

Vocal Education Series

Part 10: Attitude + Power = Performance

By René Torres

During pilot training for an instrument rating, the qualifications for “flying blind” require the student to learn many acronyms and mnemonics related to flying an aircraft without being able to see out the window. One of the most stressed expressions is: *Attitude plus Power equals Performance*. This means that, if you place the aircraft in a given attitude and use the same power setting every time, with practice you will know what the aircraft will do about it. In other words, for a given attitude and a given power setting, the aircraft will do one—and only one—thing. If you know what that is and practice it, then each time you have that given attitude and power setting, you will have the same performance.

As the expression kept going through my mind, it occurred to me that it is more far-reaching than just a memory jogger for flying instruments. Let’s look at what it could mean to the chorus as well as the chorus member.

Attitude

The importance of proper mental attitude for a perfect performance has been mentioned in previous articles. Every chorus member needs to have the proper mental attitude to be able to sing at his best. This requires a combination of proper warm-up (both physical and mental) and stamina, a healthy disposition, and an overall readiness to sing. When all these items are combined consciously and applied religiously, then the right “mindset” is developed and good things can and will happen. Miss any one of them, and you will be less of an asset to the chorus.

So, do YOU have the right attitude? It’s actually very simple. Here are a few points to remember. Arrive at rehearsals on time; be mentally prepared and vocally warmed up; don’t talk on the risers; pay attention to the director; and, above all, put your heart and soul into each and every song every time you sing.

Whether at rehearsal or during a performance, each member of the chorus must be singularly focused every time he is on the risers. When ...POWER... a few members are “off,” the entire chorus is off! The only way to achieve a proper *overall* chorus attitude is for each member to have the proper *individual* attitude.

...Plus...

If all it took was a proper attitude, then any chorus could resolve to have the right attitude and become international champion! Unfortunately, it doesn’t work that way. You need *attitude plus*. Here is where confidence in yourself pays off handsomely. If you have the right training, maintain the proper personal regimen and listen to your director and section leaders, then you are a long way toward having that *attitude plus*.

There is always a spark—something special—that distinguishes a championship chorus from average chord singers. It’s that “plus” ingredient inside that needs to be let out and allowed to combine with the proper chorus attitude. That’s what makes you and, consequently, the chorus so special.

When I was studying voice at New York University, world famous opera singer Anna Moffo told me something I have never forgotten. She said: "A good singer can sing great when he wants to, but a great singer can sing great even when he doesn't want to." Think about it! Is there a better definition of the "plus" attitude?

...Power...

In an airplane, power comes from the engine acting through the propeller or jet exhaust. In a singer, power comes from the diaphragm and lungs acting through the vocal chords. An aircraft engine provides a certain amount of power given a certain setting. A trained singer provides a certain sound given a certain physical "setting." There's no difference. With proper training, good diet and stamina and knowledge of what you are doing, you have the power! If you have a smooth running engine that is trained for singing, properly lubricated and controlled, you have everything you need to react to the attitude you have set in your mind. All the ingredients are there, and all you have to do is practice the combination until you know what the result will be.

...Equals...

The American Heritage Dictionary defines *equal* as "having the requisite qualities, such as strength or ability, for a task or situation." Following this definition, we easily see that, if there is the right attitude present, the "plus" factor discussed above and the power, then we have the requisite qualities, strengths and abilities to be "equal" to the task at hand. We become an integrated part of the whole and are ready to give 100%.

Another dictionary definition of *equal* is "showing or having no variance in proportion, structure, or appearance." This brings up the issue of repeatability. The purpose of the rehearsal is to make a song come out the same way every time it is sung. It also assures that every singer has practiced the piece and is "on the same page." Rehearsals are supposed to make things repeatable, identically reproducible, over and over again.

Performance

The performance is the bottom line, the reason for a performer's existence. It's where all you have done to that point shows up, rightly or wrongly. It's where points are scored, standing ovations are earned, and true championship caliber is displayed. Need I go on?

Never forget: *Attitude + Power = Performance*

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