



# TOUCHPOINT

The Division of Education Newsletter

Conn-Selmer  
DIVISION of EDUCATION

Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser  
Vice President of Education  
Cell: 260.410.0717  
DrTim@conn-selmer.com

Michael Kamphuis  
Managing Director, Division of Education  
Work: 574.523.0677  
Cell: 574.607.6000  
mkamphuis@conn-selmer.com

Kelly Bryan  
Manager of Educational Outreach  
Phone: 574.523.0651  
Cell: 574.329.8727  
kbryan@conn-selmer.com

Gary Markham  
Executive Director,  
Music Administration Collaborative  
Phone: 678.300.3438  
markham@aol.com

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## A Note from Dr. Tim

Greetings. In this edition of *Touchpoint* Heidi Sarver, Associate Professor of Music/Director, University of Delaware Marching Band at the University of Delaware, shares her very poignant insights on leadership and student motivation.



By Heidi I. Sarver

### Starred Thought: "The Band is Your Mirror"

We have all heard it before: "Be a good role model." "Set a positive example." These are terrific statements that ring true to virtually everyone. They speak to a person's approach to his or her life. They are excellent rules of thumb to follow, but they each fall short of the mark. Something is missing because they do not take into account each person's ability to influence others. These phrases approach the situation from the perspective of the leader—what WE must do. They focus upon the leader's actions and behaviors. They do not go far enough in explanation because they fail to include the outcome. In order to understand the consequences of our actions one must look at the role of the leader from a different perspective—the band's perspective. If we approach the leader's role from the band's perspective we begin to see WHY a leader should be a good role model. We begin to understand the consequences to our actions.

Translated literally, "the band is your mirror" indicates the band is a replica/representation of the leader. (Of course, this statement is flawed but we will examine that a little later.) If the leader is happy, the band is happy. If the leader is impatient, the band is impatient. If the leader is excited, the band will be excited. On the surface this is an obvious statement and simple to understand. However, beneath the surface lies a goal few true leaders are able to achieve consistently. Each day leaders face challenges and those challenges can easily impact interactions with their students. Telling yourself to be positive, encouraging and excited in EVERY situation we face throughout the day is a very difficult task to achieve. One must remember we are "on stage" all the time. Whether in rehearsal or walking down the hall a leader must ASSUME they are being observed even if they do not necessarily see other people. This is not to say that one needs to be paranoid – quite the opposite! This is a time for personal awareness and "walking the walk." It is easy to "talk the talk" but much harder to practice what one preaches at all times. Standing in front of the copier machine and cursing when it jams sends a message to anyone within earshot that there is a negative side to you. Is that the side you want others to see? The bar, if set high enough, must be continually sought—there should never be a sense of arrival nor completion.

Of course, the reality of every situation is that the entire band will not always be able to emulate the leader—every person has outside events that affect their life. Just because the leader is excited does not mean that every band member will portray the same level of excitement. A band member could have just experienced a very difficult day and simply cannot be energized about anything at that time. This is when a leader must work hard to provide the proper example, for the person in question might have an easier time in rehearsal simply because others around him/her are excited. Perhaps they will even be able to put away their troubles for a time and enjoy band.

That road, however, is a two-way street. When a leader is excited and their peers are not it brings with it a level of frustration. This is a time when it is easy for the leader to "give up." Of course that is not an option. The leader must persevere with the understanding that their peers are not at fault—they are just having a difficult day. Giving in to the negativity that surrounds a leader is like trying not to eat the candy bar that is sitting on the table in front of you. It's right there in front of

you, it's calling out to you, and unless your willpower is ironclad you will cave into the temptation. When confronted with negativity from your peers the leader MUST take a deep breath and stick to his or her guns. The key is not to force it on others. You need to just be a positive and excited role model regardless of how others are acting. Do not succumb to the negative pull—this, of course is easier said than done. It is the strong leader who recognizes this pull and works hard to fight against it. Stay the course and in time the others will follow.

The other important point to remember is that the band will imitate you but at a lesser degree. If you are a 10 on the 1-10 Excitement Scale the band will be about an 8 at most. The more consistent you are about being excited the higher the band will score on their scale, BUT they will always be slightly below you. Inversely, if you are a 5 on the 1-10 Excitement Scale, the band will be around a 2 or perhaps as low as a 1. The reason for this can be found when examining a Xeroxed copy of a photograph. The original is crisp and clear, while the copy is less defined and even blurry in places. The copy will always pale in comparison to the original and negative traits will be magnified!

Broken down to its simplest form, this starred thought is all about your attitude. If you are having a "bad day" then the band will be less responsive to you. Your peers will lose interest in rehearsal, and any progress you had made in gaining your peer's respect will be lost. To make matters worse their level of respect will be less than when you first started the job! So if you're having a "bad day" the band can never, ever know.

A former student of mine had one of the most positive attitudes I have ever encountered. He was a leader in high school and a vet of the Drum Major Academy® program. Whenever I would see him on campus he ALWAYS had a smile on his face and ALWAYS had something good to say. During the two years he was in my band he NEVER had a "bad day." Many members of the band thought it was all an act when, in reality, it WAS reality and his peers in his section knew that it was true and sincere. If there was ever a person who always found the proverbial silver lining in every situation it was this young man. His final two years of college did not afford him the opportunity to continue with band. His major required him to take classes that directly conflicted with rehearsal time. It was a loss for him, but a greater loss for the band. One day another university professor whom I had never met approached me on the street and asked if I remembered this young man. I said I most certainly did! This professor then went on and on about how he was one of the most unique students he had ever encountered because he had never met anyone who had such a sincerely positive outlook on life.

**"The band is my mirror." Let this starred thought take shape and guide you through a productive and successful life.**



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### In Our Last Issue:

Building a Bridge Between Middle School and High School by Erin Cole

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