Lessons from Churches of 50 and 5000



Over the past 18 months, I have served fifty-plus churches as a worship team trainer and guest worship leader. I've noticed some interesting trends in worship ministries that are healthy, growing, and happy.

These observations have little to do with the quality of liturgy or congregational worship experience, but are more of a peek under the administrative hood. It is not exhaustive; it's just a list of markers I have noticed.

FOUR behaviors of thriving worship ministries:

1. THEY CONSISTENTLY (and uniformly) SCHEDULE THEIR VOLUNTEERS

Most churches have multiple worship leaders. If you have three worship leaders and three different ways of administering bands, you will drive your volunteers crazy. There should be one system that everyone adheres to. If possible, try to implement the SAME system across the board for all volunteers so families can serve in multiple areas of the church without confusion.

- Pick a System – There are several ways to let people know when they are serving at church. Planning Center Online is the king, however, you can also look at worshipteam.com and others. You might use a mix of online tools and simple PDF attachments to email. Your system should have a way to communicate seasonally (1-4 months at a time), weekly (hey, you're on this week), and the day of service (hey, you're on today). Provide schedules at least 1 month before the start of the schedule. (i.e. the January schedule is emailed November 30th etc.).

- Do not avoid creating a system because one volunteer doesn't use email or Facebook. Those people either need to yield to the agreed method or you can build a secondary system for them. Either way, there should be a system to reach everyone.

- Once a healthy method for communication is in place, don't constantly change your methodology. You will build trust with consistency, which is measured in years, not months.
- Raise heck when your system is ignored or amended by well-meaning, creative people. Consistency breeds faithfulness (and more drummers).

2. THEY HAVE SYSTEMS FOR SONGS

Every local church is marked by the songs they sing. In this day and age, the song is the most prominent means of gospel delivery and discipleship. There is a virtual sea of thousands of worship songs for the choosing. Instead of pulling from that potential sea, great worship leaders work from a pool of songs. New songs are added with care and intentionality and are not adopted via the affections of one particular worship leader. Your pool of songs can live on a Google Doc or similar online database. It should be editable and list active, potential, and retired songs.

"Instead of pulling from a bottomless SEA of songs, great worship leaders work from a small POOL of songs."

Churches that sing the same songs over and over again have a more active engagement in worship than churches that have no congruent songs week-to-week. If worship leaders and musicians are bored to tears with songs that

means the congregation is just getting to know them. Keep in mind many people only come to church once a month!

3. THEY HAVE COMPELLING + ORGANIZED ENVIRONMENTS

Where is a sharpie? Are we seriously out of 9 Volts? My mic stand is holding on by a prayer.

The stage, backstage, and soundboard areas should be clean and labeled so a variety of workers can function with ease. Growing organizations are constantly inviting new people to “play” and there should be physical spaces that are hospitable to newbies. Your faithful volunteers too should have what they need to do what has been asked of them.

All areas (seen and unseen) should be stripped, cleaned and reorganized throughout the year. Old moldy cups of coffee and nests of cables communicate that you don’t care and you will repel some creative personalities.

The quality of the church drum set and vocal mics will tell me all I need to know about the value of worship in any given church. Great gear attracts great servant artists.

4. THEY SAY “THANK YOU” IN A VARIETY OF WAYS

In the heart of every volunteer (and staff member) is the question: “Does what I do matter?” Great leaders are consistently encouraging and rewarding those that are serving on their teams. EVERYONE has a different language of love and you might need to ask your volunteers directly, “How can I say thank you?” Here are the essential methods:

- Public Praise (from the pulpit, from a Facebook post) - **FREE**
- A Written Note - **FREE**
- A Thoughtful Gift
- A Gathering (quality time and/or fun)
- A Specific Word of Encouragement - **FREE**

Healthy volunteer cultures are immersed with recognition, thanks and encouragement.



My name is Mike O’Brien and I am passionate about teaching and mentoring through music. My calling is to use my experience as a 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.