



PRE-DRILL CAMP 2026 · LEADERSHIP SEMINARS · DAY 2

Drum Majors

"Command the Field. Own the Show."

Joshua Gibbons

Drum Majors Breakout · Sunday, August 2, 2026

The Hampton University Marching Force

HAMPTON'S HEARTBEAT

Icebreaker

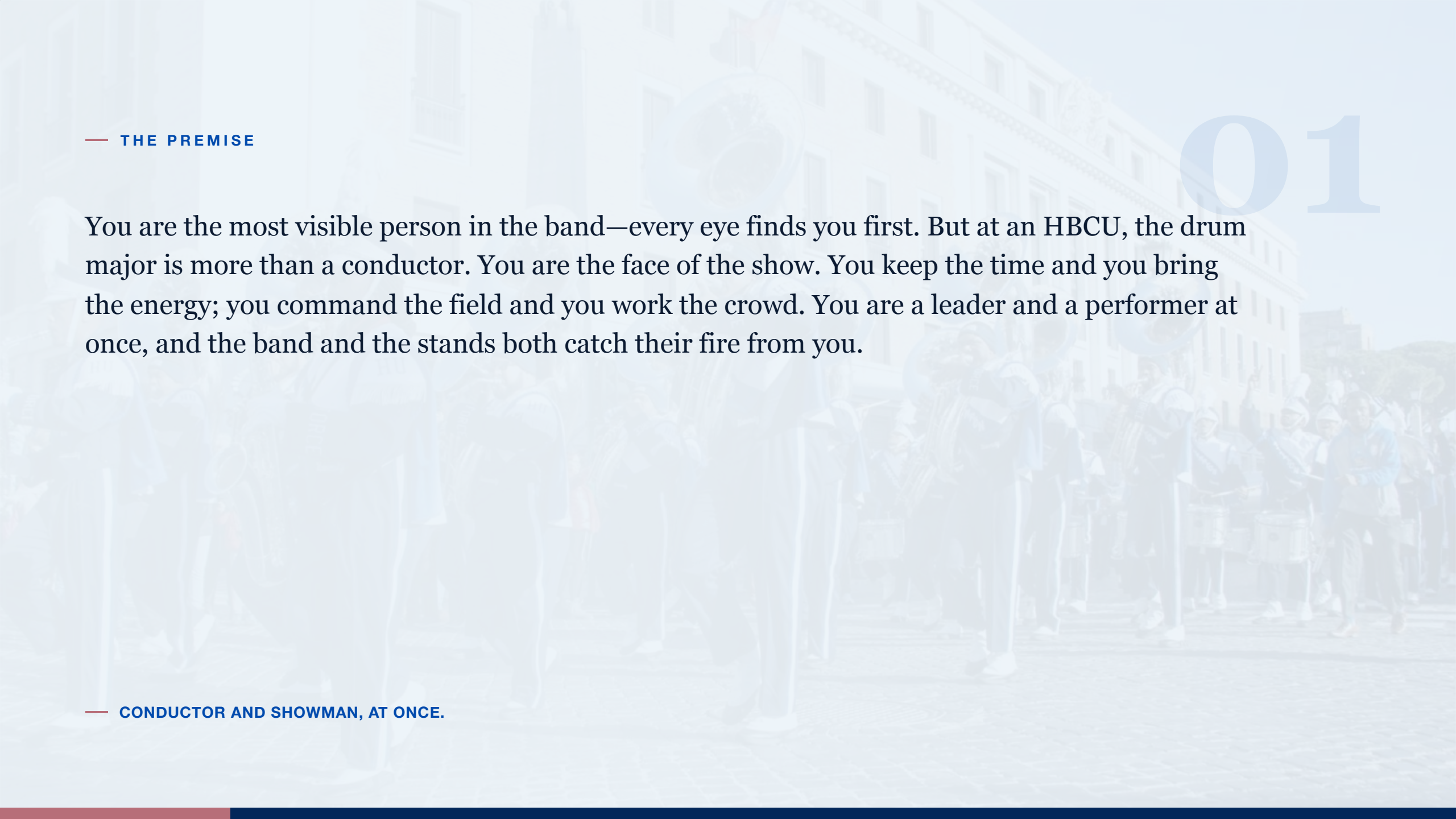
Great leaders lead from the front. Before a shot is fired, a commander swears he will be the first to set foot on the field and the last to step off. That is exactly what the field asks of a drum major.



We Were Soldiers — “First On, Last Off”

youtu.be/Uu77LGPAIPA

WATCH · 2:41

The background of the entire page is a faded, light blue image of a marching band. The band members are wearing uniforms and carrying instruments, including drums and brass instruments. They are standing in formation on a cobblestone street in front of a large, multi-story building with many windows. The overall tone is professional and academic.

— THE PREMISE

You are the most visible person in the band—every eye finds you first. But at an HBCU, the drum major is more than a conductor. You are the face of the show. You keep the time and you bring the energy; you command the field and you work the crowd. You are a leader and a performer at once, and the band and the stands both catch their fire from you.

— CONDUCTOR AND SHOWMAN, AT ONCE.

01

The Role of the Drum Major

Four jobs at once, from the front of the field.

1 The Time Keeper

You are the living metronome. The whole show rides on the tempo you set and hold.

3 The Standard-Bearer

Posture, poise, and precision. What the band sees in you is the bar it holds itself to.

2 The Field Commander

You call the band to attention, march it off, and bring it home—with voice, whistle, and signal.

4 The Showman

The face of the show. You bring the energy, own the entrance, and make the crowd feel every moment.

Two Sides of the Same Job

Master both, or the show falls flat.

THE CRAFT *the leader*

Clean conducting, rock-steady tempo, and clear command—**the technical floor**. Get this wrong and the band falls apart, no matter how much energy you bring.

THE SHOW *the performer*

The energy, the strut, the dance, and the crowd—**the HBCU DNA**. Get this wrong and the stands go to sleep, no matter how clean your pattern is.

A drum major who can only conduct is a metronome; one who can only perform is a cheerleader. At an HBCU, **you are both**.

The Craft: Conducting Is Athletic

Controlled, economical motion—the kinesiology of the podium.

- ◆ **Stand tall and set.** A still, strong body is the frame; only the arms move. Tension in the shoulders shows up as noise in the beat.
- ◆ **Isolate the motion.** The gesture comes from the wrist and forearm—small, clean, and repeatable.
- ◆ **Work in a plane.** Keep the pattern in a consistent window in front of your chest so every player reads the same picture.
- ◆ **Economy wins.** The clearest conductor uses the least motion. Flailing is not energy—it is confusion.

Sources: Elizabeth A. H. Green, *The Modern Conductor*; Max Rudolf, *The Grammar of Conducting*.

The Beat and the Patterns

Make every beat a picture the band can read.

- ◆ The **ictus** is the exact instant of the beat, the bottom of the stroke. A clear ictus is a clear band; a mushy one is a ragged one.
- ◆ Give a **preparatory beat** in tempo before they play, and a definite **release** so the sound starts and ends as one.
- ◆ Know the **patterns cold**: the downbeat drops straight down; two is down-up; three is down-out-up; four is down-in-out-up.
- ◆ Keep the pattern a **consistent size and speed**—bigger for louder, smaller for softer, never sloppy.

Sources: Elizabeth A. H. Green, *The Modern Conductor*; Hunsberger and Ernst, *The Art of Conducting*.

Lead With Your Eyes, Not Your Ears

On a football field, the sound lies to you.

- ◆ Sound travels about **1,130 feet per second**. Across a field, the back of the band hears the front a noticeable fraction of a second late.
- ◆ If everyone plays to what they **hear**, the band drifts apart and slows down. The only fix is a single visual clock: **you**.
- ◆ **The band watches, it does not listen.** Conduct so clearly that a player 80 yards away can lock to your hands, not their ears.
- ◆ Hold your tempo even when the sound coming back tempts you to chase it. Trust the beat, not the echo.

Sources: the physics of sound (~1,130 ft/sec); George N. Parks Drum Major Academy.

Be the Metronome

Steady time is the drum major's first gift to the band.

- ◆ **Internalize the pulse.** Practice with a metronome until a given tempo lives in your body and you can produce it on demand.
- ◆ **Do not rush the exciting parts** or drag the hard ones—the moments the band most wants to speed up are exactly where you hold firm.
- ◆ Set the tempo **the same way every time** so the band knows what is coming from your first preparatory beat.
- ◆ Even in the middle of the biggest show, the time never wavers. That steadiness is what lets the show go wild **on top of** a solid floor.

The Show: This Is Entertainment

HBCU bands don't just perform—they entertain. You lead that.

- ◆ At an HBCU, the band is a **show**. The crowd came to be moved, and the drum major sets the energy that moves them.
- ◆ **Full-out, always.** Half-energy from the podium tells the whole band and the whole crowd to relax. You set the ceiling for the energy.
- ◆ The show is bigger than the beat. Your job is to make people **feel something**, not only to keep time.
- ◆ Your fire is contagious—bring it, and the band brings it, and the stands bring it right back.

Make an Entrance

The show starts the second you step onto the field.

- ◆ The entrance is a **statement**. Before you conduct a single note, your strut, your salute, and your presence tell the crowd who runs this field.
- ◆ **Own the walk.** High, sharp, and confident—every step says The Marching Force has arrived.
- ◆ Command the moment. Make them feel you coming; make the whole stadium turn to watch.
- ◆ Nail the entrance and you have the crowd **before** the first downbeat—then you never let them go.

March It, Dance It

You don't just stand and beat time—you perform.

- ◆ The HBCU drum major marches with **high energy**—the strut, the high-step, the sharp and powerful style the tradition is built on.
- ◆ **You dance.** Hit the moves with the band, feel the music, and bring the flair. Showmanship is part of the job, not extra credit.
- ◆ Every move is still **clean and controlled**. High energy is not sloppy energy—the precision is what makes the show pop.
- ◆ When you move, the crowd moves. Your body is the spark that lights the whole field.

Work the Crowd

The crowd is part of the show. Play them like an instrument.

- ◆ Command the crowd the way you command the band—**hype them, feed off them, and give it right back.**
- ◆ Charisma is a skill. Eye contact, big gestures, and pure confidence turn a routine into a moment people never forget.
- ◆ The parades, the battle, and the fifth quarter are yours—this is where showmanship wins and where the Force makes its name.
- ◆ **Never break character.** On the field you are always performing, always selling the show.

Command the Field

Authority is projected—on purpose, every time.

1 Voice

Commands are crisp, loud, and confident. Mumble a command and you have already lost the field.

3 Presence

Chin up, shoulders back, eyes on the band. You look like the leader before you sound like one.

2 Whistle and Signal

One clear system for attention, mark time, step off, and halt—drilled until no one has to guess.

4 Poise

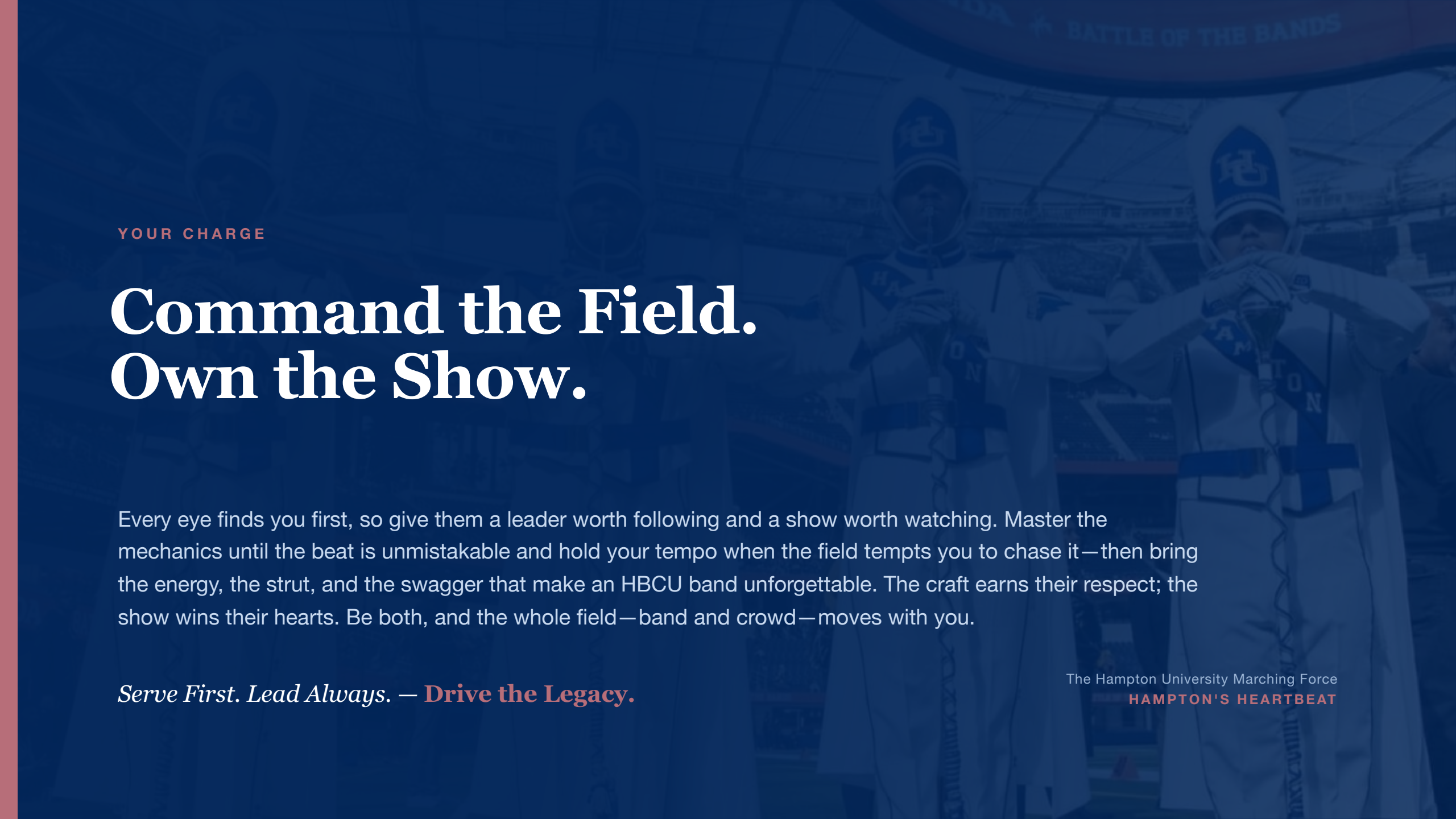
Calm and controlled at all times. The field reads your body language before it reads your words.

Reference: George N. Parks Drum Major Academy — leadership and field presence for marching drum majors.

Poise Under Pressure

Something will go wrong. The band will do whatever you do next.

- ◆ A rank breaks, a tempo wobbles, the weather turns—**your calm is the band's calm.** Panic on the podium spreads instantly.
- ◆ **Fix it without flinching.** Give the clear beat, hold the tempo, and let your steadiness pull the band back together.
- ◆ Never show frustration to the field or the stands. Handle it in your face and your hands, then debrief later.
- ◆ The greatest compliment to a drum major is a band that never looked worried—because you never did.



YOUR CHARGE

Command the Field. Own the Show.

Every eye finds you first, so give them a leader worth following and a show worth watching. Master the mechanics until the beat is unmistakable and hold your tempo when the field tempts you to chase it—then bring the energy, the strut, and the swagger that make an HBCU band unforgettable. The craft earns their respect; the show wins their hearts. Be both, and the whole field—band and crowd—moves with you.

Serve First. Lead Always. — **Drive the Legacy.**

The Hampton University Marching Force
HAMPTON'S HEARTBEAT