

WHY GOING TO AN AUDIO ENGINEERING SCHOOL IS GENERALLY A WASTE OF YOUR TIME AND MONEY.

I regularly get asked the question, “Where should I go to learn Audio Engineering?”. The question I usually ask in response is, “Why?”

The answers to “Why?” mostly they boil down to people who are looking towards a professional career in the audio industry. If you have to ask about where to learn audio engineering/production/creation, then you’re probably already heading in the wrong direction. Here’s why.

In the past, a few lucky people were able to get a full-time job as an assistant in a big studio or large broadcast company (T.V., radio, etc.). From here they’d work under experienced mentors slowly building up the experience and knowledge needed to become professionals and experts in their own right. This world was a small one with limited spaces, and often these people ended up working at the studio or company for many many years. Today, apart from a few *extremely* scarce places, this apprenticeship system doesn’t really exist any more. What we have now is a broader network of peers, that exist in places like good music and audio colleges, internet forums, magazines and ‘out there’ in your local music community.

The truth is that many people working as professionals today fall into their career as audio engineers. Increasingly just being an audio engineer alone is not enough to sustain an interesting and fruitful career (think about being an audio engineer at 55!). Another truth is that 99% of people who pay out their (or their parents) money to attend privately held “Big Dollars Audio School” will not end up working as professionals or even skilled amateurs. They will give up as they lack one thing.

What they lack is passion. It seems none of the peers who I admire set out to be “audio engineers”, instead they set out with a desire to make. A lot of these people don’t even call themselves audio engineers, there’s a whole range of titles for what they do; composers, producers, artists and so on. What binds them together however,

is that they are *obsessed* with the process of making sound and music using whatever electronic tools that come to hand. Most of these people stay the hell away from “Big Dollars” and if they do study, they’ll sniff out a good course at an established university or technical college that’s oriented towards creativity rather than vocation.

They all recall with fondness what they did with that first radio, cassette recorder, record player, synthesiser, effect pedal – the point where their obsession first took flight. From this they begin to gather 2 essential things – knowledge and experience. Like any obsessive they do this using any means at their disposal; endlessly listening to records, getting a band together to make music, recording any sound they can, mixing the live sound for other bands, consuming any web-page, blog, book or magazine that has information, saving up to buy equipment, asking questions of anyone who seems they might know something. This process never stops. They live it and are on a constant quest to make better and better work, no matter what part of the process they are involved in. Sometimes this drive means that many other aspects of their life will come second to this need. All of this effort however, feeds back into their knowledge and adds to their experience.

One thing I often tell people is that there are no secrets in making music & sound with technology. If you have ears and know how to listen, you can figure most sounds out. It is not a black art. It’s not as Kevin “The Caveman” Shirley says [in this interview](#), rocket science. Anyone who makes you think or feel this way is probably trying to sell you something and should be avoided. If a student, client or friend asks me a question I will try and answer by telling them everything I know about the subject, hopefully in a way that helps them out. Probably so much so that sometimes I’m kind of annoying, and maybe they wished they hadn’t asked. People who avoid questions, the kind that hold onto their knowledge like it’s a secret, are douchebags and should also be avoided. As useful as words and knowledge are, they are nothing without experience. The time it takes to gather experience and fold that into your working method. It is time served and the wisdom you gain that sets you apart. Knowledge alone is not enough.

People who are looking to go to “Big Dollars Audio School” have been duped into

thinking the only way to get direct access to knowledge and experience is to pay large piles of hot, wet, stinking cash for the privilege. What they get mostly is a very diluted version of both which is usually taught by some unfortunate creature(s) who have *minus* passion for what they do. Many teachers at “Big Dollars” are conflicted about the fact that they’re having to teach what they’d rather be doing for a living. You might get very lucky, but I doubt that “Big Dollars” is the kind of place that’s going to attract a good teacher – ie. a seasoned professional with good communication and enthusiasm for teaching. In the end drained of cash, dreams and time, most “Big Dollars” graduates get their gold embossed diploma receipt and in no time head straight back into the loving arms of the bank, call centre or cafe. It’s a depressing thing for anyone to endure, and there is a way to avoid this pitfall.

Here’s what I suggest to most people heading down the path of handing out their money to one of these schools – take that same amount of cash you were going to give to “Big Dollars” and buy some gear, learn how to read a manual, how to use google, and get to work. Record your band, find a band and do a free demo for them – anything! Just get your hands dirty and give yourself problems to solve, things to learn. You’ll become a better sound engineer faster. The other bonus is you’ll have your own set-up to build upon – you can’t record much sound with a piece of paper! If you don’t have truly have the passion, this probably sounds like a risk. *It is a risk.* If it’s too big a risk or you don’t think you can get your own small studio together sorry, but you’re not going to make a career out of audio and music – face it and move on. If you’re obsessed however, it’s a risk you’ll gladly take. *You’ve probably already taken it.*