

## 8. Should the artist enter into an exclusive agreement with the manager?

“Why should I be exclusive with you when you’re not exclusive with me?” is a question I was asked more than a few times in response to my insistence upon artist exclusivity. The simple answer is because the manager is working off a much smaller percentage of the gross income than the artist with a commission at 15 to 20%. But the more important reason is that it’s better for the artist in its efficiency and direction. Like having two leaders in a group, two directors on a film, or two head coaches for a basketball team, having more than one manager will cause conflict, confusion and inertia. That doesn’t mean that the manager makes all decisions like an employer in a sole proprietorship. Nor does it mean that the artist works for the manager.

Essentially the artist/manager relationship works best as a partnership, especially during the earlier period of career development. At this stage the relationship is much like a marriage, where an affair or an old unresolved relationship can do irreparable damage. A previous manager who still handles occasional business, or offers another line of input to the artist can drastically interfere with a plan of development, especially if the new manager has good strategic abilities. Another manager brought into the picture in the midst of the plan can be both a threat to the present manager and a disruption to the plan.

In a management team, there can be as many as six different management roles, but there still needs to be a single voice that directs the activities. While the ultimate choices are made by the artist, the business activities that take place need a focus of energies and coordination. No matter how committed and able a group of people may be toward common goals, working together in a perfect balance of cooperative activity is highly unlikely without someone taking a leadership role. An artist and manager working in that type of harmony can occur relatively easily if everyone has a clear understanding of goals, expectations and possibilities. Adding a third voice is usually detrimental.

The one exception is where business management and personal management are the responsibilities of two separate people. The most common form of this in jazz is when the life mate handles the personal and the manager handles the business. Since the mate is probably going to have a very significant impact upon the artist’s career simply by the nature of the personal relationship, a direct involvement in the planning and execution can sometimes be quite productive. It will also diminish the conflicts that so often arise through the undermining efforts of a mate who can’t perceive the entire picture.

But this can only work if the mate has enough knowledge and ability to handle the job. That person must also understand that the role on the management team is a professional one, subject to the same business dynamics as any other person handling the job. If not, such participation is *always* disastrous on one or more levels. We’ll look more deeply at the issue of a mate handling business in Question 19 of this chapter.

The only other outside management influence that doesn’t usually interfere, and can also be quite advantageous, is the use of a management consultant who serves a specific purpose in the overall plan. I’ve often provided this service in areas ranging from non-profit advice to full management training. It’s important that such a consultant *does not* take over the plan, even if he/she is the one to devise it.

In all my 35 years in the business, I cannot think of a single case where a multiple manager approach has been effective. (There are management firms where two individuals may work in tandem for an artist, but that's still essentially a single manager.)

From the manager's point of view, the reasons for exclusivity hinge upon the enormous investment of time and to a lesser degree money (usually), that demands there will be return on that investment. The possibility that some other manager will be reaping the benefits of all that hard work is upheld by a long tradition of such occurrences. The presence of another manager will give the manager an indication that this is likely to happen. This will often result in less committed efforts on the artist's behalf.

The issue of exclusivity would be less daunting to the artist if he/she were able to ascertain the level of ability that the manager possesses. It's hard to feel trust or confidence when you don't really understand whether a person is entitled to it.