

A large, stylized red brushstroke graphic that partially overlaps the signature.

Keith R. Webster

A LETTER TO THE PARENTS

First of all, I want to give a shout out to all the moms and dads out there. Easily the hardest job in the world, but also the most rewarding, right? But this article isn't about you. This article isn't about all the great moms and dads that manage their kids and help them every day, whether they are writing songs in their bedroom or touring the world. After all, a lot of famous singers were managed by their parents. Beyonce and her dad are probably the most famous.

Michael Jackson too although not in a good way. Taylor Swift's dad was instrumental in her career success. But this article isn't about the great momagers and dadagers out there. It's about the bad ones. Hear me out. I've seen a lot of crazy things after 20 years in the music business. And one of the worst offenses in my opinion is the bad momager or dadager. I am writing this article to hopeful shed some light on poor decisions and behavior in the hopes you won't make the same mistakes.

DADAGER #1 "THE USER"

Some years ago I found a really talented, young singer/ songwriter. She was trying to mimic Norah Jones (for anyone old enough to remember her). We spent quite a bit of time together and countless hours on the phone where I shared free advice in the hopes of signing his daughter. However, he was hesitant to commit to any type of management agreement, even after months of meetings and oodles of free advice and no real reason not to sign. Well, one day I am sitting down to lunch with another manager friend of mine. Of course, we get to talking and she casually mentions the same young singer songwriter. It turns out, her dad was also milking her for months of free advice and information and stringing her along too with clearly no intention of signing with either of us.

Now, some might think that is smart behavior. But the music industry is a VERY small world....even smaller now. And shockingly, those of us in the business don't like finding out that we are being used and taken advantage of. I tried talking to her directly and she said, "I know he's bad...but he's my dad. What can I do?" Of course, her career never went anywhere and she ended up giving up on music and getting married, never to be heard from again.

The moral of the story: be honest with people. It's fine to check someone out before signing with them. Savvy in fact.

But if you're just using multiple people with no intention of committing to anyone, DON'T. People talk. People know each other in this city and industry.

And when you're found out, you can bet that they will tell everyone they know not to work with you because you aren't a good honest person and are taking advantage of people's kindness. The lesson? If you find a good, honest and hard-working manager or representative in the music business, sign with them! Don't keep playing the field. Otherwise, you end up being labeled a "user" and instead of finding a great manager, end up with NO ONE!

MOMAGER #2 "I KNOW EVERYTHING"

I've worked with countless moms and dads who fall into this category. They think they know everything, despite the fact that they've never worked for a record label, management company or in the music or entertainment business at all. It's a real shame because when someone thinks they know everything, they are shooting themselves in the foot for many reasons and jeopardizing the very careers of the child they so desperately want to help succeed. After all, you wouldn't go to a dentist who had never done a root canal and tell them you know best, would you? "Drill more to the right, not the left! I know!!" That would be ridiculous, right? I look up this one momager's daughter from time to time. She thought her daughter would be the next Taylor Swift. Well, her daughter is still playing regional shows in and around her home town and hasn't done anything noteworthy. But her mom knows best...

The lesson? Listen to someone in the industry if they really know their stuff.

DADAGER #3:

DESPERATE PARENT / POOR DECISION MAKER™

Most recently, a dad called me about his 20 year old son. (Of course, I wondered why his son wasn't calling me himself. He's 20 of course, not 12!) Anyhow, the dadager's phone pitching skills were really bad...but I took a listen to his son's music anyhow and thought I heard some potential. We had a nice meeting over dinner and wine at his house and I met his mom and songwriting and band partner. After several hours of giving countless free industry advice, I found out they were currently working with a really dishonest person who had been sentenced to jail time. When I told them they were making a huge mistake, the dad refused to listen. I sent dozens of emails explaining the deal they were about to sign was a bad one. They didn't care.

When some artists or their parents see money, all good sense goes out the window. It's crazy to me because this industry is so small... Why would you associate yourself with dishonest and shady people when there are so many good, honest people you can work with and make money with?? I guarantee you that if you get into bed with someone who is dishonest and has a history of scamming \$10,000 a month from artist's parents before, it will eventually happen to you too. But the dad was desperate. He wouldn't listen to reason or common sense or anything no matter how much I pleaded with him. So, I had to walk away. I can almost guarantee you that family is going to eventually be bilked out of tens of thousands of dollars because they are doing business with a bad person. But they don't care. So dumb. The lesson: Don't walk but RUN away from dishonest people.

MOMAGER #4: "THE OVERPROTECTOR"

A couple years ago I stumbled upon this really amazing young singer. She has been home schooled but had this really beautiful voice and album she had made. Well, despite her beautiful voice, her parents were sweet but had just sheltered her too much. She had no idea how to use social media at all and had no ability or understanding of the platforms she needed (Facebook, IG, YouTube, Twitter) to promote her music. You can't expect you can hire people to manage your social media for you (at least not in the beginning). And they didn't have the money to hire someone anyhow...

And what was worse, since she was home schooled, she had so few friends and classmates that she couldn't even get out in front of people she knew. Her mom was sweet, don't get me wrong, but they had no band and doing anything with them was almost impossible as they couldn't even book more than one show. It's good to care about your kids...but then the music business is really not for you because you need to be incredibly social and can't shelter your kid if you want them to succeed. The lesson: Sometimes you need to get go to get ahead! Perhaps you have a story to share too?

Kirt B. Webster

I hope these stories can shed some light on common mistakes that parents make in trying to "make it" in the music business so you can avoid them too! Maybe you've made some of these same mistakes in your own careers. What have you learned?

Sincerely,

Kirt B. Webster