

After years of contemplation, hours of watching Animal Planet, and researching personality types and grooming habits, my husband Craig and I finally decided to take the big plunge to become first time pet parents. Our search yielded us finding the absolute cutest puppy ever, a sweet Bichon Frise. Sitting on pins and needles in the anticipation of her arrival, we purchased two copies of *NYTimes* Best Seller, Cesar Millan's "*How to Raise the Perfect Dog: Through Puppyhood and Beyond.*" Each night we read and discussed how we intended to raise the perfect Canine Citizen! Remarkably, as we read, I could not help but think of how each chapter could have easily been written for choir directors—the book could have been titled: "*How to Raise the Perfect Choir.*" As I prepare for another school year, I thought I'd share one of Cesar's ideas on: *How to Raise the Perfect Dog..... NO WAIT..... CHOIR!*

Cesar states:

*"If you clearly communicate your family's rules to the puppy from day one, you can mold a companion that will respect, trust, and bond with you on a level that you never imagined possible....they are constantly observing, exploring, and working to figure out how they fit into the world around them. If you consistently send them the wrong signals in the early days of your relationship, it will be a lot more difficult to rehabilitate them once those bad habits are ingrained."*

I was astonished by the relationship as I substituted the word choir or student each time I read the word puppy.

*"If you clearly communicate your goals and expectations to your students from day one, you can mold a choir that will respect, trust, and bond with you on a level that you never imagined possible....Kids are constantly observing, exploring, and working to figure out how they fit into the world around them..."*

While you recharge this summer, I urge you take some time to visualize where you want your choir to be next May. Day dream and create the "*perfect choir rehearsal/ concert*" in your mind's eye--as the old saying by William Arthur Ward goes: "*If you can imagine it, you can achieve it; if you can dream it, you can become it.*" As you create this vision, share the goals and expectations with your choir and they will most likely meet you!

Here is a list of where you may want to start in planning:

- Working with the master calendar, plan your concerts, trips and major assessments.
- Start looking for your music now- (especially those PML selections). If you select your spring literature and analyze it now, you will be able to teach the tricky harmonic elements within your fall warm-ups – thus setting the choir up for success without them even realizing it.
- How do you want every aspect of your rehearsal to flow- from beginning to end? Is there a new way you want to distribute materials? Is there a new way you wish to handle seating? Is there any furniture you need to move around to create a better traffic flow? How can you make your day to day life easier?

- Learn a few new folk songs, warm-ups or rounds to teach your choirs. They will welcome new melodies, and it will keep you from getting bored as well.
- Determine the vowel sounds you expect from your choir. Establish them in the first rehearsal.
- Determine the way you will teach music literacy and start the first week of school- not the week before your Music Assessment. Ask successful conductors what method of sight reading they use. It is never too late to change your method.
- Schedule in time for yourself. How will you rejuvenate? How will you manage your stress and anxiety during the trying times?

Choirs are a mirror reflection of their directors, thus self-evaluating and goal setting are critical to the success of our choirs. The more in tune we are to our expectations and objectives, the more prepared our choirs will be. As the wise Dog Whisperer says: *"The energy you share with your puppy/ choir will become their energy; if you are tense and frustrated with them, they will reflect that negativity right back at you.....Owning a dog/teaching choir, should be a joyful experience, not a stressful one. Sure, it takes focus and commitment in the early stages, but putting in that hard work up front will pay off in countless ways for years and years to come."*