

Thirty Things Every Music Producer Should Know

(According to Mike Monday)

www.mikemonday.com

Part Two



Mike Monday is the inspirational coach who helps artists, writers, musicians and entrepreneurs to work consistently better faster.

His mission is to help and inspire creative people to live the life they want to lead,

He does this through [his blog](#) and [personal coaching business](#) where he uses his intimate knowledge of the creative process combined with the Neuro-Linguistic Programming techniques he has studied as a qualified NLP Practitioner.

After getting a degree in music from Oxford University in 1994, he immediately embarked on his own creative journey as an electronic musician and has released well over 250 tracks & 3 albums and has performed in over 20 countries.

Well known in the electronic music world for his unique approach, as a fiercely independent creator he owned three record labels and ran his own music publishing company.

He is also considered to be a pioneer in engaging and reaching out to his fans through new digital media.

It is this work connecting and communicating with other creative people worldwide that finally led him to his real passion and purpose:

Making a difference in the lives of those who make a difference.

He currently lives in London, UK with his beautiful wife and son.

Get my free email updates:

www.mikemonday.com/newsletter

Book a free 30 minute strategy session:

www.mikemonday.com/free-strategy-session



Mike Monday

Personal Performance for Creative People

This is Part 2 of a free e-book which is yours to read, distribute or give away in any way you wish in any non-commercial setting.

If you want a copy of Part 1 you can get it here:

<http://www.mikemonday.com/musicproductionpdf>

If you want to give it away please remember to credit me as the author. A link to my website would be much appreciated:

<http://www.mikemonday.com>

If you wish to use any of the contents of this e-book for commercial purposes, please contact me direct:

<http://www.mikemonday.com/contact>

Introduction

What follows contains much of what I have learnt from 17 years of writing and producing well over 250 pieces of commercially released electronic music.

It's largely made up of articles I wrote for [my website](#) through the first half of 2011, although I have written some extra pieces for it and edited others.

It is a mixture of music production advice, ideas on improving your creative process and some less specific motivational and inspirational stuff.

I hope you get as much from it as I got from writing it. To get more of the same, feel free to [sign up for my free regular email updates](#).

Mike Monday
London, July 2011

#16/ The Most Important Question You Will Ever Ask Yourself

'Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?'
'That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,' said
the Cat.

'I don't much care where' said Alice.

'Then it doesn't matter which way you go,' said the Cat.

- Lewis Carroll, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland"

If you're engaging in any activity, in fact if you intend to engage in life at all, the first question to ask yourself is:

"What do I want?"

This might seem obvious, but in all my work with creative people it never ceases to amaze me how many of them have never asked this question. Have you?

I'm sure you know what you don't want. I bet you know what you think you should want. And you'll know what other people want from you.

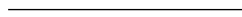
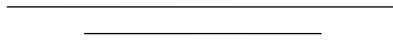
But do you know for sure what you want? Because if you don't, how will you work out how to get it?

#17/ You're Not Talented

I get annoyed on those rare occasions that people tell me I'm talented.

Because unless you're lucky enough to be a genius you don't have a gift. You're not talented. You are no more or less able than the next person.

What you do have is the ability to better yourself through determination, persistence and practice.



#18/ One Simple Technique to Beat The Fear and Do Your Art

How do you find the strength to face your fear and do your art?

The answer is simple: do it every day.

Put the time in. No exceptions. 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

(I said simple not easy!)

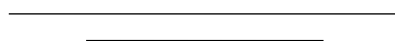
It doesn't matter whether it's writing, performing, running, playing poker or starting a business. Whatever it is, set aside a sacrosanct chunk of time each day for complete devotion to your art. Even ten minutes a day is enough at first. Just do your art every day and give it your all.

When you make a daily commitment like this you turn it into a habit. And habits are hard to break. [The Fear](#) doesn't stand a chance.

Go on right now, be your best; do your art.

If you're inspired that's brilliant. But if you're going backwards and wonder why you're doing this and think you're not good enough...

...just do it anyway until your time is up. There's always tomorrow.



#19/ The Quickest and Easiest Way to Triple Your Output

It's simple.

Forget how it sounds in your head.

If you can't start, finish, or always get stuck, I bet it's because you keep trying to make it sound the way it does in your head. The music in your head is an excellent place to start. But unless you're Mozart, striving to make it exactly as you imagine it will end in frustration.

You see, the way it sounds in your head is just that. In your head.

When I realised this, the quantity of work I finished (at least) tripled. The music was better too.

4 reasons why

1/ You'll miss moments of genius

By concentrating on what's in your head you'll ignore or reject the other (possibly brilliant) ideas that come out of nowhere. These are gold dust. Jump on them. Hint - they're what most people call inspiration.

2/ You'll lose momentum

If you're going to finish your music, momentum is key. Trying to make it exactly the same as the music in your head will bring you to a screeching halt.

3/ Danger! Boredom!

You'll tweak and twiddle for hours in your quest to make the sound in your head. And after listening to the same thing over and over you'll get bored

of it. You probably won't even remember what you were trying to do in the first place. The only thing you'll remember is that you didn't do it.

4/ You won't hear what's really playing

This is the kicker. If you focus on what's in your head you won't listen to what's coming out of the speakers. Then you're in danger of hearing what you want, not what it is. Which (because you spent ages trying to make it sound like the music in your head) is probably a pile of crap. When you say "why is it awful this morning when it was so good last night?", this is why.

How to forget what's in your head

Yes - start by trying to make what you hear in your head.

But when you have a vague approximation, stop thinking about the music in your head and start listening to what's coming out of your speakers.

Do something crazy. Be creative. Play. Have fun. That is why you're doing this - right?

Reframe it. Play the same part on a different sound. Play a different sound on the same part. Try a different rhythm. If it's not working, try something else.

While you're jamming, constantly keep your ears open for the ideas that were never in your head, but which sound amazing.

When they happen (and trust me - eventually they will) jump on them, even if they're not what you were expecting. Especially if they're not what you were expecting.

But above all, make it sound good in your ears, not in your head.

#20/ Pay Attention

When you go back to something, pay close attention to your first listen.

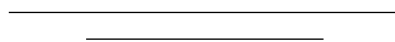
I have no idea why this is, but the ideas and inspirations I get on the first listen are the most insightful and exciting that I have.

But they're also the most fleeting and ephemeral as if in a dream.

So make sure you have a notepad and a pen to hand before you press play. Don't stop it. Listen all the way through from beginning to end. And while you're listening note down every thought you have on that first listen as fast as you can.

Whatever you do, don't listen to it again until you've got all your thoughts down. I'd even suggest avoid listening to it again. Go do the stuff you are thinking about right now.

Apart from anything else, most people who hear your music will be hearing it for the first time too and you want to pay attention to how they'll hear it.



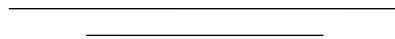
#21/ Boing Boing Boing

When writing a tune I used to bounce my individual tracks simply to save on processor power. But it's now an integral part of my creative process.

When I bounce something (i.e. record it to an audio track), it's set in stone in my mind. It's unlikely I'll mess with it because its a hassle to reload the original part and synth, sampler or whatever.

This focusses me on getting the part right and forces me to move on. I avoid the dangerous temptations of perfectionism and maintain precious momentum.

So as you create, keep on bouncing those parts. Boing boing boing.



#22/ Are You a Perfectionist?

Some say “I’m a perfectionist” with pride.

But to me the pursuit of perfection is an advanced form of procrastination. Here’s why you should stop trying to make it perfect.

You’ll never achieve it

How exactly are you going to achieve perfection?

You won’t, it’s not possible.

So how will never being able to achieve what you’re striving for make you feel? Confidence is key to creation and your pursuit of perfection will kill it.

Perfection isn’t the same as good

Why assume that something perfect is better than something imperfect?

Our Western ideal of beauty and perfection probably comes from the Ancient Greeks. But this isn’t the only way to think.

The Japanese aesthetic of [Wabi Sabi](#) - beauty that is imperfect, impermanent and incomplete - makes much more sense to me than an ideal of perfection.

Failure equals growth

“Success is 99% failure” - Soichiro Honda

Your endless quest for perfection has its roots in fear of failure.

But if you build your courage you'll learn to accept and expect failure as a natural and important part of the creative process.

Fail, fail and fail again. Because when you fail you learn.

The internet

If you don't agree with any of the above, then consider the modern world.

Soon all your work will either be promoted or distributed through the internet. The internet rewards transparency over secrecy. It also rewards quantity over quality. You might not like it, but it's the truth.

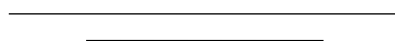
In this world it's better to get as much as you can finished and released than tinker and tweak attempting to achieve perfection.

A caveat

I'm not suggesting that you should immediately release a load of crap. And I'm assuming that you care about what you do and make deeply, and that you always try to be your best.

But assuming this, forget about perfection. Because it is more honest, courageous and useful to your development to get on with it, finish it, and get it out the door.

Worry whether it's any good later.



#23/ 5 Ways to Stop Being a Perfectionist

If you're anything like me, no matter how much you try, you still find yourself constantly perfecting but not completing.

Here's five ways of building and maintaining creative momentum by avoiding that niggling urge to perfect.

1/ Treat everything as a draft

Think of everything as a draft, not the finished article. You'll trick your brain into focussing on the big picture and not the details.

You don't have to worry about the details now. You just have to finish this draft. Get it done. You can go back and perfect it later.

Because it's only a draft, it's not set in stone and you'll finish it. At worst you'll have something tangible to work on, at best you'll have it in the bag.

2/ Take a break

When you've completed your "draft" make sure you take a break. The longer the better.

Sleep on it if you can.

When you're fresh go back to it and you'll probably find that its not as awful as you thought. (And it might even be done.)

3/ Rush it

Pick a creative task that should take an hour.

Set a timer for 30 minutes and attempt to complete it. Hold yourself to account here and just get through it. Even if you think it's terrible.

Rushing it means you won't have time to think and you might even release your inner creative genius.

4/ Multitask

Continue working while reading and replying to some emails, or reading some blog posts, or tidying your workspace. It's amazing what you can come up with when you only have half a brain on it.

This is the opposite of what I'd usually recommend as you're intentionally forcing yourself to lose focus. But if you find yourself getting lost in details try it occasionally and in short bursts.

5/ Play!

Take what you're working on and mess with it. Change everything. Be ridiculous. Shock yourself. See how far you can push it away from what you were intending.

Have fun. Be stupid. Go wild.

You never know what inspiration you'll find at the edges.

#24/ Record Everything You Do

How many times have you listened to a track you just bought and wished you'd not spent the money, only to realise later that it was brilliant?

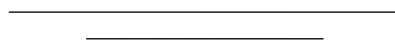
The music hasn't changed but something in your world has made you understand it and connect with it. Maybe it's just grown on you.

Bearing this in mind, how many of your tracks have you scrapped which had great potential?

Record everything you do, every single time you stop working. Be militant about this. Make sure you leave enough time at the end of every session to record it, even when it's completely unfinished, sounds terrible, and you hate it.

Especially when you hate it.

Because you'll listen to it at some point in the future and realise just how good it is. Or could be.



#25/ How to Turn Your Inner Critic into Your Greatest Asset

Your inner critic is your most reliable guide of what to avoid doing. So when that voice in your head says you need more, use even less.

When it thinks you've gone too far, go further. And when it tells you it's not good enough, finish it anyway. Go wherever you feel the most resistance, because this is where the magic happens.

Because if you're anything like me, your inner critic can be a very nasty piece of work. It will say anything and everything to stop you from doing [what you were born to do](#).

It wants to feel safe. It wants you to stop. [It wants you to be scared](#). So trust your natural critical faculties. They'll remain intact even when you're flying in the face of your inner critic.

In this brave new connected world, the winners are those who are unique. And trust me, your inner critic wants you to do anything but stand out.



#26/ The 7 Deadly Sins Against Creativity

It can be hard to get your creative juices flowing. But if you avoid these, [The Muse](#) will have little excuse not to come and breath in your right ear.

1/ Tiredness

The average person needs between 7 and 8 hours sleep a night. Go to bed early if you're an early bird, or lie in if you're a night owl. This is my number one piece of advice for anyone who wants to get anything done.

2/ Choice

Too many ideas, too many tools, too many distractions. Decide on one idea and focus on limiting your options before you start. You'll do better work quicker.

3/ Email

Including [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and internet surfing. If at all possible don't check your emails more than twice a day and set aside a specific chunk of time each day when you're not working on your art for your social networks and [RSS feeds](#).

4/ Clutter

Physical - start by removing anything unnecessary for you to do your work in your immediate vicinity. Each day move outwards until your whole workspace is free of distracting clutter.

Mental - begin every day with a little quiet time and try to empty your head of all thoughts completely. I've recently got back to meditating for 20 minutes every morning before I do anything.

5/ Envy

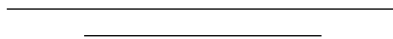
Ignore what anyone else is doing. You might covet their success; in your eyes it might be undeserved, but don't waste time thinking about it. Anything that's outside your work is irrelevant.

6/ Critics

Ignore them at all costs. Chris Guillebeau summed it up when he said that no one's ever erected a statue of a critic. I don't think there are any statues of coaches either, but I'm trying to change that. :)

7/ Perfectionism

Just finish it! Its good enough already.



#27/ The Secret to Starting an Album

If you're stuck try this. (It's how I started [my first two albums](#)).

Every day for a week spend an hour just starting stuff. Get a groove going, add parts quickly, don't worry about the details at all, just get a vibe.

Once you have a basic idea down, make sure you record it. Then move on and start something else. Above all don't get sucked into one groove or sound or making it perfect.

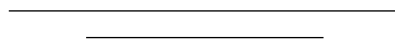
The idea is to just get a load of ideas down as fast as possible.

When your hour is up stop. Turn off the computer. Leave the area. Forget about it.

Do the same every day for a week. Don't listen back to what you did the day before, just sit down and get as many ideas down as you can.

By the end of the week you'll have a load of ideas. Give it a while before listening to them. Maybe give it a week or so. When you do, listen to them one after the other. Make sure you have a notepad next to you and write down whatever comes into your head as you're listening.

Many of your ideas will be crap, (ignore the crap) but worry not. I guarantee there'll be some gold in there. Probably enough for an album.



#28/ Behind Every Great Person...

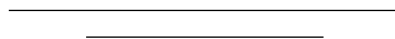
Behind anyone successful there is someone else.

Famous artists, entrepreneurs, politicians and sportspeople who seem to have done it all themselves have had a mentor, sponsor or partner who is as responsible for their success as they are. In some cases more so.

I haven't had just one person who's helped me throughout my creative career. I've had times when I've had someone and times when it's just been me. But if I look back, it's startling how the most successful periods of my life were when I had someone else in my corner. And if I'm honest, when I didn't my career stagnated.

If you want to make it to the top find someone to help you get there, Whether it be a manager, agent, publisher, partner, mentor or coach.

Having someone with you to bounce ideas off, to give guidance and support and to be interested and invested in your success is just as important as the work you do.



#29/ Experience is a Great Teacher but a Lousy Coach

How many times have you had a conversation with someone and you've later disagreed about what's been said? Why is that so often another person's description of an event bears no relation to your experience?

It's down to the way we interpret and organise information.

We constantly delete, distort and generalise what happens to us. And how we do this depends on our beliefs, values, how we physically feel, what's on our mind at the time and what's happened before.

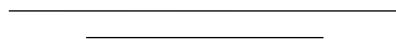
In other words your memories or "experience" are merely representations of what actually occurred and often bear little (or sometimes no) relation to reality.

Maybe you did something once that you remember as going badly, or maybe you thought it went well at first but someone criticised you.

As a result you believe forever more "I can't do..." or "I'm terrible at..." or "I've got no natural ability...", and never attempt it again.

Can you see how this might turn into a vicious circle?

Go ahead and learn from experience, but don't let it teach you anything about what you can't do. Instead let it show you where you can improve.



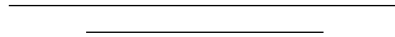
#30/ You'll Just Know

In one way, finishing your art is like being in love.

When it's right "you'll just know".

But if you don't, finish it anyway.

(The art, not the love)



Last Word...

Thank you for taking the time to download and read the second part of this e-book. I hope that it provides you with some guidance or inspiration (or maybe both).

To get Part 1 click here:

<http://www.mikemonday.com/musicproductionpdf>

And I'd love to hear how you've used some of these ideas in your own creative pursuits, and it would be great²⁴ to hear some of the fruits of your labours.

So if there's anything you can think of that I can help you with now or in the future please don't hesitate to get in touch.

In any case I'm sure I'll see you at [my website](#) very soon.

Onwards and upwards,

Mike Monday

July 2011

Get my free email updates:

www.mikemonday.com/newsletter

Book a free 30 minute strategy session:

www.mikemonday.com/free-strategy-session