GREAT WORSHIP LEADERS

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Another call has come in. "We're looking for a worship leader; can you help us?" Often, the pastor calling is looking for someone with a defined skillset, a refined character and an inclined heart toward transplanting to their church location. Most times, the request is coupled with a caveat that the pay is minimal or non-existent, the worship leader must be willing to move to their area, find a job, and voluntarily lead worship. However, at other times, the church is prepared to pay someone, either part-time or full-time, to be their worship pastor. In these cases, my list becomes shorter, and I look for the qualities and experience that mark those I consider to be "Great Worship Leaders."

As a trainer of new worship leaders, I make it my goal to reinforce the key skill-set and essential soul-set necessary for a worship leader – in any type of church environment – to be a prime candidate pursued in one of these phone calls. Whether a postmodern church experiment or an established congregation is on the line, there are certain qualities that run like a thread through the lives of consistently effective and authoritative worship leaders. Here are just a few:

Passion always leads

Great Worship Leaders... are consistent.

Anyone can lead a great worship moment every once in awhile. The strongest worship leaders have a knack for consistently leading worship, in small groups, large groups, conferences, etc., in an effective and meaningful way.

Great worship leaders have learned how to build a worship set in a consistent and systematic way, without feeling like they're quenching the Spirit of God if they prepare well.

Great worship leaders know how to make the lion's share of a set out of songs that are fresh yet familiar, God-centered and easily engaged by all age groups.

Great worship leaders know how to let the songs lead worship and give the worshiper language for worship. They feel no pressure to say-a-lot or pray-a-lot to keep energy flowing.

Great Worship Leaders... are equippers.

The most appreciated worship leaders have a streak of a trainer and mentor running through them. They are not content to have the platform all to themselves over a few years. They are always looking for those they can train, mentor and release, either inside or outside of that local congregation. They are secure in the gift they offer, and in the face of the gifts that others offer.

Great worship leaders know how to enjoy the process of building lifelong friendships with developing worship leaders – particularly those who value their input and share like-mindedness on key levels.

Great worship leaders know how to mentor over time, without feeling any pressure to release people to lead worship before they are developed musically, emotionally or skillfully.

Great worship leaders know how to become older brothers and sisters in worship leading, and not to simply protect themselves in the "always-leading" worship leadership role.

Great Worship Leaders... are pastoral.

These worship leaders have a wider skillset than just playing an instrument, leading worship and leading a band. Most churches cannot afford such a limited capability in a new staff member. Most pastors and leaders I know are looking for worship leaders stirred by Kingdom passion, and motivated by pastoral love for the church.

Great worship leaders actually care for, and shepherd, their worship teams.

Great worship leaders "pastor" the congregation as they lead worship. It is clear to the church that the worship leader is not primarily in front to express his or her musical preferences in worship.

Great worship leaders know when to ask someone to join a team, because their hearts are right, and how to ask someone to take a break because their hearts are askew from the central mandate of the team – to serve.

Great Worship Leaders... are proficient.

Worship leaders who play their instrument well have a much longer sustainability factor within a changing congregation than do those who are weak technically and cannot handle a diversity of demographic or need in a local community.

Great worship leaders are able on their instrument. They are not always the most proficient musician on the team; in fact, they are sometimes the least! However, they can lead the band confidently with what they do know.

Great worship leaders have just enough arranging ability to take a rag tag team, intuitively know what songs they can pull off smoothly, and what songs they simply cannot, and make them sound sweet together in simple arrangements.

Great worship leaders practice privately, and keep their own chops up personally or with lessons.



Great Worship Leaders... understand authority.

These worship leaders understand what mutual submission is all about. They recognize the mantle that the lead pastor carries for the congregation, and they do all they can to defer to, and support, that leader.

Great worship leaders know how to honor time limits, ask teachable questions, and share the pastor's vision for the church in song selection and event preparation.

Great worship leaders do not push their way into worship leading or orther roles – they offer their gifts, and then allow God to make a place for them to lead. They are not pushy or forceful – they are centered, and full of trust in God to make a place for their leadership.

Great worship leaders graciously receive input, and even pursue it – especially from the lead pastor and common (non-musical) worshipers in the congregation.

Great Worship Leaders... are passionate.

The passionate will always lead, no matter the sphere or situation. Inspiring worship leaders carry a blend of passion and restraint in their toolbox. The leader's hunger for God, evidenced in an honest and vulnerable worship leading style, is irreplaceable, and evident to all. Many dispassionate worship leaders are hired because their musical skill level can cover up for a lack of personal passion as a worshiper. At the same time that passionate worship is the hallmark of their leadership, great worship leaders are very keen in knowing when to push the envelope in worship, and when to hold back, even when their own emotions are running high.

Great worship leaders are exhuberant, without becoming cheerleaders. In other words, they approach the moment of worship with enthusiasm, yet that enthusiasm is tempered with gentleness and a lack of need to generate outward emotion to feel that they've done their job.

Great worship leaders can separate their personal emotional state from what the moment calls for in the group they are leading (I don't know that this art is learned by any other mode than longevity in worship leading experience).

Great worship leaders love God and the secret place, and worship frequently, for extended times, on their own.

This is an abbreviated look at the key qualities to be sought after as we develop into the most effective lead worshipers we can be. Make it your vision to be the most effective worship leader you know, making it easy for the heart cry of the community of God to find its way out of their hearts through the music of worship, and before the One they love. Then, train others around you to seek greatness in the same high calling.



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