

Ask Mike!

Stressed about an upcoming gig? Work got you singing the blues? Columnist Michael Goode can help!



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LOCAL 10-208 MEMBER

In my last column, in March, we talked about some personal and management issues in our business and how to deal with them. Today, I am going to talk about how to keep in touch with yourself and keep your artistic focus and your muse as an artist in the midst of ever-changing situations and schedules. We'll also talk about how to handle a change in your work schedule. Here's April's Q&A:

Q: Lately I am having a great deal of trouble keeping my artistic sense alive in my career. It seems that schedules, deadlines and pressure from the orchestra and from other events in life are taking their toll. I have spoken to a therapist, but he is not a musician, and does not completely understand the level of excellence required and the resultant pressure that I am under in my job as he is not a musician at all. How do I cope with this?

A: I was giving a talk to actors in a workshop and I was speaking about this very thing. Many in the audience had exactly the same dilemma. It is sometimes very difficult due to the massive misunderstanding on the part of non-musicians to keep our focus and our artistic sense and standards intact when we are living in a world that does not understand art or music on the level that we do. Trying to explain to non-musicians what it is that we do can be very frustrating and difficult at times. But please keep in mind that there are many other artists out there that understand and struggle with the same issues that you do.

Remember that music is part of your life and who you are, and don't let anyone or anything compromise your standards or principles as an artist. You must always be true to your real self, what I call your Person A, and not let your false self, what I have referred to before as Person B, take over. Allowing Person B to take over is when we start to cave into pressure and begin to lose our muse. Write an anger letter or letters about the conflicts and pressure that you are facing with trying to keep connected to your true artistic self.

For those who haven't read my columns before, an anger letter is written with pen and paper and you can write about any subject as long as you use the word anger or angry in it. Do not show them to anyone else; the letters must be private and uncensored. Tear the letter up when you are done. These letters are a great release of stressful emotions that are blocking you from performing your best.

Anger letters are based on the groundbreaking work of Rudolph Dreikurs, M.D. It is the Person A self within which the ease of playing at

the highest artistic standards lies. I talk about the Person A/Person B dilemma in my next book, "Your True Self," in more detail. Good luck!

Q: I have a new steady gig that requires me to get up and be at rehearsal at 9 a.m. four days a week. For years I have been playing clubs till the wee hours of the morning. I love this new regular job and the music and pay is great, but the schedule is killing me! I have almost either overslept a few times and then some nights couldn't even get to sleep or stay asleep. I love this job and want to play my best and not lose it by either oversleeping or not being totally awake. What's your suggestion of how to cope with the new schedule?

A: Well, first of all bravo to you on the new job! Make sure you remind yourself of what a great job this is even though the new schedule is a huge challenge!! After years of playing very late-night gigs, it's hard to get adjusted to such a different schedule. Also, energetically, it's sometimes hard to make art early in the morning when everyone else in the world is on a more businesslike schedule.

Try to make sure you exercise daily to get your nervous system a chance to operate and drain the excess energy it produces every day. This is one of the reasons that people cannot sleep; not enough physical exercise which also exercises the nervous system. This should make you sleep better. Yoga, tai chi, and qi gong are great daily exercises if you don't know what to do for daily exercise. They also help focus the mind on the day ahead when you do them in the morning and help relieve stress as a result.

Also, try to set a reasonable time to go to sleep, even 10 hours before you have to get up, and try to start to get ready for bed an hour early. Make sure the room is dark when you go to sleep. And no caffeine, chocolate or carbonated soft drinks or tea at least six to eight hours before bedtime. All of these things contain caffeine and they will keep you awake!

Be patient with getting adjusted to the new schedule; it sometimes takes the body at least two weeks to adapt to a new sleep time. In the interim, write some anger letters about the situation while you are transitioning to the new sleep pattern so you can keep your focus and do your job until the new sleep habits kick in; something like, "I am angry that it is taking so long for my body to adjust to the new sleep pattern." This will send a signal to your unconscious to readjust your nervous system faster to the new sleep pattern and give you some insight into what might be standing in the way of doing so. Even if you are not overtly angry about anything, anger letters create all kinds of efficient behaviors in our nervous system, something that has been consistent with all the clients and research that I have worked with over the past few years. They work like a charm for your playing too when you get blocked on a passage that you are working on! Hang in there!!

Send your questions to: Ask Mike!, Trumpetworks Press, 715 Lake Street #269, Oak Park, IL 60301, or you can check out my website at www.trumpetworkspress.com and see information on my book, "Stage Fright in Music Performance and Its Relationship to the Unconscious." All names are confidential and will not be published.

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