

PROBLEM SOLVER

TECH MODULE #3

“I’m quick on my feet to find solutions to technical problems”

Well, that sounds all well and good and yes, that is what we desire as a Production team at RLC. But there are certainly days when things don’t go as planned and we need to be equipped to respond accordingly. And while we’d like to think of this team as one that is really good at practicing “fire prevention”, we often times find ourselves needing to be good at “firefighting”. There is a difference and our readiness, both personally and as a team, can make or break our ability to execute the technical side of services at RLC. It also affects our ability to work as a team and as ministry leaders. There will be mistakes or problems to solve--they go with the territory of live-production. But the good news is, these mistakes don’t have to define who we are as a team. Instead, they can be opportunities for reflection and growth. Proverbs 27:17 “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another”. The lessons learned as a team (and there always is one to learn) from a fire fight, grows us into better equipped firefighters.

We are a creative and driven bunch. Many psychologists and psychiatrists have studied what creativity is. Most agree that one of the true tests of creativity lies in the ability to actively problem-solve. Sure, we can look at a problem and come up with one or two possible solutions; i.e. the ability to “fight fires”. But it takes the truly creative person to be able to anticipate and head off that problem in the first place. That preparedness for us as individuals has been discussed in the **Prepared** competency and plays a big part in our ability or capacity to practice “fire prevention” even before we walk in the door (think about the 5 C’s, being rooted in the Word, having accountability with your coach or other team members, etc. Sometimes even a good night’s sleep can make or break our ability to solve an unexpected problem). That’s who we want to be as a team; one who understands “fire prevention” but is prepared to fight fires if they arise. Our communication, the knowledge of the equipment or the training needed to fill a position, along with personal preparedness, etc. plays into how well we deal with last minute changes or problems. Working along with and being trained and mentored by our team of key leaders will play a key role in your problem solving skills as a member of RLC’s Production team.

So what about those times . . . when something comes our way when we least expected it? How can we fight the “fire” or problem solve in that unexpected moment when we are caught off guard? Here are a few simple thoughts or values that are pretty easy to understand, yet harder to remember in the heat of the fire:

- **Listen:** Listen for instructions from a team leader. Make sure you are able to identify and understand what the problem is. Our solution to the problem is only as good as our ability to clearly see what the problem is. Not talking until you have clearly understood the problem can be a super value!
- **Remain Calm** (Just say No to “chaos”!): Act in such a way that your response to the problem does not exacerbate the chaos; rather, it communicates the voice of calm and professionalism.
- **Maintain an emotionally self-controlled attitude:** Our positive attitude can be the very beginning of the solution to the problem. This may be the hardest part of “fighting fires”.

- **Smile, laugh and try and enjoy the moment:** Today's problem is tomorrow's joke. Remember to laugh it off. And smile; someone may be watching.
- **Be Gracious:** Remember who first showed us Grace and Mercy. Even as production people, we are the hands and feet of Jesus. It is He who we ultimately serve.

Keep in mind that these values are not specific to just our production competency but at the very least, relate to any role you'd consider as a leader at RLC. Your training with this team will equip you with specific "production tools" that will get you closer to being a good technical or production "firefighter"

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ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment 1: Read the article below and measure your preconceived thoughts of serving on a production team, against some potential realities of that service.

ASSIGNMENT 1

Learning to Be More Flexible

Don't fight it. It's inevitable. Gear will break. Volunteers will quit. The set list will change last-minute. We can't become such rigid creatures of habit that we refuse to embrace change and learn to bend with the challenges of tech ministry.

by Justin Firesheets, CP Staff

In a lot of ways, I fit a lot of the personality stereotypes of the typical church tech guy.

I like structure, routine, systems, and predictability. I like to have a well thought-out plan, and sometimes I prefer to test things a few times before I'm willing to jump into something new.

I can get so emotionally invested in my ideas that it can become difficult to really accept and embrace feedback from others to truly consider changing my direction or perspective.

Sound familiar to anyone else?

... working full-time in a live event environment doesn't always adhere to my desire for consistency and predictability.

The downside is that working full-time in a live event environment doesn't always adhere to my desire for consistency and predictability.

In fact, sometimes, I can do literally everything imaginable to ensure that an event or service will run smoothly--and something will still manage to go wrong.

But, in a live production environment, especially when relying heavily on volunteers, we have to understand that not only is there the possibility of something going wrong, but it's very likely that something actually will.

It's critical that we learn how to maintain an attitude and posture of flexibility, because the team around us is counting on our ability to do that well.

In order to effectively lead our tech teams, we often have to force ourselves to think and act differently than our natural personality would lead us to. When change happens, we have to stop complaining about it and understand the importance of it, then adapt to the new parameters of our circumstances so we can operate as well as possible.

As Proverbs 17:27 (MSG) says, "...an understanding person remains calm." It's critical that we learn how to maintain an attitude and posture of flexibility, because the team around us is counting on our ability to do that well.

Here are three quick thoughts to consider in learning to be more flexible:

1-Embrace change

Don't fight it. It's inevitable. Gear will break. Systems will become outdated. Volunteers will quit the team. The set list will change last-minute.

We can't become such rigid creatures of habit that we refuse to accept the changing world around us. The methods we use to reach our congregations each week must constantly be reevaluated to ensure that we're as effective as we could be. We can't ever let ourselves become so married to a process or system that we start to exalt it about the mission that it was initially designed to serve.

But the problem is that most of us are creatures of habit in a very structured, predictable world. The way we did it last time worked just fine, so why shouldn't we keep doing it over and over. Unfortunately, if the world is always changing, then our methods of reaching that world should always be willing to change as well.

And fighting the prospect of change only makes our position and reputation in ministry worse. Are we willing to try new things to find a solution, or will we be known for complaining about the circumstances unwilling to budge from our own preferences?

2-Display calmness under pressure

Live productions will always be chaotic. The service flow will change after everything's been programmed, sermon notes will come last-minute, and the band will forget to tell you about the new song they'll be singing for the opener.

However, in those moments, we have a choice: are we going to reflect the chaos of the moment, or are we going to choose to be a voice of calm and professionalism in the storm? I once heard the cliché that says in a moment of crisis, I can either be a thermostat or a thermometer. This is a critical thought to consider, especially knowing that many of us lead teams.

If everyone else's hair is on fire, will we allow ourselves to be pulled in, potentially even adding more chaos and freneticism to the team around us?

Will we be like a thermometer and reflect the temperature of the room? If everyone else's hair is on fire, will we allow ourselves to be pulled in, potentially even adding more chaos and freneticism to the team around us? If so, it becomes easy for them to lose confidence in 1) their ability to execute and 2) our ability to lead them, and all bets are off regarding what may actually happen.

But, we can also choose to be a thermostat and set the temperature of the room around us. Regardless of how crazy or stressful things have gotten, we have the choice to step back, be steady, and with stability and reason handle whatever new has been thrown at us.

This allows the team to stay calm, knowing that while we may be panicking on the inside, we're at least displaying the attitude that everything's under control. If our team or co-workers don't see us worry, they inevitably will become calmer too.

It does wonders when people can look at us and think, "I don't have to worry. I know he's got this."

3-Maintain emotional self-control

This can sometimes be the hardest part of the process, because when the fur is flying, sometimes we want nothing more than to vent our stress or frustration in the moment. But just because it may honestly be justified doesn't mean that it's the right move.

It can get really easy to share our displeasure with the worship team for all of the last-minute changes ("We already programmed all of the lighting! I can't believe you're adding a song right before doors open."), or the pastor for sending me his notes during the last worship song ("Does he always expect us to pull off a miracle just to cover his inability to plan ahead?").

And, while others potentially could have done something better on the front end, the reality is that we can't control that any more. Our job is to execute.

So how does our team see us in that spot? Are we quick to shoot off our mouth and complain about how unjust it is that others treat us a certain way?

If so, we run the risk of infecting the team with a negative culture with regards to how they should see the spiritual authority figures of our church.

Instead of using our position to cover over their weaknesses and perhaps address those concerns privately, are we instead choosing to air all of the dirty laundry publicly for the whole team to see? Sometimes that makes us feel better in the moment because we feel justified in being our church's personal martyr.

But at the end of the day, it ends up hurting us more than anything. We can develop a reputation of being a complainer, and our team can wonder what we say about them behind their backs if they make a mistake.

Worst of all, when we show that we're not able to effectively honor the spiritual authority above us, what right do we have to ask God to bless and grow our team? If we can't give authority and honor well, how can we expect to lead a team that honors us?

Our emotions and actions are often intertwined more than we think. Our thoughts become words, which lead to actions. Actions become habits, which then become our character and who we are. Our character then becomes our reputation: what others think about us.

Forcing ourselves to take on a different mindset is a critical first step to being an effective ministry servant and leader. And learning to embrace change and flexibility is a key part of that process.

QUESTIONS

1. How does the statement, Our job is to execute make you feel?
2. Do you tend to be a “thermometer” or a “thermostat” when a problem arises? Does that concept ring true as to perspective when we find ourselves with a last minute problem?
3. What about technical “firefighting” vs. “fire prevention”? Do you see any difference? How do you prepare yourself in fire prevention, outside of RLC’s Production team?
4. Do you see a production role as one where you would be considered the hands and feet of Jesus? Does that concept give you a new perspective on your ability to be a “problem solver”?