ASSISTANTS
Why be an assistant? If you have a choice between launching out on your own and being someone's sidekick, give serious consideration to the second option. You have a whole lifetime ahead of you, and there will be plenty of bucks stopping at your desk, so why not put that off for a few years to continue to develop your church music skills?

The English Cathedral system (chorister to organ pupil to organ scholar to assistant to director – all focused on producing DAILY services, each one of which matches what many of our churches do once a month), which does so much to hone those same skills, has no parallel on these shores. Being the assistant to a seasoned pro is the closest we come.

AUDITIONING
Find out how much playing will be required, and make sure it's enough to satisfy your musical soul. You want to be a musician first and an office assistant second.

Don't make your first points of inquiry questions like "how much vacation time will I get?" or "who covers for me when I go off to play recitals?" Rather, show first an interest in the church and it's music program: "what do you see as the mission of the music program?" and "how do you see this program growing"

MUSICAL HABITS
Develop daily habits that will promote personal growth.

Find your way to the organ and piano first thing in the morning. Make this your first priority.

Don't wait until the last minute to learn what you need to play.

When registering for rehearsals and the liturgy, take the local train and not the express. Quite apart from any questions of musical subtlety, doing so will allow you to be responsive accompanist.

Don't put your recital repertoire first: you haven't been hired to cocoon yourself on the organ bench for the benefit all those competitions and recitals you'll be playing. You've been hired to help make the music of the Church as artistic and organically related to the liturgy as possible.

Learn the vocal lines of each anthem. You never know when you'll be asked to help out at the piano.

Learn to read your director's mind. Trail his/her every thought with the question "what is he/she going to do next?"

Match the musical personality of your director. If he/she plays hymns in a modest fashion, don't try to dazzle with your brilliance ... or loudness! If he/she is an extroverted service player, don't try to outshine.

Attend even some of the rehearsals that you're not expected to attend: we learn so much just from pure observation.

PERSONAL HABITS
Don't upstage your director. If he/she is an introvert, don't be the "funny man." If he/she is an extrovert, don't try to "go one better."
Don't bad mouth your director. No one is perfect, so learn from what you don't like about your boss, file it away in your mental safe and then throw away the key.

If you have an issue with your director, go to him/her directly, not to another staff member or to the clergy.

Trade in good gossip. This might mean that you will have less to say and be less "interesting," but, in the end, you'll be the winner.

Gravitate to the "least of these." You'll make lots of new friends in your church and its choir program – that's a given – but don't just zone in on the "cool" ones, the funny ones and the ones closest to your age. Friendships can develop along unexpected lines, and your tenure in your church will be immeasurably more enriching if you live into new friendships generously.

Model exemplary choir rehearsal behavior. Aim to be the quietest person in the room. Don't talk, don't make faces, don't make eye contract or secret code signals with cool choir members ... and put your cell phone away. Be an efficient, effective and anonymous presence.

Maintain a discrete presence on FB. Nothing says "Oops! Why did we hire him?!", more than a Friday evening posting about the world's largest margarita enjoyed with friends on a salacious trip to the wild side followed by embarrassing mistakes on Sunday morning. On the other hand, if your anthems and hymns are nearly flawless on a weekly basis, then by all means let the world know what you had for breakfast.

Curb your opinions in FB Land. You never know ... Cameron Carpenter's Great Aunt might be in your parish .... and one of the strongest supporters of its music program.

In the world of e-mail make answering your director's needs a first priority. Put turning in your prelude title and composer ahead of answering a potential recital sponsor.

Dress for success .... or at least to blend in. Chances are that if you're in a church that can afford a second musician you're going to spend your workdays and choir rehearsals with people who dress up.