

TURNING GUESTS INTO MEMBERS

Whether your chorus fielded a guest night, the Vocal Lesson Plans or another type of membership drive, it is hoped that your initial efforts were successful and resulted in guests who are interested in your chorus. At this stage, we will focus on nurturing guests who return for more rehearsals and developing qualified prospects into new members.

Of course, it's important to pay just as much attention to guests on their return visits. Sometimes, choruses plan a big membership event and train everyone on their roles—and then all the responsibilities are forgotten after the first night.

On return visits, guests still need to be greeted, welcomed warmly and nurtured—especially by the director and other visible chorus leaders. Once again, they'll need name tags and music, and to be introduced at each rehearsal. Your rehearsals still need to be organized, disciplined, productive and fun. And you need to continue to make a favorable impression. Don't slack off because you're now back to "ordinary rehearsals."

Bottomline, plan for guests' subsequent visits. This seems easier to remember to do when you have a group of guests that come through at the same time (e.g., with the Vocal Lesson Plans), but it's always important—especially for the lone guest.



Don't forget to greet and welcome returning guests.

THINGS I WISH SOMEONE HAD TOLD ME WHEN I FIRST STARTED

Most of you come to this group musically educated with years of "singing craft" under your belts. Good craft is good craft. Proper posture, breathing and pronunciation are universal elements of good singing. Here are some tips that may ease your transition into the unique style of barbershop.

Voice Parts:

From the "bottom up," the four voices of barbershop harmony are bass, baritone, lead and tenor. The female bass sings in the male tenor range, the baritone and lead are roughly in the alto range, and the tenor is in the soprano range.

The melody is usually sung by the leads. Basses generally provide the root of the chord, tenors add the "natural harmony," and baritones take what's left over to complete the chord. (Of course, this takes a highly talented person with a superior ear, as any baritone can tell you!)

Although the range is the same, a good soprano is not always a good barbershop tenor. In a choir, the soprano assumes the "take charge" role and everyone blends with her. In barbershop, the feisty lead takes this role and tenors must harmonize with her. Also, many sopranos have been trained to add color and warmth to their voices through the use of vibrato, which is undesirable in a barbershop tenor.

Speaking of Vibrato:

Barbershoppers work hard to keep this to a minimum, since chords cannot "lock" if voices are varying in pitch at different speeds. A slight vibrato or a tone produced with "color" is desirable in the lead voice. However, all other voices should strive to produce a clear tone without vibrato. (Good breath support helps here.)

We're All In This Together:

There are no soloists in barbershop harmony, so blending is the name of the game. Individual voices should not be discernible. If you can't hear people around you, back off the volume a little; you may be too loud. (Conversely, if you can't hear yourself for the other folks around you, sing out!) A successful barbershopper must listen to those around her, since we have no instrumental accompaniment to cover our discord.

Coning:

You probably sing high notes lightly and broaden the tone as you go lower into your range. A barbershop chorus strives to form a similar "sound cone." (Picture the familiar food group pyramid with grains on the bottom, fruits/vegetables next, then meats, and finally fats. This is not to suggest that tenors are fat, or that we need six servings of basses daily, but the theory is the same.)

The basses at the bottom of the cone provide a broad foundation. Baritones are next on the cone, but must remember to "lighten" when they occasionally sing above the leads. Similarly, leads must "broaden" when they go below the baritones. Both baritones and leads will do a lot of mixing of "head voices" and "chest voices" as they sing in the middle register (middle C to an octave above). If you are unfamiliar with these terms, don't worry; you'll hear more. Tenors need to be "light" — a "heavy" tenor might be better suited to the lead section if she has the range.

When the director asks tenors to back off, basses to come out, etc., she is trying to achieve the proper balance according to the cone.

THINGS I WISH SOMEONE HAD TOLD ME WHEN I FIRST STARTED CONTINUED

Pronunciation, Enunciation and the Like:

Many of us sing in the choir of a large church and have had it drilled into us that consonants must be exaggerated to be heard past the first few pews. We really have to “change hats” when we come to a Sweet Adelines rehearsal, because in barbershopping, the consonants take a back seat to the vowels! In fact, only the leads are encouraged to strongly enunciate final consonants. As a rule, other sections should stress vowels and back off the voice consonants.

We put a lot of emphasis on vowel-matching. Even if the notes are correct, a chord will sometimes fail to “ring” if the singers’ vowels are mismatched. (If you want more explanation on this, see your section leader after rehearsal and she’ll be happy to help you.)

Musical Interpretation:

Barbershoppers take great liberty with musical notations, so don’t be alarmed if what appears as a quarter note on the page is actually sung as a dotted half. Changes in arrangements to adjust them to suit individual performers are frequently made and are acceptable if minor in nature. Learn to be flexible if your director decides to throw in a key change or reassign another voice part.

While the director interprets a song through her hands, barbershop singers interpret with their voices, faces and bodies. Total involvement is required to “sell” a song to an audience; barbershoppers must be actors as well as singers. If singers lean slightly forward (from the ankles, not the waist) they’re not tipsy (we hope), they’re “energizing” to add excitement to the performance.

Our Customs:

Standing:

We stand on risers during most of the rehearsal. The majority of us firmly believe this is because our director enjoys tormenting us. But the official explanation is that standing promotes good singing through good posture, builds our stamina so that we’re comfortable standing during performances, and is simply a good discipline. Proper stance is achieved with the chin held level, shoulders down and relaxed, pelvis tilted slightly forward, knees slightly bent and feet firmly on the floor, a few inches apart. Depending on which side of the chorus you’re on, place your “outside” foot slightly forward. (Do not lock your knees; standing this way for an extended time can cause you to faint.)

If standing throughout the rehearsal is physically impossible for you, please let us know. We’d rather have a good singer in a chair than not at all.

Talking on the Risers:

You may have to do as we say, not as we do. Musicians are not usually known for their reticence, and this group is no exception. However, rehearsal goes much smoother if everyone can hear the director, so please save conversations for the break. If you have observations or suggestions regarding a song, talk with the director or your section leader after rehearsal. Likewise, if you hear your neighbor making a big mistake, don’t attempt to correct her on the risers, bring it to the attention of her section leader during the break.

I hope this answers some of your questions and helps you feel at home. We’re delighted to have you, and want you to have a great barbershop experience!

— *courtesy of Buffalo Gateway Chorus*

ORIENTATIONS AND INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

Depending on how many returning guests you have at a time, you may want to hold orientation meetings for them at the start or end of each rehearsal — or you may want to handle information dissemination on an individual basis, pacing the material with the needs and interests of each guest. In either case, be aware that returning guests are going to want to know more about your chorus, the organization and what's required to join. (See *Figure 5A – Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me When I First Started.*)

Provide a little additional information each week, so the guest can absorb the material without feeling inundated. It's also a good idea to have the *We Are One in Song* video, recent copies of *The Pitch Pipe* and any regional and chapter newsletters on hand to share with guests. Be knowledgeable and prepared with written handouts on the following topics:

- Chorus history and goals
- More about barbershop harmony/voice parts
- Audition and application process
- Financial and time requirements
- Costuming and make-up
- Chorus administration
- Chorus standing rules
- The regional and international organizations
- Calendar of key events for the coming year
- Educational opportunities

Among the biggest benefits of membership in Sweet Adelines are the educational opportunities at the chapter, regional and international levels. Help guests understand the wealth of musical, administrative and personal development training that will be available to her as a member.

HELPING GUESTS SUCCEED

Typically, on the second or third visit, guests are informed about the chorus' audition and membership application procedures. Recognize that some women will be eager to hear about auditions, while others may be struggling with their part and feel it's too much too soon. Some guests will be apprehensive about having to audition. Reassure them that it is not a daunting ordeal and that you will help them through the process. Point out that all the current members auditioned and survived. If the guest is interested, give her the music and an accurate learning tape of the audition song. Make sure she understands how she'll be evaluated, and offer to set up a practice audition when she's ready.

If a guest is considering auditioning, she should also know about the financial and time commitments involved. Don't be tempted to downplay the commitments for fear you'll scare off prospective members by telling them what's really required. In recent years, our organization has lost approximately 25 percent of new members within their first two years of membership. Of course, many of those resignations were due to life changes and other issues, but some were due to members not truly understanding the financial and time commitments upfront.

In terms of financial requirements, tell the guest about international dues, regional assessments, chapter dues, costume deposits and purchases, all-events passes and travel expenses for regional competitions, etc. You don't have to give many details, but it's important she understands the big picture so she can assess if membership is affordable.

If money is a concern, tell her about any programs your chorus offers to help in this area — angel funds, scholarships, interest free loans, extended payment schedules, fundraising points to offset dues, etc. Make it easy to help her overcome this hurdle.

Many resignations are due to life changes and other issues, but some were due to members not truly understanding the financial and time commitments upfront.



In terms of time commitments, tell the guest what's expected regarding attendance, practice outside of rehearsal time and participation in chorus activities. Explain what's required and what's optional. Don't understate the time commitments that are real. Recognize that people make time for the things they really want to do, so if the chorus experience is rewarding enough, they will find the time. Also, many choruses have adopted a philosophy of "guilt-free membership," where it's understood that members have the flexibility to participate to the extent their

schedules allow, as long as they meet specified musical and performance standards.

If your chorus has any other expectations of its members, it's only fair to let the guest know before she gets too invested in the audition process. For example, many choruses have a set of standards or member expectations. Share this early on, so the guest can make a completely informed decision before moving to the next stage. (See *Figure 5B – Chorus Member Expectations.*)

CHORUS MEMBER EXPECTATIONS

In order to achieve the level of performance excellence and atmosphere of harmony that the Joyful Sounds Chorus desires, this is what we expect of every chorus member.

She:

- Makes every effort to attend rehearsals, coaching sessions and performances.
- Is on time and ready to work when rehearsal begins.
- Gives her undivided attention to the person in front of the chorus (e.g., director, choreographer, president/team manager).
- Refrains from talking on the risers or providing unsolicited comments.
- Learns new music and choreography by the designated date.
- Works on improving her vocal and performance skills.
- Takes advantage of as many educational opportunities as possible, including regional and international events.
- Always gives her personal best.
- Contacts her section leader or director ahead of time if she must miss a rehearsal.
- Assumes responsibility for catching up on material on her own, if she misses a rehearsal.
- Is well-groomed for performances and wears the proper costume and make-up.
- Pays her dues and other financial obligations promptly.
- Helps strengthen the chorus in any way she can, as time permits.
- Maintains a positive attitude and stifles negativity.
- Strives to resolve any issues/problems with the appropriate person in private.
- Is friendly to and respectful of all chorus members.
- Represents our chorus and Sweet Adelines International in a positive, admirable way.

Figure 5B – Chorus Member Expectations.

AUDITIONING

Some guests may need a little nudge or encouragement, but don't pressure guests to audition. If your chorus is preparing for a competition, where guests would need to be members by a certain date in order to participate in the contest, let them know of the audition deadline. However, let it be their choice.

Give the guest an opportunity to practice singing with a designated quartet that's available before or after rehearsals. This lets the guest get comfortable singing with three other voice parts before the audition. Or consider having a two-step audition process that includes a practice run where there's no pressure.

Since each chorus has its own audition procedures, follow them accordingly. Here are a few points to keep in mind, however:

- When a guest indicates she's ready to audition, it's important that the audition committee/music staff is available to accommodate her during that rehearsal. Don't make her wait until next week because one of the section leaders is absent; she may lose her nerve or enthusiasm by then.
- It's highly recommended that the guest be told whether she passed on the spot. If it's necessary to re-audition, make sure the guest understands exactly why, and offer to help her correct errors and prepare for the next round.
- If the auditioning guest passes, give her the membership application papers and any other relevant information promptly. She is excited and eager to get on with the process. Keep the momentum going.

EMBRACE YOUR NEW MEMBERS AND HELP THEM GET UP TO SPEED

Once a guest passes her audition and is accepted for membership into the chorus, welcome her into the fold with enthusiasm. Many choruses have a ceremony for each new member. They may serenade her with a welcoming song such as *Consider Yourself* or *You're the*

Flower of My Heart, Sweet Adeline and give her an official spot on the risers. Also, they might present her with items such as a chorus name tag, a "mailbox folder," and a Member Handbook.

The Member Handbook is an important and handy reference book that includes all vital information about the chorus and organization. If your chorus doesn't have such a handbook, consider developing one. The international organization gave each chapter a hard copy and a computer disk of a template that will make the compilation easy. The Member Handbook template can be downloaded from one of the branding cd's included in this toolkit. (See *Figure 5C – Member Handbook Template.*)

It's a good idea to assign a riser buddy or Big Sister to help mentor each new member. Many choruses have a Big Sister chair who oversees this important program. The chair recruits Big Sisters, who, in turn, look after new members—or Little Sisters. Big Sisters answer questions, offer musical assistance, help celebrate achievements and serve as a resource to new members. The key to a successful Big Sister program is the thoughtful matching of Big and Little Sisters and frequent communication between the two. (See *Figure 5D – "A Big Sister Program That Works"* and *Figures 5E – 5H for Big Sister sample materials.*)

Be sure the new member has all the music for the chorus' current repertoire and learning tapes, including videotapes of choreography if they are available. If there's a sizable group of new members coming in at the same time, consider holding special booster classes outside of regular rehearsals (e.g., on several consecutive Saturday afternoons) for this group to learn the current repertoire and additional chorus material. Recruit section leaders, choreographers, and other chorus leaders to attend and assist. Many choruses routinely have their assistant director hold one extra rehearsal each month to review music and choreography for members who may have missed a rehearsal or need a little extra help—this is a great way to help new members get up to speed. (See *Figure 5I – Booster Classes.*)

MEMBER HANDBOOK

The Member Handbook template was designed to help chapters easily develop a compilation of organizational information for their chorus members. While chapters will customize the material and add sections to meet their specific needs, the key information every member should have in her handbook is on the template.

Topics include:

People in Our Chapter

- Roster
- Telephone Tree
- Chapter Structure
- About Our Director

Nuts and Bolts

- Financial Information
- Bylaws and Standing Rules
- Policies
- Job Descriptions
- Protocol
- Terminology

Sweet Adeline Family

- International Organization
- Regional Organization
- Regional Activities
- Chapter Activities

Performance Readiness

- Learning Music
- Learning to Perform
- Attendance Guidelines
- Costuming
- Make-up
- Chapter Show
- Regional Conventions
- International Conventions

Membership Information

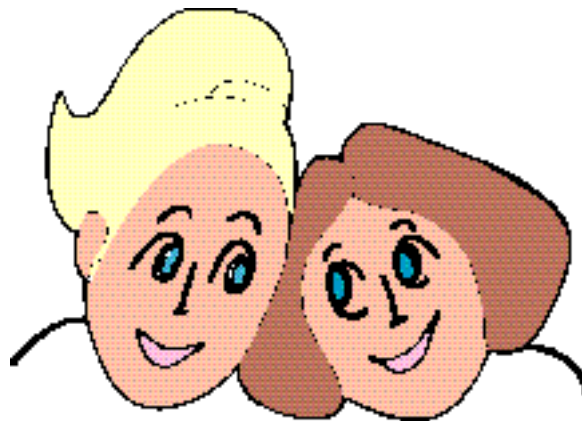
- Membership Requirements
- Leave Request

Figure 5C – Member Handbook Template.

A BIG SISTER PROGRAM THAT WORKS!

At one time or another, most choruses have tried a Big Sister approach to taking care of new members. Such approaches are often unsuccessful, for a variety of reasons. In recent years, Joyful Sounds Chorus has developed a system that has been highly rewarding for both new members and for their well-established chorus sisters.

- The Big Sister chair has the responsibility to recruit potential Big Sisters, to match them up with new members, to provide information for the Big Sisters to share with their Little Sisters, and to plan celebrations and recognition for the sisters upon the anniversary of the new member's first year.
- The Big Sister chair must make an effort to become acquainted with guests as they visit. This will help her match a Big Sister to the guest when the time comes to do so.
- When the guest has completed her audition, the chair appoints a Big Sister, introduces her and provides each with the other's name, phone number and e-mail address.
- The Big Sister chair puts out frequent bulletins to Big Sisters, encouraging them to give specific information to their Little Sisters. The initial information alerts the Big Sister to help the guest with her application for membership.
- A springtime "Sisters Act" luncheon is an opportunity to celebrate and educate new members. Big Sisters host the potluck event and sit with their Little Sisters. The management team and music staff are invited as well, so that new members can visit with them, ask questions and become further acquainted with chorus practices and procedures.
- At the end of a new member's first year, she and her Big Sister are recognized in front of the chorus, and the Little Sister "graduates," often becoming a Big Sister to someone else soon after.
- The key to the program's success seems to be the careful assignment of Big/Little Sisters and the frequent bulletins which remind the Big Sister of things her Little Sister needs to know. Not only do these "sisters" become good friends, but the program satisfies the needs of both to feel informed and included.



Joyful Sounds Chorus has developed a Big Sister Program that has been highly rewarding for both new members and for their well-established chorus sisters.

BIG SISTER BULLETIN

To: Molly Member
Date: January 22, 2001
From: Sarah Smith
Subject: Little Sister

Thanks so much for being willing to be a Big Sister to:

Nina Newby
1234 Orange Grove Dr.
San Jose, CA 95555
(H) ###/###-####
Baritone
Birthday: July 4
Husband: Steve

The first thing you should do is introduce yourself as her Big Sister and follow up with her to be sure she knows what is required for her application package. She must:

- Fill out application form
- Fill out copyright agreement
- Check for \$16 (or more)
- Nina should be using her \$10 rebate coupon!
- Tape: This is the tricky one! She needs to record herself singing and give it to me. It will not be checked unless she wants it to be. We just need to get over "tape recorder fright."

Let her know that she can't officially be a member until she turns in all these things and the management team has an opportunity to meet and vote on her application.

Her name should appear in the *Footnotes* newsletter to let the chorus members know she is applying for membership (Sarah Singer handles this). As soon as she turns in the application and check, she should be able to get her own book of music and learning tapes from any member of the membership committee. You can check to make sure this happens (she'll need to pay \$2 for the two learning tapes). We will have you introduce your Little Sister to the chorus the night that she is welcomed as a member. In advance, someone (either Sarah Singer or Beth Baritone) will create a mail folder for her, and you can show her where it is in the mailboxes. Attached to this memo is a copy of a welcome note that you should give her when she officially becomes a member. The back of this note has a checklist of people she needs to meet. Please take the time to introduce her to these people personally, if she doesn't already know who they are.

You will get frequent "Big Sister Bulletins" suggesting topics to cover with your Little Sister. Thanks for doing this, and please let me know how it is going.

Sarah
###/###-####

Welcome To The Chorus

Congratulations on your membership in the Joyful Sounds Chorus! We're so glad to have you with us and we hope you'll soon discover that we're all eager to make you feel at home and answer any questions you may have. Please read both sheets as they provide you with some very important information you will need right away.

You already received your chorus name badge. Wear your badge for every rehearsal. (Don't you wish everyone remembered?)

Please check your chorus mailbox at the end of every rehearsal. Important information is placed there every week! We prefer to print things in the weekly *Footnotes* newsletter, rather than making dozens of announcements at rehearsal; it takes away from the rehearsal and is distracting to others.

You'll find special things in your mailbox the first time you check it. Most will be found inside a plastic pouch. The plastic pouch is handy for giving tapes to your section leader or tape checker. Each time you turn in a tape, be sure to include a "taping results form;" there is a copy of one inside the pouch to show you what they are. You will also find a felt pocket to store your chorus badge (they scratch easily), and you'll also find chorus postcards and business cards! Finally, you'll find various handouts and a copy of the latest chorus roster.

Ask your Big Sister to explain our process of "passing" our songs. You'll use the plastic pouch, taping results form and tape checking sheets. These can be found in the extra (black) mailbox. The first time you tape any song, turn in the appropriate tape checking sheet. It will be returned to you with the places marked for you to fix (if any). For subsequent rechecks, be sure to return the same tape checking sheet with your tape. That way you will get "credit" for everything you got right the first time! Don't stress about taping. Your checker is not listening to voice quality, just to notes, words and breaths. We've found that this really helps to get the chorus to its current high quality.

You probably already got a binder containing the chorus music. You will notice that every piece is stamped in red "Do Not Copy" and is checked out to you. This music is the property of the chorus! Keep track of this music, because replacements are one dollar per song. You probably also got a learning tape and are working on learning some of the chorus songs. Although there is no time limit for taping and passing all the songs in the repertoire, you will want to start on this right away. Your section leader will help you decide which songs are highest priority for you to become performance ready. Also, once a month (at least) there is a Rising Stars rehearsal, to help you get performance ready. Rising Stars help with both choreography and music. Look for date in the *Footnotes*. When we learn new songs, you'll find a copy of the new music in your mailbox. You can obtain a learning tape for that song for only one dollar.

You have already met your Big Sister, Molly. Feel free to talk to her any time. She'll either know the answers to your questions, or she'll know how to find out. Your big sister volunteered, so make her feel needed — talk to her often. She'll also be glad to introduce you to the important people listed on the back of this sheet. And also feel free to call me, Sarah Singer; my job is "Big Sister coordinator," and I'm here to help you, too!

Sarah Singer
###/###-####
ssinger@juno.com

Figure 5F – Big Sister Program Welcome To The Chorus Sample Letter.

Some Important Tips for Communicating!

If you are going to miss a rehearsal or other chorus singing events, please let Peggy Queen know by giving her a note in writing, leaving a message on her phone (###/###-####) or sending her an e-mail (pqueen@svpal.org). She really likes to know; it helps with her planning. In fact, if you have e-mail access, let Peggy Fields know and she will put you on her chorus distribution list. If you don't have email, we hope you'll get it soon. About 80 of our members are now online!

If you are going to be absent from chorus for a few weeks at a time, please notify someone on the management team (like Membership Coordinator Sarah Singer or Director Peggy Queen). We do notice when you are gone and we care! If you are going to be gone a month or more, we'll send you the contents of your mailbox each month.

If a sign-up sheet is posted for something, make sure that you put "yes" or "no" in the space by your name. If the space is blank, the person handling the sign-ups will assume that you didn't see the sheet. Since the majority of the chorus participates in certain events, the assumption is usually yes, unless it says "no"

People You Need to Contact!

Financial Coordinator (name and phone number): she will explain the payment of the chorus dues (quarterly or yearly) and the opportunity to put money aside for next year, when you will again need to renew your membership with Sweet Adelines International.

Your section leader (see below)—she will help you get started on becoming performance ready by giving you songs.

- tenors – name and phone number
- leads – name and phone number
- baritones – name and phone number
- basses – name and phone number

Costume Chair (name and phone number): she will acquaint you with all the current costumes and the methods and timing for obtaining them. Information about chorus costumes is in your new Member Handbook.

Hairstyle Chair (name and phone number): she will tell you about our hairstyle guidelines for performances and shows.

Make-up Chair (name and phone number): she will tell you about chorus make-up and teach you how to apply it.

Membership Coordinator Sarah Singer (###/###-####) or Team Coordinator (name and phone number): either of them will be happy to tell you about chorus operations and see if there are any committees you'd like to join.

BIG SISTER BULLETIN

To: Big Sisters
Date: July 22, 2001
From: Sarah Singer
Subject: Topics To Discuss With Your Little Sister

The deadline for room reservations for the August retreat is coming up very shortly. Please check with your Little Sister and make sure that she is going or ask if she has any questions regarding the week-end. It is critical that she attend the retreat if she is going to Nashville, but it is not critical that she stay at the hotel. Many of our members choose to not stay overnight. However, you may want to let her know how much fun it is to stay the entire time. Please put her in touch with Peggy Queen if she needs a roommate.

At the Spring retreat, you may remember that Patricia put together the "Sisters Chorus" and we appeared on the Saturday night show. It would be fun to do something again and since we have some time to prepare (about 5 weeks), please start thinking about what you would like to do. At the Spring retreat we sang the song "Our New Sweet Adeline" with a new verse written for the little sister to sing. We could do something like this again and any helpful ideas would be most appreciated. Maybe we could sing "Harmonize The World" since everyone knows the song and someone out there who is multi-talented could write us some new words. (Hint, hint!). Or maybe we could do something with "I'm a Woman." At least we have some time to get organized. Why don't you put a note in my mailbox or just catch me at chorus, whichever is easiest. E-mail is fine too.

Thanks,
Sarah
###/###-####

BOOSTER CLASSES

Following are suggested class subjects to aid in the integration of new members.

- **Face the Music**
Design class to involve student in experiencing facial energy and its application to the musical product.
- **And Eyelashes Too!?!**
Teach new members the process of applying chorus make-up with practice time given.
- **The Dollars and Cents of it All**
Define where the money comes from and where it goes. What responsibility does each member have beyond dues and ways and means?
- **And in Your Free Time...**
How do you get involved in committees, quartets, board of directors/management teams and music teams?
- **Happy Hoofers**
Allow extra rehearsals devoted to teaching new members existing chorus choreography. Visual team could be involved to assist with faces, physical energy, etc.
- **Where Does Your Part Fit In?**
Teach how to sing your part smart. Also great opportunity to demonstrate uniqueness of the barber-shop craft.

— courtesy of Buffalo Gateway Chorus

Figure 5I - Booster Classes

GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Help the new member get to know her fellow members. Remind chorus members to always wear their name tags. Remember, with each new member, you have to learn one face and name, but she has to learn dozens!

Assemble a chorus yearbook with photos—with today's technology of scanners and digital cameras, it's easy and inexpensive to do. Or consider mounting photos of each member on a big poster board that is up on display at each rehearsal. Photos are a huge aid to help new members learn names and faces, especially in large choruses.

At the same time, help chorus members get to know the new member. Publish a picture of her and a short bio in the next chorus newsletter or on the chorus' Web site. List some of her hobbies and talents. This will help her get assimilated into the group more quickly.

On your chorus Web site, have a page for new members which posts answers to Frequently Asked Questions. Designate an hour each week for a new member chat room where new members can raise concerns, seek information, and get to know each other.

Give new members small jobs on teams or committees within the chorus. Integrate them at their own pace and give them jobs in which they're likely to succeed. Don't overwhelm them.

Hold a luncheon or social gathering for new members after they have been part of your chorus for six or twelve months. Give them an opportunity to ask questions, share experiences, and get to know each other outside rehearsal.

THE ALL-IMPORTANT FIRST YEAR

Remember that new members are “new” for the first year. It takes that long to experience the full cycle of shows, competitions, regional and international events. Assign a new member coordinator or Big Sister coordinator to look after these “junior members.” It’s easy to forget about them, particularly if the chorus is caught up in attracting and nurturing another batch of prospects.

Early on, be sure the new member gets a personal vocal instruction (PVI) from the director or a qualified musical leader. It’s important that the new member gets on the right vocal production track from the outset. Conduct a regular taping program to give new members an assessment of their musical progress and to provide positive feedback.

As new events and opportunities crop up, have informational meetings. For example, prior to their first regional weekend, have a class about the region. Explain the duties of the regional management team, teach some regional songs, and help new members find roommates if the event will be held out of town.

Celebrate milestones for new members—their first show, their first competition, their first regional weekend, etc. (See *Figure 5J – Membership Retention... The All-Important First Year.*)



Work hard, but play hard and laugh hard, too. Remember, being a Sweet Adeline is a “hobby.”

As a member’s first year draws to a close, keep in mind that some may be evaluating whether to stay in the chorus, now that they’ve experienced the whole range of activities. The number one reason cited for members leaving Sweet Adelines is “lack of time.” Consequently, be sure that your rehearsals are productive. If the rehearsal doesn’t start promptly, isn’t organized, isn’t disciplined, and isn’t rewarding in some fashion, the member will decide the chorus is not worth her valuable time. Also, be sure to make rehearsals fun.

Work hard, but play hard and laugh hard, too. Remember, being a Sweet Adeline is a “hobby.”

Take advantage of your new member’s experience as guests and new members. Ask them for feedback. Their perspective can be very valuable in helping the chorus improve its member recruitment and integration efforts in the future.

MEMBERSHIP RETENTION... THE ALL-IMPORTANT FIRST YEAR!

The first year of membership in Sweet Adelines International can be the most exciting and magical one in Sweet Adeline life; but it's also the one where the new member doesn't always know what's going on, may find herself struggling to keep up with the rest of chorus and may feel as though she's not really part of the group. Even if you've given your new members all sorts of information about the chorus and the organization while they were a guest, it's still a good idea to have a system in place to re-teach them the ins and outs of the chorus, reassure them that they're a great addition to the chorus, and just make sure they feel like a part of the group. Ideas to consider:

- Keep the new member's assigned Big Sister "on the job" for the first year, so that the new member always has someone they can ask questions.
- Have a special recognition for new members at each "milestone" in their new membership—receiving their membership card from International Headquarters, getting their chorus name tag, receiving their costume, participating in their first performance, etc.
- Make a point to invite new members to attend the next regional music event with any other members of the chorus, so they can also get exposed to the "bigger picture" of Sweet Adelines International.
- Recognize new members at chorus events in the first year—their first competition, their first show, their first chorus installation dinner, etc.
- Set up some sort of musical follow-up (or PVI) with the new member's section leader or director so that they can get one-on-one feedback regarding all the areas in which they've improved and also the areas that need some work.
- Have a "class" with the director, competition chair, costume and make-up chair for the new members, two months or so before competition.
- Have a three-month or six-month "follow-up session" with the membership chair/committee to see if there are any questions they have and to get their feedback on what they feel may have been missed or overlooked in their orientation, so that you can learn for future guests and new members.
- Have an annual new members luncheon with the membership committee. Include a "getting to know you" activity, time for questions and answers, and a "Who's who in the chorus" game.
- Offer to help the new member set up a car pool to and from rehearsal.
- Have new members get together with their section leader before their first required "taping" so they know what to expect and to lessen any fears.
- Specifically invite new members to quartet promotion events in the chorus, especially if they have expressed an interest in quarteting.