

Guidelines For Conducting A Director Search

Need a new director? Start with understanding the character of your chorus, to know what it is you seek in a director.

Sooner or later, every Sweet Adeline chorus will find it necessary to find a new director. Many things can be done to maximize the probability of success in finding a director. One of the first things should be for the chorus to do some soul-searching.

Who Are We?

Why are we searching for a director?

Think about why you are looking for a new director. Ask, “Why isn’t our former director still our director?” Obviously, there are things like retirement after a long career, family responsibilities, or work-related problems, so it does not always mean that anything went wrong with the relationship between the director and the chorus. However, if something did go wrong in the relationship, analyze what it was.

When a director participates in any SAI training, the first thing she/he learns is to “look at herself/himself” whenever the chorus isn’t giving her/him what she/he thinks she/he is asking for. When a director and a chorus part company, make sure the chorus members do the same thing. If the director didn’t give the chorus what they think was asked for, see if something about the chorus contributed to that disconnect. Don’t beat yourselves up if you discover that the chorus contributed significantly to the break-up, but identify the problems and fix them to help ensure it doesn’t happen again.

Get to know yourself.

What are the goals of the chorus? Are they really the chorus’ goals or are they the dreams of a few members, or the musical leaders? What are the true goals of the chorus, and what are the members willing to do to reach these goals? What are your values and how do they contribute to the decision-making and operation of the chorus?

Be honest and realistic in this analysis. There are different and varied goals for all choruses. However, the goals set will definitely affect the shape of the music program a director and music team would develop.

Any music program should present some challenges to the abilities of the singers and provide ways in which the chorus members can grow as singers and performers. And as our singers become more proficient vocally and more comfortable and successful as performers, their goals will probably begin to change.

What Do We Have To Offer?

Once you have looked at the chorus and undertaken whatever “fixes” are appropriate, there are two basic areas to explore: what the director can expect from the chorus, and what the chorus should expect from the director. First, look at some things the director might expect from the chorus.

What is in place to support a director in administering a music program?

Do you have a functioning (and functional) music team?

Is there a music team member who is responsible for each element of the music program (so that nothing falls through the cracks), and do the members work well together? Do they meet regularly, not just to plan meetings, but to monitor the development of the music program?

Are assistant directors in place?

Identify people to develop as assistant directors. Having good assistant directors allows greater flexibility in accepting performance opportunities. The key for the development of assistant directors is to give them training opportunities, time in front of the chorus, and consistent feedback so they can refine their skills.

Are effective section leaders in place?

Identify people to develop as section leaders. Section leaders can be the “extended eyes and ears” of the director. Their roles can encompass many tasks and are essential to the education of the members, as well as providing support needed to the director.

Is there an active quartet program in place?

Singing in quartets is not only fun, but it also encourages independence in singers, providing opportunities for individual growth and additional camaraderie.

Is there a history of asking for, and accepting, outside coaching?

If not, was it the chorus’ choice or the director’s choice?

Is the Administrative Body / Management Team / Board of Directors supportive of the music program?

Insure that the administrative team is aligned with the musical team, before bringing in candidates to interview for the directing position. This is essential for maintaining harmony and unity within the chorus.

Is there an active Membership Team?

The membership and director’s teams must work together. The membership team brings new members in—the directing team keeps them by providing a fine music program.

Does the chorus have both short-term and long-term goals ?

It is very helpful to a chorus—and to its music team—to know where they are now and where they’d like to be next year. Think about where the chorus would like to be in three or four years. Then formulate plans to help the chorus get there and to continue moving forward.

What kind of financial support can we offer?**Salary**

How much is the chorus willing to pay a director? The chorus might think that people should be willing to direct without any charge. After all, it is just a hobby. However, being a good director requires a lot of time outside the chorus rehearsal, planning an appropriate program that advances the chorus toward its stated goals, preparing to teach new music, polishing songs so that they are entertaining to the audience and interesting to the singers, developing assistant directors, preparing for contests, and myriad other things. The director deserves some consideration and reward for this investment of time on chorus’ behalf.

Dues

Will the chorus pay the dues for the director?

Costumes

Consider that the chorus will provide the costumes for the director.

Contest Expenses

To what extent will the chorus pay expenses for the director when attending contests?

Training Expenses

To what extent will the chorus provide funds for the director to attend any and all classes, such as the International Education Symposium, regional functions and educational workshops?

What Can The Chorus Expect In Return?

The previous material has been aimed at what the director might expect from the chorus, but what should the chorus be able to expect from a director?

Thorough preparation, both short term and long term.

The director must be prepared for each chorus rehearsal. And, the director (along with the Music Team) should have a vision for the development of the chorus members, as well as their development as performers.

Working closely with Music Leadership Team.

The chorus can expect the director to work together with the music team to select music that will allow the chorus to represent both Sweet Adelines and the chorus well when performing. The music selected should fill the requirements of an entertaining performance package for the audience as well as the singer.

A plan for musical growth for the chapter and its individual members.

The director and the Music Team should analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the chapter and develop an education program which address the weaknesses and enhances the strengths.

Opportunities to enjoy music and your hobby.

You want to sing a variety of music. Chorus members like to leave each chorus rehearsal with the feeling that they have enjoyed themselves and that something was accomplished something.

Work closely with the Administrative Team.

The director and the Administrative Team must work together to make sure all goals are continually aligned.

Musical knowledge and instincts.

The chorus can expect that the new director will want to learn all that is available to be the best director she/he can be.

Leadership and People Skills.

While the director must have confidence in her/his own abilities, there should be willing to accept input from the Music Team and others. The director needs to be approachable, and willing to take direction from others when it is appropriate.

Motivational skills.

The chorus can expect an environment created where singers are motivated to achieve their best.

Willingness to continue to learn.

The chorus can expect the director be interested in further developing her/his skills. She/he should want to attend training classes and seminars that will increase knowledge in every aspect.

Teaching / Communication skills.

The most successful directors are good teachers and communicators. They also utilize others on their team to assist with teaching, and serving as role models who exhibiting excellent communication.

The Search

Identifying the characteristics and components of who the chorus is and what it has to offer a director, will help determine the best match with a potential director. Now, where will you look, and how will you make the initial approach?

Look within the chapter and the community.

Existing hand and arm waving skills, while desirable, are not as essential as some of the other skills identified earlier. A potential director can develop their directing skills by utilizing training opportunities. Look at the following:

- A person within the chorus who has the qualities identified in the previous section(s)
- Past directors or assistant directors
 - Some directors and assistant directors leave the hobby for lots of good reasons, such as job-related problems or family responsibilities. There might be someone who is now ready to return to the hobby.
- Section leaders who might be ready to advance to directing.
- Assistant or associate directors in neighboring choruses
- Area Barbershop Harmony Society Choruses.
- College vocal music departments may introduce you to instructors that may be a good match, however, you should also consider the possibility of a graduate student or even an upperclass voice major.
 - Vocal music teachers— public and non-public, High School and Middle School vocal music teachers, as well as elementary teachers. They may have the ability to learn about and adapt to the barbershop style. Additionally, teachers are accustomed to continually furthering their education and enhancing their skills.
- Teachers of instrumental music may have had some training in vocal music, and can be professional musicians, as well. If there is any interest generated, there would need to be exposure to the rubato-style directing used in barbershop. However, these skills can be learned, if the desire is there and it is a good match for the chorus.
- Church choir and community chorus directors can be fine musicians and experienced directors, and are used to working with adult non-professional singers.

Initial Contact

It is essential that you determine the right approach for the initial meeting for any and all potential candidates. If the candidate is already a Sweet Adeline or is very involved in the Barbershop Harmony Society, subtlety may not be all that important. It will be important to know who you are approaching in order to make the best possible impression and thus, make a positive impact.

There are many different approaches to take. You may want to ask others for help in identifying possible directors for the chorus. As the discussion proceeds, you engage her/him a conversation about what the position entails, and you may well come out of the meeting with some new leads. It may very well be possible that the person to whom you're talking may express interest in the position.

Summary

In conclusion, the steps to follow when searching for a new director are varied and many. Before beginning the actual search, determine:

- What kind of a chorus are you?
- What kind of chorus do you want to be?
- What does the chorus expect from the director?
- What should the director expect from the chorus?
- What financial support is to be provided?
- Who will be the contact person?
- How will you maximize the probability of a positive response through your first approach either by the person giving you the names of possible candidates or by expressing interest themselves?

Good luck! With an open mind, and talented and creative people in the search process, this can be a journey filled with information-gathering, fact -finding, and win-win solutions for all.

Additional information on this subject can be found in the first section of the Chapter Guide. An article, "Guidelines for Conducting a Director Search," printed in the *LiveWire* Online Newsletter, a publication of the Barbershop Harmony Society, was used as a resource for this article.