

Leadership Isn't Something We Do; It Is Something We Are

Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser

It was just thirty years ago the STUDENT LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP began. Many directors were asking about some kind of training program to prepare their young leaders for the challenges they would face along the leadership journey. After three decades of presenting several thousand of these clinic-sessions, some things are blatantly evident. Perhaps this discovered data will help YOU and YOUR students in creating a positive and productive program of student leadership that is certain to benefit everyone.

First and foremost, LEADERSHIP is not something we DO, but it is something we ARE. One does not attend a leadership workshop and then proceed to go out and “save-the-world.” Any “training session” merely serves as a window-of-awareness affording the participants an opportunity to experience the possibilities available if they are willing to pay the price of personal commitment and dedication in accomplishing the given goal.

I. Taking a class in swimming does not a swimmer make; in fact, that's the easy part. LEADERSHIP is a VERB; it requires ACTION, and that's where we lose many of the aspiring candidates in the first test of leadership effectiveness.

2. The study of brain development indicates most young people must reach their mid-20s before embracing a complete understanding of making decisions that put the welfare of others at the forefront of the given choices. The cortex of the mind does not fully mature until then. Teenagers make choices based on the part of the brain called the *amygdala*, the emotional decision-maker. Therefore they see things through a very strong I/ME filter (“What's in it for me?”) rather than a WE/US context (“How can this benefit the group?”) This isn't good or bad, it simply is. Therefore expecting them to mature rapidly and respond to the big picture may be asking more than the mind is ready to embrace; and the developmental process cannot be hurried. PATIENCE IS ALWAYS OUR BEST PARTNER IN ALL OF THIS.

3. The number one concern for the vast majority of young people is, “How will this effect me?” Every

decision and choice is strongly (if not solely) based on this ongoing personal inquiry. They are struggling to discover who they are and

who they think they should be. Our priorities (as adults) and their priorities are often many miles apart. The importance of group cooperation and unconditional acceptance is often short-lived when it comes to the leadership payment of personal sacrifice. Students (of all ages) are conditioned and trained to compete for everything from

the attention of their friends to the status of their grades. It takes an ongoing REINFORCEMENT of the leadership concepts to offset this natural tendency of life-long self-sustaining behaviors.

4. The pendulum of commitment swings wide for the younger set, or as my friend says, “They are predictably unpredictable.” Again, this is just a matter of maturation... and that is something none of us can control; it is simply part of the

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natural growth process. We can influence the way they behave by constantly giving them positive options, however each and every student is responsible for his/her behavior. As we know (all too well) some of them will make destructive choices even when the right decision is clearly apparent. We must prepare for our leaders to fall far short of the mark of intention, then encourage them to correct their errors and make a second attempt. If we give up on them, they will quickly give up on themselves.

My own enthusiasm for what is possible with student leadership has not dwindled one ounce since the first workshop presented (in 1981!), however I have had to face the realities of the chronological limitations of the teenage reasoning. Leadership success centers on the individual's willingness to be a positive role model for his/her peers. We can certainly assign various tasks for our student leaders to accomplish, we can give them the chance to guide various aspects of the program, but all of this has to be carefully monitored, explained, re-explained, shaped, revised, and constantly reviewed to focus the students along the way. That, in itself, can be a full-time teaching job. We must constantly remind our students: LEADERSHIP ISN'T SOMETHING YOU DO; IT IS SOMETHING YOU ARE.

If I have learned one thing over the last thirty years of working with the finest students in our educational

system, it is this: I/ME logic will generally win-out over WE/US logic...and, in fact, that is exactly what SHOULD be dominant at this time of their lives. For the most part, aspiring student leaders care deeply about doing what is right, but they need to be directed, affirmed, re-affirmed, re-affirmed again (and again!) REINFORCEMENT OF THE DESIRED BEHAVIOR IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY.

I continue to draw upon this wonderful quote from Lance Secretan:

Leadership is not so much about technique and methods as it is about opening the heart. Leadership is about inspiration—of oneself and of others. Great leadership is about human experiences, not processes. Leadership is not a formula or a program, it is a human activity that comes from the heart and considers the hearts of others. It is an attitude, not a routine.

I congratulate those who have introduced their students to leadership concepts certain to create and support outstanding achievement in every aspect of their lives. What greater gift could there possibly be? What better role model could they have than YOU? CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL!

....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.