What Do I Do About 'Suzy'…? By Sheri Gould

As I travel around the country and teach at various vocal workshops and conferences, I often get this tricky question…

"What do I do about 'Suzy'….?"

Here's the problem in a nutshell. "Suzy" insists on being the center of attention in one way or another. "Suzy" will constantly attempt to sing louder, or grab more solo parts or "improvise" in a way to INSURE that she gets solo time. She will even try to "fake out" the sound person during a sound check by singing very lightly, and then let it rip during the actual worship time. Sometimes "Suzy" will have a really strong vibrato that overpowers everyone else on the team so that she is insured of getting extra attention.

Does any of this sound familiar? I have had to deal with this type of person and it can be tricky. I'm going to attempt to deal with this sensitive subject by offering some practical solutions.

1. Make sure you have addressed the *basics of blending* first.

There are many ways to help blend, such as curtailing any unnatural vibrato, shaping vowels properly and uniformly, adjusting personal volume levels etc. Reiterate the concept of listening to one another, keeping in mind that if you can't hear the other singers in your group, that you are likely TOO loud. Also incorporate acappella singing. Anyone who sticks out will become VERY obvious once the music is removed and only voices are heard. Acappella singing is also very useful for tuning up your harmonies as well.

Sometimes this will be enough to solve the problem providing the *attitude* is not the real issue. But along with blending our voices, our attitudes need to be shaped as well. We, as worship leaders/singers, are on the front line, so to speak, spiritually. Think of Joshua's wall and whom God sent out first! We are in the position to help tear down walls and strongholds and set the right atmosphere for God's presence to be welcomed into our congregations. However, we are ALSO in the place to *thwart* this effort and *quench* God's Holy Spirit. If after attempting to solve the issue by working on the academics of vocal blending you still don't have the mix you want, then perhaps attitude *is* the problem and here are some suggestions.

2. Take time to pray together as a team.

This sounds like a no-brainer, but I assure you what happens too many times on a Sunday morning is that people rush through their set, then wave a quick "Lord God please make up for our lack of preparation" prayer and off they go. This is NOT the kind of prayer I'm talking about. I'm talking about a **dedicated** time of prayer. This is to be a time set aside for nothing else, save possibly some worship time, which I'll get into later. Plan a time when you can all get together for this purpose and do not make it optional. If you have a person on your team that has a bad attitude it will likely show up right here. If they are unwilling to pray together with the team, than here is a simple way for them to take themselves off the team. By making the prayer time mandatory they have a choice. Anyone who has ever been a part of a prayer group knows that a special bond begins to form amongst the members. This is just what your worship team needs. Attitudes of pride can melt into attitudes of compassion and caring.

3. Consider adding times of fellowship together as a team.

In addition to prayer times and practice times, try tacking on some fun times of fellowship. This can also help to build the team

spirit that you want. You might want to consider what one group shared with me this year: they have a dinner once a month with their worship team. This could be tagged onto a practice or prayer time to consolidate nights out.

4. Be sure to worship together as a team.

Again, I'm not talking about 20 min before the service starts or once the service begins. I'm talking about when no one else is there to hear you except the One you are serving. Suddenly attitudes are different when the "performance" aspect is removed. This is not to be a "practice", this is REAL WORSHIP. Is there such a thing as "practice worship"!? Or what we so lovingly call "Worship Practice"? I say NO! Never engage in this yourself, make sure that you truly worship given the opportunity. This is a separate thing from practicing the music per se, this is truly engaging in corporate worship as a team. This type of thing could easily be incorporated into the end of your normal practice time, just set aside an extra half hour or so to simply relax in the songs you have chosen or just freely worship with instruments and singing in the spirit.

If you are not the worship leader, this is a suggestion you can prayerfully, lovingly and humbly make to your leader. Time is typically an issue for most people these days and many times leaders are fearful that they'll lose people if they start to require more of them. In many cases there are NO requirements at all to be on a worship team or choir. I think this is a big mistake. In my experience any team worth being on is one worth working for, and once you've established a standard, people will want to rise to that level. People will be drawn to something that is of quality.

For years I was the director of a musical production company for children. We would put on evangelistic musicals in local high schools after hours. In keeping with the idea that the gospel is free, I felt compelled to offer these programs at no charge. However, even though we put on quality productions, when people heard the word FREE they thought NOT WORTH MUCH. We found ways to work around this by printing up tickets and requiring them for entrance and various other things, but I have seen over the years that where nothing is required to gain a thing, that thing tends to be valued very little. In the same way, once you start to make requirements such as prayer times and more extended times of worship/practice, people begin to perceive the value of the being in the group as higher since the price to be in the group is higher. In my experience, churches that implement stricter standards for participation in their music groups typically have people waiting in line to be a part of their groups. Besides, I've always maintained that I'd rather have two committed people on my team then ten who aren't.