**Being a Section Leader**

**Why do we exist?**

Section leaders are the heart, soul and sweat of the music team. Without them, no chorus

can really expect steady, consistent musical growth. They do much of the detail work --

the hands-on instruction with the chorus members. They are non-commissioned officers

in the trenches with the troops. They are the eyes and ears for the MD. They are the main contact point for their section members.

For this reason, they must be as carefully selected as any member of the music team.

They are the direct link between the individual on the risers and the music leadership of

the chorus. The right person in this job can make the musical director look like a genius and

the wrong person can make the whole team's effort one of frustration and failure.

**Qualifications of a section leader**

• Sight-singing skill. The section leader should have good sight-reading ability or be

able to learn music quickly and accurately. Since one of their major tasks is to teach a

part, he/she must be willing to learn his/her part well ahead of the rest of the chorus. If the section leader is not a note reader then they can ask someone in the section who can read notes to help out. This also drives the team ethic.

• Accuracy in singing. The section leader should have a good sense of pitch

discrimination and be able to sing their part alone or within a quartet. Good

vocal quality is also desirable but not essential. Again, the section leader could ask another member of the section to help out in this area.

• Positive, helpful personality, hopefully with a good sense of humour. The section leader, as with every member of the music team, should keep their teaching both constructive and positive. The members of the section need to know that the section leader really wants to help.

• Good communication skills. Because the section leader is a link between the chorus

member and the musical leadership, they must be able to communicate clearly and

effectively.

• Respect of their section (credibility). The members of the section should appreciate the section leader’s singing ability and respect them as a person.

• Regular attendance. The section leader has a number of duties to perform during

each rehearsal and, therefore, must be very reliable in their participation. Irregular

attendance and tardiness can cause major problems in rehearsal scheduling and

execution.

**Duties of a section leader**

The section leader is called upon to accomplish a large number of tasks in any musically

active chorus. Because of this, it is often wise to split the duties between two people; one

covering administrative assignments and the other musical areas of responsibility. This

method would, of course, depend on the size of the chorus and section. Smaller

choruses may combine all duties under one energetic person in each section.

1. **Administrative functions**

• Assist guests and new members. Provide friendly support to the visitor and new

member. Introduce them to the music leadership and other members of the chorus,

especially in their particular section. The section leader should also be prepared to

answer questions about the chorus, or barbershop organization.

• Monitor attendance. Keep a roll sheet and inform the chorus committee member responsible for membership when members of the section are irregular in their attendance. Roll might also

be kept for performances.

• Keep the section informed. In this area, the section leader may handle the sign-up

sheet in their section for performance, competition and other chorus activities. They

should be a source of information concerning uniform, makeup, location of

performances, etc. They may also be called upon to notify members if any last-minute

changes have occurred pertinent to performances and chorus activities.

1. **Musical Functions**

**Section rehearsals**

This is a major area of responsibility and includes all of the following duties:

• Teach notes and words to new songs. This may be done as a member of the

teaching quartet or during a section rehearsal. The section leader may also be used to check their

section when songs are being taught to the entire chorus by the “barbershop

method.”

• Check accuracy of notes and words on material used in the repertoire. This

includes quality control items such as pitch discrimination, correct words and

word sounds, rhythmic accuracy and good vocal quality.

• Demonstrate the correct target vowel formation and sound for their particular

section.

• Teach and monitor proper vocal techniques during section rehearsal, as part of a

vocal instruction program or as part of a full chorus rehearsal. Use HAVE HIND HEART etc.

• Ensure that all performing chorus members in their section maintain an adequate level

of performance, as determined by the music team. This may be done through audition, a taping program or personal observation. The section leader should also offer help to chorus members having difficulty.

• Attend all music team meetings and planning sessions. Section leaders should contribute input, particularly in the area of what their section needs for maximum musical growth, and ways to accomplish it.

• Assist guests and new members. Section leaders may aid in voice placement evaluation, auditions, "early-bird" repertoire sessions and any other means the chorus may have to integrate the new person into the performing chorus.

•Encourage members of the section to participate in quartet activities.

• Communicate musical and personal problems of members in their section to the director, assistant director, or other appropriate officers.

• Communicate the musical goals and aims of the music team to the members of their section.

• Work with the other section leaders and music team members to apply uniformity in teaching methods.

• Assist in any craft instruction or program for the chorus evening.

• Attend education events and seminars which present material pertinent to the section leader’s instructional needs.

**Section rehearsals continued**

This staple of every chorus' teaching program can develop strong internal leadership in

the chorus. Members come to respect and depend upon their section leader for help and

inspiration. A feeling of unity can grow within the section, making the member feel an

integral, contributing part of the chorus.

**Review and reinforcement in learning notes and lyrics**

Under the guidance of a section leader, each part can clean up inaccuracies in the music

and words. One idea at chorus night is to have the three harmony parts divide into sections, with

one-third of the leads going to each section (tenor, baritone and bass). Another option is to have only two or three strong leads go with each section so the rest can work on their part. It can be difficult for the harmony parts to accurately sing in tune without hearing the melody (lead) singer. When the chorus divides into three sections, the lead section leader will need to rotate to each segment of his leads, or have the director and/or assistant directors take a part of the lead section. A track of the lead section singing could also be provided to each harmony part, thus allowing the leads to get together for their own sectional.

**Work on unit sound**

It is difficult to develop a unit sound within the section while the entire chorus is

rehearsing. Each section may be scattered out over the risers so they literally do not hear

each other under normal rehearsal conditions. Working with one section while the

others wait their turn wastes valuable time. A section rehearsal provides the opportunity

to work on vocal production and techniques which will unify the sound quality of each

section. Each voice part has its own particular problems and the section rehearsal can do

much to assist each part. Section rehearsals may deal with vocal techniques in general or

specific problem spots in certain songs. Find a voice in your section. Get the members to analyse it in terms of resonance and voice placement. Then ask them to all copy it.

**Work on target vowels**

Although this is an area that can and should be taught to the entire chorus, a section

rehearsal is a good place to work with target vowels. Individuals who can't be heard in a

large chorus may be identified and aided in the smaller learning unit. A section leader

should be able to pick out and assist those men in his section who are having specific

difficulties. HAVE HIND HEART etc

**Dealing with balance problems**

A continual problem is the volume relationship of each part within the chord. This can

really be dealt with only when all four parts are singing, but a good deal of basic

instruction may be done in a section rehearsal. For instance: in any given song the

baritones should know which notes must be sung stronger to reinforce the overtones

and which notes are thirds and sevenths and should be sung more lightly.

This kind of craft instruction can be covered nicely in a section rehearsal, so that each

singer has a better understanding of this own section's balance needs when the entire

chorus is together. Occasionally, the balancing of a particular chord may require the

borrowing of one or more singers from another section to strengthen the root or fifth of

that chord. Closely related to balance are the difficulties involved in interpretation. Once the

interpretive plan for a song has been developed, each section will have its own

particular problems to solve in balance, volume relationships, legato singing and

shading. These intricacies must ultimately be solved in a full chorus rehearsal, but

concepts can be gained within a section rehearsal that will shorten the instructional time

for the whole chorus.

**Memorization of notes and lyrics**

The section rehearsal is an ideal place for the section leader to drill and evaluate his

group's memorization of a given song. Inaccuracies in notes and insecure phrases can be

corrected. Here again, it is helpful if leads are divided evenly among the other three

sections.

**Remember: Section leaders are the heart, soul and sweat of the music team.**