

13 Strategies in Becoming a Successful Musician

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1. ALWAYS BE EARLY- *On time is late!* Everyone will appreciate you being early: the contractor, conductor, and fellow musicians. Nothing will make them worry more than when you're late. And you may not get asked back. Do whatever it takes to make sure you're ready to go before the start time; 15-30 minutes before should be plenty.

2. PRACTICE IN SHORTER DOSES MORE OFTEN- Attention spans are shortening. Minds wander. You don't need to spend 4-8 hours in the practice room to have accomplished something. Shorter, more consistent and more focused sessions will produce better results. Aim for 15-20 minutes of focused practice at a time.

3. HAVE A CLEAR VISION OF WHAT YOU WANT AND WHERE YOU SEE YOURSELF- Wherever that is: the concert stage, the arena, the jazz club, the studio; but be open to change. When I was in college, I wanted to be a rock musician with a classical background. In my junior year, I wanted to be a classical musician while maintaining my rock chops on the side. And that's what happened.

4. DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK QUESTIONS- Asking shows you care! When I was learning music theory in high school, I constantly asked questions and even stayed after class until I thoroughly understood the topic. The only stupid question is the question that's never asked.

5. BE AS VERSATILE AS POSSIBLE. THE MORE OF THESE, THE BETTER:

a. Learn as many styles on the drumset as possible- Be the rare person that can play most anything, not just a couple styles. More styles=more opportunities.

b. Learn more skills besides your main focus- *Business, education, and performing go hand in hand.* It will always help to learn basic business skills: networking and marketing, doing your taxes, and managing a band/yourself are just a few. Teaching skills bring in private students and opportunities to hold master classes and/or teach in a classroom. If performing is light, you'll have other options to keep your career moving.

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c. Learn to sing- You don't have to be Bruno Mars, but being able to sing some background vocals in a band will make you more versatile and hireable. If you can sing harmonies or even some lead, even better! I started with simple background vocals in my first band. Soon after, I learned harmonies. Eventually, I was singing lead vocals behind the kit for a few songs. Now, I'm singing lead vocals with a Beatles acoustic group where I'm not even playing drums. You never know where it will lead you!

d. Learn another instrument- You'll be able to relate to, and understand, your fellow band members better. Drummers that play another instrument can be more musical on their own. And who's to say you couldn't play all the instruments on your album like Paul McCartney, Prince-or Dave Grohl?

e. Study music theory- You'll better understand your band mates and you'll be able to speak their language. Instead of having nothing to offer, you can join a conversation about harmony, intervals, chords. Be a *musician*, not just a drummer.

6. LISTEN TO AS MANY STYLES AS POSSIBLE- Learning different styles on the drums lends itself to listening to those styles of music. African, Rock, Jazz, Classical, Pop and the many Latin styles are all related. The more you know, the more of an interesting, creative and marketable drummer you will be. Green Day, Rachmaninoff, Iron Maiden, Benny Goodman, Afro-Cuban All Stars, and Maroon 5 can all have a place in your life!

7. BE YOURSELF- *Be likeable and fun to work/play with.* People want to work with those that are easy to get along with. You can be the best player in the world, but if you have a bad attitude, you're not going to get much work. And word spreads quickly!

8. ALWAYS PLAY YOUR BEST- *No matter who or how many people are watching.* There are countless stories of there being 3 people in the audience and one of those people is a record producer. Or a famous musician. Or your next big referral. You never know who is watching and what will come of it, so play your best at all times.

9. BE OVER-PREPARED- *Whether it's a gig, rehearsal, audition, or studio session, know the music inside and out.* Nerves can creep in too, so the more prepared you are, the less they'll have an effect. Do everything that will keep you in the healthiest mindset to perform your best. Don't settle for just getting the job done; go above and beyond! You can never prepare enough.

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10. LEARN TO READ MUSIC- *Just do it!* The sooner you get started, the better (and the easier it will be). If you can't read, you won't be able to play classical music and musical theater. You also won't be able to play on most recording sessions or play in bands that require reading charts. It will likely keep you from teaching in a professional environment. Learning to read will also give you the ability to transcribe charts for drums and other instruments. Again, you'll be speaking the language. It's a skill that will help you get so much further in the music world.

11. CREATE YOUR OWN OPPORTUNITIES- *aka your own luck.* Don't be afraid to ask someone for a recommendation or referral. Offer to do something for free. You never know what can come out of any situation. I could write a book on how many times a gig or friendship was the result of creating my own opportunity.

12. ATTEND LIVE CONCERTS- Nothing compares to seeing live musicians performing on stage, whether it's a 100-piece symphony orchestra or 5-piece rock band, hearing how music comes alive right in front of you can be a life-changing experience. In the classical style, hearing the best orchestras in the world interpret notes from a piece of manuscript paper is an education in itself.

13. NEVER STOP LEARNING- No matter where you are, beginner or pro, there is always something more to learn. Have an open mind. Learn from others. Always try to get better. Have fun! Drumming, like life, is a never-ending journey!