

Listening to a good jazz trio or quartet can be an amazing experience. There is a sense of spontaneous flow that somehow fits together to generate a unique and powerful experience. Jazz musicians can teach us several important leadership lessons:

### Lesson 1: Be clear about what matters most.

Without a shared vision of the sound the musicians are after, the result would be chaotic at best. The critical framework of the music is determined and well understood by the players from the start. The key and time signatures are agreed upon. The tempo is set. The chord progressions are defined.

*Leaders have a responsibility to communicate clearly about the critical elements of where they're going and how they plan to get there. Listen for the dissonance that signals that you haven't been as clear as you thought you were.*

### Lesson 2: Give every player the freedom to improvise within the accepted framework.

Within the defined parameters, the musicians have the freedom to get creative. A descending run in the second measure, an ascending run in the fifth. Throw in some trills. Increase the dynamics through this section, soften it up through that. If it contributes to the desired feel of the song, go for it!

*Leaders who stifle creativity or attempt to control every step never get the best energy, creativity, or loyalty from their followers. Listen to where your followers are trying to go and look for opportunities to accommodate them.*



### Lesson 3: Listen to the other players.

Even if it complies with the defined elements of the critical framework, creativity will create a cacophony unless each musician listens attentively to what the other musicians are doing. If one player decides to blast a section while everyone else is bringing the volume down, the results aren't what anyone wants.

*In the most effective organizations, leaders and followers all learn to listen to each other. That enables you to anticipate their moves and responses and be prepared for them. Charge ahead with your own ideas without listening first and you'll eventually look over your shoulder and find your followers aren't with you.*

### Lesson 4: Everyone gets a chance to shine.

In jazz, every instrument can solo. Guitar, sax, keyboard, bass, drums, or kazoo – everyone knows how to lay back and give each other their moment in the spotlight. Not every instrument in every song, but everyone knows they'll get their turn eventually.

*A leader who takes all the glory for himself won't attract the highly skilled followers he needs to reach his own highest potential. If you want to be a solo artist, go for it. But if you want to lead quality people to accomplish something bigger than you can do alone, don't hog the spotlight.*

Even in the ego-rich music industry, players learn that giving others a chance to be heard and make a difference is good for everyone. Likewise, listening to your followers and creating space for them to grow is good for you and your organization.

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