

Giving PVIs

Initial thoughts – Remember your singer is here because she wants to be. She’s here on purpose. The goal is for her to go away with 2-3 things to work on. Your main job is to make her go away feeling good about herself and to learn to play joyfully with her instrument.

Step 1: Set the Stage

- A. Ask her to relax. She may never have had a PVI before.
- B. Humanize yourself. If you’re new at giving PVI’s, it’s okay to say so. Consider leaving off your medals or other potential “intimidating” jewelry.
- C. Get her comfortable by asking how she came to be here (what part, what other singing has she done, how did she come to barbershop, has she had PVIs before).
- D. Use side body posture so as not to be too intimidating.
- E. Ask if she has a specific aim for this session. If she has no idea, then it’s up to you.
- F. Be sure she records the session.
- G. Have her sing something.
- H. If she’s super-timid, sing with her at first, then back out gradually. Or have her sing with learning tracks from her chorus.
- I. Tell her you won’t look at her at first, just listen. Sneak peeks at diaphragm, posture. As she relaxes, you can move to more opposite stance.
- J. Ask if she wants more hands-on practice or a discussion of techniques.

Step 2: Where to start

Posture & Breathing

- A. See how posture pertains to her
 - a. Things you’ll see:
 - i. Hip shot
 - ii. Hands in pockets
 - iii. Swaybacked stance
 - iv. Hunched or forward shoulders
 - v. Jaw jutted forward or raised
 - vi. Tension in shoulders/throat/jaw/face/tongue (is it resting against her bottom teeth or pulled back in the mouth)
 - b. Take a look and see if everything is working the way it ought to. “Here’s what I see. Here’s what I’d rather see.”
 - c. Ask if you can touch her, make adjustments as necessary

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- d. Maybe a little physical loosening if she is nervous
- B. Discuss breathing technique
 - a. January 2019 Pitch Pipe article, “Osteopathy for Singers” by Jennie Morton – most vocal difficulties arise from improper alignment causing tension elsewhere
 - b. Discuss alignment – Posture, Breathing, Jaw (PBJ) – good also for monitoring jaw movement
 - c. Be mindful of different schools of breathing and use the one appropriate for her

Listening

- A. Ask her to sing something. If she’s not prepared, ask for a song from the real world (Amazing Grace, Row, Row, Row Your Boat, Happy Birthday) to get her started into the singing process. Have her sing it twice. The first time is going to be filled with nerves and vibrato.
- B. Listen for:
 - a. Clear, well-produced tone
 - b. Straight tone
 - c. Consistent resonance
 - d. Consistent breath pressure
 - e. Breath stacking
 - f. Real breaths, rather than sippy breaths
 - g. Pitch – singing above the molars
 - h. Scooping
 - i. Vowel & consonant placement
 - j. Migrating vowels
 - k. Consistency of mouth space
 - l. Throat singing
 - m. Using larynx to produce volume changes
 - n. Tension: Lips, tongue, throat, forehead
 - o. Leaking of breath through leaky consonants
- C. Practice these so you can demonstrate what you hear.

Step 3: Correcting the Issues

- A. Most important mind the language – BE KIND, but direct, ex. “Well done! Now let’s add . . .” or “Almost, but not quite. Try this . . .”
- B. Start with foundational issues, if you can, i.e. posture and breathing (find out what her chorus director or quartet believes about breathing technique. You don’t want her going away more confused by getting conflicting information).

- C. Listen carefully to her talk – you may get hints about how she best receives information. Some people need actual mechanical information. Some need metaphors. Some just need to be shown.
- D. Start with something she’s doing well (There MUST be something!) Tell her what she’s already mastered so that there is pride in what she’s done.
- E. Then tell her one thing at a time that needs improvement. Ask if she hears what you’re listening for. If not, demonstrate it. You may need to exaggerate the behavior (and tell her it’s exaggerated – even if it’s not, much). Have some matching practice.
- F. Use kinesthetic tools:
 - a. Lie on the floor, or back against the wall – better breathing
 - i. Place book on her abdomen so she has the physical sensation of the book rising and falling with her breath
 - b. Lean over – better focused sound
 - c. Sing (and breathe) above the hand – less “reach” in the singing
 - d. Turn up hand or do circles (resonance meter)
 - e. Hand on chest to feel vibration of chest voice
 - f. Stick your fingers in your sound and pull it out to get wider, not louder
 - g. Back and forth swiping or figure 8 for singing through break
 - h. Stepping forward or springing for lifting phrase endings
 - i. Mini kinesthetics – draw on sides of your pants
 - j. Hand up to keep pitch up – mimic the lifted soft palate
 - k. For managing air – on inhale stick hand out with palm up. As you sing, make a fist and pull back toward the body, mimicking the abdominal muscles all the way to the end of the phrase. Tension stays in arm, not throat. Also gives her a visual for managing the breath she just took.
- G. Use vocal tools:
 - a. Fill the barrel – better resonance and breadth of sound
 - b. Mimic things (roadrunner “beep beep” for forward resonance, semi truck horn for back resonance)
 - c. To correct vibrato, have her sing on “ZH”
- H. Bubbling Use real terminology with explanations when talking about the singing apparatus:
 - a. Phonation:
 - i. Vocal Folds (current terminology doesn’t refer to “vocal cords”)
 - b. Breathing
 - i. Lungs
 - ii. Ribs

- iii. Internal/External Intercostals are the muscles that pull the ribs out to allow air to enter the lungs and pull ribs into to allow air to expel from the lungs
- iv. Diaphragm – an involuntary muscle, you can't move it willingly, it flattens when the ribs/lungs expands and raises when they retract
- v. Abdominal wall – supports the movement of the ribs and the diaphragm(not the stomach – that is not involved in singing)
- I. For a 25-30 minute PVI, plan to cover no more than 3 issues
- J. Give her homework:
 - a. Record & Playback
 - b. Be her own coach, hear the discrepancies
 - c. Specific exercises to help her issues
 - i. Car toys
 - ii. Use a mirror
 - d. Recommend outside resources:
 - i. Sing, Baby, Sing by Darlene Rogers, Dale Syverson, Peggy Gram
 - ii. How to Train Singers by Larra Browning Henderson
 - iii. Vocal Coach by Chris Beatty
 - iv. Vocal Warmup Trax, Larry Wright
 - e. Encourage listening to good BBS on chorus / quartet day – have tuning and voice quality in her head

Step 4: Improve your own performance

- A. Ask for honest feedback (what worked, what didn't)
- B. Look into exercises listed by vocal fault
- C. Practice vocal faults so you can demonstrate them