



READY, SET, GO!

SOUNDCHECK AND REHEARSAL ROUTINES

by Doug Gould, Worship MD

When we were kids, "Ready, Set, Go!" was a familiar call at Easter egg hunts, three-legged races and track meets. These words signaled us to get ready, find our spot and wait eagerly for the race to begin. Win or lose, the joy was in participating. This phrase can also be a practical reminder to prepare ourselves mentally, physically, spiritually and emotionally as we pursue our goals and expectations.

The "Get Ready, Get Set, Go" framework can be a great way to create a structured routine for your soundcheck and rehearsal process, especially for worship and tech teams. Unlike professional touring bands that have this down to a science, volunteer teams might need some time to get the hang of it since they don't practice it routinely. But with practice and persistence, you can make this routine second nature for your team. It may take a while but don't get discouraged. Aim for teamwork and cooperation. You'll not only enhance your team's sound but also build stronger, more trusting relationships among its members.

Because you are in ministry and not producing a performance for a fan base, we need to consider the spiritual aspect of why we do what we do and what will glorify the Lord in our service. Check your egos at the door. It's not about you!

Are you praying? Pray first. Pray individually and pray together. Pray before you plan individually. Pray together as a team before considering what the plan looks like. Proverbs 16:3 says, "Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established." Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." Cloak whatever you do in prayer, and do not depend on your own understanding.



And when you think through your plans, think through this question: How does it bring God glory? "Lord, we ask you to send your Holy Spirit to guide our plan. Open the hearts and minds of each person who participates in this process so that our plan reflects your

intentions, and our worship brings you the honor, reverence, power and glory that you deserve.”

GET READY: The Planning and Preparation Phase

Planning is a biblical principle. Proverbs 21:5 (NLT) says, “Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty.”

How often have I procrastinated and chosen songs for the service at the last minute? You can guess what the results usually are.

I have experienced what worship looks like when I take shortcuts; I forget to pray (or don’t leave time for prayer), which leads to a plan that will fail to bring God His glory. Choosing songs that I like rather than the ones He would want to hear will not bring us, the body of Christ, into His presence. Once you have devised the plan, it’s time to start the prep.

Do you have a regular time for soundchecks and rehearsals? If not, set a regular schedule. Determine a consistent day and time for rehearsals and soundchecks to ensure all team members can attend. Make sure everybody is committed to the time required. This is a BIGGIE! Nothing sours a team more than members who are consistently late when everyone else is on time.

Choose commitment for new members over talent every time. We will talk later about how you recruit and maintain the team positively. Everyone on the team has a function and a responsibility for that role.

Do You Know Your Function?

Worship Leader/Music Director: Oversee the music selection and lead the band. You are also a pastor in the sense that you shepherd and make disciples, not just better musicians or producing a cool band. LEAD! How are you choosing the songs that will be played? Do the songs glorify the Lord? Are they in key ranges that the congregation can sing? Are you trying to do the song just like the record (Christian cover band), or are you doing it your way? Are you directing the arrangement or leaving it up to the players to copy parts exactly off the record or come up with their parts? Your position as a leader is to direct, so direct, and let the band know what it is you need in every part of the song; this will save you an inordinate amount of time in rehearsal, which for most churches is very limited, to begin with. You are their conductor; don’t waste time discussing what should be done. You should have the plan ahead of time, so see it through.

Band Members: Responsible for their instruments and parts. Bandmates must learn their parts at home. That is their responsibility. Rehearsal for the band is not the time for learning individual parts. Band rehearsal is for combining all the parts to sound like one voice, not five family members discussing politics at Thanksgiving.

Tech Team Leader: Manages, maintains and operates the sound, lighting and media equipment. Communication with all the team members is critical before, during and after

the service. Ensure you have everything required to facilitate the soundcheck, rehearsal and service before Sunday morning.

Sound Engineer: Ensures proper audio levels and sound quality. You are a teacher who, with the cooperation of the worship leader, can instruct the band members on proper microphone technique, how to build a better monitor mix, know the players' strengths and weaknesses, and be an encourager. You are part of the band, in a sense. You get to play the whole band. Listen to the songs several times before rehearsal; your ears are your greatest asset, and knowing the songs and the musicians who play them thoroughly will be the difference between a great sound and a mediocre sound.



Media Operator: Manages projection of lyrics, videos and other visual media. Make sure that the lyrics line up with the songs you're doing. Read ahead and advance the slide before the last word is sung. The congregation has seen it and doesn't want to wait to sing before you have the next slide up. Musicians know about reading ahead, and I believe musicians make for the best lyric presenters.

Communication is critical in the planning and preparation stage. The software program planning center is a great tool, but a phone call can be just as good, especially for last-minute changes, substitutions and backup plans. The music director/worship leader and tech director should discuss what needs to be done at the soundcheck and rehearsal well before it happens.

The worship leader is responsible for the song selection and flow. At times, the pastor may want to have certain songs selected to align with his teaching. Other times, you may be on your own. What is the Lord saying to you, and are you listening to Him or Spotify?

Choose songs that align with the worship theme. If you want the congregation to participate, the songs should be in key ranges they can sing along with and should be somewhat familiar. I have no problem with introducing new songs; however, I take the time to teach it and repeat it for a few weeks so it becomes a familiar song. Ask yourself the question, “Is God glorified in this song?”

Set List Distribution

Share the set list with lyrics, chord charts and recordings with the team ahead of time, including the techs. Music leaders, you may also want to annotate the charts indicating specific parts of the songs where you want musicians to pay attention to the detail you have in mind... tempo changes, key changes, dynamics, bars of rest (music is as much about listening as it is playing), breakdowns, solos, acapella sections, scripture reading, etc.

EXAMPLE of Annotated Chord Chart Arrangement

- **Intro:** Acoustic guitar only
- **Verse 1:** Acoustic guitar, Lead vocal
- **Verse 2:** Acoustic guitar with pad and vocals
- **Chorus:** Acoustic guitar, pad, light percussion, arpeggiated guitar
- **Interlude between Chorus 1 and Verse 2:** Full Band
- **Verse 3:** Drums thinned out; snare on 4 instead of 2&4. Long whole notes on Bass matching kick; acoustic guitar strumming; sustained open chords on piano.
- **Chorus 2:** Full Band, the guitar plays the same repeating lick as the previous chorus
- **Bridge/Chorus 4:** Full Band with a more aggressive feel; bigger/louder
- **Chorus 3:** Breakdown to a simple driving groove, bass and drums tightly synced, and acoustic guitar
- **Chorus 4 & 5:** Full Band: BGVs with delay fading into the sunset at the end

This is especially helpful to teams who don't have lots of rehearsal time. Make sure to share your set list, the arrangement of songs and the order/flow of the service with the whole team.

Audio Techs: Line checks are your best insurance to ensure a successful soundcheck and rehearsal from going off the rails due to a technical issue. A line check is a crucial step in live sound reinforcement before a full sound check. It verifies that all audio inputs (lines) are correctly connected and functioning as expected. Here's a detailed breakdown of what a line check entails:

Ensure Connectivity: Confirm that every microphone, instrument and audio source is correctly connected to the mixing console.

Verify Signal Flow: Ensure that signals from each input source reach the mixing console without issues. Ensure all outputs to all loudspeakers, monitors, IEM, outboard processing and recording/streaming buses are functioning correctly.

Identify Problems Early: Detect and resolve any connectivity issues, such as faulty cables, dead batteries in wireless mics, or incorrect routing, before the full soundcheck.

Importance of a Line Check Efficiency: Speeds up the full soundcheck by ensuring all lines work correctly beforehand.

Problem Prevention: Identifies and resolves issues early, preventing delays during the soundcheck or performance.

Audio Quality: Ensures clear and consistent audio signals from all sources, contributing to a better overall sound quality.

GET SET: Soundcheck and Rehearsal

The difference between the soundcheck and the rehearsal is as follows: The Soundcheck is where the audio team checks and adjusts the audio levels and equipment settings to ensure everything sounds good. Check each instrument individually for proper gain staging and set levels for each input source. Ring out the monitors. Once you have all the levels set for each instrument and vocal, begin playing through a song to set your mix. When everyone is set, give the band the thumbs up to indicate they're ready to rehearse. To reiterate, the soundcheck is all about the technical aspects, ensuring all the equipment is working correctly and getting the initial balance for the mix. Your rehearsals should be done in the order of the service, if possible, to ensure a proper flow. Do the soundcheck first, and once the soundcheck is complete, you can begin your rehearsal.

Soundcheck Tips: Set a clear start time. Ensure everyone is aware of when soundcheck begins and stress the importance of punctuality. Start with a line check. Ensure all microphones, instruments and other audio sources are connected and working properly. Check individual instruments. Adjust the levels for each instrument and vocal to ensure clarity and balance. Ring out the monitors to reduce the possibility of feedback. This process involves identifying and eliminating problematic frequencies in the monitors by gradually increasing their volume until feedback occurs and then attenuating the offending frequencies. Run a full band check. Play through a song to adjust the overall mix and balance between instruments. Check communication. Ensure everyone can hear and communicate effectively on stage and in the control booth.

Rehearsal Tips: Follow the service order. Practice the songs and transitions in the same order they will be played during the service. Focus on transitions. Smooth transitions between songs and other service elements are crucial for maintaining the flow of worship. Work on dynamics. Pay attention to the dynamics of each song, such as when to play softly or loudly, to create an engaging worship experience. Address any issues. Use the rehearsal

time to resolve any musical or technical issues that arise. Encourage feedback. Allow team members to provide input and suggestions for improvement.



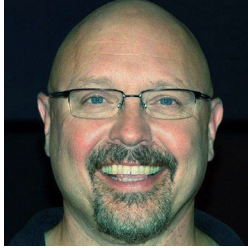
GO: The service

You are not there to entertain but to lead people in worship and glorify the Lord. Be attentive and flexible. Be prepared to adapt to any changes or unexpected situations that may arise during the service. Stay spiritually focused. Remember that the primary goal is to worship and glorify God, so keep your heart and mind focused on Him throughout the service. Encourage congregation participation. Engage the congregation and invite them to join in worship through singing, clapping and other expressions of praise. Evaluate and improve. After the service, gather feedback from team members and discuss what went well and what can be improved for future services. Have a post-service meeting to review what went well and identify areas for improvement. Pray together. Thank the Lord for His guidance and presence, and pray for continued growth and unity within the team.

In Conclusion

By implementing the "Get Ready, Get Set, Go" framework, your worship and tech teams can create a structured routine that enhances the quality of your services and fosters a spirit of cooperation, commitment and worship among all team members.

About the Author



Doug Gould is the CEO and Founder of Worship MD and has been a Pro Audio and Music Technology industry veteran for nearly 30 years, serving in management roles at Shure, Tascam and E-Mu Systems. Doug has served as a worship leader, musician and sound tech at various churches throughout his career.

Over the last 18 years, Doug has been a very effective presenter at hundreds of worship conferences throughout North America and beyond, focusing his experience on consulting and teaching.

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