

Developing a Creative Team for Worship and Arts in the 21st Century

by Charles B. Cotton, Jr.

Worship and Arts Ministries are a recent development. In the last ten or so years, in many churches we have seen the transition from Music Ministries to Worship and Arts Ministries. Most often Worship and Arts Ministries include music, dance, drama, and sound. When people hear that you are a Minister of Worship and Arts, those who know what it entails ask, “How do you handle all of that?” It is indeed a great deal of responsibility for one person. Accordingly, successful worship and arts ministries require a team approach. Assembling a group of people who are committed to worship, have creative energy, and view the work as a calling from God are ingredients for building a successful Worship and Arts Ministry.

You need a team approach to build a successful Worship and Arts Ministry. The team approach only works under certain circumstances. First, the leader must recognize that the work cannot be done alone. Until recently, most churches had one Minister of Music. This person had to teach, direct, administrate, and play instruments. This approach worked for the most part (though many Ministers of Music were overworked) when churches had only music ministries. Now that worship ministries have expanded, leaders need assistance. When a leader realizes that he or she needs assistance to accomplish quality worship, this indicates that he or she is aware of the importance and multi-faceted nature of worship and arts ministries. Any effective leader always has a core group of people help in planning, conceptualizing, and implementing. Even if you’re in a small church, start out with one person and allow room and time for growth. No matter your size, denomination, or resources you can’t do it alone!

Second, strong Worship and Arts Ministry leaders not only realize they can’t do it alone, they also know that without God nothing is possible. Often ministers forget that it was God who gave and breathed their gifts into existence. It was the Creator who equipped us with the creativity and drive to passionately do the work that we do. It always humbles me to know that God uses me in spite of me. There are skeletons in my closet that I hope never speak; I pray each day to overcome some sin. It is because of the grace and mercy of God that you and I are not consumed. So never get so impressed with yourself that you begin to believe that you can do your work without God. Without God we cannot move, live, sing, or play!

After realizing you cannot do it alone or without God, you have to embrace your challenges. Early on in my ministry, I realized that there were some things that I didn’t do well. I knew my challenges. I could either abandon them and act as if they were not there or I could embrace them. Embracing your challenges does a number of things. Most importantly, it helps you focus on strengthening your weaknesses and gives you a sense of who you need around you because of your deficiencies. For example: If you read music well but you cannot play by ear, you need someone with a good ear around you. If you are good at directing but you cannot play the piano or organ, you need a good pianist

or organist. If you have strong administration skills but you cannot dance well, you need an expert in dance/choreography around you. I have a degree in Sacred Music and play the piano and also direct and cultivate voices. I realize that while I can read, I need an accompanist for the anthems and spirituals that my church will sing. Embracing your challenges does not mean that you are a weak Minister of Worship and Arts. It means that you're strong enough to know where you are weak and to seek resources (including people) who can help make you better.

Also, for your Worship and Arts division to be successful, people on your team have to know that there is a leader and that they are being asked to follow him/her. People on your team must be willing to help and support the overall mission of the ministry; in this case to glorify God through worship and music. Understanding their position on the team will help them accomplish a win for the team. John Maxwell says, "All players have a place where they add the most value."¹

Next, a team will not win without a plan. You need to have a vision and mission statement for your team. In The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork, John Maxwell says, "Great vision precedes great achievement. A team that embraces a great vision becomes focused, energized, and confident. It knows where it's headed and why it's going there."² Your team needs a game plan. You are the Head Coach and you have a bench full of eager players. They need guidance, direction, and vision. You don't have to create this solely on your own. The easiest and best way to create vision is through fasting, study, and communication with God. God will send mentors and resources to help you compose your vision.

After developing your team's vision and mission statement, you need to empower your team to think creatively and outside of the box. I am reading a book titled Creative Matters. In one of the chapters, "Creativity Overcoming Safety," author Cole Nesmith says, "Creativity and safety are incompatible. Creativity is willing to step into the unknown and bring something new into existence. Creativity is about an unbridled heart that is so free in what it was created to be that it is unstoppable."³ Encouraging your team to develop this mindset will create expansive and explosive results.

I have a lady at my church who directs the choirs, leads in worship, directs dramatic plays, and supports me wherever I need her. This year, I asked my team to think creatively outside of the box about worship and any events that we present through Worship and Arts. She was passionate about breast cancer. I learned that her mother and several of her aunts battled breast cancer for many years. Out of her passion, she infused energy, creativity, and momentum into the entire team. Her passion has led our ministry to celebrate and educate our community. In October 2010, we presented a Breast Cancer Awareness Concert for the Greater Cleveland community. We supported the sign up for "National Mammogram Day," celebrated and remembered those who have had and are battling breast cancer, and commemorated the month by having an "All-Pink Sunday." All of this came as a result of my empowering my team to think creatively and outside of the box.

Developing a creative team to do Worship and Arts Ministry will enable us to do things differently. It's time for worship and arts leaders to stop being managers and to become status quo challengers. Yes, celebrate traditions, but do not worship them. Yes, give honor where honor is due, but don't memorialize people and things on every special day and chance you get. It's time to do a new thing. If you're given the opportunity to serve God's people, serve them well.

You can't do it all by yourself. You must allow God to lead the work you do. You will also need good followers. Don't be afraid or too prideful to assemble a team that will help you. Even if you're a small church, start out with one person and allow room and time for growth. Next, embrace your challenges. Finally, you will need a vision and a mission statement, and you will need to encourage your team to think creatively and outside of the box.

Notes

1. Maxwell, John C. The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork: Embrace Them and Empower Your Team. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001.
2. Ibid.
3. Creative Matters is in Partnership with RenewedVision.com, creators of ProPresenter. Online location: www.RenewedVision.com