The unspoken truth about success in music
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If I told you that the most important thing you can do for your music productivity involves no instruments or music software, what would you say? Would you call me crazy? Would a suggestion like that make you want to disregard everything I have to say?

Well, stay with me here because this ebook is going to make all the difference in what you do with the information you're given in the future.

This is not the typical ebook rambling about technical advice for music making & creative endeavors. All of my technical tips would be incomplete without discussing what is at the root of your success & failure. To leave these unnoticed & unchanged, you won't even be able to put the best advice to use and you'll continue to chase your tail.

So let me start by offering you an apology for not writing this sooner. Had you got your hands on this sooner it most certainly would have improved your overall results.

I'm going to give you such powerful information, that it will change the way you think the way you approach music. By uncovering negative habits and belief systems, you'll start knocking them out. You'll be amazed what a difference & few changes in your beliefs will change your whole creative experience.

Beliefs are pretty difficult to change or tweak if you don't know how to go about it and going about it the wrong way can make all the effort seem pointless. So let me offer you some information about how the brain works so you will be better informed when putting the techniques in this ebook to use.

What your brain wants

What you might not know is that your brain likes things to stay the same, whatever it's version of "same" means.

For you and I, this means decline.

This relates to every aspect of your life, which in turn has a dramatic effect on your music & creative efforts. If you aren't improving, you're getting worse.

Your brain likes patterns. Patterns that allow it to save resources by going on autopilot. This is why habits are hard to break as well as hard to start. When you make changes, you take your brain off autopilot & force it to work & re-evaluate current belief systems. Don't think your belief systems are going to change just by forcing more information in your head. You've got to be a lot more active than that. Feeding your brain information has just become a relaxing form of entertainment. It takes the pressure off you having to solve your own problems.

I'm going to share some powerful techniques that I use personally. It's important that you understand that simply reading this ebook it **not** going to bring you any results. When I tell you to act, you need to get off your ass. I wouldn't be asking you to do anything that I wasn't certain would drastically improve your productivity.

You're going to want a pen and pad of paper, because many of my suggestions will involve writing. Don't put this off for another day. Your life is right now & the only way to change your life is in the now.

Now let's get started…..

The only thing between you and your success is you & your thinking. If you could think and act in the way that successful people act, you'd be reaping similar success.

Let me be more clear so there is no confusion.

If you find yourself thinking "But my song sounds just like _____ (fill in the blank), why don't I have similar success?"

I'll tell you the harsh truth.

You two don't *think* alike.

While you are thinking about how you can emulate the artists you idolize, they are busy paving their own way & planning their next move. They have the confidence to lead, while you're busy playing catch up with the new technique of the week. Imitating is not the same thinking as leading, and this shows up in your work & the way you carry yourself.

Although it's important to have mentors, you have to get comfortable with trusting your own instincts instead of looking over your own shoulder all the time. You might not know everything, but you know enough if you have good taste & good ideas.

Trust me on this. If you spent the same amount of time working to solve your one hurdles as you do looking over your shoulder, others would start looking to *you* for answers instead of the other way around. Sure, everybody picks up things here and there and adds it to their toolbox, but the smart ones keep their toolboxes well organized and are meticulous about what goes in there. too many tools and you won't be able to lift the thing. I hope you get the metaphor. We all look outside ourselves and share ideas, that is fine. But before you implement this new technique or buy the awesome new synth everybody is talking about, ask yourself "Is this me? Is this technique or item going to make me more me, or less me?". Knowing who you are & what you want to accomplish is always the first step. Don't let distractions change who you are and who you want to be. There are many roads to success, so don't get entranced by someone else's story. Being yourself is the best way to success. Really.

Now I haven't promised you that you wouldn't get offended or get defensive with some of the things I say. Just remember that the more you react to what I have to say, the more likely that you have things you need to work on.

Self evaluation

So seldom do people take the time to evaluate how they are doing in life, pinpoint their weak spots & come up with solutions.

You can't solve a problem that you don't know is there!

Let me help you get real with yourself & ask you some important questions. **Don't just read these, actively take note**. You'll want to come back to this list regularly to see your progress:

Do you procrastinate on music activities?

Do you have trouble making critical decisions?

Do you waste your music time browsing the internet?

Is perfectionism holding you back from finishing anything?

Do you avoid working on music by instead scouring for more information?

Do you put every bit of information to immediate use, or do you just keep searching for more?

Do you abandon partly finished ideas?

Does completing a song seem like a monumental task?

Do you start a project with excitement only to have if fade just as quickly as it came?

Is your workspace disorganized? Is your computer disorganized?

Do you believe you're too smart to be getting the results you are getting?

Are your working habits inconsistent?

Do you spend more time Planning than actually doing?

Do you feel you aren't learning from your past mistakes?

Hopefully that wasn't too rough for you and I hope you did the exercise. If you didn't, I can't help you & neither will this ebook. So either go all the way with this, or stop reading and jump on your Xbox.

Still with me?

Good because I need you to dive deeper.

Get out a pen & paper & write down at least 5 more habits & behaviors you do that are hindering your music success or wasting your time.

I'm not messing around. Do This!

Just write whatever comes to mind & keep going. Don't spend too much time pondering the last thing you wrote. The only way to do this wrong is to not do it.

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Now I have 2 follow up questions I want you to read & write down your answers. I know homework sucks, but failing at something you love is far worse.

1. How have these behaviors impacted your pursuit of musical success?

2. If these remain unchanged, how much success do you expect to have in the coming months, years & decades?

Ok, sorry about making you dig into some of your harsh realities, but if you can't admit there is a problem, you have no chance of solving it. Then all you have to look forward to is regret of what could have been when it's become too late for you.

Don't make the excuse that you are too busy to go through this process. The most likely reason you are so busy is because you never took the time to evaluate your situation before it got this way. You make a lot of time for things you find much less important, so no more excuses. I know this stuff hurts your brain, but that is because you've gone so long without really using it. Ouch!

The art of Thinking

The sad but true fact is that most people's poor results in life come down to their lack of thinking. Most people don't bother doing much thinking at all in their lives. Sure they ingest and regurgitate facts & pointless information but that is far from the type of thinking I am talking about.

Your mind is so cluttered most of the day with useless information that by the end of the day, you'd rather find a mental distraction instead of doing any critical thinking. Thinking is hard work & can be pretty tiring. It's understandable why so few would be interested in doing it. But I am going to challenge you to be the exception.

In order to think properly, you have to clear your head of clutter or you just aren't going to have much success. We spend so much time hearing so many opinions from friends, family & TV, that it's hard to even know what we would think about if our mind was clear.

I'm going to get you there now by helping you de-clutter your brain and awaken your inner genius.

Here are some of my favorite tools.

Journaling

Nearly all success stories begin with writing down your thoughts. Until you can see the thoughts that are bouncing in your head in the physical world, you can expect your goals to flop & your life to stagnate.

Yes, it's that important.

If there is one thing that I can attribute to the most productive times in my life, it has been when I've kept a journal. The type of journaling I am talking about has few very simple rules.

Here they are below:

1. Write 2 full pages a day, everyday. First thing in your day.

2. Write anything that comes to mind. (Stresses, frustrations, dreams, stories, lists, ideas, plans, goals etc..)

3. If you can't think of what to say, write "I can't think of what to say" until another thought arises.

4. Don't stop writing until you've filled 2 full pages.

I hate to be blunt, but you've got a lot of shit in your head. We all do. We can't access the part of our brain that does any *real* thinking until we've taken out the trash. That is exactly what this process will do.

Most likely, during the first week, you will feel like this is a waste of time. That is totally normal. Like I said before, the ego part of the brain that thinks it knows who you are and what you're all about doesn't like change. It will try to fight you by giving you every excuse not to do this. **Don't give in**. Over time you'll find you get bored of using your writing time for complaining & you'll start actually having sparks of inspiration. Both the complaining & the inspiration are important. It get's everything out of your system and gives you a clean slate to start your day with.

This process can take you from distraction city & turn you into a **focus ninja**. Just the act itself makes me feel more productive for the rest of my day & I get a lot more done.

But let's not stop there.

Decluttering your Living space

Now that you are working on clearing out the junk in your head, it's a good idea to start dealing with the clutter in your outside world. If you live a cluttered life, you're going to find it much more difficult to focus & get inspired when you most need to.

Let me ask you some questions.

Do you have papers, notes, reminders, mail or magazines strewn around the house?

Do you have clean or dirty clothes that aren't where they belong?

What is the condition of your kitchen sink? Are all the dishes done?

Does everything have a proper place to put things back or do you just pick things up in one place and drop it somewhere else?

How about your cupboards, closet & dressers? Is everything organized or is it a mess?

Your home is your workspace, not just your office or studio, because it's inevitable that the condition of your home is going to effect your creativity, motivation & work ethic. In fact, it might be an indicator of where you currently are at. If you are not naturally an organized person, you're going to need to step up to the plate & get this sorted out.

If you are unorganized, it's ok. You can solve it. The above questions pretty much describe how I used to be & i'm happy to say that I'm a much more organized person these days & I refuse to let things go like I used to. The side effect is that I am much more relaxed & focused. You'll experience this too as you take steps to declutter your life.

Below is a technique that I use to get organized when I see myself starting to slip.

The bedroom technique

First, make your bed.

Next grab everything on your floor and put it on your bed. Take everything not essential off the surfaces of your dressers, desk, tv, end tables or any other surface and pile that on the bed too. Make sure to acknowledge how much stuff is now sitting on your bed. All of this out of place stuff is affecting you in on way or another even though you aren't consciously aware.

Dust & clean your surfaces

Now grab a trash bag and chuck anything that is trash(or should be trash). Finally find a place for each item that is on your bed, making sure not to allow clutter on your surfaces. It's ok to dedicate a junk drawer for miscellaneous items that don't have a place but you can't throw away. Just don't use this as en excuse to not organize.

You're going to be pretty motivated to get everything off the bed or you're not going to have a place to sleep, so get the job done.

When you have completed this task, take a moment to examine how you feel. Pretty awesome right? Now imagine if your whole house was this organized. How much more relaxed you'd be. How much more of your mind would be able to focus on what's important to you.

You can generally use this technique for the rest of your house but instead of piling things on the bed, you'll want to dedicate a place on the floor. If you organize 1 room every 1 or 2 days, your whole house will be transformed in no time.

Once you are pretty organized, you can occasionally go through a cupboard, a drawer or your refrigerator & reorganize it. Even those things you don't see as often have an effect on you. For me, when something is out of place now, I can feel how it affects me right away. It's scary to think how I was being affected before!

Decluttering your computer

You aren't organized with your go to tools, presets and samples

Daily/weekly check in

The best way to gauge where you are at in the moment, what you are doing well & what needs improvement, is to take inventory of each day & each week. This doesn't have to be a long process but you *do* want to be thorough. This might be a tough habit to start because you're going to learn things about your habits that might discourage you. Don't be. In finding out what you're doing wrong, you are finally able to shine a light on it and make some real change.

Earlier I had you answer some questions & come up with some of your own habits that are hindering your progress. Make it a point to check over these once a week and rate yourself on a scale of 1-10 on each of these habits. 1 being the bad habit controlling you & not changing. 10 being you completely reversing this bad habit and replacing it with a new habit. Don't be too easy on yourself, because there is always room for improvement. Also don't base your score on your previous scores. If you performed at a 7 or 8 one week & totally drop the ball the next, that doesn't put you at a five. You're back at a 1 or 2. Consistency is important everyday & every week.

Daily & weekly review questions

Now for some daily & weekly review questions. These questions are made to keep you pushing forward, staying focused & continuing to grow. You never want to stand still, and this will help keep you in positive motion. Remember, even when you are doing the right things, the results aren't going to show up right away. The same is true about the things you are doing wrong. Make sure to stay on the path until you reach your destination. It will come.

Daily - Here is a powerful technique I use at the beginning of each work week that gives me great results. It was introduced by a guy named Nathaniel Branden and it's called *Sentence stems*. How it works is incredibly simple. You make an open ended questions that is based on taking on a new habit or overcoming a bad one. A sentence stem might look something like this.

"I could easily finish more songs if…."

"I could overcome procrastination if…"

"I would enjoy the process of making music much more if…"

Get the picture?

Now what you want to do is pick 1 question for the week & everyday after your work is completed for the day (or before you start your workday if you prefer), write down at least 5 answers that come to mind. Don't over think this & don't peek over the previous days answers. It's ok if you come up with similar answers each day, but push yourself to be a little more creative each day. At the end of your work week, review all of your answers and pick the best ones to start incorporating in the following week. This is real thinking & these little improvements will make a major difference in your results in the months & years to follow.

Weekly - Every week I like to do a Sunday review. I basically answer the same questions every week, but the answers will continue to change as you become more and more focused. It's an exercise I've learned from Rich Schefren & it's been invaluable.

Here are the questions I like to run through:

1. What did I learn last week?

2. What is my greatest accomplishment over the last week?

3. What part of last week was most memorable?

4. What is the number 1 thing I need to accomplish next week?

5. What can I do right now to make next week less stressful?

6. What have I struggled with in the past that might also affect next week?

7. what was last weeks biggest time waster?

8. Am I carrying any mental clutter from last week that I can drop?

9. What have I been avoiding that needs to get done?

10. What opportunities have I been putting on the backburner that I should work on?

11. Is there anyone I've been meaning to talk to?

12. Have I thanked everyone who deserves thanking?

13. How can I help someone this coming week?

14. What are my top 3 goals for the next 3 year?

15. What recent actions have moved my closer to my goals?

16. what is the next step I can take for each goal?

17. What am I looking forward to this week?

18. What are my fears? How can I resolve them?

19. What am I most grateful for?

20. If I only had a week to live, who would I spend my final days with?

Can you see how answering these questions every week can immensely help you make major breakthrough & keep you focused on what is important? What is great is that the answers will change over time as you change and grow. This weekly review will grow with you.

Beliefs

As promised, we are going to get right to the heart of your beliefs & how to uncover which ones are worth keeping, & more importantly, which ones that need to go. Let's define a good & bad belief.

A positive belief is not necessarily one the is true, but instead is one that moving you towards your goals. Any belief that is moving you away from your goal has to be squashed. How do you identify a harmful belief? I learned this great tool & now I'll share it with you now!

Here's how it works.

When you have a thought, you simply ask yourself **why** 2 or 3 times and then follow it up with:
"What would I have to believe for these reasons to make sense?"

Here is an example:

When you have a thought like "I've got to buy that new synth"

Ask "why?" - "Because it will inspire me more"

and a second time "why?" - "Because it sounds awesome and my other synths are boring"

Finally, "What belief would I have to have for this to make sense?" - "I can't be successful in music using what I have already"

See how that works? We just uncovered a belief. Does this belief work for you or against you achieving your goals?

In my opinion, this belief would move me away from my goals and thus, I would want to dislodge it.

How do we dislodge a harmful belief? Yup, that's right, ask more questions.

Here are the ones I would be asking.:

Does this belief help me reach my goals, or slow me down?

What evidence contradicts this belief?

Are there any successful people I know personally who attribute this belief system to their success?

Finally let's replace this belief. Your new beliefs should meet the guidelines of this checklist.

Does this belief support the behaviors you want that will lead you to success?

In what way will this belief & these behaviors lead you towards success?

See? That's not too hard.

 Now all you do is be very honest with yourself as you go through your day, and write down anything that kept you from your day's goal. At the end of the day, you can go through this process above to wipe it out. Be very careful about where you are getting your information from. Friends, shows & the news are all feeding you information, and not all if it is good. Be cautious before letting new beliefs get installed in your head.

A preemptive strike against bad habits

A great way to avoid making the same mistakes you've made in the past is to be ready for them. That way when they show up, you immediately recognize them for what they are and choose a positive habit instead. This can really help with procrastination (which may just be the worst habit of them all).

Write down situations where you procrastinate, get distracted, get frustrated or run some negative habit that you know will get you nowhere.

Let's say when faced with working on your music, you instead start surfing the internet. This habit can do us no good, so let's not continue this. Changing this pattern is simple.

Write an **If/Then** question like this:

"**If** I am working on music, **then** I will immediately unplug my internet & focus on music for 1 hour without distracting myself with time wasting activities."

By deciding what you are going to do in advance, you will be able to defeat the habit instead of it destroying your productivity.

Weapons of mass distraction

We as a society have become information junkies, convinced that *more is better* & always searching for the next quick fix. With the internet, we take in far more information than we ever bother putting to use or ever *could* bother to put to use. We've come to a point in history where the balance is all wrong.

We want answers that require no real thinking on our part & the magic button that gives you the perfect EQ or compression everytime. I'm here to tell you, **there is no magic bullet** & there never was. Granted, there are some very good tools out there, but a success minded person could reach success without it & look great doing it.

Now I get it, when you are feeling uninspired and unmotivated, learning something new or reading about a new synth or plugin really juices up your imagination. Then again, how many tools do you already have, right now, that generated that same excitement in you? What is wrong with this tool now? It's still as good as it ever was. It's only *you* that has changed.

Whatever it is that you have now, you will always tend to feel the need for more & this isn't your fault. We are fed this lie from birth & the machine never stops until we die. It's important to realize that you are being sold to 24/7 and to assure yourself that you are ok, in fact better than ok with what you have right now. I'm not saying you should never try new things, but if you are just collecting new things as a distraction form actually finishing anything, you are wasting your time, your money & any chance as being successful with your music.

Social Media

Facebook, Twitter, Google plus & all the rest have become the great evil distractor. Instead of your mind being rewarded for getting actual work done, you instead get your quick fix from getting a "like" or "retweet" on one of your status updates. If you keep checking back every 10 minutes, it's not hard to get tons more or these small rewards without doing any useful work. Pretty soon your brain shuts down when asked to actually do rewarding work, because it's much more challenging to actually create, to make choices & to stand behind those creative choices. In fact, it might take time to find an audience "get" what you do & like it.

Don't be a social media junking. I suggest you limiting your Facebook/Twitter checking to twice during your work day & Always tackle something on your "to do" list before allowing yourself to check those sites. Also, set a 5 minute timer (even 2 minutes should be enough). When the timer goes off, so does the internet.

Put doing what you love above your desire for success

Don't make the mistake that many do of chasing fame & success to the degree that you stop doing what you love to get there. This is only a distraction from the path you are already creating doing your own thing. The sad thing is that it's hard to recognize that you are making the wrong step when these "opportunities" come up.

Maybe you get offered a paid gig to play commercial trance when you are more of a downtempo artist. It's enticing because there is money on the table and they tell you "If they like what you do, there's plenty more gigs for you". This seems like it's a fairly harmless offer, but you don't realize that soon you are constantly digging up music each week for your next trance gig while your real passion is put on the backburner. When do you usually get back to what you love? When the money stops coming in.

This only strengthens your desire for quick fixes by grabbing at every opportunity that comes your way instead of doing what you love. And let's face it, you aren't going to be very successful doing something you aren't 100% passionate about. Sticking to your passion can be hard when you don't see immediate results, but I promise you that there is a market for every artist who does what s/he loves. You work is to keep taking forward steps, planning your next moves & evaluating your progress.

This lesson took me far too long to learn & I wasted a lot of time chasing someone else's dreams instead of sticking with my own. I hope you can learn this lesson much sooner.

Get Focused

Wishy washy thinking is not how you want your brain to behave if you want to get somewhere with your art. It's important to be crystal clear about your intentions. Sure you can change your mind any time you want (unless the reason is a wimpy "it's too haaard").

The secret to better focus is as follows:

1. Know exactly what you want to accomplish musically

2. Figure out the minimum amount of work it's going to take

3. Divide it into bite sized tasks you can do immediately that will get you to your goal quickly & easily.

4. Tackle one task at a time & don't start a 2nd task until the 1st one is complete.

It's really that simple, however, as simple as it is, it's going to require some real thinking on your part. Don't slack off on the real work here. This is important if you are committed to your goals. You can't buy a shortcut here. Your work is solving the puzzle with your own brain.

This can be tough for those of you not used to doing this because we always love to search outside ourselves for the answer. This places the burden on someone else & when the answers aren't there, we can walk away without guilt. Not this time though.

Remember,

Successful people do what unsuccessful people are unwilling to do.

Clear Goals, Deadlines & Visualization

Clear goals

When it comes to goal setting, vague goals are not going to cut it. Keeping goals in your pocket like "Make more money", "Write more songs" or "Be happier", you're wasting your time. There is no clarity, therefore your brain doesn't ever know what to aim for & how it will know when the goal is reached. You can't see, touch, taste feel & smell these goals. These goals are like a Dart player setting the goal of "hit the dart board". Goals like this are so vague that they can't possibly improve any aspect of your life.

If you want to write more songs, you need to get more detailed. How many songs are you going to write? What styles of music are they going to be? Are you planning on making an album or an e.p.? What labels would you like to have your songs signed to? Will you be working solo or include collaborations?

Deadlines

You've heard it said, I'm sure, that *a goal without a deadline is nothing but a dream*. This is so true. Everybody says things like "oh I'd love to go to Paris", "I'd love to skydive", "I really want to play Madison Square Garden". How many people actually do these things? I'd guess between 2-5% at best. This is because they never set a deadline for completing this goal. They probably never even wrote the goal down. If you don't give your mind a detailed goal and a deadline, don't expect some miracle to happen. If going through this process stresses you out or your mind becomes blank, it's probably because you didn't *really* want to accomplish this goal in the first place.

Visualization

Lastly, it's extremely important that you practice visualization. Taking 20 minutes a day to imagine yourself accomplishing the goal & feeling this with all of your senses.
Now I'm not a great visualizer & I have a hard time holding an image. Don't worry about it. What is most important is that you feel the feelings as intensely as possible. Enjoy the experience and then let it go. Holding on to the visualization or doing it 3 times a day may sent a different signal to your brain. One of a desperate person who doesn't really believe s/he can finish a great song, get singed, get written up in magazine or play sold out shows.

Tackle more believable goals first to build your confidence. It's important that you look at this goal with excitement but also kinda like it's no big deal. Just another day in your awesome life. You don't make a big deal out of the things you've already got, so you want to match that feeling with the things that you want. I know it sounds voodoo, but trust me, you'll start having syncronicities & things will begin to line up. Again, don't make too big a deal over this, just kinda have that "of course this is happening" type of vibe.

Also, very important. Doors will likely start opening up for opportunities that are close to what you want, but not quite there. Don't cave. Hold out for what you really want. It may take a bit longer but will be far more satisfying when you get there.

I hope these tips will change your productivity & your life as much as they continue to change mine. I'm so excited to hear your success stories, which I am confident you will have plenty of when you put this information to use in combination with all the other resources you have as a member of the **Ableton Producer's Playground**. Remember to take bite sized chunks of information and put it to use immediately before devouring more techniques and information. Always check in with yourself & ask if a certain technique is actually something that will get you closer to your goals or is just an entertaining distraction. Entertainment is fine, but not during work time. My goal is for you to have well produced finished music that you can be proud of & build a career from.

I wouldn't suggest trying to put all the techniques to use all at once. Instead, build the habit of Journaling for 2-4 weeks, Then add some steps to getting organized for a few

weeks. Whatever you think will help you the most is what you should choose next. Now go on & put your own dent in the universe!

Happy Music Making!

Jason