

## ***The Benefits of Competition***

Did you know that in 2004, 42% of our chapters participated in spring contests whereas in 2007, only 36% participated? That is an annual 2% drop. Why is that? Is it a direct relationship of our declining membership? Are the district contests / conventions not providing the tools and resources needed for chapters to have a positive experience? Is it simply chapters are no longer seeing the value of preparing for a contest and are turning more towards the social, fraternal style of barbershopping? Is it too far to travel? Is it too expensive? Many chapters would answer yes to some or all of the above questions, but do they really know and understand how valuable it can be to attend and participate in the Society's contest and judging program.

The late Larry Ajer said "working towards competition absolutely confirms the commitment of the individual and the chapter." He goes on to say, "(competition) is healthy and gives value and focus on a singular purpose a contestant must feel. It is only when we observe true and unwavering intensity that there is a chance for our commitment to be true and therefore real. Intensity pushes focus forward and gives life to what can be a random compulsion."

If we are not improving, sadly, we are dying. Membership numbers are dropping each year. One could argue that a contributing factor to the decline is many chapter meetings have lost their sense of purpose. How many chapters do you know lack vision, goals, or direction? How many chapters do you know that have fewer members attending rehearsal week after week? There are many reasons for this of course, but here is a possible solution to get your chapter back on the right track!

Each spring, each district holds contests. The type of contests (division, small chorus, district, etc) varies from district to district, but every chapter in the Society has the ability to participate in the spring. If your chapter has not competed in a while, or has NEVER competed, here are some reasons to change your mindset about competition:

- All chapter members working towards a common goal increases synergy within the group.
- Fine tuning of two of your repertoire (contest) songs improves entire repertoire.
- It provides challenges to improve your personal performance.
- There are opportunities to bring in coaches to assist in your preparation.
- Your chapter can compete for "Evaluation Only" (Evaluations are essentially coaching sessions from the judges).
- Preparing for a competition WILL make you better, and in turn, better choruses are more attractive to NEW MEMBERS.
- There are opportunities to see other groups and their performances.
- Receive feedback from judges and other audience members / participants.
- You can attend a convention of which the contest is only a small part.
- Sing a bunch of tags and a lot of songs.
- The fellowship and camaraderie in one place cannot be beat.

- It's FUN.
- Meet new people and see old friends.
- It raises your awareness of your chorus' abilities in relation to other barbershop chapters in your division and / or district.
- Many more benefits...come up with your own!

Imagine you are a potential new member and you walk into a chapter meeting with positive energy, focus, direction, drive, and a fellowship and camaraderie that is contagious. Wouldn't that be a more attractive place for that new member? Wouldn't you like to have more members on the risers?

Start right now with preparation and planning to working towards competition in the spring of 2008. If your chapter is too small to compete (the minimum number is 12), start a membership drive and use the fact that you are preparing for contest as one of attractions. Preparing for and participating in contest will make your chapter better. If it is resources, ideas, concepts, planning, organization, etc. you lack, the Barbershop Harmony Society and your district leadership are here to help.