

# MUSICIAN IGNITION

HOW TO CREATE BLUEPRINTS  
FOR A SUCCESSFUL  
MUSIC CAREER

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Published by Vibe Guy Music, LLC

55 Heritage Mtn Place, Fairview NC 28730

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## Dedication

*Musician Ignition* is dedicated to my father, Raymond H. Babelay.

Originally a concert pianist with solo recordings by age 18, his career was ended by World War II. After enlisting in the Navy, he spent the next three years aboard a ship. When the war ended, he completed a Masters of Music and dedicated his life to teaching.

Dad never talked about the war or the effect it had on his life. Just days before he died, he shared that he had been dreaming the same nightmare every night for over 60 years. It was graphic scenes of what he had witnessed.

At 18 years old, his music dream took a detour. Even though he never discussed it, I know he was hurt and deeply disappointed. I also know that many people would not have recovered from the emotional impact of both war and career loss combined.

Dad never complained. Actually, he never complained about *anything*. This taught me a lot about gratitude, values and trying to find the positive in any situation.

My father chose to deal with his silent suffering by helping younger musicians. Generations of music students were inspired by his teaching, musicianship and personal caring. He didn't just teach about music, but also how to succeed in life.

It is to his strong and honorable spirit that I dedicate *Musician Ignition*.

Today, many of his students are active musicians, and *their* students are playing, teaching and pouring into their music communities. It is no exaggeration to say that not only did Ray Babelay teach thousands of musicians while alive, his methods live on in classrooms today.

So while your career may be only a dream, or full speed ahead, it is my hope that *Musician Ignition* will help in the journey. Dad would like that.

Paul G. Babelay



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# Preface

Do you really need another *how-to-be-a-rock-star* music career book? I doubt it.

You don't need another lecture in

- how to *Master social media*.
- how to *Compose a hit song*.
- how to *Mix a hit song*.
- how to *Get your songs on the Radio*.
- how to *Get more Gigs*.
- how to *Get more Fans*.
- how to *Get a Record Deal*.

And, to make it worse, you already know everything they tell you. You've read it 100 times.

You've got the books, articles, vlogs and the T-shirt. But despite all the information, it isn't working.

You're not alone. It isn't working for many musicians.

Why?

You could be trying to focus on the *wrong things* at the *wrong time*.

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## Timing Is Everything

Old farmers would say, "*You've put the cart in front of the horse.*"

In other words, you haven't taken care of the most important issues first.

1. You don't know who you are musically.
2. You don't recognize how valuable you are.
3. You are waiting for someone to give you permission.
4. You are overwhelmed with too much information.
5. You don't know what to do next.

Any one of those can be a recipe for failure. Don't worry! All of this can be fixed.

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## **First Steps**

If you want to be a policeman, what do you do?

Do you go to policeman school... or can anybody just walk in and volunteer? What are the requirements for becoming a policeman?

How do you become a lawyer? Is there a secretly-guarded collection of files and tests that only a select few can find?

What must you do to legally practice law?

There are steps to becoming a certified policeman or lawyer. They have a clearly-defined process for professional development.

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## **Career Steps**

Most careers have a step-by-step plan to take you from newbie to "expert."

It isn't easy to become an attorney, but the steps are clearly defined. They are precise, tested and true.

You do this... you do that... you do this... you take these exams... you pass these exams. BAM! You are a lawyer.

Real title - Real job - Real paycheck.

Same way to become a professional musician, right?

Buy an instrument... practice... maybe take a few lessons, (unless you're already a prodigy)... buy some recording gear... or studio time... record your big hits... create "the look"... get your video together... post to YouTube and KA-CHING!...

The money starts rolling in and you are a full-time professional musician. Right?



It *might* happen this way. There's just one problem... Reality.

Yes, artists have been discovered on YouTube and it is an important part of today's marketplace. But for every single career launched from the family video camera on YouTube, there are thousands of YouTube-wannabe-stars that will never be seen.

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## **The Challenge**

The challenge, as many of you know, is that anything goes in the music business.

The *solution*, as many of you know, is that anything goes in the music business.

There are 1000 ways to do anything.

The challenge is to choose the ones that succeed.

Traditional careers have an established curriculum, with a step-by-step process to success.

They have degrees, books, courses, internships, tests and certificates to stamp you as APPROVED and ready for business. No craziness, no opinions, no personal bias or judgment to navigate. Do the work - get the degree - get a real job.

But music is not a traditional career.

Or is it?

One could argue that musicians have held a traditional position in society as long as any others. We also know that music is loved and respected in every culture on earth. If anything, music is more traditional than most careers.

Then why aren't more musicians able to have full-time, successful careers in music?

Put another way...

Why aren't policemen, lawyers, electricians, doctors and dentists giving their services away for free? Why aren't they begging on street corners, lining up for every opportunity to be seen, gain

exposure, get more “likes” and fans in hopes of one day getting paid fairly?

It should be simple to see.

It is the challenge that every musician faces.

*There is no map to your musical dream.  
You must connect the dots from dream to reality.*

Unless you want to become certified to teach music in schools, and we need great teachers, there is no funnel system for you. There is no 1-2-3 and you're APPROVED.

Without an organization or permission-granting society to give you a green light, you must create your own blueprints for a music career.

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## **Get A Real Job**

For many years we were told, "go to college, get a degree, study hard, make good grades and you'll get a good job."

Yet we know that for musicians, this is almost a joke. I've never had what many would call a *real* job, so I get the joke. But I'm still faced with real bills, real problems, real demands that require real money. So for me, it's no joke at all.

For over 30 years I've been a full-time professional musician. That's all I've done for income.

I've paid real bills - bought and sold a couple of real houses - got a real marriage and three very real daughters... all the while doing it as a musician. That's about as real as you can get.

Why do I tell you this? Because if I've done it, you can too.

I've written this book to help you weed out the endless possibilities and suggestions invading your head every day. You can stop worrying about 300 things and focus on one, the right one, the next one.

This is how to make your dream become a reality - one step at a time.

# How To Use This Book

Dear Fellow Musician,

If you ask 10,000 professional singers, songwriters, engineers, teachers, arrangers, performers and aspiring musicians to complete this sentence:

*"I wish I had more \_\_\_\_\_."*

99% will likely say the same thing. Time.

There is never enough.

As a husband, dad, son, friend, musician and business owner, I usually feel like there isn't enough time in a day to get it all done.

Not only that... all of the responsibilities I just mentioned are constantly evolving. Life happens, and the plans for yesterday don't work today. Change is inevitable

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## **Make It Count**

As a musicpreneur, you don't have time to waste.

In order to become exceptional at your craft, time and commitment are demanded. Period. No excuses will change that.

The hours, months and years of practice, listening, performing, exploration and growth cannot be avoided.

That should make you very picky about the ideas you subscribe to. One great idea can change your life for the better. One bad idea can send you down a long, pointless detour.

I believe that *Musician Ignition* is a resource to help you find the right idea at the right time.

It does not have all the answers. Instead...

*it will teach you to ask the right questions.*

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## **Get The Facts**

Our feelings often lead us to wrong conclusions.

Facts help keep us on the right path. This should be your mantra in the music business.

Of course music cannot be created or performed without feelings.

But business is different. And much of the music *business* has little to do with music.

How do you get facts that will set you on the path to success?

ASK.

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## **Asking Isn't Easy**

I remember being embarrassed in middle school math class when it seemed everybody understood the equation - except me.

I would not admit I didn't understand and soon fell behind.

By high-school algebra, I was totally lost. Needless to say, I hated it.

At some point I regularly stayed after school with a tutor. That was a public confession of failure. Everybody knew I was struggling.

But an interesting thing happened.

Once I admitted my ignorance, the tutor could help me. I unlearned wrong ideas, stopped guessing and began to solve problems correctly.

I only had to do two things:

1. Admit I didn't know.
2. Ask for help.

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## **Humility**

Learning requires humility.

It means letting go of what people might think about you. It's also about respecting yourself enough to get help.

My wife and I have laughed at ourselves over the years when we pay too much for something or make a stupid choice that ends up taking a bite out of our wallet.

We call it paying *dumb tax*. I've done it a lot. It starts with pride - thinking I have all the answers.

It always ends badly.

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## **Dumb & Cool**

Musicians are sensitive. We don't like to admit when we don't know the answer.

We would rather appear cool and strong. Some musicians are so cool they swagger past the doors of success.

An older musician I worked with years ago liked to say,

*"Ignorance is bliss - but stupid is to the bone!"*

Don't be stupid. It's expensive.

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## **Three Questions**

There are many different questions, but three you should prioritize.

When you finish *Musician Ignition*, you will know them. You will be amazed at the vision these three questions ignite.

They are simple. They are powerful. They can help you build or achieve almost anything you want.

That's the power of a tiny, three-letter word.

PAUL BABELAY

Don't be afraid of looking nerdy. Don't be afraid to ask.

The successful person gets the facts.

I guarantee, you won't regret it.

*He who asks a question is a fool for five minutes;  
He who does not ask a question remains a fool forever.*  
Chinese Proverb

# STEP ONE: DEFINE SUCCESS

Before you can build a successful music career, you must first define *success*.

There are obviously many ways to reach your answer. They are different for each of us. It may be...

- personal satisfaction.
- make more money.
- become well-known.

There is no perfect answer, and it can change as you go. Ultimately, you must decide.

Then you can create a plan to achieve it.

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## The Process

I have divided the process into five sections.

*Step 1* will help you recognize success on the gig. To work in the professional marketplace, you should know what is expected of you. The #1 success trait is so simple you probably won't believe it.

Sadly, many aspiring musicians never do.

In *Step 2*, I share the detours my career took and why a “big picture” view of music is essential. When surprises, roadblocks and detours come, you still move toward your goal and turn the disappointments into opportunities.

*Step 3* shows you a proven technique for knowing the *next right step*. You will learn which milestones to prioritize with step-by-step accuracy. Too often, musicians try to skip essential steps, but the journey itself is meaningful.

Then in *Step 4*, you will see how choices you make today impact your future. You will begin to break large goals into Specific Measurable Action Realistic Time-related (SMART) steps and tasks. I will also help you avoid getting stuck in preparation mode and recognize the danger of perfectionism.

Finally, *Step 5* rewards your efforts and helps you create a review system. There are questions, worksheets and action steps throughout to diagnose your strengths & weaknesses.

No matter what you want to accomplish with music, *the ability to pair each goal with the appropriate procedure* is essential. That's the way to reach your destination.



# 1 - The #1 Successful Musician Secret

*You will get all you want in life  
if you help enough other people get what they want.*  
Zig Ziglar

There is no shortage of advice these days on how to do something.

We all turn to the internet for information, ratings, and DIY tips. It is easier than ever to learn anything.

But with all the experts, gurus and personal coaches available, it's tempting for emerging musicians to skip the tried and true for the latest and greatest.

It's called SOS. **Shiny Object Syndrome...**

*Nirvana...* Another guitar, a new amp, software updates - new instruments and gear you **MUST HAVE NOW** in order to fulfill your destiny. And *everybody* has it, but you.

All kidding aside, it is important to stay current and informed.

But don't forget, when the stakes are high...

*dependable gets the gig.*

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## **Reputation**

Is this true even in the wild & crazy music industry?

Are some musicians hired because they are dependable? Could this have something to do with why they stay busy?

Is this why some musicians always get the gig?

- Yes, they have proven themselves.
- Yes, we know they are dependable.
- Yes, they are excellent at their gig.

- Of course, they are personable & easy to work with.

But how did they build that reputation?

Why do the same players keep getting the best gigs, tours and studio sessions? How do they stay busy... while others can't get a gig?

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## Well-Kept Secret

It is obviously a well-kept secret, because you never hear musicians discuss it.

Do you want to know the secret to staying busy as a musician?

Do you want to

- always have gigs on the calendar?
- always have invitations from your peers?
- always be in demand?
- always have the work you want?
- always work with musicians and professionals you like?

Well here's the secret. It's simple.

### **Make other people look good.**

More specifically, as a musician, learn to make them SOUND good.

That's the secret.

Not very fancy is it?

I know, you're thinking *"I spent money to improve myself, and this guy tells me to make other people sound good!"*

Yes - that's exactly what I'm telling you.

This #1 Success Factor is the same all over the world.

Let me explain.

1. The drummer for Bruno Mars... makes Bruno sound good.
2. The bass player for Taylor Swift... makes Taylor sound good.

3. The keyboardist for Rihanna... makes Rihanna sound good.
4. The percussionist for Prince... made Prince look, sound and perform better.

Even though Sheila E. is a great percussionist and performer in her own right, when she played with Prince, the gig was all about him.

By the way, all of the artists I mentioned above also make their record labels look good. That's why they have contracts.

---

### **Make It Easy**

In professional gigs, you get hired to make the leader feel good, inspired and able to focus on their performance without worry or distraction. That's what great musicians bring to the show.

Got it?

*It's not about you.*

Now take that concept and apply it anywhere you find yourself...

- in the recording studio.
- in the classroom.
- in the music store.
- at a wedding.
- in a worship service.
- a dance.
- any gig where musicians are hired.

Do you see the common denominator? Why are you there?

It's simple, but for whatever reason, many musicians never get it.

*It's not about you.*

So how do you make somebody else sound good?

That's what we will learn about in the next chapters. There are four concepts to help you slay any gig you play.

Genre doesn't matter.

Gig doesn't matter - teaching, playing, writing, producing or booking agent.

It might come in different packaging, spotlights and flavors. But the basics of why you get the gig and how to keep it never change.

# Review Questions



## Review Questions

1. Do other musicians see you as dependable and trustworthy - or the bodacious king of cool?
2. Is it possible to be both dependable AND cool?
3. Are you able to make other musicians sound good?
4. Do you understand how valuable that is?
5. Do you understand the statement, *"It's not about you"*?

## 2 - Competence Gets the Gig

*Love what you do. Get good at it.  
Competence is a rare commodity in this day and age.*

Jon Stewart

Competence is the starting place for professional musicians.

It is the first step to getting involved with any professional band or production team.

While many believe it's not *what* you know, but *who*... and there is some truth to that - you will not get the gig if you can't cut it. Friend or not.

Competence means you've got the gig covered - and then some.

You might think *Prodigy* or *Brilliant* should top the list. But those are not the characteristics most needed to be a successful musician.

Generally, a prodigy isn't very good at sharing the spotlight, and brilliant musicians can often get so focused on their brilliance, the music suffers.

*Competence isn't just knowing HOW, but WHY.*

The music business, for example, is not just about music.

It's about money.

*The music business is strictly business.*

Kenny Rogers

Music is the medium, but the bottom line isn't the quality of the music - it's the amount of money it can generate.

People will never agree on what makes "good" music. But they can agree quickly on what's making money.

If you want to be in the money gigs, locally or nationally, you have to understand where you fit in and why you get invited.

## MUSICIAN IGNITION

You understand the *role* of your instrument, and your role in the process.

*Competence can only happen when you know your Role.*

You not only master the technique - you know what to do with it.

You KNOW your gig.

- What key is it in? Doesn't matter.
- How fast is it? Doesn't matter.
- Does it require improvisation? Doesn't matter.
- What instruments will you need? Doesn't matter.
- Will you have to read music? Doesn't matter.

Competence includes mastery of all the basic elements.

If you *don't* know how to do something... (and that's OK), it's understood that you will *figure it out*. You will get the job done.

No guessing and no excuses. You've been hired to take care of business. That's your role.

And one more time:

*It's not about you.*

# Review Questions



## Review Questions

1. Would your peers describe you as competent?
2. Are there areas of your gig that need improvement?
3. Do you understand the ROLE of your instrument or gig?
4. Do you see that success in the music business is more than music?
5. If you were a famous artist on tour, what kind of musician would you want performing with you?
  - a) cool-looking
  - b) competent
  - c) both
6. Are you competent as an all-around musician (play, improvise, sing, etc.) or are you limited to only your skill?
7. Can you see the value of musicianship (basic music theory, basic improvisation, basic chart reading, etc) for becoming a competent musician?



## 3 - Confidence Inspires the Gig

*Confidence is silent. Insecurities are loud.*

Don Corleone. *The Godfather*

Confidence comes when you know the basics so well, you forget them.

You aren't thinking, you just respond and make music.

You are able to sum up the situation and respond with sensitivity, inspiration, excitement and whatever else is needed.

Confidence is the maturity to sometimes play very few notes, without the need to impress other musicians. You are led and motivated by the music, not your ego.

There's nothing worse than playing with somebody who must prove themselves on the gig. God help us if a friend is in the audience. Then it's *ego* on steroids.

Confident musicians can serve others because they are not led by their insecurities.

*They know that serving each other makes the music better.*

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### **Silence Is Gold**

There's a great story about Jeff "Skunk" Baxter, a legendary guitarist who played with everybody from Steely Dan to the Doobie Brothers on countless studio albums, TV and movie projects. In the 80's & 90's, he was the go-to studio guitarist.

He once went to a session where the producer gave him a stack of charts to record.

The engineer pulled up the first song.

Baxter didn't feel like it needed anything. He didn't play.

The second song was pulled up. It didn't need guitar either. Neither did the third. The fourth or the fifth...

He ended up not playing a single note on any song on the album, but still got paid for his time and creativity, as if he had played 5000 notes.

*His experience and skill gave him the confidence to not play.*

The music dictated his performance - not his ego.

The producer was OK with it, because he trusted Baxter's instincts. That showed confidence on his part. Inexperienced producers would freak out from a musician getting *paid triple scale* without playing a single note!!!

---

## **Make It Look Easy**

Confident musicians don't get there overnight.

It is not their first rodeo, even though it appears to be effortless and that they never make mistakes.

Truth is they still make the occasional mistake because nobody is perfect. But you'll never catch it.

They know how to recover because 1000's of hours of practice, playing and performing gives them a solidity that can't be shaken.

They can turn a *mistake* into something good.

*Do not fear mistakes. There are none.*

Miles Davis

Confident musicians can navigate the surprises, mishaps and screw-ups that arise. And screw-ups do happen in live music - no matter how rehearsed it is.

Here is one more note about confidence; it is earned.

Nobody can give it to you. And nobody can take it away.

# Review Questions



## Review Questions

1. Is it possible to have true confidence without competence?
2. When you make music, are you limited by technical or musical roadblocks?
3. When you perform with other musicians, are you tempted to play fast and flashy to show off?
4. Professional players can play fast when needed, but they would rather serve the music. Does that make sense?
5. Have you ever been asked to add/record your instrument/voice/expertise to a song but decline because it didn't need it?
6. Are you competent and confident enough that if you make a mistake, you can turn it into something good?
7. Do you see the value in building your confidence?

## 4 - Creativity Elevates the Gig

*To live a creative life, we must lose our fear of being wrong.*

Joseph Chilton Pearce

This part of your musicianship is harder to describe.

You can't teach it, but you can nurture it. It is somewhat mysterious and magical.

It is *something more*.

Live performance brings it out - teases it - calls it to come out and play.

It thrives on living dangerously - without holding back.

This is why many musicians find their live performance to be superior to the studio environment. There is no chance to re-do or have second takes.

*"Nothing encourages creativity  
like the chance to fall flat on one's face."*

James D. Finley

Creativity is freedom to forget the rules.

That doesn't mean they no longer exist. You *bend* them, by choice - not by ignorance.

Creativity can seem elusive and fleeting the more you chase it. That's why many artists feel they must wait for it to appear, or it feels contrived.

*"Don't think. Thinking is the enemy of creativity. It's self-conscious,  
and anything self-conscious is lousy. You can't try to do things.  
You simply must do things."*

Ray Bradbury

Creativity isn't always more complex, different or weird.

Sometimes it means finding the best way to play something simply.

Many musicians think odd, weird and different are equal to creative. Strange isn't always good or interesting. Some weird is just weird.

*"Creativity is more than just being different. Anybody can play weird; that's easy. What's hard is to be as simple as Bach. Making the simple, awesomely simple, that's creativity."*

Charles Mingus

Even when it's a regular gig, day after day, with the same people, cues and charts... your job is to find ways to make it fresh, interesting and evocative for your team.

You can find it, but you might have to dig for it... Coffee helps.

*"There's a way to do it better - find it."*

Thomas Edison

I've noticed that creativity isn't given to those with the most stuff. The greatest artists have often started off with very little.

Necessity will demand you create what is missing.

*"There's no correlation between creativity and equipment ownership. None. Zilch. Nada."*

Hugh MacLeod

Creativity is within you.

It is sometimes a whisper instead of a shout.

However it arrives, you will eventually be able to flow in it, with it, enjoy it, and trust it.

*"Creativity comes from trust. Trust your instincts."*

Rita Mae Brown

And when you play, compose or improvise something that really soars, it's tempting to hang on to it, trying to recreate the magic.

You can't. You must let it go for more to come.

Creativity is difficult to let go of because it's your "time stands still" place.

*When it's happening, you don't want it to end.*

Without trying to preach, beware of trying to live in your creative zone 24/7. Not every second of life is artistic bliss.

There are bills to pay, obligations to meet, groceries to buy and responsibilities that can feel like an enemy to our creative souls. "I just want to focus on my music" may be the cry of your heart, but it isn't the sound of day-to-day life.

Artists often want to disconnect from reality in order to relax and create. Partying can begin innocently enough and it's socially acceptable, even expected at times.

Just beware that addictions start small. Anything can get out of control.

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## **You Are Enough**

Beware of the lie that you can't do your gig unless you're stoned.

I got to hear Stevie Ray Vaughan on his last tour, just before he died from a helicopter crash. Stevie had a long history of addiction issues. Not this night!

He was clean and playing great. He had a great rapport with the sold-out audience, openly discussed his previous addictions and encouraged people to get help if they needed it.

Stevie sounded freaking amazing and his creativity was off-the-charts.

Again, I'm not trying to preach, but if you feel like you aren't your "best" without getting high, I urge you to reconsider. Your natural creativity is enough. If you need to party in order to just function, it's no longer a party.

# Review Questions



## Review Questions

1. Do you recognize when your creativity is flowing?
2. Have you found a connection between risk and creative flow?
3. Do creative people know the rules or bend them? Both?  
How?
4. Does that mean creative musicians are prepared, practiced, learning... or just guessing and hoping something happens?
5. Do you believe creative means always new and strange?
6. Are creative musicians more in demand?
7. Do you see that creative maturity allows you to relax, trust and go with the flow?
8. Have you played with musicians that thought they were brilliant and creative, but in fact, were so high they sucked?

## 5 - Caring Protects the Gig

*Without a sense of caring, there can be no sense of community.*

Anthony J Dangelo

Usually, when we talk about caring, it relates to how you treat yourself and others.

But just as important is how you care for the music itself.

In order to play anything well, you need to like it... you need to care.

True confession - I grew up hating country music. I thought it was noise and never wanted to hear it. And I certainly never wanted to play it.

Well guess what?

Twenty years ago I was hired to play the musical *Always... Patsy Cline* - a review about the life and music of country music legend, Patsy Cline. We played the songs that she made famous.

Well, I thought I did a good job.

Luckily, there *were* some authentic country pickers involved, because I didn't have a clue.

I played the charts *correctly*, but I had no idea how lame my performance was.

I was ignorant and didn't know enough to know I stunk.

How's that for honesty?

The writer/director was with us for the entire 3-week rehearsal process. He *hated* how we played the music, and didn't hesitate to tell us.

I thought he was just being an ass and didn't know anything about music.



I was wrong.

Looking back, I had no idea how to play that music, and didn't put any real work into it. Why would I? I didn't care about country music.

He had every right to be upset.

I sucked. And if the drummer isn't cutting it, the rest of the team will suffer. I cringe to think about how it sounded.

Thankfully, I can change.

I recently got the chance to redeem myself. The theater where I work recently produced *Always... Patsy Cline ...* 20 years later.

This time, I did things differently.

For starters... I cared.

---

## **Do The Work**

I did my homework:

- I found the original recordings of every song and studied them.
- I re-created the feel and vibe of the originals.
- I used the appropriate stick, brush, cymbal and groove for each song.
- I liked EVERY song.
- I was enthusiastic at EVERY performance for EVERY song.
- I liked playing simple, easy, perfect parts.
- I wanted the singer to think she was in those original recordings.
- I wanted the band to get inspiration from me, without overplaying.
- I had fun.

The difference was like night and day.

We got standing ovations EVERY show.

And for a surprise bonus, the writer/producer attended the last performance.

Ted remembered me, and came up on stage afterwards to thank us for “*one of the best performances he had ever heard*” of his show.

It was musically satisfying and rewarding to be part of it. It was bigger than me.

The music was honored. The original musicians and singers were respected. The creator of the show got to hear his original vision fulfilled.

And all because we cared. All of us. It was a great production.

---

## **We Can Grow**

It's never too late to change and improve.

This wasn't just a change of heart for one show, but a new appreciation for all music.

My *caring* increased. My understanding of the music and what it took to play it was transformed.

I have always been grateful to play music for a living and bring the best to every performance. Even so, I had my own musical bias.

Musical snobbery had stunted my growth.

Once I realized and admitted it, I could become a student of the music and learn.

---

## **Are You Bringing It?**

Competence - Able to fully deliver anything necessary for the gig.

Confidence - The maturity to play *only* what is needed.

Creativity - The extra magic that boosts the music to another level.

Caring - Being able to appreciate, like and honor the music you're playing.

It is never too late to change.

Even if you realize you haven't brought your best, you can fix it.

If you are in a gig or job that is not to your liking, you can change things by changing your mind. It may never be your favorite, but perspective is everything.

*It doesn't have to be your favorite gig.*

Start small. Think baby-steps. Find one thing to like about each song.

- One vocal lick.
- One instrumental riff.
- An unusual chord progression.
- The producer's contribution to the song.
- A creative use of reverb/delay/compression or panning.

Listen differently and it will grow from there. Hopefully, you will soon enjoy the music.

Don't be surprised if your performances, and your opportunities improve too.

# Review Questions



## Review Questions

- 1) Do you play gigs where you don't like the music?
- 2) Would you rate your musical performance as *weak*, *OK* or *great*?
- 3) How can you tell?
- 4) What could you do to make it better?
- 5) What could you do to *genuinely* like the music?
- 6) I was a musical snob. Are you?
- 7) Does snobbery make you more valuable in the marketplace?

# Step 1

# Action Plan



## Your Action Plan

**1. Competence. Confidence. Creativity. Caring. Do you need improvement in any of these four domains?**

- If so, why do you believe it is important?
- How do you know it is a weakness?
- List the steps you can take to improve. List them in order of importance so you can prioritize them.

**2. What will your reward be?**

- Turn it into a statement, like “When I can read sheet music, then I will be confident enough to audition for \_\_\_\_\_.”
- Is that enough motivation for improvement? If not, what is?

**3. Who or what can help you reach this goal quickly and correctly?**

- Look for professional advice
- Join a group or class
- Consider private or online lessons

**4. What if your talent and musical dreams exist to make a positive impact on other people? How would that change your motivation?**

- Create a new mission statement:

“Today is not about me. I want to have a successful music career so that I can help \_\_\_\_\_.”

## STEP 2: BELIEVE IN YOUR SUCCESS

There are only two statements that can keep you from achieving your music dreams:

- 1) I'm not *good* enough. (talent, skill, gift, personality, age, experience, etc.)
- 2) I don't *have* enough. (money, connections, help, fans, knowledge, whatever...)

Guess what? These statements are only true if you believe them.

---

### Take Control

Too many musicians only see what they *don't* have. They focus on what is missing, what they wish they had. They can't see the glass half full - they don't even see the glass.

One way to change this is to recognize what you can and cannot control. Life happens. Stuff breaks. Everybody wants a new instrument, better mic, new software or book, different gigs and more money. Some of it is beyond your control.

Focus on what you can control. Your skill. Your gig. Your performance. Your knowledge.

*Are you good enough?* There's a simple answer - become great!

If you aren't - fix it. Take control. Learn what is required and get busy.

And don't listen to the naysayers, the doubters, the voices of fear.

When you think you don't have enough, stop looking at what you lack. Instead, see what you can control and multiply it.

- You have a work ethic.
- You have musical ability.
- You have creativity.

- You have a passion, vision & dream.
- You have the ability to problem-solve.

Get busy. You are never out of resources, just out of resourcefulness.

---

### **Past Mistakes**

Maybe you have made a ton of mistakes. You think you can't succeed in the future because you've screwed up too many times already.

I get it.

Maybe you have had huge disappointments that rocked your world and you just can't find the faith to go on. I get that too.

But you don't have to stay here. Detours in life are going to come. Disappointment is part of the journey.

One of the major motivations for completing *Musician Ignition* is that my musical partner of 25 years died recently. We played literally 1000's of gigs together, raised kids together, did life together - and now he's gone.

I couldn't control the lung disease that caused his death, but I can control my response.

I can grieve and get depressed, or allow it to motivate me.

---

### **See the Truth**

In 1997, John Mayer went to Berklee to become the *best guitarist around*.

He was already writing songs and wanted to master the guitar. Mayer thought the environment at Berklee would help. Instead, he heard guitarists from all over the world that were better players.

When he went home for Christmas break, his dream of becoming the best guitarist in the world was over.

Berklee had been a mistake. Or was it?

Many young musicians would have been intimidated, given up and quit. Instead, the Berklee *mistake* was the catalyst to help define his vision and expectations.

John Mayer is a wonderful guitarist, but his calling (as he puts it) is songwriting.

And so it will be with you.

---

## **Expectations**

The first songs you write may not be brilliant. That doesn't mean you'll never be a great songwriter.

Your first mixes might be rough. That doesn't mean you suck as an engineer.

Your first singing gig might not be spectacular. So what. We all start small.

*Your attempts may fail - but that doesn't make you a failure.*

Just do your part.

Control what you can and relax on the rest.

Believe the truth. See the truth. You *do* have enough. You *can* become good enough.

Mistakes, failures and detours only make you better.



## 6 - Dreams Don't Always Come True

*Occasionally, weep deeply over the life you hoped would be.  
Grieve the losses. Then wash your face. Trust God.  
And embrace the life you have.*

John Piper

After a lot of sweat, soul-searching and prayer, I gave my notice to the band. It was time to go.

Seven years of my life had been committed to the group, and I no longer believed we were going to do more than just survive.

It was a big disappointment. And even though I believed I was making the right decision, it left me dazed and confused.

It was seven years of pursuing a dream that did not materialize. All but one of the original members were gone, and my heart wasn't in it anymore.

I didn't know where I was going or what I would do, but it was time for a change.

---

### **Detours**

I was living in Dallas, Texas and accepted two teaching positions that would fit in my schedule.

They were both part-time and wouldn't get in the way of gigging. One was as a percussion instructor at a local high school and the other was teaching vibraphone at the University of North Texas, where I had recently completed a Master of Music degree.

I gave verbal agreements to both.

Then a funny thing happened.

I opened my mail to a royalty check from BMI for a song I had written back in college.

I sat down with that check and had a revelation - I wanted to keep playing, writing and performing but DID NOT want to direct so much time to teaching.

That royalty check helped me see that I was taking a detour.

I would like the money, could purchase a new van, a bigger place to live, more stuff, more instruments and gear. But it also meant less time for *my* music. No thanks.

I called my soon-to-be employers and declined. They both understood and there was still time to replace me.

I also decided to leave Dallas and return to North Carolina. Didn't have any gigs lined up, but just wanted to go.

Unfortunately, I didn't have the slightest idea what to do next.

---

## **Change**

It wasn't easy.

I didn't like sitting in with other groups. I was spoiled from seven years in a rehearsed, fun band.

I didn't want to go to open mic nights, jams and sit-ins around town. That's great - but if you've ever been in a real band, you know what I mean.

It's like going from an Italian chef to canned soup.

Also - *Home* was different. My once-familiar surroundings, locations, clubs, music stores, friends and everything else had changed.

Several musician friends did what they could to toss me gigs.

I played every kind of gig imaginable on drums and vibes. Soon, I was meeting with local business owners and pitching demos for jingles and production music.

By now I had a small home recording studio and was producing my own projects.

I also began sending demos to record labels as a jazz vibraphonist trying to get a record deal.

---

### **Out of the Blue**

One day I received a phone call that went something like this:

*"Hello. This is Dr. George Butler's office. Will you hold to speak with him...?"*

To put this in perspective for you, here is the Wikipedia page for Dr. George Butler:

**George Butler** (September 2, 1931 - April 9, 2008) was a prominent American jazz record producer, executive and A&R man. He worked for a number of well-known jazz record labels from the 1960s to the 1990s including Blue Note Records, Columbia Records and United Artist Records. He signed and launched the careers of a number of now famous artists including Wynton Marsalis, Harry Connick Jr. and Nnenna Freelon.

He took over the running of subsidiary label, Blue Note, in 1972, helping to increase interest in the jazz format with numerous jazz-soul crossover projects aimed at a more mainstream audience, including albums by Donald Byrd, Earl Klugh, Ronnie Laws and Bobbi Humphrey, as well as working with prominent jazz musicians from the 1960s, including Horace Silver and Bobby Hutcherson.

In the late 1970s, he became vice president for jazz and progressive artists and repertory at Columbia Records, staying into the mid-1990s. He helped to persuade Miles Davis to return to recording in 1980 and signed or was executive producer for fusion and soul-jazz acts, such as Bob James, Billy Cobham and Grover Washington Jr.

---

Not a bad resume, eh?

And he wasn't the only one. I could write a chapter about close calls with jazz record labels and how to *almost get a record deal*.

Anyway, back to Dr. Butler.

He got on the phone and said he liked my demo package. He was from Charlotte, NC and wanted to meet me the next time he visited his family.

I was thrilled, of course. The VP of Jazz at Columbia wanted to meet me and hear me play. But for better or worse, I never heard from him again.

---

## Choices

I understand the thrill of the chase for a record deal. George Butler was not the first or last executive that I spoke with.

The timing of Butler's call was interesting. It was 6 weeks before I was getting married.

How ironic that as I was preparing to be a husband/father (my wife-to-be had a little girl), I get a phone call that could change my world.

But by then I was tired of the song and dance.

I wasn't sure I wanted to chase the dream anymore.

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## Is It OK To Change Dreams?

Is it normal to stop the pursuit of a lifelong dream?

What do you do next? Who can you ask?

To be honest, I felt lost. I had no vision for music anymore.

That's a little scary when you're getting ready to say "I Do."

Oh yeah. I'm the guy that was never interested in getting married. But when I met Susan, that all changed.

That's what some might call a detour. But honestly, it was the best thing that ever happened to me.

She was perfect for me and while I wasn't sure about my future with music, I was totally sold and committed when it came to her.

---

## A Musical Maze

I was 30 years old and for the first time was really confused about what to do next.

I remember thinking:

- I'm getting married, but I don't have a real job.
- I'm not sure what I want to do with music.
- I'm not sure I can make enough to support a family.
- I want to get off the merry-go-round for a normal life, but what does that look like for a full-time musician?

And truth be told, just like math class years earlier - I was afraid to ask anybody for help.



Yes, I was still gigging, recording and sending press kits to record labels.

On the surface, it looked good. But I was struggling with my musical vision.

I had lots of questions and no answers.

- What mattered to me musically?
- Was there a market for the music I like?
- Did I want to continue doing music?

I wasn't sure I wanted to keep knocking on doors and chasing a record deal.

I didn't want to be traveling around trying to “make it” while my daughter was growing up and my wife waited for me to get home.

What do normal people do, I wondered? What is normal for a musician? Who defines it?

I was swirling. It felt like a maze with no way out.

No matter who you are, or where you are in your journey, at some point, you can swirl in confusion. I had never been here before, and it was not fun.

# Review Questions



## Review Questions

1. Have you ever put lots of time into a big goal, only to see it never come true?
2. Did that unmet goal or dream cause you to stop, or try a different path?
3. How do you think you would feel if somebody who could change the course of your career called you on your phone?
4. Ever felt like you were in the Music Maze?
5. Have you struggled with juggling your personal responsibilities and music career goals?

## 7 - Get Out of the Maze

*Nothing happens until you decide.*

Oprah Winfrey

Maybe you are in a similar place:

- You've lost your passion.
- Don't know what to do next.
- Don't have anybody to ask.
- You are no longer certain about significant things.
- You're unclear about why or what to practice.

Maybe you've read so many how-to articles, books and blogs about everything you *should be doing* that

**you are too overwhelmed to do anything.**

You've thought so much about it - you're numb. It's called *analysis paralysis* - and creative people often get stuck here.

It's OK. Don't beat yourself for being here. I think it's a valuable retreat, for a limited time.

If you don't know what to do next, the smartest thing may be to stop and do nothing. Regroup.

Wait until clarity returns and then move forward.

---

### **Get Out Of The Maze**

I want to ignite your desire to stop swirling in the maze and move on.

There are three questions that will help.

Please write down your answers. Seriously. Get a paper and pencil and write your answers.



Be honest and don't hurry. There are no rewards for cheating or speed.

I call them the **Three Magic Questions**.

1. Where are you today? (level of knowledge, skill and ability)
2. Where do you want to be? (music career goals)
3. What will it take to get there?



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## 1 - Where ARE You?

You cannot reach any destination without knowing your location. That's why when you enter a large store or shopping mall, a sign says,

*"YOU ARE HERE"*

For a musician, your *here* is:

- Self-awareness. Your needs, fears, strengths, goals and beliefs, etc.
- Musicianship. Your musical gift(s), training, creativity, skill level, etc.
- Experience. Business savvy, true alignment of skill and goals, etc.

Where ARE you... *personally, musically and professionally*? Do you know?

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## Flying Blind

Imagine a pilot trying to land a plane without true awareness of the plane's actual position.

Good luck.

Yet that's exactly what many musicians try to do with their careers.

You must know where you are. As soon as a pilot gets the true altitude, latitude and other information, he can begin a safe descent.

As soon as you know *where you really are*, not what you feel, then a solid action plan can be created to reach your goals.

The second question is equally important.

## 2 - Where Do You WANT to Be?

What is your big dream?

Can you define it clearly? There is no dream too big, so be honest.

Then ask these questions about your Musical Dream:

- Why? Is this just a childhood fantasy? Is it a realistic match for your musical skills? Is this a viable career option for you? Are you doing this to win the approval of somebody - a parent, mentor or friend?
- When? Is there a logical timeline? Is there a deadline? Can your goals be met in a reasonable amount of time? Will your current lifestyle give you the time needed to prepare?
- Level? How accomplished do you need to be? How do you know? What level do you think you can achieve? Are you good enough? What are you basing that on?

If you can't answer these questions, you are like a pilot without directions.

Finally...

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## 3 - What Does It Take To Get There?

This is the research, fact-finding and planning to reach your goals.

- Musical. Musicianship skills. Mastery of the essentials.
- Personal. You can play well with others and are secure about your abilities.
- Career. You see the *big picture* of the music industry and where you fit in.

These are simple questions. There are no wrong answers.

When you ask these questions, you *unconsciously commit* to finding the answers. Your brain, soul and spirit accept the challenge and go to work.

Asking is a form of commitment. And when you commit, it begins to tear down the walls of the maze. You remove fear. You remove hesitancy. You remove excuses that are no longer valid.

When you commit, everything changes.

Some of you are not stuck in the maze, but should answer the three magic questions anyway. The benefits are tremendous.

# Review Questions



## Review Questions

1. Have you ever faced a hard decision, but felt overwhelmed and did nothing?
2. Have you ever experienced *analysis paralysis*?
3. Do you see that a detour can be bad, but also good?
4. What does the expression "*life is not a straight line*" mean?
5. Do you truly know *Where* you are today? - (your skill level, understanding of basic music theory, market experience, etc.)
6. Can you clearly define your music dream?
7. Do you know the steps and milestones required to get there?

## 8 - Diagnose the Problem

*Where there is no vision, the people perish.*

Proverbs 29:18

Congratulations on committing to your dream.

It's easy to keep thinking, wishing and hoping - but never doing the work to turn a dream into reality. Instead...

- You can know where you are.
- You can see where you want to go.
- You can create blueprints to get there.

Next, I want to give you a way to organize all the moving parts of a music career. It is essentially a map, a big-picture reference guide.

This map can help you link the mechanical, creative and business disciplines of music, no matter what you want to do -

- Singer-Songwriter
- Recording Engineer
- Music Lawyer
- Drummer
- Studio Manager
- High School Band Director
- Choral Teacher
- Arranger
- Producer
- Rapper
- DJ
- Worship leader
- Bluegrass banjo picker
- Start a band

## MUSICIAN IGNITION

I call it **BAM**. It's a simple way to see musical growth from beginner to pro. It is the three domains that represent and connect every part of the music industry.

**BASICS:** Fundamental tools of music.

**ART:** Creating music.

**MARKETPLACE:** Commercial use of music.



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You master the *Basics*... Create your *Art*... Take it to the *Marketplace*.

Which zone are you needing work in? Which one is strongest?

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## Proper Diagnosis

When you take your car in for a repair, the solution is linked to proper diagnosis.

There's nothing worse than spending hundreds of dollars only to find the trouble is still there. It didn't get fixed.

It's the same for musicians. Proper diagnosis is the key to improvement.

*Musicians must learn to diagnose their strengths and weaknesses.*

Imagine you are a guitarist trying to jam on a D7 chord.

You keep making mistakes from guessing what the notes are. Is this because you aren't creative enough, or you need to get more Facebook likes?

Neither! You need to learn some basic music theory.

BAM can help you drill down to the root issue. It's NOT an artistic issue if you haven't bothered to learn the notes.

It is a basics issue (music theory). All the hot licks won't fix that.

Or... let's say you play great, sound great, look great, feel great, you know - you're just freaking great.

But ... you have no gigs.

That's a marketplace issue. You have no business savvy.

The basics are covered already. Leave the practice room for a bit and go get a gig.

Facts - not feelings.

---

## The Basics Never Change

Yes, I know some of you might not want to think of music in these terms.

No music theory for you. No business. Just play from the heart.



As Willie Nelson once said about his music,

*“Three chords and the truth, that's what a country song is.”*

Simplicity is the best route.

But whatever those three chords are, if you want to improvise on them, there are rules.

Likewise, if you want to get a gig, you won't get one hanging out jamming all day in your bedroom.

*The rules don't disappear because you want to play from the heart.*

---

### Next Right Thing

If life were perfect, your music career would develop in a straight line.

It would have a well-worn path of sequential steps that evolve like this:



Everything nice and neat.

- Take classes.
- Learn music theory.
- Learn to read music if needed.
- Get your basic piano chops together.
- Then work on your creative output, writing & recording several albums of your original material.
- Work with great engineers and producers and musicians.
- Have a great environment to learn at your own pace.
- Then you could take music business classes and learn all about licensing, publishing, contracts, copyrights and more.

But life is not a straight line.

You already have many obligations and responsibilities that can't be dropped. A music career is full of zig-zags, curves and schedule dysfunctions that most people can't handle.

There is no *nice and neat*. Madness is more like it:



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How do you juggle your private life, emotional and spiritual life, have a family, pay the bills, have fun, rest, exercise and still find time to be a creative, productive musician?

BAM can help no matter where you are in your career.

1. Sort out the issues.
2. Diagnose a problem or weakness.
3. Fix it.

# Review Questions



## Review Questions

1. Can you see the value in learning to diagnose a musical roadblock?
2. Do you have a weakness that would improve with accurate diagnosis?
3. Is it rooted in musical basics, artistic creativity or business?
4. If you struggle with the notes in a D7 chord, how would you fix it?
5. Did you have a straight line relationship with music, learning everything you needed before you were thrown into the real world?
6. Have you accepted the fact that not everything can be fixed at once?
7. Are you guilty of trying to accomplish too many things at once?
8. Would it be advantageous to stop doing so many things, and work on the essential areas first?

# Step 2

# Action Plan



## Your Action Plan

### **DO YOU DOUBT YOUR MUSICAL POTENTIAL?**

Answer these questions as thoughtfully as possible.

1. Do I believe I can follow my dream and have it come true?
2. Do I believe the world is against me?
3. Do I believe there are family members or "friends" that want me to fail?
4. Do I believe there are people who have the power to keep me from succeeding?
5. Do I believe I have what it takes to reach my dreams?
6. Do I believe I have made too many mistakes in the past to succeed in the future?

### **WHY DO YOU STRUGGLE TO BELIEVE IN YOURSELF?**

- My previous attempts in music did not work.
- I grew up in a family that did not want me to pursue music.
- My spouse or girlfriend/boyfriend doesn't approve.
- People have laughed at me.
- There is too much to do.
- I don't know what to do next.

### **MOST MUSICIANS BELIEVE LIES. YOU CAN STOP.**

I don't know what you struggle with, but you do.

Today we exchange these lies for the truth. List any other lies you want to leave behind.

I suggest you get 3x5 cards and write one lie/truth on each card. Post them on your mirror, in your car, your laptop, on the fridge - and view them several times a day.

## STEP 3: STUDY SUCCESS

I once attended a presentation about counterfeit money.

The former FBI agent shared tales about “funny money” printing in America.

He shared examples of fraudulent currency removed from circulation. The audience could not tell fake from real since the artistic level of the counterfeit was incredibly accurate.

He and his agents could spot counterfeit \$20, \$50 and \$100 bills with one method that *always* worked. He insisted it was the only way to detect fake currency.

Can you guess what it was?

*They studied the real thing.*

They spent no time at all worrying about new technology or analyzing great fakes. They put all their energy in viewing & understanding the real thing.

But wait... shouldn't they review all the great replicas in order to detect them?

Nope. They only studied the original design.

When you know the real thing, it's easy to spot the counterfeit.

---

### **Honest & Real**

People appreciate honest, one-of-a-kind originality. We are drawn to artists who are genuine and don't compromise. We like the real thing.

We can even listen to a less-favorite genre if the artist is 100% killing it, doing their thing with commitment and passion. It crosses all boundaries. Descriptions like *honest*, *organic* and *heart-felt* describe the performance.

How can you do that? What will that look like for you?

How do you become the real and honest you?

I believe the FBI has it right. Learn from the best.

If you study the right steps, best methods, and proven strategies, what is the probable outcome?

Your vision clarifies. Your goals become clear. Your standards are raised to only accept peak performance.

You become the best you can be.

---

## **Be Healthy**

There is an old saying, "you are what you eat."

If you only eat junk and fast food, your body becomes sick. Likewise, if you consume healthy food, your body becomes healthy and strong. You become what you eat.

Life operates the same way.

If you only consume entertainment, spiritual and emotional garbage, a daily news diet of depressing events - your vision, mood and performance suffer. Right?

On the other hand, if you want to become great, focus on great. Eat it. Study it. Examine the strategies and habits of great people and organizations. Learn from the best and become your best.

You are what you eat.

You also become what you believe and study.

---

## **Watch and Learn**

The truly successful artist has learned to study success. They examined it closely, adopted its traits and achieved it themselves.

You don't have time to consume the same junk most people waste their time on. Focus on the good, right and best steps to



achieve your dream. Put your energy on the real thing, and don't waste time on the counterfeits.

**Study Tips:**

- Read books and articles about people who have accomplished great things. They had the same 24-hour days you do.
- You generally won't find them on *reality* TV.

## 9 - Learn from the Best

*Keep away from people who belittle your ambitions.  
Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel  
that you, too, can become great.*

Mark Twain

The smart musician is always learning from others.

If you are teachable (willing to learn), you can develop the tools and skills for the gig you want.

The strategy is usually available for the asking. Just ask the best people.

Who are the *best* people?

The people that are successfully doing what you want to do.

The wrong people are the musicians and others that often *mean well*, but they have a different message. They tell you...

- *It's impossible.*
- *tried to do that for years and couldn't make it.*
- *You've got to be a musical genius.*
- *You can't make any money doing that.*

There are people doing it successfully. And you can be one of them.

Here is one of the most powerful techniques you can use.

It is a simple but effective strategy.

- 1) Find somebody successfully doing what you want to do.
- 2) Analyze the process they used to get there.
- 3) Do it.

If it worked for them, chances are good it will work for you. It won't be an exact map for you to follow, but similar.

Success leaves clues.

There are a thousand ways to do something, but only a few of them work.

I'll say it again. Success leaves clues and you should notice them.

Spot them. Study them. Learn them. Imitate them.

---

## **Reverse Engineer**

If you want to build a car, shouldn't you learn from the one in your driveway?

You would save years of trial and error if you took apart a Ford, Toyota or Mercedes to examine the engine, the transmission, steering, brakes, clutch, lights and all the interior luxuries we take for granted.

Why start from zero? (That's called reinventing the wheel).

Successful car manufacturers have already successfully built a car. Copy it.

This is known as **reverse engineering**.

You take it apart, in great detail, step by step, see how it was put together, the order, the pieces, the timing and reasons - and you have a proven model of success.

Then, work backwards and apply it to your own car design.

You can learn to *reverse engineer* a successful musician's career. Just like a car, you take it apart, and see how it was made.

Then, work backwards.

You are not trying to imitate the artist. Instead, learn how they developed.

What did they do and why? What are the take-away steps, goals and strategies you can implement?

That's the map you want to reconstruct.

*Reverse engineer:*

- to study the parts of (something) to see how it was made and how it works so that you can make something that is like it.
- to study or analyze (a device, as a microchip for computers) in order to learn details of design, construction, and operation, perhaps to produce a copy or an improved version.

---

## Take the Steps

Unless you get propelled to overnight fame by winning *American Idol*, *X-Factor*, *The Voice* or some national talent contest,

*Your dream will be accomplished in steps.*

You go up one step at a time, not by leaps of ten.

Some are small and quick, others are larger and require more time.

The same way a software engineer can learn code from analyzing data from existing software, musicians can learn from the steps of a successful musician.

Next is a case study of a vocalist who could benefit from reverse engineering.

Her name is Tina TuTu - and her story is known around the world.

# Review Questions



## Review Questions

1. What is one common trait of smart musicians?
2. How do they learn from others?
3. Who are the *best* people to learn from?
4. Success leaves \_\_\_\_\_?
5. Do you think you can reverse engineer a successful career to help build your music blueprints?

# 10 - Don't Reinvent the Wheel

*You don't have to reinvent the wheel,  
just attach it to a new wagon.*

Mark McCormack

Meet Tina - an attractive, smart and talented young woman who wants to sing.

**Name:** Tina TuTu.

**Talent:** High level. Good ear. Able to hear/sing harmonies. Sings in tune. Often told how good she is. Quickly able to fake anything.

**Background:** School choir, musicals, can read music a little.

**Style/Sounds Like:** Has no idea. Can sing many well-known songs.

**Press kit:** None.

**CD/vinyl:** No.

**Band or Ensemble:** No.

**Website:** No.

**Professional experience:** Community musicals, weddings.

**Goal:** Wants to sing.

Like thousands of young singers, she is talented, willing to work, sings at home every day and *lives to sing*. She is serious about it, but has no plan.

When asked what she wants to do, the answer is always, "*I want to sing.*"

Tina should reverse engineer a successful artist. She can learn from them and create a plan for herself.

---

## The Big Club

The biggest club in her city books regional acts.

Local bands play occasionally, but only as opening acts. It's *the* music venue in the city.

Her friends and co-workers all tell her she is great and should be performing. Why doesn't she sing at the *Big Club*? Somebody has a friend that mixed sound there once, and he has a connection to the manager. Let's go talk to him.

Does Tina have a shot at getting a gig there?

No. Not unless ...

- the club has a house band with music prepared specially for her. (doubtful)
- the manager lies & promises a gig because he wants to sleep with Tina. (probable)
- Tina has a huge fan base and can guarantee a packed house. (the best option)

What can Tina learn from the popular band that packs the *Big Club* with paying customers?

Answer: Find out and copy the steps they took to get there.

Reverse engineer it. Look backward to find out.

You see the packed club today. But how did they reach that level of success?

*Desmond Dynamite & the DeToxers* can pack the house because they...

- Have a large, supportive fan base.
- Added new fans while pleasing & rewarding the old ones.
- Continued improving their live show and creating new music.
- Expanded to regional bookings and negotiated more money.
- Continued building a unique and memorable live show.

- Partnered with other bands in other venues, growing their circle of opportunity *beyond their home town*.
- Have a great relationship with fans (email, website, social media) that support them and “share” updates with their friends.
- Continue to grow their email-list.
- Built creative partnerships with other bands, businesses and clubs in special performances and fund-raising events.
- Began to look for the right venues to introduce themselves to the public.
- Created tangible products, CDs, merchandise, website, social media, etc. (business savvy)
- Wrote & produced great original music.
- Developed their own sound.
- Built the right personnel/chemistry of players & singers.
- Started practicing, writing and recording.
- Grew the duo into a trio, eventually expanding to a full band.
- Found another person with similar vision.
- Knew it was time to start a band.

It all started small. Desmond Dynamite had no connections, band or gigs. She was exactly where Tina is today.

Here's her story:

**Desmond Dynamite**, (real name Betty Ray) a local singer, starts writing songs. She can sing and believes she has something special and unique. She is developing her voice with a good vocal coach, knows who she is musically, is actively writing/recording with her home computer. Desmond is always trying to meet other musicians. She doesn't have lots of money or time due to holding down two part-time jobs, but she has a plan. She is effectively networking and building her reputation as someone to be taken seriously. She is organized, keeps records of all her contacts, sends the occasional thank-you note, and tries to help other artists reach their goals. She is personable and genuine.



\*\*Note - Betty Ray has already been through the process of learning WHO she is musically:

1. She knows her style.
2. She knows her unique musical voice and how to present it.
3. She has basic musicianship skills.
4. She speaks the music language with other musicians, like knowing the keys of her songs.
5. She has a repertoire prepared.

---

### **Betty Is Ready**

Betty has done her homework.

She has asked the right questions.

This is where Tina must *begin to do the work only she can do*.

Unfortunately...

- She hasn't figured out *Who* she is musically or personally.
- Doesn't know what her *UMV* (unique musical voice) is.
- Hasn't figured out her favorite music or much of anything that defines her.
- Doesn't know *Where* she could sing, the appropriate music venue for her.
- Has no music ready, chosen or rehearsed.
- Has no network of friends or contacts in the music scene.
- Has no plan for a demo, video, press kit, mailing list, bio or website.

But Tina TuTu and her friends believe she is ready. Why???  
Because she can sing.

And yes, she CAN sing. That isn't the point.

Everybody can sing.

You know a great singer or two. Everybody does.

Tina, like all of us, has a journey to make. There are no shortcuts.

# Review Questions



## Review Questions

### Assignment:

Pick an artist you like, and reverse engineer three different zones of their career.

Hint: Use **BAM**.

1. Musical Basics (Artists they listened to, coaches or schools, etc.)
2. Artistic Development ( Evolution of finding their Unique Musical Voice)
3. Marketplace (Business Strategies, mentors, management, philosophies and more)
  - What did they do? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - Why did they do it? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - When did they do it? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - What were the results? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Do your homework. Be specific with names, dates, decisions, education, partnerships, mentors, gigs, awards, trials, failures, opportunities, etc.

\*\* See APPENDIX I for **Reverse Engineer Worksheet**

# 11 - The Journey Brings the Power

*The man on top of the mountain didn't fall there.*

Vince Lombardi

Talent is not enough.

Talent alone goes nowhere.

Tina is talented and has good intentions, but hasn't done the work.

Unless she is connected to a well-known producer or major label boss, she can't skip the process - no matter how talented.

She must begin to *develop a vision for her own career.*

Tina should go to performances of favorite bands and singers. This will inspire ideas for *her* shows.

She can talk to *Desmond Dynamite & the DeToxers* to track backwards from their current success to their startup blueprints.

She will learn a valuable truth...

*Everybody was a beginner.*

Tina can also:

- Go to The Big Club and talk to traveling singers and musicians.
- Interview them.
- Visit their websites.
- Do her homework to find a *trail of success.*

*Most artists are more than happy to talk about themselves.*

Tina is not a real person, but there are thousands of talented vocalists and musicians like her that want to be in music full-time. They just don't know how to begin.

---

## No Shortcuts

All of us want the Big Club gig. It's human nature.

But without the fan base, without the great songs, confidence and stage presence that *develops over time*, you are trying to do the impossible. It just doesn't work that way.

What happens when you skip the process?

**You aren't ready.**

So, how do you get ready?

One step at a time.

*"There is no elevator to success - you have to take the stairs."*

Zig Ziglar

But what about the manager at the Big Club... he's got a friend that's got a friend that used to date this guy that was with Ding-a-Ling Records and they're looking for singers that can look like...blah, blah.

Unfortunately, this is probably a waste of time for Tina.

Bragging is excessive in the music business. It can be hard to separate truth from hype.

The right journey for Tina will prepare her for the realities of the music business. It's much more than just singing.

She will also...

- Make valuable contacts.
- Develop communication skills.
- Become more comfortable in new situations.
- Learn to listen carefully.
- Hear about new opportunities.
- Promote herself without appearing desperate.
- Develop her own BS detector - one of the most-needed tools.

She will learn to smell a rat.

---

## **Smart & Ready**

Not everybody is trying to take advantage of Tina.

But plenty will. Tina must become smart and savvy enough to protect herself.

Desmond Dynamite has been lied to, hustled, cheated out of money, promised the moon and heard every come-on from every horny agent, promoter and scumbag in town. It comes with the territory.

But Desmond navigated through it. She got educated, and she got smart.

She learned, and you can too.

---

## **It Takes Time**

This applies to all gigs, not just singers and bands.

Quality takes time.

Want to be the band director at a big university? You can't skip the necessary steps of development.

Don't waste time applying for this dream job right out of college. You need experience.

Go get your first job directing Jr. high band and other conducting gigs. Pep bands, community bands, musical theatre - anything to build your resume.

Learn to interview. Practice. That's the only way you can compete with the hundreds of other applicants going for the job. Do your due diligence and get prepared.

Want to be a recording engineer?

I hope you've got a rig at home. Learn in your home studio, then smaller project studios, then eventually be an assistant for the

bigger studio sessions. Build a great demo to prove you are ready for the gig.

Want to compose for blockbuster movies? You better talk to John Williams and get some practical advice. Don't know who that is? You should if you want to write for movies.

You'll probably be told to start writing for anything and everything. Create music for college film projects, TV ads or anything where you write to accompany a film.

---

### **Step By Step**

Remember, you only need to know the next right step.

There are a thousand ways to do anything, but only a few work every time.

Success leaves clues. Recognize and apply them in your unique situation. One day musicians will reverse engineer your strategies.

# Review Questions



## Review Questions

1. Why is talent not enough?
2. Do you believe that everybody was a beginner?
3. Does that help you relax?
4. Why do we all believe we are ready for the Big Club gig?
5. If Tina were given a fantasy gig - she walks out on stage at the Big Club with a great band ready to perform for a packed house - could she deliver?
6. Are you trying to skip any process that is needed to develop your craft?
7. How do you get ready?
8. Do you think the bad experiences of Desmond Dynamite (Betty Ray) helped prepare her for the level of success she now has?
9. If excellence takes time, why are we in such a hurry?
10. Success leaves \_\_\_\_\_?

# Step 3

# Action Plan



## Your Action Plan

### DISCOVER YOUR UMV - UNIQUE MUSICAL VOICE

Grammy-winning songwriter/singer, **Colbie Caillat** was interviewed in *At Guitar Center* (Feb 2015). She discusses the pressure from her label to change her sound. (Let's forget for a moment that her sound is why she was signed).

Fortunately, her producer, **Babyface** had the clout and the courage to say “*No. We're not going to do that. Absolutely not.*” He later said, “*I can't believe they're trying to change you. That's what everyone does in this industry.*”

---

### Don't Go Changing

Your greatest musical asset is your UMV - Unique Musical Voice.

Yours is unique. It's the musical trademark that sets you apart from everybody else.

Everything you do musically will be in relation to your UMV.

If you learn one thing from me, let it be this:

*A successful, sustainable and meaningful music career  
will never happen without finding your UMV.*



This isn't like a hair style, marketing or popular trend. Your UMV is the sun in your musical solar system. Everything else works around it.

- It is what makes you different from every other musician on the planet.
- It is your distinct musical personality.
- It is the single element that ALL great musicians have.

---

### **What Came First?**

It's easy to think Colbie Caillat and others are well-known because they have big record companies.

And yes, the record labels have the power to broadcast an artist to the world.

But tours, campaigns and money did not create her UMV.

*The Unique Musical Voice came first.*

Fame cannot give an artist a unique sound. Fame can only share it with the world.

### **WHAT IS YOUR UMV?**

Do you know? Are you sure? Why do you believe that?

**Bob Dylan** has one of the most successful singing careers in the world. Is he a great singer? How about **Tom Waits**? He was once described by critic Daniel Durchholz as having a voice that sounded like...

*"it was soaked in a vat of bourbon, left hanging in the smokehouse for a few months, and then taken outside and run over with a car."*

Both of these artists have stayed close to their unique musical voices. They know what works.

### **1. Know Your Musical Roots**

Begin to review your musical motivations growing up. What music was playing in your home? Who did your parents or siblings like? What musical influences did you have?

## 2. Musical Genres

Where do you feel most comfortable musically? \_\_\_\_\_

HIP-HOP	GOSPEL	POP	FUNK
CLASSICAL	OPERA	RAP	REGGAE
COUNTRY	SKA	JAZZ	ROCK
MUSICAL	SOUL	TECHNO	RHYTHM &
THEATER			BLUES

## 3. Describe Your Authentic Vibe

Are you shy or extroverted? Like to dress up or keep it casual? Life of the party or hang back? What do friends and family say about you? What is your happy place?

## 4. What do You Want to Say?

Do you have strong opinions about things? Do you feel the need to comment and be heard? Is this fueled by personal angst or problems in the world you want to address? Can you do this with other people's songs or do you feel compelled to write your own?

If you are an instrumentalist, do you want to impress people with your technical wizardry or create moods and moments they can relax or relate to? Do you play multiple instruments or focus on one? Is your instrument suited to a particular style?

## 5. Role Models

Are there other artists successfully doing what you want to do? Can you learn from them only by imitation, or can you meet them and build a relationship? What is it about them that attracts and inspires you?

## **THERE ARE MANY PARTS TO YOUR MUSICAL PERSONALITY**

The more clearly you know yourself, the more you can define your expectations and focus on your dream.

Complete the following statements:

**My UMV**

1) My musical roots and influences include

---

2) The genre I feel most comfortable in is

---

3) My personal vibe is happiest when

---

4) The most important thing for me to say is

---

5) The artist I most resemble is

---

There are no wrong or right answers. Give it careful thought.

Next we begin to put all the pieces together and build blueprints to reach your goals.

## STEP 4: ENGINEER SUCCESS

When I was young, the word *engineer* made me think of a train roaring down the railroad track with some guy steering, blowing the horn and waving. He was the engineer. He had a hat, blue overalls and was always smiling.

Wherever that image came from, it stuck. So when I heard about going to college for engineering, it surprised me since I thought trains were becoming extinct.

Then, to make it even more confusing, there was an explosion of engineer-types: mechanical, chemical, civil, electrical, electronic and of course audio engineers. Who were these people and why did we need more of them?

---

### **Problem Solvers**

I eventually saw the value of thinking like an engineer.

Engineers solve problems. Whether to record the perfect solo or soundproof a recording studio, musicians are problem-solvers too!

But musician/artistic types and engineers seem like opposites.

# **Musician** vs **Engineer**

The artist thrives on risk.

The artist wants to stretch boundaries.

The artist wants to say it differently every time.

The artist is rewarded for saying something new.

**The engineer wants to remove risk.**

**The engineer wants to build them.**

**The engineer wants to say it perfectly.**

**An engineer is rewarded for using the resources that already exist.**

---

## **You Need Both**

I'm going to ask you to become an engineer.

Yep, like the guy driving the train - a locomotive engineer. They actually drive the train, while the Conductor oversees the people, the cargo and train business.

There is a time to be the artist, and a time to build the platform, the track on which your creative train can travel. Both are creative, but each has a unique and essential role.

When you think like an engineer, you can build your platform.

---

## **Tracks for Your Train**

Imagine your dream is to sing opera. (No easy feat, even if you actually can sing opera).

How? Where do you start? What do you do next?

Think like an engineer and list the facts:

What are your strengths & resources? Where can you perform? When? Who is your audience? How will they find you? Is your promotional package complete - website, bio, photos, reviews, recordings? Do you need an investor, a manager, an accompanist, an arranger? What are your main concerns and potential problems?

Don't sugar-coat it, be honest. Your "problems" will birth creative opportunities.

An engineer will see all the angles with a fresh perspective. They think outside the box to solve your problem. What is your problem?

You need a platform, a means of performing opera and getting paid for it. You need a track for your opera train. An engineer will create a plan to build it.

---

## **Artistic Engineer**

In every school music department across these United States, Canada, Europe and beyond, there are students singing opera. They have big dreams and hopes of singing professionally.

Sadly, I estimate 99% will never reach their dreams after graduation.

Why? They are trained to think like artists - not like engineers.

Will you join them, hoping and waiting for the phone to ring? Or will you build the platform, the track for your opera train to travel on?

## MUSICIAN IGNITION

Put on your engineer hat. Put on any hat you need to troubleshoot, problem-fix and engineer your dream.

## 12 - Time To Launch

*Instead of looking at the past, I put myself ahead twenty years and try to look at what I need to do now in order to get there then.*

Diana Ross

You've thought about it long enough.

You know it's time to spread your wings and fly. Still, it is scary to leave the familiar of today for an unknown tomorrow. It can feel risky.

*Every big venture involves some risks.  
You can't steal second and keep one foot on first.*

Robert Quillen

You can't take your music to the next level without significant change. If you're nervous, that's a good sign you're on the right track. If you aren't, it's probably not much of a launch.

---

### **Types of Launches**

There are many launch types.

Launch a new habit. Launch a new practice routine. Launch a schedule to write and record an album. Launch a plan to go back to school or develop new skills.

For you today, it can be a new resolution: you are ready to launch your music career.

Maybe, like Betty Ray (Desmond Dynamite), you don't have any of the pieces in place - but you have a dream for the future. Every future begins with a dream.

*The best way to predict the future is to create it.*

Abraham Lincoln

As you can see, your Three Magic Questions never go away.



“*Where are you*” is in constant flux as your artistry is always evolving. “*How do you get there*” is still being discovered. The essential pieces of the puzzle will appear in the launch process.

You will learn as you go.

---

## **When?**

If you're like most of us, you doubt. The little voice in your head starts to yell...

- *Wait!*
- *Practice more!*
- *You don't know enough!*
- *It's too soon!*
- *You aren't good enough!*
- *Not now!*

Do not be afraid.

Fear might have kept you from jumping off buildings and trying to fly when you were a kid. That's good! But other than that, fear is destructive and damaging.

Fear can keep you in *perpetual practice mode*, forever preparing but never able to launch.

If you know *where* you are, *who* you are, and *what* you need to do next ... It's Time.

Launching out of your comfort zone will propel you forward like nothing else. You get to see what works and what flops.

What's the worst that can happen?

- Even if you fail - you will grow.
- Even if you don't get the gig - you will grow.
- Even if your interview sucks - you will grow.

It's a no-lose situation.

The process will help you see EXACTLY what you need for the gig. How can that be bad?

This is what you've been preparing for. It is the next logical step. It works.

---

## **Worst Case Scenario**

Ever heard of jazz saxophonist, **Charlie Parker**?

His approach to improvisation changed the way musicians play.

His bebop solos set the musician language on fire with new ideas and concepts. Truly, if you improvise - he extended the harmonic/melodic framework for it.

He helped build your musical vocabulary.

But, did you know that his early attempts to sit-in with a club band were a disaster?

He stunk. The drummer threw a cymbal at him! They laughed him out of the club. Total humiliation.

Parker's first launch was a train wreck - but it was the catalyst for his musical transformation.

His initial failure ignited the clarity for what his next right thing needed to be.

*He learned what he COULD NOT do  
and got inspiration for what he SHOULD DO.*

Parker got a true *Musician Ignition* - a transformation from potential to powerhouse.

What's the worst that can happen to you if you launch out and fail?

You are a giant step closer to learning what does work.

---

## **A Better Map**

If you are like most artists, you are sensitive and don't want to fail. Failure hurts.

But what if failure is the most important step to greatness?

## MUSICIAN IGNITION

*Negative results are just what I want.  
They're just as valuable to me as positive results.  
I can never find the thing that does the job best  
until I find the ones that don't.*

Thomas Edison

Why did Charlie Parker's negative experience help him become the most influential jazz musician in the world?

I believe that if he had not failed, he would have continued as a mediocre saxophonist. He would not have seen his musicianship flaws, and nothing would have changed.

Yes, he could have played it safe and only sat in with musicians of his own level.

Instead, he decided to launch out on the professional stage. BAM - success.

- It was the process that won.
- It was the launch that won.
- It was admitting his weakness that won.
- It was his ability to dust off his pride and get to work that won.

You cannot lose when you launch.

It's your only path to greatness. You must do it, or you'll never fly.

Whatever your next launch needs to be, you are ready.

# Review Questions



## Review Questions

1. Are you feeling the need to take your musical dream to the next step?
2. If you are nervous, can you determine what is causing it?
3. Do you see that any dream is reached with goals, steps & planning?
4. Are you ready to take action steps to build your dream?
5. Do you know your next step?
6. If not, what can you do to get clarity? Read more. Take a course. Interview somebody. Do more personal soul-searching. Ask more questions. Get a mentor.
7. Do you see the value of making mistakes?
8. Artists can be perfectionists. Are you? Is it holding you back?
9. Will you give yourself permission to fail?
10. Do you understand that failure can be a path to success?

## 13 - Ready, Aim, Now What?

*I have learned over the years that when one's mind is made up, this diminishes fear; knowing what must be done does away with fear.*

Rosa Parks

How long have you been getting ready?

At some point, you must stop planning and launch.

---

### **Ready to Launch**

A singer has to be heard. A painter must put colors on the canvas. A songwriter must finish the song. A teacher has to share their ideas with students.

Are you afraid? Do these negative thoughts sound familiar?

- *I've got to get a better instrument.*
- *I don't like the music they play.*
- *I don't know all the songs I should know.*
- *I've got to learn more music theory.*
- *I've got to get better.*

That could be fearful thinking making excuses. It can cripple you.

Of course, if those nagging thoughts are based in truth, fix them! But it's not a lifetime job. Go out and engage.

Yes, I know this can be scary. But it's a vital part of your journey. Embrace it.

Remember - music isn't brain surgery. A mistake won't cost someone their life! You're not all that - so ease up and allow yourself the luxury of less-than perfection.

If you wait for everything to be perfect before you launch - you never will.

---

## Aim

This isn't a new idea for you.

Some of you have been aiming, thinking, reading, planning and preparing for years. Your aim is accurate, and it's time to take action.

You've been through steps 1-3 of *Musician Ignition*. You know more than you realize.

- 1) You can **Define** your dream. (Three Magic Questions)
- 2) You can **Reverse Engineer** it into action-sized Goals/Milestones.
- 3) You've got **BAM** to diagnose strengths and weaknesses.

Now.... Prioritize your *next right steps*.

- 4) **Create** a SMART plan.
- 5) **Achieve** your goal and review for improvement.

---

## FIRE!

Create a plan that is based on facts, not assumptions.

Let's help Tina TuTu build a blueprint.

- 1) **Define** "*I want to sing.*" Sing what? Where? In musical theater, weddings, cruise ships, local clubs, private parties, recording studios or churches? Which is it?
- 2) **Reverse engineer** the goals/steps required to get there. She can learn from many sources, books, courses and certainly her favorite artists.
- 3) **BAM** will help diagnose her needs. She must develop her artistry *before* approaching the marketplace. She should build a repertoire of songs that are perfect for her. She can do the right things in the right order.
- 4) **Plan** her work schedule using the SMART system. She gets a calendar, and commits to her goal. She prioritizes it with the weeks, days and hours needed.

- *Specific.* Choose 20 of her favorite songs.
  - *Measurable.* Select her favorite 5 by next Monday.
  - *Action.* Book a private lesson next Wednesday with a vocal coach to critique/explore/improve those 5 songs.
  - *Realistic.* Tina can select and prepare 5 perfect songs to perform.
  - *Time-related.* Tina can have a small but personalized repertoire of songs that showcase her unique musical voice in 2 weeks or less.
- 5) **Achieve & Review.** She now has a small repertoire of songs to perform. She will continue to add songs AND launch another milestone goal. Tina will review the effectiveness of her methods, tweak for improvement, and continue to grow.

There is nothing new here. No secret technique, software or trick.

*We just took Tina from ZERO to performance-ready  
in five simple steps.*

Tina is using known resources, proven strategies and SMART planning to engineer a unique blueprint for her success.

---

## Helpful Tips

Here are three tips to help musicians stay on track.

### 1) Use *Habit Practice* or *Project Practice*

Musician schedules are always changing.

If you do a funk gig for 6 months, your chops might be great, but your sight-reading sucks.

You balance this out with 2 different practice modes:

1. *Habit practice* is your regular practice/maintenance routine.
2. *Project practice* goes on the calendar for a limited time.

If you commit 10-15 minutes to sight-reading every day in a regular routine, you stay tuned and ready. (Habit practice)

If you are hired for a single performance, one gig with a traveling production, that is a one-time project. (Project practice)

Put the performance date on the calendar. Back it up with the weeks/days needed, and prepare for the show. When it ends, file it.

### *2) Limit the Scope of your Goal.*

If you say “*I want to learn to play the piano,*” that is not a clear goal and could take years.

What do you want to do with the piano? Be specific.

*“I want to play chords while I sing.”*

That is a clear goal.

Now you can find a teacher, course, class - whatever will help and put that goal on the calendar.

Better still...

*“I want to play chords/accompany myself on the piano in six months”.*

That clearly defines the parameters of your goal.

### *3) Use Deadlines!*

Mark the calendar.

Write it in INK. **Create deadlines for every goal.**

Work backwards to plan out your daily, weekly and monthly steps. This will break it up into small actions you can do.

Check them off your to-do list. Stay honest. This is how you get it done.

—

## **Fire**

Ready, Aim, Fire. It's time!



## MUSICIAN IGNITION

I won't go into all the ways to develop good habits, break bad habits, use your time more effectively, shut off the TV, put down the smart phone, shut down all the social media... blah, blah, blah.

**YOU ALREADY KNOW ALL THAT.**

This isn't going to be easy or happen overnight. But it's what you were made for.

Ask Charlie Parker... even the worst launch may be the best thing that ever happened to you. It's time to take it to the next level.

# Review Questions



## Review Questions

1. Have you been making excuses to delay launching your dream?
2. Do you see the value of the Five-Step Action Plan?
3. Can architects and carpenters build a building without blueprints?
4. What would happen if they tried?
5. If musicians are working on social media before they reach essential milestones, wouldn't that be like trying to install a roof before the walls are built?
6. How can you use the SMART system to improve?
7. Do you already have a regular practice routine?
8. Are you able to develop other skills or repertoire as needed?
9. Can you put a goal on the calendar, and work backwards to create a schedule and routine?

## 14 - Your Launch Checklist

*You don't have to be great to start,  
but you have to start to be great.*

Zig Ziglar

Ready to begin, start over, fix something, learn more, break through an old roadblock, finish that recording project, start your first band or build a brilliant website?

That is awesomely spectacular. But you can't do it all today, right?

You can do the next right thing. You can start to write your career blueprints.

Here is your checklist:

1. You have **BAM** to diagnose what needs improvement.
2. You know who you are musically.
3. You know the #1 Success Secret of Professional musicians. You are *Confident, Competent, Creative* and *Care*.
4. You have developed a *realistic vision* for this launch because you know yourself. You know your strengths & weaknesses.
5. Like saxophonist, **Charlie Parker**, you are ready to make mistakes and not be devastated. You know that failure can lead to transformation and greatness.
6. You give yourself permission to make mistakes.
7. You are not going to get *frozen in preparation*, continually striving to improve. While committed to excellence, you recognize the trap of over-preparing.
8. You are ready to engage with others in live performance.
9. You understand the *musical requirements* for your gig. You have the **Technique** to execute it, the **Music Theory** to speak the language, and can **Create Music** with emotional impact.

10. You understand that *Success Leaves Clues*.
11. You have studied successful careers, people or projects that you want to imitate. You can **reverse engineer** the details to learn the *next right step*.
12. You know that dreams become reality *one step at a time*.
13. You can define the **Scope** of your launch - the *beginning and end, goals and purpose*.

My wife likes to say that *whoever has the most fun wins*. I think she's right. Go have some fun. Start turning your dreams into reality.

# Step 4

# Action Plan



## Your Action Plan

You can read *Musician Ignition* and get warm fuzzy feelings, bask in your dream for a moment and think about how cool it could be, would be, should be... but then you do nothing. The dream remains a dream.

Or, you can do something today that will make a difference.

### **DON'T WAIT ANY LONGER**

If you walk away from *Musician Ignition* without taking action, you increase the likelihood that you never will. Commitment ignites action.

### **ASSIGNMENT #1: Write your MUSICAL EXCUSES OBITUARY - YOU NEVER ACCOMPLISHED YOUR MUSICAL DREAM.**

List details, excuses and all the cop-outs you can.

Here's mine:

Paul Babelay was buried today at Brother Bum Burial. He was tossed in a large grave with many other musical genius types that were always critical of others, but never produced anything themselves. He could have been a great songwriter, but never wrote any songs. He fancied himself a gifted singer, but never developed his voice. His drumming could have been brilliant, but he never had time to practice.

Paul could quickly detect mistakes. He knew what you were doing wrong and didn't hesitate to announce it. His stinging critiques were legendary and often got him blacklisted from bands and clubs. That didn't stop him, as Facebook and Twitter offered 24/7 negative comment opportunity. The musician blog he threatened to write was never seen, but his podcast would have been incredible.

He dreamed of being a professional vibraphonist, you know... that electric xylophony thing. When a critic penned Paul the "John Bonham of the xylophone" he reveled in it. He once got hired to play for a wedding, but promptly quit after the bride requested a song beneath his musical standards. He recognized the stupidity of the public, and refused to conform.

Paul never saw the need to write down goals. Life was too short to be uptight and boxed in. He chose to be unique and creative, free of deadlines and planning. Likewise, his music was not limited by scales and keys - but rather a deeply personal expression somewhere between Indian, Asian and 12-Tone. He didn't want his music to be tainted by money, so he never made any... music or money.

None of his girlfriends were available for comment. Paul was survived by his three dogs, Buddha, Bonzo and Booty. He had no children... thanks be to God.

**HAVE FUN!**

**ASSIGNMENT #2: Be A Reporter AT YOUR OWN FUNERAL:**

**All Your Dreams ARE Accomplished**

Now it's time to get serious.

Think like a journalist, and use the *Five Ws* to get your information: Who, What, Where, When and Why. Do not answer with Yes or No.

- **Who** was involved?
- **What** happened?
- **Where** did it take place?

## MUSICIAN IGNITION

- **When** did it take place?
- **Why** did that happen?

Think of this as a police-style investigation.

If this is what you want said at your funeral, don't you think it's time to get started?

## STEP 5: CELEBRATE YOUR SUCCESS

When you reach a goal, celebrate it!

A music career has many steps from vision to reality. Each milestone is made up of accomplishments. Every time you achieve one, you should reward yourself and those involved.

Celebrate your victories. Don't be so focused on the work ahead that you fail to savor a victory. Your accomplishments should be noted and enjoyed. Reward yourself, and you'll be even more intentional to succeed again.

As a younger musician, I couldn't celebrate a victory. There was always more to do, more to practice and accomplish to become a *great* musician. It was never enough.

Thankfully, that has changed.

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### Goal Review System

After you complete a goal, you can review and make adjustments.

- What motivated your success?
- Was that motivation enough to keep you committed from start to finish?
- What would help you maintain your enthusiasm even more?
- How can you be even more intentional in your daily tasks?

We should link our daily to-do list with the bigger goals. If we don't, the daily tasks can seem disconnected and unimportant.

For me to stay **intentional**, I need a daily picture or reminder of my motivation.



I keep a list of my big goals in a notebook and review them once or twice a week. My daily checklist is always open. I read it every day.

If I don't see my list, my brain jumps to other goals - quickly!

1. I must be intentional or nothing is accomplished.
2. I am intentional when I am motivated.
3. My motivation comes from the value of my goal.
4. My goal is accomplished in small, daily tasks.

In my world, it always comes back to motivation. Do I really care? Do I know why I want it? Is it truly important? If the motivation isn't strong enough, it's not going to happen.

Your career will have many goals, launches, celebrations and reviews.

Some of your plans will work brilliantly. Some will suck mud. Those can be the most valuable if you have a review system to learn why.

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### **Every Step Matters**

Most of us enjoy some parts of the journey more than others.

I like planning and designing more than actually doing the day-to-day stuff. The daily work can become boring and tedious to me. I have brilliant outlines of books and courses in my journals that haven't seen daylight in years. I didn't commit.

I didn't know how to link the motivation of the finished product to the daily tasks required to finish.

But thankfully, we learn. My weaknesses and mistakes have made me smarter. I learn from losses and wins. You can too.

## 15 - Putting It All Together

*Success is not final, failure is not fatal:  
it is the courage to continue that counts.*

Winston Churchill

I trust this book has given you a different perspective and new ideas. Maybe you can think like an engineer and re-examine what you're already doing, or commit to a new launch entirely. The key is to find what works best for you.

The original version had 37 chapters. After doing music for 30+ years, there is a ton of stuff I want to help you *never* do, and plenty to *always* do. But I must take my own advice and limit the scope of *Musician Ignition*. It is only a guide, a starting place.

I should probably warn you that when you put your career under the microscope, it can feel yucky. You may see too many options, possible changes and tweaks that should have been made yesterday. Don't go there.

**You are where you should be.**

Any changes you make should be healthy and relevant.

As creative people, we tend to want the result NOW. You didn't get here overnight, and you won't make meaningful change overnight either.

Trust the process, the questioning, the SMART planning. It works.

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### **Stop and Go Faster**

A hard lesson for me has been that I can't do everything.

I'm not Superman. My wife has told me this for years, but I just smile and keep trying to fly.

I am too busy. I say *yes* too often, and must force myself to say *No*.

Sometimes, I find it helpful to just stop. Unplug. Cut off the phone and become unreachable. When I stop, *I can then go faster*. My priorities get back in focus.

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### **Find Your Groove**

If you're like me, you've read the whole book in one or two sittings. But the real benefit happens as you meditate on this material. That takes time.

You might “finish” the book in an hour, but your answers will evolve for the rest of your life.

Find your style of learning. Find your groove - your sweet spot.

When you can achieve your goals, that is success.

Whatever you want to do - plan carefully and write it down. Statistics prove that if you write down your goals, the likelihood of success improves tremendously. It ignites you in ways we don't fully understand.

It's time. You can do this. Count it in and make it count!

# Step 5

# Action Plan



## Your Action Plan

Learning to **review performance** is our final step.

Too often we either avoid past mistakes altogether and think “it's all good.” Or, or we wallow in our failures, get discouraged and quit. Neither is healthy.

If we avoid the recognition of failures, there is missed opportunity for growth. If we fail to celebrate the victories, we live in a continual state of dissatisfaction.

---

### **Perspective is Everything**

You can fail without being a failure.

A bad performance in a particular area is just that. You may have screwed up - but *you're not a screwup*. There is a big difference.

Framing it correctly gives you a healthy perspective.

This is how we distance ourselves from mistakes, but still get the benefit of learning from them.

These questions can help turn regrets into powerful motivations.

### **QUESTIONS**

#### **1. What did you want to happen?**

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Be very precise about your expectations.

If you thought you would sell 200 T-shirts at your gig and only sold 2, that's not because you suck. Your marketing plan did.

## 2. What really happened?

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What caused the lack of sales? The artwork? The distribution? The sales pitch? The venue? Price?

## 3. What can you learn for next time?

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What are your valuable lessons? What will you change?

Again, be as specific as possible:

- I will spend more money on \_\_\_\_\_.
- I will spend less money on \_\_\_\_\_.
- I will spend more/less time on \_\_\_\_\_.
- I should not have tried to do \_\_\_\_\_ by myself.
- I should have let \_\_\_\_\_ do more.
- I am not a super hero and will limit my involvement to \_\_\_\_\_.

## 4. How can you leverage your regret(s) into a resolution for improvement?

Our mistakes and failures can just sit in the past and haunt us.

Or, we can learn from them and take corrective actions to improve.

### **ASSIGNMENT: Turn Your Regret Into A Resolution**

"I regret that I \_\_\_\_\_ but now that I have reflected on my mistakes, I will be able to \_\_\_\_\_ in the future."

# Musician Ignition OVERVIEW

You now have a proven system to organize your tasks.

You can build a step-by-step plan to reach your goals. These blueprints are yours to use, review, change and improve. Find what works for you, and correct anything that doesn't.

Every step is important. Baby-steps add up to become milestones.

Don't wait any longer Don't procrastinate. You're ready. It's time to launch.

**1 - DEFINE** your goal.

- Be specific.
- Say it. "I want to \_\_\_\_\_."
- Write it down and review regularly.

**2 - REVERSE ENGINEER** a person/business that has done what you want to do.

- Review the Tina Tutu and Desmond Dynamite case studies.
- Use the **Reverse Engineering Worksheet** in APPENDIX 1.

**3 - Use BAM** to determine where you are in the process.

- My musicianship needs improvement in \_\_\_\_\_
- My artistic output needs improvement in \_\_\_\_\_
- My business savvy needs work in \_\_\_\_\_
- Prioritize what needs to happen next.

**4 - PLAN** out your tasks with a calendar. Stick to your deadlines.

- Use the SMART system that Tina used in Chapter 13.

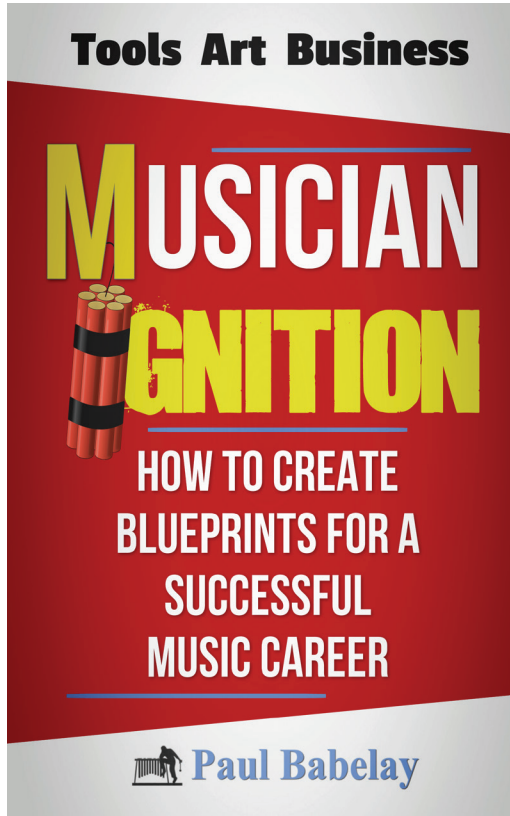
- *Specific.*
- *Measurable.*
- *Action.*
- *Realistic.*
- *Time-related.*

5 - **ACHIEVE & REVIEW** the effectiveness of your system.

- Was your motivation enough? If not, how can you improve it?
- Adjust and tweak your tasks, but stay focused on the big picture goal.
- Design a plan to achieve *your next milestone goal*.
- Don't forget to celebrate your accomplishments!

# APPENDIX 1

## Reverse Engineering Worksheet



Reverse Engineering can be used by scientists and engineers to take things apart and see how they work. You can also use it to look inside any stage of a successful music career to see how it was built.

Use **BAM** to help you analyze the key elements.

The artist/business you take apart will be known as your **MODEL**.



## Define Your Goal:

You can reverse engineer anything - But you must define your goal.

What do you hope to learn from your model?

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Who/What are you going to reverse engineer?

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Why are you choosing this person/business as your model?

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How will you do your research?

---

What tools do you need?

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# **B**asics

- \* **MUSIC THEORY**
- \* **MUSIC READING**
- \* **BASIC PIANO SKILLS**
- \* **MUSIC LESSONS**

# #1 **B**asics

**MUSIC THEORY** Rhythm, Melody & Harmony

**MUSIC READING** Understand charts, lead sheets, sheet music, etc.

**BASIC PIANO** Best instrument to help with all aspects of music

**MUSIC LESSONS** Getting a mentor

## **Musical Tools Required:**

What are the fundamental music skills involved?

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Why are they important?

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Did your model have any formal musical training? Explain.

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Can you hear the musical evolution of your model?

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Who did they learn from? Imitate? Study with? Play music with?  
Listen to?

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If your model had a mentor, can you work with them?

---



- \* **MUSIC WRITING**
- \* **IMPROVISATION**
- \* **PRODUCTION -**  
**PERFORMANCE**
- \* **RECORDING**

# #2 **A**rt

**SONGWRITING** Completed songs to express your vision

**IMPROVISATION** Ability to compose on demand

**RECORDING** Essential tool for learning and tracking progress

**PRODUCTION—PERFORMANCE** Brings all the elements of music together

## **Artistic Growth:**

Did your model always have a unique musical voice?

---

Can you hear their musical influences? List them.

---

Can you find examples of your model's early work? How is it different from their later creative output? Be specific.

---

Can you learn from your model's influences? Should you? How?

---

Did they perform/work with other musicians that influenced them? Who?

---

Can you work with those artists? Why or why not?

---

Are you transcribing and picking apart their music to see what's going on musically? If not, why not?

---

Are you actively recording yourself? If not, why not?

---

How are the **Basics** of music related to the **Artistic**/creative output?

---

What is the #1 takeaway from your musical model you hope to achieve?

---

 **Marketplace**

\* **MUSIC BUSINESS**

\* **MUSIC CAREER**

# #3 marketplace

## MUSIC BUSINESS

All legal aspects of music:  
publishing, licensing, contracts,  
copyrights, royalties, etc.

## MUSIC INDUSTRY

Generally refers to record labels  
and performing artists, but any  
job or gig that involves music

### **Business Savvy:**

When did your model begin taking their gig public?

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Did they wait until everything was perfect, or learn *on the job*?  
Explain.

---

How did they find their audience?

---

What can you learn from their strategy?

---

## MUSICIAN IGNITION

Can you track their early stages of development? (Mentors. Gigs. Bands. Awards. Jobs. Life lessons. Failures. Detours).

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If they got a manager or legal representation, how did they meet them?

---

What did your model have that caused a pro-level management team to take notice?

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At what step in your model's journey did that added level of professional representation occur?

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If your model is a performer that secured a record deal, can you find the steps that led to it. (The people, meetings, referrals, gigs and contacts that helped).

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Did your model make any bad financial decisions or sign damaging contracts?

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If so, how could they have avoided it? How will you?

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Did your model focus on marketing, developing their craft, or both?

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How did the *Unique Musical Voice* of your model affect their Marketplace strategy?



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Would success in the marketplace have been possible without first developing their artistic output? Explain.

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## Lessons Learned:

List the details learned from the reverse engineering process.

 <b>Basics</b> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
 <b>Artistic</b> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
 <b>Marketplace</b> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Put on your engineer hat  
and start building those blueprints!



## About the Author

Paul Babelay is the owner of Vibe Guy Music, a music career development company dedicated to helping musicians become their best. He is a vibraphonist, percussionist, keyboardist and the author of *“How To Read Music: See it, Say it, Play it.”*

He is a regular performer at the *Flat Rock Playhouse - State Theatre of North Carolina* and orchestra director at *Biltmore Church*, one of the fastest-growing churches in the Southeast. His performances have taken him throughout the US, Germany, Wales, Turkey and Greece with gigs that musically range from comedians *Don Rickles* and *Martin Short* to Contemporary Christian vocalist *Darlene Zschech* and a late-night jam with R&B legend, *Chaka Khan*.

Paul's former vibraphone recording service (at [PaulBabelay.com](http://PaulBabelay.com)) held the Google #1 position from 2015-2017. His vibraphone performance is respected by professionals like Ray Hair, president of the American Federation of Musicians who says, *“I have heard Paul's performances on many occasions and I would categorize his musicianship and performance ability to rate among the top five (5) percent of all professional musicians throughout the United States and Canada.”*

Paul inspires musicians to learn the basics, art and business of music. As a clinician, he has taught thousands of students for the *North & South Carolina Arts Council*, *North Carolina Touring Roster* and *National Endowment for the Arts*. His students are successful throughout the industry.

While Paul loves his work, it is not the most important part of his life. That role belongs to his family. He has been married to his wife, Susan, for twenty-five years. They have three daughters and live just outside Asheville, NC.

## Special Thanks

To my wife and best friend, Susan Babelay: You've inspired and encouraged me for years while juggling a thousand things of your own. This book wouldn't exist without you. Neither would I.

To my daughters: No man is more proud or blessed than me. You guys are amazing. I'm grateful for the role of being your DAD. It's the best gig ever.

To my friend, musician and editor, Gwynn Griffin: I'm so grateful for your caring eye and ear. You took *Musician Ignition* to a new level. And you know how to celebrate a birthday!

