



HERE'S YOUR GUIDE

HOW TO LEAD YOUR CHURCH SOUND TEAM

Great sound starts with clear vision.

Your role as a worship leader in leading the church sound team is to provide a **clear musical vision and direction** for connecting with the people your church is called to serve.

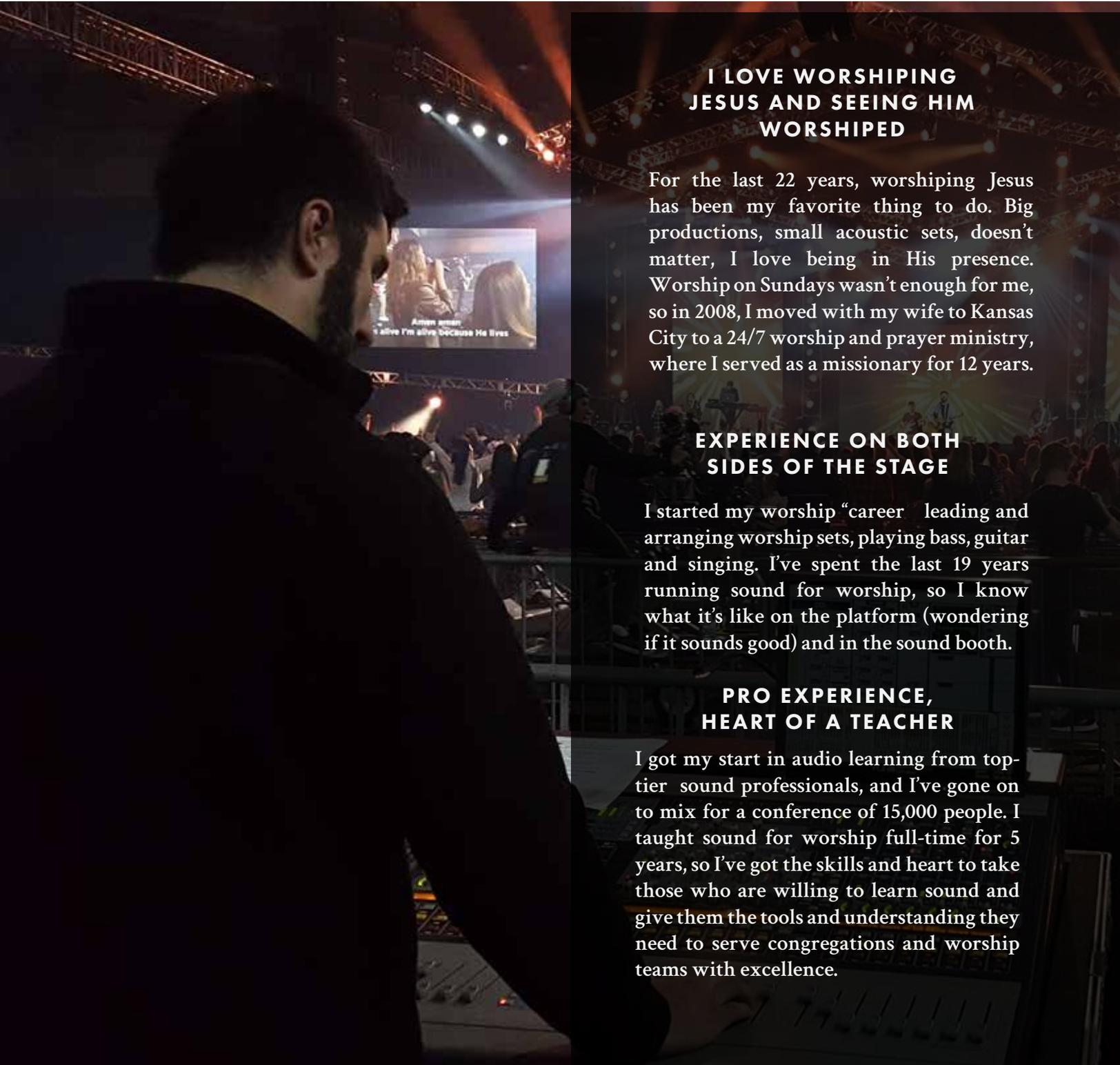
You have to find the ideal team player to serve on the sound team, and make sure the **right people are serving in the right place.**

Great worship leaders turn vision and direction into **values, processes and boundaries** for the sound team. Successful sound and worship teams don't forget to **encourage** one another often, have clear **evaluation measures** in place, and a **healthy creative culture** where trust ensures safe feedback can be given and received. They also make sure that the leadership team provides the **resources** the sound team needs to accomplish their mission in serving the church body.

Are you ready to do this? Let's go.

ATTAWAYAUDIO.COM

Why should you listen to me?



I LOVE WORSHIPING JESUS AND SEEING HIM WORSHIPED

For the last 22 years, worshiping Jesus has been my favorite thing to do. Big productions, small acoustic sets, doesn't matter, I love being in His presence. Worship on Sundays wasn't enough for me, so in 2008, I moved with my wife to Kansas City to a 24/7 worship and prayer ministry, where I served as a missionary for 12 years.

EXPERIENCE ON BOTH SIDES OF THE STAGE

I started my worship "career" leading and arranging worship sets, playing bass, guitar and singing. I've spent the last 19 years running sound for worship, so I know what it's like on the platform (wondering if it sounds good) and in the sound booth.

PRO EXPERIENCE, HEART OF A TEACHER

I got my start in audio learning from top-tier sound professionals, and I've gone on to mix for a conference of 15,000 people. I taught sound for worship full-time for 5 years, so I've got the skills and heart to take those who are willing to learn sound and give them the tools and understanding they need to serve congregations and worship teams with excellence.



STEP ONE: VISION AND DIRECTION

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

Together with your leadership team, you should have a clear idea of the people God has called you to serve and attract to your congregation. You're already choosing songs and playing the musical style that connects with them. To take your sound team to the next level, you must have a clear picture of who your church is serving, and how you'd like them to engage.

BE SURE YOU KNOW THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS:

Who has God called you to serve and attract to your church? What's your community like?

What musical style and preferences connects with those people?

How are you growing the people you have now?

How do they engage now?

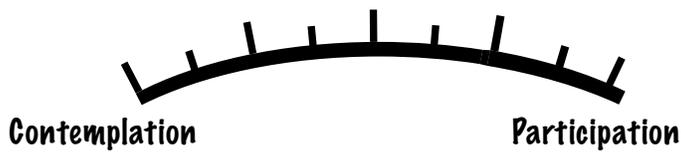
Do you have vision for them engaging in a new, deeper way, that's different than they engage now?

How do you want them to engage with the worship?

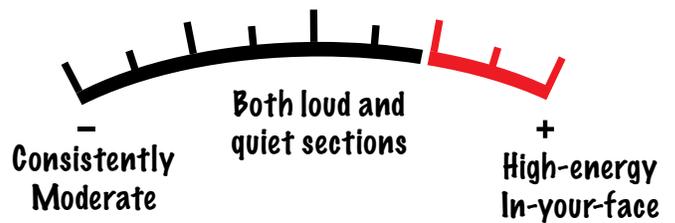
SOUND ATTRIBUTES

Here are some different ways of describing how your congregation engages with worship, specifically related to how the mix sounds. Remember, we're talking about how music feels, so these are guidelines, not parameters set in stone. Descriptions are on the next page. Discuss these with your team to get a clearer picture of engagement at your church.

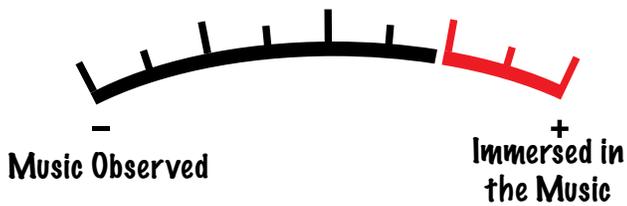
Engagement Type



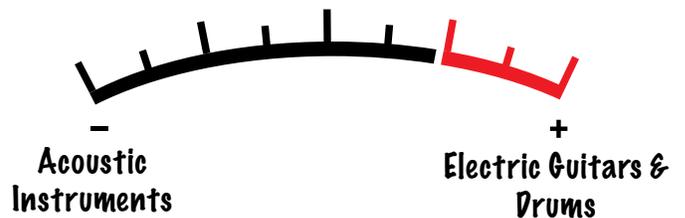
Energy Level



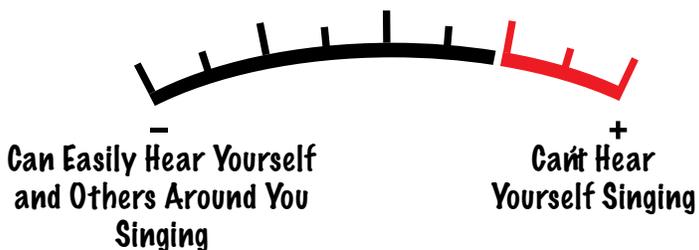
Presentation Level



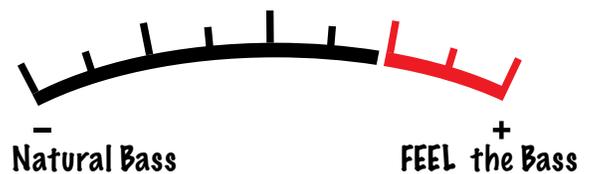
Instrumentation



Do you Hear Yourself?



Bass Level



ENGAGEMENT TYPE

Here we have a spectrum of how people engage with worship: introspective, and participative. How much of your worship service is meant to help a person engage with singing, and how much is meant to be a time of reflection? This doesn't mean the worship set is all of one and not the other, but it's helpful to lead the sound tech in knowing how people should be engaging at any given point in the worship set.

PRESENTATION LEVEL

Similar to the Engagement Type, the Presentation Level is another facet of how the mix should be presented. Should the music make the listener feel like "it's over there, and I'm over here," or should it immerse the listener, making them feel like the music is all around them?

DO YOU HEAR YOURSELF SINGING?

Further defining the presentation level and engagement type, should your congregation hear themselves singing? Some congregations enjoy hearing themselves sing, fostering a type of corporate worship that's "all of us together." A louder environment allows an environment where people can respond with loud or even spontaneous singing without the fear of being exposed.

ENERGY LEVEL

Without getting into specific levels, what should the energy level of your worship service be? While generalizations aren't too helpful, the age demographic of your congregation might overlay this spectrum in an older-to-younger way. One tip is that if you're going to start making things louder, make sure that there's plenty of "dynamic range," or differences between loud and quiet sections. This takes a team effort, of course, but it's one way you can lead an older congregation from where it is now to attract younger believers.

INSTRUMENTATION

Does your band focus more on acoustic instruments, like acoustic guitar, piano and organ, or does it emphasize electric guitars, loud drums, electric bass and keyboard synthesizers?

BASS LEVEL

Should the bass be at a level like a classical symphony would sound, or should it be hyped-up so that people can FEEL it?

Pro Tip: If you have an early service, some people haven't heard anything louder than their shower that day. These attributes can apply differently for different services.



STEP TWO: *the right people in the right place*

THE THREE-LEGGED RACE OF SOUND VOLUNTEERS

For whatever reason, the Apostle Paul didn't write about sound volunteers specifically in Ephesians 4:11 (PLEASE email me if you figure out why), but there are a diversity of skills of serving on your sound team at church. Titles and roles matter, so this can help you distinguish the skills of the people serving on your church sound team. And I don't use the term "sound guy" since it doesn't do justice for the amazing women sound techs out there.

SOUND TECH

It's not a perfect term, but this is the overarching title I use for all the roles on the sound team. But don't forget that many of these people are creatives, not technicians., so think of them more as a musician with an instrument that doesn't make its own noise.

Not every person is equally skilled in each of these areas. You may have someone who's a very talented mixer, but they can't fix something to save their life. Or some who can fix things with ninja-like skillz should never be allowed to mix without close supervision.

MIX ENGINEER

This is the person who **runs the sound board**. Responsible for setting the levels, tones and hitting the cues (videos, announcements, etc.) for the service. May also be responsible for **adjusting the band's monitor mixes**, so that they can hear themselves while they play. It's the most creative role on the team.

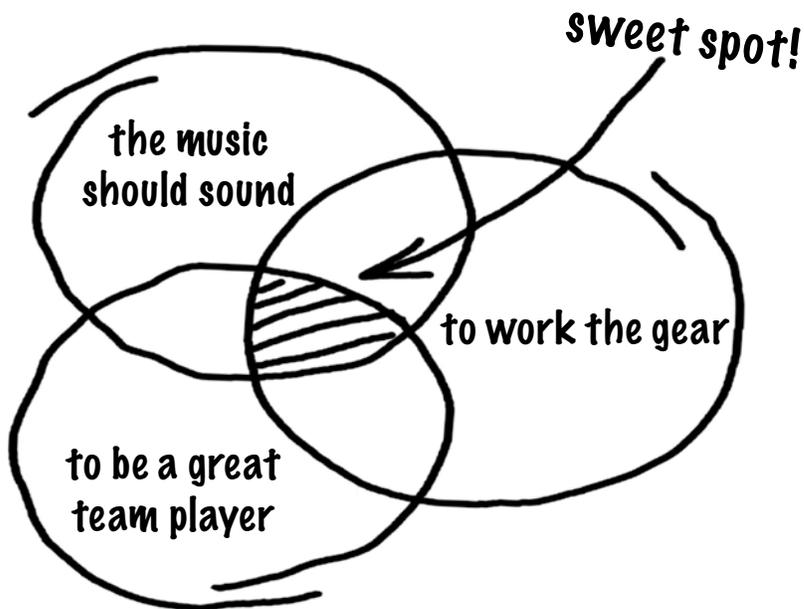
STAGE TECH

This person **sets up** the microphones, stands, cables and monitors on stage for the band. If something is working, they **troubleshoot** to find the problem and fix it. A great stage tech will "dress" the stage to make the cables look nice and tidy.

SYSTEM TECH

This person sets up the sound system, speakers, installs wiring, and **"tunes" the speakers to the room**, trying to make the speaker system sound as transparent as possible, so that what comes out of the sound board is what's heard by the congregation. Being a highly specialized set of skills, many churches bring in an outside professional to tune their sound system.

The ideal sound tech knows how...



THE IDEAL SOUND TECH

The sound tech is an integral part of your worship team, not just technical support. The sound board is such an important instrument for presenting the music that you have to see the sound tech and the mix as an essential part of your team..

Let's go beyond "warm body" in what we're looking for in a sound tech

KNOWS HOW THE MUSIC SHOULD SOUND

Half the battle of becoming a great sound tech is knowing what great music is supposed to sound like... in the style that connects best with your church. Probably not metal. But maybe!

KNOWS HOW TO WORK THE GEAR

Once a sound tech knows how the music should sound, the other side of the coin is how to make the equipment work toward the goal of presenting the music well.

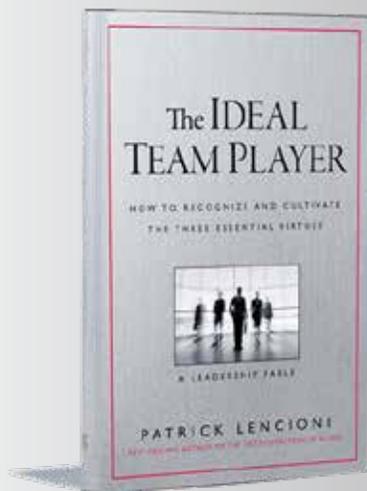
A GREAT TEAM PLAYER

The sound tech, worship team, leadership team and congregation all need each other. Working as a **part of a creative team** is a critical skill that has three parts:

Humble - Thinks of others more than himself/herself

Hungry (to grow and learn) - If you're not teachable, you're stuck and won't get any better.

(People) Smart - Sound techs have to be able to communicate with the worship team, leaders, and congregation effectively and with kindness. No grouches, please.



The Ideal Team Player by Patrick Lencioni

In this book, Patrick Lencioni lays out a fantastic portrait of how to find ideal team players for your organization. It's an easy, engaging read, with lots of actionable information that'll help you with your sound team and your worship team both.

STEP THREE: *boundaries*

BUT PLEASE STILL READ IT

BOUNDARIES: HOW LOUD SHOULD IT BE?

How loud is too loud? And how do you measure it?

Sound levels are measured with an SPL (Sound Pressure Level) meter. I'll skip ALL the nerdy details, but you need to make sure that it's set to **A-Weighted** and **Slow response**. This makes it respond more like your ears do when listening to music. They're measured in decibels, or dB. There are phone apps that can do this, but I've found many that aren't accurate. Having a purpose-built SPL meter is essential for consistency in your sound levels.

OSHA figured out what noise levels cause hearing damage, and according to them, you could listen at 94 dB SPL (average) for an hour and not suffer hearing damage.

Even though your church is most likely under those levels (most only peak around 85-94 dB SPL), you might have people complaining still. They could just not like drums and electric guitars in the same zip code as them, but here are some more reasons they might be complaining.

Harsher frequencies: The human ear is more sensitive to some frequency ranges than others. While the SPL meter takes that into account for bass frequencies (that's what the A-weighting is about), it doesn't take the tonal balance into consideration perfectly. So if you have a loud, harsh-sounding singer, or electric guitar, or cymbals and drums, people will complain about it hurting their ears, even if your levels are technically in check.

Bass frequencies: Some people just don't like to feel the bass. Others really REALLY like it. You have to decide how the bass levels should sit, relative to the rest of the music, based on whom you're wanting to attract to your church.

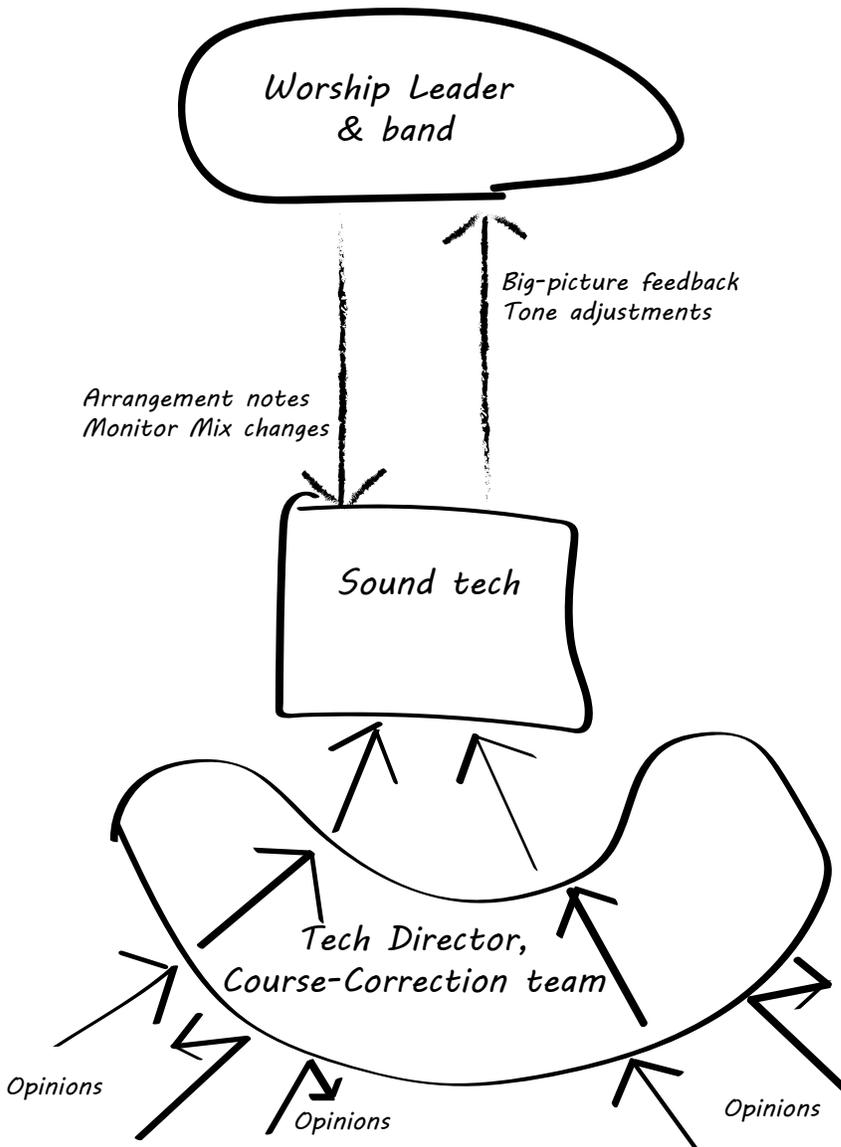


ProTip: While your congregation is probably safe from getting hearing loss during your service, the **longer exposure times due to sound check, rehearsal, and multiple services could mean that you and your worship team could be exposed to damaging levels through in-ear monitors.** Since no one knows how loud your in-ears are but you, you could have levels above 95dB SPL for an hour or more. Since since your ears will adjust slowly over time to levels that are too loud, **you might not even realize that your hearing is being damaged.** Hearing loss can be permanent and irreversible outside of a creative miracle. Be a good steward of your window to music and guard your ears from potentially damaging levels in your in-ear monitors.

**WARNING:
NERD ZONE**

Non-Nerd Summary

- SPL Meters help quantify “too loud”
- Set SPL Meter response to “Slow” and A-Weighting
- 94dB SPL average is safe for up to an hour. Your church is likely less than that, but people might still be grumpy about it.
- Check levels in different seats, especially if you have a drum kit without a shield or booth.
- It can be painful with “harsh” sounds even if the meter says its an OK level. When in doubt, trust your gut.
- Beyond just being safe, figure out what levels help your church engage the best



The course correction team can use their discretion to filter all kinds of comments, including marriage proposals to single sound techs because of how good the mix sounds. In theory, at least.

A mix that's run democratically will lead to a grumpy, handcuffed sound tech and a bad mix.

STAGE TO SOUND BOOTH

The way that feedback flows between the worship team and the sound tech (both ways) is critical. It's important that you communicate to the band that **the sound tech can hear things in a big-picture way that they can't from on-stage**, so their feedback is important. In the other direction, it's important that you and your team know how to give appropriate directions from on-stage to the sound tech. Requesting changes to the monitor mixes and pointers on the musical arrangement are essential, but it can easily cause tension if not done with care, trust and affirmation.

COURSE CORRECTION TEAM TO SOUND TECH

Running sound can be stressful, since you're juggling demands and requests from a whole bunch of different directions, and possibly troubleshooting broken gear on a time crunch. If the mix is run democratically, with everyone's opinion weighted equally, you'll end up with a bad mix, and a grumpy sound tech that feels handcuffed.

Your sound tech needs to know from whom he or she is taking directions and changes. This way, when someone runs up to the sound booth upset about something in the mix, the tech has the option to point them to a leader to discuss it with, who can then come discuss it with the sound tech. Clear channels of leadership and communication take a lot of anxiety out of the already-difficult job of running sound.

We'll take a closer look at the course-correction and evaluation methods right after...

ENCOURAGEMENT: BECAUSE IT'S A TOUGH JOB

I took a parenting class that taught a good rule of thumb for raising children is to aim to give 10 affirmations (words, smiles, positive touches, etc.) for every one correction. (If I really kept score in this, I'd fail miserably, but it sure helps motivate me to step it up on the affirmation part!)

However, **sound techs get the ratio reversed: they'll get 10 complaints or corrections for every positive comment they get.** It's the nature of the beast - if you're doing your job well, it becomes transparent, so no one notices. If you're a football fan, sound techs are like offensive linemen. When they perform well, the quarterback and the running back get all the credit; when they mess up, they're scorned to no end.

So here are some positive things you can tell your sound techs to help even out that backwards ratio.

Sounds great today!

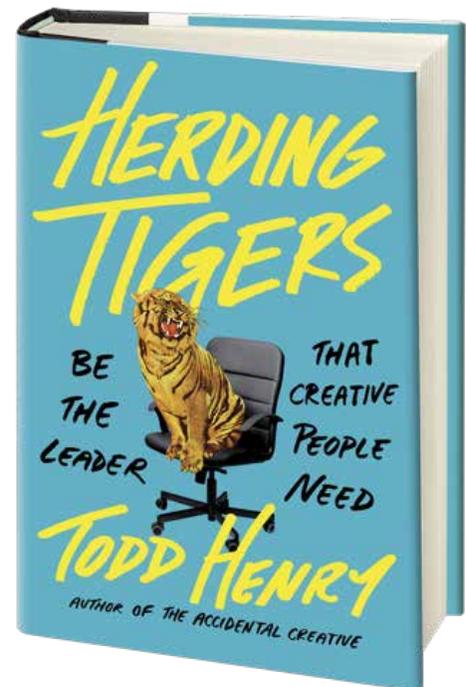
Thanks for helping us lead worship this morning.

Can I get you coffee or a donut? (Yes, please!)

I can't overstate how important it is to encourage your sound techs.

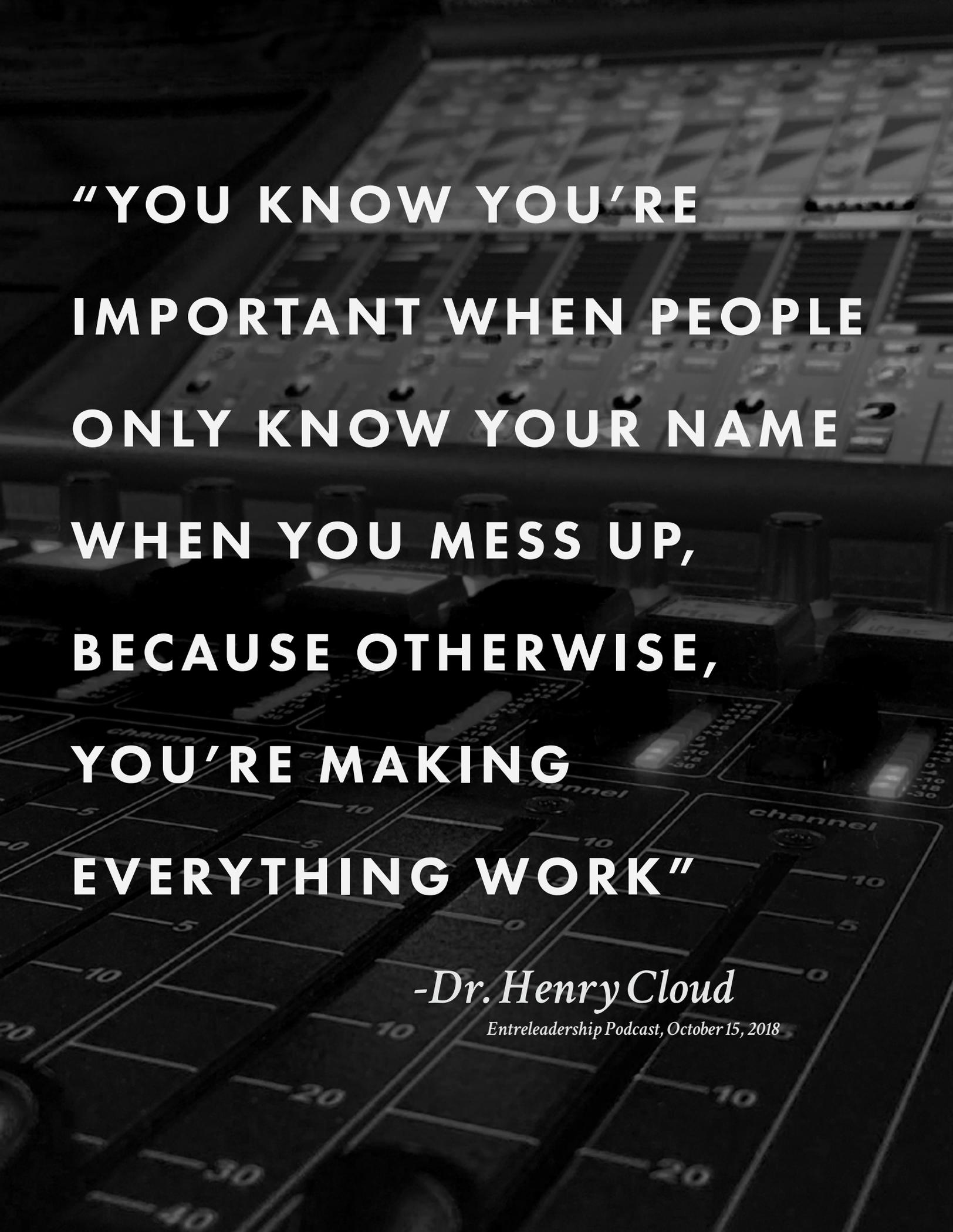
Their job is so critical that no one knows their name unless they mess up. Lots of them love serving but don't want the spotlight. When they make a mistake, and the spotlight is on them for something negative, it's like salt on a wound. This is what I call a "sound tech solo." You've undoubtedly been there. Something goes wrong in the sound booth and everyone cranes their neck to see if the sound tech is doing anything about it.

Sound techs are some combination of those who are musically creative, technically inclined, and willing to serve without recognition. Be sure to treat them with the respect that rare and precious combination deserves.



***Herding Tigers* by Todd Henry is a must-read for anyone leading creative people.**

Sound Tech Solo: When something goes wrong in the sound booth and everyone cranes their neck to stare at the sound tech.



**"YOU KNOW YOU'RE
IMPORTANT WHEN PEOPLE
ONLY KNOW YOUR NAME
WHEN YOU MESS UP,
BECAUSE OTHERWISE,
YOU'RE MAKING
EVERYTHING WORK"**

-Dr. Henry Cloud

Entreleadership Podcast, October 15, 2018

“Mona Lisa didn’t give comments to da Vinci looking at the backside of the canvas”

Here are three reasons why you need a team to help the sound tech course-correct during worship services:

1. As talented as you are, **you can’t hear what it sounds like in the room** while you’re on stage leading. I’m pretty sure Mona Lisa didn’t give comments to da Vinci looking at the backside of the canvas.
2. It doesn’t sound the same in every single spot in the room.
3. **Music is tough enough to mix** that it helps to have an extra set of trusted ears helping with quality control.

It’s important to have a team of people who are authorized to comment with clarity on the mix. This team needs to understand the goals and objectives of how the mix should sound (decided on in Step 1), and if they’re not musicians or experienced sound techs, they need to have enough of a musical ear to identify issues and give clues to where the problem might be coming from. They should be “tuned-in” to how the congregation is engaging (or not), so they can help guide the mix when it needs some quick correction. This leads us to our next step...

POST-SERVICE EVALUATION

Evaluation needs to be done both during and after the worship set. Urgent needs have to be addressed mid-service, but real growth will happen if there’s feedback given after the services are wrapped up. You might be asking, “Won’t I hurt someone’s feelings if I give negative feedback?” While can happen, with the right team environment, you can give feedback to creative people, even volunteers, in a way that can be received... if you first cast clear vision, create a safe team atmosphere, keep feedback specific and about the performance (not the person), and give lots of grace when mistakes happen.

Print the next page to bring to your next after-service evaluation.

STEP SIX: *evaluation*

QUESTIONS FOR EVALUATING AFTER THE WORSHIP SERVICE

WHAT DID WE SET OUT TO DO?

WERE WE SUCCESSFUL IN WHAT WE SET OUT TO DO?

**WHAT WENT WELL?
WHAT DO WE WANT TO DO AGAIN?**

**WHAT COULD BE DONE BETTER?
WHAT WON'T WE DO AGAIN?**

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE WE NEED IN ORDER TO ACCOMPLISH OUR GOALS?

ACTION ITEMS

RESOURCES: GIVING YOUR TEAM THE TOOLS AND TRAINING THEY NEED

TRAINING

The single biggest difference in sound quality is made by the sound tech themselves. Learning how to mix music for worship is a skill that's learned much like a trade. It takes a long time to refine the skills and the preferences to connect with the largest number of people in an audience. A weekend seminar or crash-course can help jump-start the skills of your sound techs, but **consistent training and practice are the way to improve the quality** of a sound tech.

So **how do you get a volunteer to train consistently?** You're probably already stretched thin in all the responsibilities you have. And you may be able to hear what the mix needs, but teaching that while you're leading on stage presents a variety of problems.

That's why I started **Worship Sound Wisdom University** - an online membership for church sound techs that teaches everything from the basics of mixing live and broadcast audio, to the ins-and-outs of setting up the entire sound system, from microphone to speakers, and everything in between.

With clear, easy to digest videos that cover the musical and technical aspects of presenting a great mix for a church congregation and working with a worship team, this program will give new and experienced volunteers alike a solid foundation of understanding, so you grow and learn every time you mix, getting better every week. Plus a course that teaches my playbook for training new volunteers and helping them love running sound.

With individual monthly memberships, a discount for paying annually, and an option for a **team license with coaching**, there's a Worship Sound Wisdom University option that's just right for you. [Get more information through the link here.](#)

The sound tech makes the single biggest difference in how good the mix sounds.

PARTING THOUGHTS

While we strive for excellence in everything, we have to remember that our goal is not perfection, but helping people turn their eyes to Jesus. While it's hard to lead sound techs from the stage, we have to create a culture that values growth and leadership multiplication, because one person can't do everything on the worship and tech teams. Your sound team is worth sowing into, because eliminating distractions in your church services is a noble endeavor.

Serving God with you,
James

STEP EIGHT: start TODAY

ACTIONABLE STEPS

Print this out and write down the steps you'll take this week to start casting clear vision for your sound team and giving them the resources they need.

STEP 1

Vision and direction

STEP 2

*The Right People in
the Right Place*

STEP 3

Boundaries

STEP 4

Communication Channels

STEP 5

Encouragement

STEP 6

Evaluation

STEP 7

Resources and Training

[Click here to sign up for Worship Sound Wisdom University](#)