

Developing A People-First Choral Program

Missouri Music Educators Association Annual Conference

January 24-27, 2018

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What does it look like?

*Puts the development of the whole student as a high priority, rather than solely the development of strong musicians.

*Focuses on the process, which in turn creates a high quality product.

*Evaluates the purpose of every activity to determine the true motive.

*Uses an appropriate long term perspective: Will this matter 5 years from now?

Why does it matter?

*Chorus America Impact Study Findings: Choir naturally cultivates positive attributes in children and adults.

*The state of our culture: Depression, Shootings, Suicide

*Research shows that team-building activities have a significant positive impact on the effectiveness of a group. The corporate world views team-building as an investment rather than a splurge.

*The development of the whole person will have the most value 5, 10, 20 years from now.

LARGE GROUP/ TEAM BUILDING ACTIVITIES FOR THE CLASSROOM

☞ **Human Knot:** Each student puts their left hand in the middle and grabs someone else's hand. Each student puts their right hand in the middle and groups another hand. Without letting hands go, students try to unknot themselves and form a circle. (Variations: No one can speak, only one person can speak, etc.)

☞ **Line Up, Line Up:** Give students a time limit to arrange themselves in line alphabetically by first or last name, by birthday, age, etc. (Variation: Do it silently, have them answer a question of the day with the person next to them)

☞ **Fruit Basket Turnover:** Students sit in chairs in a circle. One person is in the middle without a chair. They call out something that is true for them (I have been to Hawaii, I have a dog, etc.). Everyone in the circle who that is also true for must get up and move to a chair that is not immediately next to theirs. The person left without a chair calls out another fact and the game continues.

☞ **Clumps:** All students stand spread out in the room. The teacher calls out a random number. The students rush to form groups of exactly that number. Anyone left over is "out". The teacher calls out a new number and the groups disperse and form the new size groups. The last few left are the winners.

☞ **2 Truths and a Lie:** Students write three items on a paper, two that are true and one that is not. The group tries to guess which is the lie.

☞ **Question of the Day** (within sections for large choirs): Ask a question and allow each student to answer (Would you rather... Own a ski lodge or a surf camp? OR What is your earliest memory, etc. OR How many siblings do you have, etc.)

- ☞ **Dog, Fire Hydrant, Car:** Each student picks a partner and stand back to back. On the count of three, partners turn to face each other and portray a dog (one leg up), a fire hydrant (hands straight up over head), or a car (hand on steering wheel). Dog beats fire hydrant (for obvious reasons), fire hydrant beats car, and car beats dog. Loser is “out” and winner finds a new partner. Last one standing wins.
- ☞ **Game of Things:** Teacher (or small group leaders) reads a phrase. (Things that are stinky, things you would do with a million dollars, things you should never do in public, etc.) Each student writes their answer on a small slip of paper (no name) and turns it in to the leader who reads them aloud. Group members try to guess who wrote each response. Points are given for each correct guess and also for the response that is guessed last. (<http://www.thingsthegame.com/>)
- ☞ **Name, Favorite Food (Memory Game):** Start the group patching (2xs) and snapping (2xs) in time together. Teacher starts by saying their name (on the patch) and their favorite food (on the snap). Class repeats on the next patch/snap. The person to the teacher’s left then says their name and favorite food. Class repeats that student’s name/food, and then also repeats the teacher’s name/food. Keep going counterclockwise around the circle until the group is saying every name/favorite food in succession. (It is fun to encourage the students to use different inflections, voices, etc. for the group to mimic)
- ☞ **Body to Body:** Students pick a partner and stand on opposite sides of the room. Teacher calls out two body parts (finger to elbow, nose to foot, etc.). Students run to the center of the room and connect the two body parts called. Last group to get the correct pose is out. Students return to outsides of the room and new parts are called.
- ☞ **Humdinger:** Write the names of several well-known songs on pieces of paper, enough for each student. Include duplicates of each song that you choose depending on how many groups you want to create. Have each student draw a paper and then go from person to person humming their song until they find someone who has the same song as them. You can create random partners or larger groups this way.
- ☞ **Web of Encouragement:** Students sit in a circle. One person starts with a ball of yarn. They hold the end with one hand (not letting go) and then throw the ball to another person in the circle and say something encouraging about them. That person pulls the yarn tight and holds it with one hand (not letting go) while throwing the ball to another person and saying something encouraging about them. Continue until each person has gotten the ball once.
- ☞ **Anonymous Admiration:** Students sit in a circle. Give each student an 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper cut in half vertically. Have them write their name at the top of the paper. Then have them pass their paper to the left. They look at the name at the top of the paper they received and write something they admire about that person *at the bottom of the page* (encourage them to use character traits rather than physical traits). When they have finished, they make a very small fold over that they wrote so that it cannot be seen. Have the students pass the papers to the left again and repeat for the new person in front of them. Eventually they will get their own paper passed back to them with a list of things that other people admire about them. Bonus: play quiet, reflective music in the background and encourage them not to talk.

CHOIR RETREATS

1. Decide what your purpose is (team-building, bonding, leadership development, planning)
2. Choose activities that serve your purpose (always have more planned than you will need)
3. Make a minute by minute schedule for the event

Considerations: One day event or overnight? Required or optional? Single choirs or entire choir program? Choir members or choir officers/section leaders? Students prepare the food or parents prepare the food? Director or students plan activities? Beginning of the year or end of the year? Familiar location or new location?

Survivor Themed Retreat

Purpose: To socialize and build the morale of the entire choral program. To make the “second tier” choirs feel part of the organization as a whole and allow friendships to develop outside the walls of each individual choir.

Activities: Students are pre-arranged in teams for the day determined by the director based on personality types, mixing students from all choirs and backgrounds. One section leader/officer is assigned to each team. The teams compete in “survivor-type” challenges and activities throughout the day and points are awarded and tallied as the day progresses. The winning team receives a pizza party during lunch the following week.

- ↪ **Team Building:** Each team is given 30 minutes at the beginning of the event to create a team name, a team flag, and a team cheer with accompanying dance. Flags are made using spray paint on white sheets (from thrift store) tied to PVC pipe. At the end of the 30 minutes, each team is scored on their presentation. Teams carry their flags throughout the day and repeat their cheer every time they win an event. (You could also have them create matching t-shirts, headbands, etc. for team spirit.)
- ↪ **Blind Folded Tag:** Team gets in a circle and holds hands, with one member blindfolded in the center. The blindfolded member has to run and try to tag one of the team members in the circle. The team has to continue holding hands and move as a group to avoid any members getting tagged.
- ↪ **Balloon Stomp:** Each team member ties a balloon to their ankle with a string. When the game begins, everyone tries to pop the balloons of the opposing team, while protecting their own balloon.
- ↪ **Tallest Structure:** Each team is given a set of supplies (can be anything as long as each group gets the same things- paper, pencils, tape, straws, staples, string, cups, etc.) and instructed to build the tallest free standing structure possible. Variation: Strongest structure, tallest structure that can hold a bottle of water, etc.
- ↪ **Three Legged Race (Team version):** Every team member ties their ankle to the ankle of the person next to them, forming a long line. The entire team races to the finish line with ankles tied
- ↪ **Sponge relay:** Each team forms a line behind the team captain. The last person in line has a bucket filled with water and a large sponge next to them. They must take the sponge and pass it

over the head of the person in front of them, who then passes it over the head of the next person, etc. to the front of the line. The team captain squeezes as much of the water as they can into an empty cup or bucket at the front of the line. The sponge is then passed back down the line to get more water. The first team to fill their cup or bucket wins.

- ↪ **Toothpicks and LifeSavers:** Each team forms a line with every member having a toothpick in their mouth. A lifesaver is placed on the tooth pick at the end of the line and must be passed to the front of the line, only letting it touch the toothpicks- no hands.
- ↪ **Santa's Beard:** Each team is given a can of Vaseline (frosting or whipped cream works too) at the start line. A paper plate filled with cotton balls (or small marshmallows work too!) is placed on the other side of the room or field, one for each team. The first member covers their face with the Vaseline and runs to the paper plate, bends down, gathers as many cotton balls as possible on their face and then runs back to tag the next person, who does the same. The team with the most cotton balls (still stuck to faces) at the end of the time limit is the winner.
- ↪ **Egg toss** ☺
- ↪ **Water Balloon Volleyball:** Team members partner up with a towel, each holding on end of the towel. The water balloons are tossed using the towels to throw and catch. Can do like an egg toss or with a volleyball net.
- ↪ **Scavenger Hunt:** create a list of items to be found in a given time limit. Use social media to give hints or create bonus items throughout the hunt.
- ↪ **Newspaper or Toilet Paper Fashion Show:** Give each team materials to make a fashion outfit for one member of their team. Points are awarded for creativity, overall design effectiveness, and poise/presentation of the model during the fashion show. Bonus: play great music and create a runway for the models.
- ↪ **Photo Scavenger Hunt:** Create a list of silly or hard to get pictures each team needs to try to capture by the end of the day- this makes for a great slideshow at the end of the year!

Considerations: One day event at the beginning of the year (new students/parents to the program may not feel comfortable with overnight stay this early in the year, more cost effective, easier to manage with large numbers), parents prepare/set-up food for the event (large groups of students need to be engaged the entire time), Location: Local community soccer complex (easy to find, but different location than school allowed it to feel more like a retreat), director planned activities so that all students were on the same advantage level for competitions.

Leadership Retreat

Purpose: To develop the leadership skills of the choir officers and section leaders

Activities: Activities are tailored to meet the needs of each particular group. Focuses include strategies for motivating a group, strategies for dealing with conflict, brainstorming weaknesses in the program and possible solutions, understanding how individual attitudes affect the group, self-evaluating leadership qualities, along with many team-building activities.

- **Blind Auction:** Students are divided into two teams and given \$100 each to spend. Random items are available to bid on (bucket, broom, tape, paper, shoe, garbage bag, towel, paper clips, place mat, sponge, pencils, etc.) The teams are told that they will be given a challenge to complete with the items that they choose to purchase, however they are not told what the challenge is. Teams have to work together to decide what they are going to bid on and how much they are willing to spend. After the auction takes place, the teams are given the challenge: Using the items purchased, you must get every member of your team across the hot lava river (an area you designate, large enough that it would be difficult to throw the items from one side to the other) without anyone touching the ground. If anyone touches the ground, the entire team has to start over again. (They can use their purchased items as agents to keep their feet from touching the hot lava.)
- **Negative Nancy, Positive Polly:** Divide students into teams, at least 2- up to 5 or 6 depending on the size of your group. *Secretly* (preferably sometime long before the activity happens so there is no chance of other students making a connection) assign one person in each group to be a “Negative Nancy” (having a bad attitude, causing dissention in the group, argumentative, etc.) or a “Positive Polly” (great attitude, encouraging, motivating, etc.) Assign all of the groups the same task and a time limit. (We had a list of possible structures to choose from that had to be built using only popsicle sticks and glue- anything could work for this though!) At the conclusion of the activity, ask students leading questions about things that helped or hindered the group, eventually leading to questions that point out attitudes. Finish by sharing the secret players and having a discussion about how one bad attitude can effect an entire group.
- **Blind Communication:** Create a structure out of pipe cleaners, beads, etc. Keep track of the exact items you used and set aside supplies necessary to make two exact replicas. Divide your students into two teams and give them each a set of supplies. Then have each team divide themselves into two groups. The first group is responsible for looking at the created structure and making written notes on how to recreate it. They then return to the second group (separated where they cannot see the finished structure) and give them the written notes. The second group uses the written notes only (no coaching from first group) to try and recreate the original structure. There are lots of variations on this activity. You can set time limits for each part of the activity, allow students to take the note sheet and return back to the original structure for a second look, allow diagrams (or not), etc.
- **Inspiring Leadership:** Give the students a lengthy list of inspirational quotes about leadership. Give them several minutes to read and reflect. Ask them to choose a quote that is going to be their mantra for the year. It can be personal or something they will use to motivate their section throughout the year. Give them a plain piece of paper or index card and some markers to write the quote on and tape in the front of their choir folder as a reminder. Have them share their choices with the group.
- **Self-Evaluation & Reflection:** Think about the areas in which you would like your leaders to grow. Create a reflection worksheet that asks leading questions that may help the students see where they can improve without you having to point it out. (See Leadership Evaluation Form for one example)

Considerations: Campgrounds work really well for these types of event by naturally setting the mood for reflection and maximum personal growth. Allow students to take turn preparing meals in small groups to foster teamwork.

Year End Retreat

Purpose: To reflect on the year, evaluate activities and fundraisers, and plan for the upcoming school year. To allow an opportunity for new officers to “get their feet wet” and receive mentoring from former officers. To establish a sense of ownership for the program in each student leader.

Activities: Activity/Fundraiser Evaluation & Discussion, set dates for activities for the following year, Officer Mentoring Session (see attached form for an example), fun games for bonding (Mafia, Four on a Couch, Scavenger Hunts, etc.)

Considerations: Officers for the following year would need to be elected before this event.

Additional Resources

- ☑ Google, Pinterest, YouTube
- ☑ www.teampedia.net
- ☑ www.wilderdom.com/games/
- ☑ www.ultimatecampresource.com/
- ☑ <http://wilderdom.com/games/InitiativeGames.html>
- ☑ <http://www.group-games.com/>
- ☑ <http://www.teambuildingportal.com/games/>
- ☑ <https://www.thebalance.com/what-is-team-building-1918270>
- ☑ <http://www.mftrou.com/group-team-building-activity.html>
- ☑ <http://www.inspirechoir.com/>
- ☑ **Musical Games for the Musically-Minded** by Dave and Jean Perry
- ☑ **Ice Breakers: 60 Fun Activities that Will Build A Better Choir** by Valerie Lippoldt Mack
- ☑ **Teambuilding Puzzles** by Anderson, Cain, Cavert, Heck
- ☑ **Quick Silver: Adventure Games, Initiative Problems, Trust Activities and a Guide to Effective Leadership** by Rohnke, Butler
- ☑ **The Big Book of Motivation Games** by Robert Epstein
- ☑ **Leadership Success** by Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser, Pat Sheridan, Jon Gomez & Scott Lang (GIA)
- ☑ **The Art of Successful Teacher** by Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser
- ☑ **Scott Lang’s Leadership Survival Guide** by Scott Lang (GIA)