

David Sonnenberg

ARTIST MANAGER

Managing musicians is actually David Sonnenberg's *second* cool career. "I was a 24-year-old entertainment lawyer in New York City and couldn't get a record deal for Meat Loaf," David recalls. "I was so passionate about his music that I wanted to find an investor for a record. One person said he would put up the money if I managed the project. I thought managers were lowlives, and I wasn't too anxious to throw my Harvard Law degree away, but I did it because Meat Loaf also wanted me to be his manager. Finally, after almost two years of rejections, we were signed to a label. Then, the album sold 43 million records."

Today, David is the President of DAS Communications, Ltd., his own music management company where, for over 20 years, he has been responsible for taking artists like Meat Loaf, the Fugees, and most recently, the Black Eyed Peas, into the realm of superstardom. How? Well, not just through hope and prayer. David took time out of his busy schedule to explain the complexities of helping musicians become major success stories.



By Veronica Dominguez

What do you do for your clients?

First, we have to get them a record deal. Then, we help get their material together and get it recorded. In some instances, all we need to do is find a producer; in others, we need to help them get songs. Then, we help them put the videos together, find a booking agent, and come up with a game plan for how to attack the universe. Our goal is to capture media attention with either a personal appearance, a video, or a tie-in with a commercial product.

How do you choose your clients?

That's my most important decision. I've managed very few people, and years may go by when I don't sign anybody, unless they're unbelievably gifted and unique. When I met the Fugees, for example, I was blown away. Lauryn Hill

was magnificent-looking, incredibly smart, and had an unbelievable voice. Wyclef Jean was talented and charismatic. They were playing real instruments and writing real songs—something that wasn't happening in hip-hop. I thought they could make a difference, and they became major successes.

What is difficult about managing an artist?

Tons. Managing complete strangers is a difficult concept. It's as if there's a road and it's so clear that we should go left, but if a client wants to go right, it's sometimes difficult to convince them to go left. Also, a manager needs as much nourishment from clients as they need from the manager. If I don't sense that my clients are excited to see me and that my feelings about their music are important to them, then there's no way to manage anybody. It's like a marriage. The hope is that you can form a relationship in which you can go through the stress of failure and rejection together.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

I love that it can be anything on any day. We don't just manage artists; we also work on film projects and reality television shows, and of course we try to cast those projects as opportunities for our clients, as well.

What advice would you give to someone interested in artist management?

It's a hard business. You get compensated when your artist makes money, and your artist only makes meaningful money when he or she is *extremely* successful. Look at the statistics: Last year 35,000 albums came out. How many could you name? Fewer than 1% go gold, and under 25% go platinum. You have to be very hard-minded, analytical, and have a sensibility for music. Everyone thinks that they have taste, but it's about having common taste. Not only do you need an ear for talent—you have to have a nose for it too. 