

I am humbled, speechless and beyond thrilled to be honored in this way, by my own colleagues and by an organization I thoroughly respect because the board not only developed an inclusive mission statement but, more importantly, continue to put that statement into action with thought out events and singular opportunities for teachers and our students. I am honored to be a member of CETA and their focus on the mission prompted me to get more involved and to join the board as your treasurer several years ago.

You know, one important fact I've learned over the last 36 years of being an educator and would like to share tonight is that it is NOT our job to tell other peoples' stories. It's our job as theatre educators to ensure these stories get told, that our students and our community are heard, have a place, and a safe space. I encourage us all to push the envelope; take a risk; put non-traditional stories into your season, and if you can't cast the show appropriately, then let's commit to teaching the plays in the safety of our classrooms.

I would also ask us, as great educators, to also be willing to be educated - about cultures, religions, identities, mental and physical health, gender issues. You're probably already doing this, but I WANT to know more about the kids and their world. I used the pandemic shutdown to commit to reading at least one play a week from the breadth of diverse plays that I had always "meant to" read.

Another important item I'd like to share tonight centers around the work/life balance that I know we all strive to achieve. I'm going to go out on a limb here - and declare that instead, we SHOULD keep our jobs out of balance! Family and your and their physical and mental health MUST come first. I learned the hard way - please don't.

I started as the teacher who did everything, shows, as many festivals and competitions as I could find and FUND and I remember the day my wife expressed her concern that maybe I could, umm, cut back a bit. And so I did. I cut back. A bit.

Then, in 2007, we found out my wife was pregnant with not one baby but two - something even my friends here probably didn't know. On the night of a performance, she was rushed to emergency, and we lost one of the two with the potential that I might lose all three if they didn't immediately get her into surgery. I realized that night that while "the show must go on," we all need to prepare our students for it to go on without us. Since that day, I have ensured that student assistant directors and stage managers are fully trained to continue the show entirely in their hands.

Fate, the pandemic, and physical and mental health issues continued to plague my family through 2019 thru 2020 and on through today. This has more forcefully secured these beliefs. The result has honestly been wonderful - the students know the show is THEIR show, not mine.

Family, time and commitment to our loved ones, must always come first. Forget the attempts at a work-life balance. Trust that we must have in life includes an imbalanced relationship with work. The best gift I've given myself and my family and my students is the grace and courage to accept that my shows and my work have to come second.

We are arts teachers and educators, already changing lives and supporting our marginalized communities every single day. Instead of trying to drive four or five cars at one time, how about we explore pulling over a bit more often, spend quality time with someone, and allowing for connection and recovery. We can drive a lot further, safer, and better.

Can I ask us all to do just one thing? My family isn't here right now because, well, if ya know, ya know...Can I just have 30 more seconds and ask everyone to text I love you or thank you right now. No qualifiers, no explanations. Just text, "I love you and I can't wait to see you and spend time with you again soon." Let's all do it.

Awesome. Before I close, I would just like to thank my incredible wife for all of the opportunities to be a good husband and father, my own children for always believing that I'm not as crazy as I sometimes act, my students for simply allowing and accepting me into their worlds and cultures, Amanda Swann, Gale Caswell, and Martin Rodriguez for being the best friends a guy could ever hope for. You have gotten me through several of the very darkest of times. You are all so much more worthy of this award than I am and I am humbled to even be in your company. And finally, I'd like to thank Sheridan Cole, my high school drama teacher, and Peter Grego, my college directing professor, who are still close friends - yes, they are both still alive - how dare you! I will forever be grateful for all you taught me and so this award belongs to you both as well.

Lastly, I don't know about you but I am really awful at accepting that I "deserve" awards - deserve a vacation, or a drink, maybe? - but deserving this or any other award? No. Ever have that same inner voice? We truly need to silence that self-deprecating narrative in our heads and just say thank you. And so, I will conclude now by expressing my most humble and sincere, THANK YOU. Truly, I thank you all.

William Goldyn