Mike O'Brien



In many churches, communication with the sound tech is a touchy subject. Most worship leaders can rattle off a list of offenses that occurred from interactions with techs they have worked alongside. Likewise, most sound techs have countless horror stories of aggressive, diva musicians committing relational and technical fouls on stage before, during and after church services.

We must own, confess and repent for our part in relational damage with church techs; going forward, worship pastors and leaders must create a culture of honor, care and respect for those serving our sound. (CLICK TO TWEET)

The solutions are more relational than technical (although gear runs a close second). Below are a few ways to engage your tech and make your church culture one that honors these valuable servants:

1. Become Their Chief Encourager

Most technical people in church only get attention when something is wrong. Many have been shamed and ridiculed from the stage when things have gone wrong. Insecure musicians and communicators will often place blame on sound and media people from the stage. Stop…. Right….. Now…. and ask God to reveal any techs from your past that you might have offended. Message, text, call and make it right.

After **each and every rehearsal and service** I strive to pinpoint a specific expression of kudos for the sound techs.

"Thanks for always being on time, it really makes a difference for us."

“That kick drum sounded massive today!”

“The vocals were spot on tonight – I loved how easy you made it.”

“When you took time to help Sue with her bass amp, it really helped make the rehearsal go easy.”

Brand this phrase on your leadership heart: “what is rewarded is repeated.” This one concept has guided my leadership style more than any other in creating positive and healthy relationships in worship ministry.

2. Ask “How Can We Help?” vs. “Give me this or that!”

Instead of thinking that the sound tech is there as *your* servant, ask how *you* can help *them*achieve the best sound. We are ALL serving Jesus on equal ground and this IS NOT a consumer/customer retail situation. Sound techs have dozens of variables involved at any given time and you have only one or two. Inviting their input will help build trust. Teach your band this idea too. Your players should be interacting with the sound tech with honor and respect vs. yelling or demanding.

“Jim, is there anything we can do to help you get what you need out there?”

“Dave, when you get a chance do you mind turning down the kick drum in my in-ears? Thank you.”

“Julie, please tell me which setting is better for you.”

When something is not working on your end with the sound or monitors, instead of blurting out your problem, wait until the tech is ready and let them know your need in a calm, non-anxious tone.

3. Learn and Speak the LANGUAGE OF SOUND

Worship leaders that know some of the language of sound will better be able to communicate with their techs. Spend some time Not Leading Worship (volunteer for sound team) and learn your soundboard basics. Ask questions and become aware of what it takes to make a band sound good in your room. Learn their language so you can communicate clearly. There is a lifetime of knowledge to learn here, but here are some basics:

Gain – A microphone or guitar needs extra power to make the sound go from the instrument, through the cables to the speakers. This amplification is called gain. Too much gain and the sound will distort, too little gain and the sound will be weak and hard to expand. If you notice the volume of your instrument going up or down in your ears the sound tech might be adjusting your gain.

Equalization (EQ) – Most instruments/voices will benefit from raising or lowering certain frequencies on the sound spectrum. You can and should know what a good EQ curve is for your instrument(s).

Balance – The relationships of the instruments with one another. Can you clearly hear the different parts of the mix while enjoying the whole mix? Getting multiple guitars, keyboards, and vocals to blend well will require a good exchange between the stage and sound.

A Sampling of Language

The following are a sampling of phrases I might communicate with a sound tech during a rehearsal:

"Is there anything you need from us?"

"Sam, my voice just jumped in volume, are you adjusting gain, or is that something on my end?"

"Jim, it sounds really good from up here, thank you!"

"How's the stage volume from back there, if we turn up will it be ok?"

"How well are the drums sitting in the mix from the congregation?"

"How's the vocal balance out there, is Jenny cutting though?"

My Best Advice

If you spend more time encouraging your tech than correcting them, you will build trust for the journey which will allow for excellence to flourish. Would love to hear any other tips or ideas you have on sound tech communication; how do you honor your techs in how you talk to them?



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.