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A DIFFERENT BEAT

Thinking Inside the Box

STU’S PRACTICAL BACKUP BOX, UPDATED

By Stu Chisholm

Since I wrote them a while back, I have often gotten compliments on a number of articles (see links in sidebar) in which I detailed the things I bring along to handle potential problems—and prevent outright disaster. Like astronauts on a NASA mission, we are often far away from help, so we need to bring along all the things we’ll need, even if it is unlikely we’ll need them.

IN THE BAG

Some of these things I carry in my suit bag, such as a sewing kit, spare buttons, spare shoelaces, a first aid kit, safety pins and a few other goodies that either I or a wedding party member might suddenly need. Always going a bit above and beyond, I’ve also made it a habit to pack extra garters, as emotionally distressed brides often forget this detail, and a cake cutting set, something that often gets left behind in the whirlwind that is a typical wedding.

TECH SUPPORT

The DJ industry is tech-oriented, so I also carry a tech support toolbox. Following the lead of crime scene investigators, artists and other pros, I picked up a large fishing tackle box with a lot of pull-out drawers and compartments. In it are the things I need constantly, such as batteries, zip ties, electrical tape and an assortment of tools (screw drivers, pliers, a good flashlight, etc.). As usual, like Spinal Tap, I take it to 1: I also bring a dB meter, a multi-meter, and a frequency spectrum analyzer.

The dB meter comes in handy for several things. First, being that I’m rapidly approaching my 40th year as a DJ, suffice it to say that my hearing isn’t what it used to be. If the volume sounds just fine to me, chances are it’s blaring for others, so I’ve learned to check myself by using the meter. It also is great when setting up to find out what my noise floor is, so that I can accurately divine what my overall volume needs to be. Lastly, if you’re ever running a contest and need an “applause meter,” you’ve got one!

The multimeter is great for a last-minute electronic repair or simply checking for live outlets. The spectrum analyzer lets you run a pink noise sweep of your room, letting you optimize your speaker placement and EQ settings so you can sound your best.

Another handy gadget is a circuit breaker locator. Whether the power is on or off, this handy unit can find the breaker that your gear is plugged into, or the breaker for any outlet in your location. Just plug the transmitter module into the outlet, go back to the box and run the locator up and down the breakers. A sound and light indicates when you’ve gotten the right one. This is especially handy for those of us who run very large events where a lot of power is needed. Any hardware store should sell this.

The last items in the box are an assortment of adapters, electronic repair stuff (wire strippers, butt connectors, a soldering pen, replacement fuses for every piece of gear that has one), extra rack screws, direct boxes for multi-amp/speaker setups, and even some turntable cartridge cleaning and maintenance tools. These are topped-off with a couple of Sharpies and large markers, which somehow are always needed.

OUTSIDE THE BOX...ANOTHER BOX!

What was not included in my long-ago article were those things I routinely bring that are not in my DJ tech box but have been essential in certain situations. First and foremost is my jump box. It’s actually a combination jump-starter, for those times when you leave your lights on and your car/truck won’t start, and a compressor, so you can fill the tires of your vehicle, equipment dollies or hand trucks. It also has an inverter function, so that you can run a small PA system from it. This is extremely handy when you’re doing a wedding ceremony in a remote location where there’s no power. Not all jump boxes are created equal, so look for a good one with these multiple features.

Of course we all carry extra cords for both electrical connections as well as audio. But how do you keep people from tripping over them while protecting them? Many DJs I know use a “wire tunnel,” which is great, if you don’t mind lugging the extra weight. My solution is a bit more basic and less expensive: rubberized floor mats. Stash a few in your truck or trailer. Secure them with gaffer’s tape if necessary. Also, if you’re running your cords over a lawn in an outdoor situation, think ahead: get some cheap wire hangers and cut some long U-shaped pieces. Put them over your cords, securing them to the ground like croquet hoops.

Such a tiny bit of thought and preparation can go a long way towards keeping you, your gear and your party guests safe and happy. Until next time, safe spinnin’!

Stu Chisholm had been collecting music since he was about age 8 and began his DJ career in 1979. After a stint at the Specs Howard School of Broadcast Arts, he studied the DJ arts with famous Michigan broadcaster Bill Henning, interned at Detroit’s rock powerhouse, WRIF, and later added voiceover work and club gigs at Detroit’s best venues. He has shared his extensive DJ experience through MB columns, as a seminar speaker and through his book, The Complete Disc Jockey: A Comprehensive Manual for the Professional DJ.

Stu’s Previous Toolbox Pieces

“Suit Bag Survival Savvy,” (MB #98, December 2005, p50)
“Sweating the Small Stuff,” (MB #105, January 2007, p96)
“Don’t Panic!” (MB #119, January 2009, p26)

Musical Tools

Along with all the great stuff Stu talks about above, you might also consider carrying a “Mobile Musical Emergency Kit,” as described by Jay Maxwell in the same issue as Stu’s 2009 “Don’t Panic” piece (page 22). Jay offered 100 essential songs to “never be without.” While Jay’s song lists contain a good number of songs that are irrelevant now, the number of songs that HAVEN’T fallen out of regular use is eye-opening.
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Without question, the most important tool in my toolbox is simple: it’s my mindset to always be learning, thinking, creating, and innovating.

I ask myself: How can I create a celebration that leaves guests asking me how long I have known the couple (because “that wedding was so Tim and Emily.”)? That’s what I do. It’s what I am known for in my area.

I refuse to do “cookie-cutter” events like my competitors or the industry at large. That’s not my brand. That’s not my process. That’s not my business model. It’s also reflected by the fees I charge. My clients expect a unique, personalized celebration for their events—and that’s what I give them.

CULTIVATING CREATIVITY

Creative productivity CAN BE measured and systems CAN BE put in place to improve the overall quality in what we do as an industry. Creativity is something that can be learned.

How? I am continually feeding my mind with multisensory stimuli, both related to and especially unrelated to the DJ (or even wedding) industry. I look at well-done restaurant menus. Cookbooks. Color chips from paint stores. Browse greeting cards. There is a lot of creative stimulus available—literally everywhere, all the time. In fact, some of my best “Eureka!” moments for events have come from long drives with the radio off; or sometimes, it’s a 10 minute “blind shower” – a.k.a. a shower with your eyes closed (one of the ideas from Lawrence Katz’s book Keep Your Brain Alive: 83 Neurobic Exercises to Help Prevent Memory Loss and Increase Mental Fitness). Sometimes, it’s while listening to jazz, or right after working out; it just depends. The point is, to always be creating something is my mindset for truly memorable events.

Try this idea: Go to your local bookstore (yes, they still exist) with a package of Post-it® notes. Go to the magazine section and browse the covers of magazines. Don’t open any—just study the covers for at least 20 minutes. Look at magazines in several different categories. Do you see a trend? Then, detail on 6 to 10 post it notes, the stories or trends from the covers that jump out at you. Next, grab a mocha with your fresh notes and a sheet of paper and jot down your thoughts. No judgment. Nothing is silly or brilliant at this time. Just jot them down. This becomes an immediate stimulus for generating new ideas, whether now or in the future. This free-association works! Then rework the concepts until you create a dozen or so valid ideas. The more you do this, the faster they will come. (Once you’ve done this a few times, you can narrow it to say, the wedding...
industry. Sometimes, I’ll do this with wedding magazines, travel magazines, decorating, fashion and lifestyle magazines to cultivate fresh ideas.)

This process of exploring various subjects sets off a chain reaction to fuel business growth through a flurry of fresh ideas. A key to my ongoing success is that I’m always feeding my mind. I really do read or listen to about 70 books per year (mostly at “Auto-U”—in my vehicle while driving to and from events). They cover a myriad of topics: marketing, design, artists, musicians, historical figures, psychology, economics, etc., etc. In fact, I am just finishing up a great audio book on the life of Leonardo da Vinci. It’s simply fascinating!

On a separate visit, go back to the magazine section at the bookstore, again with sticky notes in hand. Select a couple of small business magazines and read the articles detailing how other small businesses have become successes. It is especially important that these businesses be unrelated to your industry. As you read, jot down specific principles, thoughts, quotes and lessons that the business owners found especially important. When done, you’ll have a healthy stack of Post-its notes of “business wisdom” as a source of inspiration for creating new ideas. The more you do this, you too will find that your ability to learn, think, create and innovate will progress. Soon, you will begin to assemble a portfolio of thoughts and ideas that even if not applicable today, could be tomorrow. I continually take those principles that speak to me, then work and “cross-apply” those principles to build a better me, a better business and superior performances in the future. I know what you’re thinking: “Do I need to write all this down?” Yes! As the Chinese proverb says, “The weakest ink lasts longer than the strongest memory.”

To further build your creative muscle, check out Doug Hall’s book, Jump Start Your Business Brain: Win More, Lose Less and Make More Money. Consider things like:

1) Read something you normally don’t read.
2) Exercise regularly. (Fun Fact: Your brain consumes 20% of you the oxygen you inhale.)
4) Learn a new skill or take a class.
5) Cook a meal from scratch. Cooking engages your entire brain, and multiple senses.
6) Listen to (and try to appreciate) music you wouldn’t normally listen to.
7) Experience new people.
8) Write your thoughts on paper. Write a poem, a story, a skit—just something to articulate your thoughts and expand your mental portfolio.
9) Travel. Experience the secrets of your own town, state, country or go overseas. Embrace culture.
10) Visit museums (art, historical, transportation, etc.)

CLIENT-CENTERED CREATIVITY

I truly believe that DJs were once very creative. We had to be. But, over time, far too many DJs have lost the ability to learn, think and create. Rather, the industry, clients and the media have allowed DJs an easy way out by relying on technology with more lights, crazier mixes and bigger sound. As an industry, DJs have voluntarily surrendered their ability to innovate. This creativity is why DJs once thrived.

As you approach your own ideas, focus on the client, their perceptions and expectations. Then take a practical approach. When you hit a wall (and you will), don’t give up. Hold onto the foundation of what’s in it for them. Work on modifications until you find innovative ways to overcome the challenges.

By focusing on the client, their guests and perceptions, I am guaranteed to have ideas that are pulled through by the client—as opposed to being pushed through by family, friends, planners, other vendors and social media.

And, by the way, by focusing on dramatically different ideas, I am guaranteed a higher potential profit margin. This passion has become my identity, as indicated by countless clients, vendors and venues on my behalf, that “when you want a fun wedding that is personalized, well done, and flows seamlessly—call Matt Martindale. That’s what he does.”

My focus is on the individual and true personalization of the event beyond music, lights and a few announcements. I co-create with my clients to make their event (like a wedding) memorable. That is the value to my clients. A wedding, after all, is a lifestyle statement. What is the lasting benefit they are really buying? Memories.

Applying your increasing creativity to your DJ business makes it more likely that you’ll enjoy serendipity: “the combining of a fortunate accident with wisdom.” It is truly about transforming the stimulus you come into contact with into useful ideas that spark. For this to happen, I am relentless in applying what I see, hear, experience and feel all the time into my events, my business and who I am. This is, by far, beyond all the technology and business acumen, the most critical tool in my DJ toolbox!

“Terry — I recently received your book in the mail. I am about halfway through, and I felt compelled to message you to let you know that this is hands down the most comprehensive industry book I have ever read... and I have A LOT of them...” ~ Christos Nikas

Book available at: www.weddingmarketingmastery.co.uk/p/12-habits
“Lost” an Account? Here’s What to Do Next

HOW TO COPE WHEN A GIG GOES SOUTH

By Rob Johnson

I hope the title of this post piqued your interest at least a little bit. If you have been trivia hosting for some time, then it’s bound to have happened to you. It doesn’t matter how good you are, how strong your effort, or the level of investment you put into your trivia hosting, it happens to the best of us. For one reason or another an account will be closed, a gig cancelled for some reason or other an account will be closed, a gig cancelled and you are back at square one.

The first time this happens it can be frustrating. If you are doing things right, you will be able to pick yourself up and carry on. Eventually, you’ll be able take these inevitable setbacks in stride. The following advice, gained through years of experience, is meant to help you get to that point.

GET A REASON

First, you should try to find out why the gig has gone away. This will all depend on your relationship with the bar owner. Chances are, and if indeed you are doing the job right, you should have a good rapport with the owner and therefore you would expect they will tell you a reason. Is it your style? Is it money? Is it lack of business? Are you only using pen and paper? Could you bring in an actual trivia system and buzzers to improve the atmosphere?

If for some reason you can’t get an answer as to why they are letting you go, be persistent. Has someone come in offering a better or lower-priced service? Are they looking for people with a more diverse entertainment approach? Without having a reason you can’t act. Ask them to help you improve your business by telling them what you could have done differently.

TRY TO RESOLVE

So, when you have been given a reason... do not simply give up and move along to the next step of your trivia hosting. You need to work to keep the gig. I am not saying beg or plead, but certainly try and resolve the issue. If the venue owner is telling you are too expensive, then consider working out a new deal. We all strive for top dollar but if you price yourself out the market you will find yourself—not in the market. This means you need to be willing to listen to demands and keep up with current trends. Even if you take a reduction as a short-term solution while you look for other gigs, it is a far better way than having no gigs at all, as long as you don’t go TOO LOW. One thing you could do is offer a longer package at a reduced rate. For example, if you usually charge $350 a show, offer to do 10 shows for $3,000.

If they are not happy with your style, or customers have said they are not enjoying the show, it’s a little easier to deal with. Your response should be to do a sales pitch telling them of all the services you offer. Use a DigiGames system to boost your variety and repertoire and really go out there to sell yourself. If you get let go for not having a good style or the latest technology and don’t offer to change it, then you are breaking my key rule of trivia hosting: Play to the audience.

UNDERSTANDING CIRCUMSTANCES

Maybe it’s something that’s beyond your control. Maybe a new manager has come in and thinks the bar can survive without your needs. We have all come across these people. They think just because they have enthusiasm that they can fill the bar on a Tuesday night. They will soon realize that it might not work out so well! The best thing to do in this situation, if it becomes obvious they want to go it alone, is just wait them out. Don’t burn the bridge. And follow up again soon. This is important, because if you know you have been making the bar money then you will have the confidence that the owner will reach out to you at some point. Offer to switch nights or switch styles. But, of course, there may be some occasions where no matter how much you sell, it won’t work out.

The main thing is to not give up. Your players will be surprisingly loyal; that is why I have stressed the need to build rapport with your audience and use social media to keep in touch with the group, so that if you go elsewhere you can take them with you. If they have been enjoying your trivia and it suddenly stops, players will flock to a new venue to support you, as long as it is pretty close.

Keep on playing games. Don’t let the occasional speed bump of a lost gig slow down your pursuit of trivia-based midweek income.
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Rob Johnson will be your Entertainment Director!
For the first few years of my DJ career, I was purely a laptop DJ. I did not know how to beatmatch. I wanted to learn, and after winning awards from The Knot and DJing hundreds of weddings, I took private lessons with DJ Hapa from the Scratch Academy. Then I practiced...and practiced...had a few musical train wrecks at events...practiced some more.

Man, the embarrassing confessions just keep rolling here...but my next birthday cake will have 40 candles on it. So what? I want to learn to scratch.

I've never played on vinyl or even CDJs. So what? I've never used Serrato or even owned a record. So what?

What really inspired me to finally reach out to a DJ coach in my area was meeting teen scratching prodigy, DJ Poizen Berry, through Instagram. Her scratching videos blew me away. We got to know each other messaging through Instagram. One day, I finally contacted her scratching coach, DJ Yodah (Antonio Aguilar) from Global BPM.

When I wanted to learn to beatmatch, I remember all the coaches and schools I contacted were very anti-mobile DJ, anti-controller, and anti-Virtual DJ. I felt like a pariah. So walking into the Global BPM studio brought up a lot of those old memories, and I was fairly combative with DJ Yodah, who has taught almost every local female DJ that I respect in San Diego. He told me I had to learn on vinyl, I had to beatmatch by ear, and that he didn't care whether I did weddings, used Virtual DJ, or rocked a controller -- he could get me to the next level. I wanted what DJ Poizen Berry had, so I surrendered.

“So go ahead and play that record,” DJ Yodah told me at our first lesson. “Uhhh,” I looked up at him confused. He created a safe environment for me where I could completely ignorant about how the heck to play a record. Now, after a few short lessons, I'm happy to say turntables don't scare me any more; I'm actually getting pretty fond of them. At my lesson this week, I beatmatched by ear (no wave forms on a screen in front of me, no idea what BPM the songs I was playing were). Just two records on two turntables and my ears (well, plus DJ Yodah jumping in: “Adjust! Adjust!”).

This entire experience, which is still really just beginning, has inspired me in so many ways. If you are in a rut; if DJing has become more about marketing and wedding outlines than it is about creativity; or if you want what leading mix artists like Jason Jani have -- then TODAY, right now -- google DJ schools or coaches in your area. Make the call. Send the email. Arrange the meeting. Start beatmatching. Start scratching. Start producing. Unleash your inner DJ artist.

DJ Staci Nichols is based in San Diego and specializes in spinning “country fusion,” Latin/Spanish, and mainstream music. Her know-how has appeared in San Diego Style Weddings, Offbeat Bride, Wedding Planner Magazine, and Book More Brides. She offers consulting at WeddingBizConsultant.com or check out her DJ biz at SanDiegoDJSatci.com. IG/FB/Pinterest/Twitter: SanDiegoDJStaci
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WHAT’S IN MY DJ TOOLBOX OUT AT SEA

By DJ Dayna

We all know that a big part of being a DJ is preparation and having the right tools with you to make every event succeed. We know how crucial it is for us to go into any type of event or club and be prepared to rock the crowd with the right mindset, right gear, right music, and energy level to take them on an uplifting musical journey and give them the time of their lives! It’s no different when DJing on a cruise ship.

As far as gear, some ships have provided the DJ gear and I’ve only had to bring my laptop and headphones. But majority of the time, I’m responsible for bringing my controller, laptop with stand, and headphones. I use the Pioneer SR2, a MacBook Pro (Retina, 15-inch, Mid 2014), and my dope custom-painted Floyd Rose Audio FR-18s headphones. Only having to bring those few items is obviously a huge difference from “landlubber” DJing. When I’m on the ship, I do NOT miss the loading and unloading, setting up and tearing down of equipment. It’s super nice to just show up, plug in and play—and my back thanks me. I DJ in the ship’s nightclub or lounge and poolside, so the sound system is similar to what you’d find in your typical dance-oriented bar or club. I connect to one of the channels on their sound board via RCA or XLR, depending on location...then I rock the house.

The ships do have technical and production teams, as well as skilled computer technicians onboard. So they are equipped with the necessary cables that I need, and there’s no shortage of skilled professional help. However, I believe it’s never a bad idea to be extra prepared; we’re often out at sea for days at a time, sailing to places without a Guitar Center or Best Buy. Therefore, I like to bring some adapters and RCA and 1/4” cables, just in case. I also bring an extra USB cable and external hard drive for backup.

There have been a few incidents that have taught me the lesson of being well-prepared. Once, I was having issues with software reading the music files on my external HD. We were out at sea for a few days and wifi wasn’t the strongest, so it was difficult for me to look up troubleshooting tips, let alone make a phone call to tech support. I took it to the onboard computer tech team and they were life savers! They were able to run tests on it and discovered that the drive was, in fact, dying. Talk about S.O.S. I didn’t have an extra hard drive with me at the time and had to wait two days before we reached a port. All I could do was pray it wouldn’t die before then, so I could try to salvage the music before losing my entire hard drive. I ended up having to play from the ship’s karaoke system as back up. Luckily, this story has a happy ending. My hard drive made it until we got to land and thankfully there was a Target at that port. So I was able to buy another hard drive and transfer all my music. Problem solved—whew!

I also remember one time I was having a software issue, can’t recall specifically what it ended up being, but because the ship’s wifi was too slow and I couldn’t download it again to re-install, I had to wait again until we got to land, which happened to be Honolulu, Hawaii. Of course all I wanted to do was go to the beach, drink a Mai Tai and watch the surfers, when we arrived after being out at sea for four-and-a-half days; but instead I had to have “Hawaiian fun” finding the nearest coffee shop with strong wifi to look up troubleshooting info, make a phone call to tech support, and re-install the software. I laugh about it now, but at the time I was annoyed. (The rest of the time in Hawaii was bliss, once I got that issue resolved.)

Before heading out on cruise ships, I also spend some time preparing music. Often I don’t know what the crowds will be like, since they vary, not only from ship to ship, but also each group of passengers on every voyage brings different energy, ethnicities, backgrounds, ages, etc. I spend time going through music and create new sets or update existing “cruise ship” playlists. I like to refresh my mind on Latin and Reggaeton hits specifically, since they vary, not only from ship to ship, but also each group of passengers on every voyage brings different energy, ethnicities, backgrounds, ages, etc. I spend time going through music and create new sets or update existing “cruise ship” playlists. I like to refresh my mind on Latin and Reggaeton hits specifically, since there will always be Latino passengers at some point, and they love to dance! Depending on where the ship is going, I will also take a peek at music from those places, look at the charts, and then download a handful of the popular tracks.

To put it succinctly, my onboard DJ toolbox is small, but essential. Thinking ahead and being prepared, knowing that there won’t be an electronics shop down the street, is key for successfully spinning on the high seas!
What do Steve Carell, Amy Poehler, Tina Fey, Kristen Wiig and Danny Glover have in common?

These famous entertainers studied improvisation, the first three starting their careers with the legendary Second City in Chicago, while Wiig began with the Groundlings in Los Angeles and Glover studied with the Upright Citizens Brigade as a student at New York University.

While you may not aspire to perform with an improv troupe in a show before a live audience, many of the skills essential to successful and engaging improvisation are also valuable additions to a mobile entertainer’s toolbox.

Below are a few tools that, if employed intelligently and judiciously, increase an improviser’s—and a mobile DJ’s—chances for a successful performance, the audience’s enjoyment, and personal satisfaction.

THE KEY
The fundamental underpinning of successful improv play is “Yes, and...” Simply, you agree with the other person or people and their ideas in a scene and add along the same thread. Conflict is generally avoided since teamwork is crucial to the success of the scene. Denying, ignoring or canceling out another player’s idea can effectively render a scene rudderless or incoherent, often confusing or distracting the audience.

THE PLATFORM
In improv, players quickly establish a platform—the who/what/when/where of a scene. Expedient communication of the platform provides the audience with context and the actors with a discernible starting point to advance a story. In the DJ world, particularly at a wedding, the platform is already clearly established—the bride and groom, a wedding, today, in the church and later, at a reception facility.

THE BIG ACTIVATOR
Since scenes in game-style improv are often short, “daring to suck big” is encouraged. Over-the-top reactions and larger-than-life characters cut to the essence of the scene. No time for small talk—initiate and then do something with the story, quickly. In the mobile DJ world, we often are faced with split-second decisions to toss in a one-liner, edit and post a video, join in on the dance floor, or let a tender moment grow without an auditory response. Being able to know what’s needed, when, will always set you up to succeed in the moment, and ultimately create an engaging experience for all in attendance.

ENHANCED LISTENING DEVICE
Successful improvisers must be exceptional listeners. Since scenes are but a minute or two, if a key piece of information is missed or not developed effectively, the bit can crash and burn. If an improviser—like a mobile DJ—is not in the moment, attentive to what their scene partners are sharing and adding, the sketch—or the event—may fall short of memorable or fail to realize its potential.

USING THE TOOLS
So, now that you have a basic knowledge of the fundamentals of improvisational comedy, how can that acquaintance or experience help you as a mobile entertainer?

“Improv principles are very relevant to business,” notes Renie McClay, president of Sales and Marketing Training. McClay, an improv comedy teacher for No Foam Productions in the Chicago area continues, “The goal of every improviser is to make the team look good. Period. When that happens, the performance works and the audience is pleased.”

This sentiment certainly reflects the mobile DJs goals. Mobile entertainers, like improvisers, must be able to think on their feet, react to the unexpected, flourish under pressure, assess problems quickly and find solutions, and speak both eloquently and spontaneously. Mobile jocks must work as a team with other event professionals to ensure an event’s success and a client’s satisfaction. Unfortunately, if one member of the team struggles measurably at an event, the overall performance quality reflects on each team member.

Some of my most memorable moments as a mobile disc jockey were not activities that I initiated. Rather, I reacted, supported and added to something that was developing on the dance floor, often applying knowledge gleaned from consultations (ie, pre-event “platform”-building).

Much like a client proposing an idea before an event or a situation developing at an event, a client-focused entertainer will work with the concept proposed, particularly during an event.

While disc jockeys rate speaking amongst their most saleable skills, the best in the industry also listen extremely well—to their clients, to their colleagues, and, most importantly, to their audience.

What is the audience telling us? We don’t always need to initiate, to force our agenda on our audience. Many times, following the principles of improvisational comedy, we listen, agree, then add a creative element to build the event’s success, moment by moment.
Your music is putting me to sleep.

It was the last thing that I wanted to hear five minutes before dancing started at the Gilbert-Hopkins wedding reception. I wasn’t sure if the middle-aged man standing in front of my setup was a Gilbert or a Hopkins, but he looked like a seasoned wedding guest, in his dark suit with a flower on the lapel, and a drink in his hand. He stood there staring at me as Kenny G provided the lullaby on his saxophone through the speakers on either side of us. The man’s eyes were heavy. Had my song selections really done that to them?

“We’ll be getting things going in a few moments,” I told him. “Won’t help me if I’m asleep,” he replied, before walking back to his wife sitting at Table 8 (he was a Gilbert).
I dismissed the exchange, letting a couple of other light jazz tunes complete the set while I prepared for the bride and groom’s first dance and the rest of the evening. The reception was ultimately a success, though it took several songs at the beginning of open dancing before the crowd really warmed up.

I thought about the man’s comment as I drove home that night, and I wondered if maybe he was onto something. While many guests appreciate more subdued, background music during meals at formal events such as weddings, was I allowing dinner music to overstay its welcome? When I also thought about other times when I felt like I was losing the crowd at the end of dinner, I concluded—yes.

As I became a more experienced DJ, understanding that it’s a role comprised of equal parts craft and art, I started to think of music as my side of the “conversation” with guests at an event. While a strong presence as an MC is important, the songs I play, and the order in which I play them, express much more to my audience than anything I could ever say over the microphone when it comes to overall performance. This concept first clicked in my mind as it applied to dancing, but I started to consider how that conversation occurs before dancing, based on instances like the Gilbert-Hopkins reception mentioned above. What was I telling my audience with the music that I played, leading into the dancing? Now I swear, I never actually put someone to sleep during that time, but my mix of light jazz and adult standards certainly did not shout “Hey! We’ve got a fun night coming your way!”

REBUILDING THE BRIDGE

To come up with a better transition between dinner and dancing, I brainstormed about the type of setlist that would send the right message to my audience. I thought about concerts as well as other events that I’d attended and what types of music I heard before performances there. I also considered the songs that I always wanted to play during dancing but never found a way to incorporate. Most of the selections that I came up with—songs like “In the Midnight Hour” performed by Wilson Pickett, The Supremes singing “Baby Love,” and Sam & Dave’s “Hold On, I’m Comin’”—were classic R&B songs. A few others were upbeat classic rock tunes like Van Morrison’s “Domino” and “What is Life” by George Harrison. Whatever the genre, the goal was to find songs that dovetailed with traditional dinner music while also building the bridge toward dancing.

I tried the set at my next gig, another wedding reception. As the dinner plates cleared and Dean Martin’s “Your Nobody ‘Til Somebody Loves You” faded, I kicked into “Pick Up the Pieces” by Average White Band. It was still a jazzy enough selection that I could retreat if I found it didn’t work, but it also picked up the pace of the evening. Next up was “Sir Duke” by Stevie Wonder. To my satisfaction, I noticed heads bobbing and toes tapping at many of the tables. Not only that, but the polite dinner conversation gave way to louder, more boisterous talk. The energy in the room was rising, and by the time that we got to dancing, my audience was ready.

The same results occurred over the next several weeks during which time I cultivated an eight-song setlist that lasted about 25 minutes. The first thing I consistently noticed was that my audience was more engaged in the music once dancing started, approaching the dancefloor with far less hesitation than I’d noticed in the past, when it might take four or five songs before the floor was packed.

Additionally, introducing the new set helped me structure my entire pre-dancing playlist. Instead of perceiving cocktail and dinner music simply as pleasing background programming, I now thought about how the music builds toward dancing from the first song of cocktail hour onward. Unless otherwise specified by my clients, I now use traditional jazz during cocktail hour before segueing into adult standards for dinner followed by my transitional set to lead into dancing.

Finally, the upbeat set at the end of dinner puts me in the best frame of mind for providing dance music. Call me a Pavlovian dog, but I feel my own energy perk up when a song like “Soul Man” or “Some Kinda Wonderful” comes on. It may sound funny, but it gets me into the mood, too. Thankfully, I’m not alone. I’ve talked about transitional setlists with other DJs and they agree it has impacted their own energy as well as that of their audience. It becomes an integral part of their conversation with guests.

Luckily, my conversation with the heavy-eyed wedding guest did not end on the night he approached me to complain. I booked another Gilbert family wedding several months after the first one, and he was there. We didn’t speak this time, but I did get a nod of the head and a raise of the glass as Sam and Dave rang out from the speakers while cake was served. We both knew one heck of a dancing night was on its way.

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**Transitional Tracks: Kevin’s Top Picks**

- **PICK UP THE PIECES**, **AVerage WHITE BAND**
- **PAPA’S GOT A BRAND NEW BAG**, **PT. 1**, **JAMES BROWN**
- **SOMe KINDA WONDERFUL**, **GRAND FUNK RAILROAD**
- **WHAT IS LIVE**, **GEORGE HARRISON**
- **DOMINO**, **VAN MORRISON**
- **IN THE MIDNIGHT HOUR**, **WILSON PICKETT**
- **HOLD OôcN, I’M COMIN’, SAM & DAVE**
- **SOUL MAN**, **SAM & DAVE**
- **GIMME SOME LOVIN’, THE SPENCER DAVIS GROUP**
- **I’LL TAKE YOU THERE**, **THE STAPLE SINGERS**
- **BABY LOVE**, **THE SUPREMES**
- **THE WAY YOU DO THE THINGS YOU DO**, **THE TEMPTATIONS**
- (YOUR LOVE KEEPS LIFTING ME) HIGHER AND HIGHER, **JACKIE WILSON**
- **SIGNED, SEALED, DELIVERED, I’M YOURS, STEVIE WONDER**
- **SIR DUKE, STEVIE WONDER**
- **EXPRESS YOURSELF, CHARLES WRIGHT**
I always felt it was a plus when I could bring my wife with me to an event. It was nice to have company for the ride, have her help with the event, and to be able to go out together afterwards and relax. After buying my first photo booth, the logical choice to run it was my wife. She’s had so much fun doing it over the last eight years that we’ve trained both our daughters and now my wife is on the verge of launching her own photo booth company! I certainly don’t mind her taking over this segment of the business. One less thing to worry about.

I’m sure my experience is not unique. Many of us male DJs have had our wives or girlfriends help us out, then gradually start to take on bigger roles in our businesses. What is rare in the mobile DJ world is having your wife take over responsibility for the whole thing. Going from helper or performer to owner takes courage, determination and a thick skin in this male-dominated industry.

Stacie Carroll is a DJ who is crushing it on her own. I met Stacie while attending Randy Bartlett’s “Microphone Skills” workshop at MBLV22 (Mobile Beat Las Vegas, March 2018). She explained that her husband was retiring from the DJ business they had started, and she was taking it over. The story of her transition from music mixer to business owner is inspiring.

**MC:** How did you and husband start your DJ business?

**SC:** Before my husband Randy and I were married, we played in a band together. The band played clubs, weddings and parties. I’ve been a musician all my life, but at the time I joined the band I was also a fitness instructor teaching hip-hop dance. I would make mix CDs for my classes, which lead to making mixes for the band to use on their breaks between sets.

**MC:** What instruments did you play?

**SC:** Piano, guitar and flute. I also did vocals for the band.

**MC:** Wow, you are a versatile musician. How did that lead to you both becoming mobile DJs?

**SC:** In 2006, the band broke up, and we still had all these relationships with venues and planners. A wedding coordinator called us to book the band and somehow the conversation turned to us becoming the DJs for that wedding. We had all the sound equipment and we were used to doing all the wedding formalities from being in the band.

**MC:** I guess that wedding went well or you wouldn’t have stuck with it.

**SC:** It did. I always say that I didn’t choose to be a DJ—being a DJ chose me.

**MC:** So you started the DJ company together. Where did that lead?

**SC:** We started our company in Tennessee and after a few years joined the ADJA. We started to go to conferences and really grow our business.
MC: How did you decide who would mix and who would be the MC?

SC: Randy was the lead singer and front man for the band for over twelve years. I liked mixing the music, so it was an easy choice for us. I have a background in theater, so I like doing everything that is pre-planned and rehearsed.

MC: So you would put together the timeline and all the formalities and Randy would do the talking.

SC: Yes. I like having a script and a plan. I'm not a fly-by-the-seat-of-my-pants person.

MC: Would you handle the bookings and meeting with clients?

SC: At first we did all of that together, but over the last few years, I've taken it all over.

MC: When did Randy decide to leave the DJ industry?

SC: He bought a restoration business (water, fire, smoke damage) and decided to put all his energy into that. He's also been a contractor for the last 12 years.

MC: What do you like most about being a DJ?

SC: The creativity. Taking songs and putting them together in unique ways. Making the events fun and putting it all together. I really love music.

MC: What styles or genres are your favorites?

SC: Hip-hop. But I like to mix a little bit of everything.

MC: What is your primary setup like?

SC: I use a Numark controller with Serato, and I just bought the new Evolve speakers. I like gear that is small and compact. If I had roadies that would be great, but I'm carrying all the gear myself, so I want it small.

MC: Are there many other female DJs in your area?

SC: I don't really know of any solo female DJs, but I do know some wives that DJ with their husbands.

MC: Now that you're stepping out on your own, what are your goals and plans?

SC: I want to be as professional as possible. I'd like to do something on the education side. I want to be able to give back and help people. I also enjoy making mixes and edits. I'd love to work for record pools doing that.

MC: Do you see yourself giving a seminar at Mobile Beat or another convention?

SC: Definitely, someday.

MC: How challenging is it to run your DJ business and manage family life?

SC: Well, I'm doing laundry with my little girl as we speak.

MC: Brilliant! That's exactly my point. You still have to deal with all the mom stuff on top of building your business.

SC: Yes, it's easier for the guys. They can just take off and do things.

MC: Since stepping out on your own what challenges have you faced?

SC: We already had a good business going, so it was easy for me to build on that. The toughest thing is just really having the confidence to do this on my own. I've rebranded our company to become "Weddings By Stacie," So far it's been going great.

MC: Is your main focus weddings? Do you do other events?

SC: Mostly weddings, but I like any event where I can be creative. I like to take events where they want someone different.

MC: What would be your dream gig?

SC: I would really like to become well known for making great mixes and have them on the radio.

To learn more about Stacie and her company please visit www.stacierandydj.com.

Michael Cordeiro is the owner of M.C. Entertainment, a small multi-op in Rhode Island. He has been on TLC’s Four Weddings, hosted an episode of Toddlers & Tiaras and has opened for many celebrities. He has a degree in Entertainment and Event Management from Johnson and Wales University.
Doesn’t it seem that business is more competitive and difficult than it used to be? ABC, Inc. experienced this challenging business atmosphere firsthand. A building materials manufacturer that previously dominated their marketplace, ABC suffered staggering losses in the previous fiscal year. It became blindingly apparent that what had worked in the past was no longer effective, and the company president had no idea how to fix things. It was time to use some proven techniques for achieving a competitive advantage.

ABC engaged a firm that identified the root causes of their problems. After two years, sales and profits dramatically increased—even with the same leaders. The results came from a seven-step process based on sound principles that put a focus on leveraging their internal talent. If you find your business falling behind, you can follow ABC, Inc.’s lead by putting these seven steps into practice.

1. EMPLOYEE ALIGNMENT
When a significant percentage of duties performed by employees don’t fit their innate characteristics or core nature, they won’t perform well, for example, people low in detail orientation doing work that requires high detail. Training and development, management encouragement and other well-intended efforts will not fix alignment issues. As Peter Drucker said, “A manager’s task is to make the strengths of people effective and their weaknesses irrelevant.”

2. CREATING A CULTURE OF PERSONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT
In truth, personal growth results in professional growth. It results in a greater capacity to handle life challenges, accomplish long-term goals and work well with others. Personal growth and development includes an increased awareness of self and others, the ability to manage one’s ego, ability to manage emotions, and...
development of innate talents to maximize productivity and effectiveness. Most performance issues that managers complain about relate to one or more of the above. These are fundamental character traits of success.

3. ALIGNING EMPLOYEES WITH THE MISSION AND VISION OF THE ORGANIZATION

Human beings have an innate need for meaning and purpose in what they do. This means that they care about how their efforts affect the world outside themselves—people, the environment, animals, etc. For example, take assembly line workers that produce incubators for premature babies. In one scenario the workers are only told to mechanically perform the prescribed duties. In the other scenario they are crystal clear about the importance the quality of their work has on the survival of infants. Which workers do you think are more motivated? Engagement and performance are directly affected by people's connection to the outcomes of their work.

4. ALIGNING EMPLOYEES WITH THE CULTURE AND VALUES OF THE ORGANIZATION

People need to feel that they fit in with their social groups. Employees who are significantly out of sync with an organization's culture and values will never make their highest contribution. Having perfect alignment is not the goal, since diversity of thought and behavior allow a culture to adapt and thrive. However, significant misalignments are damaging. It's also important for leaders to consider whether they should change their culture. Examples of this would include a culture that they know is toxic and when there's shrinking population of workers who fit the current culture. In both cases, without the ability to attract and retain needed talent, organizations will fail.

5. ALIGNING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES WITH THE ORGANIZATION'S STRATEGIES AND GOALS

In today's environment, organizational goals and strategies must change to adapt. Frequently, roles and supporting job duties don't adequately change to align with these shifts. When this occurs, some or much of employee work efforts are out of alignment and can impair the ability to achieve the desired outcomes. For example, a company changes strategy to shift most customer communications from telephone to online, yet the employees' duties and training continue to focus on telephone communications.

6. ASSESSING PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL WEAKNESSES, STARTING FROM THE TOP

Weaknesses are the negative side of strengths. It's impossible to have a strength without its vulnerable side. We've been taught to hide or deny our weaknesses despite them being obvious to others. Our ego's impulse to protect our self-image is normal but counterproductive. It hinders our true potential from being realized—a loss to the organization and ourselves. When leaders openly and honestly acknowledge "challenge areas," this sets the example for others. The organization opens the door to growth and development.

7. COMMITTING TO WORK ON PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES DISCOVERED IN THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Studies on human potential and positive change demonstrate that self-awareness is the first step—but it's not the last. Committing to take steps (starting with baby steps) and taking them allows for the development of positive habits that create lasting positive change. Deliberate change intended to meet the needs of your environment creates a flexible, adaptive organization—one that is poised to thrive despite the torrent of unpredictable/unwanted change that defines your world. Thriving in an unpredictable world is about you: Your willingness to acknowledge change that you don't like, openly discuss it and consistently take the actions required to adapt and emerge stronger.

At the end of the day, leaders are simply making choices that define the present and future of themselves and their organizations. There's nothing magical about the most effective leaders. They're just making more effective choices. These choices encompass how they decide to see the world, their openness to challenge their beliefs and their willingness to experiment with innovative ideas that can capture breakthrough advantages. Equally important choices include their willingness to objectively look at themselves and take actions to grow in areas of concern. They choose to become a greater, more effective version of themselves. They know that what they demonstrate (not what they say) is what has the greatest impact on the entire organization. As a leader, the question is, what choices are you going to make?

Brad Wolff specializes in workforce and personal optimization. He's a speaker and author of People Problems? How to Create People Solutions for a Competitive Advantage. As the managing partner for Atlanta-based PeopleMax, Brad specializes in helping companies maximize the potential and results of their people to make more money with less stress. His passion is empowering people to create the business success they desire, in a deep and lasting way. For more information on Brad Wolff, please visit: www.PeopleMaximizers.com.
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