

ETM: The Podcast

Episode 13: On Leadership with ETM CEO, Janice Weinman

TRANSCRIPT

Noah: You are listening to Education Through Music, the podcast. As always, I'm your host, Noah, and I'm joined today by Dr. Janice Weinman. Janice is the CEO of Education Through Music and she's led an accomplished career spanning five decades in the top leadership positions of international and national not-for-profit organizations. She has served in two presidential administrations, in addition to state and local governments, and she was just recently named a 2023 Politics NY and AMNY Metro Power Player in Education. And now, without any further ado, Dr. Janice Weinman, thanks so much for being here today.

Janice: I am delighted to be here and I'm particularly pleased to be interviewed by you, Noah.

Noah: Well, thank you. So let's start the interview off by going to your time as a student in New York City Public Schools. What was that experience like?

Janice: So I went to the New York public schools, grades K through 12. I went to elementary public school, to junior high school and then to the High School of Music and Art. My family had come from another country. They came here after World War II and they spoke with an accent and it was a little hard to assimilate. But we eventually did that. The kids kind of thought that I was different, but nonetheless now that wouldn't make a difference. But when I was growing up it was a little bit unusual. But I went through the public schools, k through, I would say, ninth grade in elementary school and middle school. Junior high school, as we called it, were very traditional, nothing exceptional. You know the regular routine of what you get in classes throughout those years. Simultaneously, however, I attended Juilliard in the preparatory division for 10 years and that was really a remarkable experience. But when I joined the High School of Music and Art, when I started in high school, that was when really my education started to flourish and to open up. For me, the High School of Music and Art was an institution in which kids from all over New York City came. Everybody had their own talents, their own backgrounds, their own interests and it was really, as you know, at the time we used to call it a melting pot. It was really a melting pot of different talents and each of us learned from one another and each of us really respected one another for what we brought to the table. So I was in the orchestra as well as in voice, and I'll never forget my teacher, Mr. Kosikoff. He was our orchestra teacher, who every graduate of the High School of Music and Art talks about. Mrs. Ekst was our voice teacher and really the High School of Music and Art brought our voices out in a way that really made us feel that we were really contributing to something as a whole. We were part of orchestras, we were part of choirs. We were part of orchestras, we were part of choirs, we were part of an integrated group that really worked together and in harmony, so to speak. It was a wonderful experience and we had our academics as well as our particular art form that we engaged in and it was really a wonderful time.

Noah: How did having access to music education sort of set you on a course towards where you ended up in your career later on?

Janice: I learned so much through music that really helped me in the development of my skills. I learned discipline from music and you certainly need that if you're going to have a trajectory of career advancement. You need to really know how to measure what you're going to do and how to do it. I learned to pick up cues when you're in an orchestra. You have to really be very, very sensitive to cues, and that's so important as you move through life in terms of a career, in terms of a profession. I learned what it meant like to be part of a team. You have to be part of a team if you are either in a choir, in an orchestra, in a chamber music group. You have to really be part of something that works well together, and being part of a team is critical and crucial to the way in which a person really is able to advance career-wise, because the only way you can really accomplish anything is to be part of a team.

Noah: Yeah, this sort of collaborative nature of working together and creating music and the empathy that is sort of a part of that, this ability to follow cues and to be able to give cues too, probably is something that a lot of successful people talk about when they refer back to their early music education, and so that's the collaborative aspect. But you've also spent a great deal of time in positions of leadership. How would you characterize your approach to leadership and your style as a leader?

Janice: Well, I've had many different kinds of jobs. I worked in to start with, in the New York City school system. At the time it was called the Board of Ed. I did a statewide assessment in Massachusetts. I worked for the US government several times in the Department of Education. I worked in an organization where we gave new product to children in need all around the world. I'm just telling you that, so that leadership takes on different roles in different kinds of situations. But there are several things I think that are critical in leadership. A lot of it has to do with balance. A lot of it has to do with priority setting, so you have to determine what is most important to the organization and that which is most sustainable and most critical for the advancement of the organization. So I think that leadership is a process of identifying for others what those priorities are and making people understand how they can implement those priorities. Everybody has a role to play in meeting the goals of an organization and leadership is clearly articulating those goals and identifying for everybody what it is that they can contribute to meeting those goals. One of the things about leadership and it's a balance all the time is I have very high standards for what I think people can do, because I have a great deal of confidence in what people can achieve. Many times I may push people a little too hard and too far, but I think it's part of the learning process. I think, actually, people need to set their own personal goals as high as they possibly can, and I've always enjoyed mentoring people in that process. I think that's part of leadership as well. I think another part of leadership has to do with the fiscal conditions of any organization. Part of leadership has to do with the fiscal conditions of any organization. That is something that people often delegate elsewhere. I think that that can be delegated, but I think it's critical for a leader to really be conscious of the fiscal situation of any organization that they lead, because that is where the future of the organization lies. Its ability to be sustainable, its ability to grow, its ability to be able to accomplish everything that it really hopes to be able to attain.

Noah: Education, I think, is one of these fields where there isn't always an instruction manual or there isn't a guaranteed pathway to success all the time. Sometimes you have to sort of innovate in order to find that pathway towards greater effectiveness and success, and that's something that I was sort of startled with when I started teaching. There's not necessarily an instruction manual. So all of these challenges that you face, you don't always know if you're going to be able to succeed right away or ever. So I wonder how your multifaceted career and all of these various leadership positions, how that has prepared you to take on all of the various challenges in the field of education.

Janice: Education has changed a lot over the past decades and I've been involved in it for decades. I think there are two things that really need to be considered in terms of challenges. First of all, there are challenges that are external and those that are internal, internal, that you are part of the organization, external, that are part of either government regulations, that are part of the environment, that are part of demands that parents and communities require. I think you have to be able to differentiate those challenges, and I think, in that regard, there's something very important, and that is you need to be able to know what you can affect and what you can't. Is you need to be able to know what you can affect and what you can't, and you need to, in terms of challenges, really focus on those that are the ones that you believe are in the kind of scope of what you can accomplish. I think challenges occur every day, every single day, in education or in any field, and I think you have to differentiate also between the big ones and the little ones. Are the little ones those things that you can either kind of allow to be treated or handled at a different time versus the very big ones that you know require a great deal of effort, a great deal of people working together, a great deal of teamwork. I think those challenges are ones that are the most immediate, the most important and the ones that you really require to build capacity to deal with. And I think it's really important to be able to differentiate those challenges and to be able to say these are the ones that are critical, these are the ones that we have to deal with, these are the smaller ones that we can kind of not ignore but treat with less strength and less capacity. So I think that's a very important part of dealing with challenges.

Noah: And sort of in that same vein, what are the challenges that your organization, Education Through Music, specifically addresses, and how is its approach unique? What does it do that other organizations do not do?

Janice: Yes, Education Through Music is really unique and that is not just rhetoric. We really deliver on what our message is and what our mission is. So we're unique in many ways. First of all, we don't just offer music instruction once a week. We come in, we leave, we bring in artists, but we are embedded in the school. We're embedded in the school, our teachers are part of the culture of the school, they're part of the organization of the school itself and we are really a core subject. So we're teaching students every week. So that's one very, very basic difference that ETM has that other music programs do not. Secondly, we build our curriculum around what we see as being the most important issues that students need to know about, or skills or techniques or history about music. That brings in DEI issues, that brings in social and emotional considerations, that reflects the cultures of all of where our students come from. It is really a dynamic, growing, evolving curriculum. The third thing is Education Through Music provides

teacher development, teacher professional development throughout the course of the year, a minimum of 100 hours per teacher, and that is really such a critical element of what we do. We do that as part of really making our program vital and vibrant and responsive and responsible and we have a terrific teacher development program. And then the last part of why we are so unique is because we really focus on sustainability. We want our teachers that we hire and that we support. We want our teachers to become employees, permanent employees of the Department of Education, so that our model, our program, our whole technique can be sustained and institutionalized in schools for the long term. I must say that there is no other program that I know of that has all those components, every part of it. It's really a comprehensive, sustainable, very, very dynamic program that we offer.

Noah: Is there a specific anecdote from your career that relates to ETM and ETM's mission?

Janice: So this is a very unusual thing that I did in my life, and that is I lived on the Pueblo Reservation in New Mexico. I went as part of a project to decentralize the Native American schools from the Bureau National Bureau of Indian Affairs, and what I learned there was primarily about their music, so much so that I wrote an article about it in a journal called Ethnomusicology. And what I learned was the way in which the rhythms and the harmonies and the relationship of and the harmonies and the relationship of rhythms to harmonies was so unique to the people that I was living with. The reason I feel that that's so important and relates to ETM is that we have really made it a priority to ensure that the different backgrounds of all of our students are incorporated into the instruction that we provide. At a recent Teacher Professional Development Day, for example, our program department had brought in somebody who explained about Arabic music, and it was so different to what we know in terms of Western music, so different to what we know in terms of Western music, and these are the kinds of things that ETM so carefully and so conscientiously tries to really make part of what we offer, so that students really can identify with the music that they are learning, so that they can feel part and pride in what they are learning. And I think that that's a very critical part of what I learned through my career. It was really a very, very important influence on my life.

Noah: In a city like New York where there are so many different backgrounds represented. I think that's particularly critical. Looking ahead to the near term and perhaps even to the further term, where do you envision ETM going? Where are some opportunities and possibilities for expansion or for further development?

Janice: Yes, we very much would like to continue to grow. We stepped back a little bit this school year in terms of the number of schools and students that we were serving, but we would like to continue to broaden our footprint to impact more students. So that's a very, very important part of where we want to go as an organization. We stepped back because we wanted to ensure that the quality of our teachers was as good as it could possibly be, and also for fiscal reasons. But we have gotten an anonymous \$3 million grant simply to focus on teacher recruitment and onboarding, teacher professional development, teacher certification, retention of teachers, and that is what we're going to be devoting ourselves to so that we can grow. So we really want to be able to increase the number of schools we are in. We want to make sure that our teachers

are of the highest quality and that we retain them. We also want to make sure that we establish partnerships with other like-minded organizations so that we can leverage our strengths and so that we can really bring in the broadest possible array of skills to our students. And, finally, we really want to be top of mind of the public of the music world, because what we have to offer is so unique and it is so value-added and it is so much a part of what everybody, every single student, should experience, not just those that go to private schools or highly resourced schools, but the whole point, the whole point of ETM is access and equity in music education, and that's what we want to offer to an increasingly larger number of needy students.

Noah: Janice, thanks so much for taking the time and for sharing your story with us.

Janice: As I said before, I'm delighted to do this and I'm really most overjoyed to be able to talk about ETM, which I have the greatest of all pride. I think it's an organization that really accomplishes what it says it does, and I think that that's very important and, in some cases, very unusual.