

A WORSHIP LEADER'S HANDBOOK:

ADVENTURES IN HUMILITY, CONTEXT & NOT-SO-COMMON SENSE

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Introduction

Disclaimer: I am not a writer. This book is neither exhaustive nor definitive, it is merely a small collection of thoughts, experiences and practical tips that I've learned from my time in music ministry thus far. Hold on to what is good and leave the rest. This book assumes that the reader has a basic understanding of church ministry and leaves plenty of dots to be connected. It is intentionally short. I've removed redundancies and fluff in an attempt to keep it lean and accessible - perhaps to a fault. I'll let you decide.

Over the last 15 years of leading worship, two words have shaped and guided my ministry philosophy: Humility and Context. You will see these themes recurrently in the following pages.

This book is meant to be both an easy read and a quick reference handbook. If you see a chapter that interests you, feel free to skip around. Bookmark it, thumbnail it, use it as a coaster, door stop, sketchpad, fire-starter, or find some other practical application.

Most of all, enjoy!

Josiah

Chapter 1: The Taste of Humble Pie

Cultivating the Heart of a Worship Leader

Philippians 2:5-7

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

Humility is the heartbeat of the worship leader.

If you're looking for fame, confirmation, or recognition of your talents, gifts, or abilities, this is not your gig. The way of public ministry is the way of sacrifice and service. It is the example of Jesus. It is not about you - it is about Him and them. Therefore, leading worship is not the anti-performance, but rather the backdrop for God's performance as He engages the hearts of His people.

Humility should not be confused with false humility. False humility is devaluing yourself in the presence of God. False humility says, 'I am a worm'. True humility is seeing yourself as God sees you. It is deeply rooted in gratitude and love.

Humility returns grace when wrongfully accused. It has nothing to prove. It desires no accolades or praise from people. Humility seeks only the Kingdom and Purpose of God.

Although humble pie may be difficult to swallow at times - it sweetly nourishes, refreshes and fuels the soul.

Chapter 2: O Brother Where Art Thou?

Putting Things in Context

“_____ Church really gets ‘it’ right” (Northpoint, Hillsong, Willow Creek, Saddleback, Mars Hill, Life Church, etc... fill in the blank...)

Have you ever been inspired by the success of another church or ministry and found yourself dreaming about how you could bring ‘it’ to your church? Have you ever caught yourself thinking, “if we just had _____ like _____ Church - then we would be set”? Or perhaps you’ve already implemented ‘models’ from other churches - only to wonder why some succeed and some fail? *All potential ministry inspiration should first pass through the filter of Context.*

Your ministry context is the framework that determines your congregation’s needs. Your local church’s context is made up of many elements, including: denomination, history, church vision/mission, your people, church resources, church size/scale, technology, media, culture, local demographics: ages, religions, ethnicity, education, crime, politics, economy, working class, and so on.

For example, a rural country church of 100 provides an entirely different ministry context than my suburban church of 1,000. For that matter, my church of 1,000 has a different ministry context than the church of 1,000 down the street. A church that is in close proximity to a university has a different context than one sharing a parking lot with a retirement home or one set in the homeless district of an urban inner-city. What style(s) of music do you use? What do your outreach and service activities look like? Ministry today should look different than it did 10 years ago. It’s a different time, a different world, a different context.

Know your context. Know the people you are ministering to (both inside and outside the church). And let that inform your ministry decisions.

Chapter 3: Living on a Prayer

How NOT to be a Poser

Your relationship with God is a... relationship. As in all relationships, the more time you spend with someone - the better you know them and the more you take on their characteristics.

When I was young I had a best friend. We would spend every moment allowed together. We could finish each other's sentences and knew exactly what the other was thinking in response to any question. We would call each other on the phone and knew the voice without a name or introduction. My mom would joke that she couldn't tell which one of us was her son and which one wasn't.

Too often people limit their prayer life to making requests and seeking direction. Prayer is spending time with God. Listening. Conversing. I once asked Jimmy Johnson (the former Wesleyan Kansas District Superintendent - not the former Cowboy's coach) how I could know God's Will for my life. He said, "God's Will is 99% relationship and only 1% direction - stop looking for a sign."

Are you looking for signs and wonders and missing the words of Jesus in John 10:27, "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me."?

Your ministry capacity is directly proportional to your prayer capacity. Spend time knowing the Father. You can't lead someone somewhere that you haven't been or aren't going yourself.

My mom may have joked about my friend and I being indistinguishable from each other, but my prayer for you is: May you spend time falling in love with the Father. And may you know the Father so intimately that people can't tell where you end and where He begins.

That is the foundation and the fuel of life-giving ministry.

Chapter 4: Family Feud

Balance VS Priority

Your primary ministry calling is your family. Do not regularly miss out on quality family time & meals due to ministry-related programming, meetings, hospital calls, or emergencies. That's not sacrifice - that's arrogance, neglect or worse.

Nobody else can be a husband to your wife, a wife to your husband or a father/mother to your children. Play together. Pray together. Intentionally protect that time at all costs. Schedule meetings and hospital calls during business hours, prioritize your schedule, drop or delegate the responsibilities that you're able to. Unplug the phone during dinner. If your ministry position will not permit these sort of boundaries - quit. It's not worth your family.

That said, there inevitably will be seasons in ministry (Christmas, Special Events, Camps, Conferences, Retreats, etc) that may require more of your time - and that's ok. The key is "if you regularly miss..." During these peak seasons - try to find ways your family can be involved with what you're doing. And if possible, at the end of peak seasons, comp the time missed in order to spend some extra time with your family.

For those who are not married or whose children are out of the house, be intentional about spending regular quality time with family members - even if only by phone.

If you are faithful with the ministry that God has given you in your family, you may be surprised by His faithfulness in all your secondary ministry endeavors.

Chapter 5: God Has Not Called You to Save the World

Un-avoiding the Sabbath

“God has not called you to save the world, He has called you to be obedient.”

Dan, a friend and mentor, has often reminded me of this truth. People who find themselves in public ministry are often people who want to make a difference in the world. They condemn apathy and look for a mission to identify with and pour their lives into. When they find that mission, they approach it ‘full speed ahead’. For a while. Then they burn out - because ‘full speed’ is simply not sustainable long-term.

Be it insecurity, faithlessness, arrogance, naivete, an inability to focus or poor time management that fuels ministerial workaholism, these are often the people who joke that they’ll have plenty of time to sleep when they’re dead - which will probably be much sooner than they think.

Dr. Dan Spaite has written a book, “Time Bomb in the Church: Defusing Pastoral Burnout” which explores both the physiological and spiritual/theological consequences of ignoring sabbath rest. It is a must-read for anyone involved in public ministry (including volunteers): <http://www.amazon.com/Time-Bomb-Church-Daniel-Spaite/dp/0834123207>

Observing the Sabbath is the only commandment carried over from the Old Testament. God commands it. God observed it. Our bodies require it. You cannot do the Will of God while simultaneously defying His command.

So, what is a modern Sabbath and what does it look like? For most ministers, it is not Sunday - that is a day of work. A Sabbath is 24 consecutive hours of non-work, non-ministry rest. Protect it at all cost. Do not check your email. Do not answer your phone if there’s even a possibility of it being church/ministry related. Do not stop by the church/office for any reason. Do not do any ministry prep, planning, scheduling, or otherwise. If it is God’s church, it will survive without you for a day - if not, leave. Now. He does not need you to be a ‘Super Pastor’, He needs you to be obedient.

What DO you do on your sabbath then? Spend time with your family. Take a hike or bike ride. Read a book. Take a nap. Play a sport. Rest.

“When David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he died.” Acts 13:36

What greater thing could be said about a person - but that they fulfilled God’s purpose for their life? I pray the same will be said for you and me.

Chapter 6: Remember: You Don't Know Anything

Learning and Re-Learning How to Learn

I had accrued 8 years of ministry and educational experience across various churches, denominations and in varying capacities before landing at my current church 7 years ago. Now, after 15 years of experience, one thing I am absolutely sure of, is that there is so much more to learn.

There is freedom in the fact that no one has it completely 'figured out'. Because our ministry context is perpetually changing, our approach to ministry is in a constant state of evaluation and adaptation. Our churches and ministries are made up of organisms (people) - which makes our organizations living, moving, breathing, changing, adapting organisms as well.

In fact, one of Jesus' most popular metaphors for the Church in scripture is a 'Body'.

It is not static. It is alive.

I often meet people who attended a particular school or seminary and they may have years of theoretical ministry praxis and ideals - but they have little actual world experience. The ones that will both survive and thrive are those willing to humble themselves and acknowledge that there are many 'right' ways to do ministry. Whereas those who believe that they already have it figured out - will probably and unfortunately carry a snobby chip on their shoulder for the rest of their unfulfilling and pathetic ministry career.

Then there are transplant ministers from other churches who have a long history of a particular way of doing ministry and may even be nostalgic about or longing to recreate the way things were 'back then'. These folks may forget the simple fact that they have been given a new context. It is no longer 'then' and 'there', it is 'here' and 'now'. They should be careful to invest the time necessary (be it months or years) to know their context before applying new methods to it - not neglecting the possibility that there may be a new Best Way to do it.

The key to success? Be teachable.

I went to hear Andy Stanley speak at a conference recently. During the Q & A time following one of his sessions, a young associate pastor explained that he and his lead pastor had been having differing opinions about how ministry should be done at their church and was asking how he should deal with the issue. Andy's response? 'If you're under 30 - submit and learn'. I love that! And it's not just for the young (although the young do tend to be more compulsive) - and that wasn't the point of Andy's response anyway. The point is for us to always be teachable. My lead pastor is 20 years older than

me, has a Doctorate of Divinity and has studied and probably written more theology than my feeble little mind will comprehend in my lifetime. Some of the most humbling times I've experienced in ministry is when I suggest a new idea or perspective in a meeting to which he responds, "I haven't thought about it in that way before - but I like it". He is open to learning from any source - even an artsy punk kid.

Be teachable. Learn from those who are younger than you. Learn from those who are older than you. May humility be your light and the Holy Spirit your guide.

Chapter 7: Mixed Signals

Leading With Non-Verbal Communication

By now you've discovered that leading worship is so much more than playing and singing songs. That's a concert - anyone can do that. Leading worship is a real-time multi-task of hearing and knowing what God wants to do in and through His people, translating that into music, directing a band, two-way communication with the congregation, on the fly musical rearranging, more band direction, reading directional queues from tech team/director/pastor/etc - all while being fully present in the moment - and looking like you're actually enjoying yourself. For the non-multi-tasker, it can hinge on overwhelming.

Stage Presence

The great dichotomy of leading worship is that it is simultaneously both a performance and not a performance. The state of a worship leader's heart, rooted in humility, is one of sacrificial service that pleads, "don't look at me - look at God". The concurrent reality however, is that you're up front - on stage and people are looking to you for leadership. You don't have the luxury of hiding behind a curtain - which would, in fact, be disastrous. People need to be led. Here are some practical tips to leading and engaging with people in worship.

1. *Keep your eyes on the prize.* Make eye contact with the people you are leading. Few things can be more alienating to a congregation than a worship leader with closed eyes. You're off sprinting to the throne room and you've left them behind and they know it. Eye contact lets them know that you're still with them. Additionally, eye contact allows you to scan and read the room - which gives you context to what God is wanting to do in the room.
2. *Memorize.* When possible, memorize the music and lyrics of all the songs in your set. This enables you to keep eye contact with people, removes potential visual barriers such as music stands, and frees you to focus on other concurrent tasks. If you have lyric screens or monitors - use them for reference - not for reading.
3. *Smile.* If you're happy and you know it then your face will surely show it. Beware of 'constipation' face - trust me, everyone feels your pain. Ease it.
4. *Dance monkey, dance!* Ok, not really - but people are looking for visual queues as to what is permissible or expected of them. You set the tone and lead the way for that. Clapping, hand-raising, movement, kneeling, posture, dancing. Know your context and lead the way accordingly.

Team Communication

More than likely, your band and singers are all facing the same direction as you (forward), putting the band out of your direct line of sight. With on-the-fly musical adjustments and your mouth filled with microphone, how do you communicate changes to your team?

Define *signals*. Some of these examples will seem silly - but use them as a reference to get you thinking of ways to communicate non-verbally:

1. *Hand Signals*. If you have your hands available, you could try or modify some of the following signals:
 - a. Closed fist = End the song
 - b. Swirling finger in the air = Repeat current section of the song • 'V' behind the back (like a peace sign) = Go to verse
 - c. 'C' behind the back (like you're holding a drink) = Go to chorus
 - d. Shaky side hand (like you're panning for gold) = Build musically (crescendo)
2. *Foot Signals*. If your hands are occupied with an instrument (such as a guitar) you could try:
 - a. Stomping a foot = Build musically
 - b. Leg lift (like snapping your heel while being kissed) = Bring down (decrecendo)
 - c. Tip Toes = End song
3. *Body Gestures*.
 - a. Lean back = End song or cut back musically
 - b. Tilt and lift guitar neck toward drummer = End song
 - c. Drop guitar neck = last note/chord
 - d. Pump guitar neck = end with ritard in sync with neck pump
4. *Head Signals*.
 - a. Rhythm nod = set song tempo
 - b. Big up and down nod = defines the start or end of a section of the song
 - c. Sideways head turn = watch for the next signal - it's coming..... now
 - d. Sound booth nod = next lyric slide
5. *Verbal Cue*. Say or sing the first word or two of the section you want to go to.

Remember to time the signals appropriately. Too close to the change, and your team might not all make it there in time. Too early, and you may have folks jumping in to changes prematurely. It may benefit you to identify a point-person on your team - someone without a microphone that can read your signals and properly translate and communicate them to the rest of the team.

Alternate methods for those with in-ear monitors:

1. Talk-back mic. This mic is muted in the house and only your players can hear it. Use your point-person to give instruction in the background throughout the song/set. “Chorus”, “Build”, “Verse 2”, etc.
2. If you play along with pre-recorded click tracks or loops, you could also add such instructions to the recording.

Chapter 8: Planning to be Surprised

The Spirit, spontaneity, and the plans we make

Planning is an inevitable and important part of any worship ministry. Scheduling and coordinating rehearsals, singers, players, selecting songs, making arrangements, transposing songs into different keys, printing out copies of music, and so on - are all necessary and good things. Without sufficient planning, people can feel lost and confused or even alienated. Distraction in worship is often a result of poor planning. On the other hand, it is also possible to be so planned that it removes any wiggle room for the Holy Spirit's interjection. So the question becomes, would you rather have good music or the presence of God in your worship set? Haha - thankfully those ideas are not mutually exclusive!

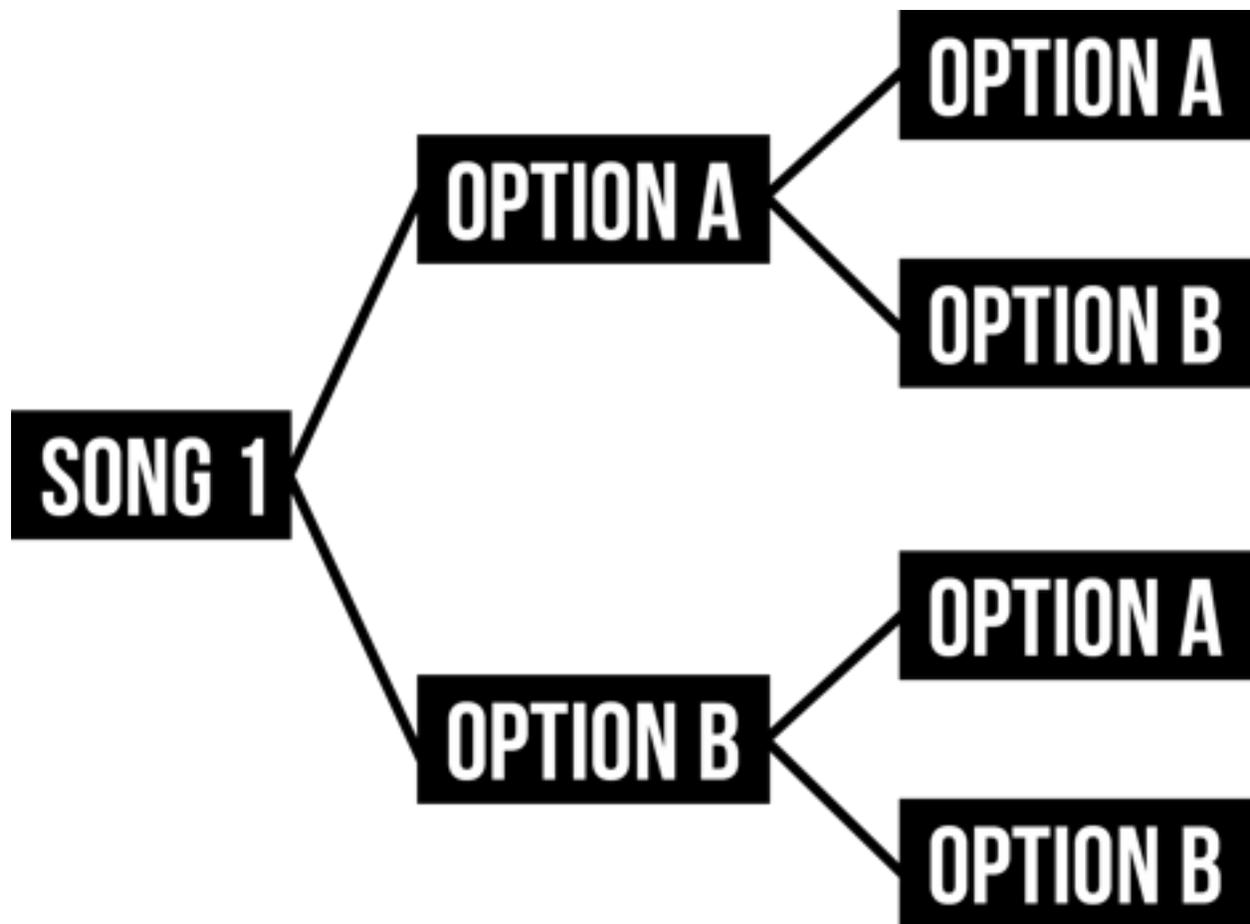
Worship leaders experience God differently based on their experience and personality (how they are wired). Some are more inclined to find the Spirit's leading IN the planning process. Some are more inclined to find the Spirit's leading IN the execution of the worship experience. Notice I said 'inclined' - neither side gets to write off the other and in fact, can learn from each other's strengths. When life gets busy - it's easy to revert to our inclination rather than agree to seek God's leading both before and during our sets. I would encourage you, don't give in.

Also, consider how people are affected by your planning and/or the lack thereof: players, singers, lyric projection, lighting, sound, other people looking for cues for the next item in the service order. Work out signs/signals ahead of time and communicate with everyone involved. Remember, spontaneity should not feel chaotic.

Here are some ways I've seen worship leaders plan to be surprised:

The Bracket

Start with your first song, and for every subsequent song in the set - create two options, like a fork - so that when you arrive at the end of a song, you can choose between the two paths (based on where you feel God might be leading you). It works like a family tree or a backwards sports bracket or like one of those classic 'Choose Your Own Adventure' books.



Pros: Easy for your team to follow - while still allowing room for spontaneity.

Cons: Depending on how many songs are in your set, you can see how quickly the rehearsal could become cumbersome and lengthy.

The Big Pick

I've used this extra spontaneous method for nights of worship at my church. Select 20 - 30 familiar songs and make a list. Sort them alphabetically and grouped by key (also alphabetically):

For Example,

- (A) How Great is Our God
- (A) How Great Thou Art
- (A) You Never Let Go

(C) How He Loves

(D) I Am Free
(D) O Lead Me

Print the list as a cover sheet for each sorted stack of music and distribute them to the players for reference. During the set, you can simply mouth the title of the next song to your players between songs - it should be pretty quick and easy for them to locate and begin playing.

Pros: Uber-spontaneous

Cons: First, you have the right people in the right places - solid players who can communicate with each other and are familiar with all of the songs, solid lyric operator who is also familiar with the songs and can pick them quickly out by ear (you could also assign a player to text the next song title to the lyric operator as it comes). Alternatively, if your team uses in-ear monitors, you could configure a talk-back mic that is muted in the house but that all of your players & key people are able to hear. This method works best with transitions. Transitions between songs, aside from removing disruptions, allows worshippers to remain in a moment while you're setting the next song up - and consequently, covers up the necessary team communication - creating a seamless flow of music.

Selah Moments

I use this method most often. The word 'Selah' appears throughout Psalms giving sacred pauses or space for reflection on what has just been heard. Selah moments can be interjected anywhere in the set: they are the interludes between songs, the extra instrumental measure between chorus and verse, the premature ending of a song. They are the playing-out of the whispers of the Spirit.

A Selah moment may also be an un-metered song/chorus/bridge/scripture/poem/prayer that creates aural space and invites engagement, interactivity, or response. Don't rush through these moments. Give them space. Watch your people. Listen to the Spirit.

Don't force these moments either. Is it God speaking, or are you? Have you ever been caught in a moment that you can't get out of? Create space for discernment and move on when it's time. Don't manipulate the situation. Approach it with humility and context and at the end ask God, "Was I obedient?".

Chapter 9: Party up Front, Business in the Back

Dealing with Criticism

“It’s too _____”
(Loud. Quiet. Dark. Bright. Distracting. Dull.)

“Why can’t we sing more hymns?”
“Why can’t we sing more choruses?”
“I really wish you would sing (this) song.”

I’ve kept a comment card that came across my desk a few years back. It fascinated me because it had two very different perspectives from people sitting very close to each other. One person said, “the music is too loud”, and the other, “the music is too quiet - hard to hear.” These folks were sitting on the same row - two seats apart.

Everybody has an opinion. Some are more vocal about theirs than others. Our churches are challenged by people with a deep seeded cultural sense of personal entitlement. We want it our way, right away, or get out of my way.

There are also those who lift a voice out of genuine concern for the Kingdom - and many times rightfully so. While maintaining a teachable spirit, it is our job as ministry leaders to sort through valid critique, hold on to what is good and shrug off the rest.

An elderly gentleman used to stand in the middle section about 6 rows back in my church (where I couldn’t possibly miss him) and would plug his ears with his fingers the entire music set. Not in a “I’m trying to protect my hearing” sort of way, but in an elbows-out declaration of “your racket is offensive to me and to God” accompanied by a generous piercing glare. He hated my music. I know this because I asked him about it once. So week after week I would smile and listen to the Holy Spirit and lead God’s people in worship while attempting to overlook the huge human windmill in the room. He didn’t like me, but it wasn’t personal. It was personalized, but it wasn’t personal. He hardly knew me. From a place of grace and humility it was easy for me to see that he simply didn’t agree with my ministry methodology - it hardly had anything to do with the person of me, and it had everything to do with the circumstance.

A friend and mentor of mine, Curt Gentry, has this saying: “Lord, soften my heart as you toughen my skin.” In public ministry, you will receive criticism. Ground yourself in humility, know your context, take all things into consideration, hold on to what is good and leave the rest.

Chapter 10: Modeling Clay

Implementing Models VS Creating from Scratch

You've been to the conference. You've visited the church. Now how do you become the next Northpoint, Willow Creek, Mars Hill, Saddleback, Hillsong, etc?

By doing what they do, right?

Here are two quick thoughts to consider before implementing that new idea...

First, be who God has called you to be. Your ministry Vision, Mission & Calling should not be dictated by popular opinion - but rather by God. By his design, churches and ministries will come in all shapes and sizes. There are people who would never enter the doors of a mega church that would attend a home church. Your ministry is unique. Don't let the allure of numbers define your ministry objectives.

Second, Know your context (refer to Chapter 2). Not all programs will work in all places. Just because something 'works' somewhere else, doesn't mean it will work for you.

Should You Create or Model?

The artist in me screams "innovate - don't emulate!" But I also understand that there are some people who, when they see a blank page, can only see a blank page. For some of us it's easier and more fun to create from scratch, and some of us need a baseline or starting point to build off of and tweak. There are implementers and dreamers and both are important and necessary in the Kingdom of God.

Creating from Scratch

Have you ever heard or thought something to the effect of, "What did we ever do before cellphones.."? Inventors and innovators excel at finding the solutions that never existed. They're able to ask, "what could make this better, easier, etc?", and not limit the answer to existing products, services, examples or methods. If you are wired this way, you have a lot to offer - but be careful that your desire for originality doesn't trump what's best for your ministry. It can take significantly more time and resources to create something from scratch than it would to adapt something already in existence. There is a wealth of great ideas and inspiration out there already - don't be afraid of them. That being said, when you are able to create something from within your Context for your Context, the impact has phenomenal potential. Humble thyself and do what's best both for yourself, and for your ministry.

Implementing Models

If you are an implementer, you're probably really good at 'getting things done'. While a dreamer is spending hours looking for the 'best' way - you've already been doing stuff with satisfactory tools. When you see a great illustration at a conference - you are inclined to want to duplicate it. Beware of copy-cating. You may be more inclined than a dreamer to use stock video clips or existing song arrangements - rather than go through the extra effort of creating your own. Be aware of the artists that you may alienate if creativity is held at arms length. Know your people. Know your context. Humble thyself and do what's best both for yourself, and for your ministry.

Chapter 11: Video Killed the Radio Star

Technology: Supplement or Replacement

Thank you MTV for ruining our lives. Lights, fog machines, camera cranes, jumbo-trons and gut-shaking sound systems. These are the things that capture our attention. 100,000 watts of audiovisual stimulation. How is the church supposed to compete with that? *Is* the church supposed to compete with that? What happened to the good old days when Jesus was able to draw a crowd of 5,000 with no electricity? The world and thereby our ministry context has changed over the last 2,000 years and *is* continually changing. Video screens have replaced stained-glass windows and they powerfully tell the stories of our faith. But how much is too much? What communicates the message and what distracts from it? Are people so captivated by swirling motion backgrounds and flashing lights in worship that they miss the opportunity to engage with the living God?

In his book, “Small is the New Big”, Seth Godin notes, “If your target audience isn’t listening, it’s not their fault, it’s yours.” Presentation does matter. You have a responsibility to actively engage your people. Within the framework of your context, what are the things you can do to help those who need Jesus to connect with Him?

Chapter 12: Breaking Legs

Dealing with Divas, Slackers, and Flakes

People are messy. Especially artists. They possess incredible abilities to move and motivate the heart - setting the stage and preparing the way for God's transformational work - if you can get them to show up. Managing artists, particularly in a volunteer capacity, can be like herding cats. Let's look at three of the top culprits:

Divas: Love to make a big deal out of things. They want to be the center of the show. They want to be recognized and acknowledged for their talents and accomplishments. They will most likely seek you out in order to grab a piece of the limelight. The tricky part? They may actually be that good.

Slackers: Often, these are the people who have been given enormous talent and could care less about it - so it goes to waste or never really develops beyond a certain point because they lose interest and move on to the next thing. It seems impossible to get them excited about anything. How can you expect to keep them continually motivated and engaged?

Flakes: Flakes forget. They usually have great intentions and poor follow-through. Any kind of distraction or disturbance in their day and all bets are off for their future. These are the people that you schedule, confirm, and then they just don't show up. They forgot to set their alarm clock, they forgot they were scheduled, they were all gung-ho and then felt suddenly overwhelmed so now they're taking a break.

So, how do you get a bunch of artists excited about and committed to a vision based in humility and self sacrifice?

First, be creative. Artists are drawn to creativity like moths to lights. They want to be a part of something vibrant, exciting, and fresh. Cultivate a culture of creativity. Let them know what creative things are coming up that they will get to be a part of and invite them to be part of it. Try songwriting sessions together and introduce new music into the church (song for us, by us) - make them a part of a movement of God. Spend time together working on new sounds and production ideas. And make a big deal out of every accomplishment - no matter the size!

Second, build loyalty. Some people will serve out of a sense of obligation - when it's convenient for them, but people will bend over backwards for someone whom they are heavily invested in. How do you make yourself magnetic? Invest in your team. Intentionally meet with them outside of 'ministry' context. Go to sports, movies, etc together. Build a community. Help them become the best possible version of themselves. What are their dreams and how can you help them achieve those dreams? When they can see that they are more important to you than the talents they have to

offer, and when they know that you want the best for them regardless of whether they ever do anything else for you - you've got 'em. Invest heavily in teenagers - even and especially when you know that they will be going away for college soon.

Third, communicate, communicate, and then communicate again. Don't assume that an artist is going to see or remember every email/txt/facebook event you throw at them. Confirm at least 3 times (dialogue and discussion about a role that they are playing counts as confirmation). Reaffirm community by celebrating in each other's lives and praying for each other. And perpetually preach your ministry's vision. Continually remind them why they do what they do, the heart behind it, where you are and where you are going, and let them know how vital their role in it is.

Correction

When you need to address an attitude or timeliness issue - meet with the individual face to face. If you cannot meet face to face, arrange to have the conversation by phone. Under no circumstance should you attempt to address these issues via email, letter, text, or voicemail. You need to be able to hear the inflection in their voice and they in yours. Speak the truth in love. Allow them to explain themselves and offer their own solutions. Offer your help and follow through on any promises you make.

If you have group-wide issues, seek counseling. That is beyond the scope and purpose of these pages:).

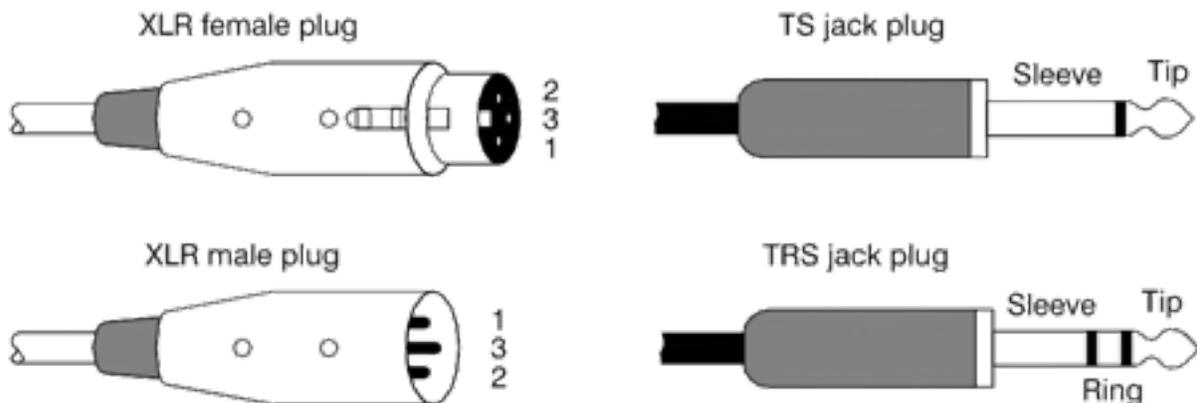
Chapter 13: The System Is Down

A Simple Guide to Troubleshooting Tech Issues

Many churches these days make regular use of modern technologies such as electricity and sound systems/microphones. If that is not you, feel free to skip this chapter.

However, if your ministry *does* make regular use of mics, monitors, cables, sound mixers, etc - this chapter aims to provide you with a basic understanding of how some of these things work together so that when something stops working (and it inevitably will) you won't be entirely in the dark. Here are some basic trouble-shooting tips to help you when something goes wrong:

1. Stereo Typing (Identifying Cables):



The 2 most common audio cables found on stage are:

- XLR3 referred to simply as 'XLR' is a balanced, low-impedance connection most commonly used for connecting microphones and DI's (direct boxes) to a sound mixer.
- 1/4" TS (Tip, Sleeve) referred to commonly as an 'instrument cable' is an unbalanced and shielded cable used for connecting instruments to amplifiers, sound boards or direct boxes.

Here are 2 other cables that are easily confused with the 1/4" TS Instrument Cable:

- 1/4" Speaker cable's connector looks identical to the 1/4" TS - but is an unshielded and usually higher-gauge cable used for connecting power amplifiers to speakers/monitors. Using a speaker cable in place of an instrument cable can cause noise

interference and signal quality loss. Using an instrument cable in place of a speaker cable can cause the cable to get hot and/or burn-out/break.

- 1/4" TRS (Tip, Ring, Sleeve) provide the same functionality as an XLR cable and is used most often for effects processor sends/returns at the sound board. Using a TRS cable in place of an instrument or speaker cable can create unpredictable results and potential hazards.

If an instrument/mic is not working, your first action should be to make sure that all connections are tight - sometimes cables get moved/bumped/etc. Proper use of cables will help reduce technical issues and extend the life of your equipment.

2. DI Why? (Direct Boxes)

“DI” (dee-eye) may stand for direct input, direct injection or direct interface - depending on who you ask. It is a device used to connect a high-impedance, line level, unbalanced output signal (usually a 1/4" TS connector) to a low-impedance microphone level balanced input (usually via XLR connector). Some are passive, some are active (have a preamp built in - usually requiring phantom power), some have only in & out, some have in, out & thru, some have ground lift, signal boosting/cutting, etc. There are a variety of options for use in a variety of applications.

3. The In's & Out's of Cable Routing

Cables connect multiple devices together allowing signal to pass between them. To troubleshoot routing, we must understand the directional flow of signal. Cables carry signal (sound) from one device to another (eg. signal flows from a microphone through a cable to a sound mixer). Think of it as a train that travels through multiple stations before reaching it's destination - the signal (from your mic/instrument) boards the cable and get's off at the speakers. Each device in your signal path is a station, the train comes in, the train goes out, the signal goes into a device, then leaves out of that device - into another. Out to in. Out from an instrument In to a DI. Out from the DI In to the mixer/soundboard.

When tracing a problem, start with the source and work toward the end. Here are a few basic signal-flow examples:

- Voice > Mic > Mixer > Amp > Speakers > Ears
- Guitar > Pedals > Guitar Amp > Mic > Mixer > Amp > Speakers > Ears
- Bass > Tuner > DI > Mixer > Speakers > Ears

If this sounds over-simplified, that's because it is - but 'out to in' is a concept easily overlooked that will stop a signal in its tracks. Understanding the directional flow of signal will help you to strategically eliminate problems as they arise.

4. Sound Off! (Troubleshooting Microphone Problems)

- Check that cable is firmly connected (if it is a wired mic)
- Make sure the power is turned on (if it has a power switch/button)
- If it will not power on, the batteries may need to be replaced
- Make sure it is not muted (if it has a mute switch/button)
- Try plugging a different mic into your cable to see if the problem is with the mic or something further down the signal path. If replacing the mic doesn't fix the problem, try replacing the cable and so on.

5. Assault & Batteries

Many devices including wireless microphones, guitars with active pickups, guitar pedals, etc depend on the use of batteries and can cause unwanted disruptions when they run out of juice. It is good practice to keep the required batteries in stock so that they will always be available when needed. Some churches use fresh batteries each week or service to eliminate any potential power disruptions. At my church, the sound person is able to monitor microphone battery levels from the back and can replace batteries as needed before they completely go out. This saves waste and dollars - but it requires that the right person has their head in the game. Since the battery in my acoustic does not need to be replaced very often, I just keep a fresh 9V handy on stage and replace it when it fails or every couple of months - whichever comes first. To maximize instrument battery life, unplug your active instruments before leaving for the day.

Familiarizing yourself with these very basic troubleshooting techniques will hopefully enable you and your team to quickly diagnose and fix technical difficulties when they pop up and keep your rehearsals and worship times running smoothly.

Chapter 14: Music & Lyrics

How to Mess with and Manipulate People

Music is powerful. It's moving. It speaks to the heart. It invokes emotion.

"Where the Streets Have No Name"

"Walking on Sunshine"

"Amazing Grace"

"Poker Face"

Some people have 'go-to' songs that they play to stir-up specific memories or nostalgia. There are songs that make you want to laugh, cry, dance, fight, remember, and forget.

While attending Visible College in Memphis, TN, I had the opportunity to hear a guest lecture from a music therapist. After hearing about the interlinking of music and emotion, a question was posed if listening to the radio might be emotionally unhealthy as it allows someone else (a DJ) to dictate our emotions? Alternatively we concluded that a healthier choice would be to allow our emotions to run their course. So for example, when you feel angry - play angry music, when you feel happy - play happy music, and so on. Allowing our emotions to complete their cycles without interruption actually helps to reduce stress and anxiety.

Music is powerful.

Music paired with Lyrics can be transformational. That's why it is important that we are careful when choosing songs for a worship set. The music does something to people - and the lyrics have the potential to be just as damaging as they do fruitful. Great and true lyrics can establish truths in the hearts of people - whereas bad theology can just as easily take root.

When choosing songs, ask yourself a few questions, such as:

- What is this song saying? What is it's theme/point?
- Is it consistent with church/denominational doctrine?
- Is it theologically sound? (there are tons of hymns and songs with rancid theology)
- Is it me oriented or is it God oriented? (downward VS upward)

There are plenty more you could add to the list. As worship leaders, we want to instill solid and correct theological concepts in our people. If you're not sure how to answer these questions, consult your pastor or ministry supervisor - he or she should be able to point you in the right direction.

Also, don't be afraid to take the liberty to change the lyrics within a song or hymn to come inline with your standards (context). I do this often. Don't worry, the original author still gets the credit - and you get a usable song!

These concepts are good to keep in mind when writing original music as well.

Chapter 15: Unwritten

Getting Started with Songwriting & Original Music

Original music can be a powerful tool for the local church. Writing songs from *within* your specific context *for* your specific context can be absolutely transformational for the community.

During a 40 day fast at a previous church I wrote a song called, “With One Voice”. The purpose of the fast was to promote unity within the body and this song amplified our purpose. It was a home-made declaration, from us - to God. “With One Voice” never made it on the radio and it didn’t need to. It was a song for that church at that time and God used it. This leads me to my point:

Don’t try to write a hit song.

Don’t write for the masses. Beware of generic cliches. Know your context. What is God currently doing in your church? What does He want to do? Write about that. Write specifically. Plagiarize scripture. Create strong theological statements. Use fresh imagery.

Try this:

- Get some blank paper and a pen
- Set a timer for 5 minutes
- In 5 minutes - write down every name or phrase of God that you can think of

Now write a worship song without using any of those words/phrases listed. It may be a little challenging, but it will force you to find new and creative ways to describe God.

Listen to some different types of music for creative inspiration... Jonsi, Damien Rice, Bjork, The Cure... Find some music outside of your normal repertoire. Listen to the layering of melodies, harmonies, chords, lead lines, atmosphere and notice how they fall on and play off of each other. Listen to the rhythmic patterns and the unexpected surprises that make the song particularly interesting musically.

Obtain a rhyming dictionary or use a free online version. You will find a plethora of alternative words that may speak more beautifully or poignantly to your topic.

Always be on the lookout for inspiration. Street signs, billboards, a passing conversation, a sunset. When a phrase strikes you - write it down, text it to yourself, call yourself and leave a voicemail, log it away. Do the same with melodies that enter your head. As I write this, I have 20ish voice memos on my phone containing song ideas.

Some of them may make their way into actual songs. Most of them probably will not. But don't prescreen your song ideas - capture them, log them away, and revisit them frequently.

Most of all, write. Write often. Consider it a success if 1% of what you write ever makes it's way into a public setting. The more you write, the more proficient you will become at writing and identifying what works best for your writing style. Don't create just for the sake of producing a product - create because of how the process of creation changes us. Creating makes us more creative. And in creating we reflect the nature and the beauty of the Creator.

Chapter 16: Building the A-Team

Getting Started with Auditions

Building and maintaining a worship team is a vital part of being a worship leader. For smaller ministries such as house churches, or churches where a pipe organ is the only permitted instrument, this chapter may not apply. But for churches and ministries that regularly utilize volunteers on multiple instruments and/or singers in their worship services - this hopefully will be helpful.

First, decide what type of people do you want on your team? Are they humble? Teachable? Are they in love with Jesus? Is that necessary? Is part of your worship ministry giving potential team members a place to belong before they believe? How is their stage presence? Are they stiff and static? Remember, the entire team (not just the leader) sets the tone for the congregation. If your team looks bored and asleep, expect the same response from your congregation.

Heart trumps skill. Both are important and often both can be found in the same person - but if you have to choose, choose heart. Heart is humble, teachable, and thankful to be a part - skill can be unengaged, a prima-donna, and flaky.

Some ministries also choose to require that players & singers be involved in another area of service within the church in order to earn the privilege to be on stage. I'll leave that decision to you.

Conducting a Semi-Formal Audition

(one way to do it)

- Arrange to meet and ask the auditee in advance to prepare a worship song of their choice.
- Meet. Make introductions. Be warm and positive. Be unassuming - wear a cardigan if necessary.
- Ask them to perform the piece(s) they prepared.
- Assess skills important to your ministry (Can they read sheet music? Chord Charts? Are they able to pick harmonies, guitar parts, etc out of a song by listening to it? Do they have to play it as rehearsed/written - or are they able to make on-the-fly adjustments if necessary?)
- Answer any questions they may have.
- Ask any questions you may have.
- Be honest with them about their performance. It's hard to tell someone that they're no good, but it's important to be direct and speak the truth in love. Suggest other ways that they can get involved that may be more catered to their gifts.
- If they are good enough to make your cut, let them know what to expect next. Make sure you have their contact info. If you use worship planning software, let them know what to expect from that (eg. "We use an online planning tool plan our services and

schedule volunteers. You will receive requests to serve for certain dates to which you can accept or decline based on your availability. You can also block-out dates in advance that you know you'll be unavailable. You can view service plans, download chord charts & mp3's to rehearse with, etc. I'll be sending you a welcome email shortly with links to tutorials that will show you how it all works. If you have any questions, let me know.)

- Dismiss.

Conducting an Informal Audition

(Sneak Attack)

- Ask an individual or group of people if they want to get together and jam sometime.
- Setup up a jam session and evaluate people purely based on your interaction.
- Afterward, ask selected individual(s) if they'd be interested in playing in church some time.

Test Drive Audition

(Living on the Edge)

- Blindly invite someone to play/sing in a service.
- Give the sound guy a heads-up to turn them down in the house if they're terrible.
- If they rock it, ask if they'd be interested in being in regular rotation.

Mass Auditions

(The American Idol of Worship Music)

- I held mass auditions once. Never again.

There are probably a million ways to conduct auditions and ultimately you need to find or create the method that works best for you and your context.

Finding New Talent

People pop up in random places. Sometimes it's the guy that finds you in the hall - "hey, I play piano if you ever need anyone". Sometimes it's the husband throwing his wife under the bus - "she has the most incredible voice". But often, the people you want the most are the one's you never hear of. For example, I have a friend that I knew for three years before finding out that he played guitar. I drafted him and he has been an indispensable part of our team since.

Humble people tend to fly under the radar - but may be the ones that you want the most.

In addition to picking up leads on new players by happenstance, you might also make a public announcement for those who might be interested in being involved in worship ministry - perhaps annually, bi-annually, or quarterly. You may not need any more talent, but you may be surprised at the untapped resources waiting to be discovered.

Have a BBQ and invite interested parties and their families over to your house to hear your vision, interact with current team members, ask questions, etc. It will give potentially disconnected church people a way to connect and engage in the life of your church.

Ok, so what if you've tried all that and you've come to the conclusion that your church just doesn't have the talent pool? Or maybe you've managed to recruit 14 guitarists and 0 drummers. The way I see it, you have two options:

1. Make do with what you've got.

Nowhere is it written that true God-worship requires drums, a bass, a keyboard, an acoustic guitar, two electric guitars, and a background vocal. I once attended a worship gathering where the only instrumentation was a bass guitar and a saxophone. It was awesome! Don't be afraid to be original with what God has given you.

2. Craigslist.

Seriously. A buddy of mine needed a bass player at his church. He posted a volunteer bass position on Craigslist, received multiple replies - one of which became the weekly bassist as well as one of the most faithful members of his team. Be unconventional. Have fun with it.

Chapter 17: Sir Mix-A-Lot

Talking the Sound Guy's Language

Sound people are an interesting breed. Usually they are very technically-minded, adept to cause and effect, and are able to diagnose and fix problems on the fly. They are an invaluable part of our modern worship teams. But not all sound people are artists and not all artists are tech people - and an interesting dynamic can present itself when those two universes collide. Here are some tips to building a happy bridge.

Educate Yourself

Learn the technical side of things: how to run sound, how to diagnose technical issues, how to properly mic instruments, how to setup and teardown the stage. If you don't know where to start, ask for help. Your sound person will respect you if you know what you're talking about. You will be the credible glue that bonds the technical team and the music team together.

Educate Your Team

Because your technical people so easily understand the inter-workings of sound systems and cause and effect, they may too easily label some concepts as 'common sense' - such as, 'if you point your mic at the monitor - it will feed back'. It seems like common sense to them - but to your brand new vocalists who have never held a mic before - it is new information. Educating your team to be aware of the following items will keep things sailing smoothly in addition to maximizing the quality of the sound.

Microphones

Hold the mic close to your mouth when you sing. Sing at a consistent volume or move the mic closer (when you're singing quieter) or further away (when you're screaming) to compensate accordingly. Sing the same volume on every song (unless you're switching from solo to background vocals). When you check the mic, use the actual volume that you are going to sing. If you forget the lyrics or harmony part - don't sing (singing the wrong thing quieter doesn't help anyone). Don't clap the mic - if you want to clap, put the mic in a stand or clap one handed on your hip. Don't drop the mic. Don't dangle it from the cord (if there is one). When you're not singing, hold the mic in front of your stomach perpendicular to your body. Do not point it at any monitors/speakers.

Instruments

Normalize your sound. Play at consistent volume - allowing for appropriate song dynamics - but don't exaggerate them. When 5 instruments make a 5db swell, that can

compound to a 25db swell in the house which is drastic and can potentially damage people's hearing.

Electric Guitars

Because of the number of combination of effects pedals that may be involved - dynamic fluctuation can be an issue. Know your volume baseline and manage it with a volume pedal if necessary. Don't exaggerate the volume increase between clean, gain, and boost channels.

Acoustic Guitars

If you're switching between fingerpicking and strumming, keep the volumes of the two methods consistent. In band scenarios, acoustics should have very little dynamic range.

Bass

Use a compressor. It will normalize your volume, suppress harsh frequencies, and increase your sustain. Adding a quality preamp will also warm up your sound and keep it buttery-smooth.

Drums

Do whatever the sound person asks and don't forget.

A band that can play with decent dynamics will sound better because the sound person can actually focus on mixing - rather than chasing dynamic fluctuations.

Etiquette

Most of your team is focusing on one thing at a time. Your sound person is focusing on 48 things - which can be stressful. Being a decent human being will go a long way in building a fruitful relationship between the front and the back of house.

Know your sound person's name - and use it.

Instead of saying, "could I have more of my mic in this monitor?", try, "Bill, could I have more of my mic in this monitor?" Using their name, allows them to make eye contact with the person speaking and gives them an immediate context in which to operate. Without it, it becomes a game of connecting-the-request-with-the-individual-with-the-channel - which takes more time, and when multiplied by multiple requests can be stressful.

Pose requests in the form of a question.

Instead of, "I need more _____ in _____", try, "Bill, could I get more _____ in _____?" People respond more positively to questions than demands.

Say "please" and "thank you".

Old-fashioned manners are never over the top or out of style in a production environment.

Be patient.

Some changes may take a while. Watch and wait.

Smile.

Also, as with all of you worship team members - be intentional about connecting with and investing in your technical team outside of their ministry context. When people know that they are more important to you than the services they provide - you will gain their trust and loyalty.

Chapter 18: Angels in the Outfield

Knowing and Playing Your Role

God has made you a steward of your congregation - just as He made Adam a steward or *mediator* of the earth (Ps 8:6). The role you play in leading worship is essentially a mediator between God and His people. Some call it 'prophetic', some call it 'being sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading'. It's hearing what God wants to say to or do to and in His people, and then communicating it through song, scripture, spoken word, or some other form. This is why your personal prayer and devotional life are so vital to your ministry. This is why planning can only go so far. This is why leading worship is so much more than singing songs. It is both a great responsibility and a holy call. The planning and execution of worship should never be entered into lightly. We are called to more than getting people to sing songs - we are called to connect and engage people with the living God!

Do you feel inadequate? I pray so. In humility, let us surrender our own agendas and declare that God would have His way. We will be obedient and His grace will be sufficient.

Know your role. Perform your role to the best of your ability. And we will see the glory of God transform our churches and ministries.

Chapter 19: Trigger Happy

A Quick Look at Click Tracks, Metronomes & Loops

“I have perfect rhythm - it’s my metronome that keeps getting off beat.”

Those were the words that I spoke to my brother my first week at music school. I had been playing guitar and leading worship for 7 years up to that point. I was pretty awesome. Or not. Learning to play with metronome was sticky at first, but helped make me a solid player individually - which in turn helped me tremendously in band scenarios.

Practice with a metronome.

If your ministry makes use of in-ear monitoring, the rest of this chapter is for you.

In-ear monitoring allows us freedom to try new things - including using click-tracks and audio loops in a live music environment. We have the ability to hear things in our ears on stage that the congregation doesn’t.

Click Tracks

When I say ‘click track’ I’m generally referring to a metronome sound that plays through a channel on the sound board. It provides a tempo or consistent rhythm around which to build a song. Using a click track in a live music setting enables a group of musicians to play together better (finding the pocket, if you will). Playing with a click track also provides a band with creative opportunities such as, using background loops, relieving the drummer from keeping time - allowing other instruments to take lead at times, pre-recording a missing instrument to 'fill out' the sound, etc.

Loops

‘Loops’ is my general phrase to describe any prerecorded supplemental audio tracks that play concurrently with the band. In some cases it may be an actual ‘loop’, such as a 4 bar percussive beat that continually repeats until you stop it. In other cases it may be a multi-instrument backing track that plays the entire length of the song (Check out loopsinworship.com or interactiveworshiplive.com for examples). Some loops include a click-track panned to one side of a stereo track.

Getting Started

Worship teams around the world use a variety of computer applications to trigger and playback clicks & loops. Some such DAW's (Digital Audio Workstation) include: Ableton Live, Logic Pro, Digital Performer, Pro Tools, Reaper, and so on. Personally, I use Ableton Live because of it's flexibility in live performance settings and it's easy midi interfacing. I trigger it using either a Behringer FCB1010 midi foot controller or an iPhone/iPod Touch with iTM Matrix app running on my LAN. If that sounds confusing to you - here's a more simple (and affordable) way to get started:

I've created a free online tool for you called metronomer.com. It is an online metronome and click track generator. You can enter or 'tap' in tempos, select a time signature, select a click sound, and download an .mp3 in the desired length. These .mp3's can then be added to a playlist on an iPod or burned to a CD. Plug your iPod or CD player into a spare channel on your sound board, and play it like any other instrument. Insta-Click! Not sure how long your song is? Export 10 minutes worth - and just start/stop it as you need. Control it yourself or assign a point-person.

I have also seen an instance where the click was run directly off the metronomer.com website from a computer in the sound booth. Whatever works!

When and if you decide you're ready to graduate to the next level - drop me a line! I'll be glad to help!

Chapter 20: Are You Series?

Brainstorming & Making Services Memorable

How do you compete with Hollywood? Sure the church has the most important message in the world, but how does a non-profit organization with limited resources out-deliver the obscene media giants with billions of dollars?

In Chapter 11, I mentioned Seth Godin's quote, "If your target audience isn't listening, it's not their fault, it's yours." So how do we keep the most important message in the world from falling on deaf ears? With a little creativity.

Thinking Outside the Box

Some folks just live outside the box. Others must be invited out from time to time. Our ability to think outside the box is merely our ability to re-purpose and re-contextualize that which already exists. Creativity is key to making your church services memorable. In his book, "The Contrarian's Guide to Leadership", Steven Samples coins the term, 'thinking grey'. Instead of seeing everything in black & white, we create room for grey by temporarily removing convention. In a 'grey' brainstorm - anything is possible. Several years ago, Samples invented a new control for dishwashers. In his brainstorming process, he laid on his back on the living room floor, stared at the ceiling, and began to imagine the absurd: how could a newspaper control a dishwasher, or an elephant or the moon? Ultimately, the solution had nothing to do with elephants - but the process brought new perspective.

A few years ago I was hosting a workshop with about a dozen ministry-minded high-schoolers on this topic and presented them with the challenge of creating an unconventional worship service. It was an experiment in thinking outside the box. First, I went around the circle and asked for hobbies and personal interests. I chose hockey as the theme around which we would build our service. We then went back around the circle to gather ideas with the following rules: 1. Only solutions may be presented (no one is allowed to say why something wouldn't work), 2. Abandon convention. Someone would then suggest an idea and no matter how absurd it sounded, everyone else in the circle had to offer possible solutions for how it could work. We wound up with a huge list of ideas and solutions to choose from - some completely ridiculous, some mediocre, but some were revolutionary! In a matter of minutes, the proposition of a hockey worship service went from "you're kidding, right?" to "we can do this. we should do this! *when can we do this?*"

The best solutions are not the result of conventional thinking - they are the product of unbridled imagination. The process breeds new perspective.

Prematurely contextualizing solutions is a sure way to guarantee mediocre results. If you allow yourself to dream the impossible, the best possible solutions will present themselves.

By the way, I later attempted a similar experiment with a room of 40 students and adults and it was a complete disaster. Limit the size of your input group. Assemble a group large enough to have varying perspective, but small enough that every voice can be properly expressed.

Putting it on Paper

The challenge with great ideas is that they often come in pieces. Brainstorming is a non-linear, creative process which is best facilitated by non-linear tools. Documents are great for outlines - but they make for poor working visual representations. Here are two methods to assist you in your brainstorming process:

The Creative Board (thecreativeboard.com)

A creative board is a visual and interactive way to brainstorm and categorize ideas, and eventually edit and organize them into usable lists, such as series service orders. Many churches, make regular use of this method in series and event planning. As an affordable alternative to 'official' products, you can also use jumbo Post-it notes and Sharpies - available at your local office supply store.

Mind Mapping (mindmapping.com)

A mind map is a diagram used to represent words, ideas, tasks, or other items linked to and arranged around a central key word or idea. Mind maps are used to generate, visualize, structure, and classify ideas. It argues that 'traditional' outlines require that the reader scans the information from left to right and top to bottom, whilst the brain's natural preference is to scan the entire page in a non-linear fashion.

Mind mapping is a method - which can be applied to paper/chalkboard/whiteboard/etc - but there are also tons of mind mapping software applications available - paid/free, online/native. There is a list of some of the more popular ones here: <http://bit.ly/25AIOp>

Chapter 21: Velcro Brain

Tricks for Memorizing Lyrics and Chords

In chapter 7 - I talked about the importance of non-verbal communication, eye contact, and removing visual barriers/distractions such as music stands. But freedom comes at a cost and in this case, that cost is getting to know your music.

At one point in my life, I could have quoted the the movies, “Tommy Boy” and “Dumb & Dumber” word for word. Even now, I can recall a surprising amount of the dialogue. We as humans have an incredible capacity to memorize stuff. I sometimes wish that I had applied the same amount of concentration in high school on memorizing scripture as I did movies - but that’s another conversation. The point is, you and I are capable of memorizing the songs we lead in worship - so we should, when possible. Here are some tips to help you in your memorization.

Music

I have to be honest, the music is the easy part for me. I learned to play by ear and so hearing and learning new music just comes naturally to me. I hear intervals and chord phrasings and can easily duplicate and/or transpose them aurally. Of course, I did this for years before the technical side was explained to me. In college I took some music theory and the lights began to come on... “Oh, so that’s what I’ve been doing...” Learning some basic music theory helped me to put what was in my head on paper. So now when I hear the chorus of Chris Tomlin’s “Our God” for example, I hear: “vi - IV - I - V3” or in plain numbers, “6 - 4 - 1 - 5(1st inversion)” - which then can be applied within the context of any key, eg. Key: G - “Em - C - G - D/F#”. Some call this method the Nashville Number System.

I highly recommend learning a little music theory and a lot of aural theory. Once you’re able to ‘hear’ intervals and chords, and associate those with chord patterns on your instrument, it becomes a game of simple math. Check out musictheory.net for some great free lessons and exercises to help train your ear.

For the lesser-aurally inclined, try applying some of the following lyric memorization tips to the music side of things.

Lyrics

I forget lyrics. All the time. I can hum you the melody of any of the hundred's of songs in our church's repertoire - but I have to relearn the lyrics almost every time we sing a song. Here are tips for memorizing song lyrics:

Start with the Chorus (if there is one).

The chorus is usually the main point of the song - and is usually repeated multiple times throughout the song. If you can nail this, mistakes in other places become less noticeable and more forgivable.

Repetition.

Take song sections (verse, chorus, bridge) one at a time and read/sing it 4 times in a row. Every 5th time, attempt to sing it without looking - just sing the words you can remember and hum the rest. Repeat. Once you can sing a section without looking at it, add another. Apply the same repeat cycle to say, Verse 1 + Chorus. Repeat. When you're able to sing the song all the way through without looking, work on a new song for a while and then come back. When you can sing the entire set without looking. Take a break. Do something else, come back in a few hours and try again. Refresh your memory each day leading up to the worship experience.

Cues.

Take the first word/phrase of a song section - and try to sing the rest of the section without looking.

Make Associations.

As silly as it may sound, here's how I remember the order of verses to "How Great Thou Art". Verse 1 = "sky" (stars, thunder), Verse 2 = "earth" (forest, birds, trees), Verse 3 = "past" (cross, death), Verse 4 = "future" (when Christ shall come). So in my head, "sky, earth, past, future" = "up, down, back, forward" - which gives me a sense of the movement and dynamic of the song.

Visually reformat the lyrics in a way that makes it easiest for you to remember.

Capitalize the first letter of problematic words/phrases or highlight them. Colors, spacing, Bold, Italics, indentations, and Underlining words create powerful associations in our minds.

Chapter 22: Enter the Encore

Leading Worship After the Music Stops

I think singer/songwriter Shawn Groves said it best when he said, “Worship is not a song. Worship is our response to God with all that we are. It’s all that He is. All that He has done, is doing, and will do in, through us, around us, and in spite of us, but it’s not just a song. Worship is our response with all of our lives and everything that we’ve given to all that God is. So if we come to a place and raise our hands and we raise our voices but we don’t stretch our hands out when we leave this place to feed the hungry, clothe the poor, and care for the sick; then all we’ve done is worshiped a singer or a song - not a God.”

You are more than a song leader. Your role and influence should extend beyond Sunday morning. How do you inspire an otherwise self-indulged people to relentlessly give themselves away? How do you cultivate a culture of daily God-honoring worship within your church body?

Honestly, I don’t know. These questions most likely surpass your individual ministry role - but I think they are important questions to ask as a staff and church leadership team. Here are a few ideas that may be worth consideration:

Envision.

Without vision the people perish. Know the vision of God for your ministry and context. And then sell it, sell it, sell it as a mandate from heaven. You will have doubts about what God has given you to do - but establish a minimum baseline of assurance (70%? 51%) that if you feel that sure about a decision/direction - then you will pursue it wholeheartedly. Vision will change. When it does, discern it and sell it. Give people something to belong to that is bigger than themselves. Communicate the current state of the church, your vision for the future, why the church cannot stay where it is, and invite them to join you in God’s movement.

Prepare.

Prepare your people for acts of service. You have shown them the big picture - now give them a place in it. Being a part of a movement of God is more important than the part that is played, but still - everyone needs a part. Define it if necessary. Train for it if necessary. Lead the way by example. Financial sacrifice? You first. Fasting? You first. Share your experiences in humility and invite your people to join you.

Empower.

Give your blessing. Pray for them regularly. What if your members mastered the preemptive meet and greet? What if they sought out new people/families to sit next to, engage, take out to lunch and plug into the church?

Resource.

Put your money where your mouth is. Do they have the tools they need to be successful? What if your church reimbursed dinner bills for members that couldn't afford to take new families out to lunch after church? How do you best use your resources to put the hope of the gospel in the hands of the people?

Account.

Be accountable. Relentlessly pursue the highest financial standards possible. Pay for voluntary annual audits. Make your church's financial records transparently available to members. Integrity in stewardship is priceless and will protect you and serve you well for years to come.

Celebrate.

Make big deals out of big deals. Celebrate all kinds of victories. They mark progress - and progress is essential to building and maintaining momentum. Thank God for His continued faithfulness.

Chapter 23: Goodbye Bill Nye

Subjective Science: Revisiting Context

Now that you've read some of my thoughts and experiences in ministry - it should be clear that leading worship is not a science. Or is it? My hope is that you will take the principals, lessons and opinions offered in these pages and in humility, subject them to your Context. Hold on to what is good for you, your people, your church, your ministry, and leave the rest.

God has called you and your church to great things. Be who He has created you to be.

Resources

There are a multitude of ministry resources available to us these days thanks to the internet - although finding them and sorting through all the clutter can be a daunting or seemingly impossible task. I've created an online tool to assist you in finding some of these great resources. Worshipvitamin.com aims to be an ever growing database of ministry links and resources (Supplements for Your Church Services) - filtered by category and grown by community. Check it out:

worshipvitamin.com