

CASE 6.3

Playing in the Orchestra

Martina Bates is the newly hired orchestra teacher at Middletown School District in rural Sparta, Kansas. After graduating from the Juilliard School of Music, Martina had intended to play violin professionally, but when no jobs became available, she accepted an offer to teach orchestra in her hometown, believing it would be a good place to hone her skills until a professional position became available.

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Being the orchestra instructor at Middletown is challenging because it involves teaching music classes, directing the high school orchestra, and directing both the middle school and grade school orchestra programs. When classes started, Martina hit the ground running and found she liked teaching, exhilarated by her work with students. After her first year, however, she is having misgivings about her decision to teach. Most of all, she is feeling troubled by how different students are in each of the three programs, and how her leadership does not seem to be effective with all the students.

Running the elementary orchestra program is demanding, but fun. A lot of parents want their children to play an instrument, so the turnout for orchestra is really strong, and it is the largest of the three Middletown programs. Many students have never held an instrument before, so teaching them is quite a challenge. Learning to make the cornet sound like a cornet or moving the bow of a cello so it sounds like a cello is a huge undertaking. Whether it is drums, bass viol, clarinet, or saxophone, Martina patiently shows the kids how to play and consistently compliments them every small step of the way. First and foremost, she wants each child to feel like he or she can "do it." She instructs her students with great detail about how to hold the instruments, position their tongues, and read notes. They respond well to Martina's kindness and forbearance, and the parents are thrilled. The orchestra's spring concert had many wild sounds but was also wildly successful, with excited children and happy parents.

The middle school orchestra is somewhat smaller in size and presents different challenges for Martina. The students in this orchestra are starting to sound good on their instruments and are willing to play together as a group, but some of them are becoming disinterested and want to quit. Martina uses a different style of leadership with the middle schoolers, stressing practice and challenging students to improve their skills. At this level, students are placed in "chairs" for each instrument. The best players sit in the first chair, the next best are second chair, and so on down to the last chair. Each week, the students engage in "challenges" for the chairs. If students practice hard and improve, they can advance to a higher chair; students who don't practice can slip down to a lower chair. Martina puts up charts to track students' practice hours, and when they reach established goals, they can choose a reward from "the grab bag of goodies," which has candy, trinkets, and gift cards. Never knowing what their prize will be motivates the students, especially as they all want to get the gift cards. Although some kids avoid practice because they find it tedious and boring, many

enjoy it because it improves their performance, to say nothing about the chance to get a prize. The spring concert for this group is Martina's favorite, because the sounds are better and the students are interested in playing well.

Middletown's high school orchestra is actually very small, which is surprising to Martina. Why does she have nearly a hundred kids in the elementary orchestra and less than half that number in the high school program? She likes teaching the high school students, but they do not seem too excited about playing. Because she is highly trained herself, Martina likes to show students advanced techniques and give them challenging music to play. She spends hours listening to each student play, providing individualized feedback that, unfortunately in many cases, doesn't seem to have any impact on the students. For example, Chris Trotter, who plays third-chair trumpet, is considering dropping orchestra to go out for cross-country. Similarly, Lisa Weiss, who is first-chair flute, seems bored and may quit the orchestra to get a part-time job. Martina is frustrated and baffled; why would these students want to quit? They are pretty good musicians, and most of them are willing to practice. The students have such wonderful potential but don't seem to want to use it. Students profess to liking Martina, but many of them just don't seem to want to be in the orchestra.

Questions

1. Path-goal leadership is about how leaders can help followers reach their goals. Generally, what are the goals for the students in each of the different orchestras? What obstacles do they face? In what way does Martina help them address obstacles and reach their goals?
2. Based on the principles of expectancy theory described in the chapter, why is Martina effective with the elementary and middle school orchestras? Why do both of these groups seem motivated to play for her? In what ways did she change her leadership style for the middle schoolers?
3. Martina's competencies as a musician do not seem to help her with the students who are becoming disinterested in orchestra. Why? Using ideas from expectancy theory, what would you advise her to do to improve her leadership with the high school orchestra?
4. Achievement-oriented leadership is one of the four major kinds of path-goal leadership. For which of the three orchestras do you think this style would be most effective? Discuss.