

Many churches have a serious problem attracting and keeping volunteer musicians. Let's face it, getting a team of musicians to show up to church and play music at 8AM on a Sunday can be a challenge. Usually there is sub-par monitoring, messy stages and lots of mind numbing songs to boot. Sometimes there are a series of unclear religious rules for stage and life we have to follow. Musicians can be under challenged or over challenged. We just can't seem to convince people it's worth it! For years I struggled as a worship leader making it happen every week. About 10 years ago we made some significant changes in our worship culture. Now, in our church (125-175 attendance) we have 4 bands, 4 sound techs, 6 main stage worship leaders, and waiting lists for all positions. It's a wonderful blessing! Here are 5 quick hacks for attracting (and keeping) quality volunteer musicians at your church:

1. BUILD YOUR BASE

Consider offering one or more weeks of FREE 101 drum and guitar lessons after church. Worst case, you will be planting seeds for the future – best case, someone will probably show up you had no idea already played. People are loyal to the ones who teach them.

Don’t forget the 12-20 year old demographic hiding in your church, they have tons of time and are better than you think. We have a ninth grade home schooler that shreds a Hammond B3 organ, a sixth grader playing percussion and retired dudes on bass.

Don’t say people’s “no” for them, share vision and ask if they would like to try it out for a season. Look through your church directory and Facebook page to explore new recruits you might have missed or forgotten.

2. EASY ENTRY

Many churches have a series of hoops you need to jump through to get on the stage. I understand there being a higher standard for those with microphones (especially worship leaders) but I always wonder why church leadership puts so many obstacles in the way of those who could hold guitars vs. people who hold babies or doors? When someone expresses interest in playing, make an IMMEDIATE one on one appointment to jam. Getting together with a

musician for 45 minutes and playing through a few popular worship songs, talking about their faith walk etc… will tell you what you need to know. Offer to let them TEST DRIVE ASAP, no pressure or commitment. Let's make music!

3. INSPIRING GEAR

If you have don't have a nice functional keyboard sitting on the stage don't expect that a world class, Christ loving keyboard player will be attracted to your worship ministry. In fact they might assume you're not a "keyboard kind of church". This applies for all areas. If you have a $2500 Nord Stage Piano or a beautiful Club Date Ludwig Drum set collecting dust on the stage, musicians might be inclined to ask "why the heck is no one is using that beautiful instrument??!!" Great gear attracts great musicians. Sub-par gear that is out of date or in disrepair frustrates creative momentum. Hate to say it, but if your sound system and sound stinks, most great musicians will not be attracted to your church.

4. SEAMLESS ADMINISTRATION

Many worship leaders pride themselves on sloppy admin, blaming it on the creative spirit. To quote worship leader Randy McCoy "Bad administration hurts people!" Without great, consistent structure, your worship musician culture will likely fade.

Give everyone on your team a simple job description (Sample Job Description). This tells them what to expect and lets them know if they are "winning". If there is a problem you can always go back to this pdf you emailed them.

Give everyone on your team a schedule months in advance and be consistent sending it out. Sample Worship Schedule. In general, schedule people less even if you need them; everyone should be begging to play more. The space on the stage will create demand; otherwise potential musicians might assume you've got it covered.

Provide transposed mp3's and chord charts no later than 3 days before practice or event. A bunch of random YouTube videos will not cut it. I use and LOVE Worshipteam.com. Expect them to arrive with the songs ready to go, otherwise they will inevitably fall to your low expectations.

5. GIVE AWAY CONTROL

As the worship leader, you only have a finite amount of time. If you want to expand your influence exponentially, develop more worship leaders that can also recruit and train new musicians. In other words, train people how to recruit. Get off the stage and champion the "B Team" so they sound as good as your "A Team". Make extra church keys, give away passwords and increase the pool of people that can use the stage.

Bonus Tip: PRAY

Whomever you need, ask God to bring them! Share with the pastor and elders. Often I pray something like this out loud in our staff meetings: “God will you bring world class musicians to our church? Bring my replacement. Bring resource to this ministry. Bring diversity. Bring more gifted players. Give us waiting lists for all our teams!”

Bonus Tip: WORSHIP SONGWRITING

One of the main perks of playing music in our church is the reward of making NEW music. Every musician plays a role week after week contributing to the production of our original songs.

Bonus Tip: HAVE FUN

Throughout the year make celebration a priority. Gather at parks, homes and coffee shops to say thanks and share vision. Not everyone will come, but it will pay off over time. Share with the team the praise you hear from the people. Most of our teams do not hear all the encouragement we hear.



My name is Mike O'Brien and I am passionate about teaching and mentoring through music. My calling is to use my experience as producer, worship leader, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist to come alongside musicians, helping them more fully worship God with their instrument and lives. Find out more how I can help your worship leaders and teams HERE.