

The Four Agreements and Music, Part 1

by Dennis Winge

The Four Agreements by Don Miguel Ruiz is a bit of ancient wisdom boiled down to four steps that are very simple but very profound in their implications and can transform your life if practiced consciously. It's not a book about music at all, but each one pertains greatly to being a successful musician or learning an instrument.

The four agreements are: 1. Be Impeccable with your Word; 2. Don't Take Anything Personally; 3. Don't Make Assumptions; 4. Always Do Your Best. Today we will focus on number 1: **Be Impeccable with your Word**. It means understanding the power of the spoken word and using it to benefit you and everyone around you. How does this apply in music?

The more successful you are as a musician, the more commitments you end up being offered. Being impeccable with your word means several things and applies to both the amateur and professional levels.

1. **Be careful with what you commit to.** Tommy Tedesco said it best. Paraphrasing, he said 'If a gig doesn't have at least one of the following, forget it: 1. Money 2. Learning 3. Networking 4. Fun.' This could also apply to forming bands, going to someone's house to rehearse, record, or jam. Take your time seriously, and you will be rewarded for it. Squander your time and you will end up frustrated.
2. **Keep your commitments.** Obviously, once you make a commitment, honor it. If it ends up not working out for you for personal or musical reasons beyond the short-term, you can always re-negotiate. But if it's just a question of your being lazy or distracted, then do what you say you'll do.
3. **Give honest, sincere appreciation.** Everyone loves to get positive feedback on their playing. A secret is, you attract what you radiate. So compliment other players where it is due. Take it a step further than the standard line "sounds great!" Say something specific about what you like about that person's playing.
4. **Constructive criticism is good, but get permission first.** The music industry is notorious for people getting fired or at least not re-hired for gigs without the person who lost the opportunity finding out the real reason for the decision. Bandleaders and club-owners typically just move on the next person or band they think could fit the position better. But if people would simply tell each other, nicely of course, what they think could be improved, we could all save a lot of time and energy. However, ask "may I give you a bit of constructive feedback?" before you volunteer anything.
5. **Remind others of their commitments when appropriate.** Venue-owners are notorious for changing details last-minute on a gig based on all sorts of reasons, like they didn't make what they thought they would on ticket sales or at the bar, and they want to deduct the difference out of the musicians' wages, for example. Contracts are important. Use them when appropriate. If it feels too formal to do a contract for the event you are being asked to perform, at the very least one of you can summarize in an email all the details and ask the other person to respond confirming that the details are right. This applies not only limited to agreements between musicians and venues, it could be between several musicians, or different bands, etc.

