



Working Smarter at Worship

By Jonathan Bauer

"There is no reason ever to have the same thought twice...unless you like to have that thought."¹ That statement comes from productivity guru David Allen. I'm guessing most of us would offer a hasty and hearty, "Amen!" with one small rider. Along with "have the same thought," we would add "say the same thing," "write the same email," and "do the same task." Why do something twice when you could only do it once?

Discussing productivity in a fallen world is kind of like the Washington Generals devising their strategy against the Harlem Globetrotters. You already know you're going to lose. The only thing in question is by how much.

In the wake of the fall, one decree God issued essentially was, "You won't be productive."² There's simply no way around the fact that life in general, and ministry in particular, is made up of plenty of examples of "painful toil." When it comes to being productive, we are fighting a battle we know we will lose. But why lose it by more than we absolutely must?

"Working Smarter at Worship" was the title of the presentation that Pastor Caleb Bassett and I gave at this past summer's National Worship Conference. The goal of our presentation was similar to the spirit of David Allen's statement on productivity. When it comes to planning and executing worship, how can we constantly strive to do things once? How can we do something the right way the first time so that we don't have to do it again? How can we avoid wasting time and needless frustration?

Before getting into some of the specifics of that presentation, permit a couple of preliminary remarks.

Working Smarter *Isn't* about Technology

One of the things I like best about David Allen's approach to productivity is that it makes use of the simplest technology imaginable. And by that I mean a pen and paper. He doesn't want his ideas to be rejected simply because someone might not be familiar with certain technologies. Those who are more technologically inclined will easily transfer the pen-and-paper

process he describes to their computer, tablet, and smartphone.

I would hope the same is true for the ideas shared about working smarter at worship. It isn't just about technology. It's about striving to do things the right way the first time in order to avoid having to do them again.

The fact of the matter is that we're all using some sort of technology to do a lot of the activities involved with worship planning. We just might be using the wrong technology. Working smarter isn't the same as learning a new computer trick.

Working Smarter *Is* about Stewardship

Perhaps you've experienced what I've often experienced. You read an article, attend a conference, or go to a meeting. And when new and potentially helpful ideas about doing things faster, better, or smarter are shared, a nagging sense of guilt settles in like a thick fog.

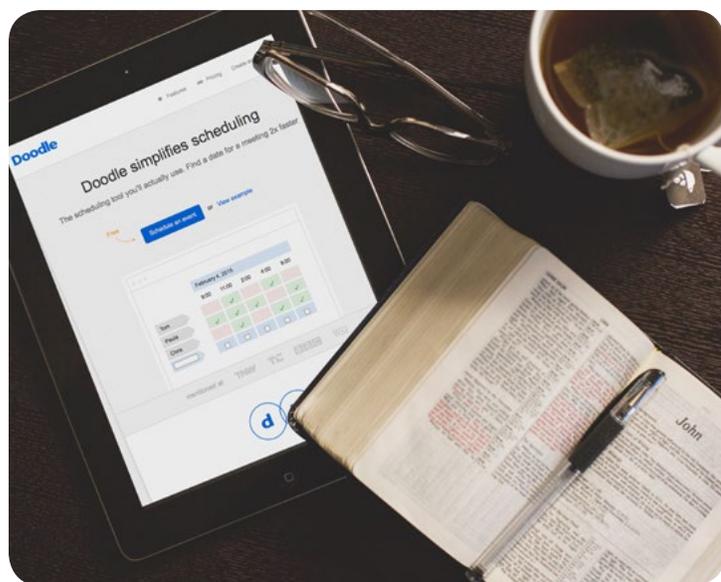
The last thing I would want is for a few humble suggestions about working smarter at worship to be sources of guilt. The second-last thing I would want to do is try to shoehorn a few Bible passages into this article in an attempt to make a topic more spiritual than it actually is. Let me state up front that I am quite confident you can dismiss every single suggestion offered here without any need for confession and absolution.

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At the same time, isn't striving to work smarter in ministry a part of our Christian stewardship? If it's really true that "night is coming when no one can work,"³ we want to make use of every moment of daytime God gives us. If it's really true that "every good and perfect gift is from above,"⁴ those good gifts of God include our spouse, our children, our health, and our property. Working smarter in ministry is directly related to the time God expects us to spend caring for those gifts as well.

The fact of the matter is that we all develop habits for how we do things. And as stewards of everything God has given us, it's good and healthy to occasionally evaluate whether the habits we've developed enable us to do the most with what God gives or whether other habits would help us do even more.

With that, here are some of the ways in which it might be possible for you and the individuals in your congregation to work smarter at worship, saving valuable time and avoiding needless frustration.



Finding, Deciding, and Typing Things Once

The process of planning worship requires having a great deal of information at your disposal. Some examples include the lessons assigned for a particular Sunday or festival, hymns that correspond with that Sunday or festival, the lesson you preached on and the hymns that were picked the last time that Sunday or festival occurred, the text of the verse of the day that needs to be printed in the service folder, and the last time the choir sang that anthem in your library that ties in beautifully with the sermon text.

Those various pieces of information are often located in a wide variety of places. Some of them are stored on a computer. Others are printed in a book. Others are stored in a filing cabinet.

Working smarter at worship means trying to organize all of those pieces of information in a way that allows you to see exactly what you need to see exactly when you need to see it.

Again, this can be done with a pencil and paper. The choir director might decide to write the date a piece of music was sung on the first copy in the file before putting it back in the file cabinet. The

pastor might keep a running log of sermon texts on each page of the copy of *Planning Christian Worship* that sits on his shelf. Either one of these is better than sifting through old service folders to see what was previously done in worship.

Using very simple technology like word processing software, you might first type (and carefully proofread) the texts of verses of the day, titles of hymns, and lectionary scripture references in a single, central document. That way the next time that same piece of information is used, the person putting together the service folder can simply copy and paste rather than taking the time to type that information again (and risk making a mistake again).

On a much larger scale, pieces of information can be linked in powerful ways using a relational database. In the list of resources shared with this article, there is a database created using Microsoft Access that can be used to plan services, select hymns, and catalogue choral and instrumental music libraries for easy, effective searching.

Another huge advantage, online accessibility, can be gained using a web-based spreadsheet platform like Google Sheets. While the ability to link information in a spreadsheet is very limited compared to in a database, any individual involved in the worship planning process can access the information from any Internet-capable device. An example of a worship planning spreadsheet is also among the list of resources shared with this article.

Saying Things Once

Communication is one part of the worship planning process where we might think we're already using the best technology available: email. But have you ever had to say the same thing more than once using email? Perhaps someone deleted a message. Perhaps you started a conversation about a particular topic by emailing five people all at once. But somewhere along the line, one person clicked "Reply" instead of "Reply to All," and separate conversations involving segments of the overall team developed. Perhaps a conversation via email went in one direction, reached a dead end, and then had to start over completely.

This frustrating process can be avoided. Centralized communications systems exist that help keep everyone on the same page—literally and figuratively. All communication is permanently stored in a single location and cannot be lost, misplaced, or deleted. At any given time, anyone can read the entire history of a given conversation, ensuring that they know the full context before weighing in. The specific tool that is suggested in the list of resources included with this article is called Basecamp.

One particularly frustrating task related to communication is trying to schedule a meeting. Any time more than three people need to get together, trying to find a day and time that works for everyone can be incredibly difficult.

Rather than suggesting one time (or even a couple), and then letting people respond, suggest any and all times that the meeting could occur. Once everyone has responded regarding every possible option, the best option will likely be evident. The amount of time spent communicating back and forth will be greatly reduced.

Once again, you could do this by simply documenting everyone's responses with pen and paper. Otherwise, digital scheduling tools like those offered by Doodle or Google Forms can make things even easier. Information about both can be found in the list of resources.

Creating, Saving, and Storing Things Once

During the worship planning process, it is likely that a number of files need to be shared with a number of people. These files might include a service outline, music graphic files for the service folder, and the service folder itself.

One common way in which files are often shared is through email. However, the shortcomings of email as a communication system are only compounded when it is used to share files with people.

Everything that's true of an email is true of anything attached to that email. It can be lost, deleted, or misplaced. "Can you send me that again?" is a question we've probably all been asked.

On top of that, any time you are sending a file as an attachment to an email, you are making a duplicate of that file. Two copies of the same file now exist. If the originator of the file makes any changes to the file, the file must be sent again. Now the recipient possesses two versions of the same file and must be trusted to know which version is accurate.

It gets even worse when two people are working on the same file. If you send a word document to someone and they make changes to it, they must send the updated file back to you. You must then delete your original file and replace it with the updated one.

A step in the right direction that likely doesn't require learning any brand new technology is to, as a rule, send only PDFs. If two or more people are collaborating on a single document, send a PDF and then ask people to suggest any changes. It's much easier for one person to make updates than for several people to make a variety of changes to the file and then send it back.

An even better solution is to stop sending files via email altogether. Online storage platforms like Google Drive and Dropbox allow you to store one file in one place that can be accessed by anyone from anywhere. When someone needs to see a file, he or she knows exactly where to find it. If multiple individuals are working on a given file, this online storage system allows everyone to work on the same file. This ensures that is always one, up-to-date copy of any given file.

Getting Started Once

One final way to work smarter at worship is to begin integrating any changes or new practices the right way. In fact, this is an important part of the process that you will likely get to do only once. If new practices or changes are implemented unilaterally, overly hastily, and without proper training, even the best of solutions will fall flat on its face. Then everyone on the team will likely be disillusioned with the solution, and you likely won't get a second chance.

If you are going to make some changes with the goal of working smarter, start by interviewing everyone who's involved in the

process. What are their frustrations? What isn't going well?

Start with implementing the changes that will bring the greatest benefit and the least amount of disruption. Make sure to provide thorough training to anyone who's involved in the process. Make sure all of their questions are answered.

Finally, anticipate bumps in the road along the way. Forming new habits isn't always easy. But eventually, the new practices you've implemented will start to pay off. Pretty soon everyone involved will appreciate the time being saved and the needless frustration being avoided.

¹ Allen, David. *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity*. New York: Penguin Books, 2001. Page 22.

² "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return" (Genesis 3:17-19, NIV 1984).

³ John 9:4

⁴ James 1:17



Jesus, My Joy

An arrangement of a new text translation for the classic hymn "Jesus, Priceless Treasure" was commissioned for the 2011 WELS National Worship Conference and published in 2014. The translation is by hymnal project director Michael Schultz. The music (new tune, concertato) is by MLC's Kermit Moldenhauer.

Appropriate for Easter, Redeemer, and Trust service themes. *Planning Christian Worship* suggests this hymn (the original) in the current Year B for Ascension. Year C: Lent 4, Pentecost 11, 12, 16. Year A: Epiphany 8, Lent 1, Pentecost 5, 7, 10, 11 (Hymn of the Day), 12, and End Time 1 (Reformation).

SATB, congregation, brass, soprano sax (or oboe), timpani, and organ. Or simply as a congregational hymn with unison choir or soloist on some stanzas and optional trumpet, sax, or oboe descant.

A 48-page PDF download includes the full score; vocal, brass quartet, saxophone, and oboe scores; and a congregational insert. The choir score is only 5 pages. See more at: <http://online.nph.net/p-15727-jesus-my-joy-downloadable.aspx>. The concertato is also the title track for the double CD of highlights from the 2011 worship conference, also available from NPH.

Resource List

A summary of the full "Working Smarter at Worship" presentation along with a full list of recommended resources can be found at: <http://bit.ly/workingsmarterhandout>.

Solution	Resource	Location	Description
Planning Worship, Cataloguing Resources	Microsoft Access Worship Planning Database	bit.ly/worshipdatabase2019	Database built on <i>Christian Worship</i> resources. Enables worship planning, participant scheduling, music cataloguing, hymn selection.
Planning Worship	Google Sheets Worship Planning Spreadsheet	bit.ly/worshipspreadsheet	Spreadsheet built on <i>Christian Worship</i> resources. Less functionality than a database, but the major advantage of online accessibility.
Planning Worship, Cataloguing Resources	Planning Center Online	planningcenteronline.com	Powerful, web-based worship planning platform. Up front entry of <i>Christian Worship</i> data required. Subscription-based. Fee structure.
Cataloguing Resources	Evernote	evernote.com	Great way to store music resources that you come across in choral sample packets and web-browsing.
Centralized Communications System	Basecamp	basecamp.com	Powerful centralized communication tool. Great for collaborating on projects that involve more than two people. Incorporates "to do" list and a calendar feature as well. Fee structure based on the number of active projects at any given time.
Appointment and Meeting Scheduling	Doodle	doodle.com	Free resource that makes creating polls for the purpose of scheduling very easy.
Appointment and Meeting Scheduling	Google Forms	google.com/forms	Flexible platform that can be used to poll people regarding their availability.
Online File Storage	Dropbox	dropbox.com	Stores any and all computer-created files in one central place.
Online File Storage	Google Drive	google.com/drive	Stores files in a central location. Added feature of internal software platforms for creating web-based files: Google Docs, Sheets, and Slides.

No Technical Solutions to Human Problems

Those signed up for hymnal project updates occasionally receive information about the project. The title above is a 12-14-2014 blog post by Pastor Caleb Bassett, chair of the project's Technology Committee. If you did not see this post, you can find it at welshymnal.com under the blog tab. It is valuable reading in tandem with this issue of *Worship the Lord*.