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Sound Sanctuary

20/20 Hindsight

by Richard Rutherford

Last year is now history. It is clear that the lessons we learn today give us the information we need tomorrow. One great lesson to learn may be that micro-management of your technical ministries is a vision-killing, energy-sucking, exhausting waste of energy.

That is exactly my thought as I look at the piles of technical literature, product reviews and magazines that are neatly stacked in alphabetized unread order in my office. How the heck can we absorb all this knowledge and put it to good use (or discard it)? I truly empathize with the worship leaders, executive pastors and AV technicians who are overwhelmed by the vastness of products and information being tossed their way.

Last year I witnessed more than a few pastors trying to sort out technical specifications on personal monitors, video projectors and digital consoles without ever delegating to or involving any other staff members during on-site consultations. For the most part, they have still not made any decisions, and it's a painful process to watch.

The past year also brought me in contact with many pastors and church leaders who couldn't have been more enthusiastic about introducing me to "Bob" the video guy, "Sue" the light person, "Jim" the audio fanatic, "Anne" the digital media administrator and so on. Even when budgets were modest, the willingness to learn and the effort to advance individual talents within the team really was inspiring to be a part of.

As technology advances, some technical tasks become more efficient and achieve higher quality results. It's the initial learning curves, however, that sometimes slow progress to a crawl. Finding and developing qualified staff from within a congregation is not all that easy, but without getting this done, almost all technical tasks will be far too overwhelming for just a couple of people.

Planning months or even years ahead has been a successful strategy for many houses of worship that are dedicated to reaching out through any type of technical media. For instance, running sound in the sanctuary is very different from recording, mixing and burning quality CDs. The equipment is different and the knowledge is different. However, you can't really plan for one without including the other, and this goes for personnel as well as hardware. One person could do it, but a well-developed team of two or three will do it faster and better. Dividing the tasks gives each staff member more time to enhance specific skills, and can especially take pressure off volunteers. Limited time doesn't have to mean limited results.

I should clarify that this discussion is not just about "mega-churches" with thousands of members; it's about the growing church with a couple hundred members! (Where do you

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think those large churches came from?)

I am familiar with several "portable" churches that set up and tear down all their production gear each week. Maybe only one person can live mix really well, but the teamwork is inspiring. A cable person, a case moving person, a speaker stand person, a subwoofer person, a wireless mic battery person... Perhaps the key element is that so many people are afforded the opportunity to serve and be part of the team. Eventually, everyone learns every step of audio production, and a few will begin to specialize in certain areas.

It's really a shame to hear, "We used to record our services, but John Doe left, and we don't have anybody else right now." Everybody leaves eventually, but without a plan to replace, rotate, share tasks and update volunteer training, this scenario is likely to repeat itself.

One suggestion we've heard is to have one member of the team break down individual tasks and create more opportunities to serve. Find and train at least two people for every task, then rotate the tasks monthly. You'll be surprised how just rolling up cables or stacking music stands becomes a technical event filled with purpose.

Outside training is another inspirational tool that is very inexpensive. Local or regional trade shows and seminars don't have to mean more than a car ride for a couple hours. Some are free but almost all off-site seminars have discounts for multiple members. A typical series of seminars may end up costing only a few dollars per hour to get hands-on expert training. Your church cannot afford *not* to send your staff. I also suggest that these types of events should become a requirement for AV team membership and that once completed, some level of accountability is established. A simple review meeting a week after will help information retention and help clarify where your staff may need more (or less) training.

There are obviously several methods to developing a better AV team, but creating ways to be of service, simple task division and technical training are some basic elements that need to be included in any technical ministry. There is too much good work to be done to end up short-handed and outdated!

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