

How do you know when it's time to quit your day job? by Wade Sutton
(September 2017)

“When should I quit my day job and do music full-time?” It really is the \$1,000,000 question, isn't it?

So many music artists dream about the point in their careers when they can quit the day job and do music for a living, yet most seem stuck in a state of limbo, working a 40-hour “regular job” every week and putting maybe 20 hours into their music.

Limbo was never meant to be an easy place from which to escape. Same goes for this decisive spot in a music career.

This conversation came up during a one-on-one consultation I had recently with an artist from Erie, Pennsylvania. He works at an auto dealership during the week but has been booking steady gigs Thursday through Sunday pretty much every weekend. These are paid gigs, but the majority of his income is from the regular job while his monthly finances are being bolstered by the music. Which makes music, essentially, a part-time job.

What I share in this article is a breakdown of the four steps I discussed with him.

Step 1: Figure out how much you need to survive

This one is pretty self-explanatory, so it doesn't require a lot of discussion, but I will say this: When I say figure out how much you need to survive, I mean just that.

I'm not talking about figuring out how much money you will need each month to pay for your bills plus enough to buy a fourth guitar, NFL season tickets, a new PlayStation game, and money to go out drinking every weekend.

I'm talking about what you need to pay your living expenses and everything you **NEED** for your music (strings, gas in your vehicle, Internet, phone, etc.).

There is no blanket amount of money per month I can give you and say, “If you are making **THIS** amount of money from your music each month, you can quit the day job.” Everybody's situation is different and the number varies due to things like whether you have a family to feed, the cost of living where you live, and a host of other things.

You need to sit down, look at all of your bills and expenses, determine how much money you need to meet all of those responsibilities each month – plus a little put aside for emergencies – and write that number down on a piece of paper. Then calculate how much you are bringing in from your music each month, right now, and write that figure next to the first.

Keep that paper handy... you are going to need it in a bit.

Step 2: Identify what can be monetized

One reason many artists haven't made the transition to doing music full-time is that they do not put in the time and effort in to learn about and pursue the MANY ways to monetize music.

While some manners in which you can monetize your music will yield paltry amounts of income on a monthly basis, they are still forms of income and every little bit helps. I've dealt with so many music artists operating with blinders on and nearly all of their energy is dedicated exclusively to playing live and selling their CDs.

Don't get me wrong, that is a vital part of this process. Your live show and CD sales can be a cash cow if you approach the production and marketing the show properly, but many artists fail to educate themselves on alternative income sources that could help them get past that tipping point where they tell their boss to shove it where the sun doesn't shine.

It still shocks me how many artists don't fully understand the roles PROs play in music and how being a member of one could benefit them financially. There are so many possibilities for licensing your music for things like television, movies, and video games.

If your weekends are booked up playing the traditional venues like bars, clubs, or festivals, start working the house concert scene during the week. Learn about securing sponsorships, whether they be financial or in-kind. Music artists mistakenly think they can't get sponsorships until they "make it big." That simply is not true. Even if you are only doing music on a local level, you can find local businesses that will support you, especially if you are a regular customer of theirs. It might not be a lot of money each month, but every little bit helps.

In addition to building up your own fan base, work your tail off and try to get yourself a publishing deal. Make the initial investment and begin selling merchandise.

Spend a little bit of money and create a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) for your music. It doesn't cost that much to do, and it will allow you to write off business expenses during tax season and keep more of the money you're already earning (not to mention the legal protections it grants you). Don't look at creating a LLC as an expense; it is an investment that yields a return.

Start teaching people how to play guitar or piano. Start looking for session work.

It is important to understand you don't want to just quit your job and do music full-time; you want it to STAY that way. The music business is just that: a business. All businesses experience periods where the money seemingly pours in for months and then goes dry for a stretch.

The reason it is so vital to pursue every single penny your music can bring in is because when one source dries up, you will need the other sources to pick up the slack. That way, if you experience a month or two where the live show bookings

aren't up to par, you still have enough money coming in from these other sources so you don't go bust and have to seek out another job.

Step 3: Understand the value of your time

This is a very difficult concept for a lot of people and, honestly, it is one of the things that separates those who are great at business from those who repeatedly fail at it.

A lot of music artists don't understand the true value of their time. I'm talking about the artists who scoff at paying \$15 per month for a subscription to a service that can help automate their social media accounts (like Hootsuite or Buffer). They see it as, "I don't want to spend \$15 dollars on THAT when I can use that to go out and do something with."

What they don't realize is they are spending an extra 10 hours a week running their social media without the automated service and, if they used it, they could cut that time in half. So they would effectively give themselves an extra 20 hours per month to do other things that need to be done, including things that would make them far more money than what they'll spend on the subscription.

Let's say that for every hour of work you put into your music, it yields, in one form or another, \$40 in income. Now let's also say you have a yard that needs to be mowed every week and it takes two hours to mow it. Do you mow it yourself or do you pay somebody \$40 to mow it for you?

You could do what most people do and say, "Why would I pay somebody \$40 to mow the yard when I can do it myself? That would be a waste of money!" But that isn't how successful business people look at it.

Successful business people would rather pay somebody the \$40 because they know they can then redirect their time and energy and spend those hours doing things that will MAKE them \$40 per hour. In their eyes, NOT paying somebody to do it for them would be a loss of over \$300 a month.

But if they pay somebody to do the work for them, the successful business person then works those hours and earns double the money they're paying to get the grass mowed.

I'm not just barking up a tree talking about this kind of mentality: It is a hard mental wall to break through, and I'm telling you that from personal experience. When I started my own business in the music industry, I struggled to wrap my head around thinking in this manner. But once you do and once you begin to truly understand the value of your personal time, it's a game changer that will impact almost every decision you make.

Step 4: The 20/40/60 rule

Everything I talked about in the first three steps plays a factor in this last one. This thing I call the 20/40/60 rule is a great way to determine how close you are to

realistically tipping the scale so you can declare yourself a full-time music artist and walk away from the “regular job.”

Earlier in this post I mentioned how many music artists are working a 40-hour job while supplementing their income working on music 20 hours per week (including time spent performing, booking, writing, marketing, etc.).

So these are people juggling a part-time job (20 hours) and a full-time job (40 hours) for a work week made up of a combined 60ty hours: 20/40/60.

You’ve sat down and pinpointed exactly how much money you would need each month to survive and have a little left over for saving. You’ve also sat down and determined how much money you make each month from your music working on it 20 hours per week.

If the system and habits you have in place now result in you making X dollars from your music each week working 20 hours, how much money will you earn each month from your music if you quit the day job and replicate that system and those habits over a full 60 hours each week?

In theory, you could triple the amount of money you make each month from your music. Now compare that number to how much you determined you need to survive each month.

Some of you are probably a lot closer to being at that tipping point than you realized. Others aren’t there quite yet, but now you know exactly where you stand on this journey.

You finally have a concrete and specific goal for which to reach instead of feeling like you are stuck in limbo trying to chase down some ambiguous end game that you haven’t been able to clearly define for yourself.

Having the guts to actually pull the trigger and leave the structure and clockwork-like paycheck of the regular job... that’s another story.

I want to give you a FREE 24-page preview of an upcoming book, *Hacking Music: The Music Business Model Canvas*. It is a new book about the music business I’m co-authoring with John Pisciotta of Jetpack Artist Ventures in Nashville. We are giving away that preview exclusively through NoiseTrade and you can get your copy by [clicking here](#).

With clients in major cities like Nashville, New York, London, Sydney, and Toronto, *Rocket to the Stars’* Wade Sutton has dedicated his life to helping music artists in all aspects of their careers. Armed with 20 years of radio journalism experience, Wade now provides an array of services to artists, including writing biographies and press releases; creating press kits, websites, and sponsorship proposals; media interview preparation; and more. In 2014, Wade co-authored a music business eBook titled *The \$150,000 Music Degree* with Rick Barker. [Click here](#) to get a FREE copy of the book today.

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