

KEY CHANGES: REFRESHING YOUR MUSIC PROGRAM

Professionalism in Teaching

Treating the Pursuit of Excellence as a Daily Habit

Several years ago, I attended a professional development session given by a colleague: “10 Things You Can Do to Keep Your Job.” The session presenter, Sally Wagner, was obviously the epitome of professional, and she indeed kept her job – for 34 years as band director at Eleanor Roosevelt High School in Greenbelt, Md.

Having parents who were both well-respected teachers, I learned early on the importance of professionalism. Sally’s session reiterated what my parents had demonstrated. Her suggestions were on point and simple. (For more from Sally, see her book *The Pursuit of Excellence: A Band Director’s Guide to Success*, available through Meredith Music Publications.)

I have found that Sally’s suggestions are invaluable while mentoring others in how to be more professional. She even inspired me to create my own list of behaviors for professional courtesies. These reminders may spark inspiration for even the most experienced in our field. With Sally’s permission, I have included some of her suggested behaviors (the first three here), followed by my own interpretation:

- **Be on time.** Arriving early to school or staying late is often necessary. Some people may prefer one option over the other to complete such tasks as preparing lesson plans, organizing the classroom, responding to messages, entering data and so forth. Regardless of your choice of arrival and departure time, there is no excuse for arriving late to a class, rehearsal or meeting. Set the example for punctuality.

- **Dress respectfully.** Dressing for success may make you feel more effective in your role as educator and motivator. Especially with younger students, a particular accessory that you’re wearing may even be the magic to holding their attention! Dressing respectfully should boost your confidence, helping to ensure recognition as the classroom leader.

“The most valuable resource that all teachers have is each other. Without collaboration, our growth is limited to our own perspectives.”

— ROBERT JOHN MEEHAN

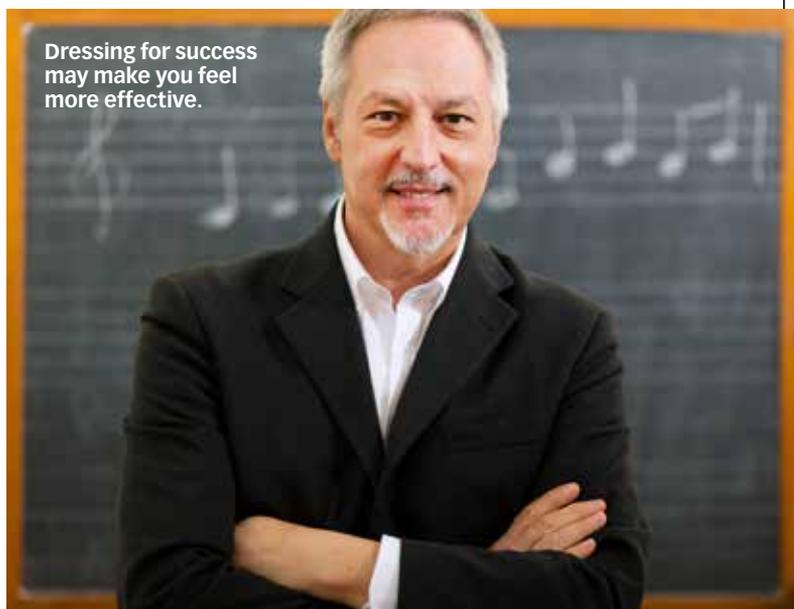
- **Be positive.** If you do not demonstrate pride in your students, program and school, then do not expect others to do so. Positivity is contagious!

- **Never complain.** If you plan to share a frustration with a colleague or administrator, be prepared to offer a solution. Complaining accomplishes nothing, and it may toxify your working environment. (That said, sharing frustrations with a friend or family member outside the walls of the school may be a necessary outlet.)

- **Blame no one.** If you are making excuses for your ensemble’s performance or your students’ behavior, then you haven’t done your best to prepare your students for success. When an educator is consistent in his or her communication, management,



Lori Schwartz Reichl is a music educator and writer. Visit her at makingkeychanges.com.



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organization and tutelage, it is evident in the performance and behavior of the musicians. Are you teaching behaviors before content? Demonstrate it.

- **Smile.** A smile offers a kind gesture when speaking may not be possible. You'll be invigorated, students will feel welcome, colleagues will feel included, and supporters will sense appreciation.

- **Compliment.** Give compliments to your students and colleagues on their accomplishments. Your kind words could be the only empathetic attention they experience on that day.

- **Ask for help.** There is no shame in this. Find inspirational people to serve as a resource for you. Invite them into your

classroom or rehearsal space and ask them to adjudicate your teaching or ensemble. Accept their feedback.

- **Listen with your eyes and ears.** Listen carefully at meetings and read all correspondence in a timely fashion. Mark your calendar accordingly – don't expect reminders of due dates to be sent by colleagues and supervisors. When a deadline is given, prepare for it and meet it.

- **Proofread and obtain approval.** Employ a new set of eyes to review the content, grammar, formatting and legalities of a document or e-mail. If suggestions or changes are made, update and re-proof for errors. Particularly if you are a new teacher, be sure to show the document to your

administrator before printing and distributing. Ask him or her to review it, offer suggestions and approve of all content.

- **Acknowledge others.** If a colleague's work interests you, kindly ask before implementing it for your own purposes. Credit that person, program or school if you plan to use the exact words or ideas, regardless of the quantity. Do not plagiarize.

- **Respect the tenured.** If a colleague is having difficulty learning a new technology or procedure, this doesn't mean that he or she will never learn it. Are you aware of all the ways that this experienced person may have added to the value of music education for your program, school and community through the years?

- **Maintain your musicianship.** If we want our students to practice effectively and perform enthusiastically, then we must model this discipline in music-making. Creating ways to showcase your own musical talent to students and the school community may end up eliciting admiration, fundraising and other support. Maintaining your musicianship doesn't only advance your cause; it can inspire and benefit others in your school and community.

- **Show gratitude.** Show appreciation for all who have supported you, for your students and for your program throughout the school year. Some people may choose to tag these people on a social-media post, but that isn't truly thanking them directly. Personalize your gratitude. Write the thank you notes.

A key goal for music educators is to create a superior sound, but this should not come at the expense of treating others with kindness and professionalism. We must aim for a purposeful and compassionate experience. What habits do you practice? As Aristotle reportedly said, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act, but a habit." **T**



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