

# Having a Successful Marching Season Through Better Communication

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Along with the prodigious task of being a band director, there is an enormous amount of other responsibilities and obligations. Some of these have to do with creating a great musical performance and many do not. All are extremely vital to the success of any program at every level.

In this fast-paced world of technology, it is essential we master the art of effective communication—musical and otherwise. Our musical communication consists of strong non-verbal gestures, expressions, body language and movements executed with clarity and rhythmic precision. Complete knowledge of the music arrangements we are performing is essential and crucial to a successful performance. However, there are several other key elements in developing a strong communication with the people we work with everyday.

One key dimension of communication is *Building Trust*.

## **Building Trust:**

Being trustworthy is more than just a character trait that is valued; it is the foundation for building understanding, support and acceptance. Lack of trust creates a barrier to connected communication that is difficult

to overcome. Once a director loses their students', parents' or administrators' trust, he or she will constantly fight an uphill battle with all communication efforts.

Here are three critical behaviors directors can adopt to eliminate the static that destroys trust.

### **1. Consistently reinforce the acceptable standards of behavior for your group.**

People become confused when there are no established performance standards, when the rules are contradictory, or when the stated values are not being followed. For example: we may communicate that we respect everyone's time, yet we consistently begin rehearsal 10-15 minutes late...wasting everyone's time. Maybe we tell students that we value excellence, yet ask more and more from our top performer, while tolerating mediocrity and poor performance from others. When people understand the rules of the game, generally speaking, they will do their best to play by the rules.

### **2. When in the gray-zone, choose fairness.**

We often have to make decisions about situations where things are not exactly black and white. For

example: if a student makes a decision where there is no obvious right or wrong answer and that decision results in a less-than-perfect outcome, stand up for the student. Most people do not look at events as isolated incidents. Students evaluate

your decisions regarding others as if they were personally involved and make the assumption that you will treat them the same way. If they perceive that you were fair and reasonable, they will assume you will be fair and reasonable with them. The opposite is also true.

### **3. Live up to your commitments.**

Everyday the ultimate test of trust is given. YOUR WORD, YOUR COMMITMENT, is judged every time you say you're going to do something, regardless of how insignificant it may be. Even the

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smallest commitment is a representation of your integrity.

“We judge ourselves based on our intentions...but others judge us based on our actions. Actions speak louder than words. Walk the talk and get results.” If your student has to make a choice to trust you based on what you say or what you do—*what you do* wins every time.

Building understanding support and acceptance begins with earning trust. When your students, parents and administrators clearly understand the standards of behavior, perceive they will be treated fairly and see you living up to your commitments, you will then connect with them and get the results you want.

### Sharing Expectations:

People have a basic need to understand what is required of them and how their contributions make a difference. In other words, people need to see how they fit into the big picture. Maybe you’ve heard the story about three people working side by side on a construction job. All three people were asked the same questions. “What is your job?”

The first person never looked up but said, “My job is to do what I am told for eight hours so I can get a pay check.”

The second person replied, “My job is to crush rocks, and I’m a great rock crusher.”

The third person looked and said with pride, “My job is to build a cathedral.”

Three people—all doing the same job, but with completely different perspectives. Which of the three do you think would be a long-time loyal student? The more information you share about the “why” behind the “what” they are trying to accomplish, the more everyone will see the overall organizational vision and the more they will accept and support the plan and strategies necessary to achieve that vision. The odds

are they will also have a greater sense of satisfaction because they understand their purpose and how they fit into the big picture.

### Provide Feedback:

Every person in an organization has four basic feedback needs. A good feedback system encourages connected communication between you and the people you work with and teach.

1. Everyone needs to know exactly what is required of him or her.
2. Everyone needs to know “How am I doing?”
  - Be sincere
  - Be quick
  - Give Feedback often
3. Everyone needs to know that you care about them and the job they are doing.
4. Everyone needs to know how the group is doing.

### Walk the Talk:

Think about it: the principal method of communication in most organizations (whether we realize it or not) is the observation of other people’s behavior. Your example communicates who you are and what you believe far more clearly than any speech you deliver or note you write. Fair or not, people judge us on our actions; regardless of our good intentions... we have to walk our talk. Everything counts. There are many examples of people whose career took a turn for the worse because of an integrity mistake. They may have forgotten that people were watching, or maybe they thought the mistake was so minor it really didn’t matter. Regardless of how they justified their actions, their group will judge them.

Here are a few enemies that tend to show up when leading by example or “Leading to Ethics.”

- **Haziness** – Acting and reacting without thinking first.

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- ***Greed*** – The drive to acquire or possess more and more in one's self interest.
- ***Speed*** – The motivation to cut corners in response to the “warp speed” of our daily lives.
- ***Laziness*** – Taking the path of least effort and resistance.

If you want to build understanding, support and acceptance, your values and operating principals must not only be believed, they must be behaved.

Communication is one of the most powerful tools you have. Rather than think of it as an activity, think of communication as an outcome. Stay focused on the message. Eliminate the static. Work to build understanding, support and acceptance. When you do, you'll be well on your way to ensuring the success you desire for yourself, your students, parents and administrators.

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