

TAKE CHARGE!

The newsletter of The Business of Singing

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WELCOME !

Thank you for signing up to receive TAKE CHARGE!, *The Business of Singing's* new free monthly newsletter offering tips, articles, and information for your singing career.

Archived copies of this newsletter may be found on the Singers Resources page of the TBOS website at www.thebusinessofsinging.com. In this issue:

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Prioritizing Singing

By Cindy Sadler

If you're receiving this newsletter, chances are you took a Business of Singing workshop, had a private consultation, or attended *Classical Singer's* Marketing Master Workshop. In other words, you did something to jumpstart your career. Good for you!

And if you did attend one of those events, you're probably familiar with my motto --- "Do one thing for your career every single day." It's very important to fulfill this contract with yourself. But no matter how faithful you are to your business of singing, it won't count for much if you don't also pay close attention to your artistry.

It can be surprisingly difficult to carve time out of our busy days for the thing that (supposedly) matters most to us --- singing! The demands of day jobs, partners, children, pets, friends, and everyday errands can distract and fatigue us to the point that we end up putting practicing, researching, and studying music last. Sometimes it's merely the lack of upcoming singing work that makes it difficult to hunker down and spend time on your music. You find yourself wasting time because you can't make yourself sit down and practice --- what's the point, if you don't have anything pressing to learn?

If you find this happening to you on a regular basis, it's time to charge up your cables and jumpstart your art as well as your career. Here are some suggestions on how to do that:

1. **Establish a Sacred Hour for singing.** Sit down with your calendar and schedule an hour a day, or several times a week, that will be dedicated to singing and ONLY to singing. Let nothing interfere with that hour. If possible, make it a morning hour when you're fresh and energetic; or choose another time of day when you tend to be most active. (Save the dull, repetitive tasks for your low-energy time of day --- after lunch or right before quitting time).



If you have a nine-to-five job, schedule your Sacred Singing Hour on your lunch hour or first thing when you get home --- the minute you walk in the door. If you take time to get sit down on the couch to flip channels or check your email, you'll never get it done!

If you have many demands on your time and attention from family members, you may have to choose a time when kids are at soccer practice or your spouse is watching a favorite TV show. Maybe your partner can take the kids to the park for an hour, go out for a stroll, or have game time in another room with the door closed. You may have to be firm with your loved ones about not interrupting you, as my mother used to tell us kids, "unless someone's bleeding, not breathing, or the house is on fire".

Be prepared to fight for your time; both with yourself and your own distractions and commitments, and with your loved ones who have their own set of needs. It may be a bit of a struggle, but you can do it! Think of it this way: you set aside time for your favorite TV program; you can certainly do it for your art.

2. **Establish a Sacred Space for singing.** Not only must you carve out time, you must carve out a space that is relatively free of distractions. Other household members must be trained not to interrupt you when you are in this space. If you have little ones who haven't yet mastered the concept of personal boundaries, you may need to make a big deal of it. Hang a sign with a skull and crossbones on the door and threaten some ridiculous penalty for interruptions. If you don't have a door to close, establish some other physical boundary --- once when I worked in an office that had cubicles, my supervisor used to string a red ribbon across the entrance when she didn't want to be disturbed. Others used yellow police "do not cross" tape!

It's great if you can have a separate room with a door that closes, but a corner will do. When I shared my New York apartment with a roommate, I used a corner of the dining table to place my keyboard; the CD player and my music reference books were on a shelf behind me, and my music stand fit into the space in between. When I was in that tiny space, I was in my "practice room".

Make sure your little corner is free of clutter (which interferes with your ability to concentrate). You may wish to place a few items that you find beautiful,

meaningful, or inspiring to help you create a comfortable and inviting work environment.

3. **Reward yourself at the end of your hour by singing a piece of music that's just plain fun.** Choose something outrageous that you would never be "allowed" to sing on stage, or your favorite torch song. Fire up a karaoke Broadway CD and enjoy belting out your favorite tune. Letting yourself cut loose a little at the end of a practice session is refreshing and reminds us why we sing in the first place --- because we LOVE it!

Which would you rather have ---
a magnificent failure
or a timid success?



Idea of the Month: Form your own marketing group!

It's time to get proactive about your career. Salesmen and other businesspeople are always attending seminars, looking for new ways to market or improve their product or broaden their markets. Singers can do this, too! We can learn from the techniques that apply to other industries. Consider joining a networking group comprised of professionals from all walks of life. You'd be surprised how their insights can impact your own business, and also how hearing from other businesspeople can help you learn to escape the traps you perceive in the singing industry.

Business Network International is one organization that helps connect people. For information or to find a chapter near you, visit www.bni.org. Service organizations such as Rotary Club International (www.rotary.org) or the Kiwanis Club (www.kiwanis.org) also provide networking opportunities for businesspeople.

If there's no networking group near you, consider also joining or forming an artist's circle, such as those encouraged by Julia Cameron in her book *The Artist's Way* (www.artistsway.com). We can learn a lot from other disciplines!

Order, Inside and Out

by Anna K. Cox-Havron

In Case of Emergency, Do Something Silly

Oh dear . . . You're *still* unmotivated to practice your music?

Here is what gets me going on my life dreams when nothing else works, but I have to warn you, if you actually do this, you are going to feel reeeaaally silly.



Anytime you know you should be doing something but find that it just ain't happenin', then you need to pull out from the all-or-nothing trap by taking a ridiculously small action.

Our life dreams usually do not have pressing deadlines. Consequently, it is very easy to allow external deadlines (translation: *other people's priorities!*) to drain time and energy from our own inner commitments. Many of us are far quicker to set aside practice time to respond to a phone call that comes up, than to respond to our own inner phone call which asks us to do the small daily work which forms the foundation of our truest dreams.

Read a biography or three and you will observe that the careers of even the most successful artists contained U-turns, stalls and lull periods. But even when that artist's work is not public for a time, does that mean the artist quits working? By keeping our promises to ourselves and our art regardless of the presence or lack of external deadlines, we are ready to seize opportunities when they come up.

We can't control our career opportunities, but we can most definitely control our readiness to take advantage of what comes our way. That is where the ridiculously small action comes in.

How ridiculously small does it have to be? It has to be small enough to make you feel silly doing it. It has to be so small you have a sheepish grin and you tell yourself, Okay. I can do *that* much.

But it does have to be an action, and you do have to do that action. It's not enough to think about doing it. You actually have to *do* it; but because what you are going to do is so ridiculously small, you are far more willing to follow through.

Think of the little tasks you specifically need to do before you sing. They must be little, they must be actions, and they must SPECIFICALLY be associated with your singing practice.

Do you have to walk over and open your music to the right page? Now, there's a ridiculously small action. Do you have to put on a pair of good shoes which allow you to stand and sing comfortably? Changing your shoes to those which support your feet while you sing is also a ridiculously small action. Do you normally have to turn on a certain reading light? -- ask people to leave the room? -- set a glass of fresh cold water nearby? These too are all ridiculously small actions.

I don't sing, at least not when the crowd is sober. I write. When I realize I haven't been meeting my solemn promise to myself to be a writer, with or without other people's deadlines, then I commit to nothing more (and nothing less!) than my ridiculously small action. The one that seems to work best for me is to sit down in my writing chair with my current file open in front of me. Another writer calls this A.I.C.: Arse In Chair.

So there I am, A.I.C. There's my file. Great. I see it. It sees me. Woohoo! CONTACT has been made! YESSSSSS!!!! Now I'm done for the day! I get up. I leave my office, and I don't look back, because I am done with my writing commitment for this day. When I commit to my A.I.C. daily, it isn't long before I find myself actually hanging around to write. I have pulled this trick on myself for twenty years. I'm embarrassed that it still works so well on me, but there it is.

So look over the tiny little tasks you do to prepare to sing. Pick the one that seems to you the silliest, the most pointless, which is still a valid -- yet ridiculously small -- action which you must take in order to practice your music.

That's the one to do, the one that makes you feel the silliest. And once you do it, you have met your practice commitment for that day! The next step is to walk away. I'm serious. The first day you do this, WALK.

Let's be very, very specific: If you decide that your ridiculously small action for your next practice session will be to set the music on the stand, then:

1. Set the music on the stand, and
2. Declare yourself done for the day, leave the practice room immediately, and go do something nice for yourself completely unrelated to singing, *because you just met your practice commitment for the day.*

Now go. Shoo! Get out of here! The music stand will see you tomorrow! That's it! That's all there is to it! If you do your ridiculously small action, *that counts* for singing practice for that day.

Phew! What did that take, 3.9 seconds? But you met your commitment for this day, and *now* you're done. That wasn't so bad, was it? Now we can get a foofy coffee drink or something . . . oh.

Well, sure, you might as well just go through those exercises, since you're already there . . . Sure, I can wait. This looks like a comfy chair . . . Hmmmm. Maybe I'll just turn on the ol' laptop or something . . . What was I working on . . . Oh yeah, getting motivatedhumminahumminahummina . . .

Oh! *Hold the phone!* I forgot to write *this*:

Keep your solemn vow to meet your silliest commitment, and the inner forces that guard your life dreams will rally to do the rest.

Anna K. Cox-Havron is a writer and professional organizer. She is the founder and managing director of The File Factor, LLC, which specializes in goal setting, time management, and office organization for artists and other professionals. She can be reached at AnnaK@thefilefactor.com.

When's the last time you ...

Sang your audition arias for an audience other than your teacher, coach, manager, or the people you were auditioning for?

DRESS FOR AUDITION SUCCESS!

By Edward Crafts



In many years of listening to auditions for conservatories, competitions and professional opera organizations, I have come to appreciate what an important role a singer's attire plays in the overall impression of the audition. While looking good at the audition may not win you the job, looking bad can certainly lose you a job you should have had! With this in mind, I have compiled a short list of audition attire do's and don'ts:

DO: Treat your audition as if it were a job interview (it is!) – wear tasteful clothing that indicates a respect for your listeners.

DON'T: Wear running shoes, boots, sandals, flip-flops or super high heels.

DON'T: “Dress for the part”. This may be advantageous in theater or musical comedy auditions, but it is unusual for opera, unless specifically requested.

DO: Women should wear makeup, especially some lipstick and eyeshadow to accentuate those expressive facial features. Be conservative with color and amount – you don't want to look like Cleopatra or Vampirella.

DON'T: Wear concert gowns, extremely low-cut dresses, short or slit skirts. You should be wearing the outfit, not vice-versa.

DO: Wear comfortable but attractive clothes that allow you room to breathe and move. Men have the option of substituting a turtleneck or open-neck shirt for a tie, but slacks and shirt should still be quite formal. For women, a dress of one color is usually best, of medium length.

DON'T: Wear a hairstyle which hangs over your face, or requires constant adjustment – this is distracting and prevents the listeners from seeing your face, your most expressive feature.

DO: Wear simple, comfortable shoes which allow you to walk and move easily. Pumps with a medium height slim heel are the best choice for women, as their open style is more flattering to the line of the foot and leg. If you are used to walking in a different type of footwear, practice in your audition shoes before your appointment. You don't want to “enter left, stumbling”!

DON'T: Wear dresses or pants that are so tight they show every calorie you had for lunch! You want the listener to remember your performance, not your various body parts or the line of your underwear.

DON'T: Wear strong perfume or cologne. Your listeners may be allergic, or they may not share your taste in fragrance.

There seem to be more “don'ts” than “do's”, which demonstrates that there are many ways of getting it wrong; dressing too “sexy”, too casual or too formal. At one recent audition most of us judges were discussing the very obvious thong underwear being worn by the singers (male and female). At another audition we had to ask a singer to take off all the cell phones, water bottles and keys hanging on his cargo pants. Needless to say, in these cases it was difficult for the listeners to concentrate on the singing being offered.

Your goal in dressing for an audition should be to facilitate your best performance, and to allow the listeners to appreciate your presentation without distractions. Let's hope after your audition you hear, “You look mahvelous, dahling, and you sounded even better!”

Edward Crafts is an internationally known baritone with credits in nearly every major opera house in the world, including extensive work in Europe. He is also a stage director, impresario, lecturer, and The Business of Singing's newest associate. Ed is available for lectures, master classes, and consultations. Please visit www.thebusinessofsinging.com for more information.



October Challenge: To date or not to date?

The topic inevitably comes up in any seminar I give. The minute the discussion turns to resumes, everyone wants to know whether or not they should put dates on the resume. They've been told “yes”. They've been told “no”. Who knows what to believe?

My personal take on dates is this: Dates are important. They show how recently you did a show and also they show (hopefully) progress over time. And some auditioners won't look at a resume that isn't dated; they believe that you are hiding something. So if the dates on your resume show you to advantage, use them. You have nothing to lose; nobody's going to be irritated that you put them on, though some people will be if you left them off.

How do you know if your dates show you to advantage? Ask yourself these questions:

1. Do they show a progression of work, from smaller to larger venues and smaller to larger roles?
2. Do they indicate that I've had recent experience in the roles for which I am currently marketing myself?
3. Are there any large gaps on my resume, during which time I didn't work?
4. Am I trying to hide or play down my age?

If your answers are, respectively, yes-yes-no-no, your dates show you to advantage.

If you have different answers, you might be better off leaving the dates off and being prepared to answer questions should they arise.

WHAT'S NEW AT *THE BUSINESS OF SINGING*?



EDWARD CRAFTS JOINS TBOS FACULTY

I am thrilled to announce that internationally known bass baritone Edward Crafts will be joining *The Business of Singing* as an associate. Ed brings a vast knowledge of both the art form and the business from many different angles. He will be available for master classes, lectures and private consultations. You can read more about Ed at www.thebusinessofsinging.com, and if you have a question for him, write care of info@thebusinessofsinging.com.

ANNA K. HAVRON-COX JOINS *TAKE CHARGE!* STAFF

I am also extremely excited to welcome writer and professional organizer *par excellence* Anna K. Havron-Cox to the staff of *Take Charge!* She is the founder and managing director of **The File Factor**, a company specializing in time management, goal setting, and organization. Anna's warmth, wisdom, humor, and understanding of the artistic lifestyle combine with her practical and fun suggestions for organizing your artistic and mundane life! Got a question you'd like Anna to address here? Write her care of info@thebusinessofsinging.com.



CONSULTATION BOOKINGS

Bookings are now being taken for New York, Chicago, and Miami for the following dates:

New York: October 21, 24, 29, 30, 31

Chicago: October 23 (limited availability)

Miami: November 19 - 21

Contact info@thebusinessofsinging.com for more information.

TBOS COMES TO MIAMI!

Florida singers have been clamoring for a workshop of their own. Now thanks to the hard work of singer Patty Bohorquez, *The Business of Singing* will be presented in Miami. An auditions masterclass will be included!

Date: Saturday, November 20

Time: 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Location: Florida International University's University Park Campus, Miami

Cost : \$25 (a STEAL --- most of these workshops go for \$150 or more!)

Registration information: Patty Bohorquez, Sweetpb731@aol.com

TBOS WEBSITE GETS A NEW LOOK AND MANY NEW GOODIES!

The website has a new, easier-to-navigate design. Also, the newsletter has been added to the Singers Resources page, where it will be archived. Freebie downloads and new resources are being added all the time.

Be sure to visit the special new section on the Singers Resources page, Clients' Club. A number of special articles and items are available there only to those who have taken private consultations or attended workshops. You will need to email me for a password to access it. Check it out! www.thebusinessofsinging.com.

CALENDAR

If you have participated in a seminar or had a private consultation with Cindy and would like to list your performance event on the Calendar, please send your email requests to info@thebusinessofsinging.com. Listings are free and at the discretion of the editor.

Thursday, October 21

Private Consultations in New York City

Only 3 time slots left!

Contact info@thebusinessofsinging.com for more information

Friday, October 22 9:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Marketing Master Workshop, New York City

Marriott Marquis, Times Square

Visit www.classicalsinger.com for details.

Saturday, October 23 9:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Marketing Master Workshop, Chicago

Hampton Inn at O'Hare

Visit www.classicalsinger.com for details.

Sunday, October 24

Private Consultations in New York City

Limited availability

Contact info@thebusinessofsinging.com for information

FREE LISTINGS!

Would you or your favorite teacher, coach, or other industry professional like to be listed for FREE on the Resources Page? Email me at info@thebusinessofsinging.com. Include a brief description of your product or service and background, along with the contact information which you wish to have on the website. All listings are at my discretion.

Parting Thought

Imagination is more important than knowledge. - Albert Einstein

Thanks for reading!

If you have questions for me or any of the contributors; comments; letters to the editor; requests; etc. please address them to me, Cindy Sadler, at info@thebusinessofsinging.com.

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