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### **How to Avoid Bad Band Breakups**

Many bands start out as a group of friends getting together to play a little music. Often there is a period of harmony and even euphoria. But like any relationship, it will inevitably be tested by conflict – whether that be a financial dispute, creative differences, or just plain old interpersonal conflict. So, how do you avoid bad band breakups?

When conflicts happen, they don't have to result in anger, lawsuits, or the band breaking apart. Two simple steps can help you manage through the conflict. First, early on in your band's relationship put together a band agreement. Second, make sure your band agreement includes a process for how you are going to resolve conflicts when they arise.

### **Band Agreements**

Many bands don't think about how to manage band relationships until after the group has been playing together for a while and it starts to make some money. But often, by that time, it's too late and patterns of behavior and assumptions about how things are going to go have set in. The decision about who gets to make the decisions has already been established perhaps without any discussion among the band members, making it difficult for the band members "on the outside" to speak up. It will benefit the band in the long run if it takes the time early on to talk through band relationships, make sure all members of the group agree on "governance" (the word the business world uses to describe this practice), and memorialize how the band wants to govern itself in writing. Some things to consider are what types of contributions will the band members be making to the group? Will some members make financial contributions while others make in-kind contributions like equipment or a place to practice? What percentage of ownership will each member of the band have? Will this be determined by financial contribution, creative contributions, or other means? You'll also want to determine who will be responsible for managing the band's practice schedule, day-to-day operations, and finances. Another important decision to make (whether or not the band is making any money) is what type of decision-making process the band will use. Will it be based on consensus, on

ownership percentages, or another process altogether? Finally, be sure to include a process for resolving disagreements.

### **Write it down.**

Once you've agreed on how you're going to run your band you'll want to put it in writing. This ensures that everyone has the same understanding and creates a record you can look back on when the disagreements, that are an inevitable aspect of human relationships, arise. For new bands, this can be as simple as typing the agreement, signing it, and giving everyone a copy. If you're thinking about turning your band into a business (like a limited liability company or S-corporation), you'll want to consider hiring an entertainment attorney to address legal issues and incorporate your governance agreement into your company's organizational documents.

### **Steps for Resolving Conflict**

Even with a band agreement in place, you can't completely avoid conflict, nor would you want to. Conflict can be a healthy process that helps groups learn, grow, and become more productive - provided it is handled constructively. As you consider your band agreement make sure to include a structure for resolving disputes. Even if the issue is just a minor flare up, perhaps a disagreement over practice times and locations, you'll want to agree on a process for managing it because unresolved conflicts left simmering can result in the pot eventually boiling over. Also, for many people, it's challenging to raise even minor issues. Establishing a culture of conflict resolution and deciding as a group to set aside a time for needed band management discussions, perhaps even just 15 minutes a week is enough, can prevent minor problems from boiling over and give more reticent members the chance to speak up. You'll also want to consider guidelines for your band management discussions. One simple, but often difficult guideline to follow, is allowing each person an opportunity to speak and requiring that others listen without interruption. If the conflict is bigger than just a momentary flare-up or involves multiple people, you'll want to consider setting up a time to have a problem-solving conversation. Again, it is essential that band members agree ahead of time to participate in this type of conversation if one of the members asks for it. Below are some guidelines for conducting a problem-solving conversation.

1. Find a mutually agreeable time to talk about the problem. Set aside sufficient time for the conversation (it always takes twice as long as you think it will). And make sure you won't be interrupted.
2. Agree on a process for discussing the problem. Perhaps giving each person a time to air their perspective without interruption.
3. Agree to actively listen to one another.
4. Clarify each person's position so that you understand one another's perspectives.

5. Prioritize the problems that are raised and start with the most important problem.
6. Stay focused on the priorities.
7. Brainstorm solutions without judging them to decide on the best course of action for resolving the problem.
8. Agree to SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound) actions for resolving the problem.
9. Set up times to check-in with each other on your progress and if needed, set up future meetings to continue your conversation.

If this feels daunting – perhaps the emotions are too high, there are multiple or complex issues, or there are lots of people involved, it may be helpful to work with a neutral third person such as a mediator. Mediators facilitate the conversation by making sure that everyone has an opportunity to speak and be heard. They can assist in calming emotions, tracking the issues, and bringing forward solutions. They can also help you craft agreements that work well for everyone involved.

When any group works together long enough conflicts arise, but they don't have to result in anger, lawsuits, or the band breaking apart. With a little upfront planning and attention to the band relationship, your band can avoid a "bad" breakup and the emotional and financial costs that accompany it. Or even if your band does decide to break-up – you can do so and remain friends, which is after all how it all started, right?