

ARE YOU A CONDUCTOR?

CHANGING GAME PLAN WHEN NEEDED



IN 2004, I watched the first season of *The Apprentice* where Donald Trump fired a person each episode.

It came to a climatic ending where only two people remained – Kwame Jackson and Bill Rancic. Trump eventually fired Jackson and Rancic became the first winner of the reality show.

Born and raised in Chicago, Rancic was always an entrepreneur at heart. His first ever business venture was selling pancakes with his grandmother.

He explains, “I learned how to make pancakes with my grandmother, who invited all her friends to brunch. When I was clearing the dishes I discovered that each blue-haired lady had left a \$5 bill under her plate. I started begging my mom to take me to my grandmother’s every weekend.”

Thus began his entrepreneurial and leadership journey.

Rancic believes that “to be successful, you have to think of yourself as an orchestra conductor. A conductor may not be an expert at each instrument, but he knows how to make all of them work together harmoniously and make beautiful sound.”

That got me thinking. How many business leaders are like orchestra conductors? Or are they more comfortable playing their ‘own’ instruments?

Most orchestra conductors begin their career specialising in an instrument. However, to lead the orchestra, they reinvent their role from specialist to conductor, ensuring all instruments are played perfectly at the right time to produce amazing music.

FROM NOISE TO HARMONY

Conducting an orchestra can be a model for team management, according to Itay Talgam, the authority on orchestra and leadership.

At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Talgam postulated that through understanding the working methods of great conductors, you can learn ‘principles to lead’.

An orchestra conductor faces the ultimate leadership challenge: to create pure

harmony without uttering a word.

Talgam adds, “A conductor out of the chaos, can create order. Noise becomes music.”

A business leader is similar as they need to create perfect ‘harmony’ in their business.

In a TEDTalk, Talgam walks through the story of different conductors and their different styles. There is the commanding conductor (Riccardo Muti), who led his orchestra through authority but it resulted in unhappy people.

In fact, he received a letter signed by all 700 musicians of La Scala asking him to resign. Why?

Because he didn’t let his musicians develop. They felt treated as instruments, not as partners.

The same can be said of some authoritative bosses, who are commanding but have extremely unhappy employees.

Talgam goes on to describe a few more types of conductors until he showcases the ‘perfect’ conductor – someone who allows each musician to express themselves freely, yet takes full control to ensure nothing goes wrong.

Talgam even shows a clip when things go wrong for this ‘perfect’ conductor – his trombonist goes off. He doesn’t panic but gently re-directs him back to the right path, ensuring harmony prevails in his orchestra.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR TEAM

Like an orchestra conductor, being a leader within an organisation bears the same challenges – trying to create

perfect harmony amongst the different variables in your business to ensure your organisation creates ‘beautiful’ products and profits.

According to Talgam, the best orchestra conductors understand their people, allow them to develop, treat them with respect, and yet gently nudge them towards the goal of making beautiful music.

As a leader you might have a strategy as well written as a symphony by Mozart, but if your orchestra is not well conducted, then noise will prevail over music.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Back to Rancic and his story. In an interview for *The Leaderonomics Show*, I asked him how he won *The Apprentice*?

In his own words he said, “By thinking through each task and changing my game plan when I had to.”

He went on to talk about how he displayed leadership which resulted in his victory. At the end of the day, Rancic won because he managed to produce the best ‘music’ for Trump.

Just as a good orchestra conductor would. How about you? Are you conducting your team to success? Are you a good orchestra conductor?

10 LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM AN ORCHESTRA CONDUCTOR

SO, what are some leadership tips which we can learn from an orchestra conductor?

(adapted from Michael Hyatt’s piece on the symphony conductor)

1 Great conductors always start with a musical score and a clear musical “vision” of how it should sound.

Do you have a clear vision of your end goal? Do you have a plan (musical score) that will help you achieve your vision?

2 Practice makes perfect – even in business. The best concerts are well rehearsed no matter how great the conductor is.

Are you practising your leadership? Or do you assume that you will automatically produce great leadership ‘music’ without practice?

3 Great conductors get the best out of their people at the right time. They ensure their musicians feel significant, accepted and secure.

A conductor needs his/her musicians. Likewise, a leader needs his/her followers and needs to take time to develop his/her followership.

4 Great conductors lead with their hearts and are passionate about their work. Are you passionate about the vision and mission of your organisation?

Do you lead with passion and conviction? A leader’s passion is infectious and generally seeps through the organisation.

5 Great conductors are aware of their gestures and impact. They have to be precise or their musicians will not be able to follow. Everything done is intentional.

Are you an intentional leader?

6 Great conductors share the spotlight. When the concert is over, and the audience is clapping, the conductor turns to the audience and takes a bow.

Great conductors immediately turn to their orchestra, inviting them to take the limelight. Without the orchestra, the conductor is nothing.

Do you share your leadership glory with your team? Are you a leader that gives credit back to the team?

7 Great conductors are not super-humans. They don’t do everything. In fact, they delegate everything to others who are better and more skilled.

The conductor only appears on stage when it is time for him to lead. Great leaders know when to lead and when to let others lead.

Do you know when to take the lead?

8 The conductor focuses on his/her task and keeps his/her back to the audience. Great leaders similarly keep their mind’s eye on things they are facing rather than worry about what is being said or done behind them.

9 The conductor usually stands on a platform and is visible to every member of his/her orchestra. This is to ensure the orchestra stays in alignment.

Are you a visible leader who is visible to your employees and your teams? Or are you not spending time with your team and causing misalignment across the business?

10 Great conductors lead. Most musicians in the orchestra are much more talented than the conductor. They are experts in their musical instruments.

They look to their conductor not for technical advice but for leadership. The same happens in organisations.

Most leaders are not functional or technical experts. Employees look up to them for leadership. Leaders need to inspire, create excitement, have a clear vision and lead.

Are you a leader?

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