

Music & Theater Department Blog

Developing Leaders Through Music

By Bryan H. Jenner, M.Ed.

There are times when as musicians and music educators, we find ourselves reflecting on the path we have chosen, which is to enrich the world with our passion for music and to develop a similar passion in the development of our students. We reflect on our own experiences of performance, rehearsals, the hours and hours in a practice room or recording studio. We reflect on those monumental moments when an instructor or conductor imparts words that make huge imprints on us as people, and we are better for it as a result.

As collegiate level educators training music majors (and some non majors), our students look to us to assist them as they start their journey of shaping new musicians if they are education majors, developing middle and high school musicians, and making a difference in the lives of their students as their educators have made on them. We are in turn, making new leaders of our students as we send them out to develop students' of their own.

We may be working with music majors who are going to hone their craft and perform on stage or in the studio. We may also be working with students who will become leaders in the music industry world. For that, we must remember that we are shaping leaders--- authentic leaders.

Bill George, in his book *True North* (2007), explores the development of authentic leaders. On page 205, he lists that authentic leadership is made up of five dimensions:

- Pursuing purpose with passion
- Practicing solid values
- Leading with heart
- Establishing connected relationships
- Demonstrating self-discipline



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We must remember that as we work with our students, we are preparing them for life “after Monmouth”. We are preparing them to lead and shape others through education, performance and areas within the industry.

We cultivate relationships with our students, many which last for years after they receive their degree. These relationships foster and develop a level of mutual respect. Leaders develop these relationships by “treating others as equals, being a good listener, learning from people and sharing life stories” (North, p. 175).

Recently, I was honored by my hometown of Kings Park, New York by being inducted into the Kings Park Arts and Letters Hall of Fame. When I was preparing my acceptance speech, I reflected back on the many educators that influenced my life and got me to where I am today. As an educator for 31 years, having taught students from kindergarten through undergraduate, I realized that my success is a result of the authentic leader I’ve become, because my influences were also leaders.

Regardless of where we are in our own personal journeys as leaders, we know we will have many highs and many lows. In my own journey, the biggest potential stumbling block, a huge low point, came to me as an 18-year-old college freshman. In the middle of a trombone lesson with my professor, which wasn’t going very well, he stopped me and stated, “You aren’t really very good at this. Maybe it might be a wise idea to consider another major.” It was a crushing moment that I wouldn’t wish on anybody. What was I going to do with my life? Music was all I knew and I knew I wanted to be a music educator from the time I was in 7th grade! I had no other real interests except possibly radio broadcasting, which I thought I was also pretty good at. After some self-reflection and many tears, I sought guidance from someone I had developed a close relationship with, the associate dean of the music school I was attending.

His name was Dr. Arthur Unsworth, and I consider him one of the people who had a much greater impact on my journey than he may realize. He asked me, “Why do I want to be a music educator in the first place?” My response was “Because I thought it was the only thing I was any good at, and I guess I’m just not that good”. “Is that what you truly believe, or is there something more?” Indeed, there was much more.

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I knew I wanted to make a difference in people's lives. I wanted to be the teacher that students could say influenced them on their journey. His final words to me were, "If you really want this, if you really want to be a music teacher, be true to yourself and find the right path, because apparently, you have temporarily found the wrong one". He then handed me a copy of a poem that has forever changed my life. A small excerpt from that poem:

"Two Roads diverged in a wood and I— I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference"- The Road Not Taken, by Robert Frost

It was at that moment that I knew, that maybe what was wrong was the instrument. I switched from a trombone major to a euphonium major. That was the difference and it got me back on the right path. It wasn't my first choice, but it was the right choice.

Our students will have these same highs and lows. Maybe they just aren't as focused as they need to be. Maybe there is something that they are struggling with as well. We need to be the leaders in their journey, at least temporarily, so that they can find their way.

Empower your students to be the leaders of their musical journeys. Be there to guide them, assist them when they falter, and cheer them when they succeed. Every path will be different. Sometimes that path will be unclear, but if we continue to be authentic in our leadership, we will shape our students to be authentic in theirs.

Reference

George, B. & Sims, P. (2007). *True north*, San Francisco, CA: Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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