

“HEALTHY WAYS TO COPE: FOR THOSE IN THE WORLD OF MUSIC”

Michael E. Berrett, PhD

As wonderful as it is, the musician’s life is not an easy one. It’s no cakewalk for others working in the music industry either. The rigors of being on the road or in the studio, the pressures to write, create, and perform, and the separation from friends and family all take their toll. The changes in the industry which have come from technology, internet, and the current economic downturn have all cut into the traditions, the way of life, and the profits of musicians, songwriters, and subsequently, all ancillary services which support the creative work of music. Stress, adversity, changes, and difficulty are a regular companion.

It is no secret that the impact of these stressors has been significant, heart wrenching, and sometimes life shattering. There have been “direct hits” and there has been plenty of “collateral damage” – just ask anyone who works in the industry, their friends and family, spouses, and their children.

So what can be done to help? And whose job is it to make some changes?

Below are just a few ideas about what can be done. And who is going to do it? Well – if it is going to be done – then that would be you, and me, and each one of us! All positive change in the world begins with one person – it begins with you. Commitment, hard work, and perseverance are the purview of an individual soul. But when these “individual souls” then focus on a common cause – that is where the power of community comes into play, and that is where healing can and does occur. We approach our difficulties with faith and humility – believing that change is possible and that miracles happen. We ask for and receive help knowing that it is the community who can help in raising a child, or an adult, and then we do the hard work of improving our lives.

The following six principles can help us avoid or escape the pitfalls of addictive processes and other unhealthy and damaging styles of coping. They can also help us find more fulfillment, peace, and joy in our lives:

- 1) **REMEMBER WHY YOU DO WHAT YOU DO IN MUSIC** – It has been said by Victor Frankl, “He who knows ‘why’ can bear almost any ‘how.’” If we remember the deeper reasons why we do what we do, and if we can remember the connection of what we do with the deeper meaning and purpose of our lives – then we can stay connected in our work in a way that elevates the mundane and the stressful into a challenge and a journey to the important. This understanding can get us through the rigors of stardom or starvation. Remember why you are doing this.
- 2) **STAY REAL CLOSE TO A FEW GOOD FRIENDS AND FAMILY MEMBERS – BOTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF THE BUSINESS** – When we stay close to those who mean the most to us, then we are more insulated from addictive processes which can destroy us. Addictive process is too often an imitation of the real thing and an attempted replacement for real and meaningful relationships with ourselves, those we love, and who love us. In the music industry, sometimes our music becomes our best friend, or the excitement of the processes which keep music flowing, or even the bondage of an addiction can seem like our most reliable friend. Please don’t accept a counterfeit. Please do take a step closer to someone in your life who matters, who is long term, and who is for real.
- 3) **REMEMBER OUR WORK (EVEN OUR MUSIC) IS NOT WHO WE ARE, BUT ONLY AN EXPRESSION OF WHO WE ARE. WHO WE ARE IS MORE THAN WHAT WE DO** – Our creativity and those things

which we create, including music, is a vehicle for the expression of who we are, and an open door to the sharing of who we are. Our creation becomes both a container and an open gate to the gifts which we offer the world. Creativity ebbs and flows, and it would serve us well to remember that we are who we are with or without any specific expression. While expression brings a certain fulfillment to life, and allows us to share our gifts with others, it does not define us. We are so much more, and we are worth so much more. After all, our expressions of creative work are but a small glimpse into the limitless soul. So share your craft, but don't let it define or dictate who you are, or what your inner worth really is.

- 4) ***KEEP YOUR FAMILY CLOSE, INVOLVED, AND ENGAGED IN YOUR LIFE, AND REMAIN ENGAGED IN THEIRS*** – Sad as it is, we often allow our work to become that which takes us away from those we love the most, and this can be a tragedy. We live in a demanding and busy age where it is a constant magnetic force to pull us this way or that way in the furthering of our career or our craft. We often don't recognize, until in feeble age, or until it is almost too late, that our family is the top priority in our lives. Someone wisely said, "None of us, in our aging years will say, I wish I would have spent more time at the office." Seek now not only quality time with your family, but quantity time as well. Include them in your work any time that you can including writing, traveling, and performing. Let work bring you together, rather than allowing it to keep you apart.
- 5) ***PRACTICE GRATITUDE UNTIL IT BECOMES YOUR NATURE*** – When we are grateful for what we have, we are more insulated from addictive processes, and other unhealthy ways of coping. Often these unhealthy ways come from a place of wanting what we do not have – including wanting to numb out negative feelings or create positive feelings. Too often we long for what we don't have, while missing the joy that comes from noticing, appreciating, and enjoying what we do have. Gratitude comes from the realization and acceptance that what we have comes from the sacrifices, suffering, and generosity of others. When we forget this, and we attribute all of our successes and attainments to ourselves, we begin to lose our connection to gratitude and what others have done to pave the way for us. Notice, embrace, and express gratitude throughout each day and night.
- 6) ***TELL THE TRUTH, REACH OUT FOR HELP, AND EMBRACE LOVE AND SUPPORT IN YOUR LIFE*** – Support comes from many different places, and social and emotional support is something which we all need in our lives. We not only want to receive that from others, but we want to give it to others as well. When we tell the truth about our successes, and also our struggles, then we can begin to notice our needs. As we notice our needs, we can consider options in taking good care of ourselves. Sometimes our pride, or our fear, becomes an obstacle in this rewarding process of giving and receiving love, and giving and receiving support. When we ask for help, we cease to reject or resist love in our lives. When we ask others for help, we give them the greater gift – the knowledge that we trust, appreciate, and are positively impacted by their lives. To whom can we ask for help? Your mother, your spouse, your friend, your father, your daughter, your spiritual mentor, professional counselors, physicians, or organizations such as MusiCares, AA, NAMI, and NEDA. Whatever your struggle, you are not alone, and as we give and receive help, our lives become more meaningful.

Remembering why you do what you do, staying close to a few good people, remembering that we are more than what we do, staying intently engaged in our families, practicing gratitude, and reaching out for help are things that we can all do. We can, in fact, do them a little better. Life in the

music world will find more fulfillment as we follow wise principles of self care, including those which allow us to manage our work and choose our destiny, rather than finding ourselves a puppet to processes which feel outside of our control. May each of you find peace in your livelihood and your life, and may you share that peace with those who matter the most. This a prayer, a hope, a potentiality.

- Michael E. Berrett, PhD is a licensed psychologist and Co-Founder and CEO of Center for Change treatment center in Orem, Utah. He is a writer, national speaker and trainer. He is a musician, and has an interest, respect, and love for music. Dr. Berrett can be contacted at 801-224-8255 or mberett@centerforchange.com