

## “How can I help?”

The focus my next two article submissions will be on leadership as it applies to the music classroom and rehearsal. It appears that as we face current social and political challenges it becomes ever more apparent that we need to model strong leadership skills in our teaching and advocating of our art form.

When I speak of leadership in terms of music education I am not referring to the position of administrator or supervisor. I am referring to the teacher that encourages program development and employs an organized sequence of instruction and an unwavering quest for excellence. I am referring to teachers that inspire aesthetic and creative endeavors. I am referring to the teachers that spend countless hours researching and selecting music that is educationally sound for their ensembles. Leadership in terms of finding solutions to obstacles and challenges and not giving in to what would be the path of least resistance. I am referring to a teacher that is a constant advocate for the profession and displays a passion for their work with genuine concern for the people with whom they work. Leadership in terms of implementing a variety of teaching strategies when introducing varied musical concepts.

There is a story from Newsweek magazine in which the president of Hyatt Hotels is quoted: *“If there is anything I have learned in my 27 years in the service industry it is this: 99 percent of all employees want to do a good job. How they perform is simply a reflection of the one for whom they work.”* Our students and our community need us to lead them to greater musicianship and understanding of our art. Our community needs us to show them that a good music education is vital for every child. This takes a teacher/leader that is prepared to share his/her experience and vision, and to communicate the result of that experience and vision to a great variety of constituents in music education and society.

The teacher who aspires to excel is almost by default a visionary and, thus a leader. Without vision there is no goal, without a goal there is no progress, and without progress the program becomes stagnant. (Raessler, 2003) To be a musical leader we must show our students where to go musically. Our words and our gestures, the meaningful and efficient lessons we create and prepare must lead to greater musical understanding. We must select repertoire that allows us to teach and connect concepts of musicianship and technical skills that result in a greater realization of our art. The development of technique must always have a higher calling than just itself. Technique is the means to something more musical and

meaningful. Teaching technique should always be done with the bigger picture in mind. How will it help us realize composer intent, how will it lead the musical phrase, how will it help impart the historical significance of the piece. When addressing intonation lead the student to a greater understanding of how to improve. Address acoustic tendencies and the tendencies of their instrument and the partials they are playing. These are examples of teaching with vision and leadership.

Kids are not age-deficient humans. (Wis, 2007) They are capable of many things given the opportunity. I am amazed when I watch my daughter play a video game that requires multiple levels of information processing instantly. She encourages me to play because she thinks it is humorous to watch my frustration and ultimate failure. She makes this all look so easy. If they can display mastery in this area what are they capable of musically if we teach and lead with a belief that they can achieve a higher level of musical understanding if we lead with an efficient process of attaining these musical goals.

You have heard me speak before on the aspect of balance between process and product in our teaching. As music teachers all of us face the responsibility of preparing public performances. After all part of what we do is still about entertainment. Process and product go hand in hand. It is completely unrealistic to have one without the other. We must do more than manage the notes, rhythms, expressive markings, articulations, etc., on the page. We must lead our students toward a more comprehensive understanding of the music we rehearse and learn by designing lessons that expand their knowledge base and musical development. In others words lead by teaching not just rehearsing.

The music education profession desperately needs leaders who are at the front of their profession developing a plan for the success of their music programs. The life of a leader is a constant quest for excellence. Those who don't care about excellence or growth are not going to be leaders. It is that simple. An effective leader is a person who always shows respect for others and their opinions and, consequently, gains their respect.

Ramona Wis in her book *"The Conductor as Leader"* states that what makes great leadership can be boiled down to one overriding theme: *"It's not about me."* It is not about what I can achieve or what kind of ensemble I can develop; it's about gaining an awareness of what needs to be done to develop the people I am given to lead.

When we think of the traditional model of a conductor we think of an autocratic or dictatorial presence that employs any means to ensure a good performance. This domineering personality is usually considered a strong leader. Just as we often relate professional recognition, stature, titles and awards as evidence of a conductor's ability to lead. There is also an assumption that true leaders conduct only professional ensembles or collegiate ensembles. I am more impressed with the leadership displayed by the middle school music teacher that finds a way to put together a lunchtime choir so her students have a choral ensemble experience.

John Maxwell defines leadership as “influence nothing more, nothing less.” (Maxwell, 1993) All of us have influence on others in multiple ways and areas. We have all known the quiet leaders who by their very attitude and approach to life have taught us a great deal. Perhaps the middle school lunch time choir rehearsal was what influenced you to make music your life's work.

An overriding theme of Ramona Wis's book is that if we use our influence in the most positive way-focusing on the needs of the individual musicians as well as the ensemble, and on the integrity of our art-we are leading by serving. This approach to leadership, known as servant leadership, has at its core the fundamental question ***“How can I help?”*** What must I do to increase the level of musicianship in my students? How can I influence their musical decisions? How can I help my community understand the importance of music in all of our lives? How can I increase my audience's appreciation for the music that is important for my students to know?

Serving doesn't mean giving in or letting students do what they want. Instead we must strive to give them what they need. If students want a day off it means that we need to find a new and fresh approach to our teaching. If they are not focused and the rehearsal is noisy then we need to find challenging material that keeps them focused or change our rehearsal pace and approach. Serving does not mean giving into wants and complaints but to assess and reflect on their needs.

The idea of servant leader is probably how most of us made our first contributions in our chosen field. How many of you volunteered to help organize the band, orchestra or choral library? Many of you took on roles as fundraising chairperson or equipment managers. You did this because you wanted to help and you knew that you had some abilities that would benefit your organization. These were ways that you could make a difference in your band, choir or orchestra. This was leading by serving.

Also we must not confuse authority with leadership. Along with leadership often comes the responsibility of making policy or decisions that others must follow. It is easy to focus on the power and not think of the influence that such a position may hold. We have all experienced people in positions of authority that are poor leaders. *True leadership goes beyond managing people to growing them; true leadership recognizes authority as an opportunity to lead, not as a license to rule others.* (Wis, 2007)

There is a big difference between managing and leading. Managing is about tasks, things and efficiency, while leadership is about people and growth. A manager is concerned with presenting and preparing a respectable concert program as efficiently as possible. A leader would rather spend more time preparing a lesson that ensures personal growth for each individual musician while developing the ensemble. Musicianship and musicality become the focus. Managing the classroom or ensemble is an important task and very much a part of who we are and what we do. Being a good manager does not necessarily make us a good leader.

In many ways our undergraduate and graduate training is all about developing the manager in all of us. Methods courses, pedagogy, education courses, seminars, conducting and even student teaching help us develop the necessary managerial skills to assume a position in our schools. To do lists, tasks and organizing events is managing, dealing with and developing the human factor is leadership.

Warren Bennis, Professor of Business at the University of Southern California, possibly said it best:

*The manager administers; the leader innovates.*

*The manager maintains; the leader develops.*

*The manager relies on system; the leader relies on people.*

*The manager imitates; the leader originates.*

*The manager accepts the status quo; the leader challenges it.*

*The manager does things right; the leader does the right things.*

(Bennis, 1989)

There is no such thing as constancy in education. The political realities of education require a nimbleness to adapt to changing circumstances. The ability to negotiate change is a key attribute of leadership.

To become a music educator at any level of the educational spectrum is quite challenging. The music teacher/leader must also be a problem solver and learn to persevere.

Leaders must possess the information, facts, analysis, foresight, political sensitivity, pragmatism, and short-and long-term vision to know why, when and more importantly how to make the right decision. Leadership is not something we do but rather something we are, it is important to develop a style that is effective and matches your own personal qualities.

Great teachers are not necessarily the ones who are the most knowledgeable. They are the individuals who can best communicate their knowledge to others. (Raessler 2003)

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