

Angela Answers

Dear Angela: I can't stop checking the news. Every time I look at my phone I get more depressed, and it's taking a toll on my art. What can I do to stay productive and not be so distracted all the time?

BY Angela Myles Beeching

We have a mental health crisis. The changing landscape of the arts infrastructure, our national and world politics, the economy and global warming—all have us feeling anxious. And for arts professionals, the results include a loss of creativity.

Check your symptoms.

These vary but may include:

- Increased anxiety (both on and off stage)
- Intermittent political rage
- Relentless negative self-talk
- Chronic “wheel spinning” without actually getting anywhere
- Addiction to our devices: social media or binge-consuming of series, podcasts, or news
- Difficulty in maintaining focus and concentration
- Loss of motivation
- Depression, a loss of hope, feeling disconnected
- Artistic ‘constipation’—feeling stuck and unable to activate our creativity

All these symptoms are related to feeling overwhelmed and powerless. To protect ourselves, we resort to distractions, acting out, and withdrawing. But these behaviors not only hurt us, they hurt those who look to us as role models and instigators.

Our job as creatives is to be fully present. To bring forth our whole selves, our best selves, in service to others. To help, here are 6 Strategies to Re-ignite Your Creativity:

1. **Remember why you got into music in the first place.** Write it down and keep it in a place you can refer to, such as in a special pocket in your portfolio, bag, or instrument case.
2. **Schedule one day each week to be completely unplugged.** Reconnect with nature and with your own human experience. Nothing will blow up. I promise.
3. **Designate one “power hour” each week for the dream project you’ve been ignoring.** Use a timer and blast through what’s needed most: drafting a critical email or making the necessary calls you’re nervous about. Get the help you need to do the creative work that matters most.
4. **Re-connect with 3 inspiring people you’ve lost touch with.** FaceTime, coffee dates, or Skype all work to help you re-charge and renew.
5. **Read long form: fiction or non-fiction.** Your brain needs to regularly engage in long-form thinking. This reading will pay off in your ability to be fully present and to connect ideas, inspiration, and hope.
6. **Volunteer for an hour or two each week to help people whose needs are greater than your own.** It’s only through compassionate giving to strangers that we learn to practice empathy. And in these times, empathy is what’s needed most. The secret is that practicing empathy cultivates our own creative abilities and our own resilience in times of stress.

Start with any two of these and see what you experience!

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. Learn more at angelabeeching.com.

