

The Four Agreements and Music, Part 3

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 3: **Don't Make Assumptions**. This is hugely relevant to the music business.

1. **When things Go Wrong on the Bandstand.** Don't assume that it was your fault (I had this problem for many years, and every once in a while it still rears its ugly head). Don't assume it was your band-mates' fault or faults, either. Record every gig, and listen back to it, but not right away. Give it a month when you are no longer feeling a lot of emotional connection to how well it went or not. The recorder doesn't lie (assuming the quality is decent enough and it is placed in a good enough place to capture the whole sound accurately.) It can be an invaluable learning tool.
2. **When people seem to love you.** Have you ever considered that there are so many other factors besides the quality of your performance that influences an audience? Suppose there's a birthday party going on in the club and the birthday girl or guy wants to dance and the whole party goes up there with him or her. You may think it's because you're doing so well and inspiring them, or that your song selection is perfect, or that your original song is so compelling. But what if they are simply reacting to the shots they just did at the bar? Of course this is only one example, but over the years you learn that the way you perceive your performance can be vastly different from the way your audience does. Don't assume anything.
3. **When people seem to be indifferent.** Let's take the scenario above. You're in the exact same club playing the exact same song on the exact same night of the week with the exact same time-slot, just 3 months later. There are 3 people in the bar and none of them are facing the band or applauding. Don't assume no one dislikes you or your band either. These things happen.
4. **When learning an instrument or jamming with new people..** Don't assume you are the worst student in the class or group. Don't assume you are too slow or will hold everyone up, or will be thought of as stupid if you ask a silly question. Perhaps some of the other students will be wondering the exact same thing. Don't assume that you've got it all figured out, either. That's just when you'll meet some other player who's going to blow you out of the water.

The list goes on and on. All these agreements take practice. That's why I said above that the book is simple but its implications are profound. See if you can watch yourself making assumptions all the time in your musical life. It'll get easier the more you watch, and adjust your thinking. Good luck.