The Importance of Being Professional

By Tom Lee

Punctuality, reliability, preparation and good manners. When working in the music industry, professionalism is key.

Those few words need to be followed, practiced and memorised to make a recipe for making a successful living in an industry where making friends and getting yourself known (in a good way) is of utmost importance.

Imagine you are a sound engineer working on a recording project as the only engineer. The artist turns up, the producer turns up, but you’re late and have no plans for the session prepared. No equipment is set up, nothing is ready for a recording and it’s all down to you. Whatever your excuse, in the music industry it means a black mark against your name, a job lost and potential jobs possibly lost too.

There is always a need to be punctual, reliable and prepared because, make a bad name for yourself by not doing so, and there will be very limited work for you and not much hope for your personal success.

Being punctual and reliable is critical because people will be looking to you to meet deadlines and be where you need to be at the time you should be there. Preparation is key to being a professional as it could save you time and in the music industry, time quite often costs money.

Health and safety, the principle of it and the practice of it, is another key part of being a professional. You must know how to be safe within the workplace to protect yourself, others and sometimes your reputation.

Hard hats, steel-toed boots, harnesses and ear protection are definitely your friends in the music industry, particularly in live sound. These are some the pieces of clothing and equipment that could save your life or career.

Within the workplace, having and learning the safety procedures for safe working practice will make you look professional and give you an extra skill. The assessing of a situation, knowing the safety risks and how to avoid or remedy them could save you your career in the industry. If you don’t follow safety procedures or don’t know safety procedures and someone else or yourself is harmed as a result of that, your reputation as a professional could be tarnished and so could your name in the music industry.

Your health as a person and a professional is important too. In the music industry the most valuable pieces of equipment you will ever use are your ears, without them you are nothing in the music industry. So you should look after them by using ear protection when needed and having checkups for hearing conditions such as tinnitus.

It’s not all about being professional in the workplace. To even get to have a workplace you need to show that flare, that ambition that says that you are the man (or woman) for the job. This means good manners when meeting people in the industry are important because first impressions could make your name. As well as good manners, being able to communicate well with people in a confident way will help you seem confident and assertive even if you aren’t.

Communicating with others confidently is one thing, but to also have the ability to negotiate with others to your advantage is a key skill. It could get you a job or buy you some time if you are hard-pushed.
Making people see that you are passionate about what you do and your views on what you do also shows you are professional. Showing you are committed to your job or the job you are looking to get will definitely help you advertise yourself as a freelance business by, again, giving a good first impression.

Of course in the business world, first impressions aren’t always made face-to-face. They are made by websites or newspaper columns that you make to try and make a good impression on people without even meeting them.

Music blogger Andrew Dubber said, ‘Online, you don’t get to make the impression personally. Your website has to do that for you. What most people think of you depends entirely on what they encounter when they find you online.’

‘Your website is not an electronic pamphlet about your business. It’s not promotion for your business. It’s not a way of generating business. Your website is your business’.

Just having your own website won’t be enough to well and truly get yourself a decent web presence either. Social networking websites such as ‘myspace’, ‘facebook’ and ‘twitter’ will help you a lot in that they give great opportunities for networking, communicating with others and advertising yourself as a business. For advertising yourself, ‘myspace’ has an advantage other networking websites as it gives you the option of putting music up on the site so people can listen to your work.

One of the key traits to being professional is preparation, and this doesn’t just mean within your work itself. Applying for and becoming a professional member of industry organisations can help you in different ways. Becoming a member of the BPI (British Phonographic Industry) means your work is copyright protected and others cannot take credit for it without breaking the law. Joining the PRS (Performing Rights Society) means that whenever your work is played or performed to the public, you are given money (royalties) for the use of your work. The Musicians Union will protect you legally and represent you in court if needs be. Becoming a member of these organisations shows you are prepared legally and that you are making sure you earn some money from your works.

As you gain skills and experience in the industry, adding information about them to your CV could stop you missing out on jobs you would have missed if you forgot to keep your CV up-to-date. The more you have to show in your CV, the more professional you will look.

It seems then that the bottom-line is choosing your words well and presenting yourself in a formal way, be it through personal meeting or through your website. Get people talking about you to other people and branch out, don’t just wait for a job to fall in your lap. After all, people can’t hire you if they don’t know you’re there.