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Who Are the Leaders?

In every aspect of our professional and personal lives, leadership plays a crucial role. Whether leaders are hired, appointed, or emerge organically, their presence shapes the direction and success of any endeavor. The Center for Creative Leadership defines the ten essential traits of a good leader as integrity, delegation, communication, self-awareness, gratitude, learning agility, influence, empathy, courage, and respect. In her bestselling book *Dare to Lead*, Brené Brown explores what constitutes both poor and excellent leadership, emphasizing the importance of "daring greatly" and "rising strong" at work.

One key aspect of leadership is that it does not come with a title or job description. A person's professional designation doesn't automatically equate to effective leadership. I have attended many meetings where everyone around the table held significant titles: Directors, Assistant Principals, Principals, and district-level administrators. Their primary role is to create the best possible circumstances for those at the ground level—educators and students. There can be a disconnect between the expectation of these leaders having all the answers and the reality of effective leadership. I attended a leadership meeting in which one administrator confidently proclaimed, "Leadership comes from this room!" The implication was that because some regions of our state lacked music administrators, the leaders in that room were responsible for all guidance in this area. Fact-check: Leadership doesn't work that way. It is not simply about holding a title or possessing a degree. Leadership must be earned!

While educational programs and degrees offer the foundation for leadership knowledge, they do not guarantee effective leadership in practice. Effective leadership is recognized from the way one interacts with others, responds to challenges, and contributes to one's community. It evolves from speaking to people, handling oneself both socially and professionally, and the values one embodies. It is about personal and professional integrity and experiences, one's willingness to give of oneself, and most

importantly, the commitment to helping others—students, colleagues, and the broader community. Effective leadership means showing-up, being on time, reliable, and organized. It means clear communication, optimism, and the ability to solve problems rather than walk away from them. A true leader listens, cares, and makes time for people. Leadership involves consistent action, a willingness to get involved, and a dedication to improving others' lives. Whether it is responding promptly to messages or making an extra effort to ensure someone feels heard and appreciated, leadership is about doing all that work, day in and day out.

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Leaders are humble and appreciative. They value the contributions of everyone and understand that respect is not granted by a title but earned through actions. True leaders don't consider themselves above others; they walk alongside their colleagues, roll up their sleeves, and support their teams. They prioritize the well-being of those they lead and work tirelessly to ensure that everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered.

Recognize as well, that true leadership often emerges in times of need. Many of our best leaders do not hold formal leadership titles. Many do not have a leadership diploma. Instead, they step up to meet the challenges of the moment and inspire others through their actions and dedication.

Recognize that each of us has a responsibility to help our appointed leaders be-

come their best selves. Effective leadership is a partnership between those who lead and those who are led. Both parties must take responsibility for fostering an environment of mutual respect, collaboration, and support.

In many cases, we are fortunate to work under the supervision of leaders who care deeply about their work and the people they lead. These leaders understand that their primary job is to create the best possible outcomes for teachers and students and cultivate the best circumstances for teaching and learning.

Leadership requires patience and a willingness to learn from mistakes. Even the best leaders are not immune to errors, but effective leaders take ownership of their mistakes, learn from them, and continuously strive to improve. Leadership is a dynamic process that requires ongoing reflection and growth.

The strongest leadership is often reflected in the relationships and bonds formed between leaders and their teams. Think, for a moment, about your best rehearsals, most successful lessons, or "banner" school years. Often, they are the result of strong leadership—leadership that has fostered passion, energy, and cooperation within a team. Effective leadership is not just about setting goals or creating plans; it is about building relationships, encouraging collaboration, and creating an environment in which everyone is respected and feels motivated to give their best.

Leadership is about earning the respect of those who are lead through actions, values, and an unwavering commitment to creating an environment in which everyone succeeds. As we strive to strengthen leadership in our field, we must also recognize that leadership is a shared responsibility. Leadership thrives when it is nurtured by both those in leadership roles and those they lead. By embodying the qualities of good leadership and fostering an environment of mutual respect, we can create a lasting, positive impact for music teachers and students alike. ||