

The Personal Values of a Student Leader

Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser

When asked, “Who would like to serve in a leadership role as we continue to move forward with our band program?” do the students really comprehend the extended effort and energy required to fulfill the responsibility-agenda that lies ahead?

All-too-often an enthusiastic young want-to-be leader will eagerly assume the coveted title only to be quickly disillusioned following several unsuccessful attempts to garner group support while trying to accomplish the given project. Personal discouragement leads to “giving up,” and (unfortunately) all future leadership opportunities are avoided based on past experiences of perceived failure.

Do we properly prepare our students for “what lies ahead” when they choose to become student leaders? Or do we simply (and randomly) pick this-or-that person to fill the given position? Are your leaders selected via a popularity vote, or are they chosen because of their abilities, skills, talents, and INTENTIONS?

Leadership is made up of two philosophical components:

1. Leadership is FOR GIVING.
2. Leadership is FORGIVING.

Many young people see a leadership position as the chance to be in charge, to tell others what to do, to delegate work, and to put themselves in a posture of authority. Nothing could be further from the truth. The essence of an effective leader lies in the student’s ability to serve others, to create success for the people in the organization. It is the opportunity to give, to contribute, to roll-up one’s sleeves and begin moving in a positive forward direction. Whether it is straightening the chairs, putting the stands away, creating a colorful bulletin board, or working with someone on a musical passage, the leader is the person who does: “What needs to be done, when it needs to be done, whether he/she wants to do it or not, without anybody asking.”

The second aspect of leadership centers on the concept of forgiving. When something goes awry (and it will), many young leaders want to react to the situation by reprimanding the followers for their inability to fulfill the leader’s suggestions. However, the true leader will forgive the people involved and proactively refocus the energies to correct the problem and quickly get back-on-course. Psychologically (and intellectually) we know, “People do not get better by making them feel worse.” All-too-often, there is a tendency for young leaders to chastise those who fall short of the given assignment; nothing could be more detrimental to the trust-relationship necessary for future success in any leader/follower relationship. The solution is simple: forgive, correct, and proceed forward.

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When selecting those chosen students who will be working with their peers in a leadership capacity, look beyond their group popularity, their musical gifts, and even their academic standing; begin to observe how they interact with others, and pay special attention to those who always are considerate of their fellow students and willing to serve those by going above and beyond the call of duty. These are the candidates who are most likely to succeed as leaders; they “live” the values required of every contributing leader by giving and forgiving.

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.