

Congregational Song Leading

I Chronicles 5:13: “*It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the LORD...*”

In every sense, a good song leader should be as Chenaniah (“the master of the song”: I Chronicles 15:27), instructing about songs, being a good example singer (I Chronicles 15:22). Thus, he should be well instructed “in the songs of the LORD” (I Chronicles 25:7). As Jehoshaphat appointed that the singers of the Lord should, in battle, go “out before the army” (II Chronicles 20:20-22), so does God ordain praise before victory, and makes us prove that as the musicians go, so goes the host of God.

I Chronicles 9:33: “And these are the singers, chief of the fathers of the Levites, who remaining in the chambers were free: for they were employed in that work day and night.”

I. Song Leading with the Voice

How a Song Leader Should Sing

- A. **LOUDLY** (an audible singer): In order for the whole congregation to follow and imitate the song leader, they must *hear him*. The quieter the leader, the quieter the people. The Levites which were ordained to sing, sang indeed, with great voices: “...and the singers sang loud...” (Nehemiah 12:42; see also Ezra 3:11).
- B. **ENTHUSIASTICALLY** (an engaged singer): The excitement of the song leader about a song can dramatically affect the congregation. Though his emotive state should not be feigned in his conducting, the leader of the songs of God would do best to personally enjoy them. David’s singers lifted up their voices with joy (I Chronicles 15:16).
- C. **SKILLFULLY** (a good and right singer): Before the people of God, there is needed a man who can sing *accurately* as a right singer, and *pleasantly* as a good singer. The Bible says that the selection of singers in the OT was of “even all that were cunning” (I Chronicles 25:7). It is written, “Sing unto him a new song; play skillfully with a loud noise” (Psalm 33:3). One must only lead songs congregationally which they know very well personally.
- D. **MODERATELY** (a proper singer). The song leader should take heed to the appropriate speed of a given song, and beware lest he, with Saul, fears the people and obeys their voice (I Samuel 15:24) when the congregation sings too slow or too fast. One should pace their singing in accordance with the mood of the song—not too fast, and not too slow.

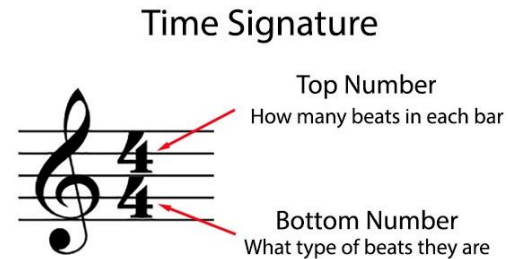
II. Song Leading with the Body

Breathing

The observant congregation will often follow the breathing of the song leader. This means that the song leader should be very pronounced in their breathing. The initial breath should be taken just before the first beat of the song. The break breath should be taken just after the last beat of each verse/chorus.

Conducting

There are three conducting patterns that a congregational song leader should know and practice: 2-beat, 3-beat, and 4-beat. As to the mechanics of a song, a song leader can hold notes at their discretion in an understandable manner, but they should finish notes in a clear and unmistakable fashion (e.g., raising and dropping the hand(s) and closing them).



Beat Pattern	Simple Time Signatures	Compound Time Signatures
2-Beat Pattern	$\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{2}^*$ *2/2 can be led as 4/4	$\frac{6}{8}$ $\frac{6}{4}^*$ *6/4 can be led as 3/4 x 2 per measure
3-Beat Pattern	$\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{3}{2}$	$\frac{9}{8}$ $\frac{9}{4}$
4-Beat Pattern	$\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{4}{2}$ *4/4 is the most common time signature	$\frac{12}{4}^*$ $\frac{12}{8}^*$ *These time signatures are very rare

- **Look at the congregation:** Unless he needs to be careful with the lyrics of a less familiar song, the best song leader will maintain eye contact with the assembly as much as possible.
- **Stand up straight:** Standing erect communicates boldness as well as excitement.
- **Use your hand(s) correctly:** (1) position the hand(s) at a comfortable but a viewable height; (2) strengthen the hand(s), not flailing them around; (3) keep the hand(s) on the same plane, not being wild.
- **Use both hands:** Songs can be led by a one-handed conductor, but the most engaging and understandable song leader will be dual-handed in what he does. One should learn to lead with their dominant hand first, and the other hand will easily be able to emulate and be brought up to speed with the trained one. Having the hymnal (or song sheet(s)) on the pulpit will facilitate double-handed song leading.
- **Lead the whole assembly:** Song leaders are supposed to also be the ones determining the tempo and playing of the instrumentalists, not the other way around. Instrumentalists should *follow* the leader, not *lead* the leader.

Tips for Becoming a Better Song Leader

Tip #1 - **Learn the Hymns.** A prospective song leader ought to be one that can recognize a song simply by hearing its melody or (better) by reading some of its lyrics. The psalmist’s injunctions to sing every day should be taken with greater gravity by those attempting to lead others in the songs of God (Psalm 35:28; 71:8, 15; 113:3; 145:2).

Tip #2 - **Memorize the Hymns.** Song memorization will make the public singing much better, familiarizing one strongly with the lyrics. Righteous Biblical characters had hymns memorized: Paul and Silas (Acts 16:25), and (likely) Jesus and the disciples (Matthew 26:30). Throughout our days, we should “have a psalm” (I Corinthians 14:26).

Tip #3 - **Practice Leading the Hymns.** God “gives songs” to those who know songs (see Job 35:10).

Example Songs

2-Beat

2/4 - Take My Life And Let It Be (#315), Dare To Be A Daniel (#309)

6/8 - Marching To Zion (#43); How Beautiful Heaven Must Be (#39)

3-Beat

3/4 - Trust And Obey (#325); Come Thou Fount (#169); Great Is Thy Faithfulness (#441)

3/2 - O For A Thousand Tongues To Sing (#158); O Happy Day (#212)

9/8 - Blessed Assurance (#143); Just When I Need Him Most (#87)

9/4 - Have Thine Own Way, Lord! (#306)

6/4 - Must Jesus Bear The Cross Alone? (#13); Just As I Am (#270)

4-Beat

4/4 - Leaning On The Everlasting Arms (#147); There Is A Fountain (#19); We'll Work Till Jesus Comes (#44)

2/2 - When I Survey The Wondrous Cross (#5)

12/8 - Saved, Saved! (#247)

Changing Time Signatures

3/4 And 4/4 - Christ Returneth (#74)

3/4 And 12/8 - Christ Receiveth Sinful Men (#258)

9/8 And 12/8 - My Redeemer (#202)