

It's the time of year when many of us have a coach coming to work with our chorus. A coaching session is usually interesting, fun and a great change of pace from our regular rehearsals. What we really want, though, is for our chorus to sound better, not just the night of coaching, but in the weeks to follow. We'll get the most out of a coach and a coaching session if we set the stage for learning with our members (and ourselves). Here are some tips to make your coaching experience a positive, productive and long-lasting experience.

- Give the coach a little background information. Most coaches appreciate knowing, in general, how things are going with you and your chorus. While a coach is not a therapist, you should be able to expect confidentiality from them and be able to share what's bugging you AND what's going well in your directing life. If it's your first time with a coach, it's helpful to meet with him or her before starting rehearsal to get acquainted with each other and to lay out the plan for the night. If that's not possible, an email message is fine.
- Share the coach's background with your chorus. Members like to know who's visiting them, their musical or theatrical background. A coach is a guest in your house and deserves a proper introduction.
- State your goals and desired outcome of the session. Coaches will listen to what you're having musical issues with and can focus on whatever you'd like IF you tell them. For example, if you're having trouble with tuning, either in general or in a section of a song, let the coach know this. If your coach happens to be a Sweet Adelines International Judge, provide score sheets from your most recent contest. At the very minimum, let your coach know what songs you'll be singing, how long you've had them, and what stage they're at.
- Be open-minded! Coaches, like directors, have their own strengths and areas of expertise. You may not always understand what it is they are going for, or you may not agree with something they suggest. For that evening, try to do what it is the coach is suggesting. You don't have to KEEP everything they suggest after they are gone. Your members will also appreciate seeing YOU in learning mode alongside them! It's not every day we get to be students too. Together, you and your singers can be a learning machine team!
- Let the coach coach! Directors have ears too and are used to being the weekly coach for their choruses. We can't step into the mind of the coach, however, so when they are hearing, watching and working on one thing, stay focused on that thing along with them and try to ignore

the voice inside your head which wants to talk about something else. Allow your singers AND yourself the luxury of letting the coach be the only expert in the room, and get back to your own agenda the following week.

- Don't expect to do everything in one session! Rome wasn't built in a day. Let your members know what you expect of them. In advance of the coaching session, lay out your expectations for your members. Here are a some things I remind my chorus of in writing before the session: to stay focused on the risers, to record the entire session, to take a personal break when needed, when to arrive and how long the session will be.
- Set ego aside. It takes a healthy ego to be a chorus director and it takes a healthy ego to set it aside for one coaching session. If the coach fixes something you've been working on for months, or something you thought had been fixed, do not take it personally. Instead, celebrate that your chorus has had a light bulb moment! After all, what we really want is for the chorus to sound and/or look better. There will still be plenty for us to work on next time!!