

Managers: Can't Live With Them...But Can You Live Without Them?

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By Sheena Metal

You can't throw a rock in any metropolis on Earth without hitting someone claiming to be a manager. Where musicians go, managers follow. It's as accepted and expected in the entertainment industry as an out-of-control cocaine habit or a failure to pay taxes. When you tell people you're a musician, one of the first things they're going to ask you is: Do you have a manager? However, those in the throws of the music business know to ask an even more accurate question: Do you have a good manager?

"What's the difference?" you may ask. Isn't any manager better than no manager at all? While it would seem that the answer to that question is unequivocally, "Yes", in reality it's a bit like asking, "Isn't having a herpes-ridden prostitute for a girlfriend better than being single?" In truth, bad representation is far worse than a lack of representation. While, it's a fact, that there are things your band will probably never achieve without the aid of a manager, agent, entertainment attorney, etc., bad representation can stagnate a career...stop it dead in its hurling climb to the ranks of superstardom or even worse...undo some of the hard work the band has already done.

Sad but true, a bad manager can take a perfectly good band and turn them into a thing so foul that old gypsy women covering their faces with rags will spit and give your band the evil eye as you pass. Ok, that may be a bit dramatic, but seriously...all your band really has is its name and its reputation, so why would take a chance on either of those by putting the whole of your band into the hands of someone that you're not 100% sure has your best interests at stake?

The following are a few tips that will help you to decipher whether or not your manager can take you to the top or turn your band into a flop:

1.) The Drummer's Girlfriend Is Not A Manager---Sure, she may get names for your mailing list, invite her girl's beach volleyball team to all of your gigs and post your latest pictures on your website photo gallery, but she's not really your manager. She's a helper, she can be the president of your fan club, the head of your street team and the world's sexiest roadie but she probably doesn't know how to put together a press package and make the calls that will get you into an A&R rep's office for a meeting. This also applies to: boyfriends, wives, husbands, booty calls, one night stands, moms, dads, cousins, aunts, uncles, neighbors, nieces, nephews, grandparents, grandchildren, pets and the homeless guy who roots through your trash at midnight. These people may all be well-meaning and you can accept their aid in dozens of ways (it takes a village to build a popular unsigned band) but don't give them the label or the powers of a manager.

2.) Treasure Your Fans But Don't Let Them Manage You---This should be a given but you'd be surprised how many over-eager, slightly-obsessed fans move from semi-stalker to mega-manager in a few simple weeks. I cannot stress how simply wrong this entire concept is for two dozen major reasons the most important of which is: fans need to

be kept at a distance. There is a reason why that same person comes to all of your shows no matter how many you play, gets there early, sits up front seemingly paralyzed staring at you enraptured. Either they're in love with someone in the band or they're insane. These may be reasons to get a restraining order but certainly not reasons to make someone your manager. A band's manager knows every secret of each musician, every person in each member's personal life, where you keep your money, where you live, and who's in your fan/contact database. This is not information that you want someone who has 450 cut-out pictures of you on their bedroom ceiling having at his/her disposal. Enough said?

3.) Don't Sign A Contract Unless It's Worth It---Manager's like control. That why they choose to be managers and not people who macramé wall hangings with the mane hair of ponies. Thus, most managers will try and evoke you into signing a contract. In the entertainment industry, contracts are like marriage certificates...before you sign one be sure your band wants to be tied to the same person for long time (a year, two years, five years, etc.) because they're much easier to get into than to get out of. For example, if you sign a contract with an efficient, but somewhat green manager, who is helping all he/she can to get you everything possible from what little resources he/she has and then Gwen Stefani's management team approaches you after a big gig and wants to put you on tour with John Mayer. Do you think if you tell them, "We love to take your tour but we're under contract with someone else for the next five years, can you hit us up then?" the offer will still stand? Not so much. So, if you must sign contracts, keep them short and make sure they give you room to act, think, play and communicate with others without getting clearance from your band warden (manager). And make it includes an exit clause. Read up on it.

4.) Sometimes Bigger Is Not Better---Although it's a huge ego stroke to brag to all of the other musicians backstage at the Whiskey A Go-Go that your manager works with Grammy award-winners and stadium sell-outs, sometimes an unsigned band can get lost in a huge management firm. While Mr. Big Stud Manager is busy picking out Madonna's dress for the American Music Awards, he may forget to ask Quincy Jones to attend your bass player's birthday gig at Billy-Bob Wang's Tofu BBQ Shack. The problem with huge managers is that their focus often goes the acts that are making them 15% of 100 million dollars a year. Your 15% of \$45.75 a year after expenses is probably not his highest priority now or ever, and what good are his super amazing industry contacts if he never remembers to invite them to your gigs?

Having a manager is great but only if they provide more benefit to the band than the sum total of your band members and band helpers can do for yourselves. If you find someone who can open doors, take your music places it cannot go on its on and has your best intentions at heart, then grab that contract, sign it and enjoy the benefits. If not, you may find yourself: conned, stalked, ignored and/or legally bound to someone that puts their own agenda (well-meaning or otherwise) and their own ego above what's right for you band. And whatever you do, don't sit around waiting for Mr./Ms. Right to wisk your band off its feet and carry it off on his/her white horse to the Fairyland where everyone gets a record deal. You, as its members, know more than anyone, how to do what's right for your band and nothing will attract the perfect manager faster than seeing musicians who are out there, doing their thing, and making headway in a very difficult business with a great attitude and terrific music.

Sheena Metal is a radio host, producer, promoter, music supervisor, consultant, columnist, journalist and musician. Her syndicated radio program, Music Highway Radio, airs on over 2,400 affiliates to more than 126 million listeners. Her musicians' assistance program, Music Highway, boasts over 10,000 members. She currently promotes numerous live shows weekly in the Los Angeles Area, where she resides. For more info:

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