

Principle 1: Find The *Hunn*

THE PRINCIPLE:

Closing the mouth in the “n” position keeps the moving air from exiting through the mouth and forces it out through the nasopharynx, sinuses, and nose.

I have found that this “n” position, along with your instruction, gives most singers a physical sensation of the vibrating air created by phonation. This tiny physical sensation can allow for an interoceptive experience of the sound they are making. When they are able to identify the sensation and focus their attention on it, their experience of it will grow and change.

Understanding this principle gives you the opportunity to find new ways to explore it.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS PRINCIPLE:

The objectives of this exercise are:

- Shift the singer's attention from actively listening to the sound they're generating to actively feeling for the experience of the vibrating air in their body.
- Help them realize that what they feel is providing information for them about how their voice is functioning.

NOTES TO THE COACH:

Please think of this exercise as brain training.

Remember that this principle, and any exercise that grows from it, are to alter or expand an existing procedural memory. It is not to create a particular sonic outcome.

Just because someone understands it doesn't mean they can do it. "Mistakes" are just as valuable as "wins." As a coach, you'll choose a "yes, and" approach rather than "correcting mistakes."

Also remember that this is strange and not what they expected when they signed up for voice lessons. Explain what you need to without over-explaining.

SCRIPT

YOU: We're going to start by making a very plain sound. Normally when we hum we hum on an M like Mary. I'd like you to hum on an N like Nancy.

THEM: Hums on "N."

If they are unable to, suggest they say "hun" like the first half of the word "honey." If that doesn't work, ask them to say the word "tin" and hold out the "n."

YOU: Great. Now, please do it again, and this time, listen to the sound you're making. See if you can hear a buzzy, or metallic, or insect-like component of the sound you're making.

THEM: It sounds like [whatever they say, e.g. *a mosquito*.]

YOU: Ok! A mosquito. Will you please do that again, and this time really listen for that mosquito sound?

THEM: *They do it.*

YOU: Did you hear it?

THEM: Yes.

If no, ask them to listen for it and do it again.

YOU: Great. I'd like you to do that again, please, and this time bring your attention to the front of your face. See if you can *feel* that [their word] mosquito-ish sound you just heard.

THEM: Yes. I can feel it.

OR, if they say they can't, go back to the beginning and ask them to listen for the sound again. Then ask them to bring their attention to the front of their face and tell them to look for a very small feeling.

If they still can't feel it, you can turn back to the sound. Ask them to attach a concept to the sound (a mosquito, a blender, etc.) and just go with that for now.

YOU: Ok! Will you do it again, and as you're noticing the feeling, try to notice if the feeling is more general, or if you're experiencing it in a more local way. Like, can you point to it or tell me where you're feeling it?

THEM: I feel it here.

Whatever they say is fine. Make it clear to them that they're simply exploring a feeling by being relaxed and affirming.

YOU: Great. Do it again please.

THEM: *They do it again.*

YOU: Great. I'm going to ask you to do it again, and this time, before you make the sound, anticipate how it's going to feel. Look for the feeling before you make the sound.

THEM: *They try.*

YOU: Great. Do it again.

THEM: *They do it again.*

YOU: Do you feel like you're getting what you intend?

*Without pointing it out to them, listen for the Neuro-Vocal Trifecta: buzzy sound, relaxed larynx, slight abdominal engagement. If that's happening, move on. When they're first learning, **close is good enough**. You want to encourage them. You can tidy it up next time.*

If there is laryngeal tension, it is because:

- 1. They think they're singing, or*
- 2. They're trying to be too loud, or*
- 3. Both*

The sound of "I think I'm singing" and the sound of working to be too loud are different, and you'll learn to discern between the two.

*Start with checking their volume. **Remember you're looking for that sweet spot of enough volume/breath energy to create the buzz, but not so much as to create any pushing, straining, or tension.***

Give them the "make the sound with a sneer" or "make the sound of a..." or whatever tricks you have. Your object is to help them, not to correct them.

THEM: Yes.

YOU: OK! We're going to move that around a little bit.

Now, on single pitches, you move them within a small range, up and down in half-steps. If they need guidance, simply remind them

of their objective. Quietly say, "reach for the feeling" or "know what that will feel like" or something like that. Do not stop and correct them. Reassure them as they go with words like "great," "there it is," "so easy," "fantastic," etc.

YOU: (picking a major third in which they felt comfortable) We're going to do these few pitches again.

After they do it again, you're done.

If the person was struggling to find their sweet spot, simply give them the homework we discuss in class (5 seconds, 5x a day) and tell them it's a strangely magical thing.

If the person was successful in finding the ease and balance of this exercise, ask them:

1. Notice how you feel that buzz in your face, and nothing in your larynx?
2. Notice how your abdominal wall is ever-so-slightly engaged when you do that?

This is what happens when you make sound efficiently. I know it's hard to believe, but that really does turn into singing. When you get more accustomed to this feeling, you'll hear it in *every single singer* you listen to!