

# Ask Mike!

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



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In my last column, in December, we talked about stage fright and how to help your students if they have the condition. We also talked about the mindset of playing when you are sick and how to use it to your advantage when you are feeling well again. Today, we are going to talk about people who have made it big but can't handle their success and how to deal with this.

**Q: Hey Mike, I have this friend in my band that I have known since high school. We have been buddies for years and we have always been best friends. Lately, we have become very successful and famous both in this town and in the rest of the world. I am happy for us, but he is all of sudden not the same. He acts like a real egomaniac and treats me lousy. What happened to the guy I know?**

**A:** Believe or not, your buddy is suffering from a severe case of stage fright, what I call "outside-the-stage" stage

fright. That means instead of having his stage fright on stage while performing, he takes it all out on you and the rest of your band. Unfortunately, there is no textbook out there to follow when you become successful, especially really successful.

Recently, I have been working with somebody with this same problem. You seem like you are handling all the success and fame just fine from the tone of your letter, but your buddy is not. Many times in our industry and in all the creative and performing arts, we can fall for all the stereotypes of what the media calls "the artistic personality" which is usually another way of saying that someone is an egocentric egomaniac and at worst, a megalomaniac, meaning a person seeking power above all else.

It doesn't have to be this way. I have been fortunate to be taught by teachers that are legends and world famous in the trumpet and brass world who didn't have any of these problems; they were and are just regular people. Your friend is responding to the fact that deep down he is scared to death about the prospect of continuing huge worldwide success and fame and is hiding behind the false screen of arrogance and ego in order to cope. This is a bad and ineffective strategy as it does not address what is bothering him in any way and sooner or later, the problems that he is struggling with deep down will continue to haunt him and could eventually affect his performing ability. One

only has to look at the news to see how many young successful performers are struggling with these very same issues.

I URGE YOU to speak to your friend directly, don't mince words, tell him he is an egomaniac right now, that he needs help, and that his art will get better instead of worse by trying to

deal with his fears. Too many great artists have ended their lives in tragedy by not dealing with these issues before it is too late. Get him in therapy with a professional therapist and detox program immediately if he has substance abuse issues. Have him checked out physically by a doctor as well. You owe it to him as his longtime friend. He'll thank you in the end for saving his life and his career. That's what friends are for!

**Q: Michael, this guy in our combo got a great review in a major magazine recently from a gig that we did. Now all of a sudden he's too good for us and is telling us at jams and rehearsals that we need to change this and change that and that we are no good here and no good there. He really is out of control. What can we do? We haven't changed our level of play at all, in fact it has gotten better, even the reviewer said so.**

**A:** This is another case of somebody that cannot handle his success and is confusing his own fear of success and the future with artistic standards. Sadly, this happens a lot in our business. The band members need to stick to the standards you have already established that brought you to this point and the three of you need to go up to him and tell him he needs help using the same suggestions as above. There is no point in having all of your careers ruined by your combo mate's refusal to deal with his own fears. He needs professional help and a checkup by a doctor wouldn't hurt either to see if the stress of success has also led to some unforeseen physical and substance abuse problems. Don't wait – get together with your buddies and tell him that he needs help in the most direct

but diplomatic way you can. You owe it to him and you owe it to your fellow combo mates.

Unfortunately, such ego-driven behavior is mistaken by the person who suffers from it as a substitute for real confidence. Those who depend on ego to succeed once they get to really huge success in their career will be in for a rude awakening once their ego gives out and the inevitable fears come to the surface when they least expect it. It could be too late if the behavior surfaces on a major important gig when their career is at stake. The pressures will simply keep increasing as you get successful if you don't know how to handle them.

The myth of the temperamental artistic personality perpetuated by people who are not musicians or artists hurts all of us deeply every day when we go to work, and robs us of our credibility with employers. This mythology is saddest when a truly great and sincere artist believes that the only way they can preserve their success is to keep their ego as large as possible. We are all used to putting up with people like this, but as much as we can, we need to somehow see that such people get the help they really need. This helps not only them but all of us. You don't have to be an egomaniac to be a truly great artist; you just need to have genuine confidence in yourself which is a totally different thing than ego!

*Send your questions to: Ask Mike!, Trumpetworks Press, P.O. Box 11574, Marina del Rey, CA 90295 or you can check out my website at [www.trumpetworkspress.com](http://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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