

HOW TO EFFECTIVELY LEAD A WORSHIP MINISTRY

INTRODUCTION

Hi there, my name is Rob Major and I am excited to share with you some pointers on how to take your worship team to the next level. My objective is to take my 30 plus years of music ministry experience and observations and put together some helpful, practical tools that will give you and your worship team an opportunity to be the best and most effective you can be.

Leading anything has its challenges. Leading a team of musicians and singers can be even more challenging. We musicians and singers tend to wear our egos on our sleeves and can be easily offended given the opportunity. It's understandable because our talent is an expression of our hearts and there is a natural vulnerability that comes with that.

Let's be honest for a minute. Not every director of music is a trained professional who is part of the paid church staff. Most churches here in the US are less than 100 people in number and can't afford to hire a music pastor. So someone has to volunteer their time to head up this very important ministry.

But whether you are hired as a music director or are volunteering your time to head up the worship ministry, you can always use input and tools to help you be more effective in your position. We love when those who serve under us are "teachable" but we also must remain teachable ourselves in order to grow and expand our own boundaries as a leader. We will never "arrive" but we can still "thrive".

I want to take a look at four areas of worship ministry and impart some insights and suggestions that I believe will help you to get the most out of yourself and your team and maybe relieve some frustrations you may be having in the process.

REHEARSALS

We know that to get better at anything you have to practice, practice, practice. Being a part of a worship team requires a great commitment from people who already have busy lives. Unfortunately there is no shortcut to having a solid worship team. It takes TIME + WORK. You as a leader have to be sensitive to the value of others time and make the most of the time that you meet together.

To be the most effective I suggest that you have...

- One evening during the week to work on new material and sharpen up current songs
- One pre-service run-through to go over the song set for that service so that everyone's minds are refreshed with the song set and they have time to warm up.

Rehearsal times are not worship times. Don't use your rehearsal time to worship, use it to equip your team so that in each song every role is defined and ironed out and muscle memory is developed. Your goal is that these songs will become so natural, bypassing the mind, that they will allow everyone to worship in the most uninhibited way. With that said there may be spontaneous times when you do worship in rehearsal. The point is that rehearsal time is for the musical training that we need to become more equipped and confident as a team.

Here is a basic outline of what a good effective practice should look like:

1. Designate a start time and end time for your rehearsals. I have always felt like an hour and a half is plenty. You can always end early if you want but try not to go over your designated time.
2. As a leader you arrive earlier than everyone else and have a clear agenda that you want to accomplish.

3. Make sure everyone has the necessary tools such as sheet music or words for the practice.
4. Get started on time.
5. Open with prayer, but don't get caught up in having "Sunday School" during rehearsal times with lengthy devotions.
6. Run through one song that the team is familiar with to get everyone warmed up.
7. Now introduce a new song if you have one on the agenda or refine a song that has been troublesome.
8. Now rehearse your worship set songs making sure that any problem areas are ironed out.
9. Go back and run through your new or troublesome song again.
10. End practice officially so that team members can know that it is ok to leave now.
11. Now have fun with those who want to stay after. This is important because this is where relationships and camaraderie are built. Hang out and talk or jam a little. See if anyone wants to go and get ice cream with you. These are just examples of ways to build relationships with your team members.

INTRODUCING A NEW SONG

1. Introduce

- Send a YouTube link or an mp3 file of the song you plan on tackling to your team members.
- Also send them a pdf of the song in the key that you will be playing. You don't want your team members spending their private time learning the song in a different key than what key you will be performing it in. They won't appreciate that.

2. Personal Preparation

- You need to know the song backwards and forwards yourself before you teach a new song. You are always to be the most prepared person on your team.

3. Sheet Music

- Make sure everyone has their "Road Map" (lyrics and chords) for practice.
- Make sure that you take the extra time to map out the order of the song.

Explanation:

Most sheet music will have the basic elements of the song, such as *Intro, Verse 1, Chorus, Ending....*, listed only once

Make sure that the order of the song is clear. *Intro, verse 1, repeat verse 1, chorus, verse 2, chorus 2 times, bridge, chorus 2 times, ending.*

This can be done with abbreviations like...*I, V1, V1, C, V2, C, C (or C 2x), B, C, C, E.*

4. Teach In Sections

- Don't just play the whole song from beginning to end.
- You want the team to learn the right way the first time and not develop any habits that are contrary to your vision of the song.
- Start with the Intro and go over it again and again until everybody has his or her part down.

- Go to the next section of the song (Verse 1) and teach the in the same manner, repeating and instructing until everyone is comfortable with that section of the song.
- Keep going until all of the sections are learned to the end.
- It's ok to slow the tempo down if need be when learning the song. When everyone feels comfortable you can get it back up to the correct tempo.
- When all the sections are learned then go ahead and practice the song in its entirety stopping at any trouble points in the song that may need extra attention and then moving on.

5. Be All Ears

- When practicing any song at rehearsal time remember that you as the leader aren't there to practice for yourself. Don't get lost in your own world. You already have put the time in. You know the song. You are there to help everyone find their roles in the song.
- Always be listening for anything that is out of order in the song and when you hear something don't be afraid to stop and address it right then.

6. Introducing To The Congregation

- I've found in my experience that there are times after your first rehearsal of a new song that you all think, "Let's do it Sunday!". Its natural to be excited about a new song but often you'll find that even an hour after you "had it down" the team can have a hard time remembering their parts. That is why I suggest doing the new song one more time before you end practice after giving some space. So trust me and give it at least one more week to allow that muscle memory to be more developed. You don't want to fall flat in your debut to the congregation.

GO WITH THE FLOW

Okay its service time! You've had your midweek rehearsal and your pre-service rehearsal and the team is ready to lead the congregation in praise and worship! It is such a privilege that should never be taken lightly. What an awesome responsibility. It's a good thing that you are not left to do this in your own human strength and ability. The Holy Spirit is there to anoint you and your team and to lead and guide you.

Our role at this point is to...

- Provide an atmosphere in which people can feel safe to let their guards down and worship God in their own unique way
- Lead by example by worshiping with all our hearts.

All of the practice has done its work by creating muscle memory so that we are not having to think about words or music or harmony parts. We have PROPERLY PREPARED, setting ourselves up to reach our PURPOSE POTENTIAL.

Corporate "Praise and Worship" time in our services is not designed by God to feed His ego. Believe me He is very secure in who He is. It is not a warm-up icebreaker for service. It is not time to show off our talents. It's not a time to teach or preach to the congregation.

What it is at its core is this. It is an opportunity for unified expression through song and music to magnify and love on the greatest, kindest, most loving, caring, ultimate dad that creation has ever known! He is our protector who is always for us, in us, and desires to shine through us!

When our congregations get their minds off of themselves and, yes, even off of us as worship leaders and musicians, and on God and His amazing attributes, that is where and when their awareness of God's presence becomes tangible and their faith and confidence in Him soar.

With that said here are some things to consider to create an uninterrupted flow in your time of praise and worship:

1. Smile

- Smile and greet the congregation. Get all the small talk out of the way up front. Whether it is an announcement or something on your heart that may set the tone for worship. Don't talk too much! 30 seconds to 2 minutes is plenty. Musicians can play in the background while you are speaking.

2. Move It

- Then move on to your worship set. Remember, keep the flow going so when one song ends start the next.

3. Shhh

- Don't spend a lot of time in between songs talking. Don't feel like you have to "set up" the next song or tell everybody what it means. There may be exceptions but the rule is keep that flow going.
- Your objective should be that you do not want to interrupt their attention on God by demanding it back to you. Let them keep their focus on Him. The song will speak for itself, in fact what that song may speak to you may be totally different than what the Holy Spirit may want to speak to them. So don't box the song in but let it breathe and have freedom to do its work in them.

4. Listen

- You've made your plan now count on the Lord to direct your steps. Listen to the Holy Spirit and try to keep up with Him. If you feel led to sing the 2nd verse again even though you didn't practice it that way then do it. Make sure you communicate where you are going to your worship team so that they will know what is going on. Something simple like just saying, "Let's do that verse one more time" is clear and simple and keeps whoever is displaying the words on the same page as well. You may even be led to do a song that wasn't on the list. If that is where the Holy Spirit is leading then don't be afraid to take that detour. The payoff may be huge as in moments like this that song may do a special work in many that God wanted to do just through your obedience.

5. Pray

- When worship time is over close out in prayer which, again, is keeping everyone's attention on God and staying in the flow.

A SPIRIT OF EXCELLENCE

When we observe the life of Daniel in the Bible we see a young man who had an incredible anointing on his life and enjoyed favor and success. In the midst of physical oppression and captivity Daniel rose to the top and whenever he faced hopeless, impossible dilemmas God defended him in miraculous ways.

There is one phrase that stands out to me about Daniel. There was a "spirit of excellence" found in him. If there is one thing that gets God's attention and invokes His favor it is a spirit of excellence. He is a God of excellence and he appreciates when we take on our Daddy's characteristics.

Excellence is something that is developed and not a natural trait of the flesh. It takes discipline. It takes a passion to not settle for good enough. It always produces fruitful results wherever it is applied.

So what are some practical ways that we can apply excellence to our worship ministry team?

1. Lead By Example

- You as a leader have to be committed to be the most prepared and hardest working member of your team. Be the first person early to practice and the last to leave. Everything rises and fall with leadership.
- As we talked about earlier, make the most out of those rehearsals. Set the example to work hard and not settle for good enough but to strive for the best your team can be.

2. Develop

- Nurture the gifts in others. Don't think that you have to be the only one who leads. Raise up your team so if you're on vacation nothing skips a beat. Release responsibility slowly to others according to their ability.

3. Screen

- Be clear up front about your expectations of your team members before someone wants to join the team. This may scare some off but it is better to lay down those expectations on the onset than to try to incorporate them after the fact.
- Audition every new prospect as well as interview them. Don't just let anyone on the team. There is a skill set that is required for music. Not everybody (actually I should say few) are gifted in this area.
- Attitude outweighs talent. Give me a super talented person with a negative, critical attitude and a semi talented person who is helpful and loyal and I will pick the latter every single time. Believe me the saying is true....one bad apple can spoil the bunch.

4. Throw Away The Road Map

I saved this one for last because I really want to spend a little time here. This one will probably be the hardest for most teams but if you

can make it happen it will be hugely rewarding. But know that there is no condemnation if you just are not there yet.

I am talking about sheet music and lyrics.

Hear me out please. I see chord charts and lyric sheets as a means to an end. They are helpful in getting everyone on the same page when learning a new song or maybe recalling an old one. But the goal should be that everyone memorize the songs until they become what I always refer to as “muscle memory”. What I mean by muscle memory is that you don’t have to really even think about those chords or those lyrics anymore. They just naturally flow out of you.

When you are singing and/or playing from muscle memory there is a freedom that you will experience to worship and praise that will not be there if you are bound to cues from a screen or piece of paper. Also your stage presence as a team will be much more engaging with the congregation as you lead them.

Here are some pointers on how to make this happen:

- When you are teaching a section of the song, start out with the music and lyrics but at some point have the team put them away, For example go through the first Verse 3 times then have them put the music away or just not look at it for the rest of the time. I think you’ll be surprised at how quickly they will begin to memorize.
- If you have the music in front of you as a musician all the time you will always use it as a crutch and you will not memorize.
- All singers should have no problem memorizing lyrics. We do it all the time with songs on the radio. But musicians on the other hand are at various levels. Don’t make a musician memorize if they just can’t but also don’t let them off the hook of continually trying. They will grow leaps and bounds as a musician if you challenge them because chord progressions and patterns will start making sense to them rather than just regurgitating what is written.

CONCLUSION

My heart as a worship leader has always been for me and my team to be a bridge that others can cross to meet with God and sense His presence with raw heartfelt expressions of awe, admiration and love.

My hope is that God would use this article to encourage, inspire and challenge you to be more effective and successful in your ministry.

If you want to correspond you are welcome to email me at **rob@rgmrecording.com**.

God bless!

Rob Major