

SECTION IV  
*TIPS TO*  
*CHAPTER LEADERS*

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING**

“You will never be greater than the vision that guides you.” Strategic planning provides your chorus with a mechanism for putting that vision into concrete terms and developing strategies for making it a reality. Strategic planning requires that you look not only inward to what you desire for your chorus, but also at the external forces and trends that will affect your chorus’ future and the realization of your vision.

The strategic planning process is simple, but it requires time and commitment on the part of chorus leaders and members. Consider bringing in an outside facilitator to guide you through the process. Sessions can be limited to chorus leaders or include the entire chorus; it can be effective either way. By including the entire chorus for the initial brainstorming session, you will arrive at a collective vision or mission, which increases the likelihood of commitment to the final product by your chorus members.

### **The Strategic Planning Process**

#### **Pre-session Work**

- Develop and conduct a membership survey to obtain input on issues important to the chorus. Distribute survey results to all participants involved in the process.
- Analyze the environment in which your chorus exists—the opportunities and challenges in your community—and your chorus’ strengths and challenges.
- Prepare a 12-18 month timeline that lists the chorus’ planned activities, meetings, fundraisers, etc.

#### **Strategic Planning Sessions**

- Conduct a brainstorming session where all ideas are welcome. This format allows you to dream what you think is possible for your chorus. Make sure that all key chorus members, especially your director, are involved in this process.
- Formulate a mission statement—a succinct statement that sets forth your chorus’ purpose and philosophy. A mission statement provides your chorus with overall direction, which allows the chorus to avoid expending resources on activities unrelated to your mission statement.
- Identify core values—statements that describe the chorus’ operating philosophy and guide internal conduct as well as the chorus’ relationship with others. Begin the discussion of core values by discovering what your chorus members value, need and expect.
- Draft goals—a goal is an observable and measurable end result, having one or more objectives to be achieved within a more or less fixed timeframe. Goals should be challenging, yet realistically achievable. The question, “Has the goal been achieved?” can always be answered with either a “Yes” or “No.” Criteria for forming goal statements are:

*Is each one necessary by itself?*

*Are they sufficient as a group?*

*Are they feasible?*

*Are they appropriate in comparison to the mission statement and core values?*

- Develop strategies—how your chorus will organize and focus its resources and actions to effectively and efficiently achieve goals. Break into groups and assign each group to develop strategies for achieving a specific goal. Select a few strategies to implement each year. Priorities are not set in the plan, but are determined by the leadership. It is the vision of the leaders that guides the plan.
- Examine current programs, activities and structure to determine their relevance to the new goals and strategies. Use the 12-18 month timeline prepared in the pre-session and make adjustments as needed. Some current programs or activities may no longer be relevant to the new goals or strategies and should be discontinued. Also, the chorus may need to make changes in its organizational structure.
- Develop action plans—how your chorus will implement the strategies and make progress toward achieving its goals. The strategic planning group can continue to develop action plans or bring others into the process by assigning specific strategies to work groups or committees. The plans developed by the work groups should be submitted to the board or management team for approval. Action plans should include the responsible parties, timelines, resource allocations and checkpoints. Checkpoints are the measurable, attainable milestones that your chorus wants to achieve by a specific point in time on the way to accomplishing a goal.
- Communicate the plan to all chorus members. Let them know what the plan means to them personally. Involving members in the plan will enable them to buy into and support the mission/direction of the chorus.
- Continually monitor the implementation of the plan. Select a person or committee to be responsible for the strategic plan. Discuss the plan annually at meetings of your team/board. Schedule a specific time/meeting at which to review and update progress each year.

A strategic long-range plan is an active, working document. It is about focus and selecting a limited number of goals that will take your chorus where it wants to go.

## **TEAM BUILDING**

### **How to Build a Team**

When you belong to a Sweet Adelines chorus, you are part of a team. Think of your chorus board/management team and committees as interconnecting teams that share the same underlying goal: to help the chorus operate effectively, efficiently and objectively.

Most individuals find satisfaction in being part of a team that works well together and accomplishes its goals. Have you ever wondered why some teams accomplish so much, while others need constant prodding to complete their tasks? When putting together a committee or work group, look for chorus members who have the traits and characteristics of successful team members who:

- Show initiative and project an attitude of individual responsibility in routine areas and also in crisis mode.
- Are goal-setters and achievers.
- Know how to set priorities and work efficiently; they organize the work at hand and meet realistic deadlines.
- Are positive, dynamic people who are dedicated to self-improvement and growth; they thrive on success, yet know how to learn from failure.
- Understand the goals and their part in achieving them.

If your chorus has members who display these characteristics, enlist them to serve on your chapter's board or management team, or chair a committee.

### **Ensuring Team Success**

A team is built to perform a function—whether it is planning, research or logistics. In addition to securing a qualified team leader, many factors contribute to a team's successful completion of its assignment. Consider these guidelines when constructing a team:

- The team must have a valid reason to work together. In other words, the assignment must have importance.
- Assign specific responsibilities to the team and set high expectations for the outcome.
- Appoint individuals who have the ability or training to meet team goals.

- Select individuals who have the desire or motivation to serve. Experience has shown that appointing someone to serve on a committee just “to get them involved” can be detrimental to the morale of everyone on the team.
- Provide the tools, time and opportunity to get the job done right. Be realistic about budgetary restraints.
- Be sure that chorus goals meet the SMART\* test:

**S**-pecific

**M**-easurable

**A**-ction-oriented

**R**-ealistic

**T**-ime-bound

### Three Steps to Training

Once a team has been appointed, there are three basic steps to training team members. It is well worth the team leader’s time to think through the following training steps:

- **Show and Tell.** Demonstrate to team members exactly what the assignment entails.
- **Performance.** Encourage feedback from team members throughout the project. Provide assistance when necessary. Establish time schedules and checkpoints to measure progress.
- **Feedback and Evaluation.** This is the “how are we doing?” stage. Solicit feedback and evaluate problems or deviations from the plan. Construct a new action plan, if necessary.

### Managing and Leading Your Team

Let’s say that the team you helped select was hitting all the right chords for a few weeks, but progress now has slowed to a halt. What’s the problem? As team leader, it’s time to analyze operations. Step back and make certain all team members are aware of performance standards and goals. Next, examine whether all team members have the training or ability to complete the assignment. Maybe a team member has decided she doesn’t like the assignment and has subconsciously fallen out of step with other team members. Or, perhaps the assignment is taking more time than everyone realized and enthusiasm is waning. Once the problem is identified, a solution can be found and implemented.

### Reward for an Assignment Well Done

Everyone appreciates being thanked for a job well done. Appreciation has special importance for volunteers since their livelihood rarely is linked to performance. Reward good performance and recognize contributing members. Rewards and recognition come in many forms. One reward could even be a promotion to a more challenging assignment! Remember, what is rewarded is repeated.

## **INTERPERSONAL SKILLS**

### **Honing Your People Skills**

Successful chorus leaders know the importance of people skills in performing their chorus management functions. They have learned to form working relationships that encourage understanding and mutual respect, and that acknowledge the needs and feeling of others. By doing so, a healthy, productive environment is created.

Improving your people skills will foster personal and musical growth for yourself and for other members of your chorus as well. Find a trustworthy peer to give you objective feedback on your people skills. Consider taking an interpersonal skills seminar, or go online to look for information about interpersonal communication or human relations.

Remember that your personality style affects those around you. Have you noticed that if you smile at people, they smile back? If you are confident about reaching a goal, others feel the same confidence. Compare the following desirable personality traits to your own:

- Are you approachable, relaxed and open?
- Do you use effective communication skills and encourage feedback?
- Do you have a well-developed, “sensitive” sense of humor and avoid sarcasm in your speech?
- Are you tolerant of differing points of view?
- Do you take a personal interest in the other members of your chorus?
- Do you treat individuals fairly and establish rules that ensure equity?
- Are you knowledgeable with others looking to you for guidance and direction?

### **Listening Skills**

Listening plays an important role in decision-making and problem-solving. A good listener hears beyond the words and facts that are spoken. A good listener also observes the speaker’s body language to better understand the meaning of the message.

If you think that your listening skills need sharpening, try focusing your attention on understanding a speaker’s meaning. Listen carefully for main thoughts or ideas. Avoid interrupting speakers until they have finished making their point. Make eye contact without staring, and use body language that indicates you are actively listening and interested in what is being said. Don’t think about what you are going to say next while others are speaking.

When disagreeing with a speaker, avoid reacting emotionally. Paraphrase what others have said when clarification becomes necessary, and ask open-ended questions to draw out a person’s thoughts and feelings. If you feel that you are being drawn into a conflict, ask for time to review the facts or to think about the problem from the other individual’s point of view.

## **ORAL COMMUNICATION**

Because miscommunication can cause avoidable confusion or hurt feelings, oral communication skills are just as important as music skills in chorus leadership. Through communication with the chapter management team/board, the director, committees, and the general membership, a chapter leader is presented with many opportunities to develop her speaking abilities.

For better oral communication, check yourself on the following good communication practices:

- Make clear, understandable and concise statements when talking.
- Organize your supporting thoughts into a logical flow.
- Provide sufficient information for others to process or act upon.
- When giving instructions, ask the listener to paraphrase the main idea to ensure that what you are saying is what she is hearing.
- Record a conversation with you as a participant and analyze how you sound. Listen for your level of enthusiasm, the interruptions you made during the conversation, the speed of your speech, and voice inflection. Identify any problems and eliminate distracting speech habits.

## CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

When working with groups, it is inevitable that disagreements and conflicts will arise. Chapter leaders should be prepared at all times to deal with those less than harmonious situations.

Each of us deals with conflict in our own way. It is wise to understand your own conflict style before attempting conflict resolution. Below are four basic conflict styles. Identify which style describes you best:

- **Agreeable**—you usually permit the other person to have her/his way
- **Disagreeable or aggressive**—you promote win-lose situations
- **Withdrawn**—you avoid conflict whenever possible
- **Constructive**—you work toward compromise

If your conflict style is other than **constructive**, work toward improving your conflict resolution style. Being aware of your basic conflict style is the first step toward positive change.

### Promote a Positive Environment

Although differences of opinion within a chorus are inevitable, a positive environment where open communication is practiced will prevent many disagreements from becoming serious problems. Since differences of opinion are normal, bring conflict out into the open without feeling that your leadership is threatened. Rely on your Regional Management Team for honest feedback when needed. Schedule regular chapter visits with your RMT.

Following are some tips for promoting a positive chorus environment:

- Keep members informed about activities and changes taking place within the chorus.
- Provide time away from regular chorus rehearsals for open discussions and socializing.
- Use active listening skills to determine signs of early interpersonal problems.
- Don't gloss over genuine differences of opinion. Clarify differences and try to understand the goals that each party is trying to reach. Look for win/win solutions.
- Depersonalize the conflict; look at it as a conflict of ideas/approaches, not people.

### Addressing Conflict

When conflict affects chorus harmony and productivity, it is time to become involved. To minimize conflict, follow these guidelines:



- Determine who is involved in the dispute.
- Determine the cause of the conflict.
- Analyze the problem from both parties' perspectives. Try to be as objective as possible, and try to understand all parties' reasons for behaving as they do.
- Decide whether it is necessary to hold a meeting with the involved parties. Face-to-face discussions may keep the conflict from escalating.
- Choose a capable facilitator. By initiating the conflict resolution process, you have placed yourself in the role of facilitator or mediator. If you are not comfortable in managing the tension that may arise during such a meeting, you may want to arrange for a member of the Regional Management Team to facilitate.
- Begin the resolution meeting by giving both parties an opportunity to state their grievances. Move into problem-solving mode as quickly as possible. Search for common ground on which both parties can agree, then look for areas of compromise.
- At the end of the conflict resolution meeting, summarize the accomplishments, noting areas of agreement and compromise. Give the parties involved the opportunity to confirm or correct your summary statements. If further meetings are needed, be sure to document the meeting time and place along with the meeting's goal or expected outcome.

You may learn more about conflict management online. Your local library may have books or recordings on the subject. Or, suggest to your Regional Management Team that a class on conflict management be included at a regional workshop. A number of International Faculty members have expertise in this area. Information about the International Faculty is available on the Sweet Adelines International website.

## **CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE MEETINGS**

Whether you are chapter president/team coordinator, director or committee chair, it is important to conduct effective, efficient meetings. Time is a precious commodity.

### **Prepare for the Meeting**

Pick a time and location that is conducive to a productive meeting. The location should be accessible to all participants. Schedule meetings on a date when all the participants are available. Avoid mealtime meetings—the fewer distractions the better.

Gather the materials and documentation you need to prepare a detailed agenda for the meeting such as budget information and committee reports and requests. The agenda should list each topic to be addressed. Allot a reasonable amount of time to discuss each topic.

Distribute the agenda and supporting documents (reports and recommendations) to all meeting participants at least one week in advance.

### **Guide the Meeting Effectively**

Meetings can get off track easily, especially when the participants know one another. Use the following tactics to ensure that the meeting runs smoothly:

- Seat people where they can have eye contact with other meeting participants.
- Stick to the time allotments published on the agenda.
- Keep discussions relevant, but ask for clarification when needed.
- Summarize discussions as you move from one subject to another.
- Maintain a business-like atmosphere. Be calm and kind, but firm in guiding the proceedings.
- Encourage the presentation of many viewpoints.
- Insist on conclusions and action.
- Document meeting actions and assignments.

## CHAPTER FILE MAINTENANCE

Correspondence, forms, reports and other papers are the essential means by which work is accomplished. However, essential as paperwork may be, it is not a goal in and of itself. Therefore, strive to create only necessary paperwork, and efficiently manage paperwork from its inception to its final disposition.

As more correspondence and paperwork is shared and maintained electronically, we can avoid using paper as much as possible. However, it is important to remember when filing electronic documents to ensure their security and safety.

### Responsibilities of Chapter Leaders

While holding a chapter office or chairing a committee, each member is responsible for maintaining the records in her custody. The responsibilities of determining the future value of any record, whether or not it is covered here, rests with the board member or chair. When in doubt, consult with your Regional Team Coordinator about what records to retain or destroy. Consider the following criteria when deciding whether or not to retain a record:

- Retain records indefinitely if they pertain to historical or legal documentation.
- Retain records indefinitely if they document an activity, measure its accomplishment, and could materially aid a successor in these areas:
  - a. performing her duties
  - b. making decisions
  - c. arriving at timely and accurate solutions to problems

The **President's or Team Coordinator's** files should contain:

*Standard Form Chapter Bylaws\**

*A list of international staff contacts\**

*Policy Book\**

The last several issues of the chapter and regional newsletters

*Chapter Guide\**

Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised

Chapter's standing rules

Chapter and regional directories

Minutes of all chapter meetings

Correspondence to the office of president

Original copy of all legal contracts

The **Chapter Secretary's** files should contain:

*Standard Form Chapter Bylaws\**

Chapter's standing rules

*Policy Book\**

Chapter minutes from the last 12 months

*Chapter Guide\**

Chapter and regional directories

Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised

The **Chapter Treasurer's** files should contain:

<i>Policy Book*</i>	Chapter minutes from the last 12 months
<i>Chapter Guide*</i>	Reports and correspondence pertinent to
Chapter's standing rules	the office of treasurer
All tax and other financial records	Chapter and regional directories

All referenced records should be kept up-to-date and turned over to the position's successor at the term's conclusion along with all other files pertinent to the office.

*\*Items listed in italics are available online through the Sweet Adelines International website.*