Colonel’s Book Club - #1 (REPRISE)

In the July issue of SBO, I suggested starting a “book club” where every three months I would suggest a book that might be of use to SBO readers. We would then conduct an online discussion of the book. As of this writing, no one has joined the discussion so I’ll take a different approach, because at SBO Magazine, our goal is to give you information that you need in the manner best suited to you.

So, going forward, I will select a book and then basically give you a book review. That way, if you don’t have the time to read the book (I do hope that you are keeping up your professional reading!), you will be able to get the big ideas from the book in a condensed form. If that motivates you to read the entire book, that’s great, but I’ll do my best to give you the important ideas that the author(s) present.

Our book is “Why Should Anyone Want To Be Led By You?: What It Takes To Be An Authentic Leader,” by Robert Goffee and Gareth Jones. First, why do I recommend learning about becoming a better leader instead of discussing how to teach beginning clarinet? As music educators, we do so much more than just impart knowledge. We guide a process that allows students to be inspired (and inspire others) while being educated. When we conduct our ensembles, we are not executing a lesson plan, we are leading.

As an admin note, I will present a number of quotes from the book and won’t bother with footnoting. Anything in italics is a direct quote from the book.

1. *As hierarchies flatten, meaning disappears. We look to leadership to instill our organizations with meaning.* This of course, refers to changes in corporate organizational structure, but is there any flatter hierarchy than a band or orchestra?

2. *Leadership must always be viewed as a relationship between the leader and the led.* Is there any relationship more collaborative than a rehearsal or performance? Conductors are only facilitators. The musicians make the music.

3. *Knowing and expressing your real self is easier said than done.* This touches on the main theme of the book, at least for me. To be an authentic leader you must have a realistic view of who you are (that is really a lifetime pursuit). Each of us has multiple versions of who we are. There are our real selves, what we think we are, and as many versions of what we present to others as we choose. My conclusion is that the more our various selves are in alignment and are consistent with each other, the happier and more successful we will be (my takeaway, not necessarily the authors’).

4. *Our overwhelming impression is that in developing their self-awareness, effective leaders pursue a clear and simple strategy: they try things out and get feedback.* Becoming an effective and authentic leader takes work, especially for someone still developing their teacher persona. That’s why a professional reading program and listening to things like relevant T.E.D. talks are important. Great leaders are not born, they work at it!

5. *Great leaders are driven by an unbending sense of purpose.* What’s your purpose? Hopefully, it is to change lives for the better through music. Without a clear purpose, where are you leading them?

6. *The exercise of leadership is contextual.* Review item number 2. While we might be the same leader, the musicians/students are always changing and we must adapt to their needs.

7. *Remain authentic but conform enough.* Stay true to your guiding purpose but that doesn’t mean every encounter has to be a win-at-all-costs head-on collision. Adapt to the environment. What’s important is the success of your students, not you winning every battle.

8. *Close but not too close.* We must be willing to reveal ourselves to our students but that doesn’t mean being their BFF. *Distance signals to the led that the leader has an overarching purpose.*

9. *It is in the careful and gradual nurturing of learners and the sustained celebration of regular performers that leaders are often able to achieve their greatest long-term impact.* Your star performers really don’t need much from you. Those who are problematic shouldn’t be the center of all of your attention. The great ensembles have a large number of solid performers who try hard and usually volunteer for everything but probably won’t make music their profession. They are the ones we should devote the majority of our attention to. Make everyone feel special!

The book is packed with real world examples of many different types of leaders, some effective and some not. As you read this terrific book, reflect on what characteristics you already have, what you need to work on, and the type of leader that you want to be.

In the January 2020 Colonel’s Book Club, we’ll feature Peter Boonshaft’s “Teaching Music With Purpose.” In next month’s issue, we will feature Andrea Hollenbeck’s terrific resource for music educators that she calls “From Chaos to Sanity.”

As always, feel free to contact me at www.ThomasPalmatier.com.