

THE WORSHIP UNICORN

How to Reach People in Lifeboats and People in the Water:

Creating Consistency and Real Connection with Your Congregation.

Every week we lead all kinds of people. They come from different places in life and they have a wide variety of life experiences. All of us as leaders have to somehow sort through this and lead them as a whole (as a congregations) but also, as much as humanly possible, as individuals.

This is quite a challenge. I see it too. I experience it every week at my church.

One way to view these groups is like people in lifeboats people in the water. The people in the lifeboats have been saved, or at least they are in the process of being saved. They know where they are going, they are headed in the right direction, they know the path, they want to be led to the shore to a safe place

And then there's people in the water. We might not be sure about them. Maybe they've not even seen the lifeboat. Maybe they have seen the lifeboat and they decided not to take it. Maybe they're not sure if they want to be rescued.

How do we lead vastly different types of people? Today I'll share 3 ways you can lead better – THIS WEEKEND. These are easy concepts to grab a hold of. They might take some bravery and intentionality to put into practice, but you CAN do this!

I have a bottom-line foundation, a core belief, that I try to encourage and challenge others with. It's the reason I spend so much time on this topic, and it's the reason I wrote The Worship Unicorn book:

***WE DON'T NEED MORE SONG LEADERS
WE NEED MORE WORSHIP LEADERS***

There's a huge difference. Looking back on my journey into music and ministry, I was a song leader far before I was a worship leader. When I started, I had some confidence in my musical ability, my natural talent. I thought "I can do this" – I can be a music director, I can lead the band, I can make some decent quality music. I have a degree in Music Composition. I can do this." Boy, did I have a lot to learn!

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With a few years of leading under my belt, let me share with you a few pointers. There are 3 ways you can lead better this weekend.

#1 BE A SHEPHERD - KNOW YOUR FLOCK

Check out Proverbs 27:23

“Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds”. Proverbs 27:23 (NIV)

“Know the state of your flocks, and put your heart into caring for your herds”. Proverbs 27:23 (NLT)

Look how personal this is. As shepherds, need to make an effort to know the people we lead. Spend time with them. We can't be just on the stage. We need to engage. Reach out. Know their stories. If we just play our set, leave the stage, get on our private jet and fly away – we miss the mark.

As we get to know them, as we learn their stories, we can relate to them personally and we can measure the pulse of our congregation. We will teach better.

Because I've been at my church a long time, I know a lot of the people. Not all of them, but a lot of them. Sometimes when I lead, it's almost like I can see thought bubbles floating above some people's heads.

Here's what I've seen:

- The family that is blessed and happy
- The mom gripped with fear
- The young girl that tried to commit suicide Thursday
- The wife who put her husband in a coffin yesterday
- The lady just diagnosed with cancer
- The young father of two who was handed divorce papers that week

These are actual people we lead. Real experiences. A real storyline in the everyday reality of our churches.

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Go back to the advice in Proverbs 27. There are words that should be emphasized. The “personal” nature of this verse should be something we notice.

Your congregation needs YOU. You need to be a shepherd. You are different. Your people are different and unique. Focus on knowing your people. Concentrate on being the shepherd. What happens when you leave the shepherd?

Consider the true story of Shrek the sheep. He became famous when he was found after hiding out in caves for 6 years. _What happens if you’re a sheep alone for 6 years? What do you look like? You need a haircut. Your fleece grows and grows because—nobody there to shave it. You need a haircut and you have no barber. You have lost your shepherd.

When he was finally found and shaved, his fleece weighed 60 lbs. Under normal conditions, with regular care from the shepherd, fleece weighs just 10 pounds. For six years, Shrek carried six times the regular weight of his fleece. He carried an unnecessarily heavy load. He was literally weighed down with an avoidable burden. Simply because he was away from his shepherd.

Our congregations need us.

If we wander from our shepherd, we are like Shrek. If we live in isolation – we are like Shrek.

***WE MUST LEAD LIKE A SHEPHERD
WE MUST BE LED BY THE SHEPHERD***

#2 Teach with Stories & Scripture

This idea might send waves of terror through your body. You might think “I can’t talk”. This concept is scary to you. I won’t go into details here but check out a guy named Moses in the Bible. Follow his story.

I can relate to this fear. As I mentioned earlier, I was confident in music but not confident in praying or speaking.

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Believe it or not, I actually had a deal with the church that I would play keyboard and sing, but I would NOT pray or speak. This is quite humorous now, because if you were to see me lead today, teaching is part of my identity as a worship leader. My “sermonettes” (as they are referred to) have become a very personal and intentional element of the worship set in my attempt to do all I can to better connect with people.

When you share stories & scripture songs become more powerful. Here’s an example: If I show you a basketball – it’s just a basketball. You can pick one up at Wal Mart for \$25. Nothing too exciting here. However, what if you knew it was Lebron James’ basketball and it made the winning basket at the last minute in a championship game? I think you would agree, it now has deeper meaning, and a whole lot more value.

Songs are the same.

When choosing songs, introducing songs, teaching about songs, consider the person in the water. Remember these are the ones not in the lifeboat. These people won’t know if you did a song that’s the #1 hit on the radio right now, or has the most views, the most downloads. They won’t know if it’s a hymn that is 400 years old, or it’s the most popular and well-known epic anthem of the church. They just honestly don’t know.

Can I share an observation? CHURCH IS WEIRD. If you are new to the church, you’ve not been raised in it, it can be even more weird. We use a lot of strange words and bizarre phrases that people in the water do not understand.

Check out one of my favorites “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing”. This is an awesome song that has the lyric “Here I raise my Ebenezer”. I won’t tell you what it means here, but I’ll tease you to say it’s a powerful message that can connect with your congregation – if you teach it. Do some homework. Share the story with your church. Then sing the song.

Let’s explore a more recent example with the song “Reckless Love”. For the sake of this discussion, let’s all assume we like this song and we won’t argue about the title. You can choose to teach the meaning of this song, or you can choose to not teach.

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Put yourself in the brain of the person in the water who sings these lyrics:

"It chases me down, fights till I'm found, leaves the ninety-nine..."

They have no idea what this means. Furthermore, do you know how many "church people" have no clue what this means? I experienced this at my church. So when I decided to introduce this song, I first taught from Luke 15; the story of the shepherd, the lost sheep. If you learn what this phrase means, and then you sing it - it has meaning.

One of the most powerful messages you can communicate to a person in the water is that they are like the 1 from the 99. They are important. Jesus sees them. He values them. If you choose to teach them Luke 15, they can see Jesus as the Shepherd. They can be impacted to know if they were the only sheep to wander away He would come get them. If Jesus was the only guy in the lifeboat, He would come rescue the one in the water.

The person in the water needs to hear that message

As you lead each week, do you know there is only one guarantee you have? It's Scripture. And ironically, it is Scripture that teaches us about itself.

*"So is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return empty,
but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."
Isaiah 55:11*

You can bank on the Bible.

SONGS WILL FAIL.

MUSIC WILL FAIL.

SCRIPTURE WILL NEVER FAIL.

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Ideas will flop. Songs will derail. The band will fall apart. At some point in your life you are likely to have an instrumental train wreck. Scripture will never fail. A word of caution: Don't preach a sermon. You have a Senior Pastor for that. Instead drop truth bombs. Give them some bite sized nuggets about worship.

Some of us need to talk more. Some of us need to talk less. Remember the sermon is not our job.

#3 Be Naked – Be Real & Really Care

What does naked mean? Lest you think I've crossed a line here, I mean to be vulnerable, raw, honest, transparent. Let them see the real you. That you care.

For some people this concept is even more terrifying than sharing a story. It's the fear of people not liking you if they can see who you really are.

As you reveal more of yourself, your sheep connect with you better. As you understand their stories, you gain wisdom into what stories to share, you find your personal story, your style, your DNA, your vibe, your songs. You will become a more effective leader. The problem here is that instead of working intently to discover who we are, we too often just seek to imitate something or someone else. We spend too much time copying and comparing. We miss discovering us. We miss finding out who we are and who we can become.

If you want a sure-fire way to miss your mark, or second guess everything you do, spend time comparing yourself to others.

COMPARISON IS THE THIEF OF JOY.

Your congregation needs YOU. You're put there for a reason, and a certain period of time to lead them. Isn't it amazing that God plops people in front of us every week? He literally and physically places people in chairs, pews, sitting, standing, whatever. They need to see that you care for them. Here's one of the best stories I know that illustrates the power of caring.

In 1912 there was a ship called Titanic. If you've not heard this story or seen the movie, I'm going to spoil the ending. You've been warned. The ship hits an iceberg and

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sinks. More than half the passengers died. As it sinks, lots of people in the water, are understandably scared.

Aboard the ship is a man names John Harper, a 39 year-old preacher. He is traveling with his daughter and sister – they are put on lifeboats and survived.

He stayed behind.

Survivors tell that he preached the Gospel to the end. First onboard the sinking ship, and then afterward to those in the freezing water. He chose to jump into the water as the ship began to sink. Some people in the water had lifejackets, some floating on wreckage. John also had a life jacket

To everyone he could reach he shouted, "Have you trusted in the Lord Jesus?" He preached to them. He cared. He wanted to give them a salvation message before they died. This is what he said to them:

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."

Acts 16:31

He found a Scotsman with no life jacket holding on to some wreckage in the water. John asked, "Are you saved?" The Scotsman answered "No".

John got washed away, separated from the Scotsman. A wave later brought him back. He asked again "Are you saved now?" The answer came back the same "No". John quoted the Acts verse again "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."

Watch what happens next – a powerful demonstration of caring.

John took off his life jacket, gave it to the Scotsman. What happened in that moment? Can you imagine being the Scotsman? John Harper gave up everything. In that moment the Scotsman sees that John cared. Before this he heard words, but now he saw caring being lived out in a real tangible way.

Because of John's generosity, his sacrifice, the Scotsman lived. John Harper died.

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In his testimony, check out the words of the Scotsman:

*“With two miles of water underneath me, I trusted Christ as my Savior.
I am John Harper’s last convert”*

That is the power of caring.

John spent the last moments of his life investing in others. When John showed and demonstrated to the person that he cared he made an impact. Of course, we might not have a story this dramatic. But we do have people who are equally as lost, equally in danger.

How can we care for these people in front of us every week? Yes, we are musicians, but it’s so much deeper than that. It has to be deeper than that. The music is obvious. Don’t get hung up on the obvious. Look for ways to care

OUR CARE IMPACTS OUR CREDIBILITY TO LEAD

If we can care for them. We can point them to God. We can impact them.

Those are 3 ways for YOU to lead better this weekend

- **Be a Shepherd** – know your flock
- **Teach** – stories & scripture
- **Be Naked** - be real & really care

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*FREE BONUS

If you've not read "How to Worship a King" by Zach Neese, I highly recommend you check it out. It has an amazing word picture of our job as worship leaders. It's the concept of Two Hands. It goes something like this: As leaders, our job is to reach one hand out to the congregation, reach the other hand up to God, join those hands, and get out of the way.

I appreciate that advice so much.

I would love to hear how you are reaching people at your church. Connect with me worshipunicorn.com or @doughood on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

I encourage you and challenge you with this:

Be You. Be Led. Lead Well.

Doug Hood

