



Raising the Bar: Worship and Sound at Northshore

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Table of Contents

1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2	WHERE WE'VE BEEN.....	2
2.1.	HISTORY	2
2.2.	THE CURRENT CHALLENGE.....	2
2.3.	THE SHIFT IN EXPECTATIONS OF EXCELLENCE	3
3	WHERE WE'RE GOING	4
3.1.	THE VISION FOR SOUND	4
3.1.1.	<i>Sound is an integral part of the Worship experience for the Congregation</i>	<i>4</i>
3.1.2.	<i>Sound is part of the expression of Worship for the Worship Team.....</i>	<i>5</i>
3.1.3.	<i>Sound is consistent across engineers.....</i>	<i>6</i>
3.1.4.	<i>Preferences are sacrificed for the common goal</i>	<i>6</i>
3.1.5.	<i>The mix is at or near professional quality</i>	<i>6</i>
3.1.6.	<i>The sound embraces Northshore's intentional style of Worship</i>	<i>8</i>
3.1.7.	<i>The sound should bring the worshipper "into" the party rather than leaving them outside..</i>	<i>9</i>
3.1.8.	<i>The younger generation is drawn in, without completely alienating the older generation ...</i>	<i>10</i>
3.1.9.	<i>The sound is passionate, not reserved</i>	<i>10</i>
3.2.	RAISING THE BAR.....	11
4	QUALITIES OF A NORTHSORE SOUND ENGINEER	13
4.1.	LOVES AND LISTENS TO MUSIC	13
4.2.	CAN IDENTIFY AND CREATE A GOOD MIX	13
4.3.	UNDERSTANDS THE VISION FOR SOUND AT NORTHSORE	13
4.4.	IS COMMITTED TO NORTHSORE.....	13
4.5.	IS WILLING TO SET ASIDE PREFERENCES AND EGO	14
4.6.	IS TEACHABLE	14
4.7.	UNDERSTANDS NORTHSORE'S WORSHIP STYLE	15
4.8.	IS A WORSHIPPER.....	15
4.9.	APPROACHES MIXING METHODICALLY AND CONSISTENTLY	15
4.10.	SEES MIXING AS AN ART AS MUCH AS A SCIENCE.....	15
4.11.	HAS A SERVANT'S HEART	15
4.12.	IS A TEAM PLAYER.....	16
4.13.	IS TECHNICALLY GIFTED.....	16
4.14.	PURSUES EXCELLENCE	16
4.15.	IS A CHURCH MEMBER	16
4.16.	IS SPIRITUALLY MATURE AND GROWING	17
4.17.	HAS GOOD PEOPLE SKILLS	17
4.18.	HAS PERIODIC HEARING TESTS	17
5	HOW WE'RE GOING TO GET THERE	19
5.1.	STEP 1: DEFINE THE VISION	19
5.2.	STEP 2: COMMUNICATE THE VISION.....	19
5.3.	STEP 3: CONNECT WITH EACH PERSON	20
5.4.	STEP 4: HELP EVERYONE MEET THE NEW VISION.....	20
5.4.1.	<i>Group Training.....</i>	<i>20</i>
5.4.2.	<i>Individual Training.....</i>	<i>20</i>
5.5.	STEP 5: EVALUATE.....	21
5.6.	STEP 6: ONGOING MAINTENANCE	21

1 Introduction

Northshore is turning 40 years old this year (2009). We therefore have 40 years of history and tradition, attitudes and approaches, culture and expectations.

As we have grown, the growth has necessitated change in our traditions and in our culture. However, 2008 and 2009 has seen an accelerated rate of change due primarily to the change of leadership from Jan to Jonathan. I would argue that while there are numerous changes which most likely would not have occurred had the leadership transition not taken place, many of the changes have simply been catalyzed by the new leadership. They were changes that were already fully ripened, ready to fall from the tree, and the new leadership simply shook the tree enough to cause the fruit to fall. I believe that the issues we are facing with sound (and media in general) can be placed solidly in this latter category.

This document will attempt to describe the changes we are facing specifically with regard to the sound (audio reinforcement) in Sunday morning services, how we ended up where we are today, and how we are going to move forward as part of the new era of Northshore in the 21st century.

2 Where We've Been

2.1. History

With the occasional exception, the primary driving force behind almost all of Northshore's expansion on the technical side was Dessert Theatre, our annual Christmas musical. Dessert Theatre was almost always ahead of Sunday services in its technical needs, so once a year the technical capabilities that Northshore owned would be evaluated and compared against the needs of that year's Christmas show. Where we fell short, we would look at purchasing new equipment – or renting equipment when a purchase was not possible or prudent. This was the case through all of Dessert Theatre's lifetime. Even the purchase of the PM5D digital mixer in 2005 was primarily influenced by Dessert Theatre.

For several reasons, the sound for Sunday mornings was never really approached in a holistic, strategic way. First, much of the gear was purchased with its primary purpose being Dessert Theatre rather than Sunday mornings. Most purchases were done with the intent of using it for both, but the driving force was the Christmas show. As a result, the use of technology on Sunday mornings was more of an afterthought or a side benefit rather than as part of a strategic approach to enhance or develop the worship experience. Second, Mark Kohls as the worship leader was of course more experienced and focused on the music and worship. He was not experienced or knowledgeable about the technical side and how those tools could be used as part of worship. Finally, the use of volunteers in the role of sound engineers meant that their role was primarily as button pushers and wiring experts rather than mixing artists.

Success for a Sunday morning for the “sound guy” could be summed up by the following two questions:

- “Was every mic on when it was supposed to be?” (desired answer: yes)
- “Was there any feedback during the service?” (desired answer: no)

Until at least the mid- to late-1990's this was the standard of measurement for sound on Sunday mornings. And, even though looking at it today it seems simple, there were many Sundays which did not pass the test.

2.2. The Current Challenge

The leadership transition from Jan to Jonathan has shaken things up quite a bit. Jonathan is bringing new and different expectations to the table, and now there is an overall sense that we need to be even more intergenerational than we were before.

We find ourselves now in a place of rapid change, where the expectations have shifted without many even realizing it, and where people act on their intuition without means to explain their new behavior. This is happening with sound: we feel like things need to

change – we *want* them to change – but we haven’t been able to explain exactly why or what it is that should be different.

The intent of this document is to start back over at the beginning: defining the vision. Once that is accomplished, we can work on communicating that vision to everyone so we are all striving to accomplish a single goal.

2.3. The Shift in Expectations of Excellence

An important element we need to discuss is a significant aspect of Northshore’s growth and maturation as we look at the future. It is an overall transition in the mindset and philosophy of the leadership and Worship Department with regard to excellence. I believe that as any organization grows in size and maturity, the expectation from outside observers for excellence and professionalism increases. This is simply because larger organizations are expected to perform better and to higher standards. In Northshore’s case, I include the congregation in the “outside observers”, and the recipients of the expectations are Northshore’s staff and those representing the church, such as our volunteers. It particularly affects the Worship Department, as that is one of the most highly visible areas of the church.

I also believe that the higher expectation for excellence is a cultural shift. Compare the quality of hugely popular TV shows from the 70’s or 80’s like the “A-Team”, “M*A*S*H”, or “Magnum P.I.” with shows today such as “CSI”, “Lost”, or “Numb3rs”. They are so different as to almost not even be comparable. Northshore has to stay relevant to how our lives are today, not stay stuck in a particular way of doing things as they were 5, 10, or 15 years ago.

This shift in the expectations of excellence manifests itself in many ways. Later I will address specifically what it means in terms of Media and even more specifically sound at Northshore.

3 Where We're Going

I posit that until recently (the last 2-3 years) the goal of sound at Northshore was simply to make a person or instrument be heard (“is the mic on?”) and to be transparent (“is the mic on and not feeding back?”). I’m talking specifically about the mindset and approach of the leadership at Northshore: Jan, Mark Kohls, and myself. (Some individual volunteers take a more intentional approach to what they do on sound, however.) That’s not to say that none of us had higher aspirations for sound, because I know we all did. But what I’m saying is that if you were to collect our actions, communication, attitude, and behavior as a leadership group and translate that into how an independent outside observer would interpret our goals, it would be hard to come up with any conclusion other than sound being a necessary tool to accomplish our “real work” of worship. I believe that is changing.

3.1. The Vision for Sound

As part of this transition to move toward a more intentional approach in leadership for media, we need to define the vision for what sound is at Northshore. Based on much discussion among the Worship leadership and with Jonathan, I am presenting the following visionary goals for the role of sound at Northshore on Sunday mornings. Please be aware that comments regarding worship are not meant to be applied universally across all experiences of worship. They should be kept strictly in the context of worship occurring during our primary Sunday services held in the Worship Center.

An important point to be aware of is that it is impossible to make all people happy. There will always be people who feel the sound is too loud, while others at the same moment feel it is too quiet. Our goal is not to make everyone happy, but to fulfill our vision for the worship experience at Northshore. This vision can and will change over time, and during this time of transition we will be tweaking the details so we don’t do things like alienate too many people. But the most important thing is that everyone involved (e.g. all the sound engineers) is trying to accomplish the vision.

3.1.1. Sound is an integral part of the Worship experience for the Congregation

This has always been the case, even if we don’t consciously acknowledge or realize it. We cannot separate the sound from the worship experience for those in the congregation. Years ago the sound primarily just augmented what was happening on stage – it was simply a reinforcement. Today however, and especially in a large venue such as ours, the mix the engineer puts together is *all* the congregation hears. Barring stage volume, which with Aviom is nearly non-existent today, you can almost take the approach that the sound engineer is mixing a recording and then immediately playing it back for the audience. The sound engineer has **complete** control over what the congregation hears during the worship service.

I don't consider this to be a problem. In fact, in today's culture I feel it is expected. People coming expect to hear the same thing they hear on the radio or their iPods. Especially for the younger generation, that is how they connect to the music.

As sound engineers we must realize that we are the final gatekeepers of the experience of worship for the congregation. The band is responsible for *creating* the experience – we are responsible for handing that experience off to the congregation. The band might as well be playing in another room, for all the difference it makes with regard to the sound.

Because people expect to hear a “mix” rather than live sound coming directly from the stage, it is no longer necessary (or possible) for the sound to be “transparent”. It must not be distracting or draw people away from the focus, which is Christ, but it should not be held back. The idea that sound should only be “heard and not noticed” is obsolete.

3.1.2. Sound is part of the expression of Worship for the Worship Team

Because the worship experience cannot take place today without sound, as discussed in the previous point, it may seem obvious (but is worth discussing separately) that the sound becomes *part of the expression of worship for the worship team*.

The sound is just as important as the vocals, or the electric guitar, or bass, piano or drums. I would consider the sound to be one of the many elements contributing to the expression of worship taking place on stage. Rather than considering the sound to be just a transmission medium (like a pipe) conveying the worship from one place (the stage) to another (the audience), the sound should be thought of as another instrument in the band. An instrument that can affect all other instruments. The sound engineer is playing that instrument for all to hear.

The engineer therefore is part of the Worship Team. As that engineer, I should be expressing my worship through my instrument: the mix. My emotion should be following the emotion of the rest of the band, and my instrument should ebb and flow in the same way as the rest of the instruments.

The sound engineer has special power, though. If the pianist were to stop playing, the other musicians could pick up the slack and still continue the spirit of worship. But if the sound affects all other instruments, then the engineer has the ability to give freedom to the other instruments on stage or to hold them back. He can stifle the expression of worship or enable it.

Therefore, the engineer should be aware and conscious of the fact that it is their duty to give freedom to the worship. If an instrument or the whole band is crying out for volume, give it volume. If it is a tender moment, treat it tenderly. If the spirit of the song starts quiet and grows to a shout, then allow that expression to flow via the mix. You want the worship to feel like it is leaping from the stage with anticipation, not hunkered down on stage in submission to an “appropriate expression of worship” legalism.

Of course, all this happens in concert with the band and the congregation – everyone worshipping together. The sound engineer cannot create something that isn't being created in the first place. The worship leader, band, and sound engineer are all working toward the common goal of creating a free expression of worship.

3.1.3. Sound is consistent across engineers

I feel that it should be possible to walk in on any particular Sunday morning, sit down without looking back at the sound booth, and go through worship without having any idea who the sound engineer is. However, I struggle a bit with this because I still value individuality. What's the balance?

I recognize that it may be impossible to accomplish this goal and maintain a full rotation of engineers. However, I believe that if the two goals following this one are accomplished, this goal can be achieved to the point where 99% of the audience, and even a knowledgeable person listening critically, would say that the sound is "the same" from week to week in terms of quality, presence, and mix.

Moving toward this goal will take some effort, and perhaps changing how we approach doing our mixes. It may mean more standardization on board layout, patching, and gain structure. It may mean more training on the use of compression and effects, and certainly will mean that all the engineers need to be able to achieve the next two goals.

3.1.4. Preferences are sacrificed for the common goal

This is very important. If an engineer feels that his own particular idea is more important than the vision and standards determined by the leadership here at Northshore, then they should not be trying to serve. They will of course have plenty of opportunity to speak into the vision and goal, but in the end it is very unlikely that the leadership and engineers will completely agree on every detail.

The key to this is having an overall vision that everyone can buy into. That is what I'm hoping to accomplish in this document.

It also means that the engineer needs to be open to constructive feedback and changing things even if they thought it was just fine before. Without this kind of humble attitude on everyone's part, no improvement can be made nor any progress toward the vision.

3.1.5. The mix is at or near professional quality

Rather than trusting the engineers to know a good mix, we need to proactively take the responsibility of ensuring that they actually know what a good mix sounds like and how to create one. This requires intentional training, accountability, and feedback as they learn.

Here are some nuggets of knowledge about creating an outstanding mix from the book "The Mixing Engineer's Handbook, Second Edition" by Bobby Owsinski:

“By and large, most mixers [engineers] can hear some version of the final product in their heads before they even begin to mix.”

“Whether they know it or not (and many mixers aren’t conscious of how they do it), most great mixers are methodical in the way they approach a mix. ... Although the method can vary a little depending on the song, ... the technique remains constant.

1. Figure out the direction of the song.
2. Develop the groove and build it like a house.
3. Find the most important element and emphasize it.

“The last point, ... might be the most important in creating an outstanding mix. As famed Latin mixer Benny Faconne so succinctly states, ‘It’s almost like a musician who picks up a guitar and tries to play. He may have the chart in front of him, but soon he has to go beyond the notes in order to get creative. Same thing with mixing. It’s not just a thing of setting levels any more, *but more about trying to get the energy of the song across*. Anybody can make the bass or the drums even out.’” [emphasis added]

“Most great mixers think in three dimensions. They think ‘tall, deep, and wide,’ which means making sure all the frequencies are represented, making sure there’s depth to the mix, and then giving it some stereo dimension.” ... “You achieve the effects or ‘deep’ dimension by introducing new ambience elements into the mix. You usually do this with reverbs and delays...”

“Every piece of modern music – meaning Rock, Pop, R&B, Rap, Country, New Age, Swing, Drum and Bass, Trance, and every other genre having a strong backbeat – has six main elements to a great mix:

- **Balance:** The volume level relationship between musical elements
- **Frequency Range:** Having all frequencies properly represented
- **Panorama:** Placing a musical element in the soundfield
- **Dimension:** Adding ambience (effects) to a musical element
- **Dynamics:** Controlling the volume envelope of a track or instrument
- **Interest:** Making the mix special

“Many mixers have only four or five of these when doing a mix, but all these elements *must* be present for a **great** mix, because they are all equally important.”

“More than being just technically correct, a mix must be as interesting as a good movie. It must build to a climax while having points of tension and release to keep the listener subconsciously involved. Just as a film looks larger than life, a great mix must sound larger than real life. The passion and the emotion must be on a level where the listener is sucked in and forced to listen.”

We need to look beyond just making it so every instrument on stage is heard. We need to develop our engineers so that they move beyond a basic mix into a *great* mix – one that has all six elements.

3.1.6. The sound embraces Northshore's intentional style of Worship

There are as many different styles of worshipping as there are people on this earth. However, there are many reasons why Northshore must, and should, choose a much smaller number of styles to express worship on Sunday mornings (certainly a topic for lunch sometime, but not here).

Today's evangelical churches tend to divide into two categories of style: "traditional" and "contemporary". A third category, "alternative," is also becoming more common. Jonathan, Mark, and the Board of Overseers have discussed Northshore's worship style and made a determination about our style: it is contemporary with possibly a few alternative elements. (For more detail on this, feel free to talk it over with Mark or Jonathan).

There are a many characteristic differences between a traditional style of worship and contemporary or alternative worship. This list is not intended to be comprehensive, represent all possible variations of the two styles, or be accurate 100% of the time for each style, but simply draw attention to some general characteristics:

Traditional Worship (Not Northshore)	Contemporary Worship (Northshore)
Content is centered around hymns	Content is centered around choruses
Uses few instruments (piano, organ)	Uses more instruments (full band), specifically: guitar (acoustic & electric), piano, synthesizer, bass, and drums. (Others may be added.)
Vocals (and vocal parts) take high priority in the blend or mix	The band has equal (and sometimes more) weight than vocals
Congregants prefer to hear their neighbors so they can blend and enjoy the "choir-like" feel of singing together	Congregants prefer to hear the music more than their neighbors so they can focus on the music and not be distracted by those around them
Places a high value on lyrical meaning and content	Places high value on the experiential and emotional aspects of worship (but not to the exclusion of lyrical content)

Traditional Worship (Not Northshore)	Contemporary Worship (Northshore)
Is more discreet or reserved in its expression, with a fairly narrow range of expression	Has a significant range of expression, from mellow and subdued to very upbeat, even rowdy

I would like to highlight three of the items in the table above as they apply to the sound mix on Sunday mornings:

1. **The band has equal weight to vocals.**
This does not mean that the vocals cannot be heard or are unintelligible. It simply means that as much attention should be given to the band in the mix as the vocals receive. Vocals are another instrument and should be balanced equally with the band – not too loud so that the band fades away, and not too soft so that the vocals are buried.
2. **Congregants prefer to hear the music more than their neighbors.**
Accomplishing this clearly implies a certain volume level – one that many people may consider too loud. However, it can be accomplished without operating at unsafe volume levels, and when the mix is properly balanced across the frequency range, it can easily be done without even feeling “loud”.
3. **Has a significant range of expression.**
This means that the range of expression of Worship at Northshore should be very dynamic. This includes all aspects, from the volume, to the use of instruments, to the passion, to the music itself. The sound engineer should be keenly aware of the desired expression at each moment during the service, and provide a mix that reinforces that expression.

All of these items are preferential, meaning that doing it this way is not the only “right” way to do it. It is just as “right” to give vocals prominence in the mix, or to make it so the congregants can hear their neighbors clearly. But, at Northshore we are making these intentional choices as part of the definition of Northshore’s worship experience.

3.1.7. The sound should bring the worshipper “into” the party rather than leaving them outside

Think of it as the difference between being outside a house and hearing through an open window a party going on inside, versus actually being inside the home standing amongst the party-goers and participating yourself. Our desire is to have the congregation be participants in the worship, not observers. Sound-wise this requires sufficient volume and presence, particularly in the low end, but not so much that it begins to alienate the majority of the congregation. It also requires that there not be any distracting elements to the mix that draw unwanted attention.

As an engineer, if you feel like the sound is “up there” on stage, or that the band is worshipping “up there” instead of “down here with me”, then something’s wrong (it could be sound, or a problem with the band’s playing, or both).

3.1.8. The younger generation is drawn in, without completely alienating the older generation

The younger generation generally prefers things louder, rowdier, and edgier. This does not mean that they don’t appreciate the finer things of life, or that they don’t appreciate traditional worship. But, one of our goals at Northshore is to keep the younger generation, specifically the 20- and 30-aged demographic, engaged in worship at Northshore. Without this generation Northshore has no future.

At the same time we must retain the “older” generation – 40’s and up. This generation generally prefers things gentler, quieter, passionate but not rowdy. It does not mean, however, that they don’t appreciate upbeat, fun, or loud. Without this generation Northshore has no wisdom.

The two generations must come and experience worship together. This will require that both generations be willing to set aside preferences and come to a common ground.

As we experiment and find a place of compromise, everyone **must** buy in to it and do their best to stick to it. Failing to do so is a breach of trust to one side or the other and we will lose at least one of the generations – or maybe both will be unhappy. Take volume for instance: if we don’t consistently run the volume high enough to maintain the interest of the younger generation, we will lose them. We will have failed in our goal. If we run it too high, then the older generation will be unable to tolerate it and we will lose them. We will have failed in our goal.

3.1.9. The sound is passionate, not reserved

Approach the mix as an artist. Initially you think and plan, but then you feel it. Rather than being afraid to have something in the sound cause a reaction, you make intentional choices to have things evoke the desired reaction.

A journey cannot take place without travel. You have to start someplace (say discomfort) and journey to a new place (say peace). If you start with peace and stay there, then no one will appreciate it and some may not even recognize it for what it is. If it’s a kickin’ song you crank the volume and the low end. If it’s a passionately sweet song you make it smooth, ethereal, with lots of reverb. You bring out the guitar solo so people can soar with it. If it’s a shout-it-out song, you crank it. You tailor the mix to the emotion of the moment.

This is all part of the expression of worship. Make it so the sound is *expressing*, not just being. Become, as the mixing engineer, a part of the worship experience. Don’t hold back, don’t be shackled by fear of what people may think, but be free to express the worship.

Just as God calls us to self-control with our bodies and lives, we can be passionate in our expression within the boundaries of what we have defined as Northshore's worship experience. That means you are free to make it loud – but not *too* loud. Soft, but not *too* soft. Bring out that guitar solo, but not at the expense of a balanced mix. And so on. The boundaries bring even greater freedom since you know that within the boundaries you can truly do whatever your heart desires.

3.2. Raising the Bar

Earlier I talked about expectations for excellence and how those expectations are increasing at Northshore. I feel that an inevitable result of this shift is a change in philosophy for how to accomplish our goals and vision.

The old way:

1. Determine areas of need (e.g. sound operators)
2. Find a willing person to fulfill that need, regardless of qualifications
3. Train as necessary to fill the role
4. Be content with whatever level of accomplishment that can be achieved with the given people.
5. Grow and develop people in their roles as much as they are able
6. Retain people as long as they are willing to serve

This works in an environment that has flexible standards for excellence (for example, small to medium sized churches). Because everyone knows everyone else, it's all one big family and as family you accept each other just the way you are. Mistakes are generally tolerated even when goals are not met as a result.

Unfortunately there is a point where this system begins to seriously limit growth, particularly growth in excellence. The growth is limited by the least common denominator (least skillful person) in each role. So, while growth in excellence stagnates due to the inability of certain people to grow past a certain skill level, expectations for excellence continue to rise.

As the size of a church grows, more people become strangers and there is less tolerance for mistakes. Combined with the inherent increase in expectations that come with a larger church, as well as a cultural shift toward greater excellence, there are powerful forces at work driving the system as a whole toward greater excellence. The "old way" of accomplishing vision begins to break down as the desire for excellence outstrips the skill levels of the least skillful (limiting) volunteers. Eventually the tension between the desire for excellence and the lack of ability of certain people to accomplish it causes serious conflict.

The state of tension must be resolved for growth to occur, and the existence of conflict provides enough motivation to drive change. A new philosophy for filling areas of need is born:

1. Determine areas of need (e.g. sound operators)
2. Define the vision for that role (what do we want that role to accomplish)
3. Define the criteria and qualifications for a person fulfilling that role
4. Search for *qualified* people to fill that role
5. Periodically assess that the vision continues to be accomplished
6. Provide training and growth opportunities to keep everyone engaged
7. Don't be afraid to find people other areas to serve if they are no longer accomplishing the vision

Every so often it will be necessary to go back to steps (1) or (2) and re-run the process. This is because the vision will be constantly changing.

We at Northshore have been undergoing this change in philosophy over the past year or two. It is a painful change. People who previously served for many years in particular roles are no longer given that option, and they feel rejected, unappreciated. Defining the vision for each role is an extremely laborious process for the leadership, one that can easily be shortchanged resulting in a lack of clarity for the role. And the number of qualified people in each role is much smaller than we're used to having.

Eventually, though, things will settle down, the new philosophy will be the norm, and people will understand the new expectations. Then, growth can occur.

4 Qualities of a Northshore Sound Engineer

One of the most important things we need to do first is to define exactly what it is we're looking for in a sound engineer. From the vision we just defined it is clear that someone who just knows how to push buttons is not qualified. So, what *is* it that we're looking for?

Here are the qualifications of a sound engineer that we look for. A sound engineer at Northshore:

4.1. Loves and listens to music

It is very important that a sound engineer listen to recorded music. Even better is to listen to the same style of music that you mix. That gives a reference for what different mixes sound like, what a mix should or shouldn't sound like, and helps develop your musical 'ear'.

4.2. Can identify and create a good mix

Not only is a musical ear needed, but the you must be able to listen to a mix and pick out its different components. Then you need to know what could or should be changed to improve the mix. It might be a volume change on a particular instrument. Or, it might be changing the EQ on an input, or tweaking the compressor settings. While experience and training plays a large part of this ability, there is a fundamental skill in this area that must be present at some level, which in turn is then refined over time.

4.3. Understands the vision for sound at Northshore

This is critical, in that it is hard to accomplish a goal if you don't know what the goal is. If you're mixing sound at Northshore, you need to know what it is we're trying to accomplish through sound so that the decisions you make moment by moment will all be directed toward accomplishing that goal. The vision you're trying to accomplish was defined in the previous section.

4.4. Is committed to Northshore

Because the sound is so critical to Northshore's mission (see 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 earlier), the person in charge of sound needs to be wholly bought into Northshore's vision and direction. You need to be committed to and excited about where God is taking Northshore, and dedicated to helping make that happen.

4.5. *Is willing to set aside preferences and ego*

The mix that you put together should not be *your* sound, it should be *Northshore's* sound. This means that you may mix things differently than how you might otherwise prefer it. Every professional band has a characteristic “sound” that spans their songs and their albums, no matter what engineers were behind their production (although many times an engineer helps determine that “sound” for a band). In Northshore's case, we are striving to the place where the sound heard on Sunday's is Northshore's “sound”, no matter what band is up there or what engineer is doing the mix.

This means you need to have a good sense for what that “sound” is. This can only come through experience. Attend as many services as possible, and learn “the sound”. Then when you are at the mixing console, you mix to that sound, not to how *you* would mix.

Setting aside preferences means letting go of your ego. You are working in submission to a greater goal and a greater purpose than yourself. As part of the sound team, you will have many voices speaking into your mix besides yourself. You *must* be willing and even eager for this feedback, responding positively and truly integrating that feedback into the way you operate.

4.6. *Is teachable*

It is very important that you be willing to learn new things and be willing to change your behavior. In fact, you need to be willing to do this *even if you thought the way things before were just fine or even better than the new way*. Again it comes back to the need to serve a purpose bigger than yourself.

Respond positively to feedback, and actually integrate that feedback into the way you work. Don't just give a cursory acknowledgement to get someone off your back and then not make any real change. If someone in authority is asking you to make a change, they are doing it for a reason.

Please know that the process is collaborative. Your voice is just as important as anyone else's, and you as the “sound expert” have a lot of weight behind your opinion. Sometime you will find, however, that someone is asking you to make a change that you need to listen to and comply with.

Part of this is understanding who the voices of authority are. Obviously you could never successfully incorporate every piece of feedback you get from everyone. Some feedback is inappropriate or conflicts with the vision. Sometimes one piece of feedback conflicts with another. Know who the voices of authority are in what you do, and then listen to them.

4.7. *Understands Northshore's worship style*

It's difficult to make a mix sound right if you don't have a good sense for how it's *supposed* to sound. Make sure you understand Northshore's intentional style of worship. Attend services and listen to it. Talk it over with the worship leader and senior pastor.

4.8. *Is a worshipper*

One of the most important elements of the sound vision at Northshore is that the sound is an expression of worship. Therefore, the sound engineer needs to be able to worship while doing, and as part of, their role at the console. Without this the spirit of worship will be missed. This is more than closing your eyes and raising your hands, neither of which you can do at the console. It means having a heart full of worship and expressing that overflow in what you're doing on the console; constantly listening, making changes, tweaking things to express that flow of worship. Worship is never static – it ebbs and flows. So is doing a mix. You need to be able to “play” the console like a piano player, expressing your heart of worship through that instrument.

4.9. *Approaches mixing methodically and consistently*

In order to be consistent from one time to another it is important that you be methodical and consistent in your approach to building a mix. This starts with your layout of the inputs and the gain structure, and goes through the use of dynamics and effects all the way up to the blend of the mix itself.

As part of bringing better consistency from week to week you may be asked to follow a particular method of building your mix, laying out the console, or structuring the inputs that is not your “ideal” way of doing it. However, for the sake of consistency, please be open to doing things differently.

4.10. *Sees mixing as an art as much as a science*

Understanding the science of sound is very important, and so is understanding the technical details of operating all the equipment that you work with as a sound engineer. However, making a **great** sounding mix takes more than applying the science. It means using your ears, your understanding of the music, and your heart to bring out the beauty of the music. A great sound engineer is one that understands this and brings their artistry to the table. It's like the difference between a sample-accurate drum beat on a drum machine and live drummer: the first one is technically correct but sounds mechanical, the second one sounds *good*. See section 3.1.5 for more detail.

4.11. *Has a servant's heart*

The sound engineer is a part of the band, but has the unique role of serving everyone on stage by giving them what they need to play or sing well, and making them sound good.

In addition, you answer to the staff of the church and are responsible for the congregation's worship experience. This is a huge responsibility, and you should approach this with an attitude of humility as opposed to "I know better" or "I know best".

4.12. Is a team player

It's easy to feel that being a sound engineer is a solo role. Unfortunately for some, it's not. You are part of the worship band, and you need to work with them, with the people running the service, and with the church leadership as a team player. Only then will the entire team be successful in accomplishing the goal of worship.

4.13. Is technically gifted

There are some people who can walk in and immediately have a good grasp on the equipment, how to operate it, the responsibilities of a sound operator, and many other things about the system. For others it is more difficult and takes more time. For others still, they can work on it for many hours and still have challenges with basic operations.

Not having a technical gift is not a negative thing; some have it and some don't. For those who don't have it, running sound is probably not the right fit for them. However, they will certainly be able to find an area at Northshore to serve where they can have a huge impact.

For Sunday morning sound engineers, we look for people who have an intuitive ability to work with and understand equipment. This is important because there are many people dependent on them for rehearsals and services. Delays in getting the equipment operating can cost many man-hours of time quickly. The sound engineer is almost always under time pressure to get things working, and most requests from others (such as the band requesting monitor level changes) mean that someone is anxiously waiting for the requested change to be made.

4.14. Pursues excellence

The sound engineer, just as in any other role at Northshore, should be a person who is continuously striving to improve things, both for themselves and others. At the same time, there should never be an unhealthy dissatisfaction with the way things are. It's a constant tension between gratitude and contentment and the desire to grow. It is the same as in the Christian walk: having a desire and motivation to grow, while at the same time extending grace to yourself and others so that you can have a spirit of contentment about the way things are.

4.15. Is a church member

Any volunteer role at Northshore is a position of leadership, and as leaders we ask you to be members. There are several reasons for this:

- It shows your commitment to Northshore as your own church body.
- It shows your commitment to Northshore's leadership, values, theology, and direction.
- It makes you a part of the Northshore team, and we can be confident that you have the best interests in mind of Northshore as a whole.
- As a leader within the congregation, it sets an example for those who may wish to follow your footsteps.

4.16. Is spiritually mature and growing

Being in a position of leadership, there is an expectation that you will show maturity in your spiritual walk, and that you have a hunger to grow more in your relationship with Christ.

4.17. Has good people skills

As much as people often think otherwise, being a good sound operator means being able to interact well with lots of other people. For example, on a week you run sound you'll have significant interactions with:

- The Worship Leader
- The members of the band
- The vocal team
- The service director
- The music director
- The media director
- The ushers
- The rest of the tech team (PowerPoint, lighting, video)
- The congregation

You are representing both Christ and Northshore in your interactions with these people, so it is important that you have the skills necessary to make those interactions pleasant and effective.

4.18. Has periodic hearing tests

Most people assume that their hearing is "normal" unless they have some very clear indication otherwise. Another way of putting this is that everyone tends to assume that they hear things the same way as everyone else. Only once your spouse has told you for the 100th time that you need to get your hearing tested do you reluctantly go in and have it done.

Because the sound engineer is so central to the success of the worship on Sunday mornings, it is critical that they not have any hearing loss that may affect their ability to

hear a mix they way most others hear it. Hearing loss also tends to creep up on people, changing subtly over time, so they don't realize it's a problem.

For these reasons we require all sound engineers to have periodic hearing screenings to ensure their hearing is within "normal" ranges. Many screenings can be obtained at no cost at hearing aid centers. We require that every engineer to be screened no less than every three years and give a copy of their screening report to the Media Director. A report showing any sort of hearing loss will be discussed on a case-by-case basis to determine if it is appropriate for that person to continue serving as a sound engineer.

5 How We're Going to Get There

5.1. Step 1: Define the Vision

That's what this document is for. To review, here are the main elements of the vision:

- Sound is an integral part of the Worship experience for the Congregation
- Sound is part of the expression of Worship for the Worship Team
- Sound is consistent across engineers
- Preferences are sacrificed for the common goal
- The mix is at or near professional quality
- The sound embraces Northshore's intentional style of Worship
- The sound should bring the worshipper "into" the party
- The younger generation is drawn in, without completely alienating the older generation
- The sound is passionate, not reserved

All our effort and the other steps in this plan will work to achieve this vision.

5.2. Step 2: Communicate the Vision

I would like to get the following people together and have a time to discuss this vision for sound, the qualifications of an engineer, and the plan moving forward:

Lyle Corbin, Mark Rydman, Jeff Stammeler, Mike Jorden, Karl Mills, Mark Wolter, Mark Kohls, Jonathan Alexander.

In addition I would like to investigate having Kenny Reeves and/or Steve Smith come as special guests to communicate their thoughts in the role of the sound engineer. In particular, I'd like to have:

- Steve Smith discuss his thoughts on the sound engineer being a part of the band, and his observations regarding the conflict in churches between the sound engineer and band.
- Kenny Reeves discuss his thoughts as to the role of the engineer accomplishing the overall vision of the "production;" that is, the engineer helps to accomplish the overall goal with intentionality, and not work independently just doing his own "mix".
- Jonathan Alexander discuss his thoughts as to the importance of the sound engineer in accomplishing the overall goals of worship on Sunday mornings and how it fits into Northshore's overall strategy
- Mark Kohls discuss his thoughts in the changes with regard to excellence that have been getting rolled out among the worship team, and his thoughts and efforts to make the sound engineer more a part of the band.

Finally, I would take the bulk of the time to present this vision and plan moving forward.

A major element of this time together would be to allow each engineer time to express their thoughts and feelings, to respond to the vision and goals, and provide input.

5.3. Step 3: Connect with each person

I would like to meet with each engineer one-on-one after the meeting in Step 2 (either in person or by phone) to connect with them, see how they're doing, answer any specific questions, and to ask them about their commitment to this vision. This is where they would have the opportunity to opt out of being involved if they wish.

5.4. Step 4: Help everyone meet the new vision

One necessary thing is to settle on Northshore's "sound," as discussed in 4.4 above. We intentionally made some changes to "the sound" in August 2008, and have been tweaking it ever since. We need to settle in on the right "sound" over the next few months so we can bring consistency.

Once we've settled on that "sound" we need to give people a chance to learn that sound and to practice it with a high level of feedback as they learn.

There will be two steps to this training period.

5.4.1. Group Training

Using a multi-track recording of the band made sometime prior to this event, all of the engineers will get together for several hours for hands-on work in building a mix. Each engineer will have 10 minutes to create what they feel is the correct mix for a particular song while everyone else is in another room. Then, we will listen as a group to each mix and discuss the positive and negative aspects of the mix. At the end of the session, I will create a "reference" mix that we will establish as the "standard" for Northshore's sound. If we have time, we may create "reference" mixes for two or three different types of songs (upbeat, ballad, etc.).

5.4.2. Individual Training

Once the group training session has taken place, I (Lyle) will be present from 6:30 – 8:00 every Saturday night (assuming a rehearsal start time of 6:00) and from 7:30 – 11:15 every Sunday (with the exception of a couple vacation times). During these times I will have the following goals:

- Listen to the mix and the musicality of the worship
- Provide a basic assessment of how well the overall worship experience is accomplishing the vision as defined in this document.
- Talk things over with the sound engineer to get a sense for how they feel about the mix, how well the band is doing, answer questions, etc.

- Verbally provide notes (in the same type of format as “director’s notes”) to the sound engineer about positive elements in the mix and areas that need modification or improvement.
- Verbally provide notes to the worship leader about elements in the band that need modification or improvement (specifically regarding the musicality or elements that affect the mix being heard by the congregation).
- Have a checklist of the 9 vision elements and grade them on a scale of A to D, where A means “fully achieved” and D means “not well achieved”. This checklist will be sent to the engineer and Mark Kohls after each Sunday.

[For consistency, need a way to share techniques. (e.g. Mark’s technique to get a stereo sound on the mono feeds, etc.).

Get practice CDs to the sound guys too (or MP3s).]

5.5. Step 5: Evaluate

In mid August 2009, I will meet with each engineer and go over the following things:

- Vision checklist review. I will have a copy of each vision checklist from the weeks that person ran sound as well as copies of the notes I gave them and we will go over them to discuss any trends, areas showing dramatic improvement, or areas that did not improve.
- Qualifications Review: I will take the 15 engineer qualifications and based on input from Mark Kohls, Cindy Swenson, and myself grade each qualification from A to D. I will then go over these gradings with the engineer and talk about anything that shows a high level of excellence or that needs improvement.
- Future steps: Discuss with the engineer how they would like to be involved moving forward and if there is anything either one of us would like to change.

5.6. Step 6: Ongoing Maintenance

Once a year in the January/February timeframe, I will pick a week with each engineer and do a vision checklist review of their mix from that weekend and a qualifications review as described above.

Operator: _____

Assessor: _____

Northshore Baptist Church**Sound Vision Assessment**

Date: _____

Vision Goal		Score			
		D	C	B	A
1	The sound facilitated, communicated, and translated the worship experience to the Congregation				
2	The sound was in alignment with and enhanced the expression of worship occurring onstage and among the congregation				
3	The sound was consistent with the "reference" mix and with previous weeks' mixes				
4	The engineer and the mix showed that Northshore's goals were a priority over personal preferences				
5	The mix was at or near professional quality				
6	The mix had balance - the volume relationship between elements was appropriate				
7	The mix had all frequencies properly represented.				
8	The mix had variety in placing elements throughout the soundfield				
9	The mix had dimension through the appropriate addition of ambience (e.g. effects)				
10	The mix used dynamics effectively and appropriately				
11	The mix had interest: it went beyond making all elements even and communicated the energy/vibrance of the songs				
12	The sound embraced Northshore's style of Worship and the style of music being played				
13	The mix had a range of expression that matched the range of expression being played by the musicians				
14	The mix was at our target volume				
15	Volume was loud enough so that congregants would hear the music more than neighbors				
16	Volume was at the point where the energy of music came out and was not "held back"				
17	Volume was at our target reading: 1st Service: 85 dBA SPL average on the loudest song(s), with peaks at 89 dBA SPL 2nd Service: 88 dBA SPL average on the loudest song(s), with peaks at 92 dBA SPL 3rd Service: 90 dBA SPL average on the loudest song(s), with peaks at 94 dBA SPL				
18	The volume did not exceed target volumes				
19	The sound drew the worshipper in as a participant, rather than leaving them an observer				
20	The sound was consistent with our goals for intergenerational appeal (that is, it stuck with the decisions and compromises made to appeal to the broadest demographic possible and did not break trust with either generation)				
21	The sound was passionate and artistic, not reserved or flat. It was expressive.				

Operator: _____
Assessor: _____

Northshore Baptist Church
Sound Vision Assessment

Date: _____

Sound Engineer Quality		Score			
		D	C	B	A
1	Loves and listens to music				
2	Can identify and create a good mix				
3	Understands the vision for sound at Northshore				
4	Is committed to Northshore, its vision, and its goals				
5	Is willing to set aside preferences and ego				
6	Is teachable				
7	Understands Northshore's worship style				
8	Is a worshipper				
9	Approaches mixing methodically and consistently				
10	Sees mixing as an art as much as a science				
11	Has a servant's heart				
12	Is a team player				
13	Is technically gifted				
14	Pursues excellence				
15	Is a church member				
16	Is spiritually mature and growing				
17	Has good people skills				
18	Has had a hearing test within the last three years				
Notes:					