

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 October, we talked about how to keep going when the going gets tough and the importance of playing with heart. Today we are going to talk about how to deal with a new conductor and what to do if a career-changing opportunity beckons.

Q: I have been in this orchestra for 30 years and now we have a new conductor. This new conductor seems radically different in every way and I would like some guidelines on how to deal with him. Even though I have the value of years of experience, I'd appreciate your thoughts on this matter.

A: Thank you for your letter and I am happy to give you my thoughts on this important subject. The same advice which follows goes for working under a new contractor as well as under a new conductor! The first thing to keep in perspective is that conductors and contractors are people, too, as well as being your boss. Although most of

them would never admit it, just as most of us would never admit to being anxious on the job or even having stage fright, conductors and contractors suffer from these things and have their own set of pressures just as we do. It does help when you have a new conductor or contractor to understand this and it will help to keep your perspective and your relationship with your new boss.

With that said, there are a few guidelines in dealing with new musical bosses. First, stick pretty much to what you have been doing with the previous music director or contractor and observe for a week or so how things go. If things are fine and you haven't been commented on or talked to negatively by the conductor or other members, that's a good sign that your new boss is happy with how you are doing. Still, keep cautious eyes and ears out for anything that may be unusual of course but if after a month or two, everything seems fine, then you are probably going to be OK. However, always trust your instincts and if something seems funny and you feel something is not quite right, discreetly ask around to make sure there are no political storms brewing that you have to watch out for!

If, however, you are getting singled out and picked on right away within the next two weeks, talk to your colleagues and see what the conductor doesn't like. Talk to colleagues that you trust that seem to be doing all right under this conductor. If the conductor is berating everyone, it's time to talk to your colleagues and go to your union steward to make a complaint so the abuse will stop. There is no place for abuse from a conductor or a contractor in this business.

As I have mentioned in previous

columns, write an anger letter (that you never send) with pen and paper about the situation if your emotions on this issue start to get in the way of your playing and/or your relations with your colleagues on the job. Use the word "anger" or "angry" in the letter and start it with something like: "I am angry that..." You don't have to be angry for these letters to work; for reasons unknown, using the word "anger" or "angry" in the letter unlocks our deep unconscious, where the smartest part of ourselves lies – what I call Person A.

Three things will happen after you write an anger letter: you will feel relief, find something else you are angry about, or you might feel numb. If you feel relief, great; if you find something else you are angry about, keep writing until you feel relief. If you are numb, write an anger letter that says, "I am angry that I feel numb and have no reference point" and you will get a thought or an idea which will serve as a reference point to begin writing. When you feel numb after writing an anger letter, this means that the issue could be an old, deeply buried issue that is keeping you from making good choices. The anger letters should always be private, uncensored and should be torn up when done.

Q: I have a full-time orchestra job but I also have a hobby that is turning into a career where I can make more money than my orchestra job. I am tempted to retire early and follow this new path. I am torn as to what to do. Any advice?

A: These are the tough questions of life. You want to think very carefully about what you really want to do and give yourself a few months to think about this from every angle and try to envi-

ron all possibilities. Remember that you have spent years developing your craft and are at a very high level of ability which took you a lifetime to develop and succeed at. What do you like about your current gig? What don't you like about it? If your job ended tomorrow, and you didn't have this new potential career opportunity, how would you feel?

Also, you have to think carefully that this desire to make a change in career might not be about a job change but about something else going on emotionally in your life. Or this decision could be about money if you are having financial difficulties. Don't make this decision by yourself. Find colleagues who are now retired who have made similar decisions, see how things all worked out for them or not, and see what they were happy about with their decision and what they regretted. Talk to as many people as you can that won't share your secret with other members of the orchestra. Wise consul on such a big decision is worth a lot. Also, the more people you can talk to the better. And give yourself plenty of time to think about this. If you get frustrated by the decision-making process, don't let your anxieties or impatience get to you. Write an anger letter on the subject as soon as you can following the instructions above and you will get more clarity on what the best thing is to do.

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 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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