

**1. BACKGROUND**

Although recruitment, particularly through Learn To Sing (LTS) courses, has proved to be very successful we continue to lose a large number of men for various reasons.

Analysis revealed that a significant number of those who had left had been members for less than 4 years. This appeared to point at low retention rates from the LTS courses.

A retention process project team was established to look at the reasons for men leaving and to identify possible solutions. Additionally, 4 regional workshops were held to obtain the views of the clubs and in all some 25 clubs have been involved. The following output from the project team and the workshops captures the input of those involved and provides a platform for establishing best practice throughout the country.

**2. GENERAL**

It was considered important to have the chorus agree on what the club aims are. If it is to be a fun club that is not interested in improving, then at least everyone will know where they stand. However, if the aim is to achieve continuous improvement then the following actions may need to be considered:-

- timed programme for rehearsals , available in advance
- 3 or 4 repertoire songs each week (include the same repertoire songs for 3 weeks which will give the new guys a chance as well as refreshing existing members' performance).
- review the repertoire, are there songs that have been in there for ages? Are they getting stale?
- ask club members what new songs they would like to do, Music Team to have final say
- it is essential that everyone on the risers is singing the right words/notes
- need to pitch the standard at the top 40% of the chorus, otherwise the club may lose some of these guys
- purple dot system, whereby each member produces a recording on the risers of repertoire songs (see reference to 3 week cycle above) may be a start. It can also be employed for new song learning.

The following suggestions were also made regarding sing-outs:-

- Seek sing-out opportunities with other local music groups (the Making Music regional rep can help with this)

- How can clubs improve their sing-out programme? A start may be to identify what talent there is in the chorus (or their relations). Particularly where a club has recruited a number of new guys via Learn To Sing.

Regional events were identified as a way of getting clubs together to have a fun day with an educational flavour and funds for these have been budgeted for 2009.

### **3. LEARN TO SING**

**Pre-Course :-** Involve existing members in the course arrangements, ensure everyone has a role

Where possible include existing members as part of the student body

Whilst LTS is a great recruitment tool, the whole chorus needs to be on board regarding why the club is running a course

If a club wishes to charge for the course then it may be an idea to run the course as a fund raiser for a local charity (e.g. a hospice). This will raise the club's profile in the community as well as providing easier access to local radio. Also, more likely the local press will do an article rather than the club having to pay for ads.

Time courses to run well away from Convention (danger of losing members through the 2 song syndrome – they will need time to work on the club repertoire)

In order to avoid the 2 song syndrome in the run up to Convention, June is probably the best time to run a course. The advantages are:

-it gives the chorus an immediate focus post convention when rehearsal attendance can dip

-provides ample time for the new guys to learn repertoire before January when things start gearing up for Convention

- If you think summer holidays will get in the way, Coventry had their best retention result (12 guys) when they ran a summer course.

**During the course:-** Whatever time of the year a course takes place, it was considered the following should apply:-

- Courses should be fun, particularly the first week
- If existing members and students are taking the course together, suggest existing members do not wear club gear (avoids the us and them situation and encourages a feeling of all in it together)

- Give students the entire course material on the first night
- If there is a club audition song it should be included in the course material
- Try to retain students through the course (contact them if they miss a week)
- Retain their interest right through the course
- Any course attendees who drop out should receive the club magazine for a while - they may possible return at a later date. Arrangements can also be made via the Membership Development Director for them to receive Harmony Express
- Course to end with an open rehearsal/show for friends & relatives or entry to a music festival
- Also target an event (eg external music festival) 2/3 months after the course
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- Following the course, have the new guys (following their auditions) have some time, separate from the chorus, learning repertoire songs
- Give the new guys a job as soon as possible (they could be potential club officers)
- Encourage the new guys to attend Harmony College in their first year
- Courses to be the start of the students' continuous educational process throughout their Barbershop lives

**Post course:-** The majority of those involved in the workshops agreed that the transition from completion of the course to getting the potential new guys on the risers had thrown up some problems. However, the following is suggested to smooth this transition:-

- Have an unfinished song at the end of the course. This encourages men to continue beyond the course as they will want to master the song.
- There should be an early assessment of ability to pass audition, and thus an early weeding out of those who do not have a hope. This saves more able singers from being put off. If keen new members hear bad singing around them they may leave.
- Course members should get on the risers with existing members immediately after the course.
- Buddy system for the new guys
- Team manager (one of the LTS management team) for the new guys as a possible way of monitoring their progress
- Identify songs likely to be dropped from the repertoire (no need for the new guys to learn these)
- Ensure sufficient copies of repertoire music/teach CDs are available for the new guys immediately after the course
- Break repertoire songs into groups as per the club sing-out package (this way the new guys can initially do one part of a show)

#### **4. OTHER POINTS**

Other points raised included the following suggestions:-

- Essential tools of Barbershop to be made available to new guys (clubs to access LTS course material and adapt, also Graham Lawrence's 'For Rehearsal Only' book and Neil Watkins '1-6 Learning Process' - (BABS Educator to co-ordinate)
- In addition to the BABS Welcome Pack, introduce a 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary letter to members after they have been with BABS for a year – (Membership Development).

#### **5. SUMMARY**

A big thank you to the project team and the clubs who attended the workshops for their help in identifying the retention issues faced by the Association and producing ideas on how we can improve things which we can share with all of the clubs.

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