

The Real Key to True Leadership

Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser

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Our chief want in life is somebody who shall make us do what we can.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

How many times have we all heard the helpless statement, “I just can’t seem to motivate my students?” That’s absolutely the truth! Nobody can motivate another person. We can manipulate, coerce, inspire, urge, threaten, beg, demand, command, please, order, instruct, - but we cannot motivate them. Motivation is, at all times, an individual choice. Knowing this, we can quickly deduct the false data of such a statement as “He is a great motivator” or “She can really motivate her group.” Not so! The person in the first example and the person in the second example are totally responsible for their choice of behavior, just like you and me and everyone else.

If the preceding paragraph is accurate—and it is!—then why are some teachers successful in (what appears to be) motivating students, while others seem to always be lacking in his important talent? If we back up a bit, some fundamental

understanding might help make this very clear. Motivation is a derivative of the Latin word *motere*, which means “to move, to create action.” Obviously, we have carried this into our language with motor, motion, motivation.

If we want there to be motivation, there must be action; there must be movement.

In fact, under close examination you will probably discover most motivation comes after the action. The feeling of accomplishment, the desire to go on, the commitment to achievement, is usually a result of some action. Without the initial movement, there will be little, if any, motivation. As educators, we can quickly describe these great teachers we have seen “in action,” and find they almost serve as a catalyst in causing others to “take action”. The motivation (movement) is now in full swing. (It’s analogous to priming the pump!)

The only absolute certainty of any motivation in our control—ourselves! That is a

huge responsibility we often overlook in our daily teaching techniques. The skeptics can argue all they want, but history clearly shows it is always the leader, or teacher, who is responsible for the level of success of the groups;

herein lies the real key to successful motivation.

There is much to share with our students about this discovery. When students chide, “You don’t motivate us!” You can congratulate them on their insight and explain that

their own success in life will not be determined by you and some false form of motivation (manipulation), but they must be directly responsible for their attitude, discipline, and motivation just as you are for yours! Now that’s an educational breakthrough that can benefit each and every part of their lives!

Although I have never much enjoyed negative people, an individual’s attitude, or mind set, is certainly a personal choice, but when one chooses to be

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an educator and carries this negative attitude into the classroom, it then serves as “the standard” for the students—and, rest assured, they will learn to adapt it to their own behavior. Once again, the mirror squarely reminds us of our need to create action, be positive, set high standards, and on and on. It is not going to happen until we motivate ourselves!

This reality is beautifully described in the following magnificent quote by Haim Ginott:

I have come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration, I can humiliate or honor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or de-humanized.

Great isn't it?! Wisdom is always so simple, so direct, so honest! You might want to share this with some of your colleagues—and you know “just the one” who needs to read it, too!

Plato once said, “We will be braver and better if we engage and inquire than if we indulge in the

idle fancy that we already know—or that it is of no use seeking to know what we do not know.” As educators, it is our “mission” to seek out new knowledge, strive to grow personally, and set the example for those who will follow in our footsteps. The education process begins with us!

Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser is a well-known name in the music education world as a teacher, clinician, author, composer, consultant, adjudicator, and above all, a trusted friend to anyone interested in working with young people in developing a desire for excellence. His own career involves ten years of successful college band directing at Northern Michigan University, the University of Missouri, and New Mexico State University. Following three years in the music industry, he created Attitude Concepts for Today, an organization that manages workshops, seminars, and convention speaking engagements focusing on the pathway-to-excellence. Tim presently holds the Earl Dunn Distinguished Lecturer position at Ball State University. Tim is the Executive Director of Education for Conn-Selmer, Inc., and he serves as the national spokesperson for MENC's “Make a Difference with Music” program. His books The Art of Successful Teaching, The Joy of Inspired Teaching, Music Advocacy and Student Leadership, and Everyday Wisdom for Inspired Teaching are best sellers. He is co-author of Hal Leonard's popular band method Essential Elements - 2000.