

# Keeping Young Men Happy and Singing in Choir

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## Getting Them in the Door (Recruiting)

- Honestly? I don't know, but I keep trying different things to attract boys to my program. Some things that I think work:
  - Recruitment commercials
  - Singing for the younger students
    - Key to recruitment is seeing others (preferably close in age) having a blast.
    - it helps to have someone to guide them through these scary MS years.
  - Be visible in the school community. Can your older kids provide the National Anthem?

## First Day

- Understand that the first day is pretty terrifying for them! Avoid making them sing alone!!
- Allow the “determining-range” process to be something that you ease into. “But I need to know their ranges so that I can pick the right music!” True, but equally true is this: here are their ranges:
  1. My voice hasn't changed at all, and I have lots and lots of high notes
  2. My voice hasn't changed at all, but I refuse to sing above middle C
  3. My voice dropped, and I don't have control over it. I will either drone or sing 1(2) octaves lower
- First Day — Patriotic Sing-a-Long (there is time to talk through class rules later on) Get them singing right away!!!
- 6 weeks into the year I finally start hearing them alone — all the while narrating voice change stuff. MUST let them know that sucking at singing is normal, and that they need to “ride the wave” during voice change.

## Keeping Them (Retention)

- I don't have the answers. I can only share things that work for me. These might work for you, but you'll have to find your own path. These are the categories I think are very important I work hard to address with my guys.

## Programming (Retention #1)

The music you choose is SO IMPORTANT!! It's going to make the guys want (or *not want*) to sing in your program.

- Balance music that is educational with music that is fun to sing (songs CAN be both!) Talk frequently about what this song is teaching them . . . what skills they are gaining through the learning of it.
- They always want to sing pop music. Translation: We want something that others our age will think is cool.
- They both crave and fear recognition for their music performance.
- If a song isn't working, BAIL! Sometimes songs just don't work with that combo of boys. Know when to throw the towel in. FAR BETTER to sing a lesser song REALLY WELL than to publicly fail.
- Latch on to some skill they do well and exploit it!
- They need songs/performances to be proud of and share with friends/family

## Camaraderie (Retention #2)

- We all need a tribe to belong to — especially in MS!
- I think the key is helping them feel connected to the choir — like an alternate tribe that they enjoy being part of.
- Developing a sense of teamwork becomes a priority. This can and should be done in every aspect of your program
- Feeling like you BELONG is HUGE!!

### How to create a tribe

- Voice change is a journey. “I might not be going through what you are at this moment, but I likely will later on” is a great idea to foster. Celebrate each others milestones.

- Make it safe. We'll laugh *with* you, not at you . . . unless you are trying to get us to laugh :)

- Play. Often. It's important!!

- Accept their goofiness and celebrate it. Acknowledge and accept who they are instead of always wanting them to be someone else.

- Have high expectations and let them know it. Expect and demand to see their best. Thank them for showing you their best . . . it is part of showing them that you are proud of their efforts (so important!!!)

## Behavior (Retention #3)

- this is one of the big challenges . . . figuring out how to work WITH them and not against them

- They are always asked to do what others want — find a balance between what YOU want and what THEY need
- Patience — so much patience :) Choose to be amused instead of irritated
- Bad behavior is frequently a mask for something else . . . afraid of being embarrassed, so they are deflecting
- RMS — “don’t be *that guy*”
- Animal analogy — Ken Truax approach
  - if you beat a dog, he’ll cower and obey . . . but this is not willing obedience. Think of them like puppies — choose to see them as boys who intrinsically want to please you and gently steer them so that they know how to fully participate without feeling “whipped”

### Musical Knowledge (Retention #4)

- Teach them skills they can use to be better singers
- It is easy to quit when you feel like you don’t understand or can’t keep up . . .
- They will whine (about sight reading and other educational things), but if you go at it bit by bit, they’ll be ok. Balance with music that makes them feel *studly*

### Retention in general

- reach beyond your own building
  - Festivals (RMS)
  - Local groups — our association with the Harmony Hawks has led to many cool moments
- Attention from girls — a double-edged sword! Make darn sure you are solid. Laughter from 7th/8th girls can set you back months . . . talk to your boys (and girls) about voice cracks and how they make the boys feel. Explain to the boys that when girls laugh at voice change, it is not meant to be hurtful . . . it is usually a funny noise, and we girls are laughing because it was funny . . . not to undermine your masculinity.

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Full videos of all song clips are posted on my school website. To access: email me, and I’ll send you the link OR Google “Prairie Point Choir” — we are the first result. All performances are by normal kids and are not guaranteed to be perfect :)