

You're Not a Lead Worshipper

The term “lead worshipper” has been around for several years, popularized by some of the most well-respected song writers and worship leaders on the earth today. While I understand the intent behind this phrase, I believe that the unintended consequence of this approach has led to un-engaging worship experiences for many congregations.

Your role as the worship leader, first and foremost, is to create an environment where the people you are leading can enter into the worship of their Creator. Leading worship should be all about serving those you lead by crafting an environment that helps them worship. If I consider myself the “lead worshipper,” I will tend to put together services and set lists that are based on my personal worship experience rather than on creating an experience where the largest number of people can engage in worship.

For you, or for them?

Let me give you an example. Many great worship songs are being written today. I love these songs. I crank them up when I’m driving in my car, and many times I have to be careful when I do this because my eyes fill with tears, making the road hard to see. I have powerful personal worship times with these songs. The problem, however, is that many of these songs are not written to make them singable for a large majority of people. They work well for guys that are tenors ... everyone else seems to be left out.

I’ve been a part of too many worship services where these songs are presented as a part of what is supposed to be a participatory worship service in the same key and with the same arrangement as they are in the original recordings. I look at the people around me as they struggle at first to sing along, and then ultimately give up and just listen. Can people enter into worship without singing? Of course. But don’t expect or encourage people to “sing along” or truly engage when you’ve placed the song in the best key for your voice, not for their participation.

Another place this approach can be seen is just in the songs we select. Many worship leaders today gravitate to newer choruses and newer arrangements of hymns. As worship leaders, we prefer these songs for many reasons—we’re sick of singing the old songs or they feel outdated musically. And I’m certainly not against new songs in general. But when you include a new song, you should pack some “old favorites” around it so that people can stay engaged in the service.

Create a space for worship

If I consider myself to be a lead worshipper, though, these considerations will rarely enter my mind and spirit as I prepare. Our worship team can really enter into worship well during rehearsal because we really like the new songs and we’ve got the vocal ability to really tear it up. If we think of ourselves as lead worshippers, we’ll expect to have a great worship service. On the other hand, if we think of our role as creating an environment where it is easy for others

to engage, we would probably do things differently.

Create a space for people to worship. That's your job, first and foremost. Make it as easy as possible for people to engage. You are there to serve them, not to create a worship experience that you personally enjoy. During your personal worship time, jam to all the new songs and put them in the key where your voice sounds best. When you're leading worship, lean toward songs they will know and put them in the key where the majority of people can join in. You might be surprised at the sweet offering of worship that rises up around you. And God will be honored.