

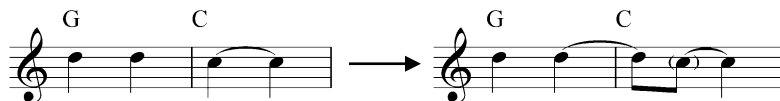
Four Principles for Vocalists Leading Congregational Singing

By Paul Ryan

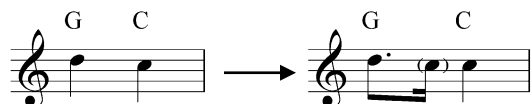
Many forms of worship leadership include the use of vocalists. Vocalists are worship leaders who often stand before a congregation to help the congregation sing. Vocalists frequently lead the singing of "Praise & Worship" music, but vocalists may also lead a variety of styles. In all settings, vocalists may benefit from four basic principles. These principles underlie the role of all vocalists who lead the congregation in singing.

- 1. The role of vocalists in worship is to support congregational singing.** This principle emphasizes the practical task of vocalists. The goal of vocal leadership is to promote and empower the full participation of the congregation as it sings.
- 2. Supporting congregational singing involves musicianship and hospitality.** Vocalists are practiced musicians; they strive for an excellent sound. But vocalists also invite the participation of all (musicians & non-musicians alike) and avoid technique that might hinder congregational singing.
- 3. Musicianship includes preparation and practiced technique and style.**
 - ❖ *Prepare the voice through regular exercise and warm ups.* Sing regularly and warm up the voice with light singing or humming. If time allows, vocalize with the team. This will allow greater vocal freedom and will avoid injury.
 - ❖ *Listen to the melody before singing.* What is the structure of the melody? Identify awkward melodic leaps and challenging rhythms. Isolate and practice a phrase at a time.
 - ❖ *Focus on the rhythm.* Speak the rhythm in time; clap the rhythm if necessary.
 - ❖ *Breathe in unison.* Mark the spots where the vocalists as well as the congregation will need to breathe.
 - ❖ *Synchronize the pronunciation, placement and articulation of vowels and consonants.* Agree on the shape of the vowels and the placement of consonants. Slow the song down and watch the mouths of the other vocalists for practice. When using amplification, articulate consonants softly.
 - ❖ *Strive for a warm tone with minimal use of vibrato.* Avoid the projected sound of a classical soloist. Strive for a relaxed, clear tone that is typical to popular styles of singing. This tone will invite and encourage the people to join in singing according to their capacity.
 - ❖ *Pay attention to the pitch.* Listen well to the pitch and solicit the opinions of others.
 - ❖ *Consider the spare and appropriate use of stylistic embellishments.* Any given melody provides opportunities for colorful embellishments. The type and placement of embellishments will vary from style to style. Embellishments, however, may discourage the congregation and draw unwanted attention to the vocalist. Be judicious and spare when embellishing the melody. Consider these examples:

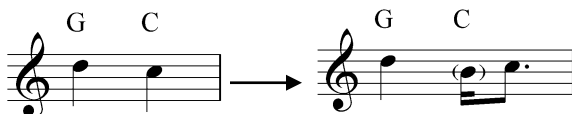
Suspension



Anticipation



Appoggiatura



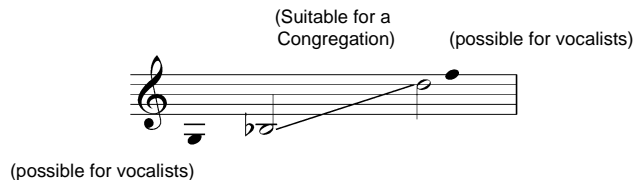
Upper & Lower Neighbors



- ❖ *Make use of harmony to highlight text and add interest to repeats.* Learn the alto and tenor harmonies; use bass harmony when singing a cappella. Consider the role and placement of harmony in the arrangement of a song; harmony at all times loses impact.
- ❖ *Use monitors when amplifying the voice to support good technique and style.* When using monitors, vocalists ought to hear themselves and others clearly. Monitors are a good solution for executing in unison melody, rhythm, pronunciation, tone, and pitch.

4. Hospitable leadership attends to the needs and capacity of the congregation.

- ❖ *Express the meaning of the words in voice, face, posture, and gesture.* What is the song about? What emotion does it express? Model for the congregation the meaning and emotion of the song.
- ❖ *Choose a key that sings in a comfortable range.* Many popular songs today are written in a key suited to the performer, not a congregation. The range of a congregation typically sits comfortably between Bb below middle-C and D an octave above.



- ❖ *Reinforce the melody through unison singing.* This is essential for helping the congregation learn the melody. Harmony early on may confuse the congregation.
- ❖ *Know the vocal entrances and make eye contact with the congregation.* In settings where notation is not provided, the congregation looks to the vocalists to know when and how to sing a song. Knowing entrances and making eye contact is a central role for vocalists. This ought to be a focus of rehearsals.
- ❖ *Designate a lead vocalist to (depending on context) speak or sing upcoming words to cue congregational entrances.* Many congregations find it helpful to look to one vocalist for cues. Speaking or singing prior to an entrance may be appreciated depending on the setting.
- ❖ *Consider simple hand gestures that keep time, outline the melody, and give direction.* The use of hand gestures will vary in different settings. What simple gestures will help the congregation enter on time or follow a melody?
- ❖ *When using amplification:*
 - Listen and respond to the volume of the congregation.
 - Underline (rather than overwhelm) congregational singing.
 - Hold microphones near the mouth, still allowing the congregation to see the mouth clearly.
 - Consider raising the microphone to the mouth as a cue for congregational entrances.
 - Occasionally drop the microphone when singing a cappella.

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