

8th Grade ODOR PURE SUCKING OUTLOUD

SEVENTEEN (17) WAYS TO BUILD a (BETTER) YOUTH BAND

ONE. Start with who and what you have now. If you've got an 8th grader who can play three chords on the guitar, great! Don't wait till you've gathered enough for a full band. Just start. Don't have drums? Spend 100 bucks on some basic percussion instruments and enlist a kid who plays percussion in the school band.

TWO. Aim toward what you want: a student-led band. At first, you might need to supplement the band with adults. But always keep in front of the youth (and adults) the goal to be a band of, by and for the students.

THREE. Recruit mentors from the adult worship team. It's OK to have them participate in the band at first, but don't let them take over. And move them out of the band as soon as possible. This is about teaching and guiding the students. Not another opportunity for the adult to play. (See inset: "Demoting Your Adults")

FOUR. Enlist lost kids. This can be muddy water, but it's definitely worth wading into. Here's my suggestion: the singers' primary job is to be the lead worshipers. So they need to be Christ followers. But when it comes to instrumentalists, find some pagans and let them play. What a great chance

to build bridges into their life. A lot of these types of kids aren't going to come to your youth ministry without a connection like this. And besides, I find pagans practice more than my church people.

FIVE. Create an ultra-limited song list. Start with 2 or 3 songs max. Encourage the students to memorize these songs. Their confidence will soar. After the initial 2 or 3 are down cold, introduce songs one at a time, just before they're completely sick of the other songs. Give time for the students to memorize and internalize before introducing more into your repertoire.

SIX. Create a standard form for each song. And don't deviate from that form (at least until #16 starts to happen). By a standard song form, I mean the order of the verse, chorus, bridge and other parts of the song. Use the original recording arrangement when possible. (And check out www.Transposr.com for chang-

ing mp3s to more student-friendly keys.)

SEVEN. Practice to improve. This generation of students has epic amounts of confidence infused from helicopter parents and school-sponsored self-esteem programs. You may have to yank some chains occasionally to help them to realize they are NOT yet the legends they think they are. Create the expectation of personal practice and continual improvement. Encourage and love them, but don't coddle them.

EIGHT. Rehearse to relate. I have a mantra with my adult team: "Practice is personal. Rehearsal is relational." Rehearsal



is partly about getting better as band. But for a youth band, it's the perfect chance to make deeper connections with your kids. It also gives your students a greater sense of belonging to and purpose in your ministry.

NINE. Let them make mistakes. Stress doing things well, but don't be that perfectionist youth leader. And you'll have to keep an eye on your mentors/teachers from the adult team. Remind them the goal isn't to create Jesus Culture-Cleveland or Hillsong Toledo.



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Also...

TEN. Encourage the students to make mistakes. The aforementioned self-esteem and confidence also cuts the other way – some students are paralyzed at the thought of making mistakes. I like to tell my musicians: “Suck out loud. It’s the only way you’ll get better.”

ELEVEN. Make it fun. Recently, I became the subject of the youth band’s joking – actually, my mother did. Somehow ‘your mom’ jokes started flying and stuck to me. Soon a theme song emerged: “Jon’s mom is greater, Jon’s mom is stronger...”. I’m not sure if Chris Tomlin intended that song to be used in such a way, but it made for great bonding.

TWELVE. Create a community. Beyond “your mom” jokes and having fun at rehearsal, create a sense of belonging (without malignant exclusivity). Start and maintain a Facebook page, Google+ circle/hangout, etc. Post pics and videos of rehearsals and worship times. Go hear local bands together. Watch a U2 concert DVD some night with lots of junk food on hand.

THIRTEEN. Multiply/subdivide as soon as possible. I know, I just said create a community. But your band can only get so big. And students (like their adult worship team counterparts) will get possessive of their spot. Your team won’t grow if you don’t open it up and shake it out a little. Here are a couple ideas:

- **Create two or three teams.** Combine your best players for a once-a-month, A-team band

Demote Your Adults

The adult leader’s role should start and end with mentor/teacher. While she’s developing the students, she may need to be the lead musician carrying the band, or even the upfront worship leader. But the goal should always be to move them down the ladder to support musician and eventually cheerleader.

I know this seems like a no-brainer. But remember, even though these full-grown musicians may look like adults – they’re still “musicians.” That means there’s an 8th grade ego that can emerge from time to time. Just gently remind them of the goal: STUDENT-led.

blow-off-the-doors worship time. Then create one or more teams with less experienced players, supplemented and led by your A team players. But don’t call them your A-team, B-team, etc. Create fun names for them – like “Jon’s Mom’s Band” or something.

- **Create a middle school farm team.** They might not be ready to actually take the stage, but invest time with them. Encourage your high school players to mentor them. Jr. high kids with loud amplifiers and drums? Yeah, it’ll suck at times and you won’t see immediate pay-off. But you’ll be happy you did all this in two or three years.

FOURTEEN. Consider your space. 20 kids singing in the 200-seat sanctuary = crickets. 20 kids crammed in a classroom = awesome energy (and jr. high boy-odor, but you’re gonna have that anyway). And for what it’s worth, electronic drums stink. But when it comes to a youth band and smaller rooms, even a cheap electronic set will make life much more bearable.

FIFTEEN. Leave them want-

ing more. Don’t expect a weekly band--especially at first. You don’t want your band burning out or your youth group growing complacent.

SIXTEEN. Foster Creativity. As your kids get to know the songs, they may have ideas for new arrangements. Let them run with it. And consider starting a song-writing group for your teens. You might have the next Chris Tomlin sitting on one of your broken couches just waiting to be encouraged.

SEVENTEEN. Teach bite-size biblical worship. Don’t force the kids to read Piper’s *Desiring God*. (You should, though.) Instead, teach as you go with small sound-bites. Use memorable phrases backed up by scripture. E.g. “This is not about us” (Psalm 115:1).

