



## A New Year - A New Look.

Mike O'Neill



In the spirit of New Year's resolutions, the Chorus Director Development Committee and staff have vowed to revamp and revitalize the Directly Involved newsletter for Chorus Directors all across the Barbershop Harmony Society! I won't go into details as to why the large gap of publications, but I will say this new format promises to be the best ever. We now have a team of writers all around North America working on bringing you the most current, relevant, fun, and educational material. This newsletter will be published quarterly and hopefully in every issue, there will be something for everyone.

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Speaking of our team of writers...below is a brief introduction of each one of them:

- **Jim Bagby**, Kansas City, MO – Director Emeritus of Heart of America, gold medalist quartet singer (Rural Route 4), and 34 career writing for the Associated Press
- **Karl Chapple**, Beaver, PA – Directs the Beaver Valley Chapter, past DVP of CDD for JAD and has a college degree in Communications
- **Chad Hall**, Traverse City, MI – Current Certified Director and assistant director of the Cherry Capitol Chorus
- **Denis Laflamme**, Ottawa, ON – Currently directs the Capital City Chorus in ONT, 12 year BHS director, 3 year District V.P. Marketing and P.R.
- **Mike Nichols**, Westfield, NY – studied music at SUNY Fredonia and has directed several choruses in the past
- **Mike O'Neill**, Nashville, TN – Employed with BHS as Music Educator, current director of Music City Chorus, staff liaison to CDD Committee
- **Steve Tramack**, Nashua, NH – Past director of Granite Statesmen, certified MUS judge, Chairman of CDD Committee
- **Lynn Trapp**, Pittsburgh, PA – Currently directs the Pittsburgh Metro Chapter and past DVP of CDD for CSD

As always, if you ever have an idea for an article or interest story, please do not hesitate to contact us ([moneill@barbershop.org](mailto:moneill@barbershop.org)).

Thanks for reading!



## Back To Basics

Chad Hall

If you are like many directors in the Barbershop Harmony Society, in preparation for a successful contest experience you spent many rehearsals whipping the chorus into shape with stage presence, artistry, and many other finite details to get you on the right track. Then, after the contest you received feedback from the judges that will suddenly make your chorus into the next Westminster with the wave of your arms. Now what?

The time after contest is often a great time to return to the basics of what make great singers and choruses. The time spent refining fundamentals can pay back in huge returns by the time the next chorus contest rolls around.

There are several skills to focus on, but focusing on just a few will be a lot easier for you and the singers.

### Breathing

Breath control is an essential element. It is the difference between a confident full sounding chorus and a wimpy dull sounding one. There are various exercises on breath control, but they all focus on two aspects:

1. The singer must recognize how to properly take a breath.
2. The singer needs to make breathing active.

Inhalation is the only naturally active part of breathing. The diaphragm contracts causing the viscera (your guts) to be pushed down and out the abdominal wall, which creates a vacuum in the inner chest cavity causing the lungs to inflate with air from outside. Exhalation happens when the diaphragm relaxes and things return to normal. In other words, the air just “falls out”. The problem is that phonation (sound making) happens during exhalation only! If we allow it to just “fall out”, the sounds created are lacking the vitality we constantly strive for.

In order for the singer to make breathing active, we often concentrate on making sure they are using deep breathing techniques during inhalation. We use metaphor such as “breathe from your knees” or

“breathe through your lower back”. This encourages the singer to allow the abdominal wall to relax completely and maximize space for air. During the inhalation process, the muscles in the neck and shoulders should be completely free from stress.

We want to use the abdominal muscles (front) and oblique muscles (sides and back) in conjunction like a sphincter. During contraction, the muscles close off the center. This forces the viscera inward and upward in a nice even pressure. Resistance to the outgoing airflow comes from the vocal folds.

Exhalation and phonation need to become active. This takes effort. Quite often the amateur singer will forget this on a regular basis. Breathing is something we easily take for granted. A constant airflow to the sound gives a more solid sound sometimes called singing “on the breath”.

Pulsing drills can be used to help the singers recognize the origin of breath. Sustained exhalations and single sustained notes can be used to help the singer take advantage of using the total torso muscle package.

### Relaxation

Stress hides in many parts of our lives, including singing. Muscle tension is cause for a “pinched” sound. It can be uncomfortable for the singer. The listener may or may not recognize this tension, but they know there is something awry with the sound. Common areas where tension happens in singing are the jaw, tongue, neck, shoulders, and chest. As a director, it is important to be able to recognize when the singers are experiencing tension and how to correct it. The ultimate goal is to get the singer to be able to recognize their own tension areas and self-correct the issues on the fly. Individual voice lessons are excellent for this. Knowing all the chorus members do not feel comfortable with individual voice instruction, group techniques to reduce tension are sometimes necessary.

A very good tactic to counteract the effects of stressed singing is through movement. When muscles are moving, they are less likely to be tight. Shaking arms, twisting while flailing arms, wiggling jaw, wiggling the tongue are all useful tactics. You will probably get some strange looks from singers when you ask them to sing while shaking their head side to side, but it works! The key is to get the singer to realize when tension is at play and give them tools on how to combat it. Sometimes, tension is caused by over thinking. Most of us are either visual learners (learn by seeing) or auditory learners (learn by hearing). A small percentage of the population is kinesthetic learners, they learn by doing. Kinesthetic learning is a way to keep the singers' minds occupied. Performing movement can affect the sound subconsciously. Movements such as raising arms can cause the volume to increase, the pitch to maintain, and the energy of a phrase to grow. This all happens with very little effort from the director. Keep this in mind when creating a visual plan. Choose movements that help the interpretation of the music.



## New Year's Resolution

Steve Tramack

How many of you have made a New Year's Resolution in the past? I'm guessing that just about everyone, at one point or another has issued a proclamation at the dawn of a new year that something "would be different" in the coming 12 months. I'm also guessing that many of us have made a promise to ourselves and/or to others, during the glow of the holiday season, which ended up being a bit too much to tackle than they'd anticipated in the moment. A couple of keys to making a successful New Year's Resolution are to do something positive immediately, take it one step at a time ("baby steps", as Richard Dreyfuss' character promoted in the movie "What About Bob?"), and do something that has a positive impact on you and the people around you. Success breeds success!

## Vowel Matching and Tone Production

Vowel matching is a constant challenge for a chorus director. It is an issue for every group in every song. When we work on vowel matching, we are trying to get everyone to have uniform space. Usually, the space we want is three dimensional and open. By having the singers use their most resonant space, it is likely the most open sound they produce naturally.

I once tried an experiment with my own chorus. The singers were asked to sing their "role model" vowel on a single sustained pitch. It didn't matter what vowel it was, just as long as it was the vowel they could get the sound they felt they could sing with the most ease and fullness. Guess what happened? It rang! There were many overtones despite the fact they were all singing different vowels. Unknowingly, my singers were matching space instead of vowels. After a brief discussion, the singers began to realize how it is not what we say, but how we say it that adds to the full chorus sounds.

I'd like to suggest that you, as a chorus director, make a New Year's Resolution (the kind that breeds immediate success) to become a better director this year. There are so many areas where we chorus directors can have a positive impact on the experiences (and even the lives) of our members. Improvements in even just one of the following areas will translate into a more rewarding experience, week-to-week, for you and your chorus members:

Leadership – can you be a more positive role model? Can you celebrate the small successes during the night more honestly and frequently? Can you find a way to more succinctly set a vision of success for you and your members? Can you engage your musical leadership team more effectively during the rehearsal night, giving them ownership for certain facets of the evening?

Musicianship – can you spend more time developing the delivery of your music? Can you

delve more into the primary musical theme / key musical elements of a song and find ways to highlight those in your performances? Can you use an even bigger palate of musical tools (dynamics, lyrical inflection, tone color, pacing, phrasing, rhythm) to provide a richer experience for your members and your audience? Can you improve your knowledge of chord vocabulary in your music and know where your singers are in the chord?

Communication – Can you build your repertoire of non-verbal gestures to better communicate musical ideas to your chorus during a performance? Can you be more proactive in sending out email or blog recaps of rehearsals and plans for the following week? Can you set up a more effective, ongoing, open dialog with your music team and board?

Conducting – Can you better convey the music in your head through your hands? Your body language? Everything except your lips? Can you identify a consistent issue (synchronization, pitch, scooping, breath support, tension, choppy singing) which you could address strictly through change the visual message that you're sending to your chorus? Can you conduct in a mirror at least once a week?

These are simply a few thoughts and areas; I'll bet you could come up with your own list equally as long and effective if implementing. How many times have we made a New Year's Resolution similar to, "I'm going to be a better chorus director in 2011. I'm going to be a better leader, a better musician, communicate more clearly and effectively, and improve my conducting skills. I'm going to ...." This becomes a daunting task, and it often is easier to do nothing than try to boil the entire ocean.

Clearly, you'll read through this list and say, "I do a really good job at XXX – it's a strength of mine". You might also find a few items where you'll say, "I really could do better at that". I'm sure you'll also have your own personal hit list. This year, let's all make a New Year's Resolution which is designed for success. Let's pick one thing, be specific about how we're going to succeed, and start doing it now.

Would improving in just one area in a scope similar to those listed above have a positive impact on you as a director? Would it have a positive impact on your singers? Can you imagine the impact on the Barbershop Harmony Society if every chorus director were to improve in even just one aspect of leadership / communication / musicianship / conducting in the coming year?

If you don't know where to start, I would suggest visiting [www.barbershop.org/direct](http://www.barbershop.org/direct), and read more about the director's educational opportunities available to you. Programs like Outstanding in Front, CDWI and Next Level are available to you, in your District, even to be hosted by your chapter. Please contact your District VP of Chorus Director Development for more info on scheduling, or contact me directly, and I'll help you make the connection.

Have a Happy New Year! Here's to some immediate success for you and your chorus members!



<http://www.barbershop.org/education/harmony-university/directors-college>



*A program that has been utilized by our Society  
for the past ten years.*

- Well over 150 such workshops have been conducted
- Post workshop evaluation scores average 95% or better.





## Book Review – *The Art of Possibility*

*by Rosamund Stone Zander, Benjamin Zander*

Denis Laflamme

4 years ago, I attended a class at Harmony University called "The Art of Possibility" led by Charles Metzger. It was a director track class, and to this day I can assure anyone who will listen that I use something from that class almost every day and certainly at EVERY rehearsal I run. We were 8 directors in a room and our program was simple: read a chapter that evening and discuss the next day (sounded a little boring at first but it turned out to be a life changer).

My buddy Neil and I spent the entire week borderline freaking out about how "accurate" this book was to us barbershop directors and that we would be lucky to ever "get it" all. I STRONGLY recommend you give yourself the gift of this book. All my section leaders have a copy, and we reference it frequently. It doesn't matter if you started last week or if you've been directing for 20 years. There is something in this book for you. If there isn't, I'll personally buy it back from you. No joke.

Benjamin Zander is the conductor of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra and a professor at the New England Conservatory of Music. Rosamund Stone Zander is a family therapist and a landscape painter. Based on the principles developed through the authors' unique partnership, Mr. Zander gives presentations to managers and executives around the world and Ms. Zander conducts workshops for organizations on practicing the art of possibility

The Art of Possibility offers a set of breakthrough practices for creativity in all human enterprises. The book joins together Ben's extraordinary talent as a mover and shaker, teacher, and communicator, with Rosamund Stone Zander's genius for creating innovative paradigms for personal and professional

fulfillment. The authors provide us with a deep sense of the powerful role that the notion of possibility can play in every aspect of our lives. The Zanders' deceptively simple practices are based on two premises: that life is composed as a story ("it's all invented") and that, with new definitions, much more is possible than people ordinarily think.

Presenting 12 breakthrough practices for bringing creativity into all human endeavors, "The Art of Possibility" provides a life-altering approach to fulfilling dreams large and small. The Zanders invite readers to become passionate communicators, leaders, and performers whose lives radiate possibility into the world.

The book shifts our perspective with uplifting stories, parables, and anecdotes from the authors' personal experiences as well as from famous and everyday heroes. From "Giving an A," to the mysterious "Rule Number 6," to "Leading from Any Chair"-the account of Ben's stunning realization that the conductor / leader's power is directly linked to how much greatness he is willing to grant to others-each practice offers an opportunity for personal and organizational transformation.

The Art of Possibility provides a life-altering approach to fulfilling dreams large and small. The Zanders invite us all to become passionate communicators, leaders, and performers whose lives radiate possibility into the world.

I humbly suggest you pick up a copy (see my earlier promise)...this would be a great way to start off the New Year.



<http://www.barbershop.org/director-certification-.html>



## Choral Voicing

Mike Nichols

Many of us have experienced the old, "Tenors over here. Leads over there. Basses next to the tenors and baritones next to the basses." And don't forget... "Oh yes, and the young, limber ones with great faces in front!" Over the past 15 years, coaching and conducting barbershop choruses, as well as community and church choirs, I have learned to develop better ways to place singers on the risers. I will refer to it as, "Choral Voicing." Really, nothing you will read here is new, but perhaps presented in this way, you will gain another approach for obtaining your own "optimal" choral sound.

Everything I do, chorally speaking, I have learned from someone. This is not to say that I have not gone "out of the box," experimented, and refined these techniques to achieve my own "optimal" choral sound. It's important to note that the old adage, "Nothing ventured, nothing gained," should be a mantra for all creative people.

When I first started conducting, I was one of those that bought into the concept of blending your voice with the singer next to you! That was the school I knew; that was the school I taught. I used to stand next to different singers in each rehearsal and practice the craft of blending too! Leading by example has always worked for me and I felt confident doing so. What I realized is that while I was doing an excellent job of blending, I was also giving up a substantial part of my own voice while singing. Well, if I was giving up 20 – 30% of my singing voice, what else was I giving up? Emotion? Heart? Soul? There had to be a better way.

In the mid 90's, I attended a clinic where guest speaker and clinician, Dr. Greg Lyne demonstrated a technique he called, "Resonance Matching." He had each singer sing a familiar tune such as, "Happy Birthday," and classified each singer with a numerical value based on the singer's natural

resonance. An example might be anyone classified as a "1" would sing with less resonance and more clarity. A "2" would have more natural resonance and less clarity and are sometimes referred to as, "filler" voices. "3's" would have the most natural resonance in the chorus. Accordingly, Dr. Lyne, placed the "1's" in the front, the "2's" in the second row and the "3's" in the third row. I was in awe at the significant change in the overall sound of the choir. It was amazing.

In 2002, during my time as conductor of the, "Racing City Chorus" Saratoga Springs, NY, the Music Team and I agreed on Steve Jamison as our primary coach and mentor. One of the great things that Steve made me understand was that coaches are not for the chorus. Coaches are for the director. It was quite an epiphany! Throughout our time working together, Steve and I discussed individual voice and how they related to each other in the chorus. Finally, we decided to implement Steve's approach to choral voicing. Initially, Steve's concept emulated that of Dr. Lyne's. He checked everyone for their natural resonance and assigned them a number. In addition, Steve added another element: dominant ear. To test dominant ear, have two singers stand side by side and sing and blend in unison. A simple melody such as, "Happy Birthday" or "My Country Tis of Thee" will work fine. As they sing, ask one singer to move from one side of the other singer with the other singer not moving whatsoever. Have some fun and ask the choir on which side of the singer did they prefer the moving singer to stand. There will be a variety of opinions, but the consensus will know immediately which side works best. As it turns out, just as we have a dominant eye, we also have a dominant ear. Sound will change dramatically depending which side you are on. Yet another Epiphany!

Over the years, I have taken Dr Lyne's, "Resonance Matching," applied it with Steve Jamison's, "Dominant Ear," placement and created great sounding choruses and quartets. Yet, I still hadn't created the sound I was looking for in my choruses and those I mentored. There was something

missing. It dawned on me that we are a singing singers possible. As I worked on my own skills, I began to work on teaching others skills to help them become better singers.

What if we asked our singers to sing as naturally as possible and match vowel resonance and shape? What if we separated the singers just enough so that they can hear themselves? I asked them to move away from each other. No, I'm not talking miles, but instead of shoulder to shoulder; how about 12" away from the next singer? How about 24? Both distances created a different choral sound. I asked the singer to sing a melody, but this time, I asked them not to try and blend with the other singer, but rather, contribute their own voice as naturally as possible. As a result of this change and the overall change in the sound of the chorus, this choir grew from 27 members to 44 in under one year. Not because we recruited, but because our members were that excited!

society and it was our responsibility to be the best Don't be concerned about which voice part you are putting next to one another. Be concerned with placing the voices. When you are done voicing you will likely have a "mixed" choir. If done properly, changing a couple of voices in the choir will cause an immediate difference in sound. If you feel your chorus isn't ready for the "shotgun," or "mixed" approach, use the same techniques within each section and then use, "Dominant Ear" to decide how your sections will stand relative to each other. Remember..."Nothing ventured, nothing gained!" Again...none of this is new...but if you aren't already doing something to place your singers appropriately on the risers, try at least one of these techniques and you will be astounded by the difference in their sound!



## *So Who Felt Good at the End of Your Chapter Meeting?*

Jim Bagby

Some wise soul (or maybe just a wisecrack) once suggested that every chorus director should have a mirror just inside the front door of his home, so he could check it on his way in after each chorus rehearsal.

The idea: are you glowing because you did such a great job that night? Was your talent and wisdom dazzling? Or perhaps, fellow arm-waver, you're glum because those chowderheads couldn't tell an A-flat from an eighth note and you might as well have been overseeing a regional thum bsucking meet all night.

The mirror doesn't lie. And if you want it to produce the picture you want, let's back up a week and see (a) how you prepared for a successful meeting and (b) for whose success were you preparing. Part (a) will be covered in a future

Directly Involved article. Here we want you to consider (b) -- because the Great Arm-Waver in the Sky and his minions in Nashville hear rumors that some of our Society directors are on an ego trip.

Actually, the rumors are reflected in membership figures. If your 10 or 15 or 25 or 55 or 155 singers have a good time every meeting night, it's a simple and provable fact that they probably will return next week. They might even bring a friend -- that's where the majority of our new members come from. If Joe Tuesday Night Singer has a less-than-satisfactory time, he may not come back next week, and pretty soon he's gone (and he certainly won't be bringing guests with him). That's particularly true if ol' Joe views barbershopping as a hobby, rather than a calling, and he's convinced that his life is pretty busy.

He knows (and so do we) that he can stay home on meeting night and watch "reality" TV without ever having to leave his easy chair or his family; or he can devote that same amount of time to any of a dozen other projects in his home, church or community.

So we as directors owe him -- yes, owe him -- a rewarding musical experience he can't get anywhere else. And in concert with other chapter members and chapter leaders, we want him to have that fraternal and social interaction that makes him feel better about himself and his world at the end of the night.

Obviously, ego is a necessary commodity for any director. We should be proud to be up front. Let's just be sure we're up front for the guys and aware how much they depend on us to give them as much as we are capable of. Talent and ability are not as important as your willingness to guide the singers and the chorus, and have an enjoyable experience tonight. The short and long-term goals are up to each individual chapter.

I bet you've heard this, and I wish I'd said it -- someday I may claim I did: They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

- Do you address each man by name?
- Do you look every guy in the eye each at least once during the night (you may not be aware, but he sure is)?
- Are you available to socialize and/or answer questions a little while before or after the meetings, so you get the chance to be one of the guys (sure, this is easier in smaller chapters, but you can figure it out)?
- How much time during the actual rehearsal do you spend talking? This is our Achilles heel, as Chuck Greene is pointing out in his successful seminars. And it's where ego most often rears its head, because some/most of us love to hear ourselves dispense our, uh, endless wisdom.
- Are you prepared to take a different approach when something doesn't go as smoothly as planned (or someone disagrees with you)?
- How and when do you deal with the dissenter? \*Write to us all, and we'll make it another Directly Involved topic!
- What do you plan for the final activity of the evening? This is akin to the golfer's comebacker shot, as Society Immediate Past President Bill Biffle says. Will you be sure there's a ringing chord in Joe's head as he heads out the door.

AND IF ol' Joe has that overtone or barbershop rush to accompany him on the way home, YOU should be able to greet your mirror not by saying "Hey, nice job tonight, big guy," but with "Awright, I think it went OK -- let's start planning for next week!"

All these are in concert with your musical plan for the evening. And they work better if you're not the only one up front all night (we'll address director burnout in future issues of Directly Involved).



[www.barbershop.org/direct](http://www.barbershop.org/direct)





## Standing Tall

Karl Chapple

Vince Lombardi was one of the most successful coaches in the history of American football as head coach of the Green Bay Packers from 1959 to 1967. He is said to have started every season by addressing the team with, "Gentlemen, this is a football." He and his teams relentlessly pursued perfection, and it was all about the basics.

One of the most fundamental concepts of singing is often the most overlooked. How you stand or sit can make or break your singing experience and

mastering this basic concept is the key to success. For many of you, this will be review material. Some may find a concept that is new to you here and there. The hope is that this article will serve as a reminder to all of you who stand in front of your choruses every week, and encourage you to teach, coach, and encourage, your singers to practice solid fundamentals as you lead your chorus to success and more fun, whatever that may be for you.

We all know the drill; feet flat on the floor about shoulder width apart, knees not locked, pelvis slightly tucked under, tailbone anchored, chest proudly expanded, shoulders squared, head naturally resting on your neck...wheew! It may seem a lot to remember, but if we find fun ways to remind our singers, and do it consistently, we will help them discover that correct posture allows them to be better singers. With consistency and repetition they will soon make it a habit of singing that way. Some like to refer to this as the "Singer's Posture."

Some of us have singers with physical limitations that prevent them from standing for any length of time. What about those guys? Well, we can show them to sit UP rather than sit DOWN when they sing. If they sit on the front edge of the chair with the same feet, pelvis, back, chest, shoulder, and head postures, they will be set for success (no pun intended). If your rehearsal site has those chairs that kind of suck you back into them and make it very difficult to sit UP, please consider investing in a better chair for the guys who need to use them. A simple and inexpensive stool would suffice.

Greg Lyne elegantly summons a visual of good singing posture by simply asking us to "look like a singer." Please consider encouraging your chorus to look like singers every time they sing. Help them to make good singing posture a habit. Coach Lombardy also said, "Success is a habit." Basics, Habits, Success...we can all do that.

