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Leadership is a Stage

Strong and weak. Loud and quiet. Tough and gentle. Leadership incorporates all of these opposites. The “traditional” leader many immediately think of is harsh and rough, loud and muscular and mean, like a drill sergeant. But I prefer to think of a leader differently.

She walks into the office, wearing a crazy outfit and smiling that famous smile. Everyone around her sits in silence, half asleep and cranky. After all, we are a group of teenagers in a meeting at 7:30 in the morning in the summer. She goes over our plans for the week, everything we will be doing, emphasizing it will be hard, but enjoyable. Her smile doesn’t fade a bit. We head downstairs, where the kids come flooding in. When they are not around, I see her rub her head, trying to stay happy even though she has so many things that distract her from her cheery mood. Her workdays are long, her fingers are numb from sewing and hammering sets, and reading the script for the show is making her dyslexia act up. Then the kids come, and she is magically back into her theatre persona. She is a leader, strong and weak.

She walks out onto the stage, singing, skipping, and laughing. Small, nervous children sit as her audience, terrified of this loud lady. By the end of this week, they will be clinging to her, never wanting to leave. But after the children leave, wild and screaming because of their great day, she just sits quietly. She sums up the day with us, her willing assistants. One would think she is the most serene person in the world, until the next day when she is back in full swing with her cackling laugh, animal dance, and positive encouragement. She is a leader, loud and quiet.

Few people have seen her angry, but I am one of them. It rarely happens, but when it does, you don’t want to be near her. Few things get her angry: bullying, not participating, and giving up. But when any of these happen, it is usually her gentle, motherly side that comes out to those who have been hurt. Drying a tear, administering a Band-Aid, or simply smiling, she takes care of everyone as if they were a queen or king. She is a leader, tough and gentle.

Leaders can be harsh and mean and easily angered. But she is not. I think the world would be a whole lot better if the leaders of world nations got along like actors on a stage. Leadership is passed around, and everyone gets a turn. Everyone is working toward a common goal. She does this with everyone who walks through Civic Theatre’s doors. And isn’t that what a leader is? Not just someone who can take the reigns, someone who can bring people together and make everyone feel included. I aspire to be that kind of leader, one that goes about her business quietly, but still makes a big difference in society. And that is exactly who she is.

Meet Susan Strohmer, Civic Theatre Costume Designer and camp teacher, a good friend of mine and a true leader. Strong and weak, loud and quiet, tough and gentle. Leadership is this, and leaders, especially good ones like her, live it.