

1. DREAM AND BELIEVE

Vision is 95% of reality. I know it sounds like a stretch, but I really do believe this. So many times we find ourselves feeling stuck, hampered or even discouraged by the musical, emotional and spiritual state of our choirs. But listen, I've found this to be true: the “smallness” of a choir – whether in actual size or in morale or in impact – is very often a *director problem*. It's our fault! We haven't challenged, encouraged or motivated our choirs to be something more than they currently are. We haven't taken the time or expended the energy to dream and visualize what the impact of our choirs could be.

Everybody likes to be a part of something that's bigger than they are and that stretches their imagination. This includes your choir members. Everybody likes to take part in something that's a valuable, efficient use of their time, and this includes your choir members. And everybody likes to contribute their energy to something that – despite the occasional inconvenience – is just worth it. This, again, includes your choir members. So, how do we develop this spirit and this mindset among our current choir members, and how do we encourage others to join in?

THE BEST CHOIR RECRUITING TOOL EVER

You've been waiting for this, haven't you? The one secret that will garner you dozens of new and enthusiastic choir members. Yes, it's the Best Choir Recruiting Tool Ever. *Ever!* Are you ready for this? Here it is: *Have a good choir.*

That's it. It's that simple and it's that challenging. A choir that has members who work hard, love each other and know what they're about is just about as attractive a group as you could imagine. When they work hard, they accomplish a lot. Their imaginations are stretched, they know they've used their time efficiently, and they know that all the effort is just worth it. When they love each other, there will be sacrifice and compassion fully on display and concern for each other's welfare becomes evident. When your choir knows what it's about (what its mission is; what its goals are; why it exists), then extra effort, extra energy, and extra enthusiasm aren't anomalies; they're defining hallmarks of your musical organization. They give more and they accomplish more.

I'll say it again – the Best Choir Recruiting Tool Ever is to *have a good choir.*

In later sections we'll talk about some rehearsal and performance components that will help you develop a choir that will, in itself, become your best recruiting tool. But for now, let's look at more foundational aspects – aspects that will give your choir a stronger sense of purpose and mission. For instance, how would you define or explain your choir's mission? Their philosophy? Their identity? Their reason for existence? No, really...how would you define or explain these? These aren't hypothetical questions.

the more ownership they feel. They've "bought into" the ministry; they've invested themselves.

Do you have a leadership team or officers for your musical organizations? Determine what tasks or leadership positions need to be filled (and these will vary from group to group), and select those with the skills, interests, and passions to fill them. Not every group will require the same number or duties. Find a creative way to describe their tasks and make it a rewarding experience for them, and a successful one for the entire choir.

Create committees, or enlist the help of existing committees in your church to help with some of the non-musical tasks that need attention. For instance, does your church have an outreach ministry that involves some sort of publicity to the community? Or how about a committee that already handles the responsibilities of decorating the worship center and other areas of the facility? If you engage these groups that are already in existence, suddenly any event that involves them becomes the project of more than just the choir; it's truly a church-wide endeavor. Win-win-win...

Above all, when you select, recruit or enlist others to help in leadership or assisting roles, identify them according to their skill set and their experience. Let them do what they love! Let them do what they're good at! Want a biblical precedent for that? Exodus 31 mentions a guy named Bezalel who was in charge of construction and craftsmanship in the creation of the tabernacle. He was chosen because *he was good at it*. And get this: Bezalel, the blue collar construction worker is the very first person the Bible mentions as "filled with the Spirit of God." How about that!

2. REHEARSAL IDEAS

Rehearsals are the lifeblood of any musical organization. It's there that the woodshedding happens and it's there that new ideas and techniques are tested. And it's there that we carve out some time to offer a reminder of why we do what we do; or the reason this particular song was chosen for this particular service or event; or who it is among our choir family that needs prayer right now. Personally, I spend a lot of time in thinking about and planning out rehearsals that I lead. In fact, I probably spend as much time in the preparation process as I do in actually leading the rehearsal. A well-prepared, well-run rehearsal usually leads to a well-attended one. Preparation, Application and Evaluation are key. Here's why:

PREPARATION

Before you can have an organized rehearsal, you have to organize yourself. This is Priority One. It's important to establish a regular time to plan out your

rehearsals. If you're juggling several jobs and/or family responsibilities, this can be a real challenge, but it's a necessity. I'll explain in a little more detail below, but for now, as you plan out your time, be sure you have specific goals in mind not only for the overall rehearsal, but for each individual piece to be covered. You probably won't need to go over every measure of every song that's included in your plan; just be sure you've mapped out what needs to be covered at this point in time. What will need work now? What can wait till the next time? How will I introduce this new piece? (And while I'm at it, be sure you've communicated this game plan to your accompanist *before* the rehearsal. As you know, rehearsal times for the choir aren't times for the director and accompanists to be figuring out what they're going to do.) I write out my goals and what parts of what song I'll cover in each rehearsal. That way I don't get distracted in “the heat of battle” so much so that I lose the overall picture of what needs to be mastered.

Another aspect of preparation is the atmosphere and temperature of the room where we'll be rehearsing. Are there any visual distractions that detract from a good rehearsal experience? Too cluttered? Too messy? Is the distribution of new material as efficient as it can be? Is the room too hot? Too cold? Is the piano tuned? Is the lighting sufficient?

Here's a tricky one – start on time! Don't accommodate late-comers (and we all have them!) but *do* plan accordingly. Reward those who are prompt by beginning when you said you would...even if it's with only a handful of singers. More on this below, but let's agree to honor each other's time, both on the front and back ends of a rehearsal. If a rehearsal is going to go long because of what needs to be covered, make that known before the rehearsal starts. There are lots of ways to communicate that these days. As much as we'd like to think we're flexible, nobody really likes a surprise where their time is concerned.

APPLICATION

Explain the rehearsal's “work order” to the choir at the beginning of your time together and as you begin work on each different piece: what needs work, what you'll cover and why; what you'll save till next time. Be conscious of “pacing” the rehearsal – fast/slow, up/down, new/old, this week/down the road. Here's an example of how you might pace the rehearsal based on covering 7 songs in your time together:

- 1) A familiar song that you need to just run through with no stops, or a congregational worship song or hymn for next Sunday that might be just a bit unfamiliar. This gets everyone singing and signals to the late-comers that the rehearsal has begun.
- 2) A new song that needs to be introduced; you'll only look at places in the song that are similar – verses, choruses, etc. - and get the general feel for those. What's the challenge in these? Rhythm? Notes? Words? Cover that first.

3) This Sunday's song. By following this procedure, eventually the song in this slot will only need to be run through once. It's a great comfort to get through the third song in the lineup and you've already conquered this week's choir piece.

4) Next Sunday's song. This is where a lot of the work for this rehearsal will be done. You will be very close already to performing this song, so you'll be touching up and polishing a few specific places. Run through it one time without stopping before you leave it.

5 & 6) Similar to #2. Rehearse the specific spots that need woodshedding and drilling. Be sensitive here to pacing ... up and down, fast and slow ... so that the rehearsal stays energized. You probably won't go through either piece in its entirety. Just work on what needs to be worked on.

7) Something that's familiar; maybe a familiar anthem that you'll be repeating in the next few weeks; this way the rehearsal time closes on a positive, "got it done" feel.

You'll develop your own adaptation of this depending on your own circumstances, time constraints and whatever else in the way of special projects that the choir may be working on – Christmas, Easter, Patriotic, etc. As you're doing all of this, begin to initiate some visual and aural "cues" for the choir. Teach them to write down directives and reminders in their music ... and then to do what they've written down! Shorthand symbols for breaths, accents, phrasing and the like can be taught. Ask them to "color" the sound: what does *royal blue* sound like as opposed to *light yellow*? What if the sound weighed 587 pounds? Or what if it sounded like a smile? I think you'll be amazed at the results by asking for what would appear to be non-musical effects. And of course your conducting gestures will be learned with a little practice and eventually your choir will respond to even the slightest signal from your hand or your eyes.

EVALUATION

"Why?" is a good question to ask. Always. About most everything. And this applies to both choir rehearsals and the worship experience. Why do we do this? And why don't we do that? Evaluation is what keeps things fresh, keeps them innovative, keeps them meaningful. Always ask "why."

Once a rehearsal is over, evaluate. Ask "why." What needs work? What technique worked beautifully? What technique didn't? How was the pacing? Did we accomplish everything we needed to? If not, how can we assure that we will next time? What needs to change? How?