

PERSPECTIVE



MINDSET

Honestly, even growing up in a town like New Orleans where music is on every corner, I didn't develop a mindset that I could actually make a living as a musician until very, very late in the game. I settled for one dead end, miserable job after another until I realized that even if I kept a "day gig" it was very possible to make a decent part-time income playing the bass.

One day, the supervisor at my crappy office job suggested that if I didn't quit and go work at a music store or something, she was going to fire me. It sounds harsh, but I still text her from time to time to thank her! I quit and then went on to earn a degree in music, but that's a story for a different book.

The point is that I had to start thinking differently about my situation and figure out how to really pursue a career as a bass player; however, my mindset didn't just change overnight. It took a long time and some really bumpy roads. It took some serious soul searching and observation. That got me to thinking about some things that I want to share with you about mindset and some of the different perspective that holds people back as well as some that allow people to excel in the music business.



Photo by Cia Gould

Concerns about money and job security

The issue with my mindset, back in the day, was that I thought that I needed a secure job with benefits and a weekly paycheck. That and a backup plan. (Cue laughter.) I thought that I had to have so many ducks in a row before I could start really getting out there. That is, of course, a mindset based on lack and fear as opposed to the desire and expectation of success.

Look, I'm not saying that if you've got a mortgage and children that you should shrug off your responsibilities and start pursuing a career as a bass player. What I am saying is that many times we allow ourselves to become trapped in our "safe" jobs and never realize our goals or

potential in other areas. Fear moves us in every direction except one of our bass-playing goals.

The most successful musicians that I've ever known have thought extensively about how to build their careers without putting themselves in unnecessary financial hardship. They found ways to earn money to live with jobs and gigs that provide flexibility to work on music and are in line with long-term music goals. This might include working in radio, at clubs, blogging, DJ'ing, photography, teaching, etc. I know a lot of musicians that were lucky enough to get coveted analyst jobs at Pandora in the early days that allowed them to take their work on the road with them. I was "this close" to becoming an analyst at Pandora, but that is also a story for another book. For those who want to go full time, you'll want to build multiple streams as soon as possible with things that line up with what you want out of your career or even side hustle in music.

Getting gigs and other opportunities

Musicians with a cynical mindset think, "Better opportunities only come to the best of the best, the person "who knows whom" or kisses the most butt, or to those who live in New York, L.A., or Nashville." This cynical mindset shifts responsibility for their success onto other people and circumstances. Cynical musicians make e x c u s e s .

Musicians with a success-focused mindset realize that even though they may not exactly be aware of what to do or who they should know, they are still determined to find out and put

themselves in positions to learn. They seek guidance and mentorship from people who have been where they want to go.

Musicians with a poor mindset think that they're above certain gigs and have arrived long before they do. They complain about money or turn their nose up at blessings in disguise. These types of musicians will always struggle. Always. You've got to earn the right to expect a certain pay, and even then, humility goes farther than one might think.

Musicians with future, success-oriented mindsets view every gig as an opportunity and see "the game" like a game of chess, not checkers. In the game of chess, each player must be able to see multiple moves down the line. While the move (the gig) right in front of you may or may not be a major one, you certainly want to keep in mind how it affects future moves. Every artist's community is incredibly small, especially as the world becomes smaller thanks to the internet.

Abundance mindset

It's tough making a full-time living as a blue-collar bassist. I won't lie about that. You have to wear many hats, and competition can be stiff. Although the music industry has a reputation for being cutthroat, don't allow yourself to fall into a mindset of lack. I believe that a mindset rooted in lack causes people to do things that they regret later, like talk poorly about people behind their backs, undercut, and take opportunities for granted. A mindset of abundance lets us realize that there is enough for everyone.

There is opportunity all around us. Look, I get it, it sounds all fluffy and new-age but it's true. I've had both types of mindsets and am not above



With Jody Watley at Long Beach Pride Festival

having to remind myself to have a mindset of abundance. It takes some practice! Thinking about lack causes us to stop practicing our instrument, looking for inspiration, networking, socializing, etc., as we sit around thinking that the well has dried up. Abundance thinking helps us to keep pushing forward with the understanding that there's more than enough to go around!

Ten people or ten thousand

A big part of having a pro mindset is being able to respect every gig, regardless of its perceived importance, whether it's for an audience of ten people or ten thousand. I've seen people lose future opportunities just by the way they treated the gig they were currently on. Let me give you a real-world example.

I was in the house band for a club that did a monthly shed session in Oakland, and the host had invited a special guest artist to come from Los Angeles to do a tribute to Prince just after he passed away. The artist sent over charts and MP3s about a month before the gig, and was coming straight to the rehearsal from the airport. On the night of the rehearsal, the guitarist was late, and it was evident he hadn't done his homework. His body language and attitude spoke volumes. He was slumped over or leaning backward, looking at his phone and it was obvious to everyone in attendance that they really didn't care that

much about not having done his homework and how that was affecting the rehearsal.

There was also a keyboard player on the gig whom I'd heard about but was just meeting for the first time that night. After the rehearsal, the artist who was kind of a big deal... even though he isn't necessarily a household name decided that he didn't want the guitarist to play the Prince tribute portion of the set. Luckily, the keyboard player knew a guy who happened to be free. That guy came in the next night, on the respected word of the keyboard player, and absolutely nailed the Prince tribute portion of the set. The original guitarist, bad attitude in tow, played the rest of the shed session and it was pretty bad.

I can't even begin to describe how bad the original guitarist's vibe was one stage. He sat on his amp and played as though he were sitting around, playing with his buddies in the living room. We were all pretty irritated by how much the guitar player was bringing the vibe down. At the end of the gig, the keyboardist told the guitarist that they'd blown "100 connections" in one night. Not surprisingly, the original guitarist didn't take it seriously and kind of laughed it off. This was in 2016.

Every time I think about some of the gigs I've since played with the keyboard player — large and small — I cringe for the original guitarist. Sure, we were playing a "one-off" gig that didn't pay much...upfront.

But the opportunities that have come from that one gig have been pretty incredible. That keyboard player turned out to be fairly connected, but it didn't just go from zero to sixty. He and I did, and do, a bunch of nondescript gigs together. Those are the gigs where some people are "sizing you up." Those are the gigs when people see what you're made of. Can you be flexible? Will you do your homework? Will you be a good hang? Will you respect the gig? If you keep a pro mindset that allows you to give every artist, bandleader, and bandmate the comfort of knowing that you'll make their job easier, you're going to get called a lot more than the person who doesn't.

All of those "little gigs" are the proving ground, the trenches.