

A Musician's Growth: Lessons Learned from the Road and Recording Studio

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1) BE PREPARED

- Do the homework, learn the material. No exceptions.
- Learn the Nashville Number System and develop your chart writing skills
- Use charts only as a safety net, not as a crutch.
- Invest in the best quality gear you can afford, keep it well-maintained.
- Develop tuning skills to achieve the sounds you want. Your sound is your voice.
- Your vehicle is gear, too. Make sure it is reliable. You can't play the gig from the side of the road.
- Be punctual. Early is on time, on time is late.
- Whatever the gig may be, exhibit professionalism in your dress, behavior, and demeanor.

2) BE ORGANIZED

- Maintain an updated calendar of commitments and daily/weekly to-do lists.
- Double check gig details, confirm any secondhand information with the person hiring you.
- Have a professional email address and keep your inbox organized.
- Maintain a folder or binder of paper charts or organize on tablet. Never throw away a chart.
- Integrity is invaluable. Stick to your word when you book a date, even if offered something better.

3) BE VERSATILE

- In order to make music for a living, one must "wear as many hats" as possible. Branch out.
- Versatility and additional skill sets add to your value as a musician. Make yourself hard to replace.
- Consider moving to a "music city" to further your career. Follow opportunity.
- Study and listen to a wide range of music to know what is appropriate for any gig that comes along.
- Don't be afraid to take a gig outside of your comfort zone. You will grow as a player.

4) BE AWARE

- Our primary responsibility is to serve the song. Don't step on the vocals.
- Be conscious of how your choices affect the song. Is the bass player happy? Are people dancing?
- Bring your biggest ears to the stage, constantly listening to the players around you.
- Read the body language of the band leader and bass player, they will also guide you for changes and stops.
- Play with intention. Every sound should be there because you wanted it to be there.
- Pay attention to your posture. Set up your kit with ergonomics in mind.
- Be mindful of your musical tendencies and proactive in avoiding the negative ones.

5) BE INFORMED

- Decide whether you want to specialize in one genre or develop your skills in a wide range of styles.
- Continue to maintain and advance your fluency in music, theory, and aural skills.
- The more you listen, the more you know. Develop your musical intuition through listening.
- Be ready to work with songwriters/players who don't "speak the language". You'll find a way to make it work.
- The band that hires you may have a "musical translator", or it may fall on you to fill that role.
- Depth of knowledge will help you to better translate the songwriter's vision into performance.

6) KNOW YOUR VALUE

- Playing for free or cheap can diminish the value of all players in your community. Avoid this where possible.
- Determine your rates for rehearsals, gigs, tour dates, and studio sessions.
- Be realistic in the above and willing to be flexible where needed.
- “Perceived Value” is real.
- When considering a gig, remember “The Trifecta” – good money, good music, good hang. Aim for 2/3.
- Establish a quality online presence – personal website, social media, audio/video, etc.
- Embrace digital music distribution. It is now easier than ever for independent music to be heard.

7) FIND BALANCE

- Make an effort at maintaining your physical and mental health. Musicians are notoriously hard on their bodies.
- Establish a habit of stretching and warming up before playing.
- Engage in non-musical hobbies and social activities.
- When on tour, make time to get out and see the city around you as often as possible. Ask locals where they go.
- Take on gigs and projects that are strictly for fun. Remember the joy of music from when it was just a hobby.
- Avoid burnout. Take time off. It’s OK to say no to gigs.
- Control your vices. All things in moderation, including moderation.

8) BE GRATEFUL

- Humility is key. Those who have to tell you about how good they are probably aren’t.
- The “hang” is half. When everyone is talented, the good hang will get the call.
- Control your musical ego. The gig is about the song, not your chops.
- Comparison is the thief of joy. Avoid “gig envy” and applaud colleagues who are succeeding.
- Keep a positive outlook, even on the rough gigs and bad nights. All things in perspective.
- Do your best to be friendly and gracious to everyone you meet at a gig or on tour.
- The above is doubly true when you’re not in the mood to do so.
- Respect your sound engineer. They are a vital link between band and audience, or the room and the record.
- Same goes for other bands/musicians on the show, venue staff, stagehands, bartenders, etc.
- Don’t talk about poor sound or bad bands at the venue. You never know who is listening.
- Our musician community is small and everybody knows everybody. For better or worse, word travels fast.
- Many folks hate their jobs. Acknowledge the fact that you are incredibly fortunate to play music for a living.

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