

NON-TRADITIONAL



David Wiley music director and conductor of the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra (standing right) brings Allstate executives onstage amid orchestra members

In harmony: Insurance company a symphony

Allstate executives get a lesson in working together as only an orchestra can demonstrate it

Woodwind, brass, percussion, strings: sections of the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra demonstrated on October 16 that just as an entire orchestra must adhere to the same high standards to produce a harmonious sound, so do the executives of Allstate.

"Conducting Change in Harmony," a 1½-hour program during the morning that took place within the orchestra, was a collaboration between Music Director and Conductor of the

Roanoke Symphony Orchestra (RSO) David Wiley and Allstate Territory Manager Fred Hatch.

Hatch and Allstate Senior Support Center Manager Pam Prestage had been trying to find a way to bring the executives together, not just literally but figuratively as well. The music did it. "We received overwhelmingly positive feedback from Allstate about this collaboration, and it really reinforced much of the work they were doing in their own leadership meetings and corporate change," says Wiley, who envisions further collaborations with the business community. He explains that this verified the disparate nature

of an organization having problems holding to the same standards within its ranks.

Allstate executives were told little. They arrived at the RSO in the morning and were asked to take a seat among the various sections of the orchestra, which was in full complement that day.

Then, Wiley demonstrated what happens when virtuosos don't work together. "I asked the wind section to tune down to a different pitch than the rest, and they were not in harmony with the orchestra," says Wiley. He also removed information from the podiums and forced the orchestra to listen in a new way, making the leaders com-

municate to players.

Or, he would exaggerate something musically and then ask, "What would happen if I exaggerated in the opposite direction? All the while, [Allstate] members were sitting within the orchestra, within a few feet of the players. I think it was an eye-opening and inspiring situation for them," says Wiley.

Hatch has seen something like this done with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and felt it could be done with his group in Roanoke. Allstate, which is a corporate partner of the RSO,

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RSO

had been going through corporate change and Wiley knew that its business leaders, like his orchestra section leaders, had to work collaboratively to make the whole stronger than its parts. One hundred and twenty business leaders sat among the orchestra and saw that the RSO was a business just like Allstate.

"We need to run efficiently and effectively as we try to put these business practices into play. As an aside, this is a time of real success and business growth for us. We're exceeding ticket sales and goals, and our surplus is going into our endowment. We have a real team in place to make that happen," Wiley points out.

Allstate was sitting among members of a team whose balanced budget had grown from \$750,000 to \$1.6 million in 10 years.

Wiley calls an orchestra a team sport where everybody wins. "The reason I say that is

that it requires real listening all the time—verbal and nonverbal cues." He says everyone is expected to arrive at rehearsal knowing their part, "cold," and that the rehearsal is all about "making it larger than the sum of the parts. And that's why it's an amazing business model."

It wasn't just a matter of slapping a few thoughts down on paper, though. Wiley says this 1½-hour collaboration of trying to correlate business model information to a working orchestra took a significant amount of preparation.

He read *Our Iceberg is Melting: Changing and Succeeding Under Any Conditions* by John Kotter, the same book that many of the Allstate executives had just finished as part of their corporate change process.

"It proved to be an interesting book that got me thinking more about what I do in the

orchestra. Many [Allstate executives] said that the experience really reinforced what they had read in Kotter's book in a personal way by sitting in the orchestra," says Wiley.

Hatch says the experience was "awesome," and a lifetime experience for his executives. In a letter sent to Wiley, he says "Our leadership team was highly impressed with how you navigated through the various sections and elaborated so elegantly on how

each musician and instrument must work in harmony to achieve the desired sounds and effects. The demonstrations revealed to our leadership team the importance of key leadership attributes such as teamwork, listening, timing, communications, work ethic and commitment to be your very best." One executive told Wiley that she could see the orchestra was most successful when "the

players had shining eyes," recounts Wiley, who adds, "I think that's something a leader looks for in his employees—that sense of joy and discovery, and that's something that, as musicians, we can never take for granted."

Both Hatch and Wiley foresee further collaborations and a draw for ticket sales from programs such as these. "We can see this as a revenue-generating opportunity for them," says Hatch.

Wiley was quick to point out that it's not just the members of the orchestra onstage that are enabling this business to run well. As its leader, he says, it is his job to make others more powerful. "I talked about how a conductor's power depends on his ability to make others powerful."

It is not just the soloists, the chorus, and the players, but the ticket sales, the marketing, the fundraising, the youth orchestra program and the education and outreach efforts that, he says, "make this truly a team effort."

(Sarah Cox is a Vinton-based freelance writer.)

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