

GET OUT OF YOUR BOX!

AS musicians, singers and artistic types, we all like to think that we are creative, spontaneous, original, progressive, etc. The truth is few of us really are any of those things beyond what comes naturally to us. Most people, when observed from the outside, appear to be in a box of their own making, constructed from their habits, comfort-zones, traditions, preferences, cultures and age groups. How many times have you referred to another musician or singer by saying, "He/she sounds like so-and-so," or "They always play so jazzy"? It may surprise you to know that people see it in a certain box as well. "He sings like Chris Tomlin"; "She's our ballad singer"; "His worship sets are always so full of angst!"

"Not me!" you cry. "I'm not like that!"

TRY ANSWERING THESE FEW QUESTIONS:

1. How long have you been doing the same arrangement of _____ (insert a song title you frequently use)?
2. When was the last time you let another musician in your band make musical decisions?
3. How often do you consult people of different age groups (younger AND older) about song choices, and actually use their suggestions?
4. When was the last time you were uncomfortable?

This last question is really the key. Change is almost never comfortable, and if you have not been uncomfortable lately, then chances are you haven't changed in some time. If you haven't been through an uncomfortable period of change in your ministry methods, musical directing habits, song selection or musical arranging, then you, my friend, are "in a box."

Still think this doesn't apply to you? Grab a video of one of your worship sets from a year ago. Worse yet, five years ago. If the only way to tell when it was recorded is by your hairstyle, it's time to shake things up and get uncomfortable.

If your ministry is failing or flailing, it is definitely time for a change. But many of us are in successful ministry situations, so, why change? The point is not to change what's working, but rather to enhance what's already there – to add to a successful situation. Don't change just for the sake of changing, but change to keep your ministry fresh. One true thing about our human imperfections is that no matter how good we've made something, it can always be better.

Finding Hidden Talents

You may even surprise yourself finding hidden talents God has

given you and your team that have been hidden for far too long! We have a singer in my ministry whose vocal style is always referred to as "soft, pretty and folksy." Whenever a "rockin'" song was chosen she never got the call because everyone had her in a certain box. Recently she has been given the opportunity to lead her own worship service. As the weeks have passed, she has recognized the opportunity to choose songs that cover a broader range of styles. While she still offers the styles she is known and loved for, she is more frequently stepping out of her comfort zone with songs no one would have associated with her previously. Suddenly everyone is realizing she can rock! Her versatility was unknown until she was willing to (and was allowed to) break out of the box. Now, our ministry has yet another gift to offer our congregation and our Lord.

Following Jesus' Example

The Christian church exists, in part, because some people were willing to be uncomfortable and think "outside the box." Jesus was not revolutionary because he was looking to overthrow Roman political parties or Jewish religious authorities. He was revolutionary because he caused people to look at everything differently. The Jewish people were expecting their messiah to be a conquering king, not a humble servant. They weren't expecting a man who would break tradition and allow women to be present when he taught, or break protocol by dining with tax collectors. Jews weren't supposed to consort with Samaritan women, but Jesus did. Love Your enemy? Turn the other cheek? The meek will inherit the earth? What was that all about?!

I realize this example of Jesus may not necessarily apply to issues such as song choices or style changes, but I believe there are things God wants to do in your ministry and the biggest barrier might just be your unwillingness to get uncomfortable. Staying in our comfort zones means that there is likely little to no room for any fresh work to be done in our ministries. Being uncomfortable also forces us to rely on God and trust in His sovereignty. That alone is something even the best of us struggle with.

Prayerfully Get Uncomfortable

You, and more importantly, your team, have gifts and abilities far beyond your current expression and output, and these will only become known when you allow yourself and your team to "think outside the box." Of course, this should really only happen with the blessing of your pastor, but I would challenge you to prayerfully start allowing yourself to get uncomfortable. Sing songs you don't consider your style. Allow creative expression and direction from your band members. Challenge your singer's abilities. Alter your instrumentation. Rearrange those old standards you've been doing for too long. There are countless ways to keep you and your ministry fresh, but neither will reach their full potential if your comfort zone takes priority. In other words, get out of your own way...and God's!

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