

Job Description for the 21st Century Piano Teacher

By Gayle Kowalchyk

The path I took to my career in independent piano teaching was not a straight one. Sure that I wanted to do *something* in music, but certain I didn't want to be a public school music teacher, I began my college career with a major in Music Therapy. One year later, I switched my major to Piano Performance. By my senior year, I had developed an interest in piano pedagogy and decided I wanted to teach class piano at the college level. I set my sights on a Masters Degree in Piano Pedagogy and upon graduation, got a job teaching class piano and piano pedagogy in Illinois. I was all set on my career path!

But along the way, I fell in love, got married and moved to Oklahoma. With no college job prospects in sight, I decided to open a piano studio in our home. My first student, Joel, was a transfer student in the third grade. We clicked immediately, and together we were off on a journey that continues to this day—Joel studied piano with me until he graduated from high school. He has continued to play piano and keep in touch with me since then.

There were other students like Joel, and it wasn't long before I was hooked. I loved teaching children and running my own studio. But never in a million years when I began college as a Music Therapy major would I have envisioned myself as an independent piano teacher!

I imagine that many independent piano teachers' career paths have wound around just as mine has. This got me wondering—if I saw a job advertisement for an independent piano teacher position, would I apply?



What would that job description entail? I then wrote the following as a hypothetical job announcement for someone seeking work as an independent piano teacher in the 21st century.

Wanted

Long-term position open for someone looking for challenging permanent work in a changing world. Candidates must possess excellent communication and organizational skills and be willing to work variable hours including afternoons, evenings and some weekends.

Responsibilities

Must be able to work with a variety of ages and levels and assume responsibility for the final end product. Must schedule all lesson times, reschedule lesson times, and once again reschedule for clients who are continually adding other activities to their schedules. Candidates for this position must have their own studio space, piano, music library and other needed supplies. Aside from scheduled lesson times, candidates should devote part of each week to lesson preparation and practicing the piano.

Wages and Compensation

Candidate will set his or her own wages, but must also bill for them and collect payment. Must be prepared to handle clients who pay late and clients who ask for family discounts. All continuing education is paid for by the client and will include out-of-town travel. During this time, wages will be lost unless other arrangements have been made.

Knowledge of Technology

Candidates must have access to a computer, the Internet and a teenager who can show them how to use these things.

Possibility for Advancement and Promotion

None. The job remains the same for years, but candidates must consistently retrain and update their skills so that their clients no longer need them.

Benefits

While no health or dental insurance, no pension, no paid holidays and no stock options are offered (unless you create your own), this job supplies limitless opportunities for changing lives one at a time, instilling the love of music in the hearts of many and in general, making the world a better place to live.

Obviously, all of us have accepted this position! Congratulations on choosing a career that touches the lives of many and enriches the world in which we live. There is none other like it. ❖