

## DEAR UNCLE MAX

Send questions to Dear Uncle Max, AGO National Headquarters, 475 Riverside Dr., Suite 1260, New York, NY 10115.

*Dealing successfully with personalities of all sorts is a very important part of being a church musician. From time to time, I have had to deal with challenging personalities and so far have had relatively good success. Some people have an innate ability at this task and some don't, but anyone could benefit from training. I would certainly welcome the opportunity to hone personality-management skills. Why is it that these skills are not integral to our academic training? Now and then, one finds a good workshop on the subject, but time restraints relegate it to being only dissemination of information; significant time (at least a semester or two) is needed in this area. Might I suggest that AGO Headquarters make more workshops available on this topic but also do whatever possible to encourage institutions offering organ and church music degrees to make this an integral part of the curriculum?*

W.E., Va.

I am sure no one will challenge you on the centrality of the task of working with difficult personalities in the field of church music, or just working in church, period. One encounters every personality type, people from every stratum of economic and educational background; the goal is to love them all, bring out the best in them, and that ain't always so easy.

We have all watched incredibly talented young musicians come along from whom we have every right to expect great things and then, for all sorts of reasons, ego in the way, whatever, they make themselves unemployable by the church, which usually goes overboard to be patient. Sad. If you can't work with people, what do you do? Sort eggs into Grade A, B, C, small, medium, and large?

For all that, I have some difficulty (though I am not outright opposed to it) trying to imagine just where a course on personality-management skills belongs in, say, a music school curriculum. Courses of study are already jam-packed at the undergraduate level. In music study there is so much to be got through and so many strictly musical

skills to be developed that liberal arts are pretty well shunted aside, though most study would include (at least as an elective) a course in psychology of some sort. My own priority for music students would be, give them as many fundamental musical skills as you can while in the school setting. That is, anything that requires a steady, pressured discipline to learn and which students are not apt to undertake on their own, either because of a lack of teachers, books, equipment, or self-discipline. The situation doesn't change at the graduate level. It gets worse. Think of all the sifting that will be required to sort out what is really important in the music of the 20th century? What new theoretical skills will need inclusion? Faculties argue these matters endlessly—good that they do and good that each gets one vote, which keeps things in some sort of balance.

My impression is that there are all sorts of workshops floating around if you want them. How to tell what is really good is more difficult. TV seems to have plenty of smallish men with square mustaches selling four cassettes that tell you how to get along in any business (all were multimillionaires at 16), as well as ladies (slightly aging) in sweeping skirts and flowing movements gliding between quasi-Greek columns pushing their books on interpersonal relations, each book, be it noted, having a supplement called *Vitamins for Success*.

You are 100% right that people have differing skills in this area, but I suspect that a self-awareness of how good or how poor one's skills are comes after one is in the field rather than during the college years. This is why I think your suggestion that AGO National Headquarters make something available is well worth considering. Perhaps you are the one to put a program together. I can easily envision the usefulness of a case study approach to be used at Guild chapter meetings: Fred Harumph has been singing a solo in his church since 1917, insists on continuing his "rights" though he can barely breathe and automatically sings a minor third lower than whatever you play. Donna Bella, a retired Army officer, insists that all choir members wear the appropriate uniform of the day as determined by her—no jewelry, black stockings, and black shoes required; choir members are not permitted to display any mirth, even if it is the pastor who has told a good joke.

Real cases would need to be used for such a "what-would-you-do," "how-would-you-handle" set of exercises.

MAX B. MILLER, FAGO

## NICE TO BE APPRECIATED

So often we as church musicians are caught up in problems and in church politics that interfere with our ministries. With these problems always on our minds, I felt it was important to share with colleagues my situation. I am minister of music at a Lutheran church (Missouri Synod) with about 1,300 members. This is a place where the staff truly feels supported, cared for, and loved. I can honestly say that not a week goes by that we do not get words of encouragement, support, or compliments from members, pastors, or other staff. In addition, notes letting us know that we have been prayed for are the rule, not the exception.

Not too long ago, I was looking for another position because the music ministry position here was half-time. This did not work out, but through caring and creative planning, the congregation was able to offer me a full-time position here.

Just this week, I received the following note signed by one of the elders of the church. It expresses better than I could, the attitude of the people and the kind of environment this congregation creates for its staff:

Dear Bill,

At our Elders and Deaconesses meeting this evening, we gave thanks to God for the gifts he has given you as an organist. Last Sunday's music in particular was extraordinary. We're pleased that we were able to find a way to keep you on staff, and we pray that God will continue to bless our individual and joint ministries. God be with you."

It sure is nice to be appreciated, isn't it?

BILL AHLMAN  
San Antonio, Tex.