



Getting them in the door (and then keeping them)

Question: Why do you want new members anyway? They're only a big pain in the butt!

As long as you can think of some good answers to the question and you can convince the rest of your chorus, a singing course is a really good way to get lots of people in the door.

Decisions you need to take early.

- Who will be your Course Manager. It's really important that one person (or possibly a small team of two or three) coordinates it all and keeps his/her finger on the pulse.
- When to do it! Early September is good but January works. Date is probably less important for men than women.
- Where to do it. It will usually be your own rehearsal hall but make the decision.
- How much to charge. Free is good but some clubs have charged successfully.
- What format will it be? 6/8/10/12 weeks. Same night as chorus or another night? Mixed with the chorus or separate (or a bit of both)? How many songs will you learn? What will they be? Will you have a show at the end (highly recommended)?
- Who will take it? You need a primary educator. Could be your MD but doesn't have to be. If you don't have the skills, bring someone in (speak to Mick Kett). You can share the load – one person to do the education, section leaders to teach notes, another to do the choral work (MD!).
- Will you limit the intake? Can't think of a reason why you would but some have.

Things you need to do early.

- Appoint a point of contact. This name will appear on all ads, posters, flyers and other PR material. Needs to be a good talker, friendly and welcoming. Needs to be organized as well.
- Get an ad in the local papers, as many as you can afford. About six weeks before seems to work.
- Produce posters and flyers. Posters can go to your local main library. They'll usually distribute them for you round the sub-libraries. Get one up in the place where you're going to have the course. Flyers/posters go to club members to put up in golf clubs, singles clubs, working men's clubs, anywhere they have easy access.
- Produce an information sheet that you can send out to anyone who responds. Make sure that it will answer their questions. Include a registration slip for them to return – then you get some idea of how many will turn up.
- Ongoing tasks for your point of contact.
- He/she will receive phone calls/ letters/emails asking about the course. He/she will respond with a form letter and a copy of the information sheet. Get personal details where possible and enter in a register. Then, if you don't get confirmation, you can chase. When a confirmation slip arrives, annotate the register – this will be your final list of attendees for you to produce packs, badges etc..

Things you need to do next.

- Get copies of the music for the song(s) and produce teach tapes/CDs. Music you can photocopy (legally, of course) is good because you can leave it until the last minute to produce enough copies. If the course is to be a one-day thing, it's only the section leaders who need teach tapes, otherwise everyone gets one.
- Your primary educator must produce a set of course notes. These will be your hand outs, either at the beginning or during the course. Good course notes already exist on the membership website – all you need to do is to change them for your own purposes. One copy of these will go to all attendees.

Singing Courses

- Purchase welcome pack materials. A wallet to put it all in, a badge that you can customize (the kind that is a card inside a clear plastic pocket that hangs on a cord or a chain is good), any chorus PR material you want to put in there etc.
- Appoint a few people from the chorus to do jobs. You'll need greeters on the day to say hello, check people in, hand out the welcome packs and be friendly. You might want a couple of car park attendants to keep chorus members out and allow room for your guests! Think about asking wives/husbands/friends to help with coffee/tea at the break (if that is part of the plan).
- Really important is to get the rest of the chorus onside and keep them up to date so that an atmosphere of anticipation is created. This will improve your chorus before the course even starts.
- Have a rehearsal or two for the people who are going to teach the song (probably the section leaders). They need to know their stuff.

Things to do close to the day.

- Your point of contact should be ringing anyone who responded but hasn't registered. They may just have forgotten!
- Produce name badges for all the people who have registered. Printing them on your computer looks professional and gives the appearance of a club that has its act together. Include some blanks for those who turn up without registering. (I was still producing name badges on the day it was all to start!)
- Produce labels for your welcome packs. Again, printed ones are good for the same reasons as the badges.
- Stick labels on welcome packs and stuff them with goodies. Music, teach tapes/CDs, course notes, chorus PR material, anything else you want to put in there. (We gave everyone a bottle of water on their first day.)
- Tell the chorus how many people you are expecting. Urge them to make sure they chat to people coming in the door. No-one is more important than the face you haven't seen before.

On the day

- Arrive early. Set up tables at the entrance, in the foyer, wherever, where you will have the register and the welcome packs.
- Ask the chorus to use walk out dress or wear something that sets them apart. Your course attendees will find it helpful to know who is on the course and who is in the chorus (i.e. they're the ones who should know what's going on!)
- Set up enough risers for everyone (if you have them).
- Make sure you start the course on time (even if people are still arriving). This looks professional and tells everyone that time keeping is important.
- Do the course!
- Make sure you finish on time. This tells everyone that you recognize the value of their time.

During the course

- Make sure that you do what your PR material and course notes promised.
- Start and finish on time every week.
- Make sure that chorus members continue to engage the course attendees in friendly conversation.
- Keep the register every week. Then you know who's stayed, who's dropped out etc.

After the course

- Write to everyone thanking them for their time. Frame different letters depending on whether the person dropped out early, stayed the course and left or stayed the course and expressed interest in joining. Include a questionnaire to get some feedback on how you did.
- Deal with all your potential new members.

The course itself

- On the first night, you'll need to separate people into their comfortable voice parts. For a few people, you can do individual voice tests but for more than 10 or 12 say, you'll need to do it en masse just to keep the time down. Start with everyone at one end of the room. Get them all to sing up a scale (together) and, when they can't get higher, move into the center of the room. Those left are your tenors. Now get the rest to sing down a scale and, when they can't go further move to the other end of the room. Those left are your basses. Of the others, anyone who reads music, sings or plays a musical instrument becomes a baritone. Everyone else is a lead. This really works and it takes 10 minutes maximum.
- You advertised a Singing Course so make sure they sing, a lot!
- Keep any craft type work to the very basics. It will be completely new to most people and, even those who've sung in choirs before won't have heard most of it. Posture, breathing, support, resonance and a bit on vowels is where you'll make the most impact. Don't be afraid that it seems too simple, it isn't.
- I suggest that, on the first night, your section rehearsals only work on, say, the first 8 bars of the song, no further. Anything more will seem daunting and this is enough to fire their enthusiasm to learn more. You'll probably find that most of them have learned the rest of the song by the second week.
- Don't get too picky. Small improvements must be applauded. You will have some people who can't sing to save their lives. Put up with it and praise everything.
- People will start to show interest in joining. Have a handout ready to give them when they ask. Make it clear that attendance on the course is not a substitute for whatever your normal audition procedures are.
- You can organize the show however you like on the last night but it needs to be a big occasion. The finale will be your massive chorus singing their very own song(s). Plan for them to do it twice.

Recruitment and retention

- Make your chorus aware of their tendency to group into cliques. This is natural when people have been together a long time (and some of us have been together a VERY long time) but, when they do that, they are unconsciously shutting new members out. Your members must take positive action to welcome, accept, absorb and integrate the new people otherwise you'll lose them.
- Don't plug recruitment before or during the course. It's just a singing course. No pressure. Once they ask, though, you can do your full recruitment bit, whatever that is. Make sure they know all about your audition procedures and are aware that they will have to go through them.
- Allow for some section rehearsals in the two or three weeks after the course to help your recruits learn the audition material and get them through as quickly as possible.
- Plan for the chorus to learn a couple of new songs, starting after the course. The new members will feel more at home learning new material with the chorus rather than always playing catch up.
- Prioritise your repertoire so that the new members know which songs are most important. If it's coming up to Christmas though, forget carols (there isn't enough time). Focus on your normal repertoire.
- If possible, provide a goal. Maybe you have a singout two or three months hence or you could put on a mini-show. Give the new members the target of learning the songs for that occasion (7 or 8 songs max). They'll do it so that they can be on that show or singout.
- Be prepared to lose one or two when they realize that the commitment is too much for them. It doesn't matter how many times you tell them, nobody can quite believe how much time we all spend on our hobby. When they realize, it will either be too late (they're hooked) or they'll go.

Plan to do the same next year

- Now you have the experience, do it again. Or, do something a little different (6 weeks instead of 12, or 1 day instead of 6 weeks). Now you have the infrastructure, use it.