How to Get Your Students to Accept Online Lessons
(quarantine edition)

Once upon a time,

and for an unavoidable reason, a community theater lost its director. This happened just weeks before the show was set to open, and the board of directors rushed to hire a replacement director who could salvage the show.

The new director was hired, the cast was called, and rehearsals commenced, having missed only two days. The new director was in an impossible predicament. Take a cast of over forty people, stage a show, and put it up in less than three weeks. She went into task-overdrive. She did not have time to mess around. She didn't have the luxury of learning everything the previous director had done.   She had a punch list, and if she could get through it she'd meet the deadline.   As it turned out, she needn't have bothered. The show never opened. Because over half the people quit. The cast, the production crew, everyone.

There is no bad guy in this story.

This story is about what happens when people are not allowed to go through the process of changing behaviors. The board didn't have time to process the best way to orchestrate dealing with the loss of a director. The director didn't have time to get to know the cast and crew, and fit into their rhythms and culture. The cast and crew didn't have time to grieve their loss and shore up their attitudes for the new normal of their show.

Here's another story.

Once upon a time,

nearly every voice teacher and vocal coach met with most – or all - of their private clients and classes in person. Then a deadly monster roamed the land and made everyone stay at home.   But the voice teachers did not want to lose their livelihood or their relationships with their students. They were forced to learn how to start teaching voice lessons online instead of in person. Most of them learned really quickly. But many – or even most - of their students didn't want to take lessons online. The voice teachers lost a lot of their income.

These are both stories of change. People both love and hate change. They love it when it's their idea and they have the time and resources to implement the change, and they hate it when it's forced upon them.

There's a solid theory of the dynamics of behavior change in psychology; the stages of change model. There are five steps. We're going to use four, and apply it to our current situation.

Contemplation → Preparation → Action → Maintenance

You're the nicest! They miss you!

Like my Facebook page!! I speak Voice Teacher and love to give stuff away!

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Step 1: Contemplation

This step just blew by in a BIG way! Almost none of us working people contemplated a situation like this, or planned for a solution. Neither you nor your students anticipated something like a pandemic interrupting your lessons.

YOU had your hand forced. You got online stat. You dealt with your feelings of resistance, confusion, and fear. Because you had to.

Your student did not have to. That's probably why this very important first step in change may not have happened. For those students who haven't been willing to try online lessons, let's help them encourage this step.

Call, text, or email your student. Just check in on them. One at a time. Not a group email. Ask how they are. Tell them you're doing fine. Tell them you've been teaching online. You could describe an amusing lesson that actually happened, or send them a video of their song. DO NOT ask anything of them.

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Hey Talia!

[Checking in.]  I've been thinking about you and am just checking!
I'm wondering how you're doing through all this craziness.  Has
you school moved everything online yet?  I've been moving my
studio online. It's important that people can stay safe and still
have their voice lessons.

[Personal note.]  Sandy The Dog just doesn't know what's
happened!  You know how she loves having all her friends come to
visit her, and now all she has is me!
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You KNOW they miss their lessons!

Like my Facebook page!! @MeredithColby.NeuroVocalMethod

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[Give them something.]   I found a wonderful performance of the song we've been working on, and thought you'd enjoy listening. Here's the YouTube link. Also, here's a link to a pre-recorded accompaniment for your song. I love this song for you and don't want you to forget it! Enjoy your singing!

Voice Teacher

This note will stimulate the "contemplation" part of change. You're reminding the student about lessons with you and all that means to them. Seeing you, being in your space, singing, being in that special frame of mind. You said that you're doing online lessons without asking students to acquiesce to your "change timeline".

Step 2:   Preparation

In this step you help your student identify the feelings of resistance, and prepare to address them. Let's assume the student replied to your Contemplation communication. (If they didn't, you may need to hit that again.) Let a day go by.

 Reply to them by asking them if they'd be willing to touch base online.

You're the only YOU they have! Help them come back.
Money Notes, the book that introduces Neuro-Vocal method is on MeredithColby.com

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Tra-la, Talia!

I'm glad to know that your family are all safe and well, and that you're enjoying sleeping late every day! 🫤

I'm happy to say that I'm really enjoying teaching online! Most of my other students have tried an online lesson, and I feel better about everyone staying safe for now. I'd like to send you a link so you can see what it looks like. We could talk for five minutes.

It's a lot like Facetime. Maybe you can tell me how it's going with your song, or if you haven't been practicing we can talk about alternatives for you...just for now. Do you have five minutes to go online with me at 1:00 tomorrow?

Cyber-psyched,

Voice Teacher

You've made this itty-bitty ask, and the student will probably agree to it.

(If you have something they can help you with, that's even better. "Can we talk about rescheduling the spring recital? Or "Can you tell me about how Instagram live's work?")

Once they do, send them the link for the instructions to download Zoom in a very short email:

Look at you! Just like those fancy Broadway voice coaches!

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So glad you can make time tomorrow!

Here's a link to a one-minute video that explains how to download Zoom. It's super easy. I'll send you an "invitation to meet" email that has a link. When you paste that link in your browser a popup will ask you if you want to open Zoom.us. Just click "yes" and we're good to go!

It's even easier if you use the app. Download the Zoom app. When you open it click the blue button that says "join a meeting" then enter the "meeting ID" that's in that same email I send you. That's it!

See you then!

You're allowing the student dip their toe in the water without committing.   Once you're online with them, you may be able to get them to tell you what their issues are.

Right now, the most common challenges our students are having are
- lack of funds - the shut-downs have hit some sectors really hard
- lack of private space because everyone is at home

Mission accomplished. You have them online, and they're feeling a little more confident about this online lesson thing. Have the chat online about what their feelings of resistance might be about. Keep it short and positive.

It's all about your attitude!

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Action

Time to assume they're ready. If they're not, they won't schedule.   But communicate as though they're ready.

Talia!!

Today marks 12 days since they closed school! We're all going little bonkers at our house, and I can't wait to see you for an online lesson! ♫

The online lesson will be almost exactly like our regular lessons. We'll warm up and then work on your song. Maybe we can try the new song you mentioned from Tuck Everlasting?

It will be helpful if you can set your computer or tablet on a bookshelf or mantle. Ideally you're standing up in your normal singing posture and not hunched over. Also, can you have your phone nearby so you have something to play your accompaniment on?

Here's a link for you to paste in your browser:
Or **if** you're using the app on your phone or tablet, use this meeting ID:
Here's a link to the accompaniment for your song:
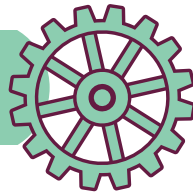Here's a link to a pdf of the music for the song we talked about:

Looking forward to seeing and hearing you!
Voice Teacher

To make your life easier, you may want to start a share-able folder in the cloud for each student (drop box, google drive, icloud drive, etc.) so they can access their stuff easily. You may already be doing that!

Step 4: Maintenance

As long as this online-lesson-thing is standard operating procedure, I'd encourage you to send a scheduling link, or an email confirmation of the next lesson on the same day as the lesson. Every time. (If your student is young, text them and tell them you've sent them an email.) Take the opportunity to create the next lesson in their minds. Not just the time, but the objectives or songs. You could mention something that you thought went well at "today's lesson."

is never any need to get worked up or to trouble your soul about things you can't control.
- Marcus Aurelius, Stoic philosopher

That's what you can do. You cannot control your students. You can keep your good nature, your posture, and your grace. You can reassure yourself as you would a friend. You can address your own anxiety by serving others.

My thoughts and care are with you. All will be well.

You're beautiful! You're smart! You got your mojo workin'!
Teaching healthy CCM/Pop using brain science? What? MeredithColby.com

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