

## Sound Foundations: The 7 a.m. Sound Check

Soundchecks. In most churches they are either a cause for war or something that is missing entirely.

Nothing shows the maturity of a team more than their sound checks.

- 1. Check one instrument at a time** – This allows the sound tech to get a proper EQ of each instrument.
- 2. Make sure your sound tech shows up early** – It's important for your sound tech to be early in order to prepare for a soundcheck. If that's not possible, for some reason, appoint someone to prepare the stage and sound board for the scheduled band.
- 3. Speak kindly** – It's easy to take "low jabs" at the sound man or other members of the team during a soundcheck. It's unbelievable the issues that soundchecks reveal. Musicians, resist the urge to verbally stab other team members.
- 4. Soundcheck early** – Build it within your team culture that soundcheck happens BEFORE rehearsal starts. Otherwise, it will eat up the precious little time you have to practice.
- 5. Make sure everyone plays at the loudest volume** – This allows the sound man to get a proper EQ and see if any channel gain is spiking.
- 6. Train your team to be disciplined (and not play) if they're not being checked** – I know, for a musician to hold an instrument and not doodle is nearly impossible. But you can do it!

**7. Teach your team members how to get a good monitor mix –** Whether you're using in-ear monitors or floor wedges, teach your vocalists and musicians to be picky about their mix. Make sure they have what they need.

**8. Speak vision before you start practice –** Everything you do should be about vision. Before rehearsal starts, cast a vision for the set and set expectations.

**9. Pray –** It fixes everyone's attention on what matters

**10. Utilize a skilled sound tech –** The more proficient your sound tech, the better your sound check. In our local churches, at times, we utilize people who simply don't have the skills. I can understand if you're low on volunteers and they're all you have, but work to find and attract skilled people.

**11. Position your vocalists as far away from the drums as possible –** One of the biggest frustrations with worship teams is that vocalists can't hear themselves. The further away from the drums, the better. If you can, purchase in-ear monitors for your team. It covers a multitude of sins

Once everything is line checked the engineer would generally ask each band member what other instruments they would like in their monitor and crucially at what volume. This is normally done by getting each instrument to play individually and then every musician says how much of it they want in their mix. And here lies the problem.... you have no overall volume level reference of where each instrument needs to sit in your mix until the whole band starts playing together. Once they start and you add in acoustic stage volume, everything changes. It's then very difficult to communicate back to the desk what's too loud or soft whilst you are trying to play. When you have stopped you try and remember your list of what was too loud or soft. Adjustments are made and the band plays again but because everyone else's levels have changed, the mix you hear onstage is different and you need to tweak your monitor again, but you can't because it's very difficult to attract the soundman's attention whilst playing...

The 7am alternative goes like this

1. Have one person leading the sound check from the stage and liaising with the desk. This could be a second sound man or musician.
2. Line check instruments in this order: vocals, then instruments and most importantly, drums last.
3. Once the drum levels are established get the drummer to drop into a straight simple groove at the volume he is likely to play for a loud song. As he is playing get the sound check leader to stand at each instruments' wedge

and relay to the desk what elements of the kit each member would like in their monitor one member at a time. Don't stop playing!

4. When each member has a drum mix, get the bass guitar to add a one note groove as a layer on top of the drums. Repeat the same monitoring procedure with each member until they have enough bass in their mix and then check all other instruments in the same way. After this the best order is probably rhythm instruments first such as acoustic guitar, then textural sounds like keyboard pads and electric guitar chords followed by single melody instruments such as flutes. Think of it as adding layers to the same one chord groove. Don't change the groove! It's probably worth leaving any instrument that doesn't have its own amplifier such as strings till this point too.
5. Lastly, bring in lead vocals and then backing vocals. Don't do the BVs first as they need the lead vocal level to know where their own volume sits in context.

When we soundchecked this way we found it not only saved time but also yielded a better and more detailed mix much sooner.

### The key sound checking rules are:

1. Have a second sound person or musical director with a microphone communicating mix requests to the sound desks
2. Go straight from line check into building a layered groove.
3. Start with drums, then rhythm, textural, lead, un-amplified instruments followed by lead and backing vocals.
4. Keep playing the same simple groove at consistent volume.
5. When the band does stop playing, resist the temptation to twiddle!

Try it this way. If it takes a while first go don't worry, as you do it more you'll speed up and leave much more time for rehearsing.