Scott Faulkner’s True and Helpful Things for an Orchestra Executive Director

- “As orchestra managers, all we do is manage relationships” - Peter Pastreich
- Know thyself!—strengths, weaknesses, most efficient times of day, best work environment, what to avoid & when, what you love, what you hate, etc
- “To know that we know what we know, and that we do not know what we do not know, that is true knowledge.” – Confucius
- Less but better—premise of the book “Essentialism”
- Be exceedingly clear about expectations—with new board members, employees, EVERYONE
- As executive director, have the mindset that you are in charge of everything…whether you are or aren’t
- Our product is vibrating air and the emotional and intellectual memory of it
- Never lose sight of your mission
- “Beware distractions!” - Paul Hogle—don’t chase attractive and shiny people or activities that are unrelated to your mission
- Trust your gut—your first instinct is usually the right one
- I’m at my best when I’m at my noblest
- You are here to make people’s lives better!
- “Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people.” — Eleanor Roosevelt
- Sound the alarm early—don’t hide bad news that you know may be coming, ESPECIALLY from the board
- It always comes down to governance—organizations that fail ultimately do so because of a lack of leadership from the board
- Words mean things—be careful which ones you choose
- Over-communicate your message—the world is noisy
- You can’t thank people enough—Thank you for taking this seminar!
- Sometimes a donation isn’t worth it
- Who is usually more important than What—Get the right people on the bus and in the right seats, THEN decide where you want to drive the bus OR I’d rather hear Heifetz play scales than a 6th grader play Bach
- Move the decimal point—principles are the same despite the size of the organization
- What if I (or MD or board chair or best employee or…) got hit by a bus tomorrow?—succession planning is crucial and easy to put off
- The importance of joy—you are in the joy-making business…remember it and act like it!
- As orchestra managers we tend to work terribly hard and be terribly hard on ourselves—take time to breathe, relax, and play. It makes you a better person and a better manager!
- Socialize the problem—stress is lessened when we share our struggles
- “The shelf-life of a conductor is about 10 years.” — Henry Fogel (Often true for ED’s too)
- Conductors are a unique breed of people who often have a gooey core of insecurity surrounded by a crusty shell of ego
- Conductors can make an orchestra play better than it should or as bad as it possibly can, and often the two aren’t that far apart—especially true for community/regional orchestras
- Your email is not your To-Do list—be the master of your email and social media
- Board members are volunteers who pay for the privilege of being legally responsible for your organization—respect and appreciate them
- You know much more about the organization and the field than your boss (the board) does—This is a unique and at times delicate balance, as you must teach, as well as report to, them
• “Only do what only you can do.”—Ryan Fleur—a helpful thought-guide for deciding about delegation
• Vacation is a necessity, not a privilege—for you and your employees
• Don’t be afraid to let people fail—don’t micromanage a task once you have delegated it
• Don’t be afraid to let people succeed—set people up for success when you delegate, and let them enjoy the glory
• Surround yourself with people who are better and smarter than you are—that is how organizations get to be great
• “If not controlled, work will flow to the competent man until he submerges.”—Charles Boyle—as you hire competent people, be very careful about this one
• Don’t hesitate to have non-board members serving on committees—it’s a good way to “test drive” how they would be as a board member
• Plan, plan, plan…execute the plan—the best progress comes from a disciplined and thoughtful strategic approach
• “Everything should be made as simple as possible, but no simpler” (attributed to Einstein)
• Carve out time regularly for reading, planning, reflection—You won’t do it if you don’t make yourself
• Executive Directors will never win a fight with a board, so don’t fight them
• Rich, entitled people are a unique, often time-consuming/high-maintenance, part of our jobs
• Be careful publicizing your politics—Republicans and Democrats are equally important to you
• In marketing, “fish where the fish are”/”Sell cigarettes to the smokers”—allocate marketing resources in places where the people inclined to buy tickets are
• Create a sense of urgency—otherwise things don’t get done
• The orchestra is the orchestra—not the staff
• Know and appreciate your musicians
• Know and appreciate your staff
• As executive directors we hear lots of peoples’ “most important thing.” Our job is prioritizing and juggling a million different “most important things.”
• Create systems rather than just executing tasks—this will help keep you from reinventing the wheel every time
• “Dishonesty is never called for, but you don’t always have to say everything.”—Peter Pastreich
• “All orchestras is local.”—Josh Worby (paraphrase of Tip O’Neill’s quotation: “All politics is local.”)—Although some commonalities are universal, each community is different
• “Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”—Mary Oliver
• “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”—Maya Angelou