

# MISCONCEPTIONS about MANAGEMENT

## 5 Things That Might Surprise You

by Bernard Baur

**“If only I had a manager...”**

That’s a common refrain for a large number of struggling artists who believe a manager will make a big difference in their career. The truth, however, is far more complex.

**Understanding how management is different today than it was only a few years ago is key to deciding the kind of management you need, or if you need management at all. Today a good manager has to function very much like a label... a vibrant, visionary label. According to Scott Welch, a longtime manager with a clientele that includes Alanis Morissette, LeAnn Rimes and Johnny Cooper, “When the biz was controlled by major labels, music came from the top down; they decided what we heard. Now the situation has flipped and music comes from the bottom up. Fans decide who’s going to make it and who’s not.”**

Due to that sea change, Welch says a manager’s duties have increased substantially. “We’re dealing with a whole new world,” he explains, “and labels have been slow to recognize it. We now have to do the work that labels used to do.”

The reality is, today’s managers are vastly different from managers of yesteryear. And that change has created misconceptions about the profession in general. Here are five:

### **1. “A MANAGER WILL DO EVERYTHING FOR AN ARTIST”**

Maybe back in the dark ages that statement was true, like when Colonel Tom Parker represented Elvis Presley. Of course, Parker also took 50 percent of Elvis’ income. Nowadays, **Robie Porter** contends, “A manager can’t do it all. There are too many areas to cover.”

Porter is a label owner, producer and manager with over 50 million record sales to his credit. He’s worked with stars such as Air Supply and Rick Springfield, as well as newcomers like

Porcelain and indie rockers Astral Aliens. “Artists have to do their part,” Porter insists. “They need to work hard and smart or they will fail.”

At the very least, Porter believes that artists should keep their social networks lively, keep their websites updated and promote their shows diligently. In fact, he relates that each member of a band needs to do something every single day. “I won’t work with artists who think they’re entitled to everything and are too lazy to work for it.”

Moreover, just because someone is a manager doesn’t make he or she an authority in all areas. “Every manager has a specialty, a field of expertise,” Welch informs. In fact, managers often come from a variety of fields, such as touring, production, PR, radio, marketing, law, business, and even journalism. “No manager is all in one,” Welch confirms. “That’s why connections in other areas are so important.”

**Chris Fletcher**, who has been managing independent acts for 20 years, not only agrees, but she adds, “Everyone has to pitch in to get things done. I give my artists assignments. And,

I make sure they do them—even if I have to remind them several times a day.”

Taking that thought even further, **Tom Callahan**, a veteran manager who reps international talent, states, “Artists have to be more proactive than ever. They can’t just rely on their managers to handle everything. Everybody has to work at it together. The days when an artist could just focus on music are over.”

### **2. “A MANAGER WILL INVEST MONEY IN THE ACT”**

A fact that many artists overlook is that managers only make money when the act does. Nevertheless, some artists expect managers to dip into their own pocket to support them. Fletcher believes there’s a better way. “Part of my job is to find ways to generate income for them. Artists should make money on their own, and my job is to help them do so.”

Welch has a similar perspective. “Our main goal is to create income streams. And there are many ways to do that today. Publishing and live shows can bring in a few dollars, and there are still quite a few people who want to get into the business,” he notes. “They’ll invest in a project for a backend and a chance to be part of the scene.” That scenario, however, only becomes possible when artists are willing to work—a lot.

Of course, there are times when management will financially rescue a starving artist. “It depends on how broke the artist is,” Porter responds. “As a rule, I don’t do it. It’s a dangerous territory. I’ve

got bills to pay too. But you need your artist alive and healthy; and, occasionally, I'll help out when things are tight."

That investment, by the way, is a loan that is reimbursable and will come off the top of any and all income, until it's paid in full.

### 3. "A MANAGER MUST HAVE EXPERIENCE"

This area brought the most debate among our managers. Experience may be ideal but it's not necessarily required, and it can be a double-edged sword. Callahan believes, "Creativity can be just as important as experience. You need a manager with vision, especially in the indie market. That trait can be more valuable than experience."

Porter, on the other hand, maintains, "Veteran managers have more connections, and garner more respect from industry. They've spent years building relationships and know people who can make a real difference in an artist's career." The only exception, he relates, are managers who had their heyday years ago and haven't kept up with the business. "That could be a serious problem," he declares. "Their contacts are usually long gone and their understanding of the industry may be outdated."

The only hitch is that new acts cannot usually attract a high caliber of management. Veteran managers aren't interested in artists that are still developing. They want acts that are accomplished and already producing income. The only exception is a recently signed act, because they might make some money—even if it is just an advance. Porter admits, "That's true. But if an act has something special going on, an experienced manager may be able to build on it. I look for that potential and have acted on it in the past."

With that said, all of our managers agree with **Jonathan Wolfson**, a fairly new manager who just recently started repping Hall & Oates. It's Wolfson's first gig as a manager, but he brings 15 years of public relations experience to the table. "Daryl Hall convinced me to be a manager. He said I had the right skills for it."

Wolfson likely acquired those skills because he has observed so many artist management relationships over the years; he has seen what works and what doesn't. "Experience is great," he observes, "but nothing in the world is better than having a *believer* in your corner, a manager

*"Experience is great, but nothing in the world is better than having a believer in your corner, a manager who will kill for you."*

—Jonathan Wolfson,  
manager

*"No manager is all in one. That's why connections in other areas are so important."*

—Scott Welch,  
manager

who will kill for you. That sort of passion can go a long way, as long as the person is also smart enough to absorb knowledge, and savvy enough to play the networking game."

Indeed, many superstars had managers who had never managed an act before, including Dave Matthews and R.E.M. Even the Beatles' manager, Brian Epstein, had never before managed a group.

### 4. "A MANAGER CAN BOOK BETTER GIGS"

There's one problem with that assumption, and it's a big one. In California and New York, it is illegal for managers to book their acts. Only licensed agents can do so under the Talent Agency Act. The rationale for the law is to protect artists from mercenary predators.

Many artists are surprised to hear this, but it has been the norm for almost 100 years. If a manager books an act, he/she runs the risk of having their artist-management agreement declared null and void; they would have to give up all their commissions.

This law has created a dilemma for managers, especially those who work with up-and-coming artists. As Callahan points out, "Agents are only interested in acts that generate significant income from their live performances; and new

acts rarely do." So, managers are left with a conundrum. Some, like Porter, believe it's a stupid rule but are careful not to violate it. He notes, "Even though I have an office in Australia, I won't directly book gigs in California."

Others, like Welch, think, "Most managers are not booking agents anyway. Agents have connections we don't have, because it's their full-time job." In fact, he believes managers who don't use agents are fools. Fletcher contends, "It's an old law that needs to be changed." Nevertheless, she either hires a booker or has her artists book themselves.

Although Wolfson isn't really affected by this restriction, since Hall & Oates have a big time agent, he believes the law is inadequate. "I know it's meant to protect artists from unscrupulous individuals," he observes, "but managers and, in particular, business managers handle the act's money as well."

In fact, Wolfson rightly points out that more business managers have ripped off acts than managers. Regardless of what you may think about the law, it is what it is; do not expect a manager to book your gigs.

### 5. "A MANAGER WILL GUARANTEE IMMEDIATE SUCCESS"

Let's get real. There are no guarantees in the music business. There are just too many factors involved, many of which are beyond anyone's control. Additionally, a manager is not necessarily going to act quickly. Most prefer a courting period.

Our managers cited at least a two to three month period before they even decide to work with an act. "You have to get to know artists as people," Porter declares, "to see if you can get along." During that time, a prospective manager will watch a potential client closely. Both Porter and Fletcher indicate that they learn more by watching artists before a performance than they do during a show. "I want to see how they relate with each other, how they set up on stage, and how they treat people in the venue," Porter reveals. Fletcher contends, "I can predict how they'll do on stage by the way they act beforehand."

Once past that hurdle, artists still must be patient. Welch advises, "Unless an act has already laid the groundwork, it takes time to develop their market." According to Porter, "I know everyone is excited at the beginning of the relationship, and the anticipation of what could happen is great. But I need to know that the act can go all the way.... So artists should be

# 12 Questions to Ask a Prospective Manager

*We know it's exciting when a manager expresses interest in representing you. But before you ink a deal (or shake hands), it's a good idea to ask them a few key questions. That way you'll know what's involved and what you can expect.*

## 1. What do you think of my music/act/voice/show?

If they don't LOVE everything about you, look elsewhere. Managers should be passionate about their clients and willing to do whatever it takes to make them a success. If they're not, you won't get their best efforts. If, on the other hand, you need development, ask them how they think you could improve.

## 2. What is your experience?

While experience may be important, it's not essential. But, if the manager has experience, you might want to know what they've done, especially lately. Ask them about their biggest successes and disappointments. If their last success was decades ago, make sure they've kept current with the business. You need a visionary, not a historian. If the manager does not have much experience, ask him how he will approach the job, and why he wants to be a manager.

## 3. Who have you worked with?

References are nice, but if you ask for them you'll only get rave reviews. Check out their clients yourself and talk to a few of them—artist to artist. You'll get a more honest appraisal that way.

## 4. Who do you know?

Relationships and connections rule the music business. It's nice to know if a manager can open doors for you and bring in people that can advance your career. Ask the manager if he knows anyone who would make a great member of your team; and who they think would "get" your music.

## 5. Do you have time for me?

Successful managers are very busy. It's crucial to determine if they can give you the attention you deserve. Ask them how much time they're willing to devote to your project, and if you can call them at any time.

## 6. What's your game plan?

A manager should have a plan that they can articulate. It should include both long-term and short-term goals. Make sure you agree with their vision. If you don't, discuss it to see if you can get on the same page.

## 7. What do I (we) need to do?

Managers can't do everything for you. They need your help. Today, it's about teamwork, and that means "you" have to devote time as well—to more than just the creative aspects. At the very least, managers expect artists to promote shows and network with fans. They also like artists who have an open mind and will take their advice.

## 8. What do you want?

Managers will share in your success. Make sure you know what they want, and what income they will commission. Most managers commission every stream of income, while others only commission select streams. Managers may also ask for a share of copyrights and publishing, as well as other intellectual properties. Be sure you know the terms before agreeing to the deal.

## 9. Who will pay expenses?

There will be expenses. Who's going to pay them? If it's the manager, is it recoupable? And, if so, how? You shouldn't have to pay for your manager's overhead, i.e. office expenses. But, if a manager advances money for your project or living expenses, it's generally reimbursable.

## 10. What will you commission?

The average commission for managers is 20 percent. Determine what piece of the pie they're commissioning. Most importantly, find out if their commission is based on gross or net income. Most modern managers commission net income, or a combination of net and gross. If their commission is based on gross across the board, you may be dealing with a dinosaur.

## 11. Will you personally be representing my act?

This question is important if you are talking with a management firm that has several levels of staff. Often the Big Kahuna will court you, but then pass you off to a junior manager who's not nearly as experienced. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but you should know about it beforehand so that you can get to know the person who will actually be representing you.

## 12. Do you own a van?

A couple of our managers suggested that artists should ask this question, because some managers start out as a roadie / tour manager. In fact, Dave Matthews' manager used to drive the band to their gigs.

prepared to work harder than they ever have for at least a year and a half. It generally takes that long to develop them properly."

Are there exceptions? Of course there are, but you can't count on that. What you can count on, according to our managers, is a lot of hard work. "We like artists who work as hard as we do," Welch asserts, while Porter argues, "Artists should work harder than their manager. After all," he notes, "it's their dream and their career. If they're not willing to work for it, it doesn't matter how good a manager is. The act will not be successful."

## AVOIDING MISCONCEPTIONS

We have spotlighted only the most common misconceptions artists have about managers. Another interesting falsehood is that a good manager has industry at their beck and call, and can get them to a showcase. "That's not true," Porter proclaims. "Even we have a hard time getting them there."

The savvy Porter will sometimes invite them to dinner and personally take them to the venue. Even then, he laughs, "I've had A&R enjoy the meal and then tell me they had another appointment and couldn't make it."

The music business is a tough gig, for everyone involved. And artists can't expect their managers to be miracle workers.

Ultimately, everything is a littler easier if both artist and management communicate well. "That is the key," Fletcher advises. "You have to be open and honest with each other or you won't get anywhere."

# CONTACTS FOR THIS ARTICLE:

## Tom Callahan

Tom Callahan & Associates  
[www.tomcallahan.com](http://www.tomcallahan.com)  
[info@tomcallahan.com](mailto:info@tomcallahan.com)

## Chris Fletcher

Positive Music (Coast to Coast Music)  
[www.positivemusic.com](http://www.positivemusic.com)  
[ccmusic@pacbell.net](mailto:ccmusic@pacbell.net)

## Robie Porter

Wizard Music Group  
(Australia & the USA)  
[wizardmusicgrp@aol.com](mailto:wizardmusicgrp@aol.com)

## Scott Welch

Scott Welch Management  
[www.swelchmgt.com](http://www.swelchmgt.com)  
[scott@swelchmgt.com](mailto:scott@swelchmgt.com)

## Jonathan Wolfson

Wolfson Entertainment  
[www.wolfsonent.com](http://www.wolfsonent.com)  
[info@wolfsonent.com](mailto:info@wolfsonent.com)

