

# The Art & Science of Vibe

**Every  
organization  
has a vibe. Do  
you know  
what yours  
is?**

by  
**DAVE WORKMAN**

Decades ago during my time as a pastor, we determined that God wanted us to shape our weekend services to be *a safe place to hear the dangerous message of Jesus*. We became very intentional. We wanted to lower all the religious and sub-cultural barriers that got in the way of people hearing the essential message: God is crazy in love with you, but to really experience that love you'll have to surrender...and die.

Therefore, in that light, the atmosphere of the weekend environments is critical. Or what I call: the *vibe*.

Vibe is a term jazz musicians used for years about the *feel* music has to have. It's all about atmosphere...it's what others feel as you do business. You can play the right notes with the coolest players on the best equipment, but not have a vibe. It just doesn't feel right. Vibe is critical; without it, someone can throw a party with all the right elements—food, friends, and music—and it still not work. When the party is more draining than energizing, it's a drag; and chances are good guests will avoid the next party at that place.

Every organization has a vibe. Families have a vibe. You can spend a few minutes in a home and quickly pick up that this family does not have a lot of fun together...or this family is so unstructured nothing is ever accomplished...or so structured that creativity is choked. If the atmosphere is such that I prefer not visiting that house again, I would say there is no vibe, or at least a good one.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL SELF-AWARENESS**

Every church has a vibe as well. The atmosphere is charged with something...or nothing. The hard part is actually identifying the vibe. Organizations from billion-dollar companies to churches often have little self-awareness. Why does the organization exist?

Strategic church leaders must come to a place where they answer two philosophical (but extremely pragmatic) questions for their organizations: who are we and why are we here? They take their people through difficult times and changes to fulfill their purpose as an organization.

If these questions are not asked, they'll keep plugging in the latest and greatest trendy program to try to make something

happen. Be careful: one can't take any particular program and plug it into their model without looking at the attachments.

### **PROGRAMS VS VALUES**

Great programs are attached to great values. It seems to me that the idea of adopting a model only works to a certain degree. Churches have personalities like human beings: to want to be just like someone else is disastrous—and God will break us in that process in order to create what *he* wants, which boils down to a dependency on him.

That doesn't mean that adopting a model is altogether wrong. In fact, it is actually part of the growth process for a church. Musicians learn to play by first emulating the artists they love. Budding guitarists will copy the licks and riffs their guitar hero makes until they eventually find their own voice. Or just as a child imitates its parents, as she approaches her teenage years, there is a reassessment and questioning of authority, models, and values.

So it is with a church. What's more, I think that every pastor/leader goes through a breaking process as well. There is a "nervous breakdown" point, an angry, frustrated point where one makes hard decisions concerning what they are *for*. The end result may *be* the original model, but it will be based on different values, I can assure you.

### **FIVE VIBE INTANGIBLES**

People will pick up the vibe of your church primarily from one place: your weekend services. And so when thinking about the weekend services of your church, I would consider five essential "vibe intangibles":

1. Participation;
2. Energy;
3. Inclusiveness;
4. Quality;
5. Flow.

### **PARTICIPATION**

Are people engaged during the service? Are they actively listening while the speaker offered his or her message? Do they respond in some way during worship? Is there any attempt by your leadership team to assess people experiencing God in some tangible way? Is there any laughter during the teaching (humor is a big deal: it's a major indicator of icebreaking. I would jokingly tell our creative team, "Theology is easy; comedy is hard.")? Are people invited in any way to respond to or receive the Good News? Are people given an opportunity to connect further with the church and in some

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measurable way? On a scale of one-to-ten, how would you honestly rate the level of participation? Even if the weekend service is a highly produced presentation, it still has to provide an opportunity for people to feel as though they were engaged in some way.

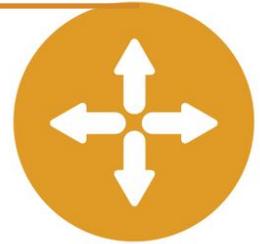


### ENERGY

Is there a sense of momentum...that the service is going somewhere? Are the worship songs directed to God? Does the music feel more like a dirge than a celebration? Do people on the platform (worship leaders, welcome host, teaching pastor, whomever) appear warm, authentically energetic, and informal...or cold, bored, disingenuous or cheesy (even if you personally know they're not like that)? Are the messages inspirational and challenging in some way? On a scale from boring or irrelevant to a call-to-action or soul-touching, how would you rate the average message? Is there often some sense of the presence of God during the services?

### INCLUSIVENESS

Is the language used during the service culturally sensitive and inclusive or too "inside" and filled with buzzwords and Christianese? Are the announcements strictly for "family insiders"? Are the words to songs easily accessible as well as understandable? Is the room lighting typically appropriate (allowing for some anonymity yet warm and inviting)? Are there enough descriptions and explanations of the order of the service? Is there culturally-inclusive music before and after the service? How does your hospitality team come off?—on either end of the spectrum, were they busy talking with each other or desperately targeting people like an aggressive salesperson? Do your services appear authentically transparent? Would people attending for the first time see people who "are like me"—and not just in a token sense, but in roles of visible leadership?



### QUALITY

Does the overall weekend service reflect an expression of your best efforts for your guests? Do the sermons/messages seem unresearched and off-the-cuff rather than thoughtfully developed for maximum comprehension and relevance? Do the print or video graphics look like a third-grader's PowerPoint book report? How are the worship leader's abilities rated on a scale from unprepared or distractingly poor to confident and genuinely worshipful? Does he or she have a warm rapport or seem remote and spiritually weird? How does the worship band appear: bored or like they just woke up? Do they sound like they picked up their instrument for the first time that morning?

How is the sound quality? Does the facility look dirty and uncared-for? How would you rate your first-impressions?

## FLOW

Does the typical weekend message seem like it has continuity and connection from point to point? Are there rabbit trails? Does it feel too long, rambling, and redundant? Great communicators can handle 35-45-minute talks, but most of us could cut the fluff and have way better messages by keeping them no longer than twenty-five minutes. And here's a little buzzkill: really great communicators are few and far between. How many athletes make it to the Olympics? Face it: there are only a few Andy Stanleys. How long was the overall service (if you want to know how long it should be, ask your volunteers in the nursery—you'll get an earful)? Did people leave wanting more (that's a good sign)? Was the order of the service paced well? Was there a sense of continuity with each part? Did the worship leader talk/preach between songs? (Stop it. Please.) How long were the announcements?—people automatically tune out during this part. Why torture them? Do the services seem connected thematically (Really?—an up-tempo “happy” song after a heavy message on crucifixion)? Do things feel disjointed?



## A CAVEAT

Of course, these five intangibles are subjective. But as a leader, you have to begin to benchmark them against what you want to achieve in creating invitational environments. If you don't create and protect the vibe, believe me: someone else in the church will.

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For an outside perspective, offer an unchurched neighbor, friend or someone you met at Starbucks, twenty-five dollars to visit your church with the condition that he or she be honest and tell you afterward what they actually felt and experienced: Did they feel welcome? Did it feel clique-ish? Did it seem weird to them? Were they bored? Did they feel singled out? Were they able to find the restrooms? How was the signage? Did the message or music connect with them at all? Etcetera, etcetera.

Or ask a volunteer to take their smartphone and video everything from driving into the parking lot to leaving the facility...then look at it with your leadership team. You may be shocked. Years ago we did and noted, for instance, there was no signage for our free coffee to let newcomers know it was actually free. That could be a simple, but uncomfortable, little barrier.

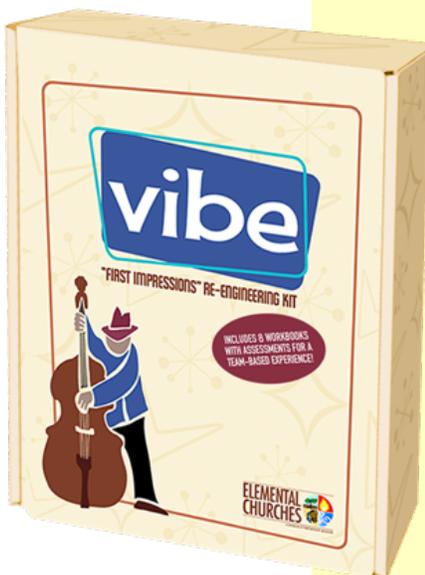
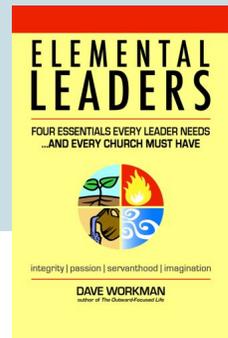
It's worth mentioning that the Greek word we translate as *hospitality* in the New Testament literally means *love of strangers*. At the very least, how welcome do strangers feel in your weekend services? Do you come off as indifferent...or equally bad, desperate? Hospitality is only one aspect, but you have to

take an honest look at the invitational-factor of your services: why are your people not inviting others to their church—especially if the best salesperson is a satisfied customer?

I don't mean your weekend service has to be The Big Show—personally, I'm not into that. It just needs to be authentic, warm and accessible to your community.

What's your church's vibe? What words would best describe it? How do you think others outside of your four walls would label it? **Even more, what needs to change in the atmosphere of your church?**

*Excerpted from **Elemental Leaders: Four Elements Every Leader Needs...And Every Church Must Have** by Dave Workman. Dave is President of Elemental Churches, a consulting group devoted to developing tools to help churches become healthier and more effective. For a free 12-page summary of the Elemental Leaders book, visit [www.elementalgroup.org](http://www.elementalgroup.org)*



## INTRODUCING VIBE!

The **Vibe Kit** is a team-based leadership development tool using comprehensive assessments and challenging (but fun!) exercises to discern what a new person feels when visiting your church's weekend services and website. **Everything changes when your team views their church through the eyes of a new person.** **Vibe** is an *objective* tool to assess the *subjective* ways visitors experience your church!

**The Vibe Kit includes 8 workbooks (70 pages) with assessments, tally sheets, and group exercises. Recommended for 4-8 participants.**

**Available online at [www.elementalgroup.org](http://www.elementalgroup.org)**