



Ten Golden Rules

Treasure No 56: Ten Golden Rules by John Bell: An article from Bulletin 185 for enabling the least confident of people to teach new songs to the most cynical of congregations

1. Believe in the voice which God has given you. It is the voice of an apprentice angel.
2. Believe in the voices God has given other people. Years of being told, and telling themselves, that they cannot sing can be redeemed by the confidence you show in others' abilities.
3. Teach only songs or harmony lines which you personally have sung in your bath or your bed. If you are uncertain about a song, that will be the first thing your 'trainees' detect.
4. Teach songs only at the appropriate time ... which is seldom if ever during a church service or even after the organ voluntary.
The best time to teach is before anything happens, while people are still settling down. If they learn a new song then, they will recognize it as a familiar friend when used later in the service. Never antagonize a congregation by teaching a new song the minute before it is to be used.
5. Always introduce a new song with enthusiasm; never with an apology. To tell a group of people that they 'have' to learn a new song and that they 'might' pick it up is as appropriate as a tickling stick at a funeral.
6. Use only your voice and hands to teach new tunes. Human beings find it easier to imitate another human being than to copy a 12-string guitar, grand piano or pipe organ. They also pick up the pitch and rhythm of notes when they are signed in the air much more easily than when they are merely sung.

7. When teaching, sing a bit worse than your best and always use your normal voice. Remember, you are asking people to copy another person, not to be amused or threatened by the vocal dexterity of a real or would-be operatic superstar.

8. Let the people know about the structure of a tune before you teach it, then teach it in recognizable sections.

E.g. if the 1st, 2nd, and 4th lines are the same (as happens in many folk tunes), tell people that. Then you only have to teach two lines—the first (which is repeated later) and the third.

If the tune has a chorus, tell people that. Then teach them the chorus, and once they have it, you sing the verses while they sing the chorus, gradually picking up the verse tune en route.

But if the tune does go fairly high, don't petrify people in advance by making a pained expression before the top note. Teach it down a key and later raise the pitch when people are familiar with it.

9. When demonstrating:

- (a) sing a verse or a verse and chorus over first;
- (b) teach a breath or two lines at a time, whichever is shortest;
- (c) don't teach a new phrase until the present one is recognizable;
- (d) sing the tune to 'la' if it looks too big a job to get words and music together at the first go;
- (e) after the song has been taught, you sing a verse through once, asking people to listen to you and correct, inwardly, their potential mistakes, if any;
- (f) ask everyone to sing the same verse together (if long verses) or the next verse (if short verses);
- (g) always thank and encourage those who are learning.

10. When using the song, already learned, in worship, try not to have all the people singing all the time. Either get a soloist to do verse 1, thus refreshing everyone's memory; or get a small group or soloist to sing most of the verses and others join in the chorus, if there is one; or alternate verses between men and women, sides of the church or whatever. People enjoy a song much more when they don't have to sing all of it. To get the right pitch, use a pitch pipe, chime bar or recorder.

To get people started, you sing the first line to 'la'. To get people singing well, you sit among them and if 'they' are expected to help lead the congregation to sing, think about positioning them not in the front of everyone, but behind or among other people. To get the best from new songs, do not teach too many at one time.

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