

# The Most Common Mistakes Band Directors Make

Don Haynes

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Too often there are reports of disturbing news about educators who got themselves in serious trouble because of their actions or inappropriate words. Whenever this occurs, it is always extremely painful, damaging, and inexcusable. After all, as teachers and administrators, we have the tremendous responsibility to guide, lead and nurture the students that we have the privilege of teaching. I would like to offer some advice on how to avoid making mistakes that can damage or end a career, crush a program and devastate a student and his or her family.

During the 2015 TBA convention, I shared some experiences and thoughts on this subject. I covered a variety of topics including:

- How To Be a Great Communicator
- How to Be Proper Stewards of Money Collected From Fundraisers (bookkeeping);
- How a Director Should Interact (behave) with Students; and
- Appropriate Language to Use with Students.

In this article, I would like to highlight a few key items that I shared at my clinic.

Band Directors today have multiple roles. We are not “just teachers”. Over the course of the

school year, we will wear many hats including:

- Teacher
- Promoter
- Organizer
- Counselor
- Bookkeeper
- Conductor
- Consultant
- Problem-solver
- Motivator
- Speaker
- Architect (in the case of new band hall facilities)
- Band uniform designer
- Music arranger

While it is tough if not impossible to be “perfect” while wearing each of these hats, here are a few suggestions to keep in mind:

1. Dress professionally at school/rehearsals/community gatherings.
2. Promote “good will” in your community. Offer to perform at key community gatherings like parades or ribbon-cutting ceremonies.
3. Invite your school board members and administrators to your concerts and acknowledge their presence. Send letters to parents when their child has accomplished marvelous achievements such as all-area, all-state, and UIL solo/ensemble achievements.

Teach your band to respect/applaud the hard work of other

bands. Competitions are terrific, but don’t promote hatred or disrespect toward the other bands.

4. Bond with your faculty whenever you can...attend faculty parties and social events. Let them know that you value academics and that academics come first! Say those words to your students, parents, faculty, and school administrators.

5. Return emails and phone calls! I know, I know.... You will always be “too busy”, but you have to get this done—you will earn respect within your community and with your parents. Remember: you are the CEO of your band program. Always make your students proud that you are their leader.

Be positive in your approach to situations—especially in a heated exchange. Be open-minded if or when your decisions are questioned or contested. The perspectives of others may be helpful and result in better solutions. Changing your mind is NOT a sign of weakness; but in fact, it is a sign of strength!

6. To the best of your ability, make sure your students and parents know that you *sincerely care* about them/and you have a *great appreciation* of them. The best way to do that is to tell them!

Being a successful teacher starts with being a good person. I believe

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that if you and your students are not having a good dose of fun and joyful times in your day-to-day rehearsals, something is wrong.

I trust that this article and my words of advice will help educators avoid the big and small traps that are out there. After completing my 42 years of high school band directing in Austin, I have begun a new career as a motivational speaker and consultant specializing in student achievement and student leadership. In addition, I offer performance improvement, morale building techniques, and leadership tips as a consultant to educational and business organizations.

I wish you a terrific school year!

Don Haynes can be contacted by email at: donhaynes2@aol.com. Website: www.donhaynes.net.

*Don T. Haynes, Jr, served as Director of Bands at LBJ High School of Austin, Texas for 39 years. He began his music career at the age of six, tutored by his father, who was band director at Solomon Coles High School in Corpus Christi, and his mother, who studied voice at both the Julliard School in New York and The University of Texas. As a child, he studied piano, trumpet, French horn, flute, clarinet, and cello. Following graduation from Roy Miller High School (Eddie Galvan, Director), he studied at the Del Mar College School of Music in Corpus Christi, and then transferred to The University of Texas, where he earned a Bachelor's degree in music in 1973 and was a member of the Longhorn Marching Band (Vincent R. DiNino, Director). In 1978, he completed a Masters' degree at UT, specializing in instrumental music conducting. He was the Assistant Band Director at Anderson High School for two years (1973-1975, Verda Herrington, Director), before being named Director of Bands at LBJ High School in August 1975.*

*Mr. Haynes was awarded the prestigious, statewide Denius Award in 1994, presented to Texas' top UIL educators. At LBJ High School, his colleagues selected him Teacher of the Year four times. He is frequently invited to conduct region bands in Texas, and has made guest appearances in New Mexico, Louisiana, and Florida. An active UIL adjudicator for concert and marching bands at all levels, Mr. Haynes held Region 18 positions in the TMEA, the TMEA Advisory Board, and served on the UIL State Sightreading Advisory Committee. He is Past President of the Board of Directors for the TBA. On several occasions, Mr. Haynes has served as clinician at the TMEA and TBA conventions.*

*Under his leadership, the Jaguar Band's awards and accomplishments are numerous—proudly representing Texas and the United States in 1996 in the New Year's Day Parade in London and toured Paris, France in 2000. The Band served as ambassadors of music in a tour of Beijing, China in 2007 with the American-Chinese Cultural Exchange Committee. The LBJ Bands have won many first place honors at band festivals in Texas, Florida, Oklahoma, California, and Colorado. The band consistently wins Division I and sweepstakes honors at UIL marching and concert performances. The LBJ Marching Band has made five appearances at the UIL State Marching Band Contest.*

*In 2007, a gorgeous new 500-seat theater was built on the LBJ High School campus. The Austin School trustees voted to name the new performing heater "The Don Haynes Theater".*