



Embrace the Process

by Robin Brockway-Nichols, VP High School

It always seems impossible until it's done. – Nelson Mandela

It's the most wonderful time of the year! UIL Concert and Sightreading Contest season is upon us. Before you assume I've gone over the edge, let's attempt to re-frame those Contest nightmares into something manageable, and dare I say it, enjoyable, by shifting the focus away from the actual day itself. Of course we all want our choirs to be recognized, and since choral directors in general are highly motivated people, we tend to be results-oriented. I've resolved to be PROCESS-oriented this spring. We all know a thoughtful daily rehearsal process inevitably leads to the real prize: artistry. It's easy to lose sight of that goal when we're focused only on those fleeting moments onstage at UIL.

Step one on this journey is to examine and re-vamp your process if necessary. Are your singers welcomed every day with a smile and a clearly outlined lesson plan? It doesn't have to be elaborate; just a few bullet points on the board or PowerPoint for each class. Be concise yet precise, and as specific as possible. Always plan more activities than you can possibly complete in one rehearsal – this gives you a starting place for the next day. Make sure student-led learning is incorporated into every rehearsal, and of course sequential sightreading exercises are vital to your daily plan.

Step two is careful selection of materials. I so admire those colleagues who confidently choose their April UIL music in September...I am NOT in that group! Choosing music is an agonizing process. It's helpful to take a day or two in January to re-voice all singers and experiment with different configurations of voices. It's also extremely important to check for patterns of eligibility, and spend time counseling singers if they are struggling to remain eligible. One of the most rewarding aspects of our job is to help students develop THEIR process for success! Choose music for each choir based on their strengths, but don't be afraid to "stretch" a bit.

Step three is to give yourself permission to have an off day without self-recrimination. The process is really comforting on those kinds of days, because we are able to fall back on the established routine, comforted by the knowledge we are not required to work magic or re-invent the wheel every rehearsal. The process does that FOR us!

Lastly, while your eyes are focused on the larger prize, make sure to take ownership of the small victories: celebrate the day-to-day graces that remind us WHY we spend our finite supply of emotional and physical energy teaching kids. Take time to re-boot your outlook. Reflect back on that hopeful first day of school, and step into your classroom every morning with the same eager anticipation. Embrace the process of this joyous and musically rewarding season of achievement.