

A background image of a marching band, featuring students in dark uniforms with "HERITAGE" printed on the front. One student in the foreground is holding a large brass instrument, possibly a tuba or euphonium. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter.

A BAND LEADERSHIP SEMINAR

Know Your People

"Meet Them Where They Are."

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Director of Bands · Heritage High School

A Leadership Seminar
LEAD WITH HEART

Icebreaker

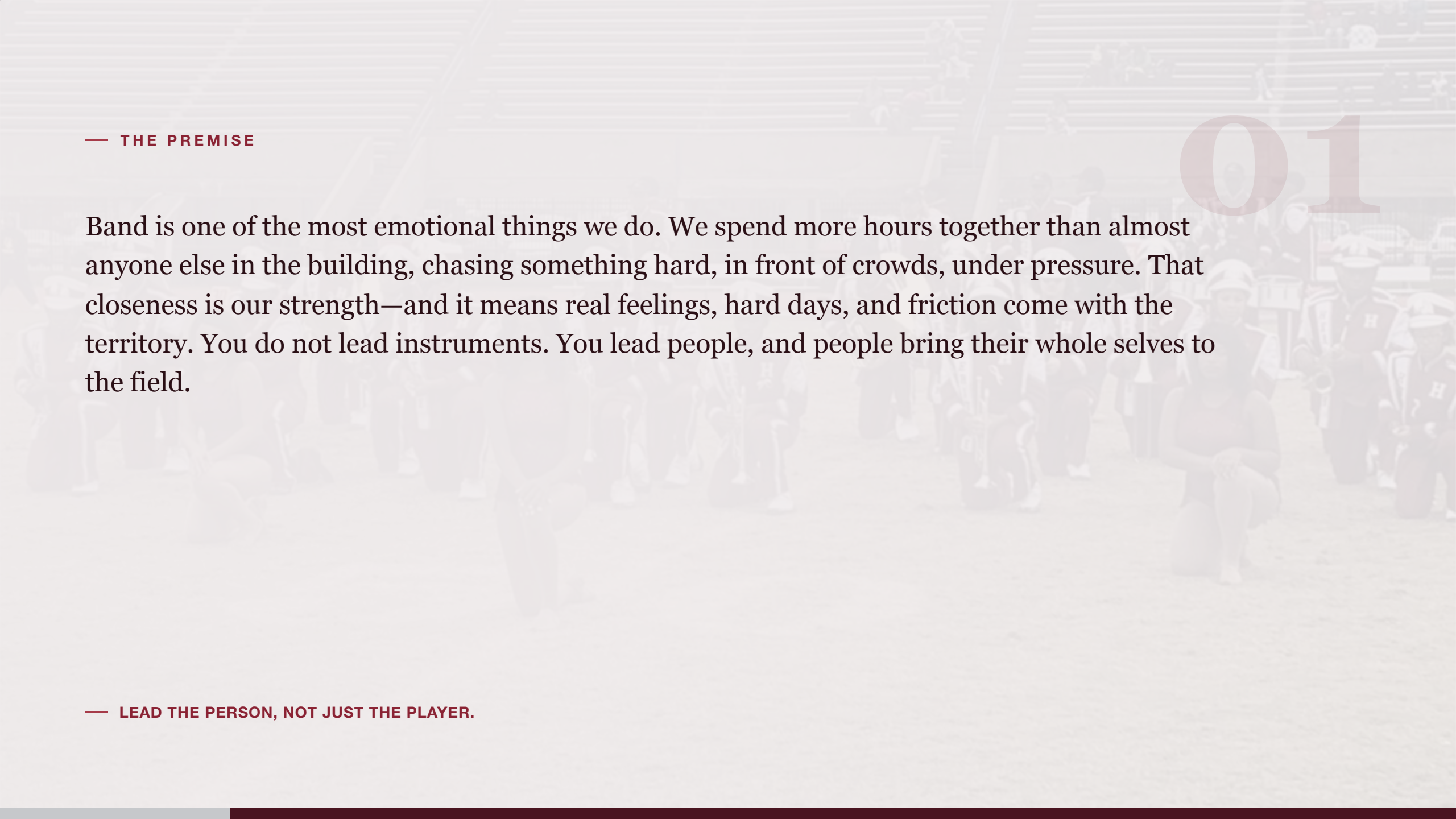
Empathy is not fixing, and it is not "at least..." It is climbing down into it with someone so they don't feel alone. That is the whole job of knowing your people.



Brené Brown on Empathy

youtu.be/1Evwgu369Jw

WATCH · 2:53



— THE PREMISE

Band is one of the most emotional things we do. We spend more hours together than almost anyone else in the building, chasing something hard, in front of crowds, under pressure. That closeness is our strength—and it means real feelings, hard days, and friction come with the territory. You do not lead instruments. You lead people, and people bring their whole selves to the field.

— LEAD THE PERSON, NOT JUST THE PLAYER.

Band Is an Emotional Activity

Recognize it—don't pretend it away.

- ◆ We spend enormous time together—long rehearsals, early mornings, road trips, high-stakes performances. That much time and pressure creates real emotion.
- ◆ People get tired, stressed, and irritated—with the work, and sometimes with each other. That is normal, not a sign the team is broken.
- ◆ The old rule is **"leave it at the door."** It is a good goal, but it is not always the reality—and pretending otherwise only makes it worse.
- ◆ Great leaders don't avoid the emotion in the room. They notice it, name it, and lead through it.

Two Kinds of Awareness

Read both—or you will lead half-blind.

THOSE YOU LEAD *the section*

Notice where your people are **today**: who is locked in, who is off, who is carrying something heavy. Meet them there before you push.

YOURSELF *the leader*

Notice where **you** are today: your mood, your stress, your fuse. You cannot manage a section's headspace while ignoring your own.

Emotional intelligence starts with awareness of yourself and grows into awareness of others. **Both, every day.**

Lead With Emotional Intelligence

The leader's real skill isn't the horn—it's people.

- ◆ **Self-awareness:** know what you are feeling, and how it is landing on others, in the moment.
- ◆ **Self-management:** handle your own emotions so a bad morning doesn't become the whole section's bad morning.
- ◆ **Social awareness (empathy):** read the room and the person—what are they actually feeling right now?
- ◆ **Relationship management:** use all of the above to connect, defuse, and move people forward together.

Source: Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* and *Primal Leadership* — the four EI domains.

Read Your People

You can't help what you don't notice.

- ◆ Learn each member's **normal**—their usual energy, tone, and habits. Then you can spot when something changes.
- ◆ Watch for the signs: pulling away, a short temper, going quiet, slipping attendance, a drop in effort from someone who usually gives it.
- ◆ The cause is often **outside the room**—classes, money, home, health, sleep. Look past the behavior to the person.
- ◆ When you notice, don't diagnose from a distance. Get closer, and ask.

Meet Them Where They Are

Same standard. A different approach, when it's needed.

- ◆ Not everyone shows up the same every day—and pretending they do costs you the person.
- ◆ Meeting people where they are is **not** lowering the bar. It is choosing the approach that actually gets them there today.
- ◆ Sometimes that's a harder push; sometimes it's a quieter word, a short break, or "let's talk after." Read which one the moment needs.
- ◆ Compassion and high standards are not opposites. The best leaders hold **both at once**.

Adjust Your Style

No single style fits every person or every moment.

- ◆ Hersey and Blanchard's **Situational Leadership**: the best leaders change their approach based on the person and the task in front of them.
- ◆ Some members need clear **direction**; some need **coaching**; some need **support** and encouragement; some just need you to **delegate** and trust them.
- ◆ Match the style to where the person actually is—in skill *and* in headspace—not to how you happen to like leading.
- ◆ A rigid, one-size leader loses the people who needed something different. Flexibility is a skill, not a weakness.

Source: Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard — the Situational Leadership model (direct, coach, support, delegate).

The Mental Check-In

Build it in—don't wait for a crisis.

- ◆ Make check-ins part of the routine, the way you check instruments and attendance. A quick, genuine "**how are you, really?**" goes a long way.
- ◆ Ask, then **listen**—more than you talk. You are not there to fix them; you are there to hear them and let them feel seen.
- ◆ Know your limits. You are a leader, not a counselor. When something is bigger than you, **connect them to help**—the director, a coach, campus or school support.
- ◆ Never carry a serious concern alone. Loop in the director. That is exactly what we are here for.

Know Your Own Headspace

You bring a whole self to the field too.

- ◆ Leaders have hard days—personal stuff, health, mood swings, pressure. Being in charge does not make you immune.
- ◆ "Leave it at the door" is the ideal. When you can't fully, at least **know** it—name to yourself what you're carrying so it doesn't leak out sideways.
- ◆ Self-awareness keeps your bad day from becoming everyone's bad day. Manage it before it manages the section.
- ◆ You lead people best when you are honest with yourself about where you are.

Share the Load

Asking for help is leadership, not weakness.

- ◆ When you are not in the right headspace, **say so**—to your fellow leaders and to the director. Don't white-knuckle it alone.
- ◆ Lean on your team. Let a co-leader take the rep, cover the section, or run point while you reset.
- ◆ Don't pass your weight to someone already stretched thin. Share the load with the people equipped to carry it—starting with the director.
- ◆ A team that communicates about its own limits is stronger, not softer. That is how the whole leadership corps stays standing.

Make It Safe

People bring their real selves only where it's safe.

- ◆ Build a section where it's okay to not be okay—no ridicule, no gossip, no punishing honesty.
- ◆ When someone trusts you with something personal, **protect it**. Guard their trust, and only escalate for safety or when real help is needed.
- ◆ Handle friction between members early, directly, and privately—before it hardens into resentment.
- ◆ The safer your people feel, the more they will give you—and the more you will actually be able to lead them.

Source: Amy Edmondson, Harvard Business School — psychological safety in teams.

Know Your People: The Playbook

Four habits to lead the human, not just the musician.

1 Read the Room

Learn each person's normal, and notice when it changes—in them and in yourself.

3 Check In

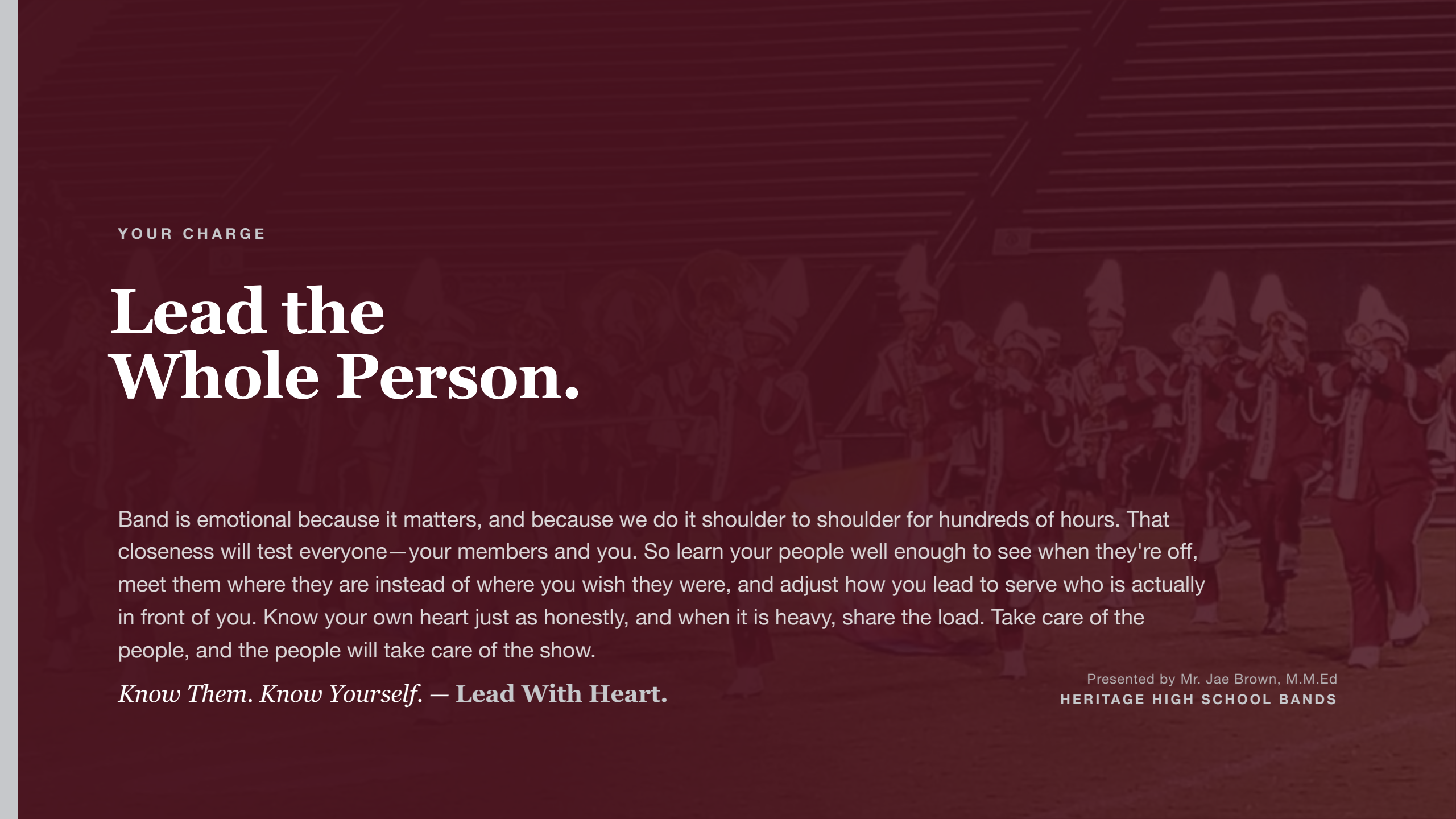
Ask how they really are, listen more than you talk, and connect them to help when it's bigger than you.

2 Meet Them There

Adjust your style to the person and the moment. Same standard, right approach.

4 Share the Load

Know your own headspace, and speak up to your peers and director instead of carrying it alone.

A background image of a marching band in a stadium, overlaid with a dark red semi-transparent filter. The band members are wearing uniforms and tall, pointed hats, and are holding instruments. They are marching in a line across the field.

YOUR CHARGE

Lead the Whole Person.

Band is emotional because it matters, and because we do it shoulder to shoulder for hundreds of hours. That closeness will test everyone—your members and you. So learn your people well enough to see when they're off, meet them where they are instead of where you wish they were, and adjust how you lead to serve who is actually in front of you. Know your own heart just as honestly, and when it is heavy, share the load. Take care of the people, and the people will take care of the show.

Know Them. Know Yourself. — **Lead With Heart.**

Presented by Mr. Jae Brown, M.M.Ed
HERITAGE HIGH SCHOOL BANDS