

The Band Director as a Leader

A Six-step Teaching Style Template for Success

Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser

As we examine today's most successful directors/leaders, there are some obvious key characteristics that serve as the foundation cornerstones we can highlight and adapt to our own situations:

1 Present an inspiring and compelling mission

Instead of merely "working to get better," outstanding directors constantly communicate the group's shared goals. While elevating the musical standards they create an ongoing awareness of various ways to support the ensemble's vision. The long range goals are always at the forefront of their communication, thus allowing the students to focus on the self-imposed behaviors required to achieve the organizational mission.

2 Demonstrate proven disciplines necessary to create group synergy

The emphasis is on the "power of the people" rather than the strict authoritarian rule of the director. The energy of the students serves as the fuel for forward motion. Discipline is an outgrowth of the commitment of the group members. Instead of "being told what to do," the students are challenged to develop their own parameters of behavior that will support the

program from bottom to top.

Positive discipline renewal comes from an ongoing series of group questions such as:

"What is working well for us and why is it working?"

"How could we better serve the people, the group, the goals?"

"What behavior will best support those around us?"

"What behaviors are counter-productive? How can we alter them?"

Blame is discouraged; solution options are encouraged.

3 Put people first

The young musicians, students, members of the group are the source of unlimited growth and development. It becomes the director's responsibility to unleash the knowledge, creativity and talent inherent in every member. This requires an ongoing interaction with everyone associated with the program. An open and honest line of communication confirms the director's concern for the welfare of the people.

4 Model a high degree of self-responsibility

The "Do as I say not as I do," theme is not effective in today's educational setting. It is important for the director to take responsibility for mistakes and

share credit for successes. Modeling is still the most potent method of teaching/leading, therefore it is imperative the successful director demonstrates trust, appreciation, caring, and concern. The master teacher/educator understands it is not necessary to have the answer to all questions. Strength often comes from saying, "I don't know. Let's find the answer together."

5 Have high expectations for results

The modern-day successful band directors are both people-oriented and results-oriented. They focus on the dual tasks of "taking care of people" and "creating results through those people." While accepting who people are, they do not accept behavior that does not support the goal of quality. This delicate balance is an ongoing learning process for the director and the ensemble; it is constantly changing, shifting, becoming.

6 Create a culture of quality through leadership/modeling

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

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group to contribute without fear of embarrassment, reprimand, pain, etc. If the students assume a defensive posture to protect themselves, it becomes impossible to access their creative potential. However, if the director consistently models a forward-focused-discipline, a remarkable shift in attitudes, energy, and performance can be felt. There will be a dramatic improvement recognized in every facet of the rehearsal climate and performance achievement.

The style of teaching we choose is a very personal decision; it usually is an outgrowth of our own educational background. “We don’t teach as we’re taught to teach; we teach as we are taught.” We tend to replicate the style of our most influential mentors as well as draw on our own learning experiences to create our own approach to teaching.

As we add more data to our collection of teaching tools, it becomes advisable to expand our leadership skills accordingly. Yet this area of personal growth seems to be the most difficult, the most challenging, and often (unfortunately) the most ignored. It takes an open mind, a willing spirit, and an accepting attitude. It is simply easier and less threatening to add more curriculum content without shifting the teaching context. However, if we expect our students to reach a higher level of musical expertise, we are responsible for modeling the characteristics needed to achieve this end, and this involves change.

We all know what changes need to be made to advance our band programs—larger budgets, better schedules, more administrative support, greater

community awareness, or a host of other possibilities. However, these changes will not take place until we change. If, in fact, the band program is a reflection of the band director, then to manifest changes in the program we must first manifest changes within ourselves. And it is more than changing the surface behavior; it involves a rigorous identity review and a constant evolutionary improvement of our teaching philosophies.

In Stephen Covey’s popular book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, he writes, “Change—real change—comes from the inside out. It doesn’t come from hacking at the leaves of attitude and behavior with quick fix personality ethic techniques. It comes from striking at the root—the fabric of our thought, the fundamental, essential paradigms, which give definition to our character and create the lens through which we see the world.”

Perhaps the most important question we must ask is, “What do I want the band to be?” Whatever answers are generated by this question can be transferred to the

correlating question, “What are the characteristics of the band director who can create this envisioned program?” It is not enough to simply answer these introspective questions, we must become our answers.

Whether it is a demand for excellence or a desire for excellence; there is one very obvious commonality, EXCELLENCE. The journey to excellence requires a delicate balance of demand and desire. If the destination is reached at the expense of the group members, we must re-evaluate our leadership style. If

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In the words of Carl Jung, distinguished psychologist/philosopher, “The human is doomed to make choices.” As directors, teachers and leaders, the choices we make shapes the life of every musician in the band.

STRIKE UP THE BAND...

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.