

THE 10 THINGS I WISH I HAD KNOWN WHEN I FIRST STARTED DIRECTING **by Sandy Robinson Marron, Master Director, Lions Gate Chorus, Region 26**

I wish I had known...

1.... how much time it takes!

- It takes 20-30 hours a week, on average. This varies depending on the time of year. Knowing this helps to keep my schedule balanced with other life activities.
- Half the time is spent on musical development/planning, the other half on “people” management.
- Long-range planning is critical. Start with the date of the event and work backwards. Layer each event so you can see if you have taken on too much at one time, keeping in mind “life” events, like spring break, or summer holidays.

2..... how to build a Music Team that suits your personal needs.

- How many Assistant Directors do you need or want? Create specific job descriptions for them. They don't all have to be great arm-wavers, but they all have to support the Director in some way.
- Choose people who work well with you.
- Choose people for their ambition & enthusiasm. Avoid prestige-seekers.
- Titles aren't necessary for everyone on the Music Team.
- Avoid “yes” women. Choose some who can play “devils advocate” at times.
- Get a Directors Personal Assistant (DPA). This is someone who helps you at rehearsals with things like making sure your music stand is set up, getting fresh batteries for your microphone or minidisk recorder, delivering your mail and emptying your mailbox, etc.
- Create an Administrative position on the Music Team that liaises with the Management Team/Board, and can take a lot of the paperwork off your plate.
- If you choose “friends” to be on the team, set ground rules to keep the relationships separate.

3....how to keep myself motivated, educated, inspired!

- Get a contract, and keep it updated every year to suit your needs and the needs of your chorus. These needs change every year.
- Know that it will be frustrating and challenging at times, but the good times will far outweigh the bad.
- The honeymoon is eventually over, and the novelty of having a new director wears off for the chorus. They *will* start chatting on the risers again!
- Have someone in the chorus who is a cheerleader, counselor, advocate, supporter, confidante, and filter! This person doesn't necessarily need to be on the team, but she is someone you absolutely trust!
- Go to every workshop/seminar/contest that you can, including events outside of Sweet Adelines.

4. follow my gut instinct.

- This takes practice, but after you learn to pay attention to the signals your body gives you when you *don't* follow your instincts, you'll learn to do this more often. It sure saves a lot of time!

5..... *how to deal with “challenging” chorus members.*

- Know from the outset that you can't please everyone. The day you stop trying is the day you finally please yourself!
- My motto is “chorus is therapeutic, but it's not a therapy group”. This keeps everyone focused on why we are primarily there: to sing.
- Some members will challenge everything you do, every decision you make, but this is usually because they need your approval.
- When members quit, let them go with grace.

6.... *How to choose coaches*

- Once you have done your long-range plan and you know *when* you want coaching, then it's time to choose the right coach. Ask other directors for their recommendations, or check the SAI website for faculty lists. Most of the coaches I chose in the beginning were based on recommendations from other directors, or from taking classes at regional and international workshops from faculty members who also coach.
- If you see a chorus that has a similar style to yours, find out who coaches that chorus, or find out if their director coaches.
- Most coaches are booked 6 months to 2 or 3 years in advance. Plan and book coaching early!

7.... *How to choose music*

- The biggest thing that I learned is that just about anything can be arranged! Custom arrangements are not that expensive, and really help to put the personality stamp on the chorus.
- Listen to every barbershop recording you can find to get song ideas.
- Find arrangers that work for your style, level, and personality. It's a big community, and there are a lot of hidden treasures out there.

8..... *Teaching tricks*

- Know your own primary learning strategy (visual, auditory, kinesthetic), then learn how to teach to all 3.
- Keep filling your toolbox. Make lists or files of tricks and tips that work for you, and discard the ones that don't.
- Ensure a good balance of education, humour, self-discoveries & success at each rehearsal. The following 3 things should be part of every rehearsal: 1. AH 2. AHA 3. HA HA
- People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

9.... *The Four Agreements*

1. Don't take anything personally
2. Don't make assumptions
3. Be impeccable with your word
4. Always do your best

10.... *Rule # 6, from The Art Of Possibility*

- DON'T TAKE YOURSELF SO #\$\$&% SERIOUSLY!