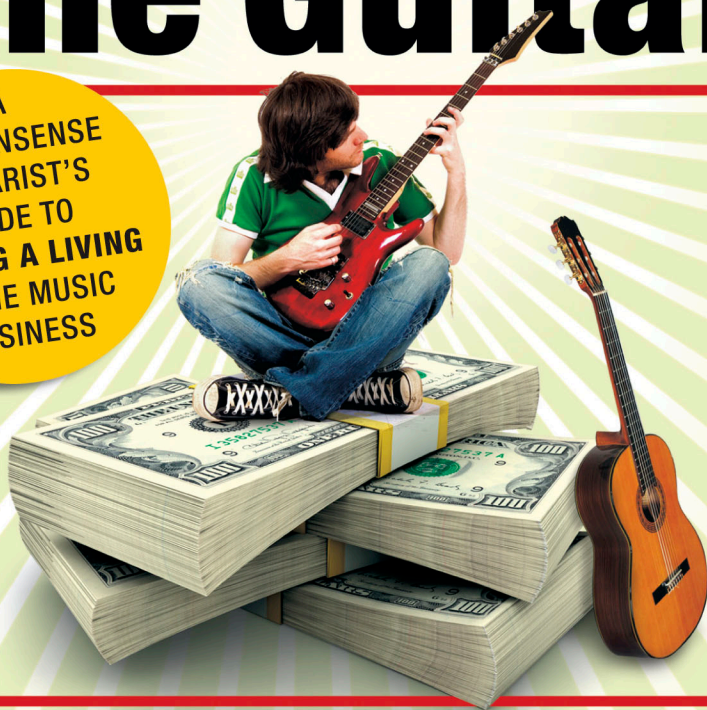


How to Make a **Million** **Dollars** Playing the Guitar

A
NO-NONSENSE
GUITARIST'S
GUIDE TO
MAKING A LIVING
IN THE MUSIC
BUSINESS



By Douglas Niedt

ONE MILLION DOLLARS: NO BULL, NO SPIN

Starving musician, starving artist—you know the cliché. I’m here to put a stop to that—at least for you, the reader. Leave that starving musician nonsense to others. You will *not* be part of that scene.

This book is not a get-rich-quick, anybody-can-do-it scam. I will *not* tell you how to make a million dollars overnight or even in the next five years. This book is about how to earn a million dollars playing the guitar *over the course of your career*. I will explain what to do, and especially *how to think* in order to achieve success *over the long haul*—note I strongly emphasize *over the long haul*.

Also, I use the phrase “playing the guitar” loosely. You may not make your million dollars actually *playing* the guitar. More likely, you will make it in a musical niche related to the guitar.

This is not about making easy money. This will be very hard—so hard that, to be honest, even though I will tell you what to do to succeed, many of you will be unable to do it. Once you understand what it will require, many of you will not *want* to do it.

Although our subject is earning a million dollars over the long haul, I

will also help you earn a good living *as soon as possible* doing what you love to do—play the guitar. Those who are unsure how to get started on the pursuit of your dream will find this book to be a valuable guide. Those who have already begun, but find your journey temporarily thwarted, will find the book helpful to get you back on track.

This book is written for the entrepreneurial guitarist or musician. In other words, its content is targeted to those who want to be *self-employed*—to go it alone. However, those who want to work as employees for someone else—a record label, music publisher, recording studio, university, school, or other business—will also find it useful, especially as a supplement to other resources.

Today's market is teeming with a multitude of books on how to achieve success. The authors bloviate on how to find happiness, create wealth, and achieve goals to create a life that matters. But they vary widely in quality, and many are not always easily applicable to musicians.

These success gurus imply that they never failed at anything. Or, they say they *failed at everything* until they discovered the “secrets” of success—which they are breathlessly about to share with lucky you. Either way, they now have everything all figured out. A rule of thumb: *Don't believe anyone who has everything all figured out.*

I'm a classical guitarist and have done extremely well in the music business. I've had much success. But I've also had many spirit-crushing failures throughout my career. As a matter of fact, the failures (and successes) continue to this day, even as I write this book.

I'm not a success guru. I'm still figuring things out, testing, and experimenting. I'm still failing. I'm still succeeding. The things I will recommend have usually worked for me, but not always. Some of them

will not work for you at all. I don't have everything figured out.

One of the really annoying things about many success books is that the writers have never succeeded at anything other than *telling* other people how to succeed. They are charlatans, like the people who write how-to-play-the-guitar books but can't really play. They're full of baloney. I want to read books by people who are really good at what they're writing about. I *have* made a million dollars playing the guitar. I don't claim to be as successful as guitarists like Eric Clapton, John Williams, Leo Kottke, or Tommy Emmanuel. But I think most guitarists trying to build their careers would be pretty happy trading places with me. Even those who are well on their way to success and have prospered more than I have will benefit from the information in my book.

I'm writing this book to make money. Absolutely. But I'm not writing it because I couldn't hack it in the guitar world and decided to write how-to-succeed books instead. I'm doing quite well, thank you. Playing the guitar is and will remain my major occupation in life. In a lifetime of playing the guitar I've learned things that no one else has written about and things that are seldom mentioned—things I think are vitally important to achieving success and satisfaction in a music career.

My name is not a household word. I'm not even well known in the guitar world. What I hope will be an enlightening and freeing thought for my readers is this:

You don't have to be well known or famous to make a million dollars playing the guitar.

When I was young, I thought what most people think: I need to be well known and become famous in the guitar world to make serious

money playing the guitar. It has amazed me through the years to learn that is absolutely not the case. Notice that the title of this book is not *How to Be a Superstar Guitarist* or *How to Be a Famous Guitarist*. The title is *How to Make a Million Dollars Playing the Guitar*.

People search for different kinds of success in the music industry. Some people are looking for overnight success. Others want to be superstars, but realize it may take some time and effort to become one. A third group is comprised of those who aren't concerned about superstardom. They would be happy being able to earn a living in music any way they can. They realize they must pay their dues and build their careers slowly over time.

The first group is chasing a dream of stardom. They may have good intentions. Or they may be incredibly egotistical. Either way they are probably unrealistic and do a lot of wishful thinking. They want the glamour of success but have no idea how much hard work and study is required. They don't realize overnight success is a rarity. When they don't succeed, they usually blame it on "I just don't know the right people" or "I just haven't gotten my big break" or "I'm just too good and those idiots don't know it."

As for the second group, the truth is that only a very few guitarists make it to the "top," overnight or not. But music is not about stardom. It's about pursuing a mission in life. If your goal is to become filthy rich, to be a household name, to be on network television and have your picture in magazines, this book is probably not for you. However, the advice and information here can still be useful. I just want to warn those who are looking for mega-success, quick or not: unless you are one of the chosen few (a Michael Jackson, Garth Brooks, Paul McCartney, etc.), you are probably headed for a life of grave disappointment,

and possibly poverty, desperation, and despair.

This book is directed toward the third group—those willing to pay their dues and patiently work and study, those for whom music is their passion. You will be the architect of your success. You will learn how the music business works and how to make and prepare for opportunities. You will learn how to be in the right place at the right time. You will meet the right people who you can help and who will in turn help you. Stardom? Fame? Maybe. Maybe not. You can make your million dollars with or without them. You will be flexible and realistic. And perhaps above all, you will have the right mindset. *The development of that mindset is a major topic of this book.*

In addition to the countless books on the market about general success, many books have been written about “making it” in the music business. Most of the books are written by professional authors, journalists, a few musicians, some educators, and entertainment lawyers. And that’s fine. On my website, MillionDollarGuitarist.com, is a Recommended Reading List that includes many books of that type. Most of these books offer solid hardcore advice and information on the basics of the music industry, including invaluable facts about contracts and copyright law. Some give specific instructions on how to approach key people at record labels and publishing companies or how to get gigs. All of that is information you should know. But again, my book is more about mindset and how to think. While I have included specific information about many nutz-and-boltz aspects of building a successful career as a guitarist, *the most important information in my book is that concerning your thinking and your attitude.*

This information will not go out of date. Although technology and public taste will change, the information in this book concerning your

mindset and how to think will remain totally accurate and relevant.

I have filled the book with my personal stockpile of clichés—I like clichés. Sometimes we forget the basic, obvious things that are actually of great importance, and need a tired cliché to remind us of them. “Trite but right,” as my dad would say. Skeptics may think that much of my discussion of mindset is corny and simplistic, especially the motivational stuff. And yes, if you only do the motivational stuff, success will not just automatically come to you. But a positive mindset is an essential ingredient to achieving success in every aspect of the music business. Don’t discount it.

You may not like some of the things I say. That’s fine, but don’t just reject them immediately. Reconsider and give the ideas a close look. You have little to lose by trying them. And remember, if you keep doing the same things you’ve always done, you will probably keep getting the same results. If you want new results, if you want to move forward, you have to try new approaches and attitudes.

As a guitarist, you know how important mindset is when you perform. Your audience knows very well whether you are “into it” or not. *Your attitude is contagious to your listeners.* Your confidence and belief in what you are doing is reflected even in your fingers. If you aren’t sure of yourself, if you aren’t positive and confident, you just don’t play as well physically. You can practice twelve hours a day, but your performance comes 95% from your head and only about 5% from your fingers. All the practice and preparation you do before the performance doesn’t really matter much if your head is not in the right place.

This is also true of your career. Achieving success in music is determined 95% by what is in your head and only 5% by your knowledge, talent, contacts, and whatever else. You must have a positive, I-can-do-

this, I-can-surmount-all-obstacles attitude in order to succeed in music. Doubts and negative thoughts in your head about your career or your music can have *serious negative consequences* for your future in music.

Positive mental attitude is crucial to success in both your performances and your career.

If you learn to think about yourself and your career in the way I describe in this book, you will immediately advance to the front ranks of the millions of people trying to break into the music business. From what I've observed, easily 90% of those millions vying for a career in music aren't thinking straight and therefore won't succeed, regardless of how well they play the guitar or how talented they are.

Because every person is unique in personality and gifts, every person's journey to success will be different. In fact, if you ask two mega-successful people what is essential for success, sometimes you will receive opposite answers. But the answers *are* there. The secret is to learn from everyone and figure out what is relevant and necessary for your own personal journey.

IT'S A LIFE ADVENTURE

This book is about making money—a million dollars playing the guitar, to be precise. But as an entrepreneurial guitarist, you will be concerned with far more than just making money. Building a music career is about pursuing your passion in life. This exciting, spirit-building, and satisfying quest for success literally becomes a life adventure.

You will have ups and downs. You will take detours and sometimes end up at dead ends. Sometimes it will be a real roller coaster ride.

You may have an incredible ride upward followed by a bad low or a crash. But those wonderful “ups” give you a glimpse of the world you are seeking. That world is waiting for you if you do things right and don’t give up. The “ups” are telling you that you are on the right track—keep going. Think of those good times as shots of courage and motivation. They will keep you going through the low points and you will keep learning.

Remember, when you fail a test *and give up*, you’re through. It’s all over. But wait. Defeat is only a temporary condition. Giving up is what makes it permanent.

The journey is important. In an interview, singer, songwriter, and guitarist Kenny Rogers was once asked, “What was the most exciting time in your life? Was it when you looked at your bank account and realized you had a million dollars sitting there? Was it when you bought your first mansion?”

Without hesitation, Kenny answered that the part of his life that he treasured most and was most rewarding was when he was a street musician in San Francisco, struggling to earn enough money to pay his hotel bill. As he counted every penny and every dollar dropped into his guitar case, he knew his talent would carry him through.

To Kenny, each step he took in those humble beginnings, though small in the eyes of others, were steps to the destination he saw so clearly in his mind. At the time of the interview, Kenny Rogers was the highest-paid performer in the world. But the period in his life he remembered most fondly was when he struggled every day to buy his dinner.