source of income. Nowadays the casual music world has not caught up with income needs. In our situation we can catch up. Beginners do not have the inventory in tools and parts that experienced tuners have. Now we are making up for the inexperienced we made due to our ignorance and stupidity and for things that we did three and four times. If a person replaces a car in five years, which is better? Is it a crime to put thousands of dollars into rebuilding an old piano instead of buying a new one?

The rebuilding industry today is more than just replacing new hammers on old shanks, just replacing knuckles, only re-spraying the plate, etc. Now it is to your advantage to subcontract certain jobs. An inexperienced tuner will sell re-spending jobs. Experienced tuners are getting paid for their ability to be able to know what is needed and what it would take to correct the situation. Even rebuilding an old Steinway piano becomes questionable. People are mesmerized by the name Steinway and will buy old used beaten up instruments. A brand new Steinway M sells for \$45,000. A divorce happens and the same slightly used piano sells for \$25,000. Although rebuilding is a money-making procedure, poorly rebuilt pianos bring down the industry. If you want to lose money, go into rebuilding. It takes the first 300 pianos to get to know the ropes. It takes a special mixture to be a good re-builder: brainy, manually dexterous, able to comprehend entire concepts, energetic.

A rim built narrower than the stretcher puts tension in the piano. Mason Hamlin builds them wide and then tightens it. Others build it straight so they fit just right. If the key bed were removed, will the beams fall out? In the old days the trees that were cut near rivers so they could float the logs down to be accessed. The water washed out the sap. This process of being wet in the river made a big difference in the sound violins. A well-rebuilt piano would cost more than buying a new piano. When Chickering, Sohmer and Steinway got together they talked about the secrets of piano making. Just like a car with a lot of mileage, it is often a wiser choice to buy a new piano.

A consumer with an investigative mind will call for advice. One who doesn't care will pay for an education. Chapter communication is an asset. Each person specializes in certain aspects. In the piano profession we cannot do everything. Even re-builders don't do everything. If you want to make money, learn how to do one specific skill, then tell others you do that and you will be swamped with work. Recommendation is by far the most lucrative way to make money.

Isaac travels a 50-mile radius. Wherever he is, he is only ten miles away from his home. Now he is trying to cut down to a 35-mile radius. Cut down on driving on your lifetime to make your life more valuable. Anyone who has customers close to home, do a customer swap with a tuner who lives farther. Trade for people with good grand pianos and pay well for them. It is never worth buying someone else's business. When we retire we cannot accumulate to live off the interest. In our business we must do this as we are working. We must make during our lifetime to pay for what we need, and slowly downsize. This is not a business that can be sold.

What if we had to uproot and move? All of the existing customer base would be left. In a new territory the way to restart would be to work for piano stores. Medical insurance is important. We don't have time to go to the doctors. For self-employed people, we are lucky to keep even half of our income.

The people who agree to do mid-range work still have huge expenses. Those customers will be looking for a cheaper guy. The people who want first-class concert work will pay \$400 for a tuning. If your tuning rate of \$95 gets you in the door, the middle layer of all the work you want is available without the need to find more clients. Tune quickly and focus on repair needs. On the paperwork, list what is most important, what should be done next and next. Set up a schedule with the customer for all the future work.

From year to year the work is endless. You will never see a perfectly playing piano. There will always be something that needs to be done. We perpetually educate our customers, but we also generously listen to their concerns. People want to be happy with their pianos. Since we keep a record of the piano conditions, when they call to say they want to sell or trade in their piano, we know what to tell the dealer.

You are an idiot slaving away by yourself. For small jobs you can hire help. For large jobs you can subcontract to the experts. If you start getting lazy and sloppy your attitude is wrong, and this can be dangerous. Soon you will be losing customers. Boring jobs like school situations are worth hiring out. If you do all your tuning for the school districts, you will not survive. Custodians have a room full of things

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to be repaired. A person with at least ten year's experience should work on school pianos as long as they continue attending PTG trainings.

*The less you get paid, the faster you learn.  
You're not supposed to earn when you learn.*

Apprentices have no loyalty to you whatsoever. The rule of the free market is that all customers are looking for a bargain.

A ninety-year old man went to a doctor and said that he wanted a sex enhancement and didn't care how much it cost.

The doctor said "it's a very difficult and costly procedure."

"Money is no problem."

"I want you to go back to your wife and discuss it and come back to me in a couple weeks."

"OK, how much is it going to be?"

"75,000."

"No problem. I'll be back in two weeks."

Two weeks later he went back and the doctor asked "Well, what did you decide?"

"We decided to remodel the kitchen."

### Bench Repairs

For a shop repair, pay somebody \$15/hour to repair, and charge \$35 or more an hour, and it takes 20 min. Isaac has a bucket with three drills.

1. #8 holes
2. anchor bolts
- 3.

Out of 4 legs on the bench, at least one of them will be drilled in the wrong direction of the grain so that when tightened the anchor bolt comes out. This is a good time to plug the hole with hammer shanks. To repair open-face pin-blocks, drill out the hole, insert pin-block plugs and then let the glue dry before re-drilling.

### Misc.

The best design for music desk is Samick. Isaac called and asked for a couple and was sent 100. Now he can repair music desks quickly and well, and he makes his 2%.

To order new legs they cost \$750 and two-month shipping wait. But other companies have a surplus of damaged parts. They throw parts in the garbage. There is an enormous amount of freight damage.

Ramsay in NY has molds from the 30's for original metal parts. They are the only ones in the world who make the old original wood parts. These are out-of-production parts. Isaac said, "Well, I think \$55 is too little for what you did for me. What would you like?" "We like sweets." So he sent them a couple boxes of chocolates and wine and established an excellent relationship with them. Valuable parts accumulated over the years become increasingly rare. When a person knows what the parts are, it's a breeze. If you lose one of a rare set, it is suicide unless you can find an equivalent replacement. Dealers junk old pianos, and Isaac salvages the rare parts.

Isaac picked up three tips from a class.

1. Needle-nosed pliers with a notch for grabbing beackets.
2. When two new strings are installed, how do you keep a mute in-between the two strings? Take a sharp razor blade and make a little notch and it will stay.
3. When voicing vertical pianos and lifting strings on the de capo bar, to eliminate the annoying sound on the tenor tools, tap with a brass tool near the pressure bar on the speaking length. The sound will smooth out without voicing.
4. After learning about a new tool in a class, make that tool immediately or you will never make it. If you sit on the tracks and think you know everything, you will be run over by the train because the competition is alive and well.

Investment of college education for four years should be paid back by their ensuing income.

In the self-employed world, nobody ever complains if you work an extra hour or two a day.

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If you are your own secretary, you have a couple extra hours of work. Clients don't like having you be on the cell phone if they are paying you by the hour.

[Isaac Sadigursky Zoom Meeting 2.17.21 on Vimeo](#)