How To Find The Right Vocal Coach by Sheri Gould

Finding the Right Vocal Coach

So many folks I meet on worship teams would love to get better at singing. They'd love to have some vocal training. The problems are often multiple though and may seem insurmountable. Time, money, a lack of contemporary and/or Christian coaches, distance, etc are just a few of the problems that seem to overwhelm many to the point where they simply give up. Let me try to give you some suggestions that may prove helpful for you.

TIME

Sorry, can't help you with this one… (just kidding). Here's the truth: yes it will take some time. However, it might not be as much time as you might think. You need the time it takes to get to and from the lesson (unless you try Skype), the lesson itself, and some time to practice what you've learned. In a perfect world, you could find someone close by making travel time manageable. Perhaps you could take lessons on a bi-monthly basis rather than weekly, thus cutting down the travel time. Lessons are often able to be taken by the half-hour or hour (sometimes even an hour and a half). Instead of taking a weekly half hour lesson (which would be great-a weekly hour lesson would be even better!) try taking an hour lesson every other week if the distance is great.

Find some time during your daily routine that you can use to sing and work on some of the things you'll learn. Some of the things you'll learn will require your undivided attention to practice, but others could be done while you are engaged in a relatively "brainless" activity (like taking a shower or washing dishes). For those other things, try to schedule a little vocal workout time at the time you might usually do something else that is fun but time consuming—like Facebook, TV, web-surfing, etc. Take a 15 min to a half hour to do some work on your singing before you do the other fun/relaxing thing that you might normally do in the evenings. Don't schedule yourself for the WHOLE time you'd normally do something else—just part of it. That way you won't feel like you're giving something up, you'll just be splitting the time and in the end you'll accomplish a great deal, even in 15 min.

MONEY

Many people are concerned about the amount of money that voice lessons can cost—for good reason. Depending on where you live they can be very pricey. In some parts of the country lessons with a decent vocal coach can easily hit the $250 per/hr mark! However, I know folks who are getting quality lessons for $40-$50 an hour. There are lots of ways to find reasonable prices if you do your homework. Some teachers will do a lesson via Skype for cheaper than an "in person" lesson. Some teachers charge less for a full hour than for a half hour and so taking a full hour every other week might work out well for time and money.

Local community colleges often offer voice lessons as a class offering. Sometime they offer a voice class as well, which is group instruction and can be MUCH cheaper and a great alternative especially for a beginner. A voice class can be a bit intimidating at first because you have to sing in front of others, but it's a great way to get over the jitters that often accompany singing in front of a crowd. Lastly, if you can't actually enroll in the school, you can try contacting the voice teachers directly. Often they give private lesson as well, at reasonable prices.

BUT I WANT A CONTEMPORARY COACH!

I know, I know…if you go to a college for a coach, you're going to invariably end up with some classical training. This does not actually scare me as much as it might you. I know that in a perfect world; you would prefer to find a contemporary, Christian vocal coach. They are out there, but they are few and far between so you may have to make some choices for the overall goal. A little bit of classical training won't kill you ☺ in fact; you will learn some really valuable tools. The important thing is to make sure you communicate to your teacher what your goals are. If you do get "stuck" with a classical teacher, ask if you can study "Broadway Musical" type songs. They are typically delivered in a way that is much less classical and will more easily transfer to your contemporary style.

The more important thing in my opinion is that a teacher is qualified. I think a student can work with a teacher that may not be the exact perfect fit stylistically as long as the teaching is solid. Too often we opt for the "church organist" who has set up shop in her home because she's convenient and very cheap. Or, perhaps the guy down the street at the local music store because he's available (and cheap), but he most likely is really a guitar player who is self taught vocally or has listened to a few instructional CDs and also teaches drums, keyboard and ukulele! Look for someone who truly has a background in voice—hopefully a college education.

CONNECTING

When all is said and done, you need to truly connect with your teacher. You need to find someone who genuinely sees great potential in you. Someone who, in fact, you actually enjoy being with. That personal connection can make all the difference. I had an amazing teacher in college. I feel that I owe everything I am as a singer to him. He believed in me when no one else did. He gave me confidence and great instruction and I just loved him. I even named my firstborn after him! Recently I ran into an old college friend and found out that she had the same guy for a vocal coach. She did not share the same incredible feelings that I have for this wonderful man. She thought he was "okay". It was very interesting to me. She also LOVED another teacher that we both had earlier on and I felt that teacher was very rudimentary, at best, in her teaching style. So a lot of times it just might be "personal". Much as I hate to think it, I might not be the best vocal coach for everyone!

MORE IDEAS

There are many great coaches that offer online lessons via "Skype". Chris Beatty with vocalcoach.com, Brett Manning and Associates with singingsuccess.com are two that I know of-both out of Nashville. Brett Manning and Seth Riggs (speechlevelsinging.com) also certify teachers and may have one in your area. These are all well qualified and teach in a contemporary style. I'm sure there are many more as well. These are ones I'm familiar with and can whole-heartedly endorse. I have not found Skype to be as effective as I'd like, so I don't personally offer it, but if you're in the New York/New Jersey/Eastern PA area and looking for a good vocal coach—give me a holler!