



HOW TO WIN BIG IN THE MUSIC BUSINESS

CLINTON SPARKS

Foreword by **DAYMOND JOHN**

Acknowledgments

Thanks to my mother who, despite being left to raise two children and working nonstop, never made us feel as broke as we were. She always put a home-cooked dinner on the table and too many presents under the Christmas tree. Most importantly, thank you for putting music inside me, for always playing music in the house or in the car: from Hall & Oates to the Commodores to Prince. You are the reason music is in my blood. Thank you.

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Foreword

I understand what it is to come from nothing and hustle your way to the top. I've been in the struggle. I've lived it. I know how the game is played and what it takes to reach your goals. I have lived through the phase of knowing that I was good enough to make it but being unable to convince those around me. I know a lot of you are in that position right now. Trust me, I can relate. The most important thing for most artists to learn is how to position themselves properly for success. I knew early on that I was meant to do something great, but it took me a long time to unlock my potential and maximize the effort I was putting towards my dream.

Looking back, I can recognize a crucial ingredient to my success: a mentor. I needed a person who had already accomplished what I was aspiring to do and who embodied what I wanted to become. In order to reach my full potential, I had to find a mentor who could give me the resources and guidance necessary to get to the next level.

In short, a mentor shares the knowledge he or she has gained and helps to guide you in the right direction. You'll know you've found the right mentor when you can confidently and consistently rely on that person for sound advice or informed opinion. I've been at the forefront of the music industry and its surrounding culture for decades and I can tell you with full assurance that if you want to make it big, you need to learn from someone who has already been there. Hustling and putting in the work to get yourself seen is great--but it's not enough. The only way to learn how the industry works is from the industry itself. You also need to understand the psychology and develop a mindset that can propel you to success. There is no one more qualified to help you with all of that than my man Clinton Sparks.

I met Clinton many years ago backstage after watching him perform. What amazed me about him was his stage presence – his energy and ability to command the audience. What impresses me about Clinton to this day is how he's maintained that same energy, passion, and enthusiasm in business and in helping others win. Clinton is the epitome of a hustler and innovator, boasting incredible vision. He is an expert at understanding culture, brands, industries, marketing, and the connecting of worlds. Just like myself, Clinton came from humble beginnings and I've personally watched his transformation from an unknown to a globally recognized DJ. Throughout the years, I've seen him build extremely successful brands and companies. Clinton has been able to POWERSHIFT throughout his career because he understands how to build influence and nurture relationships – not only to impact his situation but to achieve any outcome.

Above all else, there's one thing that consistently stands out about Clinton: if he needs you to know something, trust me, he'll figure out a way for you to GET FAMILIAR. It's this kind of commitment that separates the winners from the losers.

Your competitive advantage begins when you have an expert in your corner, feeding you the right information for every situation you face. In this book, Clinton pulls back the curtain on the music industry and gives you a clear understanding of the tools needed to become successful in the music business, from mentality to actionable steps and everything in between.

Regardless of where you are in the process, this book will help you level up. Take yourself seriously and give this book your undivided attention because your future depends on it. Good luck on your journey – and trust me, you are in great hands. See you at the top! Don't forget to RISE AND GRIND! Or, as Clinton would say, Get familiar.

--Daymond John--

Introduction

“Fuck Philly. Philly never showed me love.”

Said Eminem to me while we sat on the porch at my mother’s house. This took place just a few months before his breakout single “My Name Is” dropped.

Em told me about being frustrated by people not believing in him. He then told me what he did not only to avoid being distracted by the haters but to turn the haters into fans.

I’ll tell you what Em did - and how I tricked him into coming to my mom’s house in the first place - later in the book.

Em doesn’t know this, but that conversation prompted a **shift** in my way of thinking.

A major shift. The kind of shift I am going to create for you.

A **shift** that has brought me tremendous success and can do the very same for you.

A **shift** that changed my entire approach to the music industry--which then changed my life. A shift that resulted in my becoming a multi-millionaire; selling millions of records; generating billions of streams and views; traveling the world as a DJ; serving as a host on E! News; building a worldwide syndicated radio show; becoming Diddy’s tour DJ; working with the biggest names in music from Kanye to Snoop Dogg; producing and writing for everyone from Lady Gaga to Beyoncé; earning awards for it all, including a Grammy nomination.

Above all, it made me HAPPY.

Happy because I was doing what I wanted to do.

What I loved to do: make music.

A broke kid from Boston with NO connections, NO guidance, NO protection, and NO plan B made it!

How?

Because I shifted my way of thinking and refocused my energy into actions that would produce results. I didn’t chase my dream, I designed and built it.

I wrote this book for you. For you to make it in this industry, you must implement the same radical change that I did. I will show you how to make these changes. I’ll teach you the exact formula that has produced winning results for the biggest names in the music business.

I want to instill in you the principles, values, strategies, and formula that led to my own success. Sure, I could just show you the formula, but that would be like handing you boxing gloves and pointing you towards the ring and expecting you to figure it out. Instead, I’m going to teach you the strategy, psychology, and mentality necessary to build a sustainable career. To be a champion, not a wannabe.

Simply put: This book is a collection of proven strategies designed to maximize your success in the music industry. I'm going to present it in a matter of fact, no bullshit way. I have been told soooo many times that I need a filter but fuck that, we don't have time to waste. Your career and future depend on it.

I've made million-dollar mistakes and wasted tremendous amounts of time. Why? Well, because I didn't have a coach or mentor, someone with the experience to polish and nurture my raw talent and abilities. I learned by trial and error, before the days of social media. And I've stored everything I've learned, both painful and gratifying, and channeled it into this book. All of my efforts will go into you, into minimizing your learning curve and making sure that you get noticed. This is the guide I wished I had growing up.

There is SO much talent out there that just doesn't understand how to move ahead. I know it because I get hit up every single day by aspiring artists, singers, producers, and DJs. They message me and hit up my DM's with the same questions: How do I break into the music business? How do I get a shot to prove myself? How do I get noticed and get my music heard? How do I get labels and executives interested in me and my music? How do I make money?

Don't worry, I've got the answers. I've filtered out all the BS and will point you down the path to success.

I'll share with you stories about successful artists I've worked with such as DJ Snake and DJ Khaled. I will tell you exactly what they did and the strategies they used to achieve massive success. You'll learn the tricks of the trade from others I've worked with from Big Sean to Diddy to Pitbull. How they continue doing dope shit that keeps them relevant and in the spotlight.

Think of me as your coach. I've watched all the plays, run all the drills, and studied the game, players, industry, and opponents.

I'm not going to pump you up with fake inspiration. I'm not going to hype you up to run onto the field, only to get f*cked up because you don't know the right plays.

I WILL TEACH YOU THE RIGHT PLAYS.

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER: I'm not the guy who's going to teach you how to hack social media to pump up your YouTube views and get fake likes and followers. I'm not the guy who happened to work at a label where Jay-Z was signed and claims to be a part of his success. I'm not the guy who manipulates Spotify or Apple streams and proclaims himself a music business executive.

I'm the anti-THAT GUY. I actually give a shit about you and your dreams.

I want to equip you with the tools necessary to **win**.

I'll teach you how to do **more dope shit** and **less dumb shit**.

I will break the common myths and misconceptions that hold so many people back.

Thoughts like...

I don't have enough money.

No one in my city will support me.

The odds are against me.

I can't figure out how it all works.

I don't know anyone in the business.

I feel like there are no opportunities where I live.

I'm not sure if I have what it takes.

Look, I sucked at school. I was constantly bullied and was sexually abused for years. I grew up broke, my sister and I were raised by a single mom forced to work two jobs after our alcoholic father left us. Tired of my constantly getting arrested, my mom sent me out of Boston when I was 15 to go live in the suburbs with my father. Culture shock for sure. I was trapped between worlds--always too white for the black kids and too black for the white kids. I didn't know who or what I was supposed to be. I was lost, with no direction and no one to tell me how I should live. I never fit in and always felt lonely. Man, at one point I was living out of my car, homeless. One night it was so fucking cold that I remember feeling like I wouldn't survive the night. If I can make it, so can you.

Despite all the roadblocks and pitfalls, I was able to lift myself out and shift my way of thinking.

I get it. I've been there. Because the shitty truth is this: a lot of what you've been led to believe is wrong, misleading or incomplete.

There's no Angie's List for the music business, no verification process to protect you from being scammed or absolutely fucked over. This business is tough and there are way more frauds and posers than legit people who will look out for you.

I know the struggle, the aggravation, depression, self-doubt. I know the highs and lows, insecurities, confusion, and anger. I feel your pain because I was YOU.

I AM YOU!

Now, the good news: you are living in the greatest, most exciting time ever to make money creating, producing, and promoting music.

“We in the easiest time to become a millionaire... Don’t be a weirdo. Lets Go!!!” - Meek Mill

There have **NEVER** been more opportunities to build a career or business with music.

I hope you’re as pumped as I am. This book will change your life if you put into practice what I will teach you.

Most importantly, don’t let me care about you more than you care about yourself. If you aren’t pumped about what we’re here to do together, then just throw this shit out or give it to someone who is serious about winning and being great.

Still here?

Great.

Fuck whatever previous plans you thought you had and dedicate yourself to reading this book from beginning to end.

TRUST ME. The answers are coming.

And please know that I have SO MUCH to tell you beyond what could ever fit in this book. I’m committed to helping long after you’ve reached the last page.

This book is the first step in getting your mind right, to start guiding you to where you need to be. To get you familiar with the strategy and mindset necessary to unlock your existing talents.

I’m going to teach you the art of being DOPE!

But most importantly, I’m going to show you how to make a successful, sustainable career in music. Whether you want to be a singer, rapper, DJ, producer, manager, executive, promoter, etc., this book is

Your go-to, kick-in-the-ass guide for making big breakthroughs and next-level success in the music business.

It’s time to GET FAMILIAR.

CHAPTER 1

The Big Mistake

The biggest mistake I've made throughout my career was thinking that **people more successful than me must be better than me**. They must be doing some magical shit I haven't figured out yet or have some unattainable skill that I couldn't possibly possess.

The reality is this is not true.

But it's a powerful train of thought that will keep you trapped. An example:

Back in 2012, I signed a record deal with Interscope Records. After signing, I met with Jimmy Iovine, then president. We sat in his office listening to my music.

"Wow, these lyrics are amazing," he said. "I love the passion and concepts behind them. I'd love to hear you collaborate with Marshall or Bono on some of these."

WTF?! Did Jimmy Iovine really just say this to me? Does he think I'm worthy enough to work with Eminem and Bono from U2?

This can't be real life. To quote David Byrne: How did I get here? Truly, a once in a lifetime moment.

It wasn't luck nor by accident.

How many times have you seen or heard somebody doing better than you and thought to yourself,

"Man, I'm way better than they are! How are they getting these opportunities and I'm not?"

One simple reason.

THEY FUCKING WENT FOR IT.

They took major action.

They made a plan.

They focused.

They committed.

They humbled themselves and were willing to learn.

They knocked down walls in their minds.

They didn't make excuses.

Excuses like,

I don't have enough money.

I don't have any connections.

I don't have enough followers, listeners, viewers, streams, etc.

My city is full of haters.

THESE ARE JUST EXCUSES.

Your success is determined by the limitations you put on yourself and not those placed on you by others.

Take me: I don't play instruments very well, and yet I became a Grammy-nominated and multi-platinum producer. I'm not a naturally gifted singer, and yet I got record deals -AS A SINGER- at major labels like Interscope and Republic Records. It's about vibe, mood, story, authenticity, and so much more than just talent.

A few years back, Kanye West and I were chillin at a cafe in Los Angeles at The Grove. I was playing him a bunch of records I was working on. When I was done, he asked me, "What do you plan to do with these songs?"

"Well, I was planning on doing it kinda Timbaland style, where I would produce, write and orchestrate the whole project and have it be like 80% featured artists and 20% me. But not really promoting it's me. I would just let people find out on their own and be like, 'Yo, that's Clinton on those songs?'"

Kanye replied, "Man, with your story, your connections, and this music you just played me, I would make it 80% you and 20% featured artists."

I was like, 'Oh shit. Kanye believes in me like that?'

You see, at that moment, I didn't think I was good enough to put myself at the forefront. I thought I wasn't on the same level as the artists I'd planned to feature. I thought because they were more successful than me that they must be better.

Another time, I had written and produced a song that made its way to Beyoncé, who went on to record it. While in the studio, she asked, "Who's singing on this record?" Knowing it was me, and that I only sang on it because I couldn't find anyone else on short notice, my response was, "It's just a demo so you could hear the melody and lyrics." The question was asked again, "Yeah, but who's singing?" I kept avoiding the answer. I was embarrassed to reveal it was me. I finally admitted it was me: "Oh my god, it sounds like a hit already with you on it," she said.

Again, I had made the mistake of thinking others more successful than I must be better.

I'm sharing these stories to show you that I had -and have- the same fears as everyone else. But when I stopped being captive to them, I was able to work with incredibly successful people and sign that major record deal with Jimmy Iovine at Interscope records.

I mean, how else could I have written and produced a record that Beyoncé would then record? Or do you think just anybody can hang with Kanye and discuss their music with him?

NOT HAPPENING.

I had obviously been doing something right that allowed me to even be in these situations.

A major problem is comparing yourself to others. You measure your success against theirs. Everyone is on a different wavelength and at different stages in their careers.

I moved past the fears and grappled with the issue: why do I think people more successful than I are better than me? Better at what, exactly?

We're all pretty trusting to the point of being gullible, to be honest. We automatically assume a Harvard graduate is smarter than we are. The person who invested in a startup that went on to blow up has to be more intelligent than us. What we don't hear about are their fifty failed prior investments. Are they really "smarter" than us or perhaps just smarter in a specific field? Or, did luck play some kind of role?

If I am a master chef, that doesn't mean I know how to fix cars. And even though I can't fix cars, that doesn't take away my skills as a master chef.

Einstein once said, "Everyone is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."

Just because someone is great at one thing doesn't mean that someone is great at everything. We make the mistake of thinking this to be true; we compare our weaknesses to their strengths, and we feel empty in comparison. Or we take our strengths against their weaknesses and wonder why the playing field isn't level.

For instance, let's say you are a better producer than someone you know, and you're pissed off that he or she keeps placing records, and you aren't.

You keep complaining that you're a better producer, DJ, singer, or a rapper, but others keep getting more looks than you are. You can rap, sing, produce? Great. And?

You are comparing your ability to play an instrument, produce, DJ, rap, or sing against theirs.

YOU ARE FOCUSED ON COMPARING THE WRONG SKILLS.

They are using skills and strategies that you may not see or consider. Skills beyond the musical that are equally necessary to WIN BIG in this industry. You need to learn how to properly communicate, negotiate, develop Emotional Intelligence (EQ), generate sales, network, market, etc.

You're not seeing their POWER or why they deserve what they've achieved.

Beyoncé is not just selling a song. She sells female empowerment, fashion, lifestyle, beauty, and hard work. If you just compare song to song, you miss the hidden product or the true power behind their success.

I freely admit: there are producers much better than I am and singers that would run circles around me. That said, if you measure my success strictly by comparing those components--you are missing the point. If you want to win big,

you need to become well-rounded, so you can beat the competition not only in the obvious skill but in other essential skills you must develop that will give you the upper hand.

If you go to war, you don't just carry one weapon. You're armed with a knife, a pistol, a machine gun, grenades, and even hand-to-hand combat skills. You have multiple weapons and multiple options for what the situation may demand.

I knew that I had to be a dope producer, writer, performer, and DJ. But I also had to outwork everyone else. I had to take advantage of the resources. I needed to network like a madman. I needed to be everywhere and market myself while figuring out how to add value to others. I set out to beast the music business.

I was so focused, so confident in my ability, so sure in my eventual achievements that I was almost naive to the fact that I could actually lose. This blindness gave me an advantage over the more talented but less focused people around me.

When I decided music was going to be my career, I approached music executives and successful artists like I was already at their level. While others would imagine making it, I couldn't imagine not.

This mentality and approach almost ensured my success. So goes the saying: "When you aim for the moon, even if you miss, you're still amongst the stars."

The ability to sing, rap, produce, or DJ is just one component of the talent needed to WIN BIG TIME in the music industry. Someone's success is not necessarily indicative of superior talent. It means they have figured out the FORMULA and skills necessary to properly scale.

When you compete with yourself, you can only get better. When you compete with others, then you are only aiming to be better than their best, which may never be as good as yours.

CHAPTER 2

The Other Big Mistake

Listening To People Who Have Not Succeeded In What You Are Trying To Do.

Everyone has opinions. Unfortunately, most people listen to the opinions of those who have never won or experienced the kind of success you are striving for.

Why the F*ck would you ever do this??

IT'S VERY SIMPLE.

If someone hasn't made a hit record, don't listen to them tell you how to make a hit.

If someone hasn't built a million-dollar brand, don't listen to them tell you how to build a brand.

If someone hasn't discovered, developed, or built a successful artist, don't rely on them for artist development or management advice.

If someone hasn't secured a major record or publishing deal for themselves or others, don't listen to their opinion on negotiating or what's best for you.

If someone hasn't broken records on the radio or garnered millions of streams/views, don't listen to them tell you how to do so.

If someone hasn't built meaningful relationships and a powerful network with people in influential positions, don't listen to their advice on how to network and build strong connections.

A lot of people can tell you Jay-Z's rise to success. But to listen to Jay-Z say it himself would be a totally different experience. An onlooker can only document what he sees. Jay would tell you how he felt along the way--his own fears, anxiety, and missteps. He would be able to share the feeling of standing on a mountaintop. An observer cannot. Cataloging others' experience is not the same as walking in those shoes.

There is a powerful scene from the movie "Good Will Hunting," wherein Matt Damon's character, a teenage genius, rips apart his psychologist, played by Robin Williams. Matt has seen a painting done by Robin's character and attempts to extrapolate and analyze his whole life from it.

Matt attempts to judge and define Robin's character without knowing him. He ridicules him, thinking he knows him for having seen the painting on his wall. He is both presumptuous and negative, infuriating Robin's character, who eventually grabs Matt by the throat and kicks him out of his office. In the next session, Robin takes Matt to a park and tells him that he had stayed up half the night thinking about what Matt had said to him until something occurred to him (Robin), and he hadn't thought about Matt since. He was no longer angry because he realized that Matt was just a kid without experience. He agreed that Matt was a genius--but only in what he knew. And Matt's lack of experience was his weakness, as much as his intelligence was his gift. Robin started quizzing Matt: "You've never been out of Boston, huh?" "No." "You've never been in true love before, have you?" Matt sat in silence. Robin went on, establishing Matt's inexperience, before

hitting him with the most poignant question: “You’re an orphan, right?” to which Matt nodded yes. Robin then said, “Do you think I know the first thing about what it feels like or what you went through as an orphan because I read Oliver Twist [Dickens' novel about being an orphan]?”

The point I’m making here is this: without experience, even the smartest guy can look foolish. They can dazzle you with facts but don’t necessarily have insight. They can’t tell you when to pivot, what decisions to make, what to look out for, and how to identify potential issues. They can’t relate to feelings you will be forced to confront. Who and what to avoid, and why. What your options are and what are the consequences of those actions. They don’t know the mechanics of building; they’ve never even conceived a blueprint.

Do your research and get receipts. Do not listen to those who have not achieved what you are trying to achieve.

This is one of the many essential things to keep in mind on your journey to winning big in the music business. In the meantime, I’ve made it simple. When starting out, you need to begin with...

CHAPTER 3

The Most Important Thing

When I was starting out, I put myself on a 5-year plan. I wanted to get to a point in my career where people would have at least heard about me or my music.

Back in 1999, I would load my wack-ass Ford Escape up with my mixtapes and drive up and down the East Coast. I would give out those tapes for free, tapes I'd worked so hard on, because I knew my shit was dope. I knew that the first step to success was to make the streets get familiar with me.

I would stop at barbershops, salons, and music stores. I would pull up next to dudes banging music out of their cars. I approached people exiting clubs or even walking through the mall. I would just randomly pull over, jump out and hand my CDs to people walking down the street: anyone who looked like they listened to HIP HOP. By giving my product to people for free, I knew they would listen, tell others, and talk about me in the streets (Just like this book). I also knew that once my name was in the streets, store owners would start calling to buy my mixtapes from me to sell them in their stores.

At the same time, I was syndicating my own radio show. I would be on-air LIVE on 4 stations in 4 cities--EVERY WEEK.

Boston - Mondays and Tuesdays at 5-9 pm. Then I would drive 5 hours to New York.

New York - Wednesdays from 8 pm to midnight. Then I would drive 5 hours back to Boston.

Boston - Thursdays 5-9 pm. Then I would drive 2 hours to Connecticut.

Connecticut - Fridays 5-9 pm and then again midnight-3 am. After my show, I would drive 2 hours back to Boston.

Baltimore - Saturdays from 6-10 pm. On Saturday mornings, I would catch a 2-hour flight to Baltimore to do my radio show Saturday evenings. Then back to Boston.

This wasn't me hustling without a plan. I was very intentional about every move. I knew that when major record labels needed their artists to promote new music, the artists would visit all of these stations. Eventually, I'd run into all of these artists. We'd have no choice but to build rapport, then a relationship. If I could be where the artists were, my talent would get noticed.

"A good hockey player plays where the puck is. A GREAT hockey player plays where the puck is going to be." - Wayne Gretzky

During one week, I saw Pusha T three different times--at THREE different stations. I was working, and he was promoting. "Sparks, you're at this radio station too?" he said. "You are everywhere, man!"

This strategy was built by design, and it worked.

So what's the most important thing to do when starting out?

YOU NEED TO HAVE A PLAN. Running around, feeling busy and productive is useless without a goal.

Activity does not equal productivity.

Further, you need a plan that you can execute daily and track the progress that it yields. Always nurture the big goal but set smaller, interim objectives. Keep track of these little victories because they're the building blocks in your structure of success and will also keep you enthusiastic about chasing the bigger goal.

You need to develop a marketing strategy, having done proper market research and identifying the target audience.

TIP 1: You can simply go on [googletrends.com](https://www.google.com/trends) and quickly find out what people are searching for and talking about. You also need to learn the fundamentals of branding and virality.

TIP 2: After going on Google Trends, you can create content that will have a higher chance of going viral because it's currently relevant and trending. You need to pay attention to culture and learn to forecast its waves and shifts.

TIP 3: Pay attention to where people are spending their time on social media and start investing time on those platforms. You need to understand money management: know the best places to spend whatever money you have.

TIP 4: Instead of buying the next Gucci T-shirt, invest those dollars in advertising your music on YouTube's suggested column. Don't know how to? Google it.

No money to spend? Don't worry, I'll give you options on how to overcome that later in this book.

Protect your music. Be sure to have the proper documents, agreements, and contracts in place when doing business. No handshakes or an "I got you, man." **HANDLE. YOUR. BUSINESS.**

TIP 5: Follow my bulletproof business checklist. It will save you a lot of time, money, and headaches.

Build a team. At first, you may have to be your own team. As the popularity, success, and checks come in, you can choose to delegate tasks to others, but make sure they also know **YOUR** plan OR are experienced enough to help you develop an effective one.

You need to be relentless with this plan.

You need to be focused and committed to this plan.

You need to hold yourself and others working off this plan accountable.

I hear people tell me all the time, "I'm in the studio making music or beats every day, but I still ain't gaining any momentum."

There is a simple reason why: **YOU DON'T HAVE A SOLID PLAN.**

I made that 5-year plan and stuck to it. And I surprised even myself; people knew my name in under two years because I went hard. Trust me, there's no better feeling than having to come up with a new and improved plan because you've crushed the previous one.

In those two years, I won Mixtape DJ of the Year at the annual Justo's Mixtape Awards in New York and Radio DJ of the Year at the annual Mixshow Power Summit--like the Grammy Awards for DJs. I got my first major label check for \$15,000 for producing a record. I got my radio show on multiple radio stations. I crushed the streets with my mixtapes and built the world's largest mixtape website, where I introduced everyone from DJ Drama to DJ Khaled to a global audience. I also helped my boy Q conceive a new website known as WorldStarHipHop. To the outside world, I was killing it. To me, I was executing a plan. A plan that I knew would take focus and commitment if I wanted it to yield tremendous and sustainable results.

Here's a plan for you: start by taking the course I've created to complement this book. This master course, which includes guidance from some of the best in the business, will give you in-depth insider knowledge on how to absolutely win big in the music industry. I'll share many powerful ways to conceive and follow an effective plan that will increase your chances of reaching your goals. To get you started, I present five essential questions to ask yourself. Don't continue reading until all these questions have been answered.

THE 5 MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS YOU MUST CONTINUALLY ANSWER.

1. How am I going to get people familiar with me? (Promotions, marketing, networking)
2. What will make me stand out or be different? (Branding, uniqueness, approach)
3. Who can help me? (Identifying allies, connecting with gatekeepers, media outlets, and platforms, bartering value, utilizing believers)
4. Who and where is my audience? (Knowing where to look, how to engage them, and how to keep them)
5. How can I make money from this? (Locating places to make money, isolating revenue streams, knowing how and even when to worry about making money, and, of course, figuring out how much you can make). Focus on streaming, performing, and the sale of merchandise because that is where most of your money is.

The answers to these questions are essential for your plan for success. Routinely coming back to these questions will keep you on track and alert you to any deviations from the plan. They will also, of course, prompt tons of other relevant questions along the way.

Other questions like:

How do I get a manager? When should I get a manager?

How do I get distribution? Who's the best distributor?

How do I contact or network with music executives?

Where can I find the right people for my team?

How can I get a million followers or make my video go viral?

How do I get shows and gigs?

Should I sign to a major label or be independent?

I will help you with all of these answers, but I'll let you in on a (not-so) little secret in the meantime:

A MAJOR LABEL DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN MAJOR SUCCESS.

Most artists suffer from the misconception that, if and when they sign a major record label deal, they have made it!

Quick check: Do you know how many artists are on the Capitol Records roster right now?

Probably not.

It's not easy to get signed to a major. But it is easy to become one of the "probably nots."

Let me be clear: Signing to a major label has its benefits. A label has the contacts and resources to fast track you to radio and streaming platforms; that said, with the internet, you can do most of the necessary work on your own. By doing so, you remain in complete control of your music and career and needn't surrender a big piece of your earnings to someone else. Of course, the majors have much more money to market you, which in turn could generate more revenue to split. Also, it's not easy to build an experienced team to run your own business and make connections. Major labels have spent decades cultivating these relationships and opportunities. You may leave a lot of money on the table or miss out on opportunities entirely simply because you don't know what is available.

In short: There are many benefits to a major label deal if negotiated right, and you've already done a lot of the work when it comes time to negotiate. The internet has cut out the middle man. Please take advantage of this! Doing so establishes your track record and following and gives you leverage.

For now, know that a solid plan and COMMITTING TO THAT PLAN are THE most important contributors to major success.

That said, sometimes, your plan won't work out the way you hope. That's ok. There will be times when you come up short, when you don't accomplish what you set out to do, or when you feel like it's absolutely impossible to make shit happen.

If you have a dream about being successful and it doesn't include failure, disappointment, and sacrifice, well, odds are it will remain just a dream.

People are so afraid to take an L. More accurately, they're so afraid to admit they took an L. How often do you check your social media and read people's stories about getting played, dissed, or outright conned? I'll save you the time and trouble: never. You never see that shit. Why? People don't want you to see the wack parts of their lives or any moments of weakness. They certainly don't want to highlight their utter failures.

What they don't realize, and you are now in a position to learn, is that those Ls don't stand for losses. They stand for Lessons. Lessons to be learned. Failing can feel deflating, but it all comes down to perspective. The only way to truly see all sides, to understand everything and everyone, is to fail.

Think of these Ls as speed bumps, not roadblocks.

A speedbump is a momentary delay. It doesn't prevent you from reaching your destination. It just slows you down for a moment.

Any perceived failures or missed opportunities do not mean game over. Instead, they just arm you with more patience, information, insight, and ammunition to get back in the game. You'll be better for it. There's nothing worth more than a scar earned in battle.

When making your goals, be sure to leave room for failing. If you don't plan for it, you won't know how to deal with it.

There is one self-imposed failure that you do need to avoid, however. It comes from spending too much time looking around at irrelevant stuff instead of being head down with your own work. Focusing on YOUR PLAN also means not giving a shit about anyone else's.

3 THINGS YOU NEED TO STOP DOING.

- 1. WORRYING ABOUT WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING OR GETTING THAT YOU ARE NOT.**
- 2. THINKING THAT YOU'RE DOING EVERYTHING RIGHT EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE NOT ACHIEVING THE SUCCESS YOU DESIRE.**
- 3. FEELING THAT THE WAY SOMEONE ELSE IS WINNING IS THE ONLY WAY FOR YOU TO WIN.**

More often than not, the person winning did it their way and you should too. How?

CHAPTER 4

Be The First You And Not The Second Somebody Else

Everybody has a superpower. The problem is that most people want a power someone else has so badly that they never take the time to discover their own.

It was 2006. I was doing my first party in Las Vegas. I climbed up on the turntables and started hyping the crowd on the mic. No big deal, right? Well, in 2006, nobody stood on their decks. And being on the mic was strictly an East Coast thing. Meanwhile, the club manager was furious that I was playing so much hip-hop.

He was so mad that in the middle of my performance, he told the sound guy, "Turn off his mic and get him down." Afterward, he said to me, "You aren't cut out to DJ in Vegas. No one wants to see or hear that shit."

Two years later, I conceived and built THE biggest weekly party in Las Vegas, doing precisely what that manager told me no one would want to see or hear.

It's easy to copy what others are doing, primarily if it's worked for them. But do you really want to be the next somebody else or the first you?

Think about the greatest to ever do it. Those that have done it their way and became legends.

Michael Jackson, Eminem, Queen, Kanye West, Beyonce, The Beatles.

They were the first of their kind. They believed in their visions even when others did not. They did it their way and created a lasting effect that will cement their names in the history books.

Be The First You And Not The Second Somebody Else.

One afternoon, Machine Gun Kelly and I were hanging in his manager's apartment. Kels was voicing his frustration with me, "Man, I'm so f*cking tired of my label not understanding who I am as an artist and wanting me to make another 'Wild Boy' record."

It's clear to see that MGK is special. And it should be clear to any half-decent executive that he has much more to offer than sticking to a format or re-creating a record that worked once. A real artist wants to create, experiment, evolve, and get better. Why would you ever let someone else's opinion of you supersede your own?

MGK knew how he wanted to evolve as an artist. However, he struggled with certain executives limiting his vision. He decided not to do what others wanted him to do. He made what he and his fans wanted, and IT WORKED!

It's like this: People won't get you at first when you are original or doing something new.

People like familiarity.

Everyone creating a new trail or introducing a new way of thinking is misunderstood at first. EVERYONE.

BE RUTHLESSLY FOCUSED AND UNAPOLOGETIC ABOUT YOUR DOPENESS.

It might be hard to believe, but there was a time when you were ridiculed for imitating someone else. You were wack if you sounded like another artist. Unoriginality was frowned upon, and you needed to be unique for anyone to pay attention to you.

People are too busy chasing a style, sound, or image that is working for someone else. Instead, they should be spending time developing their own.

It's cool to get ideas or inspiration from others--we all do it. But do it with purpose. Elevate it, do it differently, and own it.

Stop trying so hard to be down with what others define as cool.

It can be cool trying to be down, but it can also bring you down, trying to be cool.

When I started interviewing high profile artists on the radio and television, I noticed that every host was trying to be just as cool or cooler than the artist they were interviewing. I wanted to develop a new approach. I wanted to stand out, ask different questions, and create unique content.

I decided to interview artists from the perspective of a young inexperienced kid. This allowed the artist to be transparent with the audience in a way they have never been. It also harnessed an environment where artists would have fun and let their guard down. I didn't try to be smarter or cooler than them. In fact, I took on a persona that almost made me appear innocently naive. This gave me the ability to venture into topics that would usually create tension or drama if other hosts were to discuss.

For instance, I was interviewing Jay-Z during a time he was in a public beef with another major artist. I knew that everyone who would interview him would only talk about this and ask the same cliché questions so they could get that clickbait. I took a different approach.

During our interview, I asked him if he ever gets bored and watches adult feature films while on the road.

He and his entourage all kinda laughed and looked around the room. He then replied, "Whatchu mean?"

I responded, "Like when you are on the road and get lonely in your hotel room. Do you ever just watch adult feature films?" Unsure if I was being serious or not, he said, "What for?"

I answered, "You know, man, to get familiar with yourself." Jay and everyone in the room all died laughing.

This interview stood out because it was different and original. It was unlike every other clip that was circulating with him talking about the same beef. It was a unique approach that set me apart and worked.

If you have a unique skill, whether it's as an artist, DJ, producer, manager, or executive, you must make people aware of what sets you apart.

There is one proven and effective way to do this, and that is to make others...

CHAPTER 5

GET FAMILIAR!

WHEN PEOPLE WOULDN'T LISTEN TO ME TALK ABOUT BUILDING THEIR BRAND, I TURNED MYSELF INTO A MILLION DOLLAR ONE.

MARKETING and BRANDING.

I could author a whole book and course on this topic alone, on everything that goes into meaningful, successful marketing and branding. Psychology, timing, communication, emotional intelligence, demographics, generations, economics, design, etc.

Explain why you are dope. Why should people care about what you're selling or what you're about?

What makes you stand out? Ultimately, why should people listen to you?

YOU ARE A BRAND, and if you follow my teaching, I am going to show you how to turn your personal brand into a successful **COMPANY**.

Before I start, let me be clear. There is a difference between marketing and branding.

What is branding?

Netflix has clearly defined its brand. It has branded itself as the world's most recognizable streaming platform. From the Netflix logo to the boom-boom jingle you hear when you sign on, Netflix has distinctive characteristics that make it stand out.

Chances are if I yell WHAT?! YEEEEAAH! Or OKAAAY! You would automatically think of Lil Jon. You'll even say it the same way he does. This is a perfect example of what powerful personal branding does and how it can elevate you above any competition.

THIS is what you need to do.

BRAND YOURSELF TO BE RECOGNIZABLE AND STAND OUT FROM OTHERS.

What is marketing?

Marketing is the proactive effort of creating, communicating, and delivering your brand to an audience.

Your brand must be marketed in a way that gets people familiar with it via social media, creative activations, sponsorships, events, content, brand alignment to drive traffic, collaborations, traditional media outlets, influencers, paid traffic, and so on.

Most people look at these as one and the same, but they are not. I need you to pause and understand the difference between these two things.

In fact, let's do an exercise. Doing this will determine the success of your career, so I need you to take it seriously.

I need you to get out a pen and answer the following questions:

1. Who are you?
2. What is your message?
3. Beyond the message, what do you want people to think or feel when they encounter you or your music?
4. What do you stand for?
5. What does your brand look like?
6. Who is your audience?
7. What do you associate with your brand?
8. Does your brand serve a purpose?
9. How do you campaign your brand?
10. Are you doing enough, and is it effective?

The objective of this exercise is for you to focus on having a clear and realistic understanding of your brand. This will also help you develop a true sense of self-awareness and identify if you are effectively marketing your brand.

You cannot stand apart and be unique unless you take the time to figure out what makes you that way. If you don't know these answers, how can anyone else?

Let's take Lil Nas X. He leveraged social media, Google architecture, and viral videos to push "Old Town Road" to the top of the charts. He was persistent. He put his song on TikTok Challenges for several months until one influencer liked the idea and did the challenge, which went viral. Once viral, he made sure that it spread to other platforms like Instagram and Twitter. He then used Google to educate the audience by creating Reddit threads steering curious listeners to the song. Instead of the usual spammy comments on Instagram, he leveraged technology and social media in a way that allowed people to be PART of his song. Part of his movement. Had he done what everyone else does to promote their music, it would've been a lonely road for him. Talent is great, but it's not enough if no one knows where to find you. In fact, sometimes it's incredible marketing that proves far more important than talent.

No one ever had to convince me to market. I've studied marketing and the psychology behind it but also paid attention to cultures, demographics, and marketplaces since I was 10. I would sit in those hot-ass vinyl seats in the back of my mother's car and analyze billboards we drove by. I critiqued everything from the design to the messaging. I remember wondering why Eggo didn't make a syrup to lock down the whole breakfast experience or why Reese's didn't make peanut butter in a jar. (Sidenote, they do now but didn't when I was 10.) I didn't realize it then, but I was planting the seeds for a mind steeped in marketing. Pay attention to these instincts; they often indicate something real.

When I moved into full-time artistry, I never looked at Clinton Sparks as a person. I always treated Clinton Sparks like a business and brand. I am the president and CEO of Clinton Sparks. Everybody calls themselves a brand nowadays, but when I first introduced the concept, people would laugh at me for calling myself a brand. I even created a slogan for my brand: Get Familiar. GET FAMILIAR WITH CLINTON SPARKS.

I would stamp “Get Familiar” and “Clinton Sparks” everywhere: during my radio shows, all over my mixtapes, and I was one of the first producers to tag the beginning of my beats with my name. Clinton Sparks, G, G, Get Familiar. People heard my name and tag so much that it became part of the song.

Not everyone was a fan of my guerilla techniques. When I was on the radio in my hometown of Boston, my program director would call up and yell at me, demanding that I stop playing the Get Familiar sample so much on the air. I told him, ‘this is how you embed your brand into people’s minds.’ He didn’t get it and insisted I stop. I didn’t.

A few months later, the same program director called me in for a meeting with other station executives. Very soberly, they told me they had a problem. Apparently, the audience was more familiar with Clinton Sparks and Get Familiar than they were the radio station itself. I responded, ‘How is this a problem? It’s proof my method works! You guys should employ the same style of marketing.’ They refused. That station no longer exists, the program director went to work at FedEx, and I went on to continued success.

What’s funny is that I never wanted to be THAT guy out front. I always wanted to be in the background, dispensing wisdom and helping others, but nobody would listen to me when I would map out marketing plans and strategies for their success. Therefore, I made myself the brand I focused on. It gave me a platform to stand on. This has allowed me to share my platform with you in this book and in the upcoming course.

Every decision I have made since has focused on my brand, on what’s best for my company, and its elevation to the next level. Looking at the brand, almost in the third person, allows for level headed thinking. It encourages decisions made on market research and not emotions. There was actually no ego involved. If someone didn’t like something I made, I wasn’t offended. I used the opportunity to ask questions and analyze what they didn’t like.

What kind of person am I getting this information from? What is their taste? Is it reliable? How do they dress, talk, act? Parsing this information helped me decide what parts of their feedback to consider. Not everyone can like everything. Don’t be offended if someone doesn’t like your music. It’s just not for them.

So, to sum it all up: after years of trying to make everyone else wealthy and successful and being ignored for my efforts,

I DID IT FOR MYSELF.

Which then led to my doing it for MANY others over the years.

NOW, when I speak, people listen.

At least the smart ones do.

Do you want to grow? Build a fanbase? Get people familiar with you and your product?

Don't dismiss your hometown, no matter how small. Market and promote the shit out of yourself locally. Think of new and innovative ways to get people familiar. Build a loyal following that f*cks with you heavy. One fan a day is still progress. That goes for any business or venture outside of music as well. One customer or believer a day is progress worthy of acknowledging.

That Vegas club manager might've hated on me. But you can bet that when I made my grand return into a Vegas club by being lowered through the roof by helicopter and onto my turntables, everybody there left knowing my name. I made them GET FAMILIAR. Including him.

In summary:

KNOW WHO YOU ARE: your strengths, weaknesses (Yes, you have them.)

Don't be all over the place with your marketing. Be hyper-focused on what you represent and sell to people. Don't be confusing or misleading. If your goal is to get people familiar with your new record or project, stick to that. Market your music and brand to them.

Selling 101. CLOSE THE SALE.

Your record, video, project, and YOU are the sale, and people need to GET FAMILIAR.

You are the brand, and ultimately, that is what you are selling. You must focus on the goal. And don't worry if you haven't narrowed down your goal yet because...

CHAPTER 6

The Only Thing Worse Than Having No Goals Is Having Too Many Goals

People seem to think that to impress, they must be doing 15 things at once.

By showing you all the things they do, they think they're demonstrating hustle and drive.

I can't tell you how often I meet artists who are all over the place. I rap; I have a cannabis company; I'm working on two different albums; I'm thinking of doing a third under an alias; I have a PR company; I'm working on an app; I'm a host; I'm an influencer; I promote parties; I have a production company; I'm a Youtuber; I do online marketing; I sell followers and views.

Dude, what the f*ck are you?

Do you even know?

If you don't know exactly who you are or what you're selling, how in the world could anybody else?

Don't get me wrong: I am a massive fan of those with many talents and who can create multiple streams of income, but you gotta focus, man.

It's like the famous saying, "Jack of all trades, master of none."

Your talents must make sense as part of something larger. They should complement each other. And you definitely do not need to hijack every meeting by mentioning everything you do. When you spray too much information at someone or your social media bio is a clusterf*ck of what the f*ck, no one knows who you are, what they are supposed to be a fan of, how they can do business with you, or even how to affiliate with you.

Believe me, I know what I'm talking about. People have accused me of doing too much and spreading myself too thin. But let me show you the difference and why I now know what works and what doesn't.

At one point, I was on TV every week as a host on E! News. My radio show was syndicated in 22 cities; I also hosted a weekly show on Eminem's Shade 45 on Sirius/XM. Meanwhile, I had one of the most popular parties in Las Vegas, I was killing the streets with mixtapes, and I was producing platinum records. Sure, it was a lot at once, but each of these pursuits connects and lifts each other up. Here's what I mean.

When you listened to my mixtapes, you heard exclusive records that I produced. This then made you want to listen to my radio shows. When you heard me on the radio, I would be playing more dope music I created and pushing you to watch my TV show. When I was on TV, I was promoting my radio shows, mixtapes, and music as well as advertising my Las Vegas parties. While DJing my parties, I was playing hit records I produced, plugging the TV and radio shows, and giving out my mixtapes.

Everything connected seamlessly. One thing pushed you to the next. If you liked one, the odds were you'd follow me to the others. And if you happened to dislike one, I was offering enough content and personality to hook you somewhere. I was a human SEO.

This was built by design, the same way I'd positioned my radio shows geographically so that I'd see the same artists several times a week when they were on their publicity runs.

If you want people to believe you to be incredibly multifaceted, or if you intend to build yourself as a commodity to offer value for others, all the parts must make sense.

What artist wouldn't want to be down with a person doing what I was doing? Look how much value I could add to them with the system I've built. Built by design.

This is called a value add, which we'll come back to.

This all goes back to having a plan.

You can't build anything without having a blueprint drawn up.

Why should your career be any different?

Literally, draw it out. Make a timeline. Create benchmarks that keep track of your progress

If your goal this week is to gain 100 followers, or record two new songs, or get another gig, or even something else, **WRITE. THAT. SHIT. DOWN.**

Once you accomplish it, check it off. Make new goals. Little victories matter. They are the steps to the staircase of success.

I know you want people to notice you. I know you want people to go on your IG feed and think that you made it. However, when you look at yourself in the mirror, that's when you need to be f*cking honest. Focus on you and not on what others think about you.

"This generation is obsessed with looking successful instead of actually being successful." - Kanye West

Stop trying to impress people by bragging about all your hustles.

More often than not, you'll find yourself getting hustled out the door.

CHAPTER 7

Just Because you could doesn't mean you should

Whenever you're faced with a new opportunity or venture, stop to ask yourself:

Is it on-brand with what I'm selling?

Does it speak to what I'm about?

Does it even make sense for me?

Will it elevate my plan?

Can it potentially negatively affect me or my plan?

This can mean a collaboration, a show, a business venture, even an affiliation.

I know it sounds counterintuitive to say no to an opportunity.

You're trying to familiarize people with your brand or your product, so what's the harm?

Mark Wahlberg told me the best lesson he learned from his agent was how to say no. Even though it killed him inside to turn down movie roles with big paychecks attached, Mark learned to say no when it didn't make sense for his brand or the direction of his career. He told me learning to say no is one of the reasons he's enjoyed the success and longevity he's had.

Just Because You Could Doesn't Mean You Should. You need to monitor your bandwidth. **It's better to do one thing right than to half-ass many.**

Years back, I got a call from the program director of Power 105 in New York City. He asks that I come to NY to meet with him. He was a fan of what I was doing on all my other radio shows and knew my name was buzzing in the streets and wanted to offer me a show with a prime time slot: going up against Funkmaster Flex. Funkmaster Flex was on Hot 97, which happens to be Power 105's competition station and the biggest hip-hop station in the world, as far as I was concerned. To an East Coast kid that grew up on hip-hop, Hot 97 is the Holy Grail. And Flex was one of the biggest DJ's in the world.

WHAT!?!? Are you giving me the opportunity to be on New York radio? The number one market in the country. WTF! This is crazy. There isn't a DJ in the world that wouldn't want to be on New York radio. He told me they needed someone dope to go up against Funkmaster Flex. "I've made it," I thought. "Every major rapper will know who I am."

WHO WOULD SAY NO TO THIS??

After thinking about how crazy this opportunity was for a few minutes, it hit me. I might have to say no to this. This might not be a smart move.

I requested they give me a few days to consider. The director looked at me like I was crazy and asked me to let him know my decision before the end of the week.

You see, there was more to think about than meets the eye. From a business perspective, I'm a white guy from Boston, and he's a black guy from New York. At that moment, New York was hip-hop, as it always had been. Meanwhile, Eminem and Benzino, a Boston rapper, were going at it, dissing each other. Em had come up with a line that made it easy for New Yorkers to talk shit about Boston. Plus, there's the age-old Yankee/Red Sox rivalry to think about.

Mostly, I thought of it this way: New York is Flex's house, the house he built. I, meanwhile, am sorta kinda a DJ he built. There would be no me or a lot of other DJ's if it weren't for Flex. Flex knows everyone. Who would ride with me over Flex? It would have been career suicide.

To get run out of NYC would have been a stain on my reputation that I may have never recovered from. I would forever be known as the dude that got ran out of New York. But an even bigger reason was,

RESPECT!

I respect Flex so much for what he's done and what he means to hip-hop. I couldn't even imagine ever having to say or do anything disrespectful to him. To disrespect him would be to disrespect the very thing I love. The very thing I am.

I reached out to the program director, declining his offer. I suggested they offer the spot to DJ Clue, who would make more sense in that slot. They did.

From there, I went on to build my own radio show, syndicated in 22 markets around the world, and become a host on E! News. Meanwhile, Flex became a buddy of mine and has since supported me and projects I've been involved in.

The moral of this story is:

Just because you could doesn't mean you should.

By the way, if I took that job simply because I wanted the fame that could potentially come with it, it would have not been great nor helped me to build a great career. I was aiming for greatness, not fame because..

CHAPTER 8

Famous Doesn't Make You Great but Great Can Make You Famous

So many people make music with the hope of being famous. No one ever seems to stop and ask why.

What do you think comes with fame?

What about being famous is better than what you do or can have without being famous?

Is it because you think you will be rich?

And if you are rich, you think your life will automatically be better? Will wealth make you feel more accomplished or special?

Most people focus on fame and think everything stems from that.

I always hear people say things like, "I just need to get on more playlists" or "I just need my video to go viral."

If any of these things happen, in their minds, they've made it. But just as in our conversation about being signed to a major label, these are not necessarily signposts of success.

These steps are simply small PARTS of the larger PLAN of great success. These steps aren't the goal. They're the means to the goal. They're steps you should absolutely expect to accomplish, not steps you spend your entire life waiting for.

Which do you think is more likely: Michael Jordan or Beyoncé yearned to be famous or to become the greatest at what they do? Forget entertainers. Do you think Bill Gates or Steve Jobs woke up with the goal of trending on Twitter or of changing the world by doing great things?

Do you think ANY of them thought or expected to be famous after ONE video, one song, one accomplishment, or one venture?

They were seeking GREATNESS. You should too.

Too many people envy the perception of fame. They don't admire the work it takes to accomplish and then sustain this fame. Their admiration is misspent and misguided. Great spends every waking moment building and creating more greatness. Great is not content, not complacent, and it yearns to become greater.

What we have now are people who only want fame and think that a silly antic, meme, or prank is the means to that end. They don't realize that today's hot topic is tomorrow's afterthought.

I live in Los Angeles now, and I'm seeing the backwash of this tide. I've encountered so many Vine and YouTube kids all the time who, a few years ago, thought themselves the biggest stars on the planet. You couldn't tell them anything. Well, they're listening now, having suffered the consequences of poor, even nonexistent planning, or of not realizing that demographic fame is temporary. Poor guidance and clouded vision will lead to this outcome.

Despite everything I've accomplished every day, I wake up thinking about being a little bit greater than the day before. 'How can I be great today?' My job, my very identity, is sunk into this pursuit. And I'm never satisfied. Meanwhile, I meet artists coming off ONE successful record or influencers who've earned followers by being goofy or cute online, and they feel overly accomplished. They honestly do not and cannot see that their future is bleak when they focus on being famous rather than being great.

How many times have you thought or heard someone say,

"What are they even famous for?"

How many videos went viral, and you don't even remember the person involved?

Ain't nobody got time for that.

What was the lady's name in that viral video that said that?

See my point?

Here today and gone tomorrow.

This trend isn't new. How many "Where Are They Now?" slideshows have you thumbed through online, featuring child stars of the past. The same shit happens today, only much, much faster.

Fame and trends are moving targets, but GREATNESS stays. Greatness prevails.

Again, don't misquote me: creating interest and attention to your brand or product is paramount. If you use the internet instead of letting it use you, you can create content that leads an audience back to you and what you are offering.

But what you lead them back to **MUST BE GREAT!**

If you're fortunate enough to get playlist placement or to get a video to go viral but don't have a great business set up in support of it, you actually **FAILED. YOU MISSED YOUR CHANCE.**

"It's better to be prepared for an opportunity and not have one than to have an opportunity and not be prepared."

– Whitney M Young.

Ask yourself this simple question. Let's say you saw or heard something dope, something that inspired you to check out the creator's socials, website, or YouTube channel. And these outlets looked wack, offering nothing compelling, intriguing or interesting. What would you do?

You would abandon and move on without a second thought.

You might even clown it.

Don't do this.

You will lose potential fans or supporters.

It will be that much harder to get them to care ever again.

Treat every show, performance, record, interview, or sound bite like it's your one shot to prove yourself worthy of fandom. Once people notice you, make sure you have great content to continue posting. People want to feel like they've discovered something new and dope. They want to be the first one up on something so they can then tell their friends. That is how virality is born.

GREAT must be a part of your entire business plan. It must be the BIGGEST part.

Be diligent about having great production, assets, videos, artwork, messaging, content, performances, and fan engagement. Have a great, meaningful, focused online presence.

And greatness extends to your conduct. Don't forget to treat people great. Never think you are too successful or too great to treat others well. Be humble and grateful.

So many rappers, DJs, executives got some fame and became dicks; I've seen it a number of times personally and heard countless stories.

When those same rappers, DJs, executives get cold and are not poppin anymore, they all want to come back around. Now THEY want to be down with great. They hit you with lines like...

"Yo, let's link up and chop it up. Let's break bread. Let's build or Let's work."
Don't be that guy.

On the contrary, consider my buddy Pitbull. He's sold millions of records, received tons of awards, and enjoys unparalleled success.

He shows up on time, every time. He is a professional and one of the most appreciative people I have ever known.

I have never met anyone who has anything less than the highest praise for Pit. What a stellar human being Pitbull is.

You know what else Pitbull has?

Great business.

Great performances.

Great work ethic.

Great music.

Great respect--for himself, his fans, his business, and those who depend on him.

He planned for greatness, he executed greatness, and he conducts himself greatly to keep people coming back.

Great actions are remembered forever.

The greatest minds are revered forever.

Fame fades.

Just remember: most overnight success takes 10 years to create. Meanwhile, most overnight success doesn't last 10 years.

CHAPTER 9

The Dirt Pile Strategy

What does everybody want?

To be heard?

To be seen?

To have a hit?

To make money?

To be respected and recognized for their greatness?

How can any of this happen if you aren't beating the world over the head with your product?

Content, content, content.

After you create something you love... MAKE MORE.

Now, I'm not saying you need to shoot a lavish music video every week. Then again, I'm not saying not to. One way or another, you **MUST** continually be in people's faces and on their minds. In the age of millisecond attention spans, you must do everything you can to stay in people's consciousness. There are simply too many other threats to your permanence.

This is no secret. Even the most famous brands in the world rely on this strategy. Movie studios commandeer billboards, TV commercials, even the sides of buses. Stars do publicity runs. Affiliated merchandise is sold. Even the biggest brands in the world keep reminding you to **GET FAMILIAR**.

People need to see you in different places and hear about you from multiple sources, typically 3-5 outlets to secure engagement. When people keep hearing about you or your product, especially from trusted sources, they feel the need to get up on you, so they don't appear out of the loop.

How many times have you thought to yourself, 'Man, I keep hearing about this dude / TV show/movie/song. I need to check it out.'

Case in point: DJ Snake. I discovered and signed Snake in 2007, long before "Turn Down for What" and any measure of global fame. Snake and I had been releasing remixes, mixtapes, and original music **FOR YEARS** before we sold millions of records and won countless awards.

Snake, I, Tchami (who was also signed to my production company), and my production partner Kamau would bang out hundreds of beats a year. We never stopped creating content. Be it to release for the streets, online or for the ears and minds of other artists and music executives, **WE KEPT PRODUCING CONTENT**.

I continuously sent out music to industry executives and artists. One of those artists was Lil Jon. After years of sending music, I finally introduced him to DJ Snake. This pairing led to one of the biggest records of the decade.

Had we NOT been consistent with creating and distributing content, that along with MANY other victories may have never happened. You must get on and then stay on people's minds. There is only one way this can happen.

You MUST keep putting out content.

Let's use dirt as an example.

If I sprinkle some dirt on the ground in front of you, you would walk right over it and not even notice.

If I add some more, you probably still wouldn't notice.

If I tossed some more in that same spot, you might kick a little bit of it.

Let's say I add a bit more, now you may feel a lump under your feet when you step on it. You may even look back and wonder what you stepped on, but you'll keep on your way.

Now let's say all of the dirt I've been throwing down has formed a dirt pile, so big that you now trip over it.

That's your content.

Keep throwing it out, and, inevitably, people will trip over it.

Oh wait, you don't believe in just blanketing the market? Your stuff is just too dope to throw out there randomly?

You need to have a bigger budget or a label behind you? You have big plans, and you just need to wait for the perfect time?

If this is you...

CHAPTER 10

Stop Waiting For Some Magical Moment That Doesn't Exist

I see so many artists holding onto amazing music because they're just waiting for the RIGHT time to release it. Like it's the one and only time they'll ever make something that dope.

STOP doing this.

Go!!!

I'm not saying to ignore a strategic roll-out plan. You absolutely should have a strategy and plan. We already discussed how paramount this is. Yes, you want to impact as much as possible, but the WORST thing you can do is feel like, 'Man, this record is too big. I need to hold this one until the right time.'

F*CK THAT DUMB ASS IDEA.

That record you're clinging to could be THE record that gets you the exposure you've been looking for.

That record can open the ears of fans and doors to other artists to get familiar with you.

That record might catch the attention of an editor or writer, a website that wants your next exclusive premiere, or a venue looking for new acts.

That record could grab a producer who wants to work with you now; a manager; a record executive; a DJ who hits you up for more music on the strength of that one (remember, always have more content waiting!)

One repost by one influencer could literally change your life. That record might earn that repost.

There's one thing for sure: None of this can ever happen if people don't hear your music.

When I was working with a young rapper named Token, he was pumping out videos regularly with gradual success because he was consistent and good.

Btw, his consistent releasing of videos is how I even discovered him in the first place.

Anyhow, some random kid posted one of Token's videos on Reddit. It caught. That video ended up being Token's first to surpass a million views. No budget, no press release, no publicist. No waiting for some magical moment to release. All it took was one kid to like it enough to repost.

To show you the power of that one post, Token's next video didn't clock even a quarter of that number. It didn't matter. He had caught enough attention. More importantly, he was inspired to put out his very best work each and every time he released something. Now, all his videos get millions of views, and he sells out shows worldwide.

All this without a major label deal, a record on the Billboard charts, or even a major feature to up his status.

He found and built his audience organically through consistency. He kept building his dirt pile until people noticed.

This same tactic worked for Joyner Lucas. He was consistently releasing well thought out and meaningful music videos, but most people that are fans of him today only became fans after his “I’m not a racist” video caught fire.

Don’t treat a record like it’s the best record you will ever make, and it demands some magical moment to be released. Think of it like this: if you’re not inspired to top what you just made, why be an artist at all? Who wants their first work to be their best? You should approach every project like it’s going to be the best thing you’ve ever done.

Holding onto a dope record is like saying, “I’m not pulling out the Rolls until I’m invited to a billionaire’s secret mansion party.” Never mind the fact that maybe it’s being seen in that Rolls that earns you the invite in the first place.

Put out HOT shit EVERY TIME, and don’t look back!

Create dope, put it out.

Create dope, put it out.

Create dope, put it out.

You think Kobe Bryant ever got on the court and said, ‘I’m not going to play my best today because this team is the worst team in the league?’ OR ‘Man, I played so well last game I’m not even gonna try tonight.’ OR, worst of all: ‘I’ll wait until we get to the Finals to bring out my A-game.’ He wouldn’t have gotten to the Finals had he not given his best every time leading up to that moment.

Believe me, I know tons of artists, producers, and DJs who live with regret; they have killer records just trapped in their computers. They didn’t put the material out when they could’ve, and the moment has passed. Maybe it sounds outdated now. Maybe they’re at a different stage in their career, and the records don’t fit sonically. Worse yet, maybe somebody else came along and had success with something similar, and they’re pissed off because they f*cking froze when they should have just put it out.

I see producers holding onto beats for years, waiting for the “right” artist to be on it.

Meanwhile, you could’ve used that beat for your own betterment and that of someone else. You could’ve broken a new artist or upped your own currency and brought more ears to your production. With each set of ears, you get closer to the artist you dream of producing for. Then that call comes. Instead, you sat back and waited for a call that never came.

You have amazing music?

You want to be sure the world hears it?

PUT THAT SHIT EVERYWHERE SO THAT YOUR AUDIENCE CAN HEAR OR SEE IT.

CHAPTER 11

Where Is Your Audience?

Finding and building YOUR audience.

So you got this incredible music, and you need to get it heard.

Who do you want to listen to you?

I know, I know. Everybody.

Well, odds are everyone isn't going to be interested in your music. So, you need to identify your audience--who's into what you are doing. Where do they hang?

You wouldn't hang out at a pizza shop to sell car parts.

Why? Because they didn't come for car parts, man.

There are so many places to find an audience. Sounds simple, right? Well, you not only need to find an audience, but you also need to find the RIGHT audience, an audience that cares about what you have to offer.

Let's break it down...

Are you making hip-hop music?

What style of hip-hop? Underground? Emo? Leaning pop? For the club? Some street shit?

You need to understand who your audience is and where they hang, so you know who and where to target.

Where you should post your music.

Where you should perform.

Who you want to connect with on the artist and production side.

Which labels are interested in your kind of music and, ultimately, in signing the type of artist you are.

So, look around. Figure out where online people look for this kind of music and who online will help promote your music to an audience that makes sense?

YOU MUST GET OUT, PERFORM AND BE SEEN.

THERE IS AN AUDIENCE FOR YOU. YOU NEED TO FIND THEM, and YOU NEED TO ENGAGE THEM.

Once you've begun building your audience and fanbase, you need to deliver your product to them by means of different outlets.

STOP SELLING THE SAME PRODUCT, THE SAME WAY, TO THE SAME AUDIENCE.

People think if they keep posting on their own social media page, they'll all of a sudden see tremendous growth.

This WILL NOT HAPPEN unless you actively engage and/or do something outside of your page.

USE THE INTERNET, DON'T LET IT USE YOU.

Everyone has something to sell nowadays. What makes you different? What makes you worthy of someone's time and money?

Why should someone choose you over someone else?

You must not only find and build your audience, but you must also develop a relationship with them.

They need to see who you are and what you are really about.

Don't just keep selling them.

"Buy my new single."

"Buy my new hoodie."

"Watch my new video."

"Come to my show."

GaryVee always talks about how to build an engaging audience strategically. You can quickly Google Gary's \$1.80 strategy and understand how to get ahead in the game.

He says that "The way to win on social media is to actually be social. The number of Instagram followers you have means nothing if you can't build a community of like-minded people who care and engage. The only real way to do this from scratch is to become part of the conversation. Whether it goes down in the DM or you are actively searching the top 9 posts in every hashtag on Instagram or Twitter, you need to participate and engage with people who have the same interests as you."

Talk to them, share valuable and useful information, express your opinion about issues and current affairs. Motivate and inspire.

Show respect for them deciding to give you their time, attention, and hard-earned money. Don't treat them like numbers.

People want authenticity. They want to stand by you to cheer you on. In turn, you must continue to communicate and share content.

You're striving for plays and for your video to go viral. Meanwhile, what have you set up beyond that?

Where does an audience get sent? What are they supposed to become a fan of??

Don't drag people somewhere online and then tell them to click another link to go somewhere else. I already came to your f*cking page. Pin your shit. Have what you are selling and want others to pay attention to in their faces when they arrive. Always!

Do you know how many times I went to an artist's page on someone's recommendation or because I heard a snippet of their music online, only to not hear any music or see anything to indicate that this person is focused on making good music?

Your social media pages are hubs for what you're selling.

Yeah, it's cool to display things of interest to you in an effort to be relatable, but if your music isn't there or easily listenable, then what you aren't about is making sure all of your work is being heard or seen.

People are busy. A&R's, managers, label execs, DJs and potential fans got shit to do. If you got them interested enough to check you out, then you'd better be prepared to give them what they came for.

They might never come back again.

If you are fortunate enough to build a committed audience, then it's your duty to commit to them as well. Don't ask that they invest in you and your music only for you to take them for granted.

That's an ungrateful dick move.

Don't look at them as just customers.

Don't just sell them.

Be relatable. Speak to what matters to them and you. Engage with them. Your success depends on them.

You need to...

CHAPTER 12

Make People Buy Into You, Not Just What You Are Selling

So I'm hanging out at Rick Ross' house in Miami.

It was a Tuesday morning, and I had just flown into town. I hit him from the airport to see what he was up to.

Ross: What up Sparks? Why don't you just come straight to my crib?

I arrived at his house, and we just vibed out the whole day. He asked that I read a script for a movie he was considering producing. We discussed everything from music to life and even recorded some records in his home studio.

I played golf in his backyard, made some funny videos around his house, and even took a nap... in his bed...by accident. (Video is on YouTube and my Instagram page @clintonsparks)

Anyhow, after all this, we headed into his office to discuss business. When he opened the double doors, I couldn't believe what I saw.

What I saw was so unexpected and dope AF.

I would never have imagined that Rick Ross, whose street persona is boss status, would have an office full of action figures and collectibles. I said to Ross,

"WTF, dude?! You collect all these, and no one knows about it?"

"Yeah, Sparks. It's just a little hobby of mine."

Imagine the massive audience he could attract if people only knew about his collection? Fans, old and new, would be able to relate on a whole different level!

People who may not necessarily have been fans of his music could become fans of him. Ross, the inaccessible street boss, could become more relatable. Imagine how many people and communities would f*ck with Ross even if they didn't like his music.

People need something to live for, believe in, and relate to.

Provide that thing, and you can be rich.

Sure, people need products, but I'm talking about ideas and feelings.

This is much bigger than any product. And it lasts much longer.

Ever hear someone describe a feeling or a vibe by assigning it a name?

"Yo, that sounds like a Drake vibe."

He sold you a feeling. He made you relate. You bought into him, which in turn made his product more appealing and desirable.

Kanye could have never dropped 808 and Heartbreaks as his debut album. He got an audience to buy into him with College Dropout and Late Registration. Once they buy in, they believe. He then led them where he wanted to go. He took them on a journey. When they believe, you can make them accept almost anything. In Kanye's case, anything.

Poopy-di scoop
Scoop-diddy-whoop
Whoop-di-scoop-di-poop

See what I mean?

YOU AND YOUR MUSIC ARE A PRODUCT AND A BRAND.

To repeat an important message: getting playlist placement or radio play isn't all there is to success. They're components. They're vehicles to put you in the spotlight and allow you to direct people back to your brand or business. If you don't have your business in order when they arrive, you wasted that valuable opportunity and their time. Would you return to a dirty, poorly stocked store? Of course not.

TV commercials and online ads convey much more than simple brand awareness. Their main purpose is to direct you to their product through your buying into their brand. Take Nike, for example. They don't just sell you a product, their focus is on the lifestyle associated with their brand because they know if you buy into the lifestyle, then you buy into the product. They sold you a feeling. "Just Do It."

Buying into an artist is no different. Look through your own music collection. How many artists do you really love and yet know nothing about them personally? What they do, wear, or like? Who they hang with, what they stand for, or even where they're from?

It doesn't happen.

You fun with the artist. Whether it's a 50 Cent or Travis Scott, you buy into the world they built. Their story, their lifestyle, and what they have to say, even when it's not on a record.

If YOU are interesting, people fuck with YOU. That never gets old.

CHAPTER 13

But I'm Doing 'Everything' Right, So What's Wrong?

If what you are doing is not working, then you are NOT doing everything right.

Just because you're in the studio every day making new records or creating new beats doesn't mean you're killing it.

Again, ACTIVITY DOES NOT EQUAL PRODUCTIVITY.

Understanding what you are NOT doing right is just as crucial as knowing what you ARE doing right. Perhaps even more so.

In 2009, I had the biggest weekly party in Las Vegas, Smashtime Saturdays. It was all the buzz in Vegas.

I crushed it every Saturday night. It sold out almost every week.

There were billboards of me on the Las Vegas strip. My face was plastered on the sides of buses and taxis. Flyers were everywhere.

Simultaneously, I was doing my E! News gig. As I mentioned, I leveraged that look to build this party in Las Vegas.

I took each week very seriously and went to great lengths to make sure it was the best party around. I created theatrics and grandiose entrances. One time I set up the club like a boxing event, and I came out like a prizefighter. Another time I acted as a bandleader; I brought the UNLV marching band out with me so that I could beatbox to the horn section. Perhaps my biggest spectacle was being lowered into the club through the retractable roof. I landed right on my turntables, and the crowd went nuts.

EVERYONE from actors to athletes to musicians came to my party: Tyrese, Ne-Yo, Paris Hilton, Brody Jenner, Big Sean, Idris Elba, Tommy Lee, Floyd Mayweather, Jermaine Dupri, Lil Jon, Akon, even Lady Gaga in one of her first performances.

Anybody who was somebody attended.

These parties were also promoted globally via the E! Entertainment channel, which was by my design.

It was THE party every Saturday night for years, and I was crushing it. I was making so much money that I didn't even know how to spend it.

I was doing everything right to make me THE guy in Vegas and cement my permanent residency there.

Right?

WRONG.

I wasn't doing the WHOLE job. I was only doing PART of my job.

I neglected one of the major components, something just as important as my crushing the show every week. Something just as important as bringing A-list celebrities out. Something just as important as the antics, intros, and all the marketing and promotion.

I didn't network.

I was so focused on creating a great show and convincing artists to appear that I never took the time to build meaningful relationships with the power players in Las Vegas. The people who would be there even after the fans left. The people who could ensure my permanent home in Vegas.

Everyone knew who I was and that my party was incredible. At the time, that was enough for me. Looking back, it was a major mistake. I didn't go to other parties to support, either out of courtesy or genuine interest. I didn't invite the power players to dinner or pal around with them after my parties because I was too busy working.

That is NO excuse.

Part of "doing everything right" is building these relationships. I didn't. So I wasn't doing everything right after all.

Some things, yes. Not everything.

Understanding what you are NOT doing right is just as crucial as knowing what you ARE doing right.

Doing everything right also includes building the right team to get these jobs done.

When you assemble your team, it is crucial that you select the right people for the job.

People who match your hustle or hustle even harder than you. People who understand and support YOUR PLAN and vision.

Analyze your team and figure out if they are doing their job properly. If they are not doing what they are supposed to, then you need to be quick to correct the problem, even if that entails firing the individual. Regardless if it's a parent, friend, or someone you came up with that can't take you to the next level. Don't let emotions or "loyalty" get in the way of doing what is best for you and your career.

Don't spend time complaining about others not doing their jobs or what's expected of them. I know people who've complained for YEARS about inept team members. Or people who've kept on a parent or friend out of loyalty and it severely handicapped or even ended their careers.

Find the person or people who see your vision and can genuinely help bring it to life. If you find that they cannot, don't be afraid to replace them. Nothing is more dangerous than complacency, either theirs or yours.

If things aren't working, make changes! Most people will insist they're doing things right simply because they don't know better, they're misinformed, or they don't know where to look for advice or examples of proper working relationships.

So, if you think you're doing everything right and it's still not working, find the part you are NOT doing right. Trust me, it exists.

Like I said, in my case, it was...

CHAPTER 14

NETWORKING

If you want to build your net worth then you gotta build your network.

Networking is one of THE most vital keys to success.

Like I mentioned earlier, I had no connections and knew nobody when I was starting my career in music.

Or, so I thought.

I bet a lot of you think this way too.

In fact, your network has already started to take shape by you just existing in the world. Your life is your first network.

Maybe it's a neighbor or someone you went to school with. Maybe it's a relative or coworker. Man, it could even be the guy at the corner store, a friend of your parents, or a Lyft driver you strike up a conversation with.

There is a whole world to network with right at your fingertips. Learn to leverage Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, your friends on Snapchat, and Facebook.

You think that to get the results you seek, you need to get at the biggest or most connected people in the industry. You don't.

Somebody in your current network may hold a tremendous value that you can benefit from. You need to identify these people and discover what that value is. You must capitalize on and utilize this network in ways you haven't thought of. The most important connection in your life might be right in front of you. It's just that you or he/she might not have thought of how. That's **mastering** the **A.R.T.** of networking. We'll get to that.

If you're determined to network, there's no time to be shy, nervous, or reluctant to walk up to a potential connection. If someone adds value to your network, engage that person. It's essential for moving forward and opening doors.

I didn't know Diddy personally before I became his tour DJ. We didn't grow up together, and I definitely didn't audition for the position.

I knew the people around him. Namely Shawn Prez, his VP at Bad Boy. Shawn and I had built a strong relationship over the years and he recommended me to Puff. Just like that. Why? Because I had built a relationship and continually kept in touch with him even when I didn't need anything from him.

Shawn was once a record promoter. I'd always support his records on my radio shows. He then branched off and started his own marketing agency; he'd ask me to help with the campaigns. I added value to his initiatives and helped him meet his objectives.

So, when I found out Puff needed a DJ for his tour, I reached out to Shawn. He agreed I was right for the job and told Puff I was the obvious choice. Puff agreed, not only because he valued Shawn's recommendation but also because I'd marketed myself so much that, in Puff's mind, my name was synonymous with dope.

How many people have you met and walked away from thinking, "How does he have that job?" You guessed it. Networking.

One day, a friend from a major record label called me to tell me that her boyfriend was holding a networking event in New York. She told me he's a fan of my work and would flip out if I spoke on his DJ panel, which included A-Trak, Kid Capri, and Juske.

I told her I would love to participate and confirmed I would attend.

A few days later, I got a call from Paul Rosenberg, Eminem's manager. He told me Em would be coming to Boston to perform and wanted to invite me. Being that it was my hometown, he also said that Em wanted to bring me onstage at the Boston Garden.

WHAT????!!! F*ck yeah, I want to roll.

He told me the date and asked if I'd be around. Are you shitting me? It was the same day I'd committed to the panel in New York for my friend's boyfriend.

I immediately called my friend and explained the situation. I asked if it was cool that I not attend the panel. She understood the opportunity for me but also told me how excited her boyfriend was and that he'd be heartbroken if I backed out.

SHIT!

So, I called Paul and told him I couldn't come to the show because of a prior commitment.

The day finally came where I was supposed to do a panel for this dude, and can you believe it, there's A F*CKING BLIZZARD OUTSIDE! I had to drive from Boston to New York in the snow to do a panel for some kid I'd never met.

After six hours in the car, I arrived at the event. There are like 3 people in the audience for the panel.

Can you imagine how I felt knowing what I was missing back in Boston?

I arrived at the venue and was introduced to my friend's boyfriend. "Hey man, I'm Ben. Thanks so much for coming here. I'm a big fan, and it really means the world to me that you could participate."

Ben's enthusiasm and excitement made me forget what I was missing. He helped me realize what I was doing...

The right thing.

We proceeded with the panel, 3-person audience and all.

After the panel was over, I hung out and talked with Ben. After getting to know him a bit, I braced myself for the long, snowy drive back to Boston.

Fast forward several months. I get a phone call.

“Hey man, It’s Ben.”

“Bennnnn, Ben, who?”

“Ben Lyons, we met in New York when you spoke on my panel.”

“Oh, hey man, how’s it going?”

Ben: “Great. Listen, I’m now the movie guy on the E! Network. I interview movie stars and talk about movie-related stuff. Would you ever consider talking about music on E!? Basically, being the music version of me?”

Me: “You mean like Hollywood E!? Like Paris Hilton and Britney Spears E!?”

He laughed and said yes.

I thought for a minute. ‘How can this help my goals? How does this fit my plan of rising as a hip-hop producer, DJ, and radio host? This might not make sense.’ Remember: **JUST BECAUSE I COULD DOESN’T MEAN I SHOULD.**

Then, an epiphany: This is my way of introducing Hip-Hop to Hollywood.

I flew to LA a couple of weeks later. Long story short, I was a host on E! Entertainment for almost 5 years.

The moral is to demonstrate the power of networking--not just networking that took place at the event but the networking that led up to the event. The fact that his girlfriend asked me to do this event in the first place was her utilizing her network. Prior to that, I’d contact her at the label to get music for my radio shows, which was me utilizing my network.

Networking is a powerful tool for not only growing your own career but also about giving value to others. Helping others, in turn, helps you. But it’s more than just that. You must have a stellar elevator pitch that will grab someone’s attention in five seconds. Begin your pitch with why they should care and what benefit it has for them before you present the ask.

There is also something to be said for the strength of standing by your word and commitment. Honor and honesty are not always synonymous with the music industry.

This goes back to the “famous doesn’t make you great, but great can make you famous” concept. Sure, sharing a hometown stage with one of the biggest artists in the world would have been awesome. But being a man of my word led me not only to a great opportunity but also a series of new relationships and possibilities. Tapping into Hollywood opened up a whole new network, one that’s been invaluable in my life.

To this day, the network I built so meticulously brings me a massive ROI. Simultaneously, I'd like to think those in my network have been helped by the opportunities I brought their way.

WIN/WIN.

You never know when the assistant or even the security guy will end up becoming the VP of A&R or Director of Promotions. **Treat everyone like they are CEOs, and you will build a powerful network.** Build it carefully. Build it with respect; people remember those that treated them well. They are also quick to remember those that don't. So, don't be a dick.

If you want to build your net worth, then you gotta build your network. I will show you numerous, effective strategies for doing so in my course.

In the meantime, don't be afraid to go right up to someone. DM them. Write an email. I have gained so many relationships by simply reaching out or walking up and striking a conversation. Remember the power of adding value to someone else when networking. Don't just approach it with a "what can you do for me" mentality.

Maintaining these relationships is a separate but equally important art. There's a fine line between being persistent and annoying. You might think you're strengthening a relationship when in fact, you're eroding it. You can find these strategies in my course as well.

CHAPTER 15

Pivot

We f*ck ourselves up because we develop in our mind the way things are supposed to be. When they don't happen the way we planned or expected, we get angry, deflated or depressed.

This causes us to act out of emotion more often than not, which can be dangerous.

We get trapped in this limited design we built in our minds and if things don't happen the way we expected, everything's ruined, right?

Wrong.

So,

You have to push back the release date to your song because the mix isn't right.

Everything is ruined now because the video editor didn't finish editing in time.

Your release didn't get the online attention you were expecting.

The record you went to the studio to record didn't turn out the way you wanted.

The manager you hired isn't as great as you thought.

The deal you signed turned out to suck.

You didn't get that opportunity that you were expecting to get.

So f*ckin what.

Shit happens man.

You need to plan for the unexpected and leave room for error.

You MUST learn how to pivot.

Adjust and be flexible with your plan when met with an opportunity.

When you do this, the train never stops. It simply changes its route.

A problem or issue can also be viewed as an opportunity.

Remember, it's all about perspective.

Years back, I made a record with Big Sean and Mike Posner entitled "Ambiguous." Mike and I originally made it together after we were driving around in his car, and I randomly used the word Ambiguous and suggested, Yo that would be a good title for a song.

So, we created the record, which was a beat me and DJ Snake had made together. Once the record was done, we both agreed that getting Sean to put a verse on it would be dope.

Sean recorded his verse, and the record was done.

We didn't really have plans for the song, so Sean asked if he could use it for his Finally Famous 3 mixtape he was preparing to release. I said no because I thought a line from my verse was crude and I didn't like it. A few weeks later, he had asked again. My answer was the same, no.

A few months had passed, and I get a gang of Google alerts indicating Sean had a new song online with my name on it. It was the Ambiguous record that I did not want to be released.

I was livid.

I immediately texted Mike and Sean, asking who leaked the song. Mike responded right away with, "Not me bro."

A few moments later, Sean's response read, Yo, call me.

I called Sean, and he proceeded to tell me that he included the Ambiguous record on his Finally Famous 3 mixtape. I expressed how upset I was, and he responded by saying, "I thought it would be cool."

I was like, "Dude, I said no multiple times, why would you just do it anyway?"

He said that the mixtape was dropping at midnight, and even though it would have messed up the tracklist, he offered to take it off. After talking to him for a few minutes about it, I asked him to give me a minute, and I would call him back.

Here is the key part of the story that you need to pay attention to.

Although I didn't want what was happening to happen, I calmed down to assess the situation.

Is it really as bad as I think it to be?

What are the pros and cons of this song coming out?

Can I turn this into a positive outcome?

I began to answer these questions for myself and realized there were no cons other than the potential embarrassment over that line. But was that worth eliminating a possible opportunity? I mean, if Sean and Mike didn't find it to be as vulgar as I did, maybe it wasn't as bad as I thought it to be.

Plus, Sean's mixtape was highly anticipated, he was down with Kanye who would presumably listen to this, every Hip Hop outlet would feature this project, and I was on a song with two buddies I think are super dope.

Why was I concerned again?

Oh yeah, because I had built in my mind what shouldn't happen without being open-minded to other amazing opportunities that could present themselves by not limiting my options.

I called Sean back and told him that it was all good and I was excited to be a part of his project. The mixtape came out with rave reviews, and we even shot a music video that garnered a million views in the first couple of hours.

Had I been stubborn and not flexible or willing to Pivot, I would have missed out on this opportunity and most likely tarnished my relationship with Sean.

Be willing to adjust to unforeseen changes or obstacles. If you do not, it won't be those changes or obstacles that block you from progress, it will be you.

CHAPTER 16

Stop Trying To Knock Down Brick Walls With Snowballs

You're discouraged because, no matter what you try, your views, comments, and likes aren't growing.

You get angry or discouraged.

Again, you worry that there's some magical solution that everyone but you has figured out.

Back to Em and me hanging outside my mom's house.

I had already told Em twice not to get loud because my neighbors complain about the noise.

"I got you, Clint."

Em was discussing his experiences being on the road and performing in different cities. He paused, noticeably frustrated.

"Every time I perform in Philly, they fucking boo me, man. Every other city shows love, but every time, no matter how much I kill it or how ill my bars are, Philly never gives me props."

The more he talked about it, the more aggravated he became. It was clear that this was eating away at him.

He kept going on and on, getting louder and louder.

I finally had to say,

"Dude, shut up! My neighbors, man."

My saying this seemed to snap Em out of his anger.

"So, what did you do about it?" I asked.

He laughed and said,

"I just spit a verse and dissed the whole crowd. I didn't give a f*ck. I was like 'F*ck it' and started shitting on everyone there and the whole city of Philadelphia. F*ck Philly. Philly never showed me love."

Do you see what Em did?

He changed his approach.

What he had been doing wasn't working, it wasn't being accepted. He kept doing the same thing and getting the same unfavorable result.

Until he did something completely different. He took a risk.

He changed his approach. This approach yielded a new outcome.

Einstein once said, **“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.”**

Most artists might worry about damaging their relationship with that city or giving the audience even more reason to hate on them. On the contrary, Em got them to pay attention and really listen.

Em’s decision to change his approach opened my eyes. I realized I had been basically doing the same thing.

I, too, kept trying to knock down a brick wall with snowballs.

At about this same time, I was trying to get my music played on the local college radio station. I would stand out front every week, waiting for the DJ to arrive so I could play him a record. Every week was the same: “Nah, I ain’t feeling it.”

I kept at it, and I continued getting the same response over and over. Then I switched up my approach. I did research and started paying attention to what music this DJ was a fan of and would champion. That gave me insight on a new way to approach him to get my song played on the radio. It also gave me the recipe to produce exactly what I knew he would f*ck with. A week after changing my approach, my shit got on the radio.

I was a nobody producer dying to get ears on my beats. I would send them to local DJs and even remix popular radio records. I befriended the biggest DJ in my city, and he would tell record label promoters about the music and remixes I was producing. Still, nobody cared. All they wanted to know was whether he’d play their records on his radio show. They weren’t trying to hear about some kid making beats in his mother’s basement.

So, again, I changed my approach. More accurately, I lied.

I told record labels that I was a DJ with a popular online radio show. I was not.

These days, everyone has a radio show, podcasts, YouTube vlog, etc. and begs to get celebrity access. But twenty years ago, labels were desperate for new promotional outlets. So I took advantage of their need and also of their ignorance of the internet. I called the label promoters and told them about my online radio show. I informed them that if their artists came to Boston and didn’t appear on my show, they’d be doing themselves a major disservice.

Well, they believed me. Label promoters put me on their list of priority radio outlets in Boston.

THIS LIE brought Eminem, the Wu-Tang Clan, Cam’ron, Common, and Talib Kweli all to my mom’s house. They’d sit in my home studio -in Mom’s basement- and I’d play them my beats, which they’d rhyme over, thinking it was airing. To this day, I have unreleased music from guys like Eminem, Cam’ron, and Common rocking over my beats. Out of the lie came truth--musical truth and relationships that stand to this day.

I had a goal. My approach was not yielding results.

I had to find another way in.

Now, especially in the age of internet slick talk, I don't suggest lying. But I do urge you to recognize that there is more than one path to the mountaintop.

People want to believe that there's only one way to get to where they want to go. In believing blindly, they often miss out on potentially successful lanes opened in front of them.

If something is working, do more of it. If something isn't working, change it up. Leave your emotions at the door. You must not let your feelings impact your decisions. Instead, you need to...

CHAPTER 17

F.T.F.

**Face The Facts.
Fuck The Feelings.**

**Follow The Formula.
Fix The Future.**

As much as we pride ourselves on being rational, we often act on emotion. These emotions are connected to the narrative rattling around our heads--whether this narrative is real or imagined.

It's easy to feel some kind of way because someone won't respond to you or is hating on you and delaying or interfering with your forward motion.

If you are running towards the end zone for a touchdown, but someone in the crowd shouts something disparaging, do you run into the stands, quit the game, or sit on the bench complaining?

Of course not. You stay focused on getting to the end zone. That is your only goal. You don't heed your emotions, no matter how strong. You focus on being great and getting shit done. Use your emotions as fuel to get shit done. Once you get it done, you can thank all the haters.

It is IMPERATIVE that you be able to control your emotions in this business. Everyone has their goals, priorities, and objectives, just like you do. Theirs might not necessarily overlap with yours. Or they might not slow down enough to consider yours. That's ok.

YOU must find ways to bring value to those you seek assistance from.

I never ask a favor of someone unless I'm also bringing equal value to them. And not what I think MIGHT be valuable to them based on my own priorities but something I KNOW to be valuable to them. I care enough to do my due diligence. I don't hypothesize about what they might need. I do research, I listen to them, and I provide solutions.

DON'T GET MAD IF PEOPLE DON'T LISTEN WHEN YOU TALK. INSTEAD, LEARN TO TALK WHEN PEOPLE ARE LISTENING.

None of us are immune to emotion; some are just better than others at controlling it. People catch feelings because they sent an email, text, or DM and never got a response. You can't take things personally or conjure up an imaginary story of what you THINK that person is thinking or why they haven't responded. People have a life, and you have no idea what may be going on that didn't allow them to respond when you felt they should have. You must F.T.F.

Ask yourself:

In this area of my life, art or business

1. Am I outperforming most of my peers and competitors?

2. Am I seeing the amount of progress I want?
3. Do I have a successful track record of accomplishing things at this level?
4. Has my gut been more right or wrong in the past?
5. Am I using my head when making decisions, or are my emotions dictating my decisions?

If the answer to any of these is an enthusiastic HELL YES! Then Trust Your Feelings and Follow YOUR Formula.

On the other hand, If you can't answer HELL YES to any of these, then find somebody who is ACTUALLY doing it and

FUCK YOUR FEELINGS and FOLLOW THEIR WINNING FORMULA.

When someone does give you the opportunity to present an idea or give you some of their valuable time, be **GRATEFUL**.

When I was coming up as a mixtape DJ, my boys would always nag me to reach out to bigger DJs to collaborate with. I would always say no. My response then is the same as the advice I give you now: I'm never going to ask someone for something unless I can reciprocate. Fast forward to when I won Mixtape DJ of the Year and was among the A-list mixtape DJs. As luck would have it, I ran into Kay Slay in New York. For those who don't know, Slay is a legendary DJ whose Streetsweeper mixtapes were some of the hottest mixtapes in the streets.

We discussed doing a tape together. Slay's name was ringing heavy in the streets at that time.

I was pumped when he said he was down and agreed to follow my format: making the mixtape a street album with all exclusive records produced by yours truly.

Slay and I set a day and time for me to come back to NYC and work. I drove down from Boston and hit him when I arrived. No response. I wait for hours until he finally hits me, saying we'll link later. Dope. I'm excited.

He never hits me. It's now midnight, and he goes on air for his Thursday night show. I waited for him to get off and hit him again. No response.

I slept in my car overnight.

The next day, I hit him a couple more times, and he says that we should link later. Ok, dope. We'll get up later and knock it out.

Later never comes.

It's now Friday night. I assume he has a club gig somewhere, so I head back to Boston, frustrated. I'd basically waited in my car for two days and drove about ten hours for absolutely no reason.

My boys are fired up and suggest I make a mixtape dissing him for playing me like that.

Absolutely not, I said. I just chalked it up to 'shit happens.' My goal is to get this mixtape done. I reminded them -and myself- that my priority isn't necessarily his. I have a plan, and I know the benefits. I will not let emotions blur my objective.

(THIS CONCEPT IS CRUCIAL. PLEASE REREAD WHAT I JUST WROTE AND LET IT SINK IN.)

Hardhead that I am, I hit him again a week later. I don't even mention him blowing me off or all that time spent waiting. I acted like the process was just starting.

He tells me to come to NYC so we can knock it out. Once again, I drive from Boston. I'm there at 10 am, and he says we'll link at 3 pm. Wouldn't you know it, he leaves me hanging all day again. We never connect. I hit him a couple of times and no response. It's now midnight, and he's on the air again. I gotta admit, even my composure has started to slip. But I kept my cool.

I drive to his crib and wait out front for him to come home. I hop out of my car and greet him excitedly. I tell him to jump in my car and that I have a plan to knock this out real quick. He reluctantly gets in, and I drag him to a desolate section of Central Park.

"Ayo Sparks, whatchu got me out here for?" he demands incredulously. "This is crazy. I'm a black man out in the middle of Central Park at 3 am. This is not cool. If the cops come, they will be on my ass. You're good man, you're white."

I ignore him and told him to get out. I open the trunk and hand him a shovel and a shirt. A photographer I had on standby jumps in the trunk. Slay is bewildered. "WTF?! You fit a white man in a trunk, and I'm a black man holding a shovel! I'm going to jail man! WTF are we doing, Sparks?"

I tell him to chill out and to put his hand on the trunk. We snap the picture, and we're out in two minutes.

We get back to his place, and I make him record a script I'd already written up about the tape. I give him a hug -which he hates, btw- and back to Boston, I go.

I put the mixtape together, using features from every hip-hop artist who mattered at the time: Eminem. 50 Cent. Mobb Deep. The Lox. Diddy. N.O.R.E. Joe Budden, etc. I turned the photo into a grisly cover and titled the tape "Kill Yourself."

I gave the finished product to Slay, who LOVED it. He loved it so much that he played the entire mixtape for an hour on Hot 97. In that hour, he shouted me out at least twenty times, calling me a genius.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND HOW BIG THAT IS?

TO HAVE ALL OF NEW YORK HEAR YOUR NAME OVER AND OVER? TO BE CALLED A GENIUS BY THE HOST OF THE SHOW?

Yooooooooo! You couldn't pay for this kind of authentic support and notoriety.

The “Kill Yourself” mixtape became a street classic. More importantly, I stuck to my plan. I didn’t let anyone influence me or steer me from that plan. I had all the excuses in the world to get angry, but I didn’t. That was not going to help me get the job done.

Instead, I opted to:

- Fuck the Feelings**

(Getting upset about being disrespected.)

- Face the facts**

(Kay Slay had his own shit going on, and my priorities were not necessarily his.)

- Follow the formula**

(Stayed patient and focused on meeting my objective.)

- Fix the future**

(Completed the project, built a relationship with Slay, and earned the biggest promotion I could ever ask for, thus fixing my future.) Slay shouting me out and playing my records caused other DJ’s to hit me up for the music, extending my **network**.

This formula has worked for me over and over.

Assess what works for you. If something is working, DO MORE OF THAT. If it’s not working, face the facts, f*ck your feelings and do something different.

This might be the only time you’ll hear this from me:

DON’T BELIEVE IN YOURSELF....

If what you’re doing isn’t working. Instead, believe in your ability to change. Unless you are willing to adapt, you’ll never get to the next level. It’s important to stay focused on your plan to accomplish your objective, but when seeking assistance from others, it is equally as important to answer the question...

CHAPTER 18

What Can You Do For Them?

Value add.

When you become valuable to other people's needs and objectives, you build an avenue to getting yours met.

You need the local DJ to play your music? Remember my story. You want a club owner to book you? A playlist curator to add your record? A producer to work with you? Someone to hire you? Remember my stories.

To sell or pitch somebody requires you to understand what they actually need or how it adds value for them. That understanding is the first skill.

The second skill is more elusive but equally important. You must be able to show people what you bring to the table or the value of the opportunity you're presenting, even if they can't see it for themselves. It's crucial for you to learn how to paint the picture for someone to understand what you are selling them.

I went to see Ludacris to play him some new beats I had produced. I was excited about one beat in particular because I created it specifically with him in mind. When I played him this beat, he didn't seem overly impressed and asked what else I had to play. I was like, "WHAT?! How do you not see that this beat is you all day?" He didn't see it the same way I did. That's ok. It wasn't his job to see my vision; it was my job to make him see it.

I left the studio and hit Ludacris' engineer and asked him to send me an acapella verse off Luda's most recent mixtape. I then hit Rick Ross's engineer and asked for the same thing. I placed those two verses on the beat and then created a chorus. Once I was done with that, I hit Bun B and asked him to lay down a new verse. I finished the record and called it "Down In The Dirty" and then sent it to Ludacris. He loved it. It not only became the first single off his DTP album but he shouted my name in the record, and we ended up shooting a music video together.

I could have easily walked away, upset that he didn't see my vision. Instead, I used the F.T.F. concept. I had to figure out a way to make him see what I was seeing. You must take into consideration that people have other things going on in their lives, and successful people always have stuff to do. Perhaps Luda didn't see it because he had a different vibe in mind, or his mind was elsewhere. Who knows? What I do know is Luda called me after producing three or four songs for him and told me how impressed he was by my vision, way of thinking, and my ability to get in the minds of others to help them get the results they need.

70% of people buy out of emotion, and the other 30% buy from logic and data. Remember I talked about selling a feeling earlier?

Now, I don't mean coercing them to do something that simply meets your objective. If you're selling solely for personal gain and feel gratified by convincing somebody to do something that's not really in their best interest, that's not being a great salesman.

THAT'S BEING A CON ARTIST.

I've recently enjoyed one of my biggest wins in another explosive sector: Esports.

When I was named VP of business development at Faze Clan (the world's biggest lifestyle gaming brand), I intended to do what I always have: colliding cultures and help others get familiar with an emerging industry. To grow, we needed to raise capital. Artists and celebrities often want to be affiliated with innovation and entrepreneurship, especially when mixed with cool. Again utilizing my extensive network, I thought about who'd make sense to approach. Most in my circles didn't know about esports, but I knew they would need to--not just for our raising money but for their own benefit. Esports has an enormous and engaged community, a perfect marriage for artists looking to build their own brands.

My first task was to educate celebrities about the business of esports. I then had to demonstrate how and why their involvement made sense. I targeted hip-hop artists because rap music and gaming have always been connected: in the barbershop, during downtime at the studio, and even creatively, like when Smif-n-Wessun sampled Super Mario Brothers' sound effects in their 2008 song "Super Brooklyn." Hell, even Def Jam released titular games, Def Jam Vendetta and Def Jam: Fight for NY in 2003 and 2004. Gaming is like battle rapping, a competitive, shit-talking way to establish clout and superiority amongst friends and peers.

So, after hundreds of calls, texts, emails, and meetings, I finally got Yo Gotti to see the vision. He became the first hip-hop artist to invest in Faze Clan. Though he didn't understand esports when I first sat him down, I was able to convey its importance as a vehicle. I knew it would behoove him as both an artist and an executive in his own right. Thereafter, I brought in DJ Paul of Three6Mafia.

Meanwhile, I knew Offset of the Migos was himself a gamer, so I approached him about Faze. We went back and forth for five months about a potential alignment: the advantages, any concerns, plans, affiliated businesses. Ultimately, we agreed it was a smart play for his business and his brand. Of course, Faze would benefit greatly as well. This reciprocity is the key.

Since then, I've brought in Swae Lee, Ray J, Tyron Woodley, and Pitbull. Even Lil' Yachty has joined the Faze family.

To really add value to someone, you must first establish if what you are asking actually makes sense for them. When you can make them realize this is something they need and didn't even know it, you become insanely credible and valuable.

It's just like any other relationship. When someone realizes you're only in it for yourself, it won't last.

Think of it like this. When you're interested in someone for a relationship, do you consider what that person wants and if YOU fit the bill in their eyes? Or do you just look for in them what's of interest to you?

You want them to be perfect for YOU, but do you really consider if YOU are perfect for them?

Probably not.

That's selfish in relationships and also in business.

To create a sustainable, mutually beneficial business relationship, you must care about the other party's needs, objectives, concerns, vulnerabilities, and pain points.

It's taken us 18 chapters to get here, but here's the book (and my career) summed up in a handful of principles:

1. Be kind.
2. Over-deliver .
3. Never ask for anything unless you can offer something of equal or greater value in return.
4. Be grateful.
5. Stay focused.
6. Be humble.
7. Work hard.
8. Be consistent.
9. Plan to fail.
10. Be flexible and learn to pivot.

The ability to see others' greatness and to help others achieve greatness without feeling threatened by it is a true mark of one's own greatness.

When I was starting out my career in the music business, DJ Khaled was already the man in Miami. His larger-than-life personality was already in full force. And he was THE guy to see if you wanted to break a record on radio in Miami.

At the time, I didn't know Khaled personally, other than our crossing paths in the DJ world.

He was a heavyweight on the radio. Yet I would find myself wondering, 'Why isn't he known globally as he clearly deserves to be?'

So I'm sitting in a label exec's NYC office, and I see a stack of mixtapes. At the time, I owned the world's biggest mixtape website, mixunit.com. A Khaled tape sat on top of the pile.

“Khaled is making mixtapes now?”

It was odd that Khaled had a mixtape out and I didn’t know about it. Believe me, through my work with Mixunit, I knew every DJ making noise with tapes. Khaled wasn’t one of them.

I took it for my drive back to Boston.

THE MIXTAPE WAS FIRE!

The tape featured icons like Scott Storch and Timbaland literally showing you how they’d made some of their most epic beats. It was basically a podcast before podcasts existed.

I CONSIDER MYSELF ONE OF THE MOST ORIGINAL MIXTAPE DJs ALIVE AND I’D NEVER HEARD ANYTHING LIKE IT.

I wanted the world to Get Familiar with his work.

I contacted Khaled and told him we needed to meet ASAP so that I could help build his brand.

He accepted, and we agreed to meet in Puerto Rico.

Naturally, my mind had been spinning with ideas for him ever since I’d heard that tape. As soon as we sat down, I started rattling them off. I was convinced -and trying to convince him- that he could and would be as big around the world as he was in Miami.

Khaled said simply, “I need that.”

Then: “Yo Sparks, remember that kid Lil’ Wayne?”

“Of course.”

He tells me that Wayne gave him a bunch of new records to put out a tape, but he’s not sure the best way to go about it.

No worries, I told him. I’ll help.

We assembled and released the mixtape, and it was a major success.

It jumpstarted Lil’ Wayne’s resurgence and helped the world -not just Miami- GET FAMILIAR with DJ Khaled.

What was in it for me? Well, I got a dope new mixtape to sell on my website, and I had records that needed support. By channeling my network, resources, and abilities, I added value to Khaled’s needs--which in turn became incredibly beneficial for my own objectives. From that moment on, Khaled and I have become friends, done each other mad favors, and supported each other’s projects.

To reiterate: figure out how to add value to someone who can add value to you. Even if you don’t have an immediate need, extend the opportunity. You never know when reciprocity comes; remember my story about Ben Lyons and the E! Network.

Just so you know, the person that convinced me to write this book reached out via Instagram. We had never met before, but he reached out with an offer that seemed too good to be true. Naturally, I was skeptical. I must have asked him a dozen times, “But what do you want from me? Where is your win?” Luke was adamant that it stemmed solely from the fact that this was something that would take my career to the next level. He seemed both intelligent and sincere and was successful in the online marketing space, so I accepted his offer. He did as he promised and it worked out. Luke is now my business partner, and we are crushing the mentorship space.

This selflessness appealed to me psychologically, to the point that I want to explore this relationship further and figure out what I can do to reciprocate. Kindness always wins. This is how you elevate and sustain relationships. In other words, build a powerful network. Give before asking, but make sure that what you are giving holds value to the other person.

Remember: helping others be great IS being great.

Khaled was already great. I just wanted to make more people GET FAMILIAR with his greatness.v

CHAPTER 19

Mastering A.R.T.

Automatic. Resourceful. Thinking.

Stop stressing over what you don't have and utilize what you do.

You have so many more resources than you realize.

When I was broke and didn't know what to do with my life, I still had music. That's all I knew how to do well (legally) but never even thought about it as a stable career choice. Every job I've ever had was hard labor; I was a mover, a stock clerk, a paperboy, a snow shoveler, a warehouse worker. That is until I injured my back working at UPS and couldn't do hard labor any longer. I didn't even have a high school diploma.

'Oh shit, what am I going to do now?'

Yeah, I had a passion and talent for making music. It was something cool I loved doing. I was making a little money here and there producing for local artists, but that's a far cry from my owning houses in Los Angeles. Shit, I never thought I'd own a home in my lifetime.

But I was out of options. I decided to turn my passion into a real career. That meant...

ONE GOAL.

I immediately thought about the resources available to me:

Music stores.
Barbershops.
DJs.
Radio shows.
Clubs.
Other aspiring artists.
Media outlets.
Blogs.
Friends.
Promoters.

How do I connect with them?

Who do I know that can connect me?

How do I get in touch with the appropriate people?

This frame of mind is an example of mastering A.R.T.

Automatic. Resourceful. Thinking.

You must stop stressing about what you don't have or think you don't have and start taking stock of what resources you do have.

In 2014, I had a song with 2 Chainz and Macklemore called “Gold Rush” that had a rock vibe to it, and it needed a video. I wanted to shoot a live drummer backing me on vocals. I went through my contact list, looking for drummers. I reached out to some directly and asked other friends to make inquiries on my behalf. Nothing. No one was available. Then, the light bulb moment: I’ll get my buddy Travis Barker to do it!

Unfortunately, Travis wasn’t available on the date I needed him. DAMMIT! I’m screwed. I can’t reschedule. The crew is paid for. Now what?

After stressing for a while, I remembered that I’d interviewed Tommy Lee a few years prior, and we’d exchanged contact info. I would occasionally reach out to say hello and stay connected. Remember: it’s not just making contact, it’s also maintaining it.

I contacted Tommy and told him what I was trying to do. I sent him the song. He was in. Nice!

Now, we needed a place to film our performance scene. I couldn’t come up with anything suitable. My frustration had been building all day because there were no spaces available to shoot. Tommy stepped in. He suggested we just get a white backdrop and film it in his garage. So we did.

Both of us mastering A.R.T.

At that moment, Tommy mastered A.R.T., and I had learned to master A.R.T. well before that to even get the song made. How so? Let’s backtrack.

I was in the studio when my friend Julie Pilot, then program director of an LA radio station, came by to hear what I’d been working on. After listening, she said excitedly:

“Have you heard of this kid Macklemore out of Seattle? You guys would totally click because of your personalities and the kind of music you’re making.”

This was right when Macklemore’s single “Thrift Shop” had dropped.

I told her that I hadn’t heard of him. She showed me some videos and songs, and I loved what he was doing.

After Julie left, I tweeted, “Anyone in Seattle knows Macklemore, please tell him to hit me.”

Ten minutes later, he responded, “Yo, DM me homie.”

I did. I sent him a record I was working on with Rick Ross called “Gold Rush” and asked him to be a part of it. He loved it and immediately agreed to lay down a verse.

Remember that story about hanging at Rick Ross’ house? That hang, years earlier, resulted in his verse for this record.

Things were clicking, then a speedbump. Long story short, Ross did not stay on the record. I needed a replacement, so I reached out to 2 Chainz for a verse. Would you believe that he told me that he’d been wanting to do a record with a rock vibe?

With connections comes coincidence. I was resourceful, utilizing my network to complete this record. Still, I was also adding value to everyone involved: to 2 Chainz by bringing him the kind of record he was looking for and to Macklemore by offering a look alongside a prominent artist--initially Ross but ultimately 2 Chainz.

CONNECTING IS SUCH A POWERFUL SKILL.

Funny enough, I was crashing at Tyrese Gibson's crib during the week of the "Gold Rush" video shoot. I was still living in Boston at the time and needed a place to crash in LA. I'd met Ty through my E! gig, and we'd stayed connected, eventually getting tight.

When I was filming at Tommy Lee's house, Tyrese called and asked where I was. I told him at Tommy Lee's--you know, the drummer from Mötley Crüe. Ty got super excited to meet a rock legend. So he came by to meet Tommy, and I threw him in the video too.

When would you ever see Tommy Lee, 2 Chainz, Tyrese, and Macklemore together? Oh, I forgot to mention: Tyrese brought Brandy with him. I'd become friendly with Brandy many years earlier through her brother Ray J.

So, what started as a chaotic, stressful, haphazard day turned into one of the best, most spontaneous, most gratifying experiences.

This elaborate story is to illustrate and demonstrate how to master A.R.T. Follow me through the steps:

I continuously put out content, growing my brand with mixtapes and radio shows, which built my audience.

By building this plan, I got Rick Ross familiar with me and helped him break in the Northeast, where I was doing my radio shows. This look grew into a friendship that led to my recording in his home studio.

Meanwhile, I had built my radio shows up to be great, which gave me access to major celebs like Tommy Lee and 2 Chainz. In turn, that helped me to build my network.

I reciprocated by adding value to both Tommy Lee and 2 Chainz, promoting their projects via my radio and TV shows.

I mastered A.R.T. by contacting Tyrese when I needed a place to crash in LA and then again by reaching out to Tommy for the video shoot. Tommy himself mastered A.R.T. by suggesting we use his garage to film the performance scenes.

When I decided to put Macklemore and 2 Chainz on a record together, everyone around me said it was a wack idea. But they'd never even thought of a collaboration like that, let alone put one together. So I didn't listen to any **unqualified** opinions.

This whole scenario allowed me to **connect with people** who were fans of each other and shared mutual respect but most likely would never have met had I not created this opportunity.

Now, you might be thinking, 'Yeah, Clinton, it's easy for you to pull all these people together because you're already successful.'

My response would be...

NO. I'm in a position to do things like this because,

I DID EVERYTHING I'M TELLING YOU TO DO IN THIS BOOK.

What I am telling you WORKS. This story is just one of many that proves it. There's a formula. It's not luck. It's built by design.

IF YOU USE THE TOOLS I'VE PROVIDED, YOU TOO CAN WIN BIG IN THE MUSIC BUSINESS.

CHAPTER 20

The Formula

I could've started the book with this formula. I could've skipped the advice, stories, and anecdotes. That would've been like giving you a blueprint and instructing you to build a house; meanwhile, you'd had no understanding of materials, costs, the proper tools, or even where to get the right tools in the first place. Your building would have collapsed. In fact, you'd never even have gotten started. Now, you're ready to start.

It's time to take everything you've read and apply it to this formula.

This is **THE** formula that EVERY single successful artist follows to **win big**.

To have a successful, lasting career in the music business, it is essential that you and your team understand and employ these 6 elements. Neglect to do any of these, and you'll never maximize your potential or, even worse, **fail entirely**.

Powerful Production.

Bulletproof Business.

Attractive Assets.

Compelling Platforms.

Aggressive Visibility.

Effective Monetization.

Let me break each one down:

1- Make Powerful Production

- Create your product.
- Select or create the right music.
- Write the song, either alone or in collaboration with other songwriters.
- If you're not a good songwriter, find someone who can write for you.
- Record your song with a good engineer/ vocal producer.
- Have your record professionally mixed.
- Have your record professionally mastered.

2- Bulletproof Business

- Protect your music and brand (IP, Copyright, and Trademarks).
- Sign producer agreements.
- Agree upon and fill out publishing split sheets. NOT DOING SO CAN PREVENT YOUR RECORD FROM EVER COMING OUT OR LAND YOU IN COURT.
- Clear any samples contained in your record.
- Register your music. YOU WILL MISS OUT ON REVENUE AND DEALS BY NOT REGISTERING YOUR MUSIC.
- Clear any artist featured on your song.
- Secure possession of work you made or were a part of.

3- Create Attractive Assets

- Create promotional videos for your song.
- Create content designed to go viral on social media (memes, quotes, etc.)
- Invest in professional photos.
- Design promotional graphics and social media marketing assets: flyers, banners, etc.
- Produce music videos.
- Develop artwork for your record/project.

4- Have Compelling Platforms

- Make sure that your social media pages are informative, exciting, and accessible. **MAKE SURE YOUR CONTENT IS EASY TO FIND AND PLAY.**
- Display contact information so that you can be recruited for shows, collaborations, or any other business opportunities.
- Make sure all your DSPs (Digital Service Providers) reflect your socials and stay on brand with who you are and what your music is about.
- Make your website an experience for fans and offer enough cachet for the casual visitor. Use this platform to provide a plethora of information and elaborate on who you are and what you are about. Provide a show schedule, newsletter, and long-form biography. Capture fan data, sell products, and offer exclusive content and deals.

5- Be Aggressively Visible

- Distribution - Product availability.
- Marketing - Product messaging and positioning.
- Publicity - Brand awareness. Grow your audience and attract more significant collaborations and opportunities.
- Performances, shows, and placements.

6- Effectively Monetize

- Performing.
- Streaming.
- Merchandise.
- Syncs.
- Sales.
- Ad Revenue.
- Endorsement deals.

YOU WILL NEVER REACH NUMBER 6 IF YOU DO NOT HAVE STEPS 1-5 PROPERLY HANDLED AND EXECUTED!

So, here's the BIG question. The final question.

Are you doing all of the things highlighted in the formula?

ALL of them?

Aggressively? Are you committed and not taking shortcuts?

Be honest with yourself.

If you're not doing ALL of these, literally walk over to a mirror and say out loud, 'Why the f*ck am I not doing these things?' Then, begin doing them all.

Most people cheat themselves out of a successful career because they aren't truthful about where they currently are. They believe their own lies and the fictional life they created for themselves online. You can fake the Instagram account or the gold chain, but you can't fake long term sustainable success.

If you are doing all these things, GREAT! Now all you need to do is make some adjustments based on what I've advocated in this book. One simple adjustment can change everything. As I said, if something is not working, try a different approach. Stop trying to knock down brick walls with snowballs.

I have laid out the mental and strategic groundwork for you to follow. Channeling that groundwork while utilizing this formula will give you an enormous advantage.

YOU MUST USE THE FORMULA!

In my course, I will mentor you on how to take full advantage of this knowledge to win big. I will teach you, step by step, how to master each and every move and maneuver. A mentor is someone who has already taken the hits and has learned how to help others navigate to success. A mentor is one who has learned valuable lessons through experience and wants to instill them in you. A good mentor can tell you what to look out for and help prevent you from making critical mistakes.

Look, I've spent my whole life putting people in positions to win.

Now I want to do the same for you.

It's time for the world to GET FAMILIAR... WITH YOU.

YOU DID IT!

You took your first giant leap into really understanding what it takes to

WIN BIG in the music business but... WE ARE NOT DONE!

In my book, I gave you the formula and I told you what you need to be doing to WIN BIG in the music business. Now, I will be thoroughly walking you through how to use the formula effectively as well as personally elaborating on the book and teaching you so much more.

Your next step is to **GET FAMILIAR with my MASTER COURSE.**

I have experts from every part of the music business breaking down EVERYTHING for you to easily understand and follow. In this course you will hear from Grammy winners to Academy award winners.

You will hear from platinum producers to the biggest names in content creation. You will learn from award winning film and video directors to CEO's, A&R's, Billboard charting artist and executives from record labels. You will get a clear understanding from heads of digital streaming platforms and distribution companies. You will also hear from award winning songwriters, Youtuber's to Play-listing Guru's and financial planners. EVERYTHING you need to know is in my master course. You didn't come this far just to go this far. So, GET FAMILIAR and let's keep winning.

CLICK HERE TO BE THE FIRST TO KNOW WHEN I DROP HOW TO WIN BIG IN MUSIC THE FULL COURSE!

Btw, I created a bunch of invaluable free products that will literally save you time, money, headache and potential legal problems for you there as well.

Man, I am so psyched to keep going together. Let's GO!!!

Oh, one more thing. Please share with me what the most valuable parts of the book were for you. **Hit me on socials @clintonsparks**

I would love to hear from you and share your experience with others. Like I said, my intention is to continue to help and take this journey with you to winning big.

If my book helped you, let others know and share on socials. I will be paying attention and reaching out to you who share my book on social media.

CLINTON SPARKS

**IS A GRAMMY-NOMINATED, MULTI-PLATINUM DJ,
PRODUCER, SONGWRITER FROM BOSTON, MA.**

Sparks has written and produced records for multi-platinum recording artists such as Lady Gaga, Beyonce, Rick Ross, Diddy, Pitbull, Ludacris, Big Sean, Akon, and 2 Chainz. Clinton was Grammy-nominated for his production work on Lady Gaga's Born This Way. He won a BMI songwriting award for writing Pitbull's "Shut It Down" as well as several ASCAP Awards with DJ Snake, who Clinton discovered and signed to his Get Familiar Music publishing company.

With over 75 million records sold and billions of streams, Clinton has created critically acclaimed projects with artists such as Eminem, Kanye West, Busta Rhymes, Tyga, and The Clipse who's "We Got It For Cheap" series was recognized as a top 50 album of the year by Rolling Stone magazine.

Clinton was Diddy's tour DJ, a recording artist signed to Interscope and Republic Records, he helped launch Eminem's Shade 45 radio station and played an intricate role in the branding of Ciroc. He has built multiple multi-million dollar companies, and his visionary marketing prowess continues to shape and shift pop culture.

*"Clinton Sparks
influences cultures."
- Diddy*

**HOW TO
WIN BIG IN THE
MUSIC
BUSINESS**

*"Clinton doesn't have
his finger on the pulse,
he is the pulse."
- Pitbull*