

NO “GUT”, NO GLORY” by Amy Correia

Derek Sivers, innovator & entrepreneur --I follow his blog, asked 17 musicians to read and “blog” about how a couple popular marketing books apply (or don't apply) to their music careers: I was sent *Ignore Everybody: And 39 Other Keys to Creativity* by Hugh Macleod. He'll write a piece about what we had to say and I don't know anymore about it than that other than he added his aim was to help musicians. That was good enough for me and I'm happy to have been asked to be a part of it.

I've been a “full-time” musician since 1997 when I quit my day job (#8 in Macleo's book and what NOT to do). I've just finished a new album with my fans as the financial backers, and I've been doing a lot of research about what it means to “release” an album these days, especially as an independent. Most of the 40 keys Macleod talks about I've had some personal experience with. Here's where a few of his “keys” led my thinking.

“Ignore Everybody...trust your gut” (#1)

Trusting my gut is at the heart of how I'm learning to create more: whether business, songs or anything. I'm a very emotional person but I think my “natural” tendency is to come from my “head” rather than my “heart.” That's my default mode: I approach things by thinking them through and then after much research and careful analysis I finally “make a decision.” Then, unfortunately, I tend to re-think it. This is compounded ten-fold, if I start asking my family and friends, What do you think? I'm learning to hone in on what my “gut” is telling me, trusting it and acting from that part. Yes, I will ask opinions from a trusted friend, business partner, band member: but for me “trusting my gut” is an ongoing awareness that's at the heart of making music and life more fun and more productive.

The same applies when writing a song. The first thoughts are often the best ones, but a lot of inner voices can start piping up after that first flash of inspiration. As I start to flesh out the song, I can go down a hundred different paths in search of “the right one.” I start re-configuring, turning it over and upside down. It's a cat-and-mouse game and some of it's engaging and worthwhile. But a lot of times I end up coming back to the original idea. I record my song/melody/word ideas as I go along, so I don't forget the first ones. The really good stuff does seem to come from “the heart” (#27) and fleshing out of a song is trying not to screw up that good stuff with too much of my brain.

Another scenario where the “gut” comes into a play: I'm in a room with a musician trying some new songs out and it doesn't feel right. Maybe I'm even in the studio spending money on a recording and there's a goal to get things done! But things are going wrong and I'm getting nothin'. Maybe there's a personality clash. Or maybe it's just two different aesthetics and things aren't sounding right. In the past I would try to “figure it out.” A lot of times it's something simple: Something's just WRONG. Sometimes you pick the wrong players or maybe your song isn't as good as you thought. And there's nothing to think about. Nothing to be upset about. Even if everyone is saying, but SHE'S THE BEST OBOE PLAYER IN THE WORLD! Everybody loves her, what's wrong with you? I'm learning to silently ignore “everybody” and trust my gut.

A Catholic nun, Sister Rose Clarice, described this connection with an inner feeling as “grace.” She was in her late 70s, a piano teacher and Ph.D in pastoral counseling. I had gone to see her as a therapist, and it took her two sessions for her to “cure” me. (I wanted to see a third time, but she said that was it!) Basically she told me 1) “trust in grace”. When I asked her what that meant, she pointed to her heart. “it’s your gut feeling.” (that was a revelation!) and 2) Get in touch with it through one hour of sitting alone a day, doing nothing. Sit in a chair and be silent. Listen to your gut. How does it make you feel? It’s not touchy-feely. It’s not “spiritual.” It’s just seeing what is: I’m applying that to everything I do in my music career and life.

“All existing models are wrong. Find a new one.” And “Go Ahead and Make Something” (from #7)

Sometimes existing models do work. I based an album fundraiser for my new record on Jill Sobule’s “fan funded” plan. I didn’t need to invent a brand new approach, because one already was in front of me. Instead, I modified an existing model (fan-funding) to fit my own style/needs. Now that I’m planning my album release I do feel I’m in a wilderness where “existing models are wrong.” This will be a time for me to find new ones and do things differently than I ever have. With “Lakeville” (my 2nd album) I recorded it on my own dime (good start, a new model for me) but then waited for a label (old model) to put it out. I did find a label eventually, but I had to wait another whole year before it came out. Yes, I got some advance money and it helped me live for a while, but it was a short term solution to a bigger long term issue: Making music and making a living.

“Power is not given. Power is taken” (#29)

I’ve rolled up my sleeves and am in the thick of every aspect of my career now. That’s a big difference from when I was first signed to major labels. In those days I knew very little of what was going on with business and was encouraged NOT to be involved. It was considered bad form to call up the President of your label, and ask to meet with him or to ask to sit in on a marketing meeting. I was told that “business people” don’t like to hear directly from “the artist,” and it makes them uncomfortable. I remember hearing what a “pain-in-the-ass” Garth Brooks was because he was so involved in every detail of his career. I don’t remember the context of this or even who said it, and it doesn’t matter. The only point is about power: I run in the other direction when I hear someone say “Let me handle this!” Sure, I appreciate help when I can get it. Just don’t make me feel like it’s none of my business!

“Whatever Choice you make the devil gets his due eventually.” (#30) and “It doesn’t have to be a big idea. It just has to be yours” (#2)

I don’t own the copyright to my first album and never will. When I found out I was “deleted” from the Capitol catalogue, I didn’t even know what this meant. (They chuck all your CDs because they’re taking up too much room on the shelf.) This was before iTunes, and I was very sad (okay, completely depressed) to think the music I’d spent many years creating, had simply disappeared. I believe I was then experiencing Macleod’s “The devil takes his due eventually.” This new album, on the other hand is my own. I don’t

know what, if any, material reward will come of this ultimately. But I already feel this: a sense of pride, a sense of control and a “hands-on” relationship with my music and career that I haven’t had in a very long time. I also have a much more direct connection with my fans – I’ve found out who many of them are, whereas before I simply didn’t know.

“You are responsible for your own experience.” (#6) and “accept the pain, it cannot hurt you” (#6) (I diverge from Macleod’s key, but this is where these chapters led me)

When I first got signed to a label many years ago, I was very eager to turn over responsibility to someone else because I lacked confidence in myself. I also had ongoing depression and anxiety for most of my life and didn’t know what it was or how to cope with it. Those mental/spiritual issues created problems with my choices, performance and ability to work or think clearly. I still struggle with anxiety in particular, but I’ve grown leaps and bounds. I’ve done a lot of soul-searching, different kinds of therapy, tried various medications, continue to read and listen and communicate to understand and accept this very deep reality: We are responsible for own experience. It’s an ongoing process which I don’t even separate out of the creative process itself. Books that helped me to understand more about this are: *When Things Fall Apart* by Pema Chodron. Also Charlotte Beck' *Nothing Special*. Eckhart Tolle’s *The Power of Now*.

“Don’t worry about inspiration. it comes eventually” (#25)

When you’re depending on inspiration to help you make a living, eventually is not usually soon enough. Sometimes the whole song comes out quickly in a finished form but I’d say more often than not, that’s not the case. For me the tricky thing is taking an inspired idea and fleshing it out into a finished song. I think when you “put the hours”, inspiration will come. If you don’t put the hours in, it doesn’t. I’ve learned the hard way that it’s easier to get down to work than wait for inspiration.

“Put the hours in” (#3)

As obvious as this one seems and as necessary as it is, it’s been a a major challenge for me. The D.I.Y. model (do it yourself) can leave precious little hours to actually focus on MUSIC. It’s also tough to manage my time and I tend to work too hard and burn out. I have found sometimes doing “less” (resting/exercising) and not trying so hard I can get more done and have more stamina over the long haul.

“Far away from the maddening crowd”

Living in New York was an important part of my career because it connected me to a lot of people (musicians, music lovers and industry at the time) that I otherwise never would’ve known. I went to school at Barnard/Columbia in NYC, so I had a good group of friends from those years. There was a vital singer/songwriter scene on the lower east side which I was fortunate to be a part of it: Christopher Thorn of Blind Melon saw me play one night at Café Sin-e and invited me to his home in Seattle to record my first “demo tapes”. I would never have met him if I wasn’t there that night. I don’t need to live in the midst of a big city now but I stay connected to. I need both: solitude and the maddening crowd.

“Keep your day job” (#8)

I worked for a small ad agency in NYC when I graduated from college. I had only started writing songs a year earlier but had decided to pursue my passion full-force because it felt “right.” I worked for a wonderful woman named Jo Foxworth, an advertising hall-of-famer, who became a close friend eventually. After working for her for a couple years, I felt my “day job” had taken over my life and that I didn’t have enough time or energy to put into my music: I was nervous, but walked into my boss’ office and told her I was very sorry, but I had to quit. She asked me what my plan was. “I have no plan.” (And at that age that seemed perfectly reasonable.) Instead of letting me go, she offered me part-time work -- and eventually I worked for her part-time at my old FULL-TIME salary. I worked for her for several more years before I left to make my first album. Jo had mixed feelings about me leaving, but I knew she wanted me to pursue my music. We remained close friends until she died in 2006. She’s mentioned in the song “Coney Island, U.S.A.” The greatest mentor of my life, she was also “my friend who turned 84 and said it's too late now for me, but it ain't too late for you.”

“You become older faster than you think...be ready when it happens.” (From #33) and Being Poor Sucks (#34)

I’m not ready to get old, but it's happening anyway. I have a hard time with the financially preparing for this – and I’ll probably need to bear down even before I'm old because “Being poor sucks” (# 34) I remember what my friend Jo said on her deathbed. She was well-off, but wondered what she could’ve achieved if she had put as much energy into her own writing as she had with advertising business. She was really sad about it and feeling a lot of regret. I said, you were being true to yourself at the time. You decided to focus on making a living and supporting yourself and your family. (Her mother and sister at the time). And the truth that she was forgetting was she had a wonderful time, a lot of FUN doing advertising and wrote some very successful business books from her experiences, traveled the world and had fantastic friends. She was hugely successful no matter how you sliced it. But she wondered what more she could’ve done with her art and passion. I don’t agree with Macleod that you can really have your cake and eat it too, when it comes to making music. I think most day jobs do become your life and a few spare hours a day wouldn't be enough. On the other hand, I may find that the moment I may give up this journey as a “full-time” musician, I might start writing the best songs of my life because it's completely PURE again and a whole new adventure. Who knows?

“Start blogging” (#37)

I started my blog at 3am after watching the movie “The Wrestler” and finding that Darren Aronofsky (the director) had a blog. I was not at all tech savvy and had an old website from 2004 that I never could update and was therefore completely useless and even embarrassing. I directed amycorreia.com to my new blog so I could create what is now my website. I now have control over updates and also have a “storefront.” Without the blog/website, this album wouldn’t have been made because it’s how I communicate info

and also “sell” my idea. It was also the portal by which I collected most of the funds for my album, via a link to PayPal.