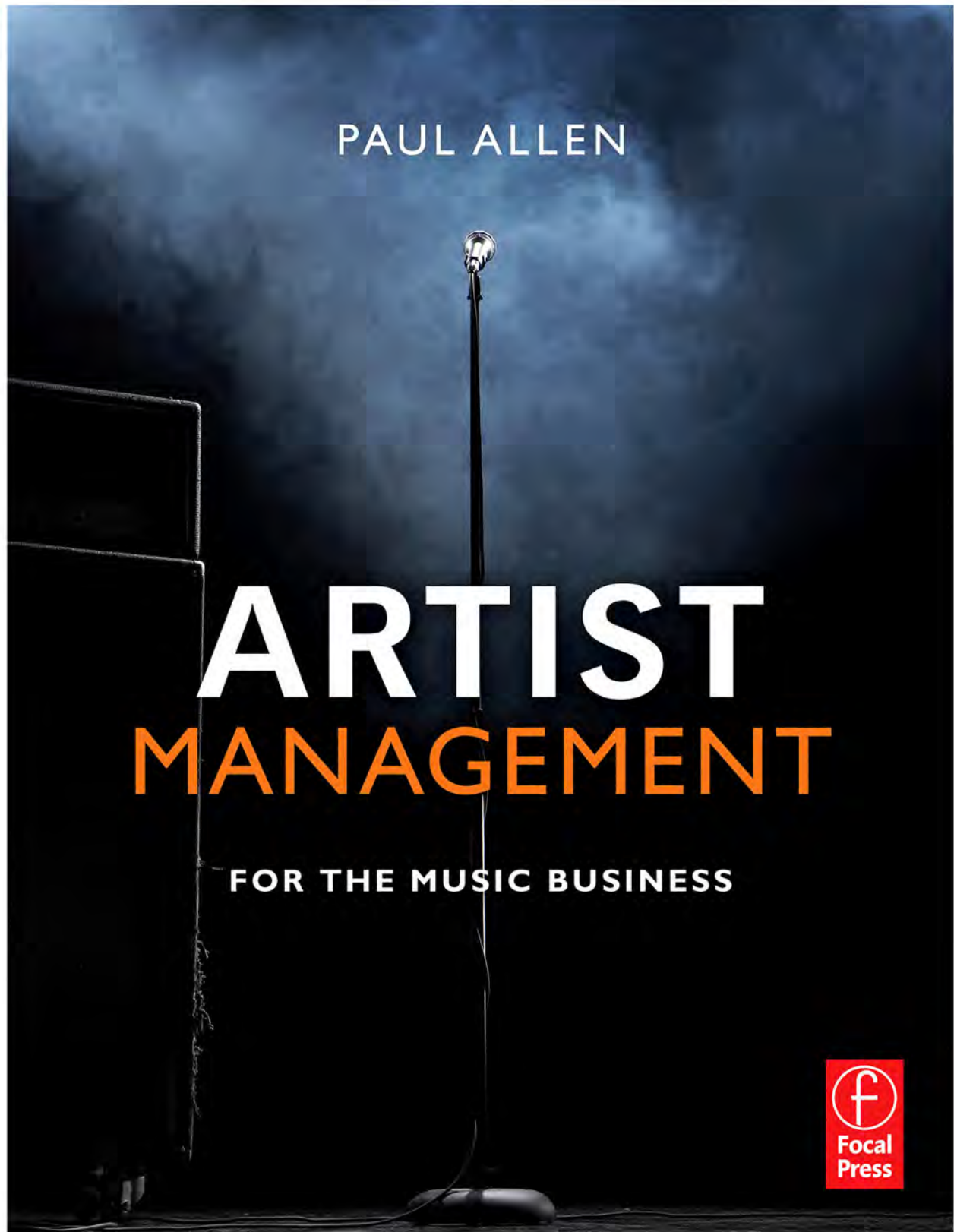




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PAUL ALLEN

ARTIST MANAGEMENT

FOR THE MUSIC BUSINESS



at first. Publishing royalties can be slow to develop if the artist is new to songwriting. So a new manager should be prepared to finance his or her own management business for three to five years. There are other ways to enter the business of being a professional artist manager, which we will discuss in this chapter. Meanwhile, a more detailed analysis of a manager's compensation will be presented in Chapter 5, where we examine the contract between the artist and the manager.

Acquiring the knowledge

The aspiring artist manager needs a basic understanding of the entire music industry. Without that, the manager will never know of opportunities that he or she has missed on behalf of artist clients. Earning a degree in business is very useful, especially one that emphasizes marketing, brand management, and salesmanship. Earning a degree with an emphasis in the recording industry can give a graduate a very broad, contemporary look at the business that many active players in the industry do not have. A degree in law is helpful as well as a masters in business administration, though to effectively manage an artist, an undergraduate degree in business gives the manager a good general working vocabulary and understanding of the business world.

Aside from the classroom, an especially effective way to acquire knowledge is to work for an artist management firm. Opportunities at management companies are limited, so a very basic, entry level position may be the best that is available, but the experience will permit the aspiring manager a place to develop a hands-on understanding of the management business, and it will help build that important personal network of industry contacts.

Another option is to seek an internship or apprenticeship with a management and production company that is willing to put the aspiring manager on the road for a season of touring. Many of the basic issues that a manager regularly handles are found on a tour, and one can get a good education about management issues by being in that environment.

Understanding the nature of artist management

Any business is primarily providing a form of customer service to a target market, and artist managers must keep a good working definition of who the customers are that the artist serves. Certainly, the fans who buy tickets, recordings, merchandise, and digital products are first on the list. However, others that artists and their managers serve include concert promoters, talent bookers, sponsors, members of the artist's

team, and anyone else who relies on the artist to provide something. Striving to promote good relationships with people who rely on the artist creates the kind of reputation that draws and keeps the kinds of professionals who are willing to invest their energies in the success of the artist's career.

Making decisions

Decision making about an artist's career certainly has to do with business, but there are also decisions that are made that deal with art and artistry. As tough as some of those decisions are for the artist manager, management icon Lee Iacocca puts it best when he says, "If I had to sum up in a word what makes a good manager, I'd say decisiveness." (Iacocca, 37) Often that becomes easier to say than to do. For example, choosing the commercial viability of a single recording from a ten-cut CD requires a certain intuition based on experience. In the music business, it often is referred to as making a decision based on your gut feeling. BMG's CEO Clive Davis is said to have golden ears, because into his 70s he is still able to hear the sound of commercial musical success of artists he chooses to sign to his labels. While Davis uses a different part of his anatomy, it is the same concept as using your gut to guide your decisions. Artist management today requires professionals to step away from the standard strategies that have been used in the past to manage careers of artists in the music business. Some things remain as always, but there will be times when a manager must rely on that special inner feeling to direct the artist to an opportunity because it feels right, or, to guide them away from it because it does not feel right. There are no criteria for this kind of guidance. You just need to follow your gut.

Managing pressure

The stress that comes with managing an artist is set in motion when the manager begins promoting the artist's career. When launching a career for someone else there is constant pressure to plan and to try alternatives that will work. On the other hand, when an artist has become popular, there are demands on their time that the manager must try to meet because an artist's career in the music business has a limited shelf life, and there is an urgency to draw as much from it as possible while demand is there.

Artist management causes pressure for those whose style prefers order and predictability. While an artist's manager is an advocate and is viewed as someone who makes things happen, managers cannot predict when people will respond. That means that the manager must always be prepared to react, regardless of the time of day or the day of the week. So, an artist manager does not have set office hours with weekends and holidays off and a guaranteed two-week vacation each year.

Artist managers are ultimately responsible for the success of every performance an artist makes, and many of those performances are rehearsed during the week and performed over weekends. When you add in the other dimensions of an artist's career and multiply it times the number of artists in a manager's portfolio, it is easy to see that 24/7 easily could become 25/8 if it were possible.

With the stress of the work, it becomes very important and necessary to balance personal life with work as an artist manager. This book advises and guides artist managers to create plans on behalf of artist clients; however, actively planning for personal time can keep the artist manager refreshed and have them prepared to handle the business of managing careers. Planning for that balance between work and a personal life can minimize the burnout that can result without it. Occasional long weekends are equivalent to a power nap—they're a quick refresher and then it's back to work. Plan for longer breaks. Block out the time and take at least a week away from management responsibilities. Without this extended break from the office, it will be impossible to genuinely break the frenetic cadence of the office environment with its cache of wireless and electronic devices that keep you lashed to your work. Put your watch in a drawer and give your digital assistant to your human assistant for a week.

Perhaps the best strategy an artist manager can use to handle the pressures of managing within the music business is to learn to put stressors in perspective. The most effective artist managers are those who are not prone to take the actions or inactions of others personally. In nearly all circumstances, the response or lack of response by others has little to do with your work as the artist's manager; rather it has to do with *their* personal and professional agendas. Knowing to expect some of the stressors that accompany a career of artist management can help the manager approach issues professionally and with the aplomb that keeps them from becoming personal. Remember as you consider the realities below that they usually are business—not personal—and these are specific realities that can cause the manager stress and consternation *only* if they are permitted to. Following are some of the realities in the music business that have the potential to create stress.

Reality one

A lot of people will say no and a lot of gatekeepers will seem immovable. The music business offers the promise of great financial rewards for the relative few who are able to connect with a large audience. This means that there are countless thousands of talented people seeking ways to access gatekeepers who can give career opportunities to artists in the music business. When they say “no,” it is not personal to the manager. It simply means the manager must find a way to get past the gatekeeper, or

pursue another that is more likely to give you an audience. Finding out what the gatekeeper needs and using it as a way to gain access is one strategy. (Kragen, 1996) For example, personal or executive assistants are essential gatekeepers in any company and they are often underappreciated for their contributions. They have a need to be recognized for their value to the company, so the manager who takes time for a brief visit with them implies to the assistant their importance and builds an ally who can perhaps open other gates within the company.

Another way to get past gatekeepers is to find someone in your network who can open that door for you. Build the network and use it.

Reality two

You are only a “player” in the music business if you are relevant. Relevance has to do with your current activity in the industry, and specifically in the case of an artist manager, it is defined by the artist management firm for which you work, or by the artists you manage. If your telephone calls are not returned or your emails not acknowledged, it is not personal. It just means that you haven’t developed the perception that you offer something that will improve the other person’s business.

Reality three

Keeping the spirits of your artists up during a continuing career roller coaster will be draining for you. Understand that the pursuit of opportunities for your artists will include many rejections due primarily to competition within the industry. Knowing that rejections are a regular part of the music business, they can still be defeating for the manager. And then the manager is the one who passes along the news to the artist. Finding a way to cope with disappointment at the personal level and then being able to find a way to keep the spirits of the artist up is always the challenge for the artist manager.

Reality four

People will string you along. Early in the author’s career in the music business a prominent music industry publisher advised, “Never pet stray dogs.” His point was that you can waste a lot of time by giving advice and befriending individuals who are not in the industry yet and who have a long way to go before they will have any chance at success. Some in the industry will tell others whatever is necessary to get them off the telephone or off of their doorstep if they think the individual has nothing to contribute to their business. A frequent tactic is to be told “They’re tied up in a meeting. May I put you into their voice mail?” You leave your message and there is

no chance your call will be retrieved and returned. It is not personal. They just don't know how you can contribute to the success of their business and don't have the time to figure it out.

The second time you hear from a personal contact, saying, "I'll get back to you in a couple of days on that," is the time to move on. It's a not-so-subtle way of saying, "Don't call me again." Don't allow people to string you along—they're wasting your time.

Reality five

People will disappoint you. Some who you feel that you can depend upon will disappoint you by not following through with promises or commitments made to you and your artists. Even the smallest oversight by others can have an impact on the things you are trying to achieve for your artist. Anticipate that people will disappoint you, but be pleased when they deliver on their promises. Advice to artist managers: always follow through with your promises.

Reality six

The agendas of many people in the music business determine whether you matter to them. If you are the current manager of a significant artist about to go into the studio to record an album, music publishers will stumble over each other to get the chance for a conversation. If you are now the *former* manager of a major artist, you might elicit a faint hello from those same publishers.

This is just the beginning of a larger list, but it covers key points that can easily be taken personally, when in fact, they usually are not. Recognizing these points as being realities of the business environment can help the manager step away from an issue, realize that it is not personal, and prevent an emotional response to a business situation.

Managers are inconspicuous

Many artist managers are very low key and rarely mentioned or quoted in the press, and so it is important that they actively pursue their own public relations within the music industry. An artist manager's best clients will be the result of the active network of contacts that they maintain. This means attending industry parties, events, conventions, and other networking opportunities. Since there is no official Association of Artist Managers in the US, managers must find events and occasions when they can be seen by being involved socially in the music business on a regular basis. In the UK, however, the Music Manager's Forum offers regular meetings and