THE
ESSENTIALS
IN WORSHIP
TOOLKIT



4 WAYS
TO READ YOUR CONGREGATION AS YOU LEAD WORSHIP

worshiptraining

INTRODUCTION

How do we read our congregation as we lead worship?

How do we gauge or assess what's going on in our congregation as we engage in our gathered worship experiences together?

Are there things we can see, hear, or intuit as we're leading worship that can help us in our quest to lead our congregation more effectively into more meaningful worship experiences?

INTRODUCTION

1. Take Their Temperature
2. Listen To Their Chat
3. Open Up Your Eyes
4. Invite Selective Feedback



WAY 1 - TAKE THEIR TEMPERATURE

Take their temperature.

How do we take the temperature of our congregation in worship? Well, body temperature is a measure of health in a human system – and we can learn much about the health of our "worship system" by doing some informal diagnostics.

Firstly, document your own observations about the health of your congregation's worship life. Does there seem to be engagement and connection? Anticipation and a lifting of faith when we gather to worship? Secondly, talk to a variety of members of the congregation – especially those who won't tell you exactly what you want to hear. Ask them for their answers to those same questions, and let them know you are listening by taking notes. Thirdly, talk to pastors and leaders around you, asking, "Where do you see our community in terms of its 'worship health,' and in terms of its spiritual life in the gathered worship setting?"

Ask for brutally honest feedback from the leaders in your church. Then take the time to find out why they feel the way they do. You can make better decisions for growth and health when you have some honest feedback to go on. Don't simply judge your congregation's worship health by outer appearances – we can't always read what's going on in the room based on the congregation's reactions or facial expressions. We don't want to subtly push people to outwardly express themselves in worship so we feel better – especially when so many other healthy experiences could be going on underneath the surface.

WAY 2 - LISTEN TO THEIR CHAT

Listen to their chat.

Listen closely to the conversations your community is having about the service. Listen to the buzz going on inside the church building as they're gathering for worship. Eavesdrop in the foyer (when appropriate), listening for the tone of mutual connection folks are feeling.

Is there expectation as people arrive? Is there a sense of anticipation about what's about to happen? Is there a "buzz," or some form of palpable energy as people gather?

Keep in mind that buzz alone is not always a good indicator of anything, because true, rich, meaningful worship is sometimes happening in beautiful ways in the interior life of our congregation. That engagement is not always expressed in obvious ways.

Feel for the sense that "we are here to meet with God, and we understand that the opportunity is in front of us." While there is no one, foolproof way to read our congregation, we can always learn something by paying attention.

WAY 3 - OPEN UP YOUR EYES

Open up your eyes.

We've established that we can't always see everything that is going on in our congregation in worship. But sometimes we are able to get a read on the congregation by simply opening up our eyes in the midst of worship.

As you lead, take the time to look around at your worshipping community. Don't freeze on one set of eyes, or scare anyone with creepy stares, but try to perceive what's happening by paying visual attention in worship.

Try this. When you're not leading worship, go to the back of the church, and just observe what's happening. See what's going on in the back row, or what's going on in that corner the introverts typically hide in. See how the truck driver is responding to God. See how the Computer Systems Analyst is responding to God. See how the single mother, the children, or the man who always arrives disheveled and looking tired, is responding to God. We can't see everything, but there is some level of engagement that we may be able to perceive if we keep our eyes open.

WAY 4 - INVITE SELECTIVE FEEDBACK

Invite selective feedback.

You may want to get more formal about reading your congregation in worship. Some leaders poll the entire congregation – online or through a private paper poll – on how they perceive the richness of their shared life together in worship.

If you narrow your poll to a select group of folks, make sure the poll makes it to people you trust to be honest with you – as well as to those you know will encourage you. Most people will be happy to offer their opinion, and many folks will be very perceptive as to what they sense is going on in the community during worship.

In your polling, if you decide to be selective, choose some intuitive people who readily "perceive" the life of the community. I call these folks the "soft spots" in the congregation. Find out their sense of the health of your congregation in worship.

ACTION STEPS

> Try at least one idea for the next time you read your congregation.

Don't get hung up on what you see in front of you. Try to bring in different kinds of data – taking the congregation's temperature, listening to their conversations, observing both on and off the stage, and asking people you trust to give specific feedback. All these approaches can help you get a stronger read on what's actually happening in your worship community.

Taking a read on our congregation frees us to lead from a place of confidence and intention, rather than from a place of guessing, subjective feelings, or personal opinion.

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