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Reflections

By

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As I reviewed the personnel managers' roundtable discussion and compared its messages with those pervading the Oregon, Pittsburgh, and Hartford discussions, I found myself once again thinking deeply about the difficulties and challenges most symphony institutions continue to face if they ever want to become comprehensively engaging and highly effective organizations.

Let me provide some background for the personnel managers' roundtable. In late 1993, when I was struck with the idea of forming an entity to address the organizational issues within the symphony orchestra institution, I exposed the idea to a few friends, asking them for the names of people with whom I should discuss the idea further. I was put in touch with Bill Moyer, former personnel manager and trombonist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Bill and I had a very formative discussion about how symphony organizations are structured and function, and his enthusiasm for the idea of an institute devoted to this topic was instrumental to its subsequent creation. It was through Bill's eyes that I first became familiar with the unique role of "personnel manager" in the North American symphony organization. My regard for Bill and his former duties was the genesis of regularly having a personnel manager be a member of the Institute's Board of Advisors. Discussions with Bill were at the root of having a roundtable discussion among a representative group of personnel managers, a goal now accomplished with the enthusiastic assistance of Julie Haight, personnel manager of the Minnesota Orchestra, and a member of the Institute's Board of Advisors.

As the personnel managers agreed, they were drawn or recruited into their roles because they understood orchestra musicians and could help management and players operate under a collective bargaining agreement. The participants emphasized their role as first-line problem solvers and two way communicators—almost mutual interpreters between parties who speak different languages. More than one participant reported that, as musicians, whether former or continuing orchestra members, they had high personal regard and great empathy for their playing colleagues, and it was their assignment to care and provide for the orchestra, on behalf of the institution.

As they quite accurately explained their role in their organizations, I was painfully reminded of the great gulf which still exists between the members of

most orchestras, as the central component in a symphony organization, and the members of the other quite vital constituencies—the administrative and conducting staff, the board, and the volunteer group. Historically, and thus now embedded by tradition, we have built into our orchestra systems these widely spaced and boundaried constituencies, and have particularly maintained the wide space between the orchestra and management, and between the orchestra and the board. Then, we have come to rely on an elaborate legal document to describe and define this space and all the activity to be conducted over and through it. And finally, in essence, we have assigned, to a single person, the task of interpreting, facilitating, bridging, administering, and managing most of the human interactions and relationships which must take place across this no man's land.

Except for a relatively few organizations, we are doing too little to mix, cross-involve and integrate all the human activity taking place in an orchestral workplace in order for this activity to result in sustained, growing benefits to the community being served, and in turn, growing recognition and increasing material awards to the organization's participants. Too few organizations are learning how to bring about and then release a natural and boundary-free flow of multiple, widely inclusive human interactions throughout the organization which build trust, communications, and understanding, and which result in unified action toward a shared purpose. These processes extend infinitely beyond what one person and a document can achieve, never mind how necessary both may be in today's world.

But we should be looking forward and finding new and better approaches, as is happening in Hartford, Portland, and Pittsburgh as well as in a few other cities. Orchestral organization workplaces need to be significantly more invigorating and engaging to all employees and volunteers. More organizations should be taking the concerted steps to achieve this better world. In the process, many of the rather singular expectations of the personnel manager will and should be shouldered by many other participants throughout the organization.

Paul R. Judy, founder and chairman of the Symphony Orchestra Institute, is a retired investment banking executive. He is a life trustee and former president of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Mr. Judy holds A.B. and M.B.A. degrees from Harvard University.