

Agents, managers and promoters are often the first point of contact when boycott pressure, reputational risk or controversy arises. You may hear concerns before an artist does, or be asked to respond before anyone has assessed what is happening.

This document helps you slow pressure, protect artists' professional interests and avoid unintentionally escalating risk.

Often, the most effective response is buffering: absorbing pressure without passing it on, translating demands into neutral language, and insisting on process before action.

- Not all pressure requires engagement.
- Not all controversy requires explanation.
- Silence, delay and clarification are often protective tools.

Keep this principle in mind:

Agents reduce harm not by resolving conflict, but by preventing panic from becoming policy.

What Protects Artists (and Agents)

When pressure subsides without escalation, certain practices are almost always present. These are not dramatic interventions. They are disciplined, professional habits that prevent urgency from turning into irreversible decisions.

Holding the buffer

Protective agents understand that they are often the first point of impact. Rather than relaying hostile messages or speculative concerns directly to the artist, they filter and translate. Demands are reframed in neutral, factual language. Emotional intensity is reduced before information is passed on.

By acting as a buffer, agents preserve the artist's decision-making space and prevent unnecessary distress at the earliest stage of pressure.

Buffering protects agency and prevents escalation at source.

Slowing timelines deliberately

Time is not passive. Buying time is an active intervention.

This may mean resisting artificial deadlines, requesting written clarification before responding or simply allowing public attention to crest and pass. Pressure often relies on urgency to force decisions. Deliberate delay restores proportionality and reduces intensity.

Delay is often the most effective form of protection.

Separating risk from discomfort

Not all pressure carries the same weight. Protective agents distinguish carefully between legal or safety risk, reputational anxiety and political or ideological disagreement.

Only genuine legal or safety risk requires urgent action. The rest requires judgement. Conflating discomfort with danger leads to disproportionate decisions that harm artists unnecessarily.

Clarity about risk prevents fear from driving outcomes.

Restoring process when it breaks down

Under pressure, institutions sometimes drift into informal decision-making. Conversations move to private channels. Authority becomes unclear. Artists are bypassed.

In these moments, agents re-establish structure. They insist on formal communication, clarify who holds decision-making authority and redirect discussion into proper contractual and governance frameworks.

Process is protection – for artists and institutions alike.

Minimising public exposure

Visibility does not always provide safety. Protective agents frequently advise against public responses while pressure is live. They discourage multiple or evolving statements and keep communication factual and minimal.

Over-explanation extends controversy. Strategic restraint shortens it.

Silence can be a professional strategy, not a failure of confidence.

Knowing when to escalate – and when not to

Escalation is sometimes necessary, but it should be deliberate and proportionate. Seeking legal advice, involving senior leadership or consulting specialist support may be appropriate where genuine risk arises.

Escalation should never be reactive or driven by reputational panic. It must always serve the artist's professional interests.

Escalate with purpose, not emotion.

Maintaining clear role boundaries

Agents represent artists. They do not arbitrate morality or ideology. They are not responsible for resolving political disputes between institutions, audiences or collaborators.

Clarity of role reduces the pressure to concede ground unnecessarily or to solve conflicts that fall outside professional representation.

Role clarity protects both integrity and leverage.

Keeping records

Documentation is a quiet but essential safeguard. Recording requests, advice given and decisions taken ensures that reflection and protection are possible if matters escalate later.

In moments of dispute, clear records provide stability and evidence of proportionate conduct.

Documentation turns uncertainty into a defensible process.

Attempting to Arbitrate Ideological Conflict Within a Group

At times, agents may find themselves drawn into ideological, political or identity-based disagreements within a band, collective or collaborative project. Pressure to resolve internal conflict can be intense, particularly where reputational fallout is feared.

This impulse is understandable. Agents want to preserve projects, reassure partners and prevent collapse. Yet adjudicating belief or identity is not within the agent's mandate. Taking sides, facilitating compromise on matters of principle or allowing majority pressure to override minority protection can fracture trust and expose artists to exclusion or discrimination.

When agents step into ideological mediation, role clarity is replaced by emotional arbitration, often under significant pressure and without formal authority.

The protective approach is different. Clarify professional boundaries. Protect contractual and practical interests. Allow ideological disagreements to unfold without imposing resolution.

Agents protect professional interests – they do not adjudicate belief.

What This Achieves

When buffering, role clarity and proportionate judgement guide decisions, pressure often loses momentum. Campaigns that rely on urgency struggle when confronted with process.

Artists remain protected from unnecessary exposure. Agents retain credibility with partners and institutions. Most importantly, options remain open. Decisions taken slowly and deliberately preserve flexibility that panic decisions eliminate.

Protection does not come from compliance with pressure. It comes from measured judgement exercised consistently.

Protection is sustained through discipline, not reaction.

When Artists Choose to Speak Publicly

Not all pressure comes from outside the artist. In some situations, artists actively choose to speak out on political, social or cultural issues and see this as an expression of personal integrity or artistic freedom.

Agents have an important role in these moments. Supporting an artist's freedom of expression does **not** mean encouraging silence or discouraging speech. Artists are entitled to express lawful views, including views that attract controversy. At the same time, agents are not responsible for amplifying those views or managing the consequences on the artist's behalf.

When artists choose to speak publicly, protective practice includes:

- **Clarifying roles**
Making clear that the agent's role is advisory, not directive. Advice may be given, but the decision to speak ultimately rests with the artist.

- **Separating expression from escalation**
Supporting an artist's right to speak does not require coordinating media strategy, issuing statements or engaging with critics unless this is clearly in the artist's professional interest.
- **Advising proportion, not silence**
Agents may advise on timing, format and tone without attempting to control content. This includes discussing whether speaking publicly is likely to reduce or increase pressure.
- **Avoiding spokesperson drift**
Agents should not become the public voice for an artist's beliefs or intentions. Speaking on behalf of an artist in political matters can create unintended reputational and legal risk.
- **Documenting advice and boundaries**
Where agents advise caution and artists choose to proceed, it is good practice to record that advice and the decision taken.
- **Maintaining professional focus**
Even when artists speak publicly, agents should continue to focus on protecting contracts, bookings and professional relationships rather than managing ideological debate.

Disagreement or controversy does not mean that representation has failed. What matters is that artists are supported to exercise their freedom lawfully and knowingly, without agents being drawn into arbitration or advocacy beyond their role. This approach protects both artistic autonomy and professional integrity.

Early Risk Identification - Recognising Early Warning Signs

The best crisis management is prevention.

Be alert to the following:

- Online petitions or coordinated social media posts calling for cancellation.
- Open letters targeting specific sponsors, artists or organisations.
- Sudden communications from partners or funders hinting at "reputational sensitivity."
- Requests that artists sign collective statements or take political positions.
- Rising levels of abuse or misinformation directed at artists online.

Action:

- **Document everything:** Save posts, emails, screenshots and messages.
- **Notify your artist** and legal contact early.
- **Avoid public comment** at this stage.
- **Consult FITA** for confidential advice on reputational and legal implications.

Early identification allows for proportionate, professional responses rather than reactive decisions.