10 Ways To Improve Your Worship Leading

by Mark Cole

1. Study under a great worship leader

This is the best way to learn and it can take on many forms. Jesus used this method to teach His disciples. His disciples ministered alongside Him for three years and then He sent them out to do it for themselves.

If you have a good mentor in your church, watch them and learn from them. In this situation you can watch them in weekly rehearsals and Sunday worship times. Study what makes them successful and learn from their strengths and weaknesses.

If you're not blessed with a good mentor in your local church, search out a mentor. This can take many forms. You can go to worship conferences and watch the leaders and attend their classes. You can go to local worship events and watch leaders. You can attend other churches, as the opportunity arises, and note what each church does well (and not so well). You can also check out YouTube videos of worship leaders and note their different styles and ways of leading.



2. Make worshipping God a daily part of your life

Anything that you do daily, you improve on. Spending time with God on a daily basis is a basic prerequisite for being a worship leader. This should include daily time reading your Bible. My habit has been to read a Psalm and a Proverb every day and I use a daily reading plan that takes me through the whole Bible each year. Here is a link to the plan that I am currently using. It gives Old Testament and New Testament daily readings in a chronological order in the New Living Translation: Bible Reading Plan

Reading the whole Bible every year will give you an overview of how God works in people's lives. I have read the Bible through every year for the last thirty plus years and God's Word still speaks to me daily. The Bible has a way of being relevant for the situation that you are going through right now.

Another important part of spending time with God is in prayer. A well-known pastor once said that the key to his prayer life was 'I pray and I obey'. The key to prayer is finding out what God wants you to do and doing it.

As you spend time with God daily, you will know Him better and love Him more. And your passion for worshipping Him will increase. The best worship leaders worship God much more privately then they do publicly. Your public ministry should only be the tip of the iceberg.

3. Learn the great worship songs

There are great worship songs coming from all over the earth. There has never been a better time to learn worship songs. We now have access to great songs and recordings from around the world. We now have websites that are full of the great songs that God is using.

Learn the old songs and the new songs. **Memorize** these songs. Find the songs that God's Spirit is resting on. Find the songs that are blessing the nations.

Side note: You are so much more effective when you memorize your music. Nothing is worse than seeing a worship leader and band with their heads stuck in the music stand. The congregation and the Lord deserves our full attention!

A great place to find the strongest worship songs is to look at the lists that CCLI (Christian Copyright Licensing International) has compiled. They track the songs that are sung in many countries around the world. Check out their new SongSelect Top 200 songs list. It's a great list of current songs.

For more info on picking strong worship songs, check out my blog: What I've Learned About Picking New Songs For Worship

4. Understand the progression of worship

Psalms 100:4 says '*I will enter His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise.'* God likes it when we come before Him with singing. One of the most common ways to begin a worship service is with songs of thanksgiving.

These songs are often songs that are sung about God as opposed to songs that sing directly to God. They are often (but not exclusively) faster songs that are more praise orientated. It often takes time for the general congregation to get warmed up in a worship service and starting with thankful upbeat songs is often the best way to start a service.

People often come to services with their minds on anything but God. A leaders responsibility is to help everyone focus on why they really came to church in the first place. Our main purpose is to meet God. Having a progression in the worship service can help people set aside other distractions and focus on God.

The progression of songs often goes from general upbeat songs that talk about God and give thanks to Him to songs that talk directly to God. When we sing songs that talk directly to God we are beginning the progression toward worshipping Him. The term 'Praise and Worship' indicates that general trend of going from praise songs about God to worshipping God directly.

It's also important to keep your focus on the Lord as you lead. There are so many things to distract you from your main purpose of worshipping God. That's why it is so important to really know the music ahead of time so the music doesn't become a distraction. If you watch the great worship leaders, they are focused on the main purpose: worshipping God!

For more on this check out my blog: 7 Tips On Taking Your Sunday Morning Worship To The Next Level

5. Understand the importance of worship in the Bible

The book of Psalms, the largest book in the Bible, is a songbook. There are songs sprinkled throughout the Bible. Some of the greatest men of God were songwriters. Moses, David and Solomon were among the most prolific.

God is looking for people to worship Him. In John 4:23-24, Jesus said '*But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as those to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."*

God loves worshippers. King David was called a 'man after God's own heart'. He was also one of the chief songwriters of the Bible and a man who loved to worship God. In spite of his failures, his desire was to be close to God and worship was one of the best ways for him to express that.

Worship and specifically, musical worship is important to God. Never underestimate what God can do through anointed musicians and great songs of worship.

For more on this subject, check out my blog: What I've Discovered About Worshipping God ~ Part 1

6. Learn a musical instrument

Most worship leaders play an instrument. It is not a prerequisite but it is of great help. The two main instruments for a leader are the guitar and the keyboard. Piano generally takes longer to be proficient at, so I suggest that people who take up an instrument later in life should take up the guitar. Obviously the earlier in life that you start playing an instrument, the better chance you have at being proficient at it.

I have written a whole blog on this subject: How To Learn A Musical Instrument

Another great way to learn is just to listen and copy the worship songs that you want to learn. Take it note by note, chord by chord and learn to listen what the keyboard or guitar player is playing. This is often the most effective way of learning once you get past the basic playing level of an instrument. Copying the players on professional recording will teach you better rhythm and help you learn a variety of styles. It will also help develop your ability to play by ear.

7. Learn to sing to the best of your ability

Singing is a big part of leading. You do not have to be an awesome singer to lead worship but the more acceptable your tone, pitch and vibrato is, the less distracting it is to the congregation. The opposite can also be true, great singers sometimes do not make good worship leaders. They are often too busy vocalizing to facilitate the average singer in the congregation.

Leaders should generally just sing the melody. The leaders voice is usually highest in the vocal mix and if you sing harmonies it will often throw off weaker singers in your congregation. It is ok to throw in an ad lib

occasionally but do not let it become a distraction. Learning to ad lib in the various musical forms is an art form, use good taste and discretion and listen to recordings of yourself frequently.

Check out my blog on this subject: What I've Learned About Improving Your Singing

8. Learn a variety of different styles of songs

Variety is the spice of life. A congregation appreciates variety. The tastes of most congregations represent a huge spectrum of music. Pop, rock, rhythm and blues, country, folk, Irish, classical, ballade, Jewish, gospel and alternative are among the many styles that can be used in worship services. Putting the right style with the right song can bring the song to life. Learning new styles, rhythm feels, chord progressions and voicings is a great way to grow musically. Don't get stuck in a rut.

Music is constantly changing and we should grow and change with it. God is not limited to a style. Classical styled worship music is not more spiritual then pop or rock styled worship music. It's the lyrics and heart of the musicians that define the spiritual depth of a song.

9. Learn to communicate in front of your congregation

Effective communication comes in many forms. The way we speak, act and dress, all communicate volumes to our congregations. Learning to speak in public is hard for many people. Polls indicate that speaking in public is many person's greatest fear. Worship leaders are not required to speak volumes but the right word at the right time is very effective. Worship leaders should always remember that they aren't the preacher. Some of the most effective worship leaders speak very little.

Learn to overcome such problems as stuttering or talking too fast. Learn to speak clearly and succinctly. Learn good grammar and don't get in the habit of using to many clichés. Saying 'Amen' and 'Hallelujah' every second word usually shows insecurity on the part of the speaker.

Humility in a worship leader is of paramount importance. You cannot fake humility,
or at least not for very long. Your body language will speak volumes to the congregation. If they see a worship leader and team who are totally yielded to and passionate about God, they will be more open to that leadership. Leading with a humble spirit but with authority is an important balance in effective leadership. People can usually tell when you're just 'going through the motions' and when you are truly passionate about God.

The style of clothing that you wear is also relevant to the message that you are sending your congregation. The question to ask is 'What fits best in this situation?' and 'What will be the least distracting from my main message of glorifying God?' The key is to be relevant to the congregation that you are leading. Don't let your clothes be a distraction for your ministry. My general rule of thumb is to do the dressy style of what that the general congregation comes to church in.

10. Learn to work well with your pastor

A church will only rise to the level of its pastor. If your Pastor is a worshipper, the church will soon follow. Developing a good working relationship and understanding between the worship leader and the pastor is extremely important. If they do not share the same vision, the vision will not get accomplished. They will always be pulling in different directions.

I have found it to be helpful to meet at least once a week with the Pastor to review the last Sunday's services and to plan for the next week and weeks to come. It is also good to meet occasionally in informal situations (coffee, lunch, sports activities, etc.) to continue to develop a good relationship. The Senior Pastor and the

Worship Leader are usually the most visible in public ministry. Their ability to compliment each other can be a powerful asset. If they do not work together well, then the opposite can be true.

There are a number of ways that a Pastor can facilitate worship in a church. One of them is by regularly teaching on it. The Bible is full of great passages on worship. If the Pastor is not comfortable teaching on the subject, there are a number of good books on the subject from which to gather resource material.

Another important way for a Pastor to facilitate worship is to model it. If the Pastor is a wholehearted worshipper, the congregation will take their cue from him. These days the Lead Pastor does not generally sit on the platform. But, I believe it is still important for them to be passionate worshippers wherever they sit in the congregation.

Worship leading is a great privilege and challenge. It is great to be able to point people to God through worship. Learn to grow in your singing, playing and leading. Learn to hear God's Spirit as you lead. Be passionate in your love relationship with God and for the people in your worship team and congregation.

Question: What has helped you improve your worship leading? What areas are you working on in your worship leading?

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The article above and many additional insights may be found on Mark's blog at http://markcole.ca/

Check out Mark's new book - "Leading Worship ~ Notes from a Grand Adventure" available in Kindle or Soft Cover Editions. This is a great gift for the musician or worshipper in your life.