



by Clay Hecocks



Rejection: a gift from God?

How Calvary Chapel's "Simon" uses auditions to speak the truth in love

We all hear about how we should use volunteers in various aspects of ministry, but what happens when a volunteer is not able to supply the quality level you need? What if their talents and abilities lie elsewhere? Should you just go on and pretend that nothing is amiss? Should you go ahead and have "the talk"?

Rejection in any form is always uncomfortable... but it can be even more awkward when the person on the other end isn't even on the payroll! No one wants to hurt a church member's feelings. What do you say? What don't you say?

In this article, Clay Hecocks (Pastor of Worship for Calvary Chapel Ft. Lauderdale) shares his strategy for turning rejection into redirection. Clay deals with this touchy issue when choosing musicians and worship teams, but the principles he shares can be liberating to anyone who is responsible for recruiting and leading volunteers.

Auditions are often an intimidating process for both the auditioner and auditionee. They don't have to be. The other day a visiting worship leader asked, "How do you do auditions, tell somebody they're not good enough and then face them week after week in the congregation?" I have been told there should be no auditions, that if someone feels led by the Lord to be a part of leading worship, then ability should not matter. Instead, it is their heart that matters. I could not disagree more. Psalm 33:3 (NIV) states, "Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy." There must be a gifting, an investment in that gifting, and a pre-determined proficiency. Of course, skill level in itself is not a

substitute for a right heart. Both skill and a right heart must be evident and sufficient to serve in leading worship.

Every worship leader should determine what level of skill he or she is willing to accept from someone auditioning for a specific role. For example, I use a group of 7 or 8 singers at a time on the worship team, each on a mic, to lead worship on a regular basis. I also feature them individually because of their abilities and skill level. While I hold the worship team members to the highest standard, I don't have

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as high a standard for the choir. With sheer numbers, the need for blending and precision is not as critical and, in fact, lends itself to a unique “huge” sound very much like a gospel choir. Depending on how singers perform in an audition determines whether I will place them on the worship team, the worship choir, or neither. I do something similar for other instruments as well. While I may hold the standard high for a guitarist to be part of the worship team, if the audition doesn’t match that standard, I may suggest that he or she lead worship for home groups, children’s ministry, or other ministries that don’t demand the same skill level.

I parallel all of this to Matthew 25:14-28 (NIV), where Jesus tells the parable of the talents (in this case money, but a fascinating similarity). “To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability.” All three servants are to go out and invest their talents and receive a return. The men with five talents and two talents did just that, and their master replied, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!” It’s safe to say that if the man with one talent had done the same, his master would have responded word for word the same.

To me this is one of the most powerful teachings in Scripture. So often I encounter musicians who strive to be



the best rather than investing in their gift in order to realize a return without regard to placement or position. This is a critical point to realize and to relate. I’m looking for “five talent” musicians for the worship team; “two talent” musicians for the worship choir, home Bible study worship leaders, children’s worship leaders, and other similar small group leaders and musicians; and “one talent” musicians to lead their own personal times of worship. Some might think God unfair in giving some five talents and others only two or one. God can do what He wants; He’s God, and He’s sovereign. The real beauty of this area of Scripture, however, is that regardless of the amount of talents one has been given, if one invests in his or her gift and uses this gift responsibly, the reward is exactly the same. That’s beyond fair! Unlike the world, in God’s economy, it doesn’t matter where you serve, it’s how you serve.

The key to an audition is to allow the auditionees to present their best performance to eliminate such responses as “I’m a little rusty,” or “I didn’t know the song,” or “I didn’t know that’s how you wanted it played,” or the famous, “I’ll have it ready by service.” Don’t have them come in and just play or “jam”; give them specifics as to what you want them to do and play. Here’s what I’ve found that works:

Give them a packet with charts and a CD of four or five songs that are most suited to the instrument they play. I audition vocals in a two-step process: first, I have them choose any of the songs we use in service in order to determine their range. If they can stay on pitch and rhythm, then I give them a soprano, alto, or tenor packet with charts and a CD of a couple songs with their part emphasized to learn and sing at the second audition.

When they’re ready, they call for an appointment, and I accompany them on the piano; however, you can have them play along with a guitar, a track, or just about any other combination that is available. The purpose is to give them all the tools and time they need to prepare so that when I hear them, I’m hearing them at their best, no excuses, thus

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allowing me to determine whether they have a “five”, “two”, or “one” talent gift. If they are unprepared or give me any excuse as to why they’re not prepared, I remind them that it was their responsibility to call me when they were ready. Since I won’t be able to make a well-informed decision, I send them away, just as the servant who hid his talent in the ground was sent away.

The audition takes place, and now comes the moment when they finish and they’re looking at you with hopeful eyes. You would love to be able to say, “You are truly a talented and gifted musician. What’s your availability for weekends?” If that’s not the case, I begin by sharing my observations prayerfully with honesty and tact. I’ll explain where rhythms were uneven, if pitch was inconsistent, when tempos were rushed or dragged, if execution was sloppy or inaccurate, and anything else that will help explain and clarify where and what the discrepancies are. If they are a “two talent” musician, I explain the options for service in music ministry other than the worship team.

If they fail to meet the criteria of a “five” or “two talent” musician, I then give them two options:

1) If they really feel God is calling them into music ministry, then they first must go invest in their gift. They need to get extensive training, lots of lessons, and lots of practice. If they can pursue their training consistently for at least 6 months, I’ll hear them again and make a subsequent recommendation based on their re-audition.

2) Depending on the audition, I may strongly suggest that they pursue another area of service. I share 1 Cor 12:20 (NIV): “As it is, there are many parts, but one body.” I explain that, as an overseer in this area, I have a responsibility to be a wise steward with the gifts and talents presented to me, and that this would not be the best part of the body to invest their time and talents. I then ask them what other areas of ministry they may be interested in, give them a name and number of that area’s contact person, and ask them to see me after they meet to let me know how it all went.

I can’t tell you how many times I’ve received letters, e-mails, and personal messages of thanks for steering them in the right direction rather than blowing them off. That’s how I can face them week after week, but now I get a smile and a greeting rather than a snub and a look the other way. ■

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