

THE INDUSTRY AND YOU

The misconceptions about the music industry and how to make it in music are loud and constant. The industry itself assists in generating rumors of that one artist who breaks through and has an amazing career from out of the blue.

From what is said on reality shows, in interviews, and stories, the road to success is a fairy tale. Unfortunately a very, very small percentage of artists gets to experience that fairy tale path, and those who do very often come to realize the illusion that fairy tale truly represents.

Think of a band you know that was playing small rooms, with each member holding a basic day job and living check to check. They practiced, recorded, struggled, and played everywhere they could. All of a sudden they come out on this amazing album. Then you start to see them in nicer cars and spending more money. That should raise a couple of red flags. When a larger scale record company spends a fortune on the recording of an album and gives the band new things, such as cars, clothes, and money, it is doing it as incentive. What the bands don't recognize is that the record company wants all that money back, and with interest. The record labels are a business, and they use artists' dreams as a way to lock musicians into deals that have crazy percentages. All the bands see is the light at the end of the tunnel. They see the ability to quit jobs, play all the time, and live the superstar

lifestyle. What they don't see is that the light can often be a train coming at them with a terrible contract that will own and control their choices for years to come.

Many of these artists sign the dotted line and do not read the contract. They hear the hype, and it blinds them from the reality and length of the contract. Words and phrases buried in these contracts can restrict the artist from making choices that everyone would assume would be theirs to make. Examples include what you can and cannot say on camera, what you can and cannot do, where you can and cannot go. Some of these contracts put artists into servitude, if not basic slavery. Those cool new logos, the bios, and the merchandise are created by other people, and sometimes, basic merchandise profits are not given to the band. Artists on all levels can be badly hurt by the deals they sign. The reason it doesn't seem like it with the larger artists is because even the small percentages that go to the artist are more than most could imagine. Regardless, they are often stuffed with requirements to record a certain number of albums, do a certain number of performances, and be under binding agreements for years and years.

Even deals that the smaller labels make can hurt the artists. Sometimes bands are signed into deals that will make them less attractive to larger labels and managers. Many small labels will incorporate percentages into contracts beyond the work that they do. This can include long-term publishing deals, royalties, and other percentages. The goal for these labels is to continue to get a piece of the artists if they go big, but many of these artists will not get better or larger deals because larger labels and managers don't want to deal with the hassle.

All this information, along with everything else that's happening in the industry, is why I push so hard for artists to look to a business side of things as they go ahead into the creative world. Learn the industry. Work to understand the loopholes, and if it seems too good to be true, especially in the music industry, you can pretty much bet that it is.

I'm not saying to turn down every deal but read the contracts and take the time to learn what you don't know. If something is unclear, don't ask the guy trying to get you to sign. Get a lawyer to review and explain it for you. Talk to a disinterested third party, someone who is not tied to the contract in any way. Don't ask for a lawyer from the label or manager that's handing you the contract.

Look to a realistic career and not just number-one hits and playing for thousands of people. Think about the spectrum of sales that are possible.

Look to creating as much as you can by yourself so you can bring more to the table and not have to have labels, managers, and agents take away from what is yours and take you in a direction you don't want to go.

Look to the possibilities of licensing your songs to movies, television, commercials, video games, corporate videos, and news reels.

Look to how you can license your songs to other performers, or even hire performers in other countries to sing your song in other languages.

Look with a set of eyes that can believe in the fairy tales, but aim for the real dreams that can happen—the dreams where you can achieve self-sustaining, long-term success and give away as little in percentages to others as you can.

Make that light at the end of the tunnel a real light and not an oncoming train carrying awful deals, long-term percentage loss and commitments that bind you for years to come.

If It Were Easy ...

I'm not sure how many musicians out there have noticed that working in the music industry is not easy. You know, all that practicing, creation of music, then playing it out. But that's the fun stuff, right? That's all you want to do. That's what it's all about, right?

Wrong.

All the marketing, promoting, attention to detail, the problem solving, the failures, the losses, the pain, the strife ... Damn, I sound like a Cure song.

You get the point. It's challenging. It's even more challenging when you are closed-minded or stubborn and don't do the things that you have to. I wish it were all about the music. I wish there didn't have to be any business in the middle of it. I would love it if you didn't have to deal with the politics and outside issues that take time away from your art, but it's a part of the equation of your success.

It's hard. It's hard as hell. If it were easy, everyone would do it.

The point is to stop looking for the easy way out. It's going to be challenging. It will take a longer time to do it if you're doing it the right way, and—you'll love this—even when you *are* doing it the right way, it's still going to be a real bitch and a lot of hard work.

So, what's the secret? There isn't one. The bands you've heard about that just magically made it or were seen by the right person and signed all have their horror stories as well. They're just not publicized. I'm not trying to be a conspiracy theorist, but the industry as a whole wants to have musicians believe all you have to do is buy the right gear, play out, and you'll be seen and taken care of.

Many companies thrive off musicians failing more so than they do on ones succeeding. I know someone's going to give me crap about that statement, but when you look at patterns and sales, it kind of rings true.

So, back to the answer ...

You're not going to want to hear it, but here it is: If you want the dream, it's obtainable, but you have to work your ass off to get it. It means taking stock of the time you spend each day and how effectively you're spending it.

Can you cut back thirty minutes on your video games to do thirty more minutes of marketing? Can you miss a TV show and spend those thirty minutes practicing? Can you find five minutes here and there to pop up a blog, market your band online, or work on finding a new venue or another band to work with?

The point is that sometimes doing a little each day will get a lot more done over a longer period of time. The consistency, especially in advertising, marketing, or promotion, of small daily segments, can actually be more effective than just a one-time numerous-hours blast. Then when the days come, in which you do have hours to put into a given project, you'll be even more productive and see continuity as well as growth.

The little elements can work for you just as much as the big ones can. Mostly, though, the Secret, if there was one, is continuity, commitment, learning, and patience. Stay true to your dream, but go out and learn all the elements of what you're doing and what you have to do. Take the steps each day and don't short cut. It will be the hardest

thing you ever do, but if you do it—all of it, every element and every step—you will find success.

If you haven't found that success, take stock and analyze what you're doing and what you aren't doing, and alter the game plan. More often than not, something is not being done. I talk to so many musicians who say they're doing everything they are supposed to be doing, and then when I bring up a laundry list of approaches, they haven't touched one of them.

The industry is in a new place. There are countless avenues and possible approaches that can help artists find self-sustainable and self-sufficient success. I'm not talking about becoming a millionaire; I'm talking about paying the bills, taking care of basic needs, having basic insurance, and maybe even having a little left to put away. That's a realistic approach to the industry, considering the magnitude of changes that have occurred in the past twenty years.

Today a musician has to learn to be the businessman or woman as well. It's crucial to have an understanding of marketing because these days it's necessary to put in as much time promoting your songs and your band as you do practicing your music. Anything short of this, more than likely, is not going to work.

The labels are still out there, and people do get signed to deals. Even the super marketing dogs that get picked up by either a label or management can get the opportunity to get back to a place where it's all about the music, or at least as far as you can see. It's a common misunderstanding that if you get picked up you will have marketing people and promotion people and agents to do that busy work for you. While it's half-true that many of the larger scale acts get promotional teams with large budgets, the artists are still promoting.

Go ask someone like Jason Mraz. You know the guy who had that hit with *Remedy* back in 2002. He's on a major label and touring non-stop, playing to large audiences all over the world. Rumor is Jason spends three-quarters of his day on phone interviews, magazine interviews, radio or TV promos, and all sorts of other marketing-type events so that he can play for, at max, an hour or two a day. Even the large-scale, higher echelon artists have to market and promote. It can't be all about the music all the time. The only difference is that a team is there to set up each marketing or promotional event that Jason has,

while the independent artist needs to search out each marketing and promotional opportunity every day.

I'm not trying to say put the music second—no way. The music, of course, is first. You need to craft the tunes, practice the tunes, prepare the tunes, and make sure that you write new tunes as you continue to mold the old ones. The music, in the end, is the final result, but the thing that artists need to be much, much, much, much (did I say much?) more aware of is that it's the marketing and promoting that will bring your audience to the music.

There's no way around it right now; whether you score the deal or not, you're going to have to be assertive, you're going to have to work harder than you might have thought, and you're going to have to take a lot of punches along the way. Is it worth it to you? If it is, then make it happen.

It is this way in life. When you talk to someone, whether it's a manager, a club owner, a band member, a potential label, or whoever, speak real. So many people don't say what they are thinking these days, and it drives me insane. Be assertive. You don't have to be an asshole, but you can be confident and stand by your opinion. Be open to hearing someone else's, but step up and stand up.

If you need to say no, say no. If you need to say stop, say stop. If you need to address an issue, then bring it up. Stop being passive, stop complaining, stop holding onto things, and start stepping up. Use that negative energy to fuel your dream and bring you to where you want to be instead of bitching about why you aren't there.

If you know you should be doing something ... DO IT!!!! One of the things that blows my mind the most is when I work with clients and they learn an element and apply it while I am working with them, then after they're done with a production or consult, they revert back to the ways that were not working before and then they find themselves being ineffective. I'm not saying don't adapt, embellish, and make things your own as you learn, but if something is working, why stop?

By the same token, if something isn't working, don't keep doing it over and over and over again. Take tabs of where you're at. Have you been playing the same room to the same crowd size for over a year? That's not forward motion. Take the problem-solving approach to continue to move forward in all aspects of your career. Are sales stagnant?

What steps should you take to increase them? Figure out what you were doing when your sales were better. Where can you look for new fans, and how can you find new markets in which to sell?

It takes an assertive set of ideals to be truly successful, and it takes humility to realize when things have to change. Apply those aspects, step up, and achieve the dream. If you say you're going to do something, do it. If you say you're going to call someone, call the person. If you want to try a different approach and you have new ideas, test them. Take the steps in music, and in life, to be true to yourself, to others, and to your dreams. It's either step up or shut up.

I hope you choose the former.

The Drive to Succeed

Inside all the elements that lead to success, from the considerations of the music to marketing, promotion, and networking, you have to have drive. That drive has to be constant; it's something you cannot give up on. You have to maintain it through the periods of your greatest doubt. When things are going slowly or not the way you want them to, you need to persevere and continue on towards your goal. When things are looking up and moving in the direction you want, you still need to keep that same level of drive. It's not an option; it's a requirement if you want to make it in this business or any other business.

I'm very proud of the FSRP system. The Freedom Solutions Recording Plan that I've set up, with the help of colleagues and my own life experiences, has allowed me to outline a game plan for artists. It includes every step from the pre-production and the funding to the release, marketing, and solicitation. The FSRP covers it all, except for one part—the drive, the desire, the determination, the persistence, and the attention to detail. These are the true core elements to your success. Period. These pieces apply to every element of what you have to do to achieve what you want.

The FSRP, or for that matter, any plan that's implemented to bring an artist to success, requires that these elements be brought to the table by the artist. They must be used in all the stages with the same intensity. The most common mistakes happen when the artists lighten up. They've worked really hard to get their dream recording and all the

materials in place; then the “sit back and wait” mentality begins to creep in. What the artists need to do is take the exact same work ethic that helped them create the recording and bring it to all the other elements of post-production, marketing, and branding. If artists apply the same efforts to every stage, they will succeed.

You can succeed. I'm not talking about some type of self-help, inspirational book or tape. I'm talking about what's inside you and knowing how badly you want it.

When you were little and you decided you wanted to walk, you didn't jump out of the crib and all of a sudden start walking. You stumbled, made mistakes, grew stronger, learned what worked and what didn't. Each day you got a little further. You were able to do things you weren't able to do the day before, and you were proud of your achievements.

One of the amazing things about us when young is that we don't know failure. We could dream of achieving anything and everything we set our hearts on. It was all possible. Over time we learned limits and boundaries, and a lot of them were smart ones. I learned very quickly and painfully that the stove was hot and I should not touch it. Other elements—failure, fear of failure, fear of trying—were instilled later. Sometimes I think these elements of failure mix us up inside, and maybe that's where fear of success comes from.

The persistence and the ongoing effort are what can define your success and your path toward your dream. Deciding that one thing is less important than another can hurt the final result. So take the drive that's inside, that maybe you've forgotten about, and apply it. Get out of your comfort zone. If you have a hard time fundraising, getting the investors or working on elements of pre-production, take the small daily steps in marketing and promotion on the backside. Push yourself.

Push toward the dream and push toward the goal. Don't make room for failure. Take the steps needed, both small and large, with every element and in every stage, and you will achieve success. You might not become a millionaire, you might not play to fifty-thousand people or sell two million copies, but you will find success.

Take away your fear of failure, take away your fear of success, and jump into that uncomfortable place—that place where you stumbled as a baby when you first learned how to walk or where you fell over when you first learned to ride a bike. It's exactly the same thing.

The drive. The desire. The determination. The persistence. The attention to detail.

These elements will bring you through the challenges and uncomfortable places on your way to your dream. Bring the same effort to each aspect and every benchmark no matter how hard, no matter how you fail at first, and no matter how you might doubt yourself.

If you do this, you will succeed.

Do You Think You're Worth the Investment?

For some very strange and unexplained reason, it seems that bands still have this mindset—or maybe it should be called a pipe dream—that as soon as they're heard by the right person, they'll win the record deal and move onward and upward to million-dollar success, fame and fortune. Of course those inexpensive demos will showcase the amazing ability of these artists and automatically make labels and investors want to lay down tons of cash for this new act that will be going worldwide in an instant.

In a perfect universe, maybe there's a chance, but in the real world the likelihood grows slimmer each day. Labels are going bankrupt or combining forces with other labels, and there are fewer investments more risky than backing a musical act. Industry people know: Money doesn't automatically mean success, but it can be a big part of its foundation. So why are you worth a label's cash?

I hate to be rude, but your sound is not new, you are not about to change the face of music, and you are not going to see a million dollars in the next month. Those who tell you that have to make sure they tailor their cuffs extra wide since they'll have a lot of problems up their sleeves, which they'll take out on you.

Tens of thousands of bands filled with delusions of grandeur are out there soliciting to labels with substandard demos, no marketing, no promotion plans, and piss-poor organization. These artists seem to hold the expectation that they're worth all the money they expect to receive or have invested in them, and yet those very few who get the money and services needed get pissy about having to pay back all the money *with* the percentage and can't seem to understand why it's taking so long for them to see any profit.

With the economy where it stands, the record deals are much fewer and further between. It's no longer about finding a label that will support and stand by you with a large investment. It's about how you can be worth the investment to a label.

First off, forget the studio recording. Don't try to shop half-ass demos or poorly recorded songs. You may be showcasing your song and your talent, but you're also showcasing that it's going to take a greater investment to record the song or songs the right way. The studio is a major expense with all the line items around the room, the engineer, the producer, the food, rental gear, travel, lodging, and so on. The studio recording is also a risky investment for a label: It's money that has to be budgeted for a project in which many of the other elements are not in place. This album that they are potentially funding might never be released. So why should they take a chance?

Now as the artist, the band, or the talent, if you come to a record label with an industry-standard recording, you take away a great deal of fear as well as a great deal of necessary funding. Work to find the right studio with the right engineer and the right producer. Record the album with the consideration of submitting not a demo but a finished product that's ready for the industry. Don't short cut; if it takes a little longer to get together the money to record it the right way, then take the time that's needed. Apply that same time to the mix and the mastering. Do everything you can to make it the best product possible that's up to the industry standards.

Then, when you take your package to a label with an album that's ready to go and at the necessary level of quality, you're going to jump ahead of many other artists bringing in half-ass demos because you have something that's going to save the label money. And not only that: The more prepared you are for the industry when you bring your package and product to a label, the sooner money can be made for all parties. Remember to ask yourself how you're helping the label. Don't just sit in the mindset of what the label will do for you.

Now on that same line, if you have your logo, your basic branding, your image, and all the secondary elements that cover your marketing and promotion in place, it makes you all the more appealing to labels, managers, and agents. If you have worked to create a complete press package in which everything is uniform in appearance and content,

as well as sharp and professional looking, you have just saved the label more money and brought them closer to making profit from you and with you.

Think again of all the bands that don't have the right product or quality recordings. Think of all the bands that don't have a font, a logo, or the tools to brand themselves. Think of the bands that don't have a tight bio, stage plots, and other artist-contract materials together. Think of the bands that haven't set up a strong fan base on their own or have little Web presence. These are all things that are absolutely necessary for the successful launch of a group that's looking to make money. If any of these elements are falling short, they need to be made up in both time and investment so that the group can be a financially viable entity. In other words, if you don't have any of these elements in place, you're going to need money, time, and a development period to get them to where they need to be. If you're expecting any label right now to invest money and time into such a band without either taking a very large percentage or being very hesitant, you are well mistaken.

If you come to a label with everything in place, then you can approach it in a very strong, original way by showcasing that you have everything in place to make money for the label and yourself sooner than most. If a label just has to invest in advertising, distribution, and tour support, then it's putting money into things that can see returns much faster. If it has to invest in development, recording, promotional layouts, logos, and branding, then it's investing in something that's further from profit and a lot more chancy.

Make it easier for yourself to be distributed, to be put on the road, and to move product and merchandise. In turn, you become less of a risk in a business that's taking fewer and fewer risks every day. If you want representation, a label, or to be signed, get your product and your package up to par and beyond; then go to the managers, the labels, and agents with the professional and prepared package that will make it fast and easy for them to get you out to the world.

I Have Serious Label Interest

This is not something you want to advertise even if it's true. Label interest is nothing to write home about or brag about on Facebook, MySpace, or

your social networking sites, especially to people you want to impress or potential producers with whom you might be looking to work.

Most of the time when I hear or read that line, I move on. In the world of way too many labels and so many small labels that aren't working with the right people, it's better to say nothing until you actually have serious label interest.

Even larger labels are victims of liars and people who claim to work with them when they actually do not. I've heard artists tell me about how they're signing with Warner Brothers with a contact that has nothing to do with Warner or any of its affiliates.

Many of the scouts who are real or work with certain labels don't have the rights or the jurisdiction to sign or promise anything. It comes down to a deal that's on paper. Anything before a signed contract is only talk, and those who talk too much end up looking suspect and fake.

It doesn't look any better when artists are talking about their serious label interest from a number of labels and don't have anything together, or when they're asking for help beyond a proposal or final solicitation package for representation, management, or label signing.

The point is to display with actions, not words. Even if you have label interest and are on the cusp of signing a deal, keep your mouth shut. It looks classier, more professional, and a lot more impressive when things you say happen and continue to go in the direction of productive growth.

Impress with your actions. Keep the lips zipped and talk about the stuff that is locked in place because the rest of it is always up in the air, especially in the entertainment fields.

Opinions on Opinions: Who to Listen To

In the music business there are a lot of avenues that offer advice, consulting, counseling, ideas, expertise, and everything in between. It's always good to research where you are getting the "help" from, but it's also important to define what you're looking for and if you're receiving information that's relevant to those questions that you have.

Just because someone had a record deal doesn't mean that he or she fully understands the industry, though that person will likely be able to give you a wealth of knowledge about that record company. Today

in the world of so many different blogs (yes, I am guilty of adding yet another music blog to the mix,) magazines, books, and Web sites, it's very important to know from whom you are getting your information.

A very common issue with a lot of music business courses, and some music consulting firms, is that the information you're getting is dated and not as applicable as it once was. It's not to say that these people weren't pros in the field at some point, but just as a lawyer has to keep up with laws that constantly change and adapt, so do those in music. The past couple of years alone have brought major changes in the industry.

When you talk to people, especially if you're going to pay them, find out as much as you can about them. What's their current and past experience? How varied is it? Many people talk about being around the industry but have never actually been a part of it. This is not to say that you can't study the industry and subsequently have a good sense of it, but personally, I would rather collect my information from someone who has been knee-deep in it.

What were some of the successes and the failures of this person? Remember, someone who has had nothing but success, which is a rarity, may have had some really good deals and an impressive résumé but may not have the understanding or problem-solving skills to help you through rough patches. Those who have failed as much as they have succeeded will often have a much wider view, which can be incredibly helpful.

Watch out for "promises" or phrases like "trust me." Be wary when you're given guarantees or you're told how big you'll be and how far you'll go.

When people give you their opinion or their information, ask them what it's based on. Make sure your questions are answered and that you have a clear understanding of what was said. This will help you a lot.

I always tell artists I produce that I make no promises or guarantees. I don't tell people to trust me; actions and repetitive experiences between the client and me show that trust can be created. I was never with a single label or company as either a drummer or producer. I was a hired gun, and I jumped around quite a bit. I took the experiences of my work and have come up with the information that I share based

on that—both the failures and the things I did wrong in my career, as well as the successes that I've had.

Remember, it's not about trying to find one person, one book, or one site. You can find numerous people to help you, and there are many places to find solid information. Just be picky. Find out who is saying it or writing it, where the person comes from, and what his or her beliefs and approaches are. This will help you build a much stronger resource list.

Anyone can tell you anything, and it's great to reflect on what you hear and always be respectful to someone offering advice. However, it takes a mature and patient mind to navigate through the information that's given and find the best road possible.

It's You Vs. the Industry

Go to any musician's hangout, whether it's a practice building, a bar, a club, or a music store, give it a little time, and you'll eventually hear a rant about the music industry. People will inevitably start to talk about why they aren't where they want to be. They have every reason for how the clubs, labels, booking agents, or some facet of the industry has messed up their career. They use this as justification for where they are at.

I don't mean this to be a dig—well, in a way, maybe I do—but you can blame all you want, you can fault the RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America), you can fault managers for shady deals, agents for screwing you over, publishing companies for not getting you your royalties, or the big names for taking away your deserved popularity. I have heard so much whining and moaning, and it's completely useless.

Complaining is a negative thing that gets you nowhere. Actions beget actions. The ones who bitch the most are the ones who will often stay in this pathetic holding pattern and go nowhere. These are the people who feel they deserve something from the music industry and are waiting for it to come up and knock on their door. Oftentimes these are the people who rip on other musicians and do a solid job of burning bridges in the process.

Let me tell you something: The music industry doesn't owe you anything; it was here long before you were. Publishing and licensing deals date back to the days when musicians were hired to write for

kings and queens in the Middle Ages, and where do you fit into that? Nowhere. You want success, you want opportunity, you want to make money? Then make it happen through actions, not bitching.

The music industry is one of the hardest and dirtiest industries out there. Hell, at one point it was run by the mob. Doesn't that set quite the precedent?

One of my favorite quotes to sum up the industry is by Hunter Thompson:

The music business is a cruel and shallow trench, a long plastic hallway where thieves and pimps run free, and good men lie like dogs. There is also a negative side.

This is so true. So Earth to the negative people, Earth to the bitches, whiners, complainers, and blamers ... that is what it is, but it's also one of the most incredible industries in the world.

I've been a part of numerous tours, recordings, bands, sessions, substitutions, and productions. I've cried, I've practically killed myself from exhaustion and overworking, and I've had the time of my life. I love music. I love what I do and do what I love. There is a terrible and very broken aspect to things, but I've never let it deter me or move me from being a musician. I've wanted to quit, but I couldn't. I know what it's like to live the five-star tours just as I know what it's like to be shoved into a very small van with five very large people for a very long time. I wouldn't trade any of it for the world. I've made a great deals of money and lost a fortune as well. I've played for thousands upon thousands and played for a single pissed-off bartender who wanted us just to go home. It's been a spectrum of love and hate, anger and joy, frustration and pure fun.

I will say it again: I love what I do and do what I love regardless of the pain at times. I would take the pain to get the joy I have received.

That being said, and this is not a bitch fest, but it's true, the music industry is pretty messed up. There are some really screwy, fraudulent things that happen to artists every single day. Some labels do sign artists to awful deals. Some managers do rip off artists. Some publishers do take way too much from artists. Some producers do wrong by their clients, and some booking agents do take advantage of bands. But for

all you can bitch about, there are also labels, managers, agents, and bookers that are doing it right and taking care of the artists. These are the people who take action and move things forward instead putting out a stagnant, go-nowhere attitude.

When you bitch, complain, and whine about it—well, it actually doesn't do anything. Being negative doesn't make change in the industry nor does it help you or your career. Make a difference; educate yourself. Read the contracts that you get, and have a professional read them as well so you don't sign a deal that will allow someone to take advantage of you. Learn about the problems in the industry and how some people ran into them so you don't make that same mistakes yourself.

Advocate change by effecting change. I was annoyed with how independent artists were being messed with and screwed over. They were not being protected, so I created my first music production company. That was my action to try to make a change in the industry.

No single one of us can change the industry alone, but each of us can take small steps, which together, can amount to big ones. So shut up with the whining or—honestly—give up. The music industry is not for you. It's hard, and a lot is stacked against you. Working your tail off to take the right steps, learning from your own and other people's mistakes, and working together to give yourself and others a fighting chance is the best forward motion you can take.

Next time you are ready to complain, move that energy and effort to fire you up to make change, take action, and push yourself even harder to succeed. Keep whatever you were about to complain about what it should be: a small speed bump. That attitude has worked for me and many others. It's OK to be pissed off with how elements of the music industry treat musicians, but if you harness that energy into positive actions, you will create positive reactions.

One of my inspirations once told me when I wanted to quit...

"Buck up, Binky; it's worth it, and it's a hell of a ride."

And you know what? ... He was right.

Take It with a Grain of Salt

We all wish that everyone would love, appreciate, and understand our art, our ideas, and basically, us. It would be so much easier if each could

just “get it.” And there’s no reason at all for people to cruelly bash others or go on the attack, and yet it happens all the time. Every day someone deals a harsh word, a negative opinion, an insult. Now, it’s true that opinions differ and no one is going to like everyone and everything. Still, for some reason, while each of us can have very strong opinions about others, we often get hurt or offended when someone has strong opinions about us.

First, Grow a Pair

You have to learn to take it. You have to learn to brush it off but also see when it might actually be constructive criticism or have a seed of actual honesty. When we hear bad things about ourselves, especially relating to things we feel good about, the natural reaction is to go on the defensive. But take a step back and take a breath. Before you go on a counter-offensive, take a look at what has been said or written and see if it is something you should consider.

On the other hand, there are people who are just going to be brutal. They are going to tear into you, and really, do the reasons matter? Why justify it as jealousy or a personal grudge? It doesn’t really matter. Let go of it.

I have been writing a blog for almost two years. At least once a week, I post an entry that contains the ideas and approaches I’ve developed from firsthand experience in the music business. Without a doubt, my opinions are different from others, but I don’t think I’ve ever been completely off in any of the articles I’ve written. Ask some of my readers, however, who have both publicly and privately sent scathing comments, harsh e-mails, and called me every name in the book, and you would get a different story. They accuse me of being a hack, a scam artist, and someone who doesn’t have a clue about the music industry. Hell, I got one guy who says my writing pisses him off more and more each week. (Side note: *Stop reading*. I don’t intentionally want to upset people, but I’m not going to stop, and I’m not going to cater to you, so skip my blog. Easy enough right?) But for all the rude comments, I get many more that are kind and wonderfully supportive, so I keep on trucking. It can hurt sometimes, but when it’s more good than bad, it’s better just to let the bad go.

I was walking downtown in Seattle, and a guy actually shouted from across the street that my articles are retarded. I kind of felt like a rock star in that moment. He hates my stuff so much yet continues to read it and even knows what I look like. It didn't phase me at all. And instead of giving him the reaction he might have been looking for, I bowed, thanked him, and said the next article would be out Monday morning. But the point is take a moment to consider. If it isn't something constructive and it isn't something you want to change, whether it's your writing, your music, or anything else, then take it with a grain of salt and let it go.

Literally let it go. I know I've repeated that a few times, but it needs to be done. Don't get into the habit of responding to these people. If you're getting genuine questions, that's one thing, but if someone says you suck, your song sucks, your picture sucks or whatever, let it be. I used to erase the negative comments, but now, more often than not, I just leave them up. They are others' opinions, and it's their right to say what they want. Responding is only going to light a fire for them to attack you more. The more you react, the more you set them up to bother you more. You let them under your skin, and by responding, you just give them the power to crawl around more.

Every time I have responded to someone being negative, the person has only become more of a jerk. When I don't waste the time or the effort, he or she usually goes away or bothers me less frequently.

Wasted Energy

Regardless of your job, what you create, and what you want, people are a little more tired these days. Energy levels are down, and we need to be at 100 percent to get what we want and have the endurance and energy to continue to go after it. Worrying about the people who are being negative or giving you crap takes away from the effort you can put toward what you want and bringing it to the people who are actually appreciative of it. Don't waste your energy on the negative few.

And though I hate to say it, it may only get worse as you gain popularity. The more reads I get on my blog, the more kind comments have come my way, but at the same time, the number of rude and harsh ones has jumped as well. The more you play out, the more you are heard,

the more you get your music out there, your writings, your image, and yourself, the more people there will be to tear you a new one. The more people who will give you crap, the more people who will mock you, tease you, attack you, and all around try to piss you off.

Take it with a grain of salt; let it roll off your back. Move forward in confidence and assertiveness and create what you want to create. That power will allow you to reach many more people than playing scared, responding to every bad comment, or getting into it with every person who doesn't like you. Don't waste the time trying to turn a hater into a supporter. Spend your time going after as many people as you can to build a strong fan base that supports you.

Stay sensitive to your art but become less sensitive to criticism, or it will eat you alive. If you can't handle the scrutiny, you are going to have a rough go in any art or entertainment related business.