



Prioritizing the Guitar: A Change In Outlook

By Jason Wilford

Over the years that I have been teaching guitar, I have had my share of students who express frustration with their self-proclaimed low ability to learn things on the guitar. Some of them feel that they aren't able to put aside enough time to practice; others are worried that they're not musical enough to play at the level they desire. I've even seen people completely convince themselves that they will never have any real talent on the instrument, and quit playing the guitar altogether! In every case, I've noticed one thing in common: All of these fears or worries are self-imposed excuses, and they can easily be reversed with a change in outlook.

To go into greater detail, I'll use the scenario of two separate guitarists in the middle of learning the exact same thing (could be a song, technique, or whatever). These could be students of a guitar instructor, or even just two different people learning free things on the internet. Guitarist A complains that there is no time to practice. Guitarist A has to work long hours, is involved in multiple activities outside of guitar lessons, and just can't get a moment alone. Let's assume Guitarist B does the exact same activities as Guitarist A. The difference is that Guitarist B doesn't complain about not being able to find the time to practice. In fact, this student seems to be finding more than enough available time to practice, even after their insanely busy day. Guitarist B has put in the effort to be proactive, and has found the time to work on their guitar skills every day, even if just for a little bit. The reasons behind this could be something as simple as not watching TV for 15 minutes, or choosing to go to bed a little later than usual. There are so many priorities in life, and so many variables, that the possibilities here are endless. What is apparent though, is that Guitarist B has placed the guitar a little higher on the priority list.

As mentioned previously, some guitar players constantly complain every week that they are so busy that they can't get the time to practice even once during the week. This is almost always (and I say almost, because sometimes things do come up) just an excuse, and is not the real problem. The real problem is that the guitar is very low on their list of priorities. Just as anything else in life, if you focus on a goal and work towards it, you will get closer to obtaining that goal. With the guitar, this translates into putting the time into practicing, playing, studying, and essentially doing anything that will help further your skills on the guitar. A big reason that so many people don't get to where they would like to be as a guitarist, is that they allow themselves to hide behind their own excuses. They don't put their time and energy into working on the areas of their playing where they would like to see the most improvement. This can translate into literally every area of your life: If you don't focus on improving things, odds are that they won't get any better.

My advice is that if you haven't thought about your goals as a guitarist, start thinking about that right away. Do you hope to play in a band? Would you like to just play as a hobby, but at a higher level? Do you want to become a better songwriter? Do you just want to be able to play along to the chords of your favourite songs, or would you like to be able to throw a fire-breathing guitar solo off of your fingers? These are just a few of the questions that you should be asking yourself. If you have trouble figuring out where to start with this, go out and find yourself a good guitar teacher (trust me, it will be more than worth your money). Remind yourself every day what your goals are, and work towards them in as many ways as you can. In the end this means not letting yourself make any more excuses so that you can finally place the guitar higher up on that priority list.