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The Industry Cosign Spotlight: Angelo Ellerbee

By bigced 3 years ago



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It's been said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. But it can also be one of the surest routes to success – or failure.

For artist development guru Angelo Ellerbee, imitating and building upon the tactics of legendary Motown founder Berry Gordy – a staunch believer in head-to-toe artist development – has made him a highly sought after teacher and well known purveyor of class, style, and proper etiquette – all refreshing, albeit rare commodities in an industry of sagging pants, foul language and back alley manners.

For more than three decades, Ellerbee, like Gordy before him, has nearly single-handedly worked to convert those who imitate the worst that the entertainment industry has to offer into well-groomed, well-spoken ambassadors of decorum and refinement.

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A native of Newark, NJ, Ellerbee didn't set out to change the world. Initially, he simply wanted to make people look good. "I got into this business by way of James Mtume," he notes. "My background is in fashion but I always wanted to have a learning institution where people who look like me could come and get what Berry Gordy gave out in the '60s – education, stimulation, knowledge of how to exist in this music business. I thought it was important to mimic what Gordy gave his artists."

But while Ellerbee was mimicking Gordy, his would-be clients were picking up bad habits left and right, resorting to vulgarities, public beefs and downright bad manners. They lacked social graces and suffered from a lack of knowledge about the music industry and business in general. And, unfortunately, record executives weren't helping. "Today, record companies are dying," says Ellerbee, "but for some reason, they have eliminated artist development. I say that artist development is still important to this very day. How to speak, how to dress –that's important." Most labels, he says, resort to crash course artist development when an artist reaches a certain plateau in his or her career but by then, many potentially viable opportunities may have long since passed them by. "We should incorporate these teachings and start them from the beginning instead of trying to change someone's M.O. in the middle or at the end of their careers."

As owner of New Jersey-based Double XXposure, Ellerbee's success in the industry as a publicist, imagemaker, artist manager, and artist developer is well-documented. It is written across the pages of the many magazines that have covered his artists; it is reflected in the demeanors of those who have listened to his advice and adopted his principles; it is advocated by professionals who use it as a reference for their students, clients and colleagues.

Ellerbee's client roster is deep and diverse, including the likes of Michael Jackson, Mary J. Blige, Alicia Keys, Roberta Flack, Dionne Warwick, DMX, and Nina Simone. Outside of music, Ellerbee has touched the careers of author Smokey Fontaine, radio personality Angie Martinez, athlete Shannon Briggs and models Iman and Naomi Campbell; he has handled publicity for entertainment executives, fashion stylists, actors, and ministers; he has been the brainchild behind the creation of various events and foundations, and has marketed and publicized numerous Broadway plays and films, including "American Gangster," "Native Son," "Exit Wounds" and "Never Die Alone," which he executive produced.

In 2000, Kaplan University incorporated Ellerbee's Charm School program into its curriculum and continues to use it today to instruct students on proper social and business etiquette. In 2006, Harper Collins released his book, "What's Your Excuse," a detailed outline of the business and personal skills needed to navigate the often treacherous waters of the entertainment industry.

Unlike those who harp on the use of "the n-word" and other flavor of the month issues in the wake of some massive media maelstrom, Ellerbee has been consistent, teaching the same lesson from the same book for many years; advising us that the skills that he values will also be of value to those who control the purse strings, greenlight projects and make or break careers with the flip of a switch. Times have changed and so, he says, has the way that we do business. "I don't think people are going into a boardroom anymore to talk business and renew contracts," he notes. "They are sitting at a dinner table so it's very important for a young artist to know how to deliver and carry himself. All this stuff may sound really whack in this day and time but we're not sitting in boardrooms, we're sitting at dinner tables. That's where impressions are formed and that's where deals are sealed."

But what hasn't changed over the years is the enthusiasm that Ellerbee has for his work. "My approach doesn't change and it won't change. Care and love and concern should never change," he says. "It's an innate ability that one should always have."

Referring to Double XXposure as a "one-stop shop," Ellerbee says the company, though best known as a publicity firm, is much more. "I wind up doing everything from marketing to crisis management to artist management. My company is like a supermarket where you go down the aisle and select the information and the expertise that you want."

As Ellerbee looks across the vast and ever-evolving entertainment industry he is proud of the work he has done but realizes that there is still much more to do. As long as the industry continues to churn out artists without arming them with the personal and professional skills that they need, as long as artists continue to imitate the wrong people and mimic bad habits, and as long as there is a diamond in the rough waiting to be polished and revealed to the world, there will always be a need for Angelo Ellerbee. "You know what separates me from most?" he asks. "I care. There are people out here who try to imitate what I do but they do it without any real concern. They do it because there's an exchange of dollars and cents. I do it because I care – perhaps too much – but I sincerely feel that I am here to assist God in doing His work and that includes inspiring people to be their best; nurturing and developing their hidden attributes and stimulating and teaching them an awareness of their worth on this earth."

That is truly a philosophy worth imitating.