

Angela Answers

Dear Angela: I've seen a number of my long-term collaborations either slow down or falter in the last year or so. What can I do to be a better collaborator and get my projects back on track?

BY Angela Myles Beeching



*This test is inspired by Civcomweb's **3 Step Guide**. Learn more at www.chamber-music.org/extras



The secret superpower for ensembles and organizations (drum roll please)...

It's empathy: the ability to see the world from someone else's perspective, to understand others' feelings and views without judgment, and to use that understanding to guide our actions.

There's been a lot of talk in recent years about the need for empathy in the workplace and in leaders. And it's easy to think that as musicians, and as sensitive people in the arts, we've got empathy covered. Chamber music itself demands it, as does virtually all other collaborative work.

But many of the challenges that ensembles, artist managers, and presenters face in fact share the same root cause: a lack of empathy.

How so? It's simple: we're all stressed and stretched. There's never enough time, never enough resources. As a result, many creatives feel overworked, underpaid, and undervalued, and this takes its toll on ensembles and organizations.

To get through the day, the week, the season, we "armor up," putting on our professional fronts in order to get the work done. And the armor limits our receptivity to others and to our own creativity. We shut out new ideas that may challenge our egos or threaten the fragile status quo. In order to barrel through the week, we end up taking our colleagues, co-workers—and, at home, our partners—for granted.

But in the words of violinist Christian Tetzlaff: "In the long run, it's better to live life without armor."

Check your empathy quotient*.

Answer the following questions—first

about your organization or ensemble, and then about yourself.

In my ensemble or organization:

- Do people feel confident they can share ideas without being judged? *And do I feel that way?*
- What would help people feel heard and valued when group decisions impact them? *What would help me?*
- Do colleagues feel acknowledged and appreciated for their contributions to the organization? *Do I?*
- Do my colleagues routinely see examples of how their work benefits others? *Do I?*
- How does my organization help support its members in difficult times? *How do I?*
- Are members' strengths and skills acknowledged—including people skills? *Do I acknowledge my colleagues?*
- Do we focus not just on reaching our goals, but on how we leave audience members, colleagues, and donors feeling? *Do I focus on that?*

Empathy is a skill we can all work on. Start by slowing down, breathing, and tuning in to others when you're in conversations, meetings, and rehearsals. Park your ego and listen actively, be present. Pay attention to non-verbal cues to read the emotions and concerns behind what others are saying. Ask questions and check the assumptions you're making. Acknowledge and appreciate others.

You'll feel more connected and alive—both on stage and off. This will bring better decisions and better living, I promise. Let's do it—together.

Angela Myles Beeching is a career consultant and the author of Beyond Talent: Creating a Successful Career in Music. Angela works with individuals, ensembles, and organizations to facilitate positive change.