

# **It's Not About Me**

## **The Conductor as Servant Leader**

Midwest International Band and Orchestra Clinic  
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# **It's Not About Me**

## The Conductor as Servant Leader

**What do we mean by “servant leadership”?  
Aren't these terms contradictory?**

**Exercise:**  
What comes to mind when you think of the words...

**Servant**

**Leader**

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**A working concept of servant leadership:**

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Change is possible.  
It's not about me.  
But it all starts with me.

# Five Spheres of Leadership

Selected and excerpted from  
*The Conductor as Leader:  
Principles of Leadership Applied to Life on the Podium*  
Ramona M. Wis  
(Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc., 2007)

## Vision

*Not much happens without a dream. And for something great to happen, there must be a great dream.*

—Robert K. Greenleaf

## On Foresight, an Aspect of Vision

*The leader needs two intellectual abilities that are usually not formally assessed in an academic way: he needs to have a sense for the unknowable and be able to foresee the unforeseeable. Leaders know some things and foresee some things which those they are presuming to lead do not know or foresee as clearly. The failure (or refusal) of a leader to foresee may be viewed as an ethical failure, because a serious ethical compromise today...is sometimes the result of a failure to make the effort at an earlier date to foresee today's events and take the right actions when there was freedom for initiative to act.*

—Robert K. Greenleaf

*The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between, the leader is a servant.*

—Max DePree

# Trust

*Every relationship, in order for it to be successful and enduring, must be built on trust.*

—Ramona M. Wis

## Embrace the Trust Paradox

### Be Consistent to Be Trustworthy

*To trust a leader, it is not necessary to like him. Nor is it necessary to agree with him. Trust is the conviction that the leader means what he says. It is a belief in something very old-fashioned, called “integrity.” A leader’s actions and a leader’s professed beliefs must be congruent, or at least compatible. Effective leadership— and again this is very old wisdom—is not based on being clever; it is based primarily on being consistent.*

—Peter Drucker

Every rehearsal, every performance,  
we ask our musicians to take emotional and musical risks.  
How can they do that if they don’t trust us?

# Teaching

*Teachers possess the power to create conditions that can help students learn a great deal—or keep them from learning much at all.*

—Parker Palmer

## Balance Process with Product

### Choose a Collaborative Approach to Rehearsal

*[O]ur assumption that students are brain-dead leads to pedagogies that deaden their brains. When we teach by dripping information into their passive forms, students who arrive in the classroom alive and well become passive consumers of knowledge and are dead on departure when they graduate. But the power of this self-fulfilling prophecy seems to elude us: we rarely consider that our students may die in the classroom because we use methods that assume they are dead.*

—Parker Palmer

We want to move musicians from working *for us*, to working *with us*,  
to ultimately being able to work *without us*.

# Persuasion

*Persuasion is the process of changing or reinforcing attitudes, beliefs, or behavior.*

—Harry Mills

## Use Passion to Persuade, Not Coerce

*At one level, followers follow out of fear—they are afraid of what might happen to them if they don't do what they are asked to do. This may be called coercive power. The leader in this case has created a fear in the follower that either something bad is going to happen to them or something good will be taken away from them if they do not comply. So out of fear of potentially adverse consequences, they acquiesce and “get along by going along” or by giving “lip service loyalty,” at least initially. But their commitment is superficial and their energies can quickly turn to sabotage and destruction when “no one is looking” or when the threat is no longer present.*

—Stephen Covey

## Refuse the Talent Tangle

Whether we know it or not, or like it,  
we are in the business of persuasion.

# Character

*What you are shouts so loud in my ears I cannot hear what you say.*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

## **Be the Same Person On and Off the Podium— Be Authentic**

*If I try to use human influence strategies and tactics of how to get other people to do what I want, to work better, to be more motivated, to like me and each other—while my character is fundamentally flawed, marked by duplicity and insincerity—then, in the long run, I cannot be successful. My duplicity will breed distrust, and everything I do—even using so-called good human relations techniques—will be perceived as manipulative.*

—Stephen Covey

## **Remember Rule Number Six**

*Humor and laughter are perhaps the best way we can “get over ourselves.” Humor can bring us together around our inescapable foibles, confusions, and miscommunications, and especially over the ways in which we find ourselves acting entitled and demanding, or putting other people down, or flying at each other’s throats.*

—Benjamin Zander and  
Rosamund Stone Zander

Your strength of character will win over even the most resistant ensembles or aloof audiences and will be the foundation for opening minds to wonderful music.

## **So what do we *do* now?**

*In the end, being a servant-leader is not something you do but rather something you are. It is about creating the right environment to get the best out of people and unleash their true potential.*

—Don DeGraaf, Colin Tilley, and Larry Neal

### **Become aware of your speech and actions.**

Do you use sarcasm, pity parties, or belittling tactics to get people to do what you want?

### **Ask someone you trust (this is scary) to evaluate you as a leader.**

Be prepared for honesty, but then let it sink in and try to view yourself from another's eyes. Even if you think their perception is wrong, "perception is reality."

### **Commit to reconstructing your schedule so you have more planning time and, therefore, more opportunity to use your foresight.**

Mentally walk through the rehearsal period, the class, the concert logistics. Have a Plan B and use it while it can still make a meaningful difference.

### **Become more personally disciplined, whatever that means for you.**

It may mean doing better research on repertoire so you can challenge the ensemble to a higher level. It may mean working exercise and personal time into your day so you can diffuse all that passion and energy (or gain some). Maybe you need to read some books and open your mind to new ideas. Don't take "no" for an answer when it comes to your own growth.

### **Laugh—regularly.**

Not at another's expense but with the joy of a shared life with your colleagues, administrators, and the musicians you are given to lead.

When we get clear about what it means to lead from the podium, we spend time on the things that really matter. We focus our efforts and reap the benefits of that clarity. ME is no longer the end but the catalyst for all the great things that can come to THEM, ultimately to US. We become excited about the opportunity to lead others and do not apologize for striving for excellence because now this quest has been redefined in the direction of those we lead. Our passions are validated, our skills call for ever-increasing sharpening, and our dreams begin to be realized.



*This is the true joy in life, being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one. Being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as I live it is my privilege—my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I love. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me; it is a sort of splendid torch which I've got a hold of for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.*

—George Bernard Shaw

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## Other Resources

The Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, Indianapolis, IN.  
[www.greenleaf.org](http://www.greenleaf.org)

The Institute for Servant Leadership, Hendersonville, North Carolina.  
[www.servleader.org](http://www.servleader.org)

ServantLeadership.org—The Center for Servant Leadership.  
[www.ServantLeadership.org](http://www.ServantLeadership.org)

The Spears Center for Servant Leadership.  
[www.spearscenter.org](http://www.spearscenter.org)

Regent University Roundtable Proceedings.  
[http://www.regent.edu/acad/sls/publications/conference\\_proceedings/servant\\_leadership\\_roundtable/2006/proceedings.htm](http://www.regent.edu/acad/sls/publications/conference_proceedings/servant_leadership_roundtable/2006/proceedings.htm)