

Leadership in Action

Building Confidence, Communication, and Rehearsal Culture

A practical reflection and action guide for choral educators and student leaders.

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Leadership begins before the first downbeat

The language, habits, and decisions we bring into rehearsal shape confidence, communication, and culture long before a note is sung - and long after the final cutoff.

Interaction agreements

Healthy rehearsal culture is built through shared expectations for how people participate, respond to mistakes, and repair moments of harm.

Call people in Ask for clarity rather than publicly shaming mistakes.	Partners in learning Everyone has something to add and something to learn.
Take space, make space Speak when you tend to hold back; listen when you tend to dominate.	Assume the best - repair harm Begin with generous intent, then acknowledge impact and restore trust.
Different folks Bring your full self and allow others to do the same.	Be present Resist using technology or busyness to exit the shared space.

Growth mindset in practice: Two Notes + One Rest

Two Notes

Name one musical or educational influence and one value or lived experience that shapes your leadership.

One Rest

Name something you are pausing, unlearning, or letting go of so that your leadership can grow.

Growth Mindset and Feedback

The language we use shapes the culture we create

Core reframe

Mistakes are information, effort is a practice, and growth is possible. Effective leaders praise the process, reinforce the behavior, and make the next step visible.

Consider your own story

- [] What have I been told I am good at?
- [] What have I been told I am not good at?
- [] What labels have I accepted about myself?
- [] How much of my success is connected to effort and persistence?
- [] What narratives do I tell myself when I struggle?

Growth begins when we examine the stories we believe about ourselves.

From labels to actions

Identity-based praise tells singers who they are. Effort-based feedback teaches them how they grow. Nouns define; verbs develop.

Identity label	Process-focused alternative
<i>"You are talented."</i>	"You prepared thoroughly and shaped that phrase with intention."
<i>"You are a natural leader."</i>	"You gave clear direction and invited others into the solution."
<i>"You are a gifted singer."</i>	"Your consistent breath support and vowel work strengthened the sound."
<i>"You are smart."</i>	"You stayed curious, tested an idea, and adjusted when it did not work."

Audit your feedback patterns

Is my praise mostly identity-based or effort-based? How do I respond to mistakes? What messages am I reinforcing about success?

Try this sentence stem

"I noticed you _____. That helped the ensemble _____. Keep developing it by _____."

Discover Your Leadership Style

Directive, collaborative, and supportive approaches

Choose the response that best matches how you would usually act. Tally A, B, and C at the bottom. Your highest score suggests a preferred style - not a permanent label.

Scenario	A - Directive	B - Collaborative	C - Supportive
1. A new piece is not coming together.	☐ Take charge and run it.	☐ Ask the group what to try.	☐ Encourage persistence and reset.
2. A group project begins.	☐ Organize and direct the work.	☐ Invite ideas and share decisions.	☐ Support others with their parts.
3. Others look to you for guidance.	☐ State the plan.	☐ Ask what they think first.	☐ Motivate and cheer them on.
4. A sectional is behind schedule.	☐ Set priorities and push forward.	☐ Adjust priorities together.	☐ Keep spirits up while regrouping.
5. A singer is struggling.	☐ Demonstrate exactly what to do.	☐ Ask how the group can help.	☐ Offer encouragement and practice.
6. Conflict emerges.	☐ Set rules and stop the arguing.	☐ Listen to all sides and compromise.	☐ Lower the temperature with care.
7. Your preferred way to lead is...	☐ Give clear directions.	☐ Work as a team.	☐ Help others become their best.

A - Directive Total: ____	B - Collaborative Total: ____	C - Supportive Total: ____
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Read your result as a starting point

Mostly A: you value clarity and structure. Mostly B: you value shared input and teamwork. Mostly C: you value encouragement and belonging. Strong leaders learn to move among all three.

Leadership in the mirror

One leadership habit I am proud of is... When my rehearsal culture struggles, it is usually because... At its best, it sounds, looks, and feels like...

Lead with Range, Not Habit

Choose the approach the moment requires

No leadership style is always best. The goal is to match the approach to the people, purpose, and pressure of the moment.

Style	Core focus	Sample language	Strengths	Watch-outs	Best used when...
Directive	Clarity and follow-through	<i>"Let's begin at measure 42. Eyes up for the cutoff."</i>	Provides structure; protects momentum.	Can feel controlling; may shut down input.	Urgency, safety, new procedures, limited time
Collaborative	Shared problem-solving	<i>"What is making this entrance tricky? What should we try?"</i>	Builds trust, ownership, and listening.	Can slow momentum; quieter voices may be missed.	Interpretation, diagnosis, group decisions
Supportive	Encouragement and belonging	<i>"This is difficult, and mistakes are part of learning. Let's try again."</i>	Builds confidence and healthy risk-taking.	Expectations may become unclear without accountability.	Frustration, vulnerability, rebuilding morale

A rehearsal response builder

1. Notice What does the ensemble need most right now: clarity, ownership, or safety?

2. Choose Select a directive, collaborative, or supportive response intentionally.

3. Communicate Use words and actions that match the goal without diminishing anyone.

4. Reassess Did confidence, communication, or engagement improve? Adjust if needed.

Apply it to a real rehearsal

Describe one recurring challenge. Which style do you usually use? Which different style might produce a better result?

Key takeaway

Leadership shows up first in language and action. Our choices signal authority, invite ownership, or create safety before a single note is sung.

Leading with Awareness

Cultural capital, similarity attraction, and covering

Rehearsal culture is shaped not only by what leaders intend, but also by hidden rules, patterns of comfort, and the pressures people feel to fit in.

Cultural capital

The knowledge, objects, credentials, language, and habits that help people navigate an institution.

- Embodied: skills, language, mannerisms, cultural knowledge
- Objectified: books, instruments, technology, cultural goods
- Institutionalized: degrees, awards, certifications

REFLECT: Ask: Which “hidden rules” does my rehearsal space reward?

Similarity attraction

We often feel more comfortable with people who share our background, values, or interests.

- Similarity can build rapport and predictability
- It can also produce exclusion and reinforce group boundaries
- Comfort is not the same as fairness or belonging

REFLECT: Ask: Whose ideas receive quick trust - and whose require extra proof?

Covering

People may downplay parts of identity to fit dominant expectations or avoid stereotypes.

- Appearance, affiliation, advocacy, or association may be altered
- Students may code-switch, self-silence, or minimize needs
- Discomfort with visibility can look like disengagement

REFLECT: Ask: What would make authenticity safer in this space?

Possible signs a student may be covering

☐ Withholds cultural references, language, or personal stories	☐ Code-switches or modifies speech around authority figures
☐ Avoids identity-related topics despite lived experience	☐ Minimizes physical, emotional, or accessibility needs
☐ Rarely disagrees or expresses a personal viewpoint	☐ Changes appearance or distances from peers to fit expectations
☐ Appears uneasy when asked to represent an entire group	

Notice without diagnosing

These behaviors can have many causes. Use them as invitations to listen, reduce unnecessary pressure, clarify expectations, and make support easier to access - not as labels.

Self-reflection

When have I covered part of my identity, health, language, appearance, beliefs, or mannerisms to fit in? What pressure was present, and how did it affect participation?

Bring Leadership Home

A 30-day plan for confidence, communication, and culture

Four practices for your learning space

NAME Name your leadership choices. Be intentional about when you clarify, invite input, or offer reassurance.	AUDIT Audit your language. Ask whose voices are centered and whose might be hesitant, silent, or overlooked.
BUILD Build psychological safety. Normalize mistakes, curiosity, questions, and growth as part of rigorous learning.	SLOW DOWN Slow down to include all learners. Pacing matters, but inclusion is a leadership skill - not a delay.

My 30-day leadership experiment

Week	Focus	My specific commitment
1	Notice Track the language, habits, and moments that affect confidence.	
2	Stretch Use a leadership style that is not my default in one rehearsal.	
3	Include Identify one hidden rule or barrier and make it more transparent.	
4	Sustain Keep one change, revise one change, and name the next step.	

My challenge to myself

Choose one rehearsal habit or phrase to change intentionally. What shifts in confidence, communication, or engagement will I watch for?

Closing reminder

Awareness creates choice. Choice creates more welcoming learning spaces while maintaining rigor, artistry, and clear expectations.

Explore more resources: www.drderickfox.com | derickfox@me.com