

## NAWDP Member Spotlight - LARRY ROBBIN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

development. She encouraged him to attend Camp of the Arts where he acted as a peer counselor, mentor and instructor. These practices proved to be very valuable and his experience later led to him to his local community center where he worked as a counselor in a gang diversion program.

While attending college Larry began to explore additional fields of workforce development. Upon graduating he took a position as director of employment services

and advanced his expertise in drug/alcoholic and mental health programs. He played the lead role in designing over 150 employment and education programs for all types of people. Some years later he would also manage a displaced worker program.

Throughout his career, Larry's major interest has been in the differences and commonalities of the workforce programs. He values NAWDP because it mirrors his interest "by serving all types of levels at all types of settings." He

states that "the mix of the population that NAWDP serves is important – businesses and job-seekers - serving and maintaining a level of diversity, multi-lingual and multi-focused professionals within workforce, you rarely find people in one category." He is excited to see NAWDP breaking down the barriers in the workforce and pleased that organizations are working together at better levels than ever before. ♦

## Qualities of an Effective Organization - Lessons from Marching Band

We've all been on a team of some sort in our lives – mine was playing in the band. When we worked together well we were successful – when we didn't, things didn't go quite so well (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3pc2heh7fQ>). As I reflect back on my band experiences and the lessons learned, I find that the same key qualities that made us a successful band can also be applied to effective organizations. As you read through this article, feel free to substitute the word "boss" or "leader" for "band director," "organization" for "marching band," and "employees" for "band members."

### Qualities of Effective Organizations

#### *Mutual Respect and Trust*

Respect and trust are two fundamental ingredients that turned isolated individual talents into a cohesive marching band. The band director stood in front of us, baton in hand. Each of the band members had individual talent, but we trusted the director to keep the beat, show us when to speed up and slow down, when to play loudly, and when to

play quietly. We also trusted his choice of music, and respected his feedback on whether we were in tune and playing the correct notes. It must be stressed that the mutuality of respect and trust is a two-way street. Both must be earned, and the conditions of earning this respect and trust must be consistent amongst all. The band director had to trust and respect the members of the band as well. He trusted that we would fine tune our music and our skills, and he respected our efforts, both individually and collectively.

#### *Communication: An effective plan is one that is shared with all*

Marching band had detailed formations – plans that told every band member where to march, where to stand, when to play. This plan was developed by the director with the help of section leaders, who in turn shared the plan with the rest of their section. Every member of the band was shown the overall plan ahead of time so that they became aware of the importance of their positions within the formation. Everyone operating off of the same plan allowed for cohesive formations and

ultimately, better and more crowd-pleasing performances.

#### *Healthy competition*

The goal of most musicians is to be first chair in the band or orchestra. This is achieved by practicing hard to be the best, and then challenging others. The rules of this competition were consistent and clearly outlined so that they were understood by all. The winner of the challenge would take first chair, and the loser of the challenge would graciously step down. There may have been a few hard feelings, but everyone knew the risks involved when they entered into the challenge. In band (just as in any organization) you don't necessarily have to like each other, but you do need to understand the overall purpose of the organization, and respect each other and the "chair you sit in" in order to play together so that the band sounds good and competes well.

#### *Focus on customer satisfaction – internal as well as external*

The ultimate goal of any band is to get a "1" rating in a competi-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

# Qualities of an Effective Organization - Lessons from Marching Band

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

tion. Bands get this rating by competing in front of judges who have a series of criteria they listen and look for. The better the band meets these criteria, the higher the rating. It was our responsibility to be aware of these criteria and practice accordingly to achieve high customer (judge) satisfaction. We also found that the harder we worked to satisfy our audience and the better we performed, the more satisfied we were as well.

## *Concerted effort towards continuous improvement*

As a good friend and colleague of mine often says: "The customer's perception is our reality." Performance scores don't usually lie. Even if we thought we had done well at a competition, if the scores came back below a "1" then we knew we needed to improve. We spent a lot of time listening to and watching our performance to determine what we could do better – then we set about fixing it. Improving our performance had to be the goal of every member of the band – everyone had to understand and buy in to our efforts to achieve that "1" rating. And when our "customers" (the judges at our competitions) gave us that "1," every one of us knew we had contributed to this improved performance and could celebrate equally. (Boy, were those buses noisy driving home from successful competitions!)

## *Skills and interests identified and utilized*

Not everybody in the band wanted to play the tuba. Actually, not everyone in the band COULD play the tuba. When students decide to join band, they are taken through an assessment where they're given different instruments to play. The director observes, and then determines which instrument is the best fit for the individual. Granted, the director couldn't force the student to play the recommended instrument, but those that went on the di-

rector's recommendation were usually the most successful musicians – not only because they played well, but because they enjoyed what they were playing.

## *The leaders keep themselves out of the "weeds"*

Our band had a group called the "Booster Club." These boosters were the ones that raised the money that helped pay for the band program – uniforms, instruments, travel to our competitions, etc. They established budgets, scheduled fund raising activities, arranged for the buses to get us to the competitions, sent the permission slips home to the parents – all the necessary behind the scenes tasks. This enabled our director to do the job he was hired to do – direct the band.

## *Members feel empowered to do their job, even when the leader is away*

Our band director had high expectations of us, and because we respected him we held ourselves to those same high standards. Even when he wasn't there we were expected to conduct ourselves as professionals. This actually goes back to the issue of trust mentioned earlier. Our director trusted that we would strive to do our best, not only because it would let him down if we didn't, but because we would be letting ourselves and each other down as well. Substitute teachers didn't mind stepping in for our director when he was gone, as we knew what we were supposed to do. All the substitute had to do was hold the baton and keep an even count – we did the rest.

## *Willingness to change*

The band I participated in had a reputation of being one of the best in the state, and as you can probably guess, we brought home a lot of "1" ratings. Every other year we were given the opportunity to perform on a national level. We had to be willing to change our approach

to almost everything in order to be able to compete at this level – our marching style, our music, sometimes even our uniform needed to be changed. Was it hard? You bet. Did we want to be the best? You bet. Did we make the changes necessary? You bet.

## *Conclusion*

Using the band analogy really worked for me, because it was so much a part of my life for so many years. Now it's your turn. Think about a team you've been on that was successful. How did your team demonstrate the qualities I've listed?

- Mutual respect and trust,
- Communication,
- Healthy competition, with clear and consistent rules,
- Focus on customer satisfaction – internal as well as external,
- Concerted effort towards continuous improvement,
- Skills and interests identified and utilized,
- The leaders keep themselves out of the "weeds,"
- Members feel empowered to do their jobs, even when the leader is away, and
- Willingness to change.

How can you take the lessons you learned from this team and apply them to your current team? How might these qualities, when applied, take your organization from being good to being great?

*On a personal note – the band director I've referred to throughout this article is also my father. I didn't truly appreciate it at the time, but he was the most influential leader I've ever had the opportunity to work under. I had a lot of fun remembering my experiences, but more importantly, I realized how very much I learned from them. I hope you experience the same level of fun, learning, and insight. Ann Merrifield, General Manager, Dynamic Works Institute, amerrifield@dynamicinstitute.com. www.dynamicinstitute.com ♦*