

Know Your Music Culture

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As a worship leader it's good to know WHO you're creating worship spaces for. You have to view your "worship leading" as an act of worship through serving. You're not up there to get famous or to worship mindlessly in front of a crowd. You are there to GIVE. Not to take, not to consume, but to give.

What Not To Do:

- Don't do everything that's popular on the radio. Just because a song is familiar doesn't mean it will serve your congregation.
- Don't do everything popular by Chris Tomlin or Israel Houghton or the newest, greatest, latest worship leader phenom. Just because everyone else is doing it doesn't mean you have to as well.
- Don't pick your favorite songs, close your eyes, and enter into a time of deep, personal, and intimate worship leaving everyone else behind. Leading worship is about serving, helping others to worship, not consuming "worship" like it's your own personal energy drink each week.
- Don't do every arrangement of worship songs exactly like you've heard them on the recorded version. Mix it up. Re-mix it. Re-arrange it. Add your own spice to it.

What To Do:

- Do everything that's popular on the radio. The fact that it's on the radio mean that people resonate with it. Use that to your advantage. People are more likely to feel at ease if they have something in common with you. If you know a song and they know a song, how much more of a common denominator could you get!
- Do everything popular by Chris Tomlin or Israel Houghton or the newest, greatest, latest worship leader phenom. The fact that they are influential means a lot of people are utilizing their music. This is a good thing. In most situations, good songwriters rise to the top. Bad songwriters don't. There's a reason why some of these folks are the few you hear on the radio, they are good at what they do. Use their stuff.
- Pick your favorite songs, close your eyes, and enter into a time of deep, personal, and intimate worship leaving everyone else behind...at HOME. Do this in your own personal spiritual growth time. Enter your prayer closet secretly. Worship with total abandon. When you are "leading" worship make sure you are LEADING your family, not LEAVING them. Remember that our times of creating worship spaces on Sundays should be coming from an overflow of the times that we've spent plugged into the "flow" ALL WEEK. If the only time you get to "worship" deeply through music is on stage on Sundays then you've got your priorities mixed up. DO IT! Just make sure that you're doing it right!
- Do arrangements of worship songs exactly like you've heard them on the recorded version. Yep. It's okay to replicate an arrangement that you've heard on a cd. Why? Sometimes those arrangements are smoking hot and you've got to jump on them! More times than not, there's no way I'd ever try an re-mix an Israel Houghton tune. Why? It's

already baked up with TLC and really doesn't need to be revamped. Nothing wrong with re-arranging a song for your particular needs, but if it ain't broke then realize it's ok not to "fix" it.

Know Your Music Culture:

As worship leaders it's your privilege to find and resonate with the "tune" of your congregations heart strings. Practically, this comes from asking people questions about the music they love. It comes from knowing the demographics of the people who worship with you. Look around. If there are is a significant number of skin colors that are different than yours, you should probably be doing all that you can to incorporate music that serves THEM!

If your place is only represented by one skin color than you might have to dig a little deeper. This is where asking questions comes into play. If you have a lot of younger people, you probably shouldn't ONLY be doing traditional hymns or choruses. If you have a good bit of older people you probably shouldn't only be rocking new millenium modern worship. Ask. Look.

Don't Stereotype:

This is where the balance comes in. Just because someone of a different skin color worship with you doesn't mean they automatically like a different "style" of music. My point isn't in just blindly trying to play to skin color, but more so in trying to best SERVE your faith family by being AWARE of their music preferences and asking questions that serve your people. Don't stereotype.

Feedback Is Key:

Also, it's important to know that feedback AFTER you do a certain song is wanted as well. LISTEN to people when they say, "MAN! That song was awesome!" Or "That was pretty weird when you did What A Friend We Have in Jesus with the kazoo and bagpipes choir...it kind of messed it up."

Pay attention to feedback. Don't get offended by it.

Take Risks:

Not only is it important to be in tune with what people like, but you also need to be ready to take some risks and to nudge people in different directions. Experiment. Try new things. One Sunday we actually broke into a beat-box and rap bridge for Shackles (Mary Mary). It was fun for us. The congregation enjoyed it, and we also got a few negative comments back. Not enough to never do it again, but definitely gave us some feedback on who likes what!

Take risks, ask questions, and catalogue feedback.

For examples of how others are "knowing" their music cultures and the successes and struggles associated with that journey, head over to THE WORSHIP COMMUNITY forums. It's a great place where worship leaders and worshipers from all around the world engage in discussion about any and every topic you can think about as it relates to worship.