Solution-Driven Leadership: The Ultimate Choice

Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser

Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser will present "Spotlighting the Success Concepts for the Young Band Director" on Tuesday, July 28, 10:45 a.m.

How many times have we heard the haunting phrase, "You are either part of the problem or you are part of the solution." In choosing our student leaders, it is vitally important to select exemplary role models who are solution-oriented, rather than problem-plagued.

Students who wish to serve in a leadership capacity must first understand true leadership requires an individual to do more than his/her counterparts; it is about serving others. Student leaders are the doers, they are the people who roll up their sleeves go to work.

Even after an extensive explanation of the personal and group expectations, I often wonder if the hopeful student leader really understands the level of commitment, dedication, patience, and personal sacrifice needed, required, and even demanded? For those students who wish to take on the challenges of leadership, and for those directors who are looking for the student who has the right leadership qualifications, review the following thoughts; these are suggested requisites in selecting and developing the solution-driven leader.

Focus on the solution, not the problem.

A gifted leader will seek an objective/solution and then begin to move in the direction of the given goal, rather than dwelling on the current status and all the reasons the organization cannot reach the objective. This comes about by using a clear and concise blueprint of solution-driven vs. problem-driven plan of action.

The solution-driven leader (SDL) spotlights the strengths of the followers and emphasizes what is already working. Instead of quickly pointing out everything that is wrong, ineffective, inefficient, and preventing forward progress, the leader will first make a point to recognize the various aspects of the project (including the people) that give it credibility and make it worth the follower's investment of time and energy. The benefit package must be obvious or there will be no ownership of responsibility by the followers, thus no group cooperation and lackluster participation.

The solution-driven leader sets a stage of open communication and personal involvement. Too often we look for those we can blame for the present predicament/s; such behavior can garner initial agreement and emotional approval, but it has nothing to do with solving the problem. It is, at best, a momentary "feel good," and rarely serves the group or the leader. The SDL will create a safe-open forum of communication with everyone and begin to listen to any and all suggestions in an effort to attain a

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better outcome; in turn everyone begins to become more involved in the implementation of a plan that reflects the group's thoughts and ideas.

The solution-driven leader keeps everyone focused on the goal. We often sabotage ourselves by dwelling on the opposite of what we want. Noted psychologist/philosopher, Abraham Maslow said, "The mind will lead us in the direction of its our dominant thought." If we spend our time thinking about why something will not work, we are leading ourselves to a predictable failure. A SDL will continue to communicate the desired goal to the members of the group; what the mind can conceive, the person can achieve. We must picture high level achievement in our minds at all times, and be realistic in the assessment of what it will take to reach the goal. This is one of the fundamental responsibilities of every SDL; focus the energy of the followers on the anticipated results.

The solution-driven leader creates energy and enthusiasm. The best way a leader can create energy and enthusiasm for a group is to model positive energy and sincere enthusiasm. This does not necessarily mean assuming the role of a cheerleader, or extending shallow ingenuine compliments. It merely means demonstrating a genuine CARE for; the people, the goal, and the welfare of everyone involved. A lethargic, negative leader will drain energy from any group and he/she will amplify the problems facing the organization; on the other hand an enthusiastic positive leader will infuse the group with the needed energy to move forward and discover the endless possibilities available as a result of group cooperation. A SDL understands the secret to all leadership, the one aspect over which he/she has complete control in every situation; the ability to choose one's attitude at every moment of every day.

The solution-driven leader creates an atmosphere conducive to effective and efficient problem-solving while giving continuous renewal to everyone involved. Being a leader does not mean "having all the answers." Young leaders often think they are responsible for every solution, answer, and resolution; such logic can result in frustration, confusion, and even delusion. A perceptive and effective solution-driven leader will encourage an ongoing exchange of helpful ideas from those who are part of the group. Every suggestion will be met with genuine appreciation, and the communication will be used as an opportunity to confirm the value of the person involved. (If we inadvertently or purposefully reject someone's suggestions, we stifle his/her creativity and create a barrier for further communication.) Maintaining an open, honest, safe environment for group problem-solving is seen by many as the most important contribution of any solution-driven leader.

Young people are often enamored by the "idea" of leadership and the personal benefits they perceive to be a part of the leadership position. Choose those who can comprehend the "reality" of leadership, those who are willing to go the extra mile on behalf of their peers. The key to leadership success is, and always will be: POSITIVE ROLE MODELING!

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.