

Decision-Making in Uncertain Times

Dear Angela: Like many others, our group is grappling with loss. My ensemble colleagues and I are all teaching online and managing finances as best we can, but we're in limbo. How can we make good decisions about moving forward when everything's up in the air?

BY Angela Myles Beeching

I hear you. Uncertainty is the new normal: we are truly in uncharted territory, and it's a huge re-set for all of us—individually and collectively.

During this reset, most of us have been focused on immediate needs: food, safety, and caring for loved ones. And we're all operating from a place of overwhelm, stress, and fear of the unknown.

So let's press that re-set button.

We need to be grounded and centered in our values when making decisions about how to move forward.

To help, I'll share three core questions my business coach Dallas Travers recommends to help clarify your values. (Note: for ensembles and administrative teams, I recommend that individuals write out answers to these questions. Then you can meet online and discuss these as a group. It's a terrific way to launch a decision-making process.)

Here are Dallas' questions, adapted below for musicians, with my responses as examples. Ask yourself . . .

1. What is the core value now in my work?

There's no right or wrong answer. Just think about what's most important to you now. For me, it's connection—feeling connected to others and being of service. With clients, with my online community, with colleagues, and with family and friends.

2. How do I want to feel about the decisions I'm making?

Feelings matter with career decisions.

This is a gut check. Our intuition is a barometer for whether or not we're living according to our values. For me, I want to feel courageous and generous in my decisions. Courageous for getting out of my comfort zone, and generous for leaving my ego out of the work I do with clients.

3. What is my responsibility to my audience?

Your "audience" isn't simply the people who attend your concerts. Your audience is also your online community, your collaborators, students, and colleagues. I feel my responsibility is to provide excellence. When I keep this in mind, it's easier to stay focused on a handful of priority projects—and on doing those really well.

Once you've answered all three questions . . .

Think ahead to when we can once more gather in person for concerts. Think about what you can do now to help pave the way toward the post-crisis future you want to create.

We have the "coronapause" to improve or change our old ways, and an unanticipated chance to prepare new program offerings, commission a new work, cultivate our fan-base, or create new residency activities.

Whatever you choose, focus on the project that will help you to come back stronger and more resilient. I'd love us all to come out on the other side of the pandemic feeling proud of how we showed up—for ourselves and for each other.

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