

Leadership That Lasts

Navigating Burnout as a Choral Director

A practical reflection and action guide for sustaining your energy, purpose, and impact.

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A necessary reframe

Burnout is not a personal failure. Passion does not replace rest, and excellence does not require exhaustion. Healthy directors model healthy musicianship; sustainable leadership creates sustainable ensembles.

Why this matters

Choral directors carry artistic, instructional, administrative, and emotional responsibilities at the same time. Relentless performance cycles, invisible labor, after-hours expectations, limited resources, and a perfection-driven culture can make constant busyness feel like proof of commitment.

This handout is designed to help you notice early warning signs, reconnect with your purpose, and use the P.A.S.S.I.O.N.A.T.E. framework to build a more sustainable way of leading.

How to use this handout

- Complete the self-check honestly - without judging yourself.
- Choose one or two practices from the framework; do not try to change everything at once.
- Return to the 30-day plan after your next concert cycle and revise it as needed.

Keep this sentence visible

Your worth is not measured by how exhausted you are at the end of the day.

Recognize Burnout Early

A self-check for choral directors

Mark the statements that have felt true during the past several weeks. One sign does not define burnout; patterns and persistence matter.

Early warning signs

☐ Chronic vocal or physical fatigue	☐ Emotional exhaustion after rehearsal
☐ Disconnection from music-making	☐ Irritability over small rehearsal issues
☐ Reduced patience or curiosity	☐ Loss of creative energy

How burnout may appear in rehearsal

☐ Rehearsals feel transactional	☐ Less flexibility when plans change
☐ Over-correction instead of exploration	☐ Avoiding repertoire risks
☐ Focusing on mistakes rather than growth	☐ Counting down to the end of rehearsal

Professional red flags

☐ Withdrawing from collaboration	☐ Resentment toward colleagues
☐ Saying yes primarily out of obligation	☐ Thoughts of leaving teaching or music
☐ Feeling isolated	☐ Believing everything depends on you

Pause and notice

Which two signs deserve your attention first? What support, boundary, or conversation might help?

When the signs persist

Consider speaking with a trusted colleague, supervisor, mentor, counselor, or healthcare professional. Sustainable leadership includes asking for help before a crisis.

The P.A.S.S.I.O.N.A.T.E. Framework

Five practices for renewed energy and engagement

The goal is not to add ten more tasks to your week. Select the practices that restore meaning, distribute responsibility, and create breathing room.

P

Pace / Play

Balance challenge and release • Protect moments of playfulness • Vary pacing to support focus

TRY THIS: Add one brief, joyful activity to a high-pressure rehearsal week.

A

Acquire

Keep learning • Build a cohort when conferences are inaccessible • Explore new repertoire and ideas

TRY THIS: Contact one colleague and schedule a 20-minute idea exchange.

S

Savor

Notice progress before moving to the next error • Celebrate specific growth • Create an appreciative culture

TRY THIS: End rehearsal with two specific shout-outs about growth or effort.

S

Sing

Reconnect with your own voice • Remember the embodied joy of music-making • Participate, not only direct

TRY THIS: Sing something this week that is not connected to assessment or performance.

I

Imagine

Lead from a clear, values-based mission • Be creative beyond familiar formulas • Give audiences meaningful on-ramps

TRY THIS: Describe one concert or rehearsal experience you would create without fear of failure.

Midpoint reminder

A sustainable rehearsal culture is not less rigorous. It is rigorous without being relentlessly draining.

The P.A.S.S.I.O.N.A.T.E. Framework

Five practices for shared leadership and lasting purpose

O

Ownership

Give students meaningful responsibilities • Develop confidence and accountability • Match roles to individual strengths

TRY THIS: *Delegate one authentic task: warm-up, sectional, attendance, logistics, or peer support.*

N

Never Forget Your Purpose

Define why students should join your program • Let purpose guide daily decisions • Focus on the impact students carry forward

TRY THIS: *Write one sentence that begins: "Students leave my choir knowing, feeling, and able to..."*

A

Appreciate

Pause and notice the people behind the work • Express gratitude specifically • Help others feel seen, heard, and valued

TRY THIS: *Tell one student, colleague, friend, or family member exactly what you appreciate.*

T

Trust

Build relationships that support well-being • Separate helpful feedback from harmful criticism • Resist isolation and imposter thinking

TRY THIS: *Name three people you can contact when perspective, encouragement, or honest feedback is needed.*

E

Empower

Help students imagine who they can become • Make space for your own growth • Choose habits that support the future you want

TRY THIS: *Identify one small action your future self will thank you for taking this week.*

Choose your starting point

Circle or write the two letters that would make the greatest difference in your leadership right now. Why these two?

Reconnect with Purpose and Possibility

Reflection prompts for the leader you are becoming

Clarify your purpose

- ☐ Why should students be part of your choral program?
- ☐ What is your true purpose in the music classroom?
- ☐ What impact do you hope students carry with them?
- ☐ What guides your teaching decisions when time and resources are limited?
- ☐ How do you want students to feel when they leave your classroom?

Your purpose statement

Complete this sentence: "Our choral program exists to..."

Use "possible selves" to guide action

Possible selves are the images we hold of who we might become. They influence motivation, confidence, behavior, and decision-making.

Hoped-for self

Who you want to become.

What qualities, habits, and impact define the teacher and leader you hope to be?

Expected self

Who you realistically believe you are becoming - and how others expect you to show up.

Which expectations are healthy? Which are unsustainable?

Feared self

Who you are afraid of becoming.

What signs would show that you are becoming disconnected, depleted, or misaligned?

One guiding question

What daily choice will move you toward your hoped-for self and away from your feared self?

Your 30-Day Sustainable Leadership Plan

Small changes, practiced consistently

Choose commitments that are specific enough to act on and small enough to sustain during a demanding performance cycle.

Week	Focus	My commitment
1	Notice Track energy, warning signs, and the moments that restore you.	_____ _____ _____
2	Choose Practice two P.A.S.S.I.O.N.A.T.E. strategies.	_____ _____ _____
3	Share Delegate one responsibility and ask one person for support.	_____ _____ _____
4	Reflect Keep what helped; revise what did not; name the next step.	_____ _____ _____

STOP _____ _____ _____	START _____ _____ _____	CONTINUE _____ _____ _____
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My support network

Three people I can contact for perspective, encouragement, honest feedback, or practical help:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Quick 3-2-1 reflection

3 things I noticed • 2 practices I will continue • 1 question I still have

Closing reminder

Excellence does not require exhaustion. Your students benefit when your leadership is creative, connected, purposeful, and sustainable.

Explore more resources: www.drderickfox.com | [Derrick Fox Choral Series](#)