

What is a Section Leader?

As a leader, you will now be in a position to diagnose problems and prescribe instruction for your singers. The first rule, always, is **do no harm**. Your singers have placed their hearts, voices and egos in your hands... don't mess it up!

Your best and first diagnostic tools will be your ears and your eyes. Before you jump in to "fix" a problem, be sure you have accurately assessed the root of the issue.

1. **Listen first with your EYES.** Notice the physical alignment of your people – how they stand, how they breathe. Are they projecting physical hints of discomfort? illness? embarrassment? fatigue? disinterest?
2. **Listen with your EARS.** What is their sound telling you? Breath deprived? Nervous? Tuning issues? Tentative (maybe because they're not sure they know the music)?
3. **Listen with your HEART.** Is there a non-music issue that may be affecting them that day, that they may not be comfortable disclosing? Don't continue to spotlight them on the hotseat... move on.

Because you will be touching an emotional place in your singers, learn to provide **critique without judgement**. There are two sides to any communication interaction: giving and receiving. The tone and content of your words will make the message land successfully, or shoot a hurtful arrow into the heart and psyche of your singer.

Become familiar with learning styles. It will help you in communicating with your section if you are aware of their styles. You may need to frame your messages in several ways to ensure all learning styles understand the message.

- **Visual** – Be able to demonstrate and show (either on the music or your body) the concept you're trying to convey.
- **Auditory** – Your words and sound will be best understood by this learner.
- **Kinesthetic** – Can you say and demonstrate and, even better, have them join you in performing the technique with their own instrument? Can you provide movements/hand motions that can reinforce the techniques you're describing?

- **Left Brain vs. Right Brain** – You may also need to provide different examples to appeal to the technical vs. artistic learners.

Understand what being section leader means. Being a section leader is harder than being a non-section leader; not only do you have to worry about *your* music, but you have to worry about the music of your section. It also doesn't mean you get to be a dictator; you have to help your section. You are there to serve the people in your section, not to rule over them.

Lead by example. Not only will this let your section know what to do, but it is also a very kind method of leadership. You were most likely chosen because of your singing skills; now is your time to pass these on.

Get on friendly terms with your section. When you become friends with your section, they'll be more likely to listen to you, and you'll get a better feel of their singing ability.

Learn your music. As section leader, you're expected to know it before everyone else. If you don't know your music, how can you help others with their music?

Hold sectionals. Sectionals are the time when your section is the focus, not the entire chorus. Find the difficult passages and go over them with your section. Make sure your section knows exactly what they're trying to fix; if they don't know, it probably won't get fixed. It's also a fine time to teach singing and barbershop craft.

Help your section when they need it. Let them practice, but if you see someone struggling with a part or singing it wrong without realizing it, help them.

Hold your section to their promises. If someone said they'll learn a passage by next Tuesday, they better have it down when next Tuesday comes rolling by. If they don't, ask them why they didn't.

Be understanding. People have lives outside of chorus.

Be YOU. You're still a member of your section, and your extra authority doesn't mean you can't take part in the rest of the section's festivities. In fact, spending more time with your section only makes you a better leader.

Keep your section under control. Rehearsal time is limited and essential to the success of the whole chorus. Keep your section focused so they don't miss important instruction.

Listen to both sides of a conflict. If there's a conflict, you will probably have to be the third party to step in and solve it.

Be on the same page as your director. If you're telling your section something completely different than the director, it will only confuse your section.

Remember the team. No matter what goals you may have for your section, don't lose sight of what is best for the entire chorus. Each section must work together to achieve what is best for the entire ensemble, and your director's goals take priority over your own.

Do your best to offer advice in a way that doesn't hurt anyone's feelings. There are two sides to the communication... giving and receiving. Words matter, and words can hurt.

- Remember: A good leader is selfless. Take the blame; give the credit away.
- Don't be bossy. There is a fine line between asserting yourself and just being a jerk. The first rule is **do no harm**.
- Make sure you don't get too power-hungry; remember that being section leader doesn't mean you have to control every minute aspect of your section's lives.
- Don't let other people in your section tell you or your section what to do. Ask people to give you feedback or information privately. Listen to advice, but make your own decisions.

(Some material adapted from a Wikipedia article, <http://www.wikihow.com/Be-a-Good-Section-Leader>)