

GOOD TEACHING: THE TOP TEN REQUIREMENTS

One. Good teaching is as much about passion as it is about reason. It's about not only motivating your singers to perform at a high level, but teaching them how to learn, and doing so in a manner that is relevant, meaningful, and memorable. It's about caring for your craft, having a passion for it, and conveying that passion to everyone, most importantly to your chorus members.

Two. Good teaching is about substance and treating members as consumers of knowledge. It's about doing your best to keep on top of your field and your own vocal skills. Good teaching is also about bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Three. Good teaching is about listening, questioning, being responsive, and remembering that each member is different. It's about eliciting responses and developing the visual, oral and kinesthetic communication skills to enable you to communicate with every member. It's about pushing your members to excel; at the same time, it's about being human, respecting others, and being professional at all times.

Four. Good teaching is about not always having a fixed agenda and being rigid, but being flexible, fluid, experimenting, and having the confidence to react and adjust to changing circumstances. It's about getting only 10 percent of what you wanted to do in a rehearsal done and still feeling good. Good teaching is about the creative balance between being an authoritarian dictator on the one hand and a pushover on the other.

Five. Good teaching is also about style. Should good teaching be entertaining? You bet! Does this mean that it lacks in substance? Not a chance! Good teachers work the room and every singer in it.

Six. This is very important -- good teaching is about humor. It's about being self-deprecating and not taking yourself too seriously. It's often about making innocuous jokes, mostly at your own expense, so that the ice breaks and members learn in a more relaxed atmosphere where you, like them, are human with your own share of faults and shortcomings.

Seven. Good teaching is about caring, nurturing, and developing minds and talents. It's about devoting time, often invisible, to every singer. It's also about the thankless hours of preparation, designing and redesigning rehearsal schedules, and preparing materials to make the most of the time you have together.

Eight. Good teaching is supported by strong and visionary leadership. Good teaching is continually reinforced by an overarching vision that transcends the entire organization -- and is reflected in what is said, but more importantly by what is done.

Nine. Good teaching is about mentoring, teamwork, and being recognized and promoted by one's peers. Effective teaching should also be rewarded, and poor teaching needs to be remediated through training and development programs. You must always have successors in the wings for your leadership positions, including yourself.

Ten. At the end of the day, good teaching is about having fun, experiencing pleasure and intrinsic rewards ... like locking eyes with a singer in the back row and seeing the synapses and neurons connecting, thoughts being formed, all of the mental and physical aspects of good singing coming together, the person becoming better, and a smile cracking across a face as learning all of a sudden happens.

Good teachers practice their craft not for the money or because they have to, but because they truly enjoy it and because they want to. Good teachers couldn't imagine doing anything else.