

## ROCK 'N' ROLL & SAFETY

### What Practitioners Can Take From the Music & Musicians

By Daniel G. Hopwood

**Like many baby boomers, I grew up on early rock 'n' roll and became a huge classic rock fan. My big sister helped usher in a healthy respect for the Beatles and I remember clearly when I bought my first album. It was The Grass Roots' *Golden Grass*, with a great song on it called "Midnight Confessions."**

**I have come to appreciate** many forms and types of music, but rock and many of its derivatives are what speak to me most. While considering rock 'n' roll and its relationship to safety in broad terms, we know that music can be motivating. For example, what is your favorite opening riff? When you hear it, you immediately get pumped up, right? Think of the Guns N' Roses song "Welcome to the Jungle," frequently played at stadiums and arenas. Music often serves as a reminder of those things we need to talk to others about as well. How many songs have been written about car crashes? "Dead Man's Curve" is an early standout. The safety relationship may be that it is time to update our training.

As safety professionals, we often look for analogies to help explain things. The safety iceberg comes to mind when trying to explain direct and indirect costs associated with injuries. There are many others we often utilize. Rock 'n' roll music and the musicians serve as a great analogy bank for safety management, including when focused on managing other professionals. Embedded within three themes, I will share a few of those analogies; I think you will agree with me that they are relevant and a unique way to look at rock 'n' roll and its relationship to safety management.

#### Theme 1: You as a "Practitioner"

In professional baseball, players are recognized by many of their attributes. Great statistics, towering home runs and, for many, their walk-up song. These songs uniquely identify a player to their fans and speak to how they approach the game.

Hall of Famer Mariano Rivera of the New York Yankees used Metallica's "Enter Sandman" as his walk-up song when he came into a game to relieve a starting pitcher. The tolling bells from AC/DC's "Hell's Bells," used by Hall of Famer Trevor Hoffman, signaled to opposing batters that they were in trouble when facing him. And who could forget "Wild Thing" (a song from The Troggs), popularized in

the movie *Major League*. Whenever pitcher Ricky Vaughn, played by Charlie Sheen, entered the game, batters had to be on alert, as Sheen's character was indeed wild.

Similar to baseball players, safety professionals need a walk-up song—not a literal song, but a trait, something that helps others recognize you and makes you clearly identifiable. Are you a great speaker? Recognized for outstanding technical strengths? Maybe you are the best at bringing a team together and accomplishing great things. Pick a song, nurture a trait and people will know who you are when you walk into a room. Your walk-up song will precede you.

Like a lead singer, and whether for us individually or how we work to nurture our teams, it is important to get out front. Just as lead singers "front" bands, so too should we as leaders and safety professionals. Being out front is a clear sign of leadership; no one questioned that Freddie

Mercury was the leader of Queen, and you can bet that no one would question the fact that Dave Grohl is in charge of the Foo Fighters. Getting out front may be a challenge for us, and you might get knocked around a little. It's all right; you'll be okay. And, as a true sign of safety leadership, you will encourage and create opportunities for your team members to do the same.

As we develop skills, philosophies or approaches to safety, others can benefit from them. We need to share. By sharing, there is some degree of exposing weaknesses; singers on occasion are off-pitch or the lead guitarist may miss a note. But, just as we should, they keep going, take their lumps and get better for the next time they are in front of others.

Some would say that in the rock 'n' roll music genre, there are musical anarchists, in dress, style and performance—and maybe their message, too. There is a sub-genre called anarcho-punk, for example.

Rock 'n' roll music and the musicians serve as a great analogy bank for safety management, including when focused on managing other professionals. We all can create our own music and lyrics, our rhythm and our safety voice. We should strive for that.



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I am not advocating anarchy, but I do think there is a role for disruption, its stepbrother. Think about it. You can be a disrupter in an incredibly positive way. All disrupters are not troublemakers. You can be polite, professional and assertive, and be a disrupter worth listening to.

Part of the disruption analogy rests with the message. In 1971, the Marvin Gaye song “Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)” focused on war, ecology and human rights. The song was a call to action and a musical disruptor—it became part of the environmental movement. He wasn’t a troublemaker but was instead revelatory. The lyrics bear this out: “Hey, things ain’t what they used to be / What about this overcrowded land? / How much more abuse from man can she stand?”

Disrupters are often innovators and certainly can be influencers. There is power in looking at what we do from a different perspective. By disrupting the status quo, you lead the call to action just as Marvin Gaye and others have done. As safety professionals, there is much work to be done, and that work may not reside within our current methods. Disrupters are bold—are you?

### Theme 2: The “Songs & Collaborators”

The analogies are many when considering music and musical collaborators. Think of the music as your message and collaborators as your team or network.

First, the music. I mentioned my respect for the Beatles. So many great songs came from their relatively short time together. They had a song called “Thank You Girl,” which some may not remember unless they are a Beatles audiophile. This song was the B-side to an early and popular song people are more likely to remember, “From Me to You.” As a safety professional, you can be the B-side of our calling. But, since you have a choice, be the A-side. What have you done or what will you do that is A-side work?

Although it can be instrumental only, music is usually comprised of sounds and words—the lyrics. Your words, your writings, what you say or publish are your lyrics. Good lyrics last; people remember them, use them (sing them) and refer to them. How often have we used lyrics from a song to make a point? Make what you say and write as good as possible so it can last. Fred Manuele has had articles published in *Professional Safety* over several decades; his words—his lyrics—have stood the test of time. Let us all write like Fred.

Although some rock ‘n’ roll bands write their own music and lyrics, many

collaborate with others. Bob Dylan wrote “All Along the Watchtower,” but most of us remember Jimi Hendrix’s version. Sir Elton John has been writing and singing for more than 60 years. He can take credit for almost all his music, but few of the lyrics we sing along to. Most of those were penned by his collaborator, Bernie Taupin. John was good by himself, but John and Taupin together were great.

We can accomplish remarkable things by collaborating with our teams or other fellow professionals. Ask yourself if you are a “safety lyricist”; if not, find one. Do you write your own safety notes—the music to our profession? If not, find a collaborator. In the end, your accomplishments will blossom.

### Theme 3: The “Band”

The best bands are immediately identifiable. They have a distinctive sound or rhythm, maybe even a riff we all know immediately. Deep Purple’s “Smoke on the Water,” Led Zeppelin’s “Whole Lotta Love” and Hendrix’s version of “All Along the Watchtower” come immediately to mind. What is your band’s riff, and will others know it is you?

Akin to your walk-up song, your program efforts’ riff is about your rhythm and flow. The riff is a group effort in this context as you are all playing together as a band. For example, you may not know that the opening riff from Deep Purple’s “Smoke on the Water” is Ritchie Blackmore on lead guitar, which then builds as additional members join in. But, together or apart, we know the riff and we know the song. And together, it is a powerful song. The best safety programs have a riff and a flow, and everyone in the organization knows the band, which is the safety department. Like rock ‘n’ rollers, your job is to build a great band.

Many rock bands are known for their hard-driving songs. Aerosmith’s “Sweet Emotion” comes to mind (I think that is their best song). They also had a song in the film *Armageddon*: “I Don’t Want to Miss a Thing.” From a hard-charging rocker to a softer ballad, these two songs show Aerosmith’s range. As safety professionals, we should be active, hard-charging and, when necessary, professionally loud. Equally important, however, is understanding

when to be more subdued, softer, and measured in our message or how we interact with our teams and others. In essence, we need to be able to play the arena and the coffee house. Put another way, if you are a guitarist, at some point you should be able to put your electric guitar down and pick up the acoustic. Sometimes you turn it up and sometimes you turn it down.

There is a rock ‘n’ roll bonus to round out our discussion, especially for safety leaders. You should strive to be a star-maker. A good safety leader lets others step out front. In fact, they encourage it. Nearly all Beatles songs were sung by Paul McCartney or John Lennon. But occasionally, George Harrison and Ringo Starr got the spotlight. George sang the popular songs “Taxman” and “I Me Mine,” while Ringo’s “Yellow Submarine” and “I Get By With a Little Help From My Friends” are also readily recognized. Getting these two out front helped their popularity grow. They were given opportunities to shine; we should do the same with our team members. Give someone else the mic.

### Conclusion

Regardless of the style of music you prefer, the analogies mentioned work. We all can create our own music and lyrics, our rhythm and our safety voice. We should strive for that. I encourage all of us to:

- Pick a walk-up song.
  - Put yourself “out there.”
  - Develop work and a voice that is relevant in both the arena and coffee house—large and small venues.
  - Think about being a disrupter, but not an anarchist.
  - Work on being the A-side of safety.
  - Write safety lyrics and music that last.
  - Be a great collaborator.
  - Develop your own rhythm and riff—be recognizable.
  - Be able to write both a rocker and a ballad.
  - Finally, be a star maker.
- Now, get to rockin’! **PSJ**

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