

# THRIVE:

Five Vital Elements

# EQUIP

to

Your

# Worship Team

*A Worship Leader Guidebook*

Jon Nicol

# ***Five Vital Elements to Equip Your Worship Team***

*A Worship Leader's Guidebook*

By Jon Nicol

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## Introduction

As a worship leader, do you ever you feel like your worship ministry just survives, instead of *thrives*?

You've got a frustratingly tough task:

You're called to lead a team...

...of volunteers...

...with different skill sets and commitment levels...

...to create a meaningful worship experience...

...Sunday after Sunday after Sunday...

...AND find time to develop those team members *musically*,...

...deepen them *relationally*,...

...and grow them *spiritually*.

Oh yeah, and the next big church holiday is just around the corner. Better start preparing for that, too.

Got an ulcer yet?

I want to invite you into a moment of “intentional neglect.” For the ten to fifteen minutes that it takes to read this short guidebook, I want you to forget about the weekly demands of your worship ministry and ask, “What if...?”

*What if I could spend more time proactively developing my team members?*

*What if I could lead them to a higher level of musicianship?*

*What if I could help them understand Biblical worship and deepen their own private worship of God?*

*And what if I could raise up more leaders to not only help me do all this, but also to multiply this ministry far beyond me?*

It's possible. I'm here to tell you that it is, and *you can do it*.

Just the fact that you downloaded an ebook about developing your team members tells me that you're not chasing "Sunday-awesomeness." You want to intentionally grow a vibrant, healthy, long-term ministry—not just a hip-sounding, Sunday-morning band.

You want to build your ministry beyond *typical* to *exceptional*. You want your team to thrive, not just survive.

And you know it starts with leading your team towards transformation—*spiritually, relationally, and musically*.

This short guidebook can't get you there. But I want to give the building blocks of a process that can. We're going to explore five elements that, when put together, can create an equipping structure for your worship team.

After we explore each element, there will be a series of coaching questions to help you process and reflect.

## **Why Worship Teams Just Survive...**

Too often, a worship ministry doesn't thrive because the leader is not doing what Ephesians 4 calls him/her to do:

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to *equip God's people to do his work* and build up the church, the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-12 NLT)

Instead, too many leaders have this mindset: *"I do the work of ministry, and my team members are just helpers, assistants, and substitutes."*

Equipping worship team members is not easy for a lot of reasons. One of the biggest obstacles is the demand and urgency of “Sunday after Sunday” that I mentioned earlier.

So we need to develop a process to equip our team members AND still meet the high demands of Sunday services.

In the next several sections, we’ll look at the five vital elements that you need to build a team member equipping process. But for now, pause and process through these questions.

### **Process Questions**

1. What does a thriving worship team member look like in your ministry?
2. What are some of the ways you are “*doing the work of ministry*” while your team members are just the “*helpers, assistants, and substitutes?*”
3. What areas of the ministry (that is, the things you do) are life-giving to you?
4. What areas of the ministry are draining to you?
5. How would developing your equipping process help you do more of #3 and less of #4?

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## 1. Clear (and Multipart) Path

When it comes to developing your team members, you need a *clear path* that team members follow. They need to be able to understand where you're leading them.

And this path can't have one beginning and end. It needs *multiple beginnings and endings*.

Think about college. Imagine walking in as a freshman to find your class schedule is four straight years of classes—day after day, week after week, month after month.

*"No thanks. I'll keep flipping burgers at McDonald's."*

But since college is broken up into semesters and years, you can see the path better. And there's also a sense of accomplishment at each step along the way—you're no longer a freshman, you're a sophomore. Then a junior. Then a senior.

(Then a senior again. At least for those of us who crammed four years into five.)

So as you build your development process, you'll want to create a clear equipping path with milestones where team members start and stop along the way.

And remember: you're equipping busy volunteers, so *quicker is better*. Look for ways for those milestones and breaks to happen frequently.

If you want to see an example of a multi-part equipping path, visit [WorshipWorkshop.com](http://WorshipWorkshop.com) to look at how we use these Core Paths: BEGIN, BUILD, MODEL, and MENTOR.

## **Process Questions:**

1. Have you developed any training pathways? If so, what are they and how are they working?
2. What are some ways to create more frequent milestones and breaks along the path?
3. Are there ways to get through this training more quickly than you area now?
4. How would a clear, systematic training pathway be beneficial to your team members and for you?

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## 2. Consistent Core Content

One of the problems with developing worship team members is the fact that most worship ministries have relatively regular turnover.

New people come in and current members step down—they either move away, change churches, or just decide it's time to take a break.

Earlier in ministry, I'd often plan a training event for my whole team. We'd focus on a big issue like “understanding biblical expressions of worship and platform presence.”

The training would be helpful and the team would make progress in that area.

Before long, I started to see the same issues return:

- Heads buried in the music stands...
- No clapping or raising of hands...
- And too many of their faces looked like someone had spit in their Cheerios that morning.

With typical team member turnover, many of my new people hadn't experienced that training. I didn't have that *Consistent Core Content* that everyone walked through.<sup>1</sup>

Another example of this is how you onboard new team members. When someone comes onto the team, do they go through a consistent orientation program?

If you have a regular inflow of new team members each year, this is a fantastic place to start to build a consistent training process with team members.

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<sup>1</sup> By the way, turnover isn't the only reason my team defaulted back to old behavior. I didn't revisit that training often enough. So our Consistent Core Content needs to be retaught and reinforced continually in different ways. But that's another ebook for another time.

The bottom line is this:

As you're developing your equipping process, determine a *consistent core content* that every team member journeys through as he or she serves in the worship ministry.

### **Process Questions:**

1. What are some of themes or topics that you feel should be a part of your team's core training content?
2. What training have you used in the past that now that needs to be taught again to new team members (and reviewed with current members)?
3. If you don't have consistent core content right now, take a moment to imagine that you do.  
*What does that do for your team members?*  
*What does that do for your leaders?*  
*What does that do for you?*

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### 3. Cadenced Flow

What do I mean by *cadenced flow*?

The equipping process you develop has to fit the rhythms of your church and ministry, as well as respect the rhythms of your team members' lives.

Here's an example: for the typical church, when would be a better time to have a one-day training retreat?

The second Saturday in December?

Or,

The second Saturday in January?

That one's a no-brainer. In December, you and your team are deep into the Christmas/Advent season. Not only that, but people are more open to both new things and self-improvement as the New Year begins.

So not only do you want to avoid the busyness of the Christmas season, you can actually leverage the cadence of the New Year to promote your training event.

Another season to leverage for many worship teams is fall. People tend to get into a "back-to-school" routine and are more receptive to programs starting or restarting around September.

So keep in mind the rhythm of your calendar year and schedule out training events or begin initiatives when it fits the flow.

Also, your team members have their own life-cadence going on. Your semi-retired, empty-nester guitarist is going to have more time than your alto mom with three kids under the age of five.

So to build an effective equipping process, much of the content you offer has to be consumed at each individual's own pace.

With technology today, there's no reason why you can't make much of your training content available 24/7. But on-demand content means many of your training efforts will be largely "informational."

Now, information is useful. But for that *informational* content to be *transformational* in the lives of your team members, your equipping process also needs to include both *relational* and *experiential* elements.

So that's why we need the next two vital elements. So let's start with the relational side of team development.

### **Process Questions:**

1. List as many of the natural cadences or rhythms of your church and worship ministry?
2. Which seasons are "no-fly" zones (one's to avoid)? Which seasons can you leverage?
3. As you look at some of the other cadences of your church, worship ministry, and even your own, where are the untapped opportunities to....
  - Create discussion around what your team's been learning? (Example, Green Room time between services.)
  - Teach or review an important concept/principle/skill?
  - Meet for mentoring or encouragement with one or several of your team members?

- Cast vision, encourage, or motivate your team to work through the “on-demand” training you may have for them?
4. As you consider that last bullet point, what are some ways you can help motivate your team to put their heart into the development process.
  5. What are some ways you can make your training and development more “on-demand” so team members can work in their own time and at their own pace?

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## 4. Community Learning

Information alone doesn't change people. It needs to be run through the filter of relationships.

What does that look like? Here are five relational filters to help turn *information* into *team transformation*.

### *Imitation*

The first step in information becoming transformation is by *imitation*. Your team members need to “see” the concepts, principles, and expectations “lived out.”

For example:

*What does coming to rehearsal prepared look like?*

*How do we do these biblical expressions of worship on the platform?*

*What does assuming the best in our team members look like?*

*What does private worship look like in my life?*

### *Conversation*

*Conversation* is another relational filter. We don't always accept or even understand something when we're first exposed to it via information.

For many people, talking about information and training content with others helps them understand it better. That conversation can also help them apply it to their lives.

## *Indoctrination*

*Indoctrin-what?* That's a word we don't use much in the church—probably because it sounds a little, well, *cultish*. (“Want some delicious Kool-Aid?”)

But *indoctrination* simply means to teach or impart a doctrine, principles, or expectations to someone.

Team members may learn the norms and expectations of your worship ministry through information, but they will truly *grasp and conform* to those norms and expectations by seeing it in others and experiencing positive social pressure to adhere to the same standards.

(You may want to read that last sentence again.)

## *Inspiration*

The fourth relational filter is *Inspiration*. Information alone will occasionally inspire someone.

But most often, team members find the inspiration to continue growing as they experience encouragement and emotional support from leaders and team members.

And, they get inspired to grow further by seeing others rise to a new level.

## *Course Alteration*

Finally, the last relational filter is *Course Alteration*. Team members need constructive feedback and correctional input. Without great relationships, that sort of feedback won't be well-received.

We need to build relational bridges of love that can support the weight of truth.

So those are the relational filters of *Community Learning*. But where does community learning happen? It can happen in many settings:

- Team trainings.
- Cohorts or small groups.
- One-on-one or group mentoring relationship.
- Short times of training during rehearsal.
- Even social events can have elements of community learning as team members interact.

Any time your team members are together, look for teachable moments. When you catch a someone living up to a team standard, celebrate it publicly. (*What gets celebrated gets repeated.*)

Now, some of your training can and should be in a community setting. But for the sake of people's schedules, a lot of it needs to be available on-demand and pursued at a pace that fits the person's season of life.

And as they consume that *informational* training, you'll need to create some ways to move it through relational filters. Here are some examples:

- Quarterly training event.
- Mentoring group.
- Peer-to-peer learning cohort that meets once every other month.
- Once-a-month phone call with a leader to see how the team member's training is going.
- It could even be a ten-minute debrief at rehearsal where you ask, "*What are you learning right now about being a lead worshiper?*"

People might all be in different places on the equipping journey, but

that's OK. They'll learn from each other, as well as be encouraged to go further.

So it's clear that for *informational* training to be *transformational*, it needs to include a relational component. But it also needs to include an *experiential* component. That's the fifth vital element.

### **Process Questions:**

1. What are some ways that you can create intentional times of community learning?
2. While leveraging on-demand training content, what are some ways that you can help people filter that content through relationships?
3. In your relational times with your team, what three questions could you use to "prime the pump" in your conversations?

Here are a couple examples:

*"How impactful is \_\_\_\_\_ (the training element) for you, and what do you see as your next step?"*

*"What do you feel God might be saying or leading you to as a result of \_\_\_\_\_ (the training element)?"*

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## 5. Catalytic Experiences

If we look at Ephesians 4:11-12 again, we see an experiential component to equipping:

*“Equip God’s people to DO his work...”*

Training and equipping is not just about gaining knowledge; there has to be a chance for the person to *live out* what he’s learned.

A team member can be taught that an investment in personal practice will help to make him more confident with the music and more free to express his worship on the platform.

But until he actually *does* the personal preparation and *experiences* that freedom and confidence, that principle is only theory and not reality.

That experience of finding public confidence from his private preparation is a catalyst for continued growth.

Likewise, a worship-leader-in-training can learn techniques and ideas for crafting an intentional verbal segue between songs. But she’s not going to master it until she actually has a chance to experience it in a service.

So look for ways to unleash your team members by moving them from *informational training* to *transformational experience*.

## Process Questions:

1. What are some ways you can encourage your team to take the next step with what they've been learning and put it into practice?
2. Do you ever find that you afraid to let leaders-in-training practice what they're learning during a "real" service? What's behind that fear?
3. How can you provide team members and leaders-in-training more real experience that will grow their skills, yet still maintain a reasonable standard of quality on Sunday?

## Your Next Steps

Before we get to some practical steps, let's recap these *Five Vital Elements to Equip Your Worship Team*:

### 1. *Clear (and Multipart) Path*

Your equipping process needs to have multiple beginnings, endings, and clear milestones along the way.

### 2. *Consistent Core Content*

You have to ensure that every team member progresses through a core standard of training. It's crucial to make sure you each person is pulling in the same direction.

### 3. *Cadenced Flow*

For your equipping process to be successful, you have to respect and leverage the natural rhythms of your church, your worship ministry, and your team members.

### 4. *Community Learning*

The informational content of your development process needs to pass through relational filters, like one-on-one conversations, imitating what they see others do, and getting encouragement and constructive feedback from others.

### 5. *Catalytic Experiences*

A significant part of the process for informational content to become transformational in a team member's life is that he or she needs to experience it.

People need to "DO the work of ministry" as a way of learning and growing.



## So what are your next steps?

You might already have a solid equipping process, and this guidebook just gave you a few minor course corrections. That's fantastic!

But if you're like most worship leaders, your equipping process ranges anywhere from *somewhat intentional*, to *accidental*, to even *entirely hypothetical*—that is, it doesn't yet exist.

Please don't despair. I've been at every stage of that continuum. So let me give you two practical “next steps” to make progress.

### Step 1: A Calculated, Intentional Neglect of Sunday

What do I mean by that?

The work you do for Sunday is both *important* (that is, it's crucial for the life of your church) and *urgent* (that is, it has to get done *this week*).

The work you do to equip your team members and raise up leaders is also *important*, but it's not urgent in the same way that Sunday is.

In fact, the only time team development becomes *urgent* is when a relational crisis emerges or a team member deficiency becomes so blatant that you have to deal with it.

Instead of waiting for a team member Chernobyl, be proactive.

Intentionally carve a small percentage of the time that you would normally use to prepare for Sunday and instead, invest that to create (or build up) your team member development process. And make sure it's scheduled *early* in your work week.

This small, calculated, and intentional neglect of Sunday will barely register (if at all) with your congregation.

Because here's the reality—we always succumb to Parkinson's law:

*“Work expands to fill the time available for its completion.”*

As you do the urgent work of Sunday in the remaining 85-90% of your work week, you'll find that *it still gets done!*

So on your calendar, set a reoccurring block of time early in each week to create and implement an equipping process with your worship team.

Not sure what to do during those weekly blocks? The next step will give you plenty to work on.

## **Step 2: Explore Worship Workshop**

Very soon, we'll be opening up another enrollment session for Worship Workshop. ([Explore Worship Workshop here.](#))

Worship Workshop is NOT a “magic pill” or an “easy button.” You still have to work hard and invest in your team member equipping process.

In the Epilogue, I give a little more information why I created Worship Workshop. But as you explore it, know that Worship Workshop gives you much of what we talked about:

1. A clear, multipart training path.
2. Consistent core content.
3. On-demand training/teaching that fits the life rhythms of your team members.
4. Short training videos you can show and discuss during relational team events.
5. A clear call to action to live out what's being taught.

You may find that Worship Workshop is what you need. Or you may find it's not, and that's OK. Even if it's not what you need right now, exploring it will help discover what you do need.

*Conclusion...*

And finally, let me conclude with a blessing...

### *A Blessing...*

As you take these next steps of building an equipping process for your worship ministry, it won't be easy. And the urgent demands of this Sunday are going to try to pull you off course.

But stay with. And know that God will honor and bless you for these efforts. How do I know that?

You are being *obedient to His word* when you *equip* your team to *do* the work of ministry and build up the church.

May God richly bless the work of your hands.

# Epilogue:

## Discover *Worship Workshop*

I said at the beginning that building an equipping process is difficult.

One of the significant barriers is your lack of time to build it and your team members' lack of time to engage in it.

I created *Worship Workshop* for this very reason. *Worship Workshop* is a done-for-you, multipart training path with ready-made core content. It's designed to include or encourage each of these five vital equipping elements in your ministry.

Take a moment to go to [WorshipWorkshop.com](http://WorshipWorkshop.com) to explore how it can help you transform your team members into team leaders, mentors, and role models.

If you have questions about it, please feel free to reach out to me:  
[jon@worshipworkshop.com](mailto:jon@worshipworkshop.com)

I'd love to connect with you.

~Jon

*About the author:*

Jon Nicol is the founder of [WorshipTeamCoach.com](http://WorshipTeamCoach.com) and [WorshipWorkshop.com](http://WorshipWorkshop.com), two sites dedicated to helping worship leaders build healthy teams and lead engaging worship gatherings.

He has served as a vocational worship leader for almost two decades and trains worship leaders and teams around the world through his workshops, courses, and online coaching. He's a regular columnist for *Worship Musician Magazine* and loves to connect with worship leaders.

Jon lives in Ohio with his wife and their four (very loud) kids.

(Apparently, none of them received the “inside voice” gene. They must take after their mother.)