**Curiosity – Observation – Simplification**

This is a framework I use for teaching and improving my own singing. My hope is that it can perhaps help you to maintain and even improve your singing technique and enjoyment during this time when we cannot sing together.

1. **Curiosity** is essential. If you maintain a sense of curiosity about how you are doing something, or how it feels when you’re practicing then you are more likely to make the discoveries needed to improve your singing. You might ask yourself -
* How does it feel in my throat when I take a breath or begin a tone on an open vowel?
* What is it that actually moves the air through my vocal tract?
* How does my torso, belly and body feel as I’m approaching the end of my breath when singing a phrase?

I find that questions like these can lead to a fruitful discovery, or a line of inquiry that leads me to something new. What can you be curious about?

1. **Observation**.

Curiosity leads to observation. When you observe something in real time, a feeling, a sensation, an effort being made somewhere in your body as you sing then you have the opportunity to assess it, question whether it’s helpful or not and if not then change it. The more detail you can observe, the more you will have to work with. For example, you might observe –

* I notice my chin wants to push forward as I begin to sing.

(I sometimes call this “jaw jut.”)

Ok, how much detail can you observe and feel when your chin pushes forward? You might ask and then observe.

* How does it feel when my chin pushes forward?
* Are other parts of my body involved?
* How does my neck react?
* What other parts of my throat does it involve?
* Does my chest react?
* Can I even imagine singing a tone without the chin going forward?
* What might that feel like?
* Might some other part of my body try to replace the “effort” involved in pushing my jaw forward?

So now how do you take your curiosity and observations and translate them into an exercise to improve or change what you’ve observed?

1. I use **Simplification.** The fewer tasks my brain is being asked to do at the same time the better chance I have of improving some aspect of my singing. Taking again the example of my jaw jut, here is how I use simplification.
* I’m singing a song and my jaw juts. How can I simplify the task?
* What if I take the song part out and just sing a scale? Still jutting?
* What if I try just sustaining a single pitch? Still jutting?

At this point I might ask myself – how can I simplify any more than just sustaining a pitch!? Well… what about speech? I could ask myself –

* Does my jaw jut forward when I speak? Sometimes? Not all the time?

If I can speak without jaw jut, then I’ve finally found the place where I am producing tone without it. And then I can methodically build back from there. For example –

* If I can speak without jaw jut, well then can I sustain one non-pitched speaking tone as well? Or a siren?
* Can I translate the experience of sustaining a speaking tone to sustaining a single pitch, without the jaw?
* Can I then move that pitch up and down without the jaw? And so on…

The idea here is to simplify back to the place where the habit is no longer involved, and then slowly build back from that point without letting the habit back in. I suppose you could call it “build back better.” Now I may find that my jaw is still going to “want” to get involved if that is the habit I’m dealing with. So I use a little self-talk exercise when working on my own. It goes like this.

I talk to my jaw – I might say something like “Jaw… thank you, I know you’re trying to help, that you are convinced that your jutting forward is an absolute necessity for me to sing. But can I try to sing something without you jutting forward? I realize that it might not work; my voice might not come out. It might not sound good, my voice might not even “speak” without you jutting. But I’m ok if that happens. There’s no on here but you and me.”

I’ve found this to be gentle but effective way of asking my body to be brave and try something new even when it feels like it won’t be perfect. And when my jaw finally gives up and releases – other parts of my body kick in to support the tone. It’s as if my support system in my torso and the rest of my body is saying “well finally you’re trying to produce tone without the jaw trying to support it – now we can kick in and help in a way that was blocked while the jaw was involved.” I can actually feel my support system voluntarily engaging.

I hope this is a helpful framework for you and that you might adapt and use it for some aspect of your technique that you’re striving to improve.

Chris