



The Effective Rehearsal Leader

Competency: Effectively lead band rehearsals in a way that honors God and inspires volunteers.

Assignments

1. Read Nehemiah 2 and answer the questions.
2. Read the Article: *7 Steps to Running a Great Band Rehearsal* by Dan Wilt and answer the questions that follow the article.
3. Observe a Thursday night rehearsal noting how the worship leader navigates the team through the evening (note instances of constructive feedback to musicians, how problems and train wrecks were solved, etc.) Discuss with your worship mentor in a follow-up meeting.
4. While at work, focus on giving clear, precise instructions to your colleagues. If you have downtime, explain that you are working on your communication skills and get honest feedback (i.e. "How clear are my instructions?" "Do I ask precise questions?" "Am I too wordy?").
5. Begin filling a small notebook with musical lingo that will help you communicate precise nuances to the band (e.g. syncopation, bar, arpeggio, dotted-eighth note, interlude, etc.)
6. During your commute, listen critically to music, noting the placement and parts of every instrument. After each song, pretend you are leading a rehearsal. See how specific you can be in describing each instrument and part.

Nehemiah 2

1. What are some of the noticeable leadership qualities Nehemiah possessed that helped him inspire his team to join him?
2. What was the general response of the people when asked to participate?
3. How did Nehemiah respond to the opposition he faced?



4. Passivity is a huge threat to a leader's influence. How did Nehemiah push through passivity and maintain humility in the process? How important is that for a worship leader during rehearsals?

5. Notice how Nehemiah assessed the problems before communicating to his team. How does that translate in a band rehearsal setting?

7 STEPS TO RUNNING A GREAT BAND REHEARSAL

By Dan Wilt

Rehearsing is just plain, hard work. Every worship leader, band member, and pastor I know all loves the end result of rehearsal – seamless music, the rising and falling of beautiful, passionate worship, and the silent hum of a well-oiled community doing ministry together. But as I said, rehearsal is just plain, hard work.

Achieving the end result of rich worship times is dependent, at least in part, on confident musicians executing a song – and an entire set – in a sonically beautiful manner. And that takes rehearsal (unless you're playing with a bunch of professional musicians).

A 7 Step Rehearsal Plan

Because rehearsal is necessary, and is hard work, I've followed a simple 7-step pattern I learned from working with some excellent arranger-worship leaders.

I use this for a 15-minute rehearsal (I've had those) or a 75-minute rehearsal. It all applies. This pattern enables our band to accomplish much in a short time, and enables us to end on time with some level of confidence in what we're about to do.

[Note: This progression assumes several things: a) the musicians have received the songs ahead of time as an mp3 and chord chart, b) the band culture is to show up on time ("downbeat" time), c) the band has at least heard the songs once before the rehearsal, and d) that you have thoroughly practiced personally, and generally decided where arrangements are going, beforehand.]

Here it is, and every step is vital (and can telescope to be short or long):



1. Greet and Connect (5-10 minutes)

Smile, welcome people to rehearsal, and silently honor the fact that they have made sacrifices in their lives to be there.

You don't need to over-do this, but some worship leaders are so task-oriented that they under-do this vital step of connecting.

It changes the music and the atmosphere.

Make people feel valuable by high-fiving them, taking a moment to ask how their week is going, or by giving a simple hug. It all matters.

And be confident. Of course you're not the best arranger in the world (heck, I live in Nashville).

But greet people ready to lead the night. Timid leadership is hard to follow, and stresses out the band.

If they feel like you all are wasting time, just because of poor, unclear leadership, it's a drag on the culture you are trying to create.

Move the rehearsal forward, express appropriate humility, and push through any snags.

2. Overview the Set List and Manage Expectations (5 minutes)

Once everyone is generally set up (again, "downbeat" time is an essential part of a worship band culture), and everyone has the charts (we, with a few exceptions, ask everyone to print/bring/ipad their own), it's time for an overview.

Walk your crew through the progression of the songs, and tell them what transitions will take you from one song to the next.

Then, help the band manage their time expectations by saying something like this: "We'll take 10 minutes or less on each song we already have a grid for. Then we'll take some extra time on this new song. If I cut us off early on one, we can always come back to it at the end."

3. Do A Familiar Song and Sound Check (7 minutes)

Choose the most familiar, big song in the set, and count it in. Have everyone play full out – the loudest and most dense the band will be (but remind them to be musical).



Rock the groove for awhile, even dropping out vocals after a bit, just to let the musicians find their musical feet together.

Repeat sections, ask for things in monitors, or fix your IEMs (in-ear monitors). Git 'er done, and move on.

4. Outline The First Song, Run It and Tweak (10 minutes)

I start right at the top of the set. Give a quick rundown on where the song is going, what instruments (voices too) come in where, preferences you have, and go for it.

Play it through, the whole arrangement, and note all the train wrecks (wrong bass notes, wrong drum groove, etc.).

Go back to the train wrecks, and repeat those parts in a loop (short, 4 bar loops that repeat the challenging part over and over) until each is fixed.

Note that vocalists need direction. Our vocalists know to give me at least one verse solo before coming in on the pre-chorus or chorus.

Tweak monitors again.

5. Repeat Step 4 for All Songs (20-25 minutes – 3 more tunes)

That's it. Rinse and repeat for each song.

6. Learn The Unfamiliar Song (15 minutes)

I never start by learning a new song; I usually push it till the very end so we can linger on it for a bit.

So, you've let the band get in the groove (and respond to the Spirit) with familiar tunes. Now you're at the new song.

Spend some time on a new song, giving an overview to the band, speaking about instrument roles one by one, listening to the mp3 so it's fresh, walking through chart with pens in hand, and using separate mini-rehearsals for parts as necessary.

7. Top & Tail, Reinforce Weak Spots (10 minutes)

I aim at leaving 10 minutes to wrap up the rehearsal. I first always ask: "Is there anything anyone is feeling uncomfortable about? A part you need us to quickly run through?"

If not, I aim right at Topping (how we'll get into a song/start it), and Tailing – how we'll finish it, and get to the next song.



To do this, we literally count in the first song, do a few bars, and just when the band is ready to rock it, I smile, wave my hands, and yell, “Awesome! Let’s go to the end.” We go to the end, finish the last few bars of the song, and make the transition to the next song.

Same thing for the next song. I move fast, and skip easy ones. Top and Tail.

Some Final Tips

Here are some final tips to tighten up your rehearsals even more.

- If possible, I like to turn my mic around and face the band for rehearsal. They can then read my body language more clearly, and I can say things while making eye contact with the drummer, etc. I can also smile, and say, “Yep, that’s it” to the bass player laying it down.
- On occasion, run ‘mini-rehearsals’ that just focus on the vocals. I kick out other musicians for a break, and just let the vocalists, along with me and my guitar, nail that chorus harmony.
- Create at least one, ‘open’ moment where the band can get past the chord chart and get lost in worship for awhile. It changes the set, and creates a powerful leadership unit ready to go with you where you need to go.
- Have your awesome sound person show up early for the morning sound check, to get the system humming and to be ready for the band. Give them clear direction on what instruments are on that day.
- Be polite, friendly, and playful with each other. It lightens the burden of the hard work we must do.
- Begin and end with prayer. Sometimes, take a few extra minutes to pray for the person needing some extra support.

Bless you as you do the hard, but important work, of running rehearsals.

Questions from the Article:

1. What are some of the benefits to having a time of connecting (i.e. greeting, prayer, devotions) before rehearsal?

2. The article mentions several times the idea of creating and maintaining the right “worship band culture.” Why do you think that is important? What are some elements that contribute positively and negatively to the worship culture?



3. What factors might contribute to a leader lacking strong, assertive leadership in a rehearsal? How do you overcome these factors?

4. On a scale of 1–10, how assertive and confident do you feel when leading a rehearsal?

5. What are some benefits of having little “mini-rehearsals” within the rehearsal?

6. Explain the process of “Top and Tail” and why you think it would be beneficial during a rehearsal.

7. In the 7-step process, which step is the most difficult for you? Why? Which step comes most naturally for you? Why?