

Keeping It Cool

Arturo Toscanini (1867 – 1957), an Italian conductor, became one of the most acclaimed musicians of the late 19th century and 20th century. He was renowned for his brilliant intensity, his restless perfectionism, his phenomenal ear for orchestral detail and resonance, and his photographic memory.

As music director of the NBC Symphony Orchestra, he became a household name through his radio and television broadcasts and many recordings of the operatic and symphonic repertoire. He is widely considered to have been one of the greatest conductors of the 20th century.

One evening, shortly before a major concert, a member of the orchestra approached Toscanini with an expression of terror on his face.

“Maestro,” the musician cried, “my instrument is not working properly. I cannot reach the note of E-flat. Whatever will I do? We are to begin in a few moments.”

Toscanini looked at the man with amazement. Then he smiled and placed an arm around his shoulders.

“My friend,” the maestro replied. “Do not worry about it. The note E-flat does not appear anywhere in the music that you will be playing this evening.”

That story reveals (1) Toscanini’s command of the work to be performed that evening, (2) his knowledge of the part to be played by each member of the team, and (3) his thoughtful analysis of what an associate believed to be a calamity of significant proportion.



When you find yourself facing an unexpected crisis, take a moment or two before you leap into action or drop into despair. Consider whether the problem’s effects will make themselves known right away, or next week, or next year.

Like Toscanini’s violinist, don’t panic over a problem that may not need immediate attention.

Or, put another way, keep your worries in perspective.

– Beecher Hunter