

ACDA's 2021 Virtual National Conference: An Immersion into a World of Ideas

By Tim Sharp

I believe one of the most powerful forces at work in the world is an idea. When I think of the belief systems or courses of action that have been truly game-changing or even world-changing, those movements or theories are embodied in a single idea. More often than not, the genome of a movement is a simple and beautifully stated single idea.

I also hold the opinion that every book I read is the result of one single idea at work in the mind and pen of the author. When I pick up a new book, my pursuit is always to uncover that driving theory or idea, which results in an additional 100-600 pages or more of prose and occasional quotes, diagrams, and pictures that constitute that book. My family and acquaintances have commented to me regarding their amusement that I often display: many books open and half-read at the same time, as I read multiple books with an abundance of bookmarks and dogears in every partially read book. This might seem confusing and unfocused to some, but for me it is very natural. I am usually seeking the fundamental idea in each volume. The details beyond that single idea are significant and often instructional, but what I really am after is that transforming idea. If the author makes the case for that idea, I choose to either continue reading, or perhaps come back later for more layers of the same argument.

Earlier in my career I changed vocations, moving from teaching and administrative work in higher education to the profession of music recording, publication, and distribution. I remember my long talks with collegiate colleagues and deans about leaving the ivory tower and idea-driven world of academia, and moving to the profit motive-driven world of commerce, thinking I was somehow leaving the great ideas behind. It was a whirlwind of a decade that saw music distribution begin its migration from analog and paper distribution to digital distribution. It was my first real immersion into the real-world reality that innovation and ideas abound in every aspect of life, and the greatest motivator for our actions are ideas that work.

As I fast-forward to today, I think of our activity and programming through the American Choral Directors Association. Our signature events are our national and regional conference. A feature of these four-day annual events is our offering of interest sessions in areas that cover the interest spread of our diverse membership. Our attendees come to this event looking for those ideas that can move us forward and upward in our pursuit of excellence. The common complaint I hear from our conferences, year after year, is “I can’t get to everything.” We all seem to have an insatiable appetite for those motivational new ideas, and we don’t want to miss a single one.

As we head into conference season, we are preparing for our very first national virtual conference in response to the current COVID-19 environment. All of us have been making this shift to online and distance learning, and now the American Choral Directors Association will move into this educational and performance space with our biennial conference. We are

excited to continue the planning that will bring an explosion of new and motivating ideas into our thinking. And the good news is this year, for the first time in our recent history, we won't have to have that feeling of "I can't get to everything," because, indeed we will be able to get to everything! Let's look forward to one of the most innovative educational events of our lifetime.