

# **Applying Marching Band Concepts to Develop High Performing Team**

**Thomas Seubert**  
Manufacturing Execution Systems Consultant  
R3D Consulting  
Troy, MI 48083

## **Abstract**

Over the past few years, a lot of attention has been given to how successful a High School or Collegiate Marching Band program has been able to impart significant “soft” skills on their students, from greater communication skills to greater team work to greater confidence levels in each individual. This paper will explore how these skills can be imparted and how other curricula can leverage the Marching Band program to help increase these soft skills. This paper was researched over several years from observation with several marching bands and conclusions were reviewed with several Marching band directors

## **Purpose**

Over the past few years the demand for technical and business people to have excellent communication and team work skills. Traditional STEM based curricula has not been that successful in the imparting of these skills. Therefore we will look into a non-STEM based activity, marching band, which usually has great success at developing highly effective teams, to determine how these team building can be applied to other areas. The greatest challenge in the creation of this paper is the lack of previous studies in applying the team techniques of Marching band to areas outside of Marching Band. Most of the material covered is from verifying activities with actual participants and band directors.

## **How is this paper organized**

We will cover Marching Ban program from the perspective of a high school novice. We will then cover the skills improved by marching band and how they are improved. We will then cover the differences in Collegiate marching bands. The application of these concepts will then be covered followed by the conclusion.

## **What is Marching Band?**

A marching band is a musical ensemble that performs music with the participants changing their physical locations to make different formations, usually for sporting events, parades, and other ceremonies. Modern marching bands started off in the military and have retained most of its martial structure.

## **Terms used throughout this paper**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Band Director	The one person in charge of the Band. For High school, it is the band teacher. In collegiate, it is the professor of band.
Drum Major	The person directly conducting the band and the first person leading the band in parade. For both High School and Collegiate bands, it is a student. Bands can have multiple Drum Majors

Abstract: Over the past few years, a lot of attention has been given to how successful a High School or Collegiate Marching Band program has been able to impart significant “soft” skills on their students, from greater communication skills to greater team work to greater confidence levels in each individual. This paper will explore how these skills can be imparted and how other curricula can leverage the Marching Band program to help increase these soft skills. This paper was researched over several years from observation with several marching bands and conclusions were reviewed with several Marching band directors.

Section Leader	The leader for a specific subsection of the band. Each section is comprised of similar instruments. Section Leaders are usually more experienced members of the band. For both High School and collegiate bands, these are students.
Competition	Activities where marching band execute their program and get adjudicated by a board of experts.

### **Marching Band program in High School**

Once a student decides that they want to join a high school marching band, there are a few prerequisites that need to be completed first. Usually there is either an audition or a marching band activity where the prospective student must participate in because the Band Director needs to determine the proficiency level of the student with their instrument and also determine if the student has the interest and fortitude to stick through the whole marching band season. The instrument proficiency needs to be determined so that the ease of which the student can learn the music selection can be determined and the interest and fortitude to handle the marching band season because it is harder to adjust the team to cover for somebody who drops out in the middle of the season.

Once the prerequisites are successfully completed, the student is then introduced to the Marching band leadership, organizational structure, and more experienced band members. This is done to ensure that everyone directly participating in marching band understands the chain of command including how issues get resolved, and who and where to go for assistance. Part of this is getting the more experienced marching band participants set up to assist the newer members through a more defined mentor type leadership relationship.

The next step is the first practice. Here is where the expectations of individual tasks for the new participant become clear. The participants then find out what they have to learn and what they need to do to deliver their program. This is also where they are exposed to different levels of diversity: not only the cultural diversity of their fellow participants, but also the diversity of the different musical and physical marching skills as well as different leadership and personality styles, which is also a diversity concern.

After a few practices, typically a weeklong Band Camp is executed. This can take many forms, from a day long band practice and band program development local to the high school to travelling to a remote site, like a college campus or a campsite with cabins. This activity is really beneficial because it focuses the participants' direct tasks and learning activities, but also important is more exposure to diversity and team dynamics an team building activities, including down time activities where more socialization occurs. By the end of Band Camp the entire marching band operates with significantly more teamwork.

After returning from Band Camp, there typically remains a few weeks before scheduled performances where the band continues to meet and rehearse to fine tune the music, the marching program, and deepen the teamwork. The goal of all this work is to perform live the marching band program, which is the end deliverable. The marching band has a season which coincides with the Fall football season, which means there are multiple performances that are delivered, both a football games and at separate competitions. After each performance the performance is reviewed by the Band Director with all of the participants to determine where more work needs to be done to improve the delivery of the program.

### **Skills Improved because of Marching Band**

<b>Skill</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Communication	Improvements in verbal skills and also improvement in musical expression as a result of team dynamics.
Discipline	Marching Bands started off decades ago as a military function and continues to have that disciplinary / regimented structure. Discipline, Leadership, and punctuality are improved. Participants will be held accountable, in a constructive way, for mistakes so that the performances can be improved.
Confidence	Being able to play music and march at the same time boosts self-confidence, therefore having an impact on all facets of life.
Multi-Tasking	Being able to play the music, march and move into different formations, follow the band conductor, and being able to ensure that no collision with other band members requires

	significant amount of multi-tasking ability.
Sacrifice / Generosity	Marching band is a true team effort: the whole impact of the program is negatively affected if one participant does not play or march well. Because of this, band members become generous to each other and sacrifice their own needs for the betterment of the band. One of the outcomes is that personal Egos are kept in check
Resilience / Flexibility	While the execution of marching band programs are and organized, the rest of the activities can be more dynamic, so marching band participants do learn to be flexible and in that flexibility being resilience to continue after many hours of rehearsal and issues occur if something does go wrong is also developed.
Proprioception	While this does not have a direct influence on the program or team dynamics, this sixth sense of body awareness with being able to march in different directions and know what is going on around them while always looking forward is useful to ensure that there are no collisions. This skill does get enhanced during the band season.
Trust	Trust is developed because each band member needs to be able to trust all other band members to play the correct notes and to march in the correct formations: each individual depends on each other individual executing their tasks correctly.
Teamwork / Troubleshooting	All teamwork is an absolute necessity for marching band and individual and small group troubleshooting activities do occur and become enhanced.

### **Collegiate Marching Bands: what is different?**

The marching band programs at the collegiate level (college and university) become more intense: the expectation is that they have already have experience with marching band. There is still an audition / interview, but here the expectation is that the student is already proficient with their instruments so that they can handle most musical pieces with some comfort but also that do require practice to get correct. The next expectation is that once the band meets for the first practice, they immediately start working: there is no delay due to somebody not understanding the leadership model or what the expectations are. Once they are introduced to the leadership team, they immediately start the rehearsals based on the Band Director's direction and also immediately know how to help each other out when needed.

It is at this point that marching band becomes a high performing team. This means that the participants gain the additional skills of being able to apply these teamwork skills to other activities in their life: other team based activities that these students become involved in, whether it is inside the collegiate environment, or within the work environment, or other activities, become better performing team because of applying the teamwork that they have learned within Marching Band.

### **Applying Marching Band Concepts to Technical Teams**

Based on the previous text, the concepts that marching Band actively utilizes can be applied to any team, especially technical teams, to make them more effective:

- Skill Sets are always assessed before starting the preparation of the program
- Complete Leadership and organizational structure is clearly communicated at the start of the program development: everyone knows who to go to for questions or concerns.
- Team makeup includes novices and experienced members. Program novices know directly who their mentors are for the different program delivery skills (instrument proficiency, marching capability, etc.).
- Team members are held accountable for mistakes in a constructive manner to ensure that lessons are learned during the overall program execution
- Each team member is completely reliant on everyone else in the team for the successful delivery of the program.
- Team building activities are an absolute must, including non-structured socialization during program down time
- After each program is delivered, the execution of the program is reviewed by the entire team to determine and prioritize improvement activities.

### **Suggestions for Team Education Improvements**

The following are suggestion on creating a program / curricula to improve the skills that marching band improves:

- When creating the project or program team, always assess the skill sets of the team members before any activity begins.
- Ensure that the project / program leadership model, structure, and expectations are clearly understood before start. Leadership needs to be very responsive.
- Ensure that any novices to the project or program are know who their mentors are and understand the mentorship method / process. This needs to be pre-defined.
- As the project / program progresses, ensure that when mistakes happen that those responsible for the mistakes are corrected constructively to support accountability. This will also support ongoing lessons learned and help improve skills.
- Encourage ongoing dialog for improvements during the life of the project / program. This needs to be a defined manner through leadership. This will improve communication and help improve team responsiveness.
- Ensure that the common understanding that the success of the project / program is dependent on each team member and each team member is reliant on each other for their success.
- Ensure that Team building and non-project / program related socialization activities occur.
- At the end of the project / program, an activity where a thorough review of the success and determination of improvements is conducted with all team members to help ensure better effectiveness the next time around.

## Conclusion

The best answer to implement this educational model is to utilize the existing model already developed and in operation in years by having students directly participate in Marching Band. This is not feasible due to musical skill sets required and access to a marching band program, the next logical step is to develop the best team and communication skills, curricula need to be modified and changes to better match the model that Marching Bands have consistently demonstrated results: while in sports teamwork and communications are also enhanced, here it is more dependent on the abilities of the coaches themselves and not part of truly structured and integrated approach. The challenge is both on the collegiate side to marry these methods into existing curricula, but also encouragement for High Schools to embrace Marching Bands as an excellent method to ready the youth for the challenges of working in future teams.

## References

<http://ascendperformingarts.org/18-lessons-marching-band-teaches-our-kids-a-parents-perspective/>

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the following for their input and support of this paper:

- Rita Gerstheimer-Seubert, former marching band member, Fraser High School Fraser MI.
- Alaric Gerstheimer-Seubert, Marching Band Member and Music Education student, Eastern Michigan University
- Dr. Amy Knopps, Marching Band Director, Eastern Michigan University
- Daniel Chesher, Director of Bands, Roseville High School, Roseville, MI

## Biography

**Thomas Seubert** is currently a consultant for Manufacturing Execution Systems. He has over 20 years of controls, manufacturing, IT, project management, training, with several automotive providers. As a Boy Scout leader he has also directly led and mentored many teens on several subjects ranging from wood carving, planning, setting goals, and many different team building activities. He continues to advice Scout units in the different ways to help teen grow. He is also the recipient of the IEOM Distinguished Service award from the IEOM Conference in September 2015 where he was one of the key speakers. He currently lives in Roseville, MI with his wife Rita and son Alaric, who is studying Music Education at Eastern Michigan University and has 5 years of marching band experience.