

By Tony Guerrero



I've written a little before about the need for quality, but it is such an important issue that it warrants deeper discussion. Sadly, it is a topic that is often low on the priority list in most music ministries.

Robert E. Webber writes: "Excellence is not a negotiable quality for church music; our worship of God demands our very best."¹

We are competing with the world, and, musically, we're losing. The world offers people quality music. Record labels spend hundreds of thousands, if not millions, recording CDs by popular artists. People hear great music played on the radio, in concerts, even in nightclubs around the corner from church, and then we offer them bad songs, wrong notes and drummers they can't clap along to.

SKILL IN THE SCRIPTURES

A brief look at Scripture will show us that there was great importance placed on quality musicianship in worship:

- In 1 Chronicles 15:22, we see that Kenaniah was appointed by David to be in charge of singing because he was skilled at it.
- David appointed 288 musicians for duty who were "trained and skilled in music for the Lord" (1 Chronicles 25:7).
- Psalm 33:3 tells us plainly to "play skillfully"

Let's face it, many of us have experienced music and musicianship in churches today that is substandard. I realize that many churches struggle with finding quality musicians, and most music directors are so grateful that anyone wants to play that they may even set very low standards. We know God is pleased by a

servant heart, so we welcome people on our teams whose hearts are in the right places, even if their fingers don't always land in the right places on their instruments. However, when a musician is on our team whose abilities are lacking, there are some common problems we leaders tend to allow:

- Wrong notes, bad time and out of tune instruments can all distract from the worship of the congregation.
- The level of music quality is basically relegated to the abilities of the weakest players so as not to lose them.
- The better musicians on a team can get very frustrated not being able to play music that is of the quality they're capable of. Nobody practices for years to get good just to participate in mediocrity, and eventually talented team members can lose enthusiasm.

IRON SHARPENS IRON

As leaders we are obligated to work at improving our teams. This seems obvious enough, but ask yourself, "What am I actually doing to improve the skills of the musicians God has given me charge over?"

Music ministry can be a 24-hour-a-day job. It is taxing just dealing with each week's issues; the idea of adding more responsibility to your schedule may seem daunting. There are simple, practical ways you can begin working on improving your team member's skills without exhausting yourself. Here are five ways to lift the skill level of every worship team:

1. Teach your team – Many church musicians don't understand the need for quality music in the Church, and how they have a responsibility to work towards that. Teach them biblical standards for excellence and encourage them to pursue this in their

own musicianship through weekly practice at home and through private lessons when possible.

2. Instigate a private lesson program – Find a way to raise money for private lesson scholarships. The worship team, or even the whole church, can get behind raising funds to send musicians out for training, much like we send leaders out.

3. Develop a system of mentorship – If you have some skilled members on your team, impart to them the responsibility of working with the less-skilled musicians on the team. First Chronicles 25:8 shows that among the trained and skilled musicians appointed by David (vs.7) there were still varying skill levels: "Young and old alike, teacher as well as student, cast lots for their duties"

4. Improve your skills – Inspirational leadership is crucial. Your team should see you constantly working at improving your own skills. If you aren't doing so, don't expect otherwise from your team members.

5. Examine all areas – The call to quality is not just about musicians. Take a look at your sound system and sound crew if you have one. What needs improvement? Are you doing original music? If so, I applaud you, but find other gifted songwriters and get critical feedback—your original work should never go unchecked.

Reverend Rowland Hill (Surrey Chapel, London) asked in 1844, "Why should the devil have all the good music?"

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1) Robert E. Webber's introduction to Carolyn Jennings's chapter, "Composing Music For Worship," from *Music and the Arts in Christian Worship*, Book 1, Volume 4, Robert E. Webber, Editor, 1994 Star Song Publishing Group, Pg. 459.