



strategy + support for
musicians creating change

Air Traffic Control

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ACTIVISM ADVICE FROM OTHER MUSICIANS

Becoming a great musician takes time and practice. The same is true about becoming a great activist. Here are some things we've learned from others that help make artist-activism more effective.

1. Focus on something specific to achieve more impact. Trying to stop the entire war in Iraq may be an unattainable goal for just one band, and may push fans away from engaging in the work. However, focusing on stopping illegal habits in military recruitment, working on shutting Guantanamo Bay, speaking out against the use of torture, working to protect journalist rights in the time of war, etc. are things that a single band can do, and that will have immense influence.
2. Tell a story. Studies have shown that one of the most powerful aspects of musicians being involved in activism is that it helps make issues relevant to fans. This is best achieved through the musician's ability to tell a personal story about why they are involved.
3. Prepare for interviews. Interviews about causes and issues can be very different than ones about music. ATC has culled some advice from publicists on how musicians can prepare for interviews on issues--about how to assess whether or not to do an interview, how to defer to experts on stats and facts, and basic preparation. (See Interview Preparation for Musician Activists later in this section.)
4. Prepare for some pushback and disagreement. Everyone has different beliefs and opinions. And, the media sometimes enjoys telling artists to "shut up and sing". ATC has studied the instances when artists who have spoken up and been attacked and found that when artists stick to their beliefs, their fans and the media respect them more--even when they disagree. (For more information on this, please request our study on the media perceptions of artist activism and the Dixie Chicks.)
5. Change takes a long time. Change often happens suddenly after long periods of no change. Artists and their music can do a lot to sustain the energy and enthusiasm of a social change movement. Great artist activism allows artists to be involved over a long time in ways that are flexible and episodic (so that they can also continue to do their "day jobs"). This allows their work to act as punctuation marks on the work that activists carry forward.

Air Traffic Control (ATC) exists to help musicians play an effective, unique and vital role in the promotion of social justice. Musicians and managers established ATC five years ago to assemble an experienced and trusted team of leaders, resources and tools that would help them to create more effective social change collaborations with each other and with social justice organizations. As a result, ATC became an artists' air traffic control—one that develops capacity, efficiency, and coordination to produce stronger and more creative social change partnerships. For more information, please go to www.atctower.net.