

“Students do what Students see!”

This is the second article and final installment of my thoughts on leadership as it applies to us as teachers/conductors in the classroom. The focus here will be modeling and leading by example. Modeling is still the most effective means of teaching and leading. “Do as I say not as I do” has never had a place in education. (Lautzenheiser 2005)

As educators we are very much aware of the importance of modeling when introducing new concepts as part of the teaching process. Modeling desired behavior is also critical in terms of teacher leadership. If you are a parent you already know how your children watch every move you make. Say what you want but they will mirror your actions, beliefs and thoughts first. Our students will do the same, come to rehearsal late and your students will feel that they can as well, cut corners and so will your students, show up for rehearsal not completely prepared and so will your students.

John Wooden, legendary UCLA coach and teacher regularly quoted a poem:

*No written word
Nor spoken plea
Can teach our youth
What they should be
Nor all the books
On all the shelves
It's what the teachers
Are themselves.*

(Author unknown)

Former U.S. Army general and secretary of state Colin Powell observed, “You can write all the memos and give all the motivational speeches you want, but if the rest of the people in your organization don't see you putting forth your very best effort every single day, they won't either.”

As a leader the first person we need to lead is ourselves. Our standards of excellence should be higher than those we set for our students. We must first work harder and longer to assure the success of our organization.

I did not watch all of the HBO series entitled *Band of Brothers* but from the few episodes that I was able to see a prominent theme of leadership was very obvious. Each episode dealt with the men of Easy Company and the different officers that were placed in positions of leaderships. I remember one episode in which an officer was placed in command that had no prior experience in battle but had political connections that helped him advance to his present position of leadership. Most of the time he was nowhere to be found. He separated himself from his men by taking long walks. He avoided making decisions and appeared to be completely unaware of their situation and offered no help to improve the production of his unit. When it came time for battle, chaos ensued. The people he was to lead had no respect or confidence in him and therefore the unit failed. He was instantly relieved of command and another officer who had been assuming responsibility for the unit was placed in command and positive results occurred.

A positive leadership example that was a constant throughout the series was of an officer named Dick Winters who came up through the ranks and advanced to the rank of Major. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and was considered by his men to be “the best combat leader in World War II.” Winters helped his men to perform at their highest level. He always led from the front, setting the example and taking the same risks that the men he was responsible for did. His leadership philosophy was “officers go first.” When his troops needed to assault an enemy position Winters was in front leading the charge. Easy Company was one group of many brave and outstanding units that fought in WWII. What set them apart was their leadership. The leaders of Easy Company all held the philosophy that when leaders show the way with the right actions their followers will copy them. “People do what people see.” (Maxwell 2007)

What we do does not have life or death consequences as what the men of Easy Company faced. But their philosophy can be extended to the classroom, “*students do what students see.*” As the leader of our organization we are responsible for assuming control and making decisions in a timely manner. Take responsibility for the direction of your organization. Be accessible and available to your students. Demonstrate a high level of musicianship and scholarship.

Leadership begins when we come to each rehearsal completely prepared and ready to rehearse. Be prepared for aspects of your rehearsal that will demand your most attention. Organize rehearsals with specific objectives in mind and timely pacing so as to maximize learning. All of these are aspects of outstanding leadership.

Being a leader does not always mean we will have all of the answers. The master educator realizes that they do not have all the answers to every question. They are quick to acknowledge that they may not know the answer but they are willing to do the research to find the answers. (Lautzenheiser 2005)

There is no magical or mystical spell that inhabits us and makes us all knowing and wise. There will always be trial and error. We must be open to taking some risks that may or may not lead to the desired educational outcomes. The very act of preparing and implementing goals and objectives, unique learning opportunities, comprehensive and cross-curricular lessons, finding new and interesting literature that challenges our students musically and intellectually is educational leadership.

Leadership is caught more than taught. We learn effective leadership by modeling others. I am sure that all of us have had those individuals in our lives that have made and continue to make a positive impression on how we conduct business. I feel very fortunate to have some really outstanding mentors and models from which I have “caught” various aspects of leadership: (Maxwell 2007)

- I caught perseverance by watching my parents face the daily grind while making a life for us.
- I caught intensity by observing Bob Boedges’ passionate leadership.
- I caught encouragement by watching how Tom Poshak values people.
- I caught vision by seeing Herb Duncan make his ideas become reality.
- I caught dedication and service by observing Bob Nordman’s commitment to the youth of St. Louis.

This list could go on for several pages and I continue to learn from the above and others as well.

A survey conducted by Opinion Research Corporation for Ajilon Finance asked American workers to select the one trait that was the most important aspect of a good leader. The number one response was: *Leading by example*. The number two response was: *Strong ethics or morals*. (Maxwell 2007) More than anything people and students want leaders whose beliefs and actions line up. They want good models who lead from the front.

It is important and adds to our credibility when we continue to perform outside of school. It is even more vital to play and sing with your students at school. Demonstrate often in various capacities and genres. Conference and clinic attendance is important to stay current. Bringing clinicians to our program is a

tremendous opportunity for our students. It also tells our students that we are still interested in learning from others.

In my previous article I mentioned that Maxwell believes leadership is simply a matter of *influence*. Combining that definition with the responsibility of leadership, *people development*, it is easy to see that ours is a matter of motivating the people we serve. We must learn to find ways to encourage and show our students that we believe in them. People tend to become what the most important people in their lives think they will become. (Maxwell 1993)

Great baseball managers have a knack for making players think they are better than they are. They are committed to create in each player a positive image of themselves. They let the players know that they believe in them and that they trust them to do a good job. This motivates the players to play their best. (Maxwell 1993) Every leader wants to bring out the best in his people. Every successful leader knows that encouragement is the best way to accomplish this goal.

One of the most difficult challenges directors face has little to do with the actual teaching of music; it concerns the establishment of a positive learning atmosphere that encourages the members of the group to contribute without fear of embarrassment or reprimand. (Lautzenheiser 2005) This environment is our responsibility. We must create a culture of quality through leadership modeling. We must put our people first. It is our job to find and release the creativity and talent among our students.

In recent years the move has been toward a flatter hierarchical structure, where followers (in our case, ensemble members) take on more responsibility and provide more input into the many aspect of operations. The leader functions more as coordinator of efforts, an expert guide who helps individuals achieve a mutually beneficial goal. There is greater involvement by all participants in the organization and theoretically, more accountability, leading to a deeper, more meaningful experience. Followers own the process more and therefore, feel more invested. Put simply, the focus is much less on ME versus THEM, much more on US. (Wis 2007)

Leadership is not necessarily something that we are born with. Nor is leadership an exclusive club. Leadership skills can be learned and acquired.

Music Education is a profession and a profession signifies a way of life rather than an hourly employ. The job is only part of our profession. The word profession is

defined in Webster Dictionary as “a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation,” whereas a job is “a regular or hourly remunerative position.” A profession is a way of life; leadership is also a way of life. True professionals make their life their art. (Maxwell 1993)

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