



Part II: Hiring a Manager

After your music attorney, the next important member of your team is your manager. Management contracts typically tie the artist to the manager for between three and seven years so you really need to take your time on this decision.

A great manager/artist relationship is founded on trust. Many artists take on the duties of the manager themselves when they are first starting out. It's also not uncommon for a friend or relative to pitch in and assume this role. If this is working for you, and your career is moving ahead, there may not be any reason to change to a more experienced manager. You do need to put your arrangement down in writing - but do not sign it until you have had a qualified music attorney look it over and advise you.

Managers typically take 15-25% of an artists earnings (preferably after deductions). If you are considering hiring a manager, ask for references and check on them! If the manager is just starting out, contact their past employers even if they are not music related. You can learn about their reliability, trustworthiness, and other character traits that you will want in a manager.

Most artists prefer to be focused on the immediate future (the next gig, new songs, the next album) and the far future (hit songs, awards, fame). A great manager is able to fill in the gaps in the middle by identifying the artist's strengths and weaknesses and developing appropriate plans to get the artists where they want to go. The manager's role is similar to that of a really great parent. Some duties include:

Making sure the artists look right when they go out in public (image creation and maintenance).

Giving their opinion and advice on where to go and where not to go (which venues, interviews, tours, etc. are most beneficial).

Grounding the artists when necessary (canceling commitments when medical or other emergencies arise).

Signing permission slips (looking over any offers and sometimes signing on behalf of the artist).

Bragging (talking up the artist to everyone).

Protection (being that layer between the artist and others so that the manager, not the artist, is perceived as the "authority figure").

Be very cautious about managers who require a large retainer up front. As with any business there are disreputable managers and management companies out there who are great salespeople. They will inspire your trust and make you believe that they can "make you a star." They will explain that because they will be working so hard for you they will need a retainer to cover the incidentals. . . but the contract usually calls this a non-refundable retainer so if the manager never lifts a finger on your behalf not only are you out of your money and locked into a contract, you may need to spend more money to take them to court!

Under a typical management contract, the manager agrees to make "reasonable efforts" on the artist's behalf to forward their career - and that's about it. The artist's obligations are much more lengthy. Unless it's a well negotiated contract, the artist probably doesn't have any easy ways to get out of it early either. In fact, contracts are usually renewable at the option of the manager - not the artist!

So take your time and follow your instincts. Check references and ask questions of past employers whether music related or not. Get the deal in writing - but don't sign unless you have had a qualified music attorney analyze it for you and explain the pros and cons.

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Here are some things to think about when you are interviewing a potential manager

1) What are your first impressions of this person?

This person will be representing you in various dealings where you'll want to be taken seriously to get the best deals possible. You want your manager's first impression to be "professional, intelligent, competent person."

2) How many years have you worked as a manager?

This will give you some indication of experience. A great manager will take this as an open ended question and use it as an opportunity to brag about experience and accomplishments. If the manager simply says 5 years it's not bad, but it could be if you start seeing a pattern of short answers to direct questions. Why? Your manager should take every opportunity to plug your greatness to others. If the manager doesn't do this automatically when trying to gain your trust and get the job – will it come naturally later when it really counts?

3) Who are you currently managing and how long have you been with them?

You can learn a few things with this question. If the manager has been working as a manager for 5 or more years but all of the clients are new. . . was there a problem that made all of the artists jump at the end of the contract term? How does the manager talk about current clients?

4) Who have you worked with in the past?

A great follow-up to the last question. Do you recognize the bands? Where are they with their careers? Jot down those band names so you can ask them about the manager.

5) How many clients do you usually carry? Is artist management your only job? Do you have other employment or outside time commitments?

You want the manager working hard on your behalf so you don't want them spreading themselves thin.

6) Have you heard our music? What did you think of it? How would you describe our sound?

Now this is a really great indicator of this person's preparedness. You want a manager who goes into meetings on your behalf completely prepared. You also want a manager who "gets" you and can easily describe you to others by talking about your sound, making appropriate comparisons to other bands, and again talking you up.

7) What do you think of our image? How would you describe our image and target audience? Do you think we need to make any changes?

Again, this will be an opportunity for the candidate to talk about you, to share their vision of who you are, and more importantly who they think you should be to reach the audience they have in mind.

8) If you ask a question that the candidate obviously doesn't know the answer to – how do they handle it? Do they make something up or do they admit to not knowing and offer to get back to you. Again, this person will represent you with others. You want someone who is honest and who doesn't just make things up on the fly.

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