Beyond The Scoresheets

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Target Audience: Singers who care about getting better, **and** who have worked at it, **but** who are frustrated – frustrated that the effort-to-reward ratio has been so meager, and who are *still* looking for the magic fix. [This is part of the problem – they are still in a mindset of looking for a tidy magic fix.] Linear thinkers, and logical rational sequential doers are prized students.

Objectives:

Temporarily suspend the quest for yet one more technique, or recipe or prescription.

Appreciate that pursuing softer skills can also secure the improvements that you are seeking.

Caution to students:

Prepare for some ambiguity.

You will explore and reflect.

You might not come out of the class with a compact tidy solution, or a "magic" fix.

I. Acknowledge the approach that we've used – the tools and "fix it" approach

Most of us come at improvement in a "fix it" mindset.
        We use our drive to fix things in so many parts of our lives -- fix the car, fix the work process, fix my golf swing. "If someone can tell me exactly what to do, and how to do it, I will try to do what you tell me."

In barbershop, judges and coaches use that same language.
        "You could fix many things about your package, but if you worked on *these two items*, it would give you the greatest degree of improvement in your performance (and in your score.)"

Notice the language, and how the issue is framed:

New technique + your work and effort = better outcome.   At the very least, a better outcome, and maybe the problem is even completely solved.

II. Making the Shift – introduce the new yardsticks

An alternative <u>target</u> for their efforts.

An alternative <u>approach</u> (not tool-based.)

When we use this "tools and fix it" approach to improve our music, it only works *sometimes*. When we use that approach to unlock the emotional content of the song, or as a way to connect with the audience, it seldom has the payoff we are looking for.

When we insist on using technique-based solutions, we can fall into the trap of trying to solve A-level (artistry-based) problems with B-level (technique/skill-based) solutions.

So, if an engineer-like approach --- picking up a tool, but usually the *wrong* tool, or even thinking in *terms* of "tools" -- is not fruitful, what else can we do?

What should our mindset, or our approach, be instead?

First of all, set aside the yardstick of success that we typically use in barbershop – the score!

You can go to the Contest and Judging Handbook, and find a wealth of information on the yardsticks that the judges use.   Those yardsticks can work OK for you – sort of -- , **if** competing is your sole focus.

Note: The Contest and Judging world will tell you that their primary focus is to ensure or increase the enjoyment of the audience. (That's why they want you to do all those things on the scoresheet – to give the audience a better experience.) True enough. BUT….it is so easy to lose sight of that audience focus, and instead see the prize – the goal of our improvement efforts -- as the SCORE.

So, for now, let us consider some other yardsticks, instead.   These new items are both your new targets, and your new yardsticks of accomplishment.

Alternative Targets, other than scores.

<u>The Comfort of the Audience</u>   *What level of comfort are you giving your audience? What level of comfort are they experiencing, as a result of your being in front of them?*

 Their comfort level is different for each performance level.

D level – there is not anything offered to believe
C level – a lot of what the ensemble offers is suspect, and will not be believed. "
cognitive dissonance", and "mixed messages."
B – some of what is offered is believable, and yet some of it is still questionable.
A – I believe you. I totally buy the journey. In fact, you have caused me to think about
all kinds of things that I didn't even set out to look for.

The process and prize of discovery is a benefit of pursuing the two alternative goals (above)

> This element – discovery -- is a yardstick, but it is different from the first two.
> This is more a measurement, than a goal.   This yardstick is *primarily* a benefit
> and a bonus that comes from a strong pursuit of the first two alternative
> yardsticks, above. However, this one can also be an exercise in counting, in the
> sense of keeping track of the discoveries and the AHAs that you are having, as
> you pursue Audience Comfort, and Believability.   Oh, you're *not* having any
> discoveries and AHAs?   Hmmmm? Something's wrong, or something's not
> happening that should be happening.

III. The "Yeah, but…."

Having doubt and anxiety from leaving the old tools behind is natural.

The new approach focuses on soft skills.

The sources of the anxiety:

I've suggested that you stop trying to frantically pick up tool after tool, recipe after
recipe.

You could hear this as, "Don't use that!" and I haven't given you anything in its place.

Am I telling you to forget about tools, and to use a new mindset instead?   Partly.

Am I telling you to stop trying?   Am I saying to forget about improvement techniques,
because they don't work and only lead to a life of frustration – a "fool's errand"?   Am I
telling you to give up on improving?   No, to all of those hypotheses.

Rather, I am suggesting – in part – to work on some of the soft skills, using the three "other yardsticks" I just mentioned, and set aside those hard skills and techniques for awhile.

And here is the hitch and the bonus: by exercising these soft skills, you actually take care of the hard skills.

Punchline: **A technical solution is never a total solution.   And conversely, a soft skill approach, without technical skills, is seldom a total solution either.**

Irony: <mark>**Working on a soft skill will almost always bring out your level of technique; however, working on technique will rarely bring out your soft skills.**</mark>

IV.   The Experiential Part

V. Wrap Up

What were the AHAs?

Is there still confusion? Does this alternative yardstick approach make sense?

Does it seem to provide comfort?   Does it reduce the frustrations we have with the "fix it" and "tools based" approach?

Can this approach work, or not?

What are the obstacles?   [Brainstorm and list.]

How will I know if it is working?

It is the other half of the dyad (performer – audience) who will tell you.

> **Notice that the first two targets – Audience Comfort and Believability – have everything to do with the other half of the dyad – the Audience Member.**

Which of those obstacles (that the class offered) are real, and which are only in your mind?

VI.   Actions after this class

VII. Additional discussion topics:

Implementation issues.

If you are largely finding your own way, how will you know if you are making any progress? **It is the other half of the dyad (performer – audience) who will tell you.**

Notice that the first two targets – Audience Comfort and Believability – have everything to do with the other half of the dyad – the Audience Member.   (Here's the hook to the major theme for the weekend.)

Figuring out what to change

Where the great performers get to

Nature of the course.