

If You Can, You Must

The floors and walls were hard and white, blaring as I tried to think. The chaos of people playing instruments, talking, and laughing all faded to noise as I strained to hear my thoughts over the ever-increasing tempo of my heart panicking to get through my veins. Did I want to stand up in front of a band full of experienced drum majors to conduct *The Doctor*?

We, the junior drum majors from MCC High School and I, had been at Central Michigan University for five days now. The summer *2016 Drum Major and Color Guard Camp* was coming to a close. Of all the kids from MCC, I was the only student in the advanced conducting class. I hated it. I kept comparing myself to the other kids as everyone took their turn conducting one another. I felt like everyone looked down on me for the style I used to lead the band. When I finished my mandatory one time conducting the band, I was ecstatic because I was finally done. I eagerly looked forward to the next day in class when I would be able to relax and not worry about having to conduct.

However, God had a different plan for my last day of conducting class. We had just taken a break from playing the two songs someone in our class would conduct for all three classes: the beginner, intermediate, and advanced. During our water break, I noticed CMU's drum major, Kurt, and the leader of the camp, Cory, talking secretively in the corner of the band room. I had a pretty good idea that they were deliberating over who in my class they thought were the best conductors, and who would conduct which song. Presently, Cory called my name and discreetly waved me over. My heart

skipped a beat. My mind raced on. I thought, "Oh, you want me to go get something from one of the other classes? Or maybe I did something wrong? Or perhaps he will tell me that I have no talent and shouldn't be in this class let alone a drum major?"

In fact, I was right. Cory did bring me trouble. A little hesitantly but with a heartwarming smile Cory started, "Francesca, we've been watching you and we would like you to conduct *The Doctor* in front of all three classes." As soon as he'd said it my mind went into warp speed and I blurted out, "No! Please don't make me."

Now, you must understand how big of an honor it is to be picked by Kurt and Cory. They have both had a lot of experience being drum major, and they've seen hundreds of gifted kids go through CMU's camp. That is why I was so flabbergasted and troubled that they might pick me. Cory was clearly shocked by my brazen response. He requested that I think it over for a little bit.

He double and triple checked, "Are you really sure? You can conduct the other song if you'd like?" I regretfully replied, "No, I really don't think I can." I added gratefully that I was touched that they would ask me and how sorry I was to deny them. Cory was understanding and checked with me one last time. I felt like I was a disappointment.

Back in my seat with shaky hands, I was full of pride for myself and my school! I tried to hide my smile as I thought about how much fun it would be to tell my other drum majors that I had been picked.

Suddenly, the voice of my drum major from my freshman year and role model Ashleigh McCabe popped into my head, "Ah Chex, that's great! But why didn't you do it? You would've had a great time!" I sighed as I realized how ridiculous I was being. I

had turned down a wonderful opportunity, all because I was afraid to mess up.

Cory called Kurt over, presumably to discuss who would take my place at the podium. All at once I remembered the first night of this camp. We were all in a room being lectured about leadership from Cory. He told us all to reach up as tall as we could. All 240 of us students put our hands in the air. Then he gave us another direction, "Now go 2 inches further." All 240 students went the extra distance. The point was that we should do our best from the start. Our mantra for the week became, "If you can, you must. If you don't, then no one else will." Sitting back in that chaotic blaring white band room I realized that if I didn't go for it, get out of my box and do my best, then how could I expect my band back home to get out of their comfort zones and do their best for me?

Despite my fear, I jumped up and interrupted Cory pleading, "I'm so very sorry, can I please change my mind? I want to conduct!" Before the words were out of my mouth I saw Cory start to smile. He was gracious and overwhelmingly pleased that I had changed my mind.

I was so nervous to conduct, and I did end up messing up. However, after I messed up, I stopped trying to be perfect and I really had some fun. I went all in and I had a blast directing the band. I ended up receiving the award at the end of camp for Best Conductor. Kurt and Cory came up to me several times to tell me what they liked about how I led the band.

When I got back home to my band in Scottville, my attitude had changed. Not because of a little award at camp, but because I had experienced the value of being

me. I discovered that being the best I could be, no matter what, and encouraging others to do the same is the best way to lead. My new attitude radiated through the band like the dazzling new trophy we took home the night we earned a District 1 rating at marching band festival. This season became a time of change where I learned a lot about my band and about myself. Of everything I learned, I know I will never forget that "If you can, you must. If you don't, no one else will."