

## Drum Major Basics

### Roles and Responsibilities

The Drum Major of any High School Band program has five basic responsibilities that will help the program grow and achieve success. None of these should be approached lightly as a lapse in judgment or in one's action could cause more harm than you think. The bottom line, as a leader, you must be ready and willing to promote the ideals of excellence and success at all times – on and off the field.

- I. Conductor – conveying the music being performed, gives performers confidence
- II. Leader – confidence in making fair and equitable decisions
- III. Disciplinarian – taking the success of the program seriously and knowing when to be a friend (off the field) and when to be a leader (always)
- IV. Role Model – the ability to follow while being an example for others to mimic
- V. Motivator – the ability to inspire

Do you have what it takes? Being a leader is a full time commitment because someone is always looking at you and observing what you do. The one minute you let your guard down, you could lose the admiration and respect of those who are expected to follow your lead.

#### I. The Drum Major as Conductor

Despite whatever others say, you are not a human metronome. Yes, our job is to keep accurate time and help the ensemble stay together, but if you want the performance to have more, you must give more. Mastery of the basic patterns and the ability to have hand/arm and head independence will make your job easier. You must be clear with what you and the music wants to say. All music evokes an emotional response and you have the responsibility to convey that feeling to the band. Just as music communicates to every person who hears it, you must be an effective communicator to your band. Know what you want and how best to explain it to others. Sometimes, words get in the way so try and visually communicate your desires. -It starts with you! Know your conducting limitations, then work to expand them. (practice)

#### II. Leader

As a leader, it may not always be possible to be a friend. In order to gain the respect of all who are your subordinates, you'll need to be fair and honest to everyone. Showing favorites or excluding "different" people from your social group can be damaging to that person's psyche. Sometimes, we will have to work with people who are not our friends, the only way to make the situation feasible is to agree that there is a greater goal that both want to work for and achieve. If you are able to set your differences aside long enough to work together for general improvement, you will discover that eventually it will not be a task to work with them – it may become a pleasure and a bond between new friends. The main role of the leader is to serve their team. You are responsible for everything, even if you delegated it to someone else. Follow through on all expectations and make sure you were clear in the delivery of your message. Check back in to make sure they understood. Leaders naturally encourage unity and do not

create or engage in drama, because they see it as a block to what they are trying to accomplish. Drama must be stopped at every turn to reach the bigger goals. Students who are able to stop things quickly and effectively will make the biggest impact on the morale of the band. A band with strong morale will achieve more than a band with in-fighting or distractions. Use your leadership role to always positively redirect bad behaviors in the way you want them. Without this skill, you can be the best conductor in the world and conduct musicians who are not focused on the goal of creating a quality musical product and your efforts will be less effective.

### III. Disciplinarian

Refer back to the previous section about being a leader. Friendships can not take the place of effective leadership. If your friend wants you to be more lenient to them, they are jeopardizing your reputation. In many situations, it may be the Director who must handle discipline, but you should be fair in your involvement. Again, if you wish everyone to respect you, you must show respect. Respect goes two ways and so you must be willing to show as much respect as you want from others. Remember, you should command respect and never demand it. Commanded respect is when people see your actions and learn to develop admiration for you and what you stand for, demanded respect is an attempt to take what does not always belong to you. Students leadership looks different than teacher leadership due to the limitations of your position. Be firm, fair, and have high expectations, but always be kind, encouraging, and follow through.

### IV. Role Model

Even when you do not think so, someone is watching you and observing. What you do, what you say even what those around you do and say will all influence someone's opinion of you. Whether it is right or wrong, a leader is always being scrutinized by others. Some will be critical of you – waiting on a flaw to peak so they can use it against you. Others will just look to you because they are new and you have been around. Let's face it, being the drum major is somewhat a big deal and people will know who you are. For an incoming Freshman, the "almighty" Drum Major is someone who knows what they are doing and will do everything to help and protect that Freshman. You must be the best representative of the Head Director's vision for the program at all times. All your decisions and actions should be for the benefit of the band. You are a leader wherever you go and the highest expectations are on you to mold the product from the students you desire.

### V. Motivator

As someone who seeks to be a leader, you must ask yourself why you want to undergo such scrutiny. More than likely it is because you knew someone who influenced you and inspired you to work harder. What was it about that person that made you work even more? Whatever the reason, you must admit that had it not been for their guidance and motivation, you might not be where you are. The most effective leader is the one who makes a lasting impression on the future of the organization. You are here because you enjoy band and you want us to be successful. In order to maintain that success, you must be willing to pass the motivation to

future generations. Don't let greatness end with you, let it begin with you so that others may build upon it.

### **Common Conducting Vocabulary:**

Non-Verbal Communication- The most important part of being a conductor is realizing you are the visual representation of the music to the performers. They are counting on you, literally, to hold the band together, convey the musical ideas, and give them confidence. There is much you can do with your eyes, head, and body to communicate and guide the musicians you lead.

Ictus – The actual placement of the beat. Should be the same every time! Record yourself and watch for this! Use a music stand upside down for beginners. Draw with markers on the board. Practice in front of a mirror if possible.

Rebound – The motion after the ictus in a wet pattern. Dry patterns you try to remove rebounds.

Wet pattern- uses rebounds, extra movement

Dry pattern- eliminates rebounds, focusing only on the ictus, less movement, more rigid

Conducting plane/box – The general area where you should have all beat patterns. This area can be visualized as a box frame from which you conduct. Each frame will be different as each person is a different size and shape. The box determines length and width of the pattern and extra musical expressive ideas. Forehead to bottom of ribs is the length and shoulder width with only slight addition to sides for certain patterns.

Count off- Indicates style & tempo to start the band. Right Hand Only until the last beat 4. (1 is straight down, 3 at an angle (can also be straight down)) Subdivide in your head.

Release (cutoff) – how a note or the song ends. (can be left hand only or both hands) Practice one hand and both hand releases on all beats and in all time signatures to be prepared.

Ambidexterity/Left hand independence – the ability to use the left and right hands/arms independently of each other. You will show tempo with right hand and musicality with left hand.

Cue- indicates to performers that they are about to play something new and should be given the opportunity to be heard or to help awkward entrances. Types of cues: pointer, waiter, nod, etc.

Pattern- shape of the time signature

### **Posture and Stance**

Feet (comfortable but stable, don't rock and sway because it creates a distraction)

Standing up straight and tall with ideal posture

Arms about shoulder width

Hands should be slightly cupped (don't let fingers splay out) at bottom of rib cage

### **Styles**

1. Legato – smooth and connected with fluid motion (as if moving through water)
2. Marcato – emphasized and 'weighted' beats
3. Staccato – crisp and short movements

### **Cues**

Remember what a cue is used for and do not feel obligated to cue everything every time.

1. Look – who needs to be heard (eye contact!)
2. Prepare – use your body to get them ready
3. Deliver – actual presentation of the cue in tempo and style

### **Expressive gestures with the left hand** (check you hand position – what does it say?)

Crescendo

Decrescendo

Sustain

Intensity versus volume – are they the same?

Cues

## **Patterns**

1/4

2/4

3/4

4/4

5/4

6/8

● = ictus

\* these are the right hand patterns

