

Steven Tharpe

Singer/Singing Teacher

Musicians' Union



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**Can you tell us a bit about your career to date?**

For many years I worked as a Corporate Procurement Manager negotiating multi-million pound deals. At the same time I was playing in bands, singing, song writing and teaching. My time was split 80 per cent on the day job and 20 per cent on music.

Eight years ago in Hawaii I met a life coach who encouraged me to take a leap of faith and focus on my music, which was always my first love. I checked that my wife had no objections, and she surprised me by telling me to go for it. I returned home, signed up for voluntary severance and overnight reversed my focus to 80 per cent on music and 20 per cent corporate work. I'm very happy to say that I now spend 100 per cent of my time on my music career.

I perform a wide range of styles including gospel, soul and jazz. I write reggae music and I'm a singing teacher. I've performed with "Into the Red" a soul group and have worked with American singer Jimmy Ruffin and many other artists from various genres over the years.

What do you like most about your work?

I love working with people. Students often come to me with no belief in their ability to sing, and I help them connect to abilities they didn't know they had. It is so rewarding to see people go from zero belief in their ability, to performing in public. I absolutely believe that everyone can do it!

What I am doing now has meaning and purpose for me and is a complete contrast to corporate life. To be able to help people find a route to their own personal expression in this way is almost beyond description. I love it.

What are the biggest challenges of maintaining a freelance career?

The toughest parts of going from corporate to freelance was learning to wear all the different hats: suddenly you

are your own finance and marketing manager and if you have any issues, you have to provide your own HR support too.

Going from a salary to ad hoc payments has made cashflow a challenge. When people don't pay on time, it can feel awkward having to chase up payment without alienating clients.

Sometimes without the structure of 'a job', you can find yourself going down a rabbit hole, such as getting engrossed with rebranding, when really there are other much more pressing things needing to be done.

Freelancing can also be lonely. You have to project confidence, but there is no-one there to give you feedback or to reflect on things with.

Have you added new work/skills to your portfolio over time?

One skill I have had to learn as a freelance is marketing. Much of what I learned has been achieved the hard way by spending already scarce time and money with little to show for it.

FEU Training transformed this for me by teaching me how to use on-line approaches to marketing that have revolutionised my approach. Now I use social media effectively and track what I do so I know what has been effective. This has taken away so much stress.

I have also had to learn about keeping my own accounts and book keeping. I am still learning here and have my eye on the FEU Training workshop and e-course on this topic.

What is the biggest challenge of learning the skills that you need?

Keeping an open mind to learning something new about a topic you think you already know about can be a challenge. I was a professional negotiator, but when I came on the FEU Training negotiation skills day I still learnt loads.

There is a world of difference between negotiating



>> Snapshot

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contracts for a big firm and negotiating for yourself as a freelance with much larger organisations. The whole emphasis is different. The workshop changed my outlook and I got so much from it.

In fact, after the session I negotiated a really good rate for some work where I would have offered a much lower rate. I took on board the tips about valuing yourself and making your rates sustainable for you to continue working, named a more appropriate price, was able to justify it, and the client said yes!

You never stop learning. I always prepare for the workshops I attend so I know what I want to get out of them and I have got something useful from each one.

What FEU Training courses have you attended?

Several including Running a social media campaign, Marketing your work and Writing for business.

What are the most important things that you've learned?

All the workshops are really practical and offer easy ways to practise what you have learned. Difficult topics are made easy to understand and apply. I always feel compelled to take action on ideas received through FEU Training immediately as they make everything appear so simple, practical and easy to implement.

After the video day, I bought the tools that were recommended and started filming and editing my own promotional videos. I had hired someone to do this previously. Understanding how to do it well myself with a few inexpensive tools has given me a new skill, saved me money and made me much more responsive.

After the marketing day I went straight home and changed my strap line.

As a teacher, I am also learning new teaching techniques, which I can use in my business. I've redesigned all my courses to get more 'doing' in.



"At FEU Training courses, there is no facade. People are so honest about where they are. Everyone is so keen to learn from the tutor and each other and this makes for a rich environment."



What has encouraged you to attend FEU Training sessions?

I first attended a webinar and to be honest I intended just to do the on-line sessions, but the webinar was so good and so nurturing that when I saw the workshop on social media, I signed up and haven't looked back. In the corporate world people attending courses tend to pretend that they are big successes. At FEU Training courses, there is no facade. People are so honest about where they are. Everyone is so keen to learn from the tutor and each other and this makes for a rich environment.

I find it refreshing to interact with people in different areas going through similar versions of the same problems I am dealing with. It makes me realise that what I have been going through is 'normal' and can lead to much greater things when armed with the skill and knowledge acquired through FEU Training and their excellent tutors.

I can't believe that we get this quality of training free as part of our union membership. It is worth its weight in gold and I'm so grateful.

