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Leadership

I sit down on the stage. The lights are up and there's no audience, not tonight. I'm wearing jeans instead of a tuxedo. It's a rehearsal night. I take out my trumpet and try to make sure that both my self and my horn are warmed enough so that the entire orchestra, made up of the students sitting all around me, can tune accurately. I suppose it's my responsibility. We'd sound pretty bad if none of us were in tune, and that would be embarrassing more than anything else. In my opinion, that's a bad enough consequence.

Then the girl stands up in the front. I'm not sure what her name is, but she's a student, like the rest of us. My eye catches her blonde hair and I turn to pay attention to her. She's holding her violin and smiling calmly, but with a subtle eagerness. In just a few seconds the small talk hushes itself and the rest of the eyes on the stage turn toward her. She isn't intimidating or anything, certainly not. She can't be older than sixteen and she doesn't look like she would hurt a fly. What's more, she doesn't have any authority to punish us for *not* minding her. Nevertheless, the focus turns to her, and she cues for us to tune as a group. Tonight I can hear that I'm a tad flat, so I adjust. I occasionally ask myself why I would even bother to, but I quickly remember that even if I could bear to listen to myself being out of tune, my friends less likely could, and the conductor least of all.

Oh yes, we have a conductor. He's stepping up to the front now. He was busy doing something else until now, I guess. I know many instructors who wouldn't dare leave their kids unattended, but our conductor, from how he treats us, doesn't seem to have a fear of doing that. He isn't very much of a teacher in this setting, though. I don't mean that he's incompetent; I mean that nothing he tells us is anything that we don't, or shouldn't, already know. I like him. He's humorous but can stay on task. He runs things the way I wish every other instructor would. He shows up and gets right to work, under the assumption that everyone has prepared everything beforehand. The students won't be kicked out if they show up unprepared, and they probably won't even be scolded very harshly at all, by the conductor or by their friends. They normally come prepared anyway, because it makes rehearsals smooth and efficient. Just one productive run-through can make a difference in our sound as a whole, but that productivity isn't under the conductor's control.

I would guess that the conductor doesn't really have a great deal of authority, though I've never seen him have to act as an enforcer. The students listen to him as attentively as they can, though, because they have respect both for him and the ensemble, and they understand that it's in the best interests of the group to do so. The conductor is more of a leader than anyone else onstage, though he is in total control of nothing, save the students who relinquish their own ability to interpret and decide for a few hours on this weeknight to him, so that we can all together sound like an orchestra.