

Rock'n'Roll Learning – How can music enhance training and development?

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In the book 'Sex, Leadership and Rock'n'Roll', I argue that music offers unique insights into the serious business of personal development, creative leadership and developing a high performance organisation which truly learns from experience. This article expands upon the area of how trainers can use music to advantage in learning events.

The case for music as an invaluable learning tool

The philosopher Emmanuel Kant said music is the language of the emotions. Madonna has almost certainly made the some point during her long career! Certainly music touches many of us at a much deeper level than a Powerpoint presentation! We could touch on the research of Lozanov in the field of accelerated learning, concepts of relaxed attention / flow states and Howard Gardner's research on multiple intelligences here, however writing space is short and I must cut to the point that music can provide a useful backdrop to learning.

However the impact of music on the mind is complex and a short article can only scratch the surface of this vital topic. Some people think that it's just a case of slamming a few records on like a bad DJ. Whilst I don't claim to have invented a precious artform in my book, there are some principles which will help you use music in learning successfully developed from a wide range of experience. They are unashamed generalisations. Generalisations are not generally useful! I'm absolutely sure that there will be some controversial views on these principles, given that we are dealing with a subject that raises strong emotions. Do write in with your own views. Enough caveats, excuses and premature evaluation. As Prince, Marvin Gaye and Marc Bolan would say, 'let's get it on'.

5 ½ tips for using music in learning

Tip # 1. Mama weer all crazee now – Don't over use it – Your learners are there to learn from you – they are not at a disco, so be minded to use music sparingly. Your talents as a trainer can be enhanced by an appropriate use of music but they should not be masked by the over use of music as an aid to learning.

Tip # 2. I did it their way – Be a good DJ – This means not playing what you especially like – but playing music that will harmonise with the mood you are expecting your learners to experience. Although this is not a precise art, it is surprisingly effective when done well. However, there's nothing wrong

with putting your favourite songs on whilst you are preparing the room before delegates arrive to get you to peak personal performance.

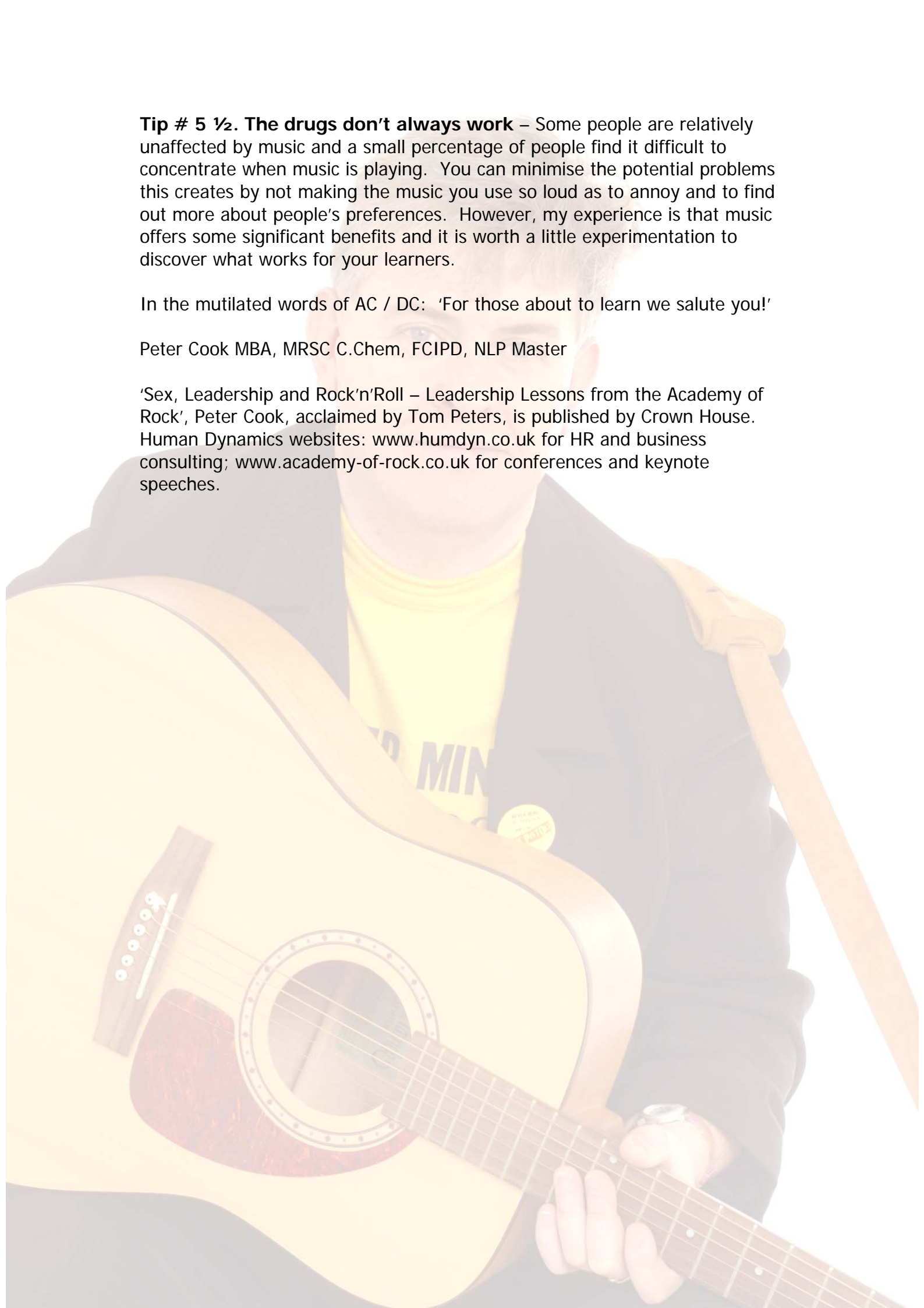
The link between music and mood is very strong. One of my MBA students even suggested that they are more likely to make a speed camera flash if they listen to Green Day than Jamie Cullum! Learners move through different psychological states during the course of an effective learning programme. Perhaps you use the Kolb Learning Cycle as your underlying backdrop to ensure all round learning or some other model. Whichever approach you use, choose music to move moods/energy in the room, following your chosen model. Some crude rules of thumb include using upbeat music for activism, classical or ambient for reflection etc.

Tip # 3. The Young Ones – Regress participants to create comfort –

Work out average age of participants and what year it was when they were around 16-18. Ensure you have some material from that era. Statistically, this will create a comfort zone as people slip back into (hopefully) pleasant memories. This might sound manipulative, but you are there to put your learners in the best state to learn from you, so this is just basically good customer care. In any case, you cannot influence someone who does not wish to be influenced, so a small percentage of your learners will probably be unmoved by the use of music. On balance, music is generally well received by the majority if done thoughtfully.

Tip # 4. Top of the Pops – Go Mainstream – it's no good getting out your favourite Leonard Cohen number to impress your participants! – they probably could not care. You are not there to give them a musical education. Use familiar songs unless you are specifically trying to make a particular point. A good tip is to buy yourself the Guinness book of hit singles across the ages to help find the most loved songs across different eras. You could of course be accused of going mainstream by a number of music purists, to which the answer is 'lighten up' – there is just as much skill in producing a catchy three minute hit as there is in a concept album. The skill sets are just different. True music lovers can appreciate Tubular Bells, Led Zeppelin IV, Chas and Dave AND the Cheeky Girls!

Tip # 5. The Spice Girls effect – Avoid recent material – Music is powerful but suffers from 'style' problems – people have strong reactions to bands who are 'in' and 'out'. If you use very recent music, you may fall into the trap of people thinking about whether the music is 'cool' rather than getting on with the work. Once a piece of music or a band is more than 10 years old, people tend to soften their reactions. Just think about it – if you hated the Bay City Rollers, Bananarama, the Spice Girls or Duran Duran when they first arrived on the music scene, over time there is a tendency to dampen these violent reactions and some of us even reach a point where we 'forgive them' for their bad taste or dress sense and almost start to enjoy the music!



Tip # 5 ½. The drugs don't always work – Some people are relatively unaffected by music and a small percentage of people find it difficult to concentrate when music is playing. You can minimise the potential problems this creates by not making the music you use so loud as to annoy and to find out more about people's preferences. However, my experience is that music offers some significant benefits and it is worth a little experimentation to discover what works for your learners.

In the mutilated words of AC / DC: 'For those about to learn we salute you!'

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'Sex, Leadership and Rock'n'Roll – Leadership Lessons from the Academy of Rock', Peter Cook, acclaimed by Tom Peters, is published by Crown House. Human Dynamics websites: www.humdyn.co.uk for HR and business consulting; www.academy-of-rock.co.uk for conferences and keynote speeches.