

GIG ETIQUETTE

by Dr. Brian A. Shook

- I. How to get gigs
 - a. Practice like there is no tomorrow.
 - b. Practice again tomorrow.
 - c. Be well rounded and versatile, both personally and professionally.
 - d. Network, network, network.
 - e. Be genuinely friendly to *everyone*.
 - f. Contact personnel managers and contractors to see if you can play for them and ask if they have a freelancer's audition coming up.
 - g. Take lessons from local principals/lead players to get placed on their sub list.
 - h. Contact local church organists/pianists to see if you can play an offertory for free. This will get you acquainted with them and lead to holiday and wedding gigs.
 - i. For jazz combos, find local venues that either have live music regularly or ask when your group could play next. If you find a venue that does not have live music but should, then make a suggestion to the manager and offer to play for tips only (at first).
 - j. Play in community bands/orchestras in order to network.
 - k. Join the music union (American Federation of Musicians)
 - l. Practice some more.

- II. The Call – what to do when you get called for a gig.
 - a. Ask: occasion, rehearsal schedule, dates, times (start/call), place (directions, not just an address), music, contact info, attire, and fee.
 - b. If you can't do the gig for any reason, recommend someone.
 - i. Be careful who you recommend—it reflects on you.
 - ii. Recommend someone as good as (or better than) you.
 - iii. If someone has recommended you for a gig, be sure to thank him/her!
 - c. If you agree to a gig, but then get a call for a better-paying gig, ***always keep gig #1*** (even if it doesn't pay as well as gig #2). You will get a reputation as a “gig snob” and be labeled as undependable.

- III. The Fee – how to ask for money.
 - a. **Be aware of your current level of ability and experience**, and price accordingly. A freshman in college shouldn't charge the same or more than a graduate student.
 - b. *After* you know the gig details, *then* ask about the fee. Many times this is already set and you cannot negotiate (especially when dealing with the union).
 - c. Be ready for them to be surprised because some people think musicians perform for free. Have a *reasonable* figure in your mind that makes it worth your time and effort (different for every gig/person).
 - d. Solo gigs (weddings, etc.) typically pay more than playing 3rd trumpet in a jazz band or 2nd trumpet in a brass quintet.
 - e. If the gig doesn't pay what you require, then kindly say you are unavailable and then recommend someone else.
 - f. It is not *always* about the money. Some of the best gigs are free because you meet other great musicians and network.

- IV. The Three Ms – how to determine if the gig is worth taking.
 - a. You must have at least two of the three criteria listed below to take a gig:
 - i. *Rewarding Music* – will this gig satisfy you musically?

- ii. *Competent Musicians* – are the musicians you will be playing with both accomplished and a pleasure to be around?
- iii. *Financial Compensation (Money)* – is the pay worth your time and effort?
- b. In some rare cases you may get called for a gig that pays an incredible amount, but the musicians and music are less than tolerable. If the money is good enough for you to put up with all that, then do it (but don't complain if you get frustrated or are treated unfairly).
- c. A more frequent situation may be that you get to choose your own band and play your own repertoire, but there is no fee. Again, if you have the time, then it would be worth it.

V. The Gig

- a. Before the gig, invite key people to come hear you play because they might be able to help you find more work. You will be surprised who shows up; a personal invitation means a lot!
- b. Be early (at least 30–45 minutes) – to be early is to be on time; to be on time is to be late; and to be late is to be fired. *Double the estimated travel time for security.*
 - i. Why? To find the location, set up, warm up, look at music, and be relaxed.
 - ii. Upon arrival, be sure to find the contractor/personnel manager and introduce yourself. Call ahead if you get stuck in traffic.
 - iii. Always grab the middle or last chair/folder unless you were hired for a specific part. The pay is (usually) the same.
- c. Be prepared
 - i. Are you performance-ready at all times?
 - ii. Did you practice the music (*at all tempos and dynamics*)?
 - iii. Is your playing up to the standards of the work you seek?
 - iv. Are your sight-reading skills competitive?
 - v. What instruments are required? Always have B-flat, C, and piccolo for classical/church gigs. Jazz gigs have B-flat and flugel.
 - vi. Mutes—bring every type of mute to *every gig*.
 - vii. Attire—be dressed appropriately. *Dress for success!* Even if the rehearsal is Saturday morning, look professional. For the performance, if you are not sure what to wear, bring an extra set of clothes (wear a suit, bring a tux). If you wear a suit, you always have the option of going more casual (tie off, coat off, etc.).
 - 1. Never wear cologne/perfume or any strong fragrance.
 - 2. Ladies: Black pants with a scarf or vest are generally appropriate. Wear closed-toe shoes (no sandals).
 - viii. Always have an extra music stand and stand light in your car.
 - ix. Expect every gig to be the most difficult one you have ever played—there's no such thing as an "easy gig." That's why many never get called back!
 - x. Do you have a list of audition repertoire (classical or jazz) that you could perform from memory at any moment? You never know who might be playing the same gig and need to hire a band for another one.
 - 1. Classical players – traditional orchestral excerpts
 - 2. Jazz players – improv, ballad, Dixieland, bebop, etc.
- d. Be friendly
 - i. "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all."
 - ii. It's not always the best player who gets called back. Many times it is the person who gets along the best with everyone.
 - iii. Know a couple of good, *clean* jokes to break the ice if needed.
 - iv. Be inquisitive about other people. Ask them safe questions (e.g. Where did you go to school? How long have you lived in the area? Have you played with this band before?

What kind of horn do you play? What's your favorite recording? etc.) Do not ask about their personal life unless they initiate it.

- v. In real estate, it's location, location, location. In music it's attitude, attitude, attitude. Don't let a bad rehearsal or gig get you down. People will hear it in your voice. Employers want to hire musicians who are excited about their music. No one wants to work with a complainer or whiner.
- e. Be professional
 - i. Do your actions say, "I'm a pro"?
 - ii. How are your people skills? Are you pushy and aggressive, or tolerant and respectful?
 - iii. Even if the other musicians are bad-mouthing someone, never join in. You don't know who might be listening.
 - iv. Have business cards ready to hand out—always ask for theirs first and they will ask for yours in return.
 - v. Before, during, or after rehearsals *never* play someone else's part (i.e. solo).
 - vi. If you have a question about your music, always ask the principal or lead player first—never communicate directly with the conductor/director if you are a sub/extra. Follow the proper chain of command.
 - vii. Never make musical suggestions to anyone unless asked.
 - viii. Be a "Yes" man/woman.
 - ix. Remember: *your goal is to enhance everyone else's playing.*
 - x. Turn cell phone and any other gadget off while you are on stage for rehearsals/performances.
 - xi. Never talk about how your previous gig was so much better than this one—even if it was, no one cares.
 - xii. It's OK to politely ask about future gigs or inquire for someone to be a reference. Just don't be pushy.

VI. After the Gig

- a. If you had been in email contact with the contractor, email them to let them know you had a good time and enjoyed the event. Keep it short and sweet.
- b. If you played a solo or were featured in any way, send a *hand written* note to a physical address expressing your appreciation and enjoyment of the experience.
- c. Be a good "student" of the gig. In a journal/file, write down what you learned about your playing and/or the gig. This will help you remember: a musical concept, a playing/performing concept, new piece of equipment, new recording, sticking your foot in your mouth, a great joke, a "small world" connection, etc.
- d. Keep an address book of all the contacts you meet from gig to gig.

VII. The "Kisses of Death"

- a. Showing up late
- b. Forgetting proper equipment, attire, etc.
- c. Loud, rude, and obnoxious behavior/demeanor/playing
- d. Bragging or drawing attention to one's self
- e. Undermining someone else's authority
- f. Talking negatively about *anyone* behind their back
- g. Not using common sense