

Developing *BOTH* Better Leadership *AND* Smarter Followership in Band

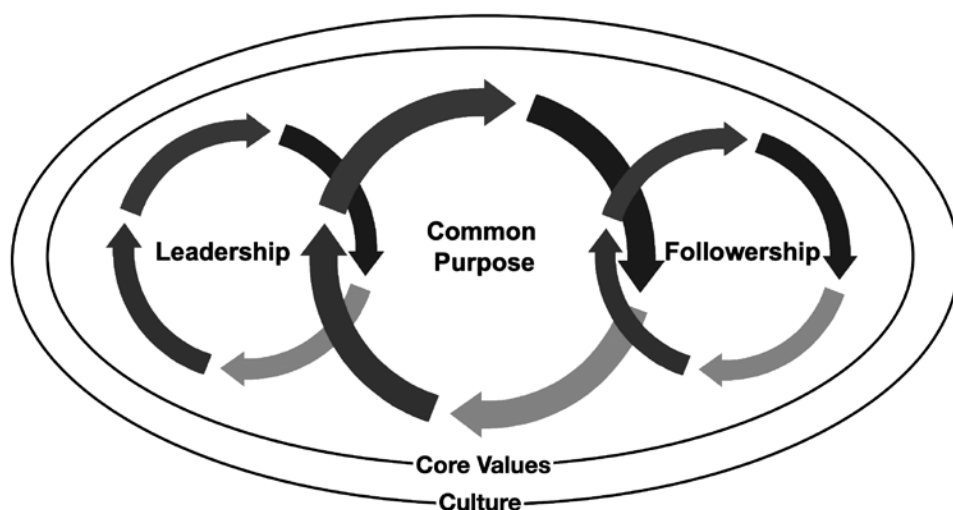
Fran Kick

What if we have been spending too much time talking about and training better leaders, and not enough time developing smarter followers? More accurately perhaps, what if our leader-centric focus on “leadership” caused us to ignore developing smarter “followership?” After all, leaders cannot lead without followers. Perhaps as a director who wants better leadership from your students, you might consider how to develop BOTH better leaders AND smarter followers in your band.

In his book *The Courageous Follower* Ira Chaleff wrote, “Most of us are leaders in some situations and followers in others... They are two sides of one process, two parts of a whole. Teachers and students form a learning circle around a body of knowledge or skills; leaders and followers form an action circle around a common purpose.” As a band director, you certainly find yourself following a principal and administrative team leading your school or district. While at the same time you are leading your band program—students, parents, and staff—towards some goal or common purpose. Leading and following are the yin and yang of how we work together. And when leadership and followership overlap, with both leaders and followers buying-in to the same common purpose, more success can be collaboratively co-created.

We need BOTH leadership and followership simultaneously working together. If you only focus on one side of the equation, your success will be limited. Imagine a couple of dancers and how they work together to dance the tango. As a social dance, the tango depends on both partners—one leading and one following. They work to co-create the motion around the common purpose of tango dancing.

The tango is a social partner dance that originated in the 1880s along the Río de la Plata, between Argentina and Uruguay. It could be found in the courtyards and social dance halls of the lower-class districts in Buenos Aires. The Spanish tango is a variety of flamenco dancing, merged with the milonga also an Argentine dance that has both European and Afro-Caribbean influences. Sharna Fabiano, author of *Lead & Follow: The Dance of Inspired Teamwork* beautifully illustrates how BOTH leadership AND followership interact using the metaphor of the tango dance and what tango can teach us about these roles in life. <https://youtu.be/Cswrnc1dggg>



The two Spanish verbs frequently used for the terms lead and follow—*marcar* and *responder*—translate more precisely as “show the way” and “respond.”

During our 2023 Texas Bandmasters director clinic session, we presented ideas that would help bring more students into the process of developing BOTH leadership AND followership in our band programs. During our session, participating directors shared 38 different practical, applicable, and adaptable ideas to use in developmentally appropriate ways to nurture smarter followership in band.

Here are the top twelve ideas as ranked by the participating directors in the session:

1. Bring a band buddy to leadership training as a participation partner.
2. Create a system to request new copies of music without talking to a director (Google form, trained student librarian, etc.).
3. Partner incoming 9th grade students with 2nd year students. Allow 2nd year students to teach them band procedures and protocols.
4. Provide “non-leaders/followers” opportunities to instruct or lead a portion of a rehearsal/sectional/class.
5. Place students in the position of the leader. Discuss what was effective.
6. Making sure student leaders know their specific job. A title isn’t enough. They need to know how to lead.
7. Establish roles that contribute for all students, regardless of rank or title.
8. Emphasize to leaders that if others see you following instructions and setting an example rather than trying to be a boss, they will see you as an equal to them and will want to start following also.
9. Trade places during rehearsal with students and staff to get a different perspective.
10. Followers should be informed of the same daily objectives as leaders.
11. Decide as a group/ensemble what exactly the common goal is.
12. Coach smarter followership. When dealing with a difficult passage in the music, I show them how I would practice this (slow down first, then bring up tempo, etc.).

NOTE: All twelve of these ideas work equally well all year long to help nurture smarter followership development within all your students.

Neuropsychologists have identified a “generation effect”—which is simply the idea that you remember material that YOU have generated yourself much longer when compared to the material you might have just read. So give yourself a couple minutes, right here, right now, to write down one idea that you want to apply in your program to help nurture BOTH better leadership AND smarter followership in your students:

FRAN KICK, MA, CSP, is an author, educational consultant, and professional speaker who knows What Makes Kids KICK! He is the creator and presenter of KICK IT IN® a series of self-motivational personal leadership presentations and materials. Since taking an educational leave of absence from teaching band at Centerville High School (Ohio), he has developed his part-time speaking adventure into a full-time mission. Every year Fran presents programs across the U.S. and Canada to thousands of college/ university, high school, junior high/middle school students, plus the many people who work with them. Since 1998, Fran has served as the Leadership Coordinator for the Music for All Summer Symposium. He also serves on the NAFME Collegiate Advisory Council as an at-large member supporting leadership

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Fabiano, Sharna (2021) *Lead and Follow: The Dance of Inspired Teamwork.* Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Fabiano, Sharna (Host) (2023, May 22). *Learning Games for Better Leadership and Smarter Followership with Fran Kick (Season 2, Episode 11) Lead & Follow Podcast.* <https://www.kickitin.com/go/sharna-fabiano>

Listen to Fran Kick’s podcast interview with Sharna Fabiano via Buzzsprout.com certified by The Podcast Standards Project:



Sharna Fabiano



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