

Leading from Any Chair

As you ponder over your school programmes and cast your eye over your staff to see who could lead, I think you may find this next practice, Leading from Any Chair, inspiring.

Benjamin Zander, as a music conductor, shares from his particular vocation but you will find it applies to any place with a hierarchy. Apparently, orchestras are very hierarchical and conductors were often autocratic. "In the music business, as in all walks of life, a leader who feels he is superior is likely to suppress the voices of the very people on whom he must rely to deliver his vision alive and kicking."

Benjamin described his previous approach as follows : "In order to realise my interpretation of the work in question, it seemed all I had to do was to gain sway over the players, teach them my interpretation, and make them fulfil my musical will."

But when he started to ask himself questions like 'What makes a group lively and engaged?' instead of 'How good am I?', he found his attention shifted to how effective he was at enabling the musicians to play each phrase as beautifully as they were capable.

Zander proposes that leaders in any organisation consider this monumental question : 'How much greatness are we willing to grant people?' This is because it makes all the difference at every level who it is we decide we are leading.

I will end this week's piece with this paragraph from the Art of Possibility :

"Listening for passion and commitment is the practice of the silent conductor whether the players are sitting in the orchestra, on the management team, or on the nursery floor. How can this leader know how well he is fulfilling his intention? He can look in the eyes of the players and prepare to ask himself, 'Who am I being that they are not shining?' He can invite information and expression. He can speak to their passion. He can look for an opportunity to hand them the baton."