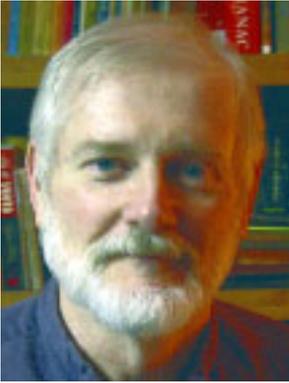


Viewpoint: The Good Manager

Written by Randall Noon, P.E., Cooper Nuclear Station
Tuesday, 01 April 2008 00:00



Randall Noon, P.E., Cooper Nuclear Station

A good manager is very much like a good orchestra maestro.

A maestro does not have to play every instrument in the orchestra. More often than not, he usually is not even the best musician in the orchestra at whatever he plays. As maestro, he is not valued for his playing abilities—in fact, he is the one person in the orchestra who is supposed to make no sound during a concert.

As members of the audience see the curtain rise, they may be thinking that the maestro's work begins when the music begins. This is an illusion that a good maestro works hard to create. In reality, when he taps his baton on the podium and raises his arms to ready the orchestra, the maestro's work is nearly finished.

Well before the concert, the maestro selects the musicians and seats them according to technical ability and musicality. He also chooses the music to be played, bearing in mind the ability of his musicians and the tastes of his audience. As a result, the various pieces in the program will, perhaps, present a theme or build a particular mood.

The maestro then assembles his orchestra and conducts numerous practices with it. He works with individuals to extract their best performances and minimize their technical shortcomings. He works with sections to blend their separate tones into integrated chords. He then works to smooth out the natural competitive urges of the various sections to achieve harmony, balance and movement. In other words, a good maestro combines the efforts of many individual musicians to produce a real symphony. But, that's not all.

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A good maestro also is the head “roadie” for the orchestra. He makes sure that the orchestra has everything it needs to make beautiful music. Likewise, he ensures that the audience has everything it needs to enjoy the orchestra. He clearly understands that good music can only be played and enjoyed when there are no distractions and the proper mood is set.

When the concert is presented, the maestro sets the tempo and leads. He makes small adjustments to the music during the performance to allow for the moment—measuring the emotional response of both the audience and the orchestra. He allows the soloists and ensembles to play and shine as they move in and out of the spotlight. Like a magician’s assistant, he adds small touches of showmanship first here, then there, to draw the audience’s attention to the “right” spots. And, ultimately, when the performance concludes, a good maestro stands out of the way, unselfishly letting the orchestra take their bows—and leading the applause to make certain that the audience knows where the real “bravos” should be directed.

A good maestro is not known by a single performance. He distinguishes himself over time by the care and quality he brings to all the performances he directs. Good musicians want to play for him—and good audiences are impatient for more performances from the orchestras he directs.

He loves and respects his work, and it shows in all the things he does. He inspires those who work with him and shares his understanding and appreciation of the music with them. He teaches what he knows, learns from experience and is open to learning from others. The goal of a good maestro is that the next performance will be the best one ever.

What a pleasure it is to play for him. **MT**