

*Harmony*TM

FORUM OF THE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA INSTITUTE
NUMBER 4 • APRIL 1997

Trust

by

Lawrence Tamburri



To subscribe to *Harmony* or provide support to the Institute, contact:

Symphony Orchestra Institute

1618 Orrington Avenue, Suite 318

Evanston, IL 60201

Tel: 847.475.5001 Fax: 847.475.2460

e-mail: information@soi.org

www.soi.org

Trust

To round out the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra story, we asked Larry Tamburri to “mull over” how he saw the role of executive director in today’s symphony orchestra organization, and especially any priorities he believed should be followed. Larry’s thoughts are captured in the following brief essay.

–Publisher

Symphony managers are blessed with being able to work in organizations brimming with highly creative, intelligent, motivated, and successful people: musicians, conductors, trustees, and staff members. Corporate executives envy the richness of our human resources. Yet away from the stage, an ironic lack of harmony plagues American orchestras.

*“...building trust
is not as simple as
autocratic
management.”*

Is there a catalyst which might ignite this human potential? Peter Drucker tells us, “Organizations are based on trust.” In this context, trust connotes a steadfast mutual confidence in and reliance on character and ability, and in the completeness, veracity, and proper use of the information that organizations disseminate.

In one of his books, Tom Peters states: “Trust. It’s the single most important contributor to the maintenance of human relationships.” Our industry is labor intensive. Presenting our artistic product to our audiences requires the efforts of many people. Just as the members of the orchestra must trust the musical convictions and gestures of the conductor to achieve a satisfying performance, all members of our organizations must trust the organizations’ leadership—the chairman of the board and the executive director. These leaders begin, as all leaders do, by setting examples.

The executive director of an orchestral organization holds the unique position of nexus: the point in the organization where the various components of the institution—board, music director, musicians, staff, and volunteers—intersect. The executive director can display trust in the institution and its decision-making processes by sending a message that unilateral decisions are to be avoided and

building institutional consensus is our practice. Those who adhere to this principle quickly learn that building trust is not as simple as autocratic management. It is time consuming, less ego gratifying, and for some, the apparent lack of control is frightening, if not intolerable. Building trust is a long-term investment in the health of the institution.

John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene observe, “The manager’s new role will be to create a nourishing environment for personal growth in addition to the opportunity to contribute to the growth of the institution.” It is the executive director’s responsibility to work with and help develop the board, creating an organizational culture that will foster a healthy self-perpetuation of the institution. This can be accomplished through the board’s selection, nomination, and election processes. Building trust is a key to the creation and maintenance of such a culture. Committed, responsible trustees will beget committed, responsible trustees.

“... musicians and staff also watch to see if the board reaches critical institutional decisions through a reasoned, honest, and open discussion of the issues.”

As its name implies, trusteeship involves trust. Ultimately, institutional trust is measured and dispensed at this level, since the board holds final authority in symphony orchestras. It is understood that trustees support the symphony through concert subscription and attendance, meeting participation, advocacy, and personal financial support. But the musicians and staff also watch to see if the board reaches critical institutional decisions through a reasoned, honest, and open discussion of the issues. Is the board weak? Does it acquiesce to an autocratic chairman, executive director, music director, or a demanding orchestra committee? Organizations develop confidence and character through the examples of their trustees’ behavior. Board membership means responsibility not just to the organization, but also to the board itself, to the staff, to musicians and to the music director.

Recently, influential members of the media have regularly expounded the notion that American orchestras are in desperate straits. While the degree of the problem and the accuracy of the facts may be debatable, it is clear to all of us that our industry is undergoing change and enduring a protracted period of instability. Peter Drucker states: “One has to make the organization capable of anticipating the storm, weathering it and in fact, being ahead of it. . . . You cannot prevent a major catastrophe, but you can build an organization that is battle-ready, that has high morale, and also has been through a crisis, knows how to behave, trust itself, and where people trust one another.”

In our personal lives, in business, and in orchestras, change is rapid, rampant, and inevitable. Coping with the pace of change is the most severe challenge symphony orchestras face. To be successful, our institutions need to be flexible in order to react quickly and intelligently to this mercurial environment.

Our institutions will be able to cope with the changing environment if they develop philosophies of shared vision based upon trust. The major stakeholders—trustees, musicians, the music director, and the executive director—must agree that the art form is important to our civilization and that it must be perpetuated. Everyone must agree to move forward in a spirit of openness and collaboration. Trust is much more than being truthful when queried; it cannot be built on passivity. Trust implies relying on one another and taking chances. The ore of today's world—information—needs to be made available to everyone. In the "Information Age," tools exist to ensure the continual free flow of information. It is our responsibility to use those tools.

Some will consider it naive to place such an emphasis on building trust, working collaboratively, and developing a shared vision. But there is much evidence that in both for-profit and nonprofit institutions, long-term organizational stability and strength are built on trust. Orchestral organizations are replete with exceptional human resources and their future success will be determined by how well they marshal this human potential. Creating an institutional culture based upon mutual trust is the first step which these organizations must take if they are to be strengthened and preserved.

Lawrence Tamburri is Executive Director of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra. He holds an M.A. in music education and an M.B.A. from Arizona State University and a B.A. in music history from Duquesne University.

I believe in dispersed leadership. The days of the star system are over and every thriving productive organization has many more than one leader. The designated leader (CEO) of the organization looks at the leadership tasks, and determines that there are some leadership tasks that can be dispersed across the organization. Some people call this the empowerment of the people; I prefer dispersed leadership because Drucker notes and many of us agree, leadership has little to do with power, and everything to do with responsibility. When we share responsibility across the circles of the organization, we are building a powerful leadership corps. When we disperse the leadership it takes nothing away from the CEO; instead, it infuses a new kind of energy within the organization. At the Drucker foundation we say, "Our job is not to provide energy, it is to release energy." I think the great leaders of now and in the future are going to be the leaders who find the key to releasing the energies and spirits of their people.

Frances Hesselbein
Drucker Foundation News, April 1996