

RMD President's Introductory Message
Leadership Academy, January 2025

Hi, everyone! I'm Mark Andromidas, I'm a member of the Wasatch Front Saltaires and Sound Check quartet and have been singing barbershop about 20 years now. I now have the honor of being RMD president for the next couple years. Special thanks to Tony Sparks, our now immediate past president, for leading us the last two years. Now, on with my message!

As both Midtown and Steve Denino said in their videos, chapters are the lifeblood of the Barbershop Harmony Society. As go the chapters, so goes the society. The District's job is to be a support to the chapters, not only by producing events but by helping all leaders understand and perform their roles to ensure the greatest chance of success for each chapter. That's what this leadership academy is all about!

The needs of the chapters are the same as the needs of the District: music, membership, and money. OK, and volunteers to keep it all moving forward – and that's all of you representing the chapters and all of us representing the district. We're all in this together!

So, with that introduction, as I think of what we might focus on to build on the great work of those who've gone before, I'd like to address a few things that come to mind. These are things that apply at both the district and the chapter levels.

First: communication.

At the BHS level, I participate on a team that focuses on fostering a culture of effective communication. We work directly with the CEO and others to continually improve the communication between the BHS and the district leaders, and hope to improve communication with the members, as well. I'll say, personally, that I've been impressed with Steve, our interim CEO, and his communication and coordination with me and the other district leaders. At the local level, I invite us all to examine our communication effectiveness and see where we can improve. At the district level, we have a few simple communication goals.

1. Send information related to district-sponsored events to you on a timely basis via all communication channels – email, social media, and website – and do that well in advance of events and with periodic reminders. By the way, for those of you who use Facebook, please follow the Rocky Mountain District, if you don't already.
2. Communicate to leaders and the general membership other relevant information concisely and with a focus on how that information helps you and your chapters. I'm talking about information related to how we can support you in your roles, support your events, administrative things like required filings, etc. I invite you to let us know what kind of information you would like us to share to help us ensure it's relevant.

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3. As part of improving our communication, we need to update the district email mailing list. We'll be working on that in the next few weeks. Due to a legal requirement in our mailing system that prohibits us from just adding all members to our email list, instead requiring everyone to opt *in*, we'll send an invitation from one of our official RMDsing.org emails to every district member with an invitation to opt in to the mailing list. Before we send that, however, we will notify all chapter leaders with a request to notify their members to expect that invitation. Thank you in advance for helping us with that.

The second area of focus is to define and reinforce positive district and chapter culture. For example, at the district level we are establishing a culture of proactive support, modeled by our individual board members reaching out to you and asking, "how can we help?" Our district board members will be proactively reaching out to you to discuss how they can help, whether that's with music development, director development, chapter development, youth activities, or whatever else. And we hope you'll respond with how we can help you! I invite you to have the same discussion with your chapter board. What is *your* chapter culture, and is that what you want it to be? What attitudes and actions will help define and reinforce the desired culture? Then model it as leaders!

Having defined your culture, our third area of emphasis is helping chapters create the best rehearsal experience to fit their culture. We understand and applaud that each chapter has a unique culture, and that's awesome! Whether you focus on contests, shows, community service, great snacks, whatever, we want to help you ensure that those who visit and join your chapter leave your chapter meetings happy and uplifted. Where I work, part of new hire orientation involves reading and discussing the book *Be Our Guest: Perfecting the Area of Customer Service*, based on principle used by Disney. It talks about customer journeys and how to design the journey so it meets or exceeds their expectations. I highly recommend it as you consider the journey of your guests and members and how you can make their experience amazing. But, if you don't want to read it, reach out to me privately and I'm happy to share some highlights. Today, we have a session on creating the most compelling chapter meetings where this will be discussed further.

Finally, our fourth area of focus is district and chapter growth and sustainability. Earlier I mentioned the need for music, membership, and money. I'll leave the music choices to you, only suggesting a couple things: first, encourage the director and music team to solicit suggestions from your membership and others and then encourage the members to respect the ultimate decisions of the music team. Next, choose music to *perform* that will show your strengths on stage or in contest, while choosing a song here or there to *work* on that will also challenge members and help them grow, and eventually those will be ready

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for the stage. We have a session today on song selection and repertoire planning that will discuss more about this.

Regarding membership, you know that members are the lifeblood of the chapter, and new members infuse the chapter with new enthusiasm. Our officer membership session will allow more opportunities to discuss best practices for increasing membership.

Regarding money, we're all constantly concerned about how to pay for everything. You're all likely aware of the grants in your areas, but continue to search online for new grants, government, corporate, and private. You could also consider hiring a grant writer, who will get a fee which can be considered an administrative expense. Apart from official grants, many of you are aware of generous individuals in your area, perhaps past or present barbershoppers. Don't hesitate to very carefully reach out to them, not necessarily to ask them to give you money, though if they're willing, that's awesome, but perhaps to help lead your chapter fundraising efforts. Generous people with money often know **other** generous people with money and are good at organizing philanthropic efforts. Finally in this regard, unless you're sitting on a stockpile of reserves, the truth is that you cannot continue to run at a loss and keep afloat. We have this challenge at the district level and you have the challenge at the chapter level. Sometimes the cost of dues, ticket prices, convention registrations, or other things rise. In not-for-profit organizations operating in a for-profit world, rising costs is an inevitability that we hope all our members understand. While we strive to keep our hobby affordable, we also must be financially stable. We'll talk about this issue at the district level in our president's meeting.

Now, as we go into today's sessions, I extend to you a couple invitations. For you newer leaders, I invite you to have open minds and open mouths. Be teachable and seek to learn and absorb all you can. Take notes not only of what is shared but also on the thoughts that come to your mind as you listen and ponder what's discussed. And also ask questions. Don't worry if it seems too simple or poorly worded. We've all been there and had to learn at some point, so please don't be bashful. Now, for you more seasoned leaders, I invite you to serve as mentors to the newer leaders. While I hope you will also find some new ideas and best practices to implement in your chapters, you know that in the true spirit of volunteerism, it's not about what you **get**, it's about what you **give** to a cause outside yourself. So, I invite you to share your experience and skill with these newer leaders, even and especially when you may feel like there's nothing new being said. Take that as your opportunity to build and lift others. With that attitude, you'll come away feeling as uplifted as the new leaders, knowing you've added strength to your fellow chapters. And I thank you for your willingness to do that this morning!

And now, on with the show!