

Playing In A Rock Cover Band Makes Me A Better Lawyer

By **Michael Gambro** (October 24, 2023)

In this Expert Analysis series, attorneys discuss how their unusual extracurricular activities enhance professional development, providing insights and pointers that translate to the office, courtroom and beyond. If you have a hobby you would like to write about, email expertanalysis@law360.com.

As many attorneys know, the practice of law can be all-consuming. Having worked over 40 years at a Wall Street law firm, I know how difficult it can be to work on deals with timetables, issues and demands that don't conform to one's ideal work-life balance.

Before law school, I enjoyed playing guitar, jamming with fellow musicians or just playing along with records. But once the legal train left the station, I felt that I had to immerse myself in being a lawyer. That was fine — I learned so much working with brilliant colleagues, clients and opposing counsel. But, as I said, my work consumed me.

By chance or fate — actually, wives talking about their husbands — I learned that three acquaintances played drums, guitar and bass guitar. Soon enough, we were jamming in the drummer's basement. He lived on Lenox Road, and soon after that the classic rock cover band Lenox Underground was formed.

Shortly after we began playing together, friends started asking us to play at parties and events, and we were getting paid. We didn't need the money, so we decided to give back to the community by forming the Lenox Underground Foundation, a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

The foundation's main purpose is to provide grants on a needs basis to local music and arts programs. We even have a Lenox Underground scholarship at our local middle school for aspiring music students whose families' finances are challenging.

Playing in Lenox Underground, and being a musician in general, has been an enriching experience. Upon reflection, I've realized that participating in the band exemplifies some key skills that, in my experience, can enhance one's legal career. Those skills are focus, negotiation, organization, networking and striving for work-life balance.

The Value of Focus

Being a good lawyer and a good musician requires the ability to focus.

While some aspects of being a transactional lawyer can be mundane, other aspects can be quite challenging — whether it be drafting an airtight provision in an agreement that addresses all foreseeable contingencies, or coming up with a disclosure in a prospectus that summarizes a complex concept in plain English. Often, it takes several tries to get it right, or as close to perfect as possible.

For me, the ability to focus deeply is the same skill that I need to learn a song or play



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something challenging. Most of the time, I don't get it right the first few times. And getting it close enough, or just OK, isn't sufficient for me. I need to get it to sound great.

Just like when I am drafting a provision or a disclosure item for a deal, I strive for perfection. My goal is to have minimal comments or changes from my colleagues and clients.

The ability to focus intensely on challenging tasks is as important in music as it is in law.

Negotiating Deals and Set Lists

The ability to negotiate effectively has been beneficial to some aspects of being in a rock band, and of course it's also a skill that's important to my work as a lawyer. Successful advocacy for a client's position is required to achieve a desirable outcome, and that requires effective negotiation.

Dealing with people whose interests diverge is a lifelong challenge, and this exists among band members as well. I have found that while all of our band members have similar musical interests, our song selections can vary substantially at times, and we all can get emotionally tied to our song selections.

Many times, finding a delicate balance between expressing your own position and listening to and understanding the opposing position is required to achieve a successful outcome.

Staying Organized to Stay on Track

Being a successful deal lawyer requires organizational skills, and I have found that those skills are also key to successfully managing Lenox Underground. In my practice and in my band, I try not to leave things to chance. I can't assume that everything will get done on time or done right.

In a deal, there are many moving parts, timetables that have to be met, documents that need to be created or obtained, etc. And many of these things may not be in an attorney's control, so it's important to anticipate next steps, handle the things that are within control, and make sure everyone else is doing what they are supposed to be doing.

I have found the same to be especially true in our band.

Our members have different jobs, schedules and obligations. It requires great organizational effort to put together suggested set lists, propose dates for practice and coordinate with venues, among other things — all with the goal of having a gig go off as smoothly as possible. Taking on this kind of responsibility is often not easy, since no band member has been appointed Lenox Underground's manager and we are all reasonably successful in our day jobs.

Nevertheless, whether it be in law or in a band, taking charge and providing gentle reminders can help ensure a successful outcome.

Networking Makes a Difference

Having excellent legal knowledge and skills is very important to being a successful attorney. But for many attorneys, to be really successful you need to really connect with current and potential clients — and I have discovered that playing in a rock band can be an important

networking tool.

When clients and others in the business learn that I am a musician, I often make a stronger, deeper connection with them. Additionally, I have learned that many of those people are also musicians, or have hobbies or passions that provide balance in their lives and joy in performing. They might come to our gigs because they are interested in classic rock or just interested in seeing their lawyer in a different setting.

As a lawyer, the more you can personalize client relationships, the stronger your bond can become.

Creative Outlets Foster Work-Life Balance

Stress relief is another important benefit that I've gained from playing in the band. For me, and I believe for others in high-pressure jobs, having a creative outlet is a great way to alleviate job-related stress.

When I am performing or practicing the guitar, thoughts of work and other obligations completely disappear. I know there are some lawyers out there, including in my firm, that live the law 24/7, and that works for them. For me, having music in my life gives me a work-life balance that I find to be healthy. I think I am a better attorney as a result.

Conclusion

Since joining Lenox Underground, I have come to realize why people go into the performing arts. It is the rush of getting immediate feedback from the audience — clapping, dancing, singing along, cheering. It is an amazing and wonderful feeling to hear and see that kind of audience enjoyment in response to a show.

Contrast that with being a transactional lawyer. When I do a great job on a deal, my performance might be acknowledged by a bill getting paid faster, or maybe a nice email. No cheering or clapping though — at least not yet.

That said, regardless of whether my work as an attorney is applauded, playing in a rock band has benefited my professional development in several ways, demonstrating that taking time to follow your muse outside of work can be a boon to your career.

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