

Developing lighting direction skills

A lighting director may have to wear many ‘hats’ at their HOW. **John Black** outlines some of the responsibilities these technicians face in enhancing the worship experience

BEHIND EVERY SERVICE IS A

team of individuals who have come together, combining their various skill sets to create and support the vision or message from within their area of responsibility. For the event to succeed, teams are led by individuals who ensure that the efforts of their team support and reinforce the vision in tandem with the other departments.

The lighting team is led by the lighting director, though the actual responsibilities or ‘hats’ that he or she has can vary greatly from organisation to organisation. Some houses of worship may have a small team or even a single volunteer who looks after service lighting and the lighting equipment. Larger organisations may have a full-time professional lighting staff, including a lighting director, lighting designer, programmer, master electrician and others.

Regardless of the scale of your service or whether the lighting team is volunteer or salaried, if any type of lighting is installed in your facility, the primary goal of those who make up the lighting team remains the same – to create and maintain an environment that enhances (rather than distracts from) worship.

To achieve this goal, I’ll summarise three key areas that exist within the scope of responsibilities for a lighting director in the majority of houses of worship, as well as some tips on how you can further develop your skills in each area. Let’s dive in!

Hat #1: lighting director as steward

How would you feel entering a house of worship and noticing that half of the sanctuary light bulbs are dead? What if you had a hard time seeing the pastor because the lighting fixtures used to illuminate the platform were broken or pointed at another area of the stage?

No matter the size of the facility or the number of volunteers or staff that make up the lighting team,

MEET THE AUTHOR

John Black serves as the theatre manager for Seoul Foreign School in Seoul, South Korea. Holding a degree in Theatre Design, he provides technical production support and design in three state-of-the-art performance venues on campus for over 40 major concerts and productions a year in the areas of sound, lighting, video and staging. He especially enjoys sharing his passion for entertainment technology with high school students each year through his student production team, *Crusader Live!*, giving students the



John Black, theatre manager for Seoul Foreign School

opportunity to learn and work with professional-level technologies

in a demanding production environment.



Working together as a team

the lighting director should concern him or herself with looking after the maintenance and upkeep of the lighting equipment. This may include simple tasks such as replacing light bulbs in the facility hallways and auditorium, or it may be more technical such as repairing stage lighting fixtures, cleaning automated lights, cleaning dimmer rack filters or updating console firmware.

The lighting equipment is the lighting director’s tools used to create and maintain a worshipful environment and to support the service message. These tools break, need fixing and need replacement from time to time. Being a good

steward of these tools means that they will function and be available for use longer, helping to create a positive environment and also saving the house of worship time and money spent on lighting equipment in the long run.

Developing the skill of stewardship is important for any lighting director. The first step is simply to learn to recognise – and then act upon – when something needs replacement or repair. It’s easy to forget to look ‘up’ and take count of how many auditorium light bulbs are dead. Get into the habit of regularly turning on all of the fixtures in your rig and checking for any lamps that have

burnt out or any gels that may need replacement.

Second, write up and post in your facility a maintenance plan for your equipment and build it into your routine or the lighting team’s schedule. Set some time aside to be able to clean, reorganise, do some repairs and update control systems and fixture firmware. Record a log of when this maintenance happens and when a piece is fixed so that you can track specific units with repeated issues.

Third, educate yourself on the equipment that you have so that you know how best to take care of it. Read through the product manuals, learn where the filters are, learn how to clean the components and develop the skills needed to perform basic preventive maintenance. If you have a lighting team, train them and get them involved – make it a party! This will help your equipment perform as it should as well as help ensure that you maximise its useful life.

Hat #2: lighting director as designer

In the largest houses of worship, it may be that there actually is both a lighting director and a lighting designer on the lighting team. This is not uncommon in other areas of the entertainment industry. In



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the majority of worship situations, however, chances are high that the lighting director will also be responsible for the lighting design for services and events.

While wearing the hat of designer, the goal should be to enhance the message rather than distract from it. To do this, the lighting director should have a clear understanding of the vision that is set for the service, the demographics of the congregation making up the service, the lighting needs of other departments (such as the video teams) and the equipment available and how to use it most effectively.

Lighting design is much more than simply illuminating a stage. Lighting designers use intensity, colour, direction, distribution, texture and movement when creating an environment. These are referred to as the properties of light that can be controlled. All of these elements are intentionally manipulated to serve the functions of lighting, which include composition, visibility, modelling, focus, information and mood.

Developing lighting design skills as a lighting director is extremely important. Anybody can point a lighting fixture towards a subject and it will be visible. However, well-designed lighting can – without us even being aware – evoke emotional responses and understandings of the message or presentation being made due to our psychological association of certain lighting situations. Lighting can be a powerful element of a worship service and, when done well, those leaving the service shouldn't be talking about the lighting on their way out.

If you've never taken a lighting course, there are many resources available online. Begin building your skills as a designer by studying some lighting design theory. Do a quick Google search for 'functions of



A variety of looks set the mood for performances at Gospel Skouspel
(photo courtesy Janco Haywood)

stage lighting' or 'qualities of stage lighting' and you will find a number of resources. One of my favourite resources to send aspiring lighting technicians is Vincent Lighting Systems' lighting articles found on its company website (www.vls.com/lighting-resources). They have done an excellent job at creating easy-to-understand resources covering the basics of lighting theory.

Another way to build your design skills is to continually learn about the craft through networking with other lighting directors and lighting designers, reading online blogs and articles specifically about lighting design and looking through images of designs that may be inspiring to you. Websites such as www.worshiptechdirector.com and www.churchstagedesignideas.com are great resources you can begin with.

Finally, one sure way of learning how light works and what is effective is to simply do it and get feedback. You may not want to do this during a service so as not to create a distracting environment but, as you are able, experiment with different angles, colours and settings and show others who you trust to give you honest feedback. Just as people can view the same painting and react

differently to it, the same is true with lighting. It will be helpful for you to learn the variety of reactions that people can have to the same lighting situation.

Hat #3: lighting director as servant

The final hat worn by lighting directors that may sometimes get lost in the technical and design demands is that of servant. It is easy to get wrapped up in tight schedules, quick

technology and forget that, in reality, the lighting director is leading people.

In a house of worship setting, it is especially important to serve the other members of the team and ensure that they feel valued. This can be accomplished through engaging them in activities outside of the normal work schedule, including them in design decisions, involving them in prep and set up work, adding fun team activities to cleaning and maintenance work sessions, or any other number of creative ideas. The lighting team will function the best when there is a unified sense of purpose and belonging.

Second, lighting directors also have a responsibility to serve the needs of the worshippers. It has been mentioned many times that it is important that the lighting enhance the worship experience and not distract from it. Most worshippers are not attending the service to experience the lighting. As such, the lighting director would do well to not only solicit feedback from church leaders and others on the technical teams, but also be willing to receive feedback from worshippers.



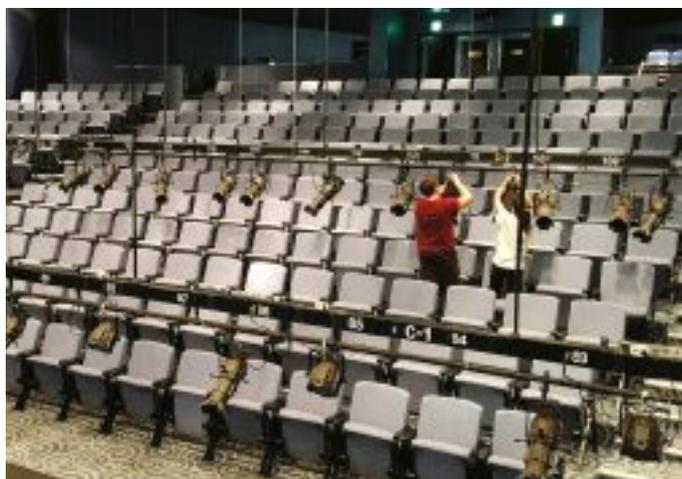
Adjusting lighting fixtures is a crucial part of the lighting director's remit

turnovers, maintenance tasks, tech rehearsals, meetings or problem solving and forget that, in the house of worship setting, perhaps the greatest role of any leader is that of servant. The role of servant has a number of different perspectives, all of which are important for a lighting director to keep at the forefront of his or her mind.

First, lighting directors will often have a lighting team that they work with regularly. Whether the lighting team is comprised of volunteer adults or teens, or hired lighting professionals, the lighting director is responsible for the culture and relationships of the team. It is often easier to focus on the tools and

This takes some humility, but it is vital that the lighting director fully understands that their role in the worship experience is helping people worship. If they can't do that, then the lighting – and the service – has not been successful.

While there are many more hats that can be worn by lighting directors in houses of worship, I believe that these three exist in the vast majority of situations. Whether you are an aspiring lighting director or you currently work in the role, I hope that this has either given you some inspiration for how to grow in your craft or reminded you of the deeper calling of working in a house of worship.



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