

Learning to BAND From the Inside Out

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Music education is a conundrum. The longer I am involved in this wonderful profession the more I am reminded that you cannot understand what it is we do from the outside looking in. You can only understand it from the inside looking out. The question, though, is *How do we go about moving those with a more generalist perspective of education closer to the “inside” of what we do?*

Creating aligned understanding comes from developing systems of superior *communication, coordination, and collaboration*. Leadership is really all about one thing - *influence*. How we go about influencing from a top-down approach comes naturally to many of us as band directors. Leading up in the organization requires a completely different skill set. Leading horizontally with no positional authority requires an even different approach.

At the end of the day, leadership is really a 360-degree concept. It isn't just telling people what to do. The most effective leaders I have ever known are those that can *influence* others equally well in all three directions. They develop trust among those they lead by being *consistent, competent, and confident*. When there is balance within those three areas, trust exists.

As music educators, if we want to bring those

with an outside generalist perspective into the inner world of our specialized music education programs, leaders must be willing and able to develop trusting relationships through how they *communicate, coordinate, and collaborate* with others. That is how you can influence understanding.

Consider Laura Bell, the band director at Stafford Middle School in Frisco ISD. Her principal, Robin Scott, is well known in Frisco ISD as a strong advocate for arts education. However, after learning to trust Laura because of her *consistency, competence, and confidence* as a band director, Mrs. Scott wanted to learn and experience more. In a recent interview, Mrs. Scott commented, “I’ve always been intrigued with how quickly students pick up music with the right teacher. I’ve always wanted to do it and I thought, ‘Well now is the time!’”

In the fall of 2021, Mrs. Scott decided to join the Stafford Spartan Band as a beginning clarinet player.

While Laura was excited about the possibility of having an administrator in her classroom for the entirety of the year to both see and experience robust curriculum offered to students in Frisco ISD band classrooms, she had no idea how this experience would work with the very busy schedule of a campus principal. According to Laura, “I never dreamed that she would be as consistent as she was able to be.”

Like every other student in the class, Mrs. Scott ordered her materials, set her schedule, and attended class. Every day. Her one requirement was that she be treated like everyone else in the classroom. Laura said, “She found a way to be in class every single day unless she was pulled off campus. She sat next to the students and remained involved in every aspect of the class, including assessments and performances.”

As music teachers, we understand what all of that entails. Time management. Vulnerability. A

willingness to put yourself out there both taking and implementing critical feedback. Mrs. Scott came to the experience with no background in music. She, too, started from the very beginning. She found time to practice on her own, gradually beginning



Principal Robin Scott (far left) learning to play the clarinet in the Stafford Middle School band room of director Laura Bell.

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to see herself as part of the band family at Stafford Middle School.

There is an interesting tension that exists between *willingness* and *ability*. Willingness begins with a mindset of intentionality. However, when we begin a new challenge, the reality of our current ability level can become a stumbling block for our attitude and willingness. That is where a great leader comes in. Through great *communication, coordination, and collaboration*, a great leader is able to help guide others toward increasing their ability while maintaining an attitude and willingness along the journey.



Learning to embrace challenges and comprehending the importance of becoming a lifelong learner are two skill sets students of all ages learn from their involvement in music. Both Laura and Robin have demonstrated and learned the importance of 360-degree leadership through this experience. Both of them committed to working together to create a culture that was based on *consistency, competence, and confidence*.

Robin showed up every day. She practiced diligently. As her skill improved, so did her confidence in what she was doing.

Laura brought the right attitude every day. She had great clarity regarding her purpose and role and worked hard to learn how to communicate how to play the clarinet with a new kind of student. As Robin improved, Laura continually worked to encourage her to continue moving to the next level of her play. Just like everyone else.

As music educators, we too must seek opportunities to help those we lead understand and experience the real value of the curriculum we teach. Moving people from their outside, generalist perspective inward takes intentionality in how we *communicate, coordinate, and collaborate* with others. Leading up, down, and horizontally in our relationships requires a different approach, and real advocacy understands and capitalizes on those differences. However, we simply must remember that we can only be comfortable with learning to be vulnerable within a culture that promulgates trust through *consistency, competence, and confidence*.

This isn't some kind of fairy tale. This is an example of what happens when we as music educators approach advocacy through the lens of the things that really matter. It wasn't the squeaks and sqawks of the 6th grade clarinet class that drew Mrs. Scott to want to join the band. It was the consistent *experience* she had observed in the band hall over time that led to her desire to get involved.

It's like our good friend and advocate Dr. Tim says, "Remember, you are on the team. But you are always IN the BAND!"

What would our world look like if we could move more people from the outside in....to be IN the BAND?

Mrs. Scott can tell you now, thanks to Laura and her students at Stafford Middle School. We could literally change the world!

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