

Required Reading

DEC 19 2023

EDITION 004

Neelam Thadhani

Manager, Jack Harlow



In this edition of *Required Reading* — an online zine designed for download and application to your career — **Neelam Thadhani** reveals how she transformed her dream of becoming an artist into a rewarding role as the day-to-day manager for **Jack Harlow**. The core of each successful stage of her career started out with a simple approach:
to help someone.

“I just want my foot in the door”

I started off as a dancer, I danced my entire life. I was also in the choir when I was growing up. In high school, I started doing musical theater and that's when I decided to go into my artist career. I auditioned for things like The Voice and American Idol.

Once I got to Georgia State University, that's when I started interning at Twelve Music Group. I went into that internship just trying to learn. I didn't know anybody, I didn't know much about the industry at all. I just wanted to get my foot in the door and see what could happen from there.

I wanted to be in the music space.

Throughout that internship, I learned a lot. There were a lot of things I saw that made me realize I didn't want to be an artist. I liked my privacy and didn't wanna share my life with the world. When I was 22 I made that decision to take a step back and go on to the business side.

A pivotal moment in college

I was on campus one day, and this guy, who was a recording engineer at the time, told me that he knew this woman starting a music studio [called Twelve Music Group] she was hiring an assistant.

I just wanted any music job. I didn't care what it was so I went to the interview and let her know I was in college. I was transparent about what I wanted to do. She told me, "You're busy with classes. You're probably not going to have time to be my full-time assistant, but come and intern." The studio wasn't even open yet. She said, "We're opening in a couple of weeks. Check it out."

Trying things until something works

I didn't know what I wanted to do on the music side for quite a while. I dabbled in A&R. I realized that sitting in sessions and picking out beats was boring to me. I think certain A&Rs have a gift, and I knew that wasn't something that I had any passion for. After taking a bunch of meetings and spending time trying to figure out what I wanted to do, I ended up getting hired as a day-to-day manager for one of her artists.

She had an artist that was based out of Belgium. I worked with her for a couple of months, and then towards the end of 2016, I met DJ Drama. I didn't really think much of it, but he let me know that he was looking to hire some people. He had a new studio [called Means Street] and was looking to expand his team. When he told me this, I didn't think he was trying to possibly offer me a job. I was like, "Sure, I'll help you. I'll try to find some interns, whatever." A month or two had passed, I still had his email, and I just happened to reach out to him.

I was ready for the next steps. I had been at Twelve Music Group for a couple of years now, and I wanted to see what else I could do in the industry. Obviously, I respected DJ Drama. I loved his music. I was pretty persistent on meeting with him, and then we finally met after New Year. It was January 2017. He needed somebody to manage his studio at the time. Lil Uzi Vert was about to take off. I think he had just released "All My Chains" with Young Thug, so they were really busy.

Drama said, "I'll give you a month, see what you can do." And literally, within probably a month and a half, I was able to get his studio up and running. I had worked in a studio for three years [previously], so I was like, "I know how many interns you need and how to get sessions together, how to make session reports." I ended up managing the studio for about a year, and then Drama, Lake, and Cannon finalized their label deal with Atlantic and made Generation Now. I got the position as a general manager for the Label.

While I was the GM, I was assisting Leighton "Lake" Morrison, who managed Drama and Uzi at the time. That's really where I was able to build this experience in management. I always felt like if you want to learn about somebody's career, assist them because that's how you get to know what they're doing. I saw first-hand all the bullshit he was dealing with.

I assisted Lake for a couple of years, and then I assisted Erin Larsen, who's Playboi Carti's manager, for a year. That really helped me get into the management space because I was able to learn from them what a manager actually does.

Meeting Jack Harlow

Jack ended up coming to the Means Street studio at the end of 2018. He came with his whole Private Garden team. He had a photographer, producers, creatives. It was cool to see this kid who was not only very talented but also had a whole team built around him. We signed Jack within the month [to Generation Now]. Obviously, as a GM, you get to know every artist, and you spend a lot of time with them, so [Jack and I] just got really close.

You don't have to want [to be successful] more than Jack. He wants it to another level. He wants to be the greatest. His dreams are 20 times bigger than you could imagine. That's always been my mindset. I knew that if I ever wanted to work with artists, I wanted the best of the best. I wanted the Kobe Bryant, Michael Jordan work ethic, because those are the type of people I've always been inspired by. I'm a Whitney [Houston], Michael Jackson type. Like, that's the type of shit I want to get into.

Artist management is worth the risk

One thing with management, it's the riskiest job. There is no guarantee from anything you do. You can literally get fired in one day, or in 20 years. It doesn't matter what you could get fired for, and it doesn't matter how much you've done for the artist. It's a big investment financially and on a personal level, with your time. But I think it's one of those things - when you love helping people reach their dreams and help them oversee this vision they have for their career. That's the high of it all.

At the end of the day, all I wanted was for Jack to be the biggest artist in the world, and for every single thing he hoped for to come true. He said, "I want a number one record. I want to have a number-one album. I want to have a song with ____." I said "Okay, I'm going to make this dream come true." That's why you do it. You are literally helping people chase their dreams. I think a lot of people come into music thinking this is a money-making industry. It's not. Money comes eventually but it's about the music. That's why you do it.

Being a manager you have to be extremely selfless. You have to have good problem-solving skills and you have to be proactive and think of things before they happen. You have to be open to listening to people and you also have to be able to say no. You have to take criticism all the time, but not let that dim your light or optimism towards the situation. You have to be okay with not being liked and being 'different.' We work in entertainment. We get to curate the world's playlists. We're the reason you're dancing at the club, [what you're listening to when] you're working out. We're the reason for your background noise. That's us. That's our job - to curate the feelings people have on a day-to-day basis when they're listening to music.

If you're willing to take risks, it's worth it.

Inside Range Music

I'm a manager at Range, and Chris is a partner. It's a great company because it's this huge aquarium of everything that you could do. There is the film and TV side, Range Sports, business strategies, and more.

Our music community is constantly trying to support each other in any way possible

We're a big network. Jack doesn't just have a small team. He has an army.

[From a manager's perspective] they look at a management company, and there is that selfish part. It's like, why would I work with a company? They're going to get a percentage [of my commission] when I could get the full percentage. But Jack is a well-rounded artist - he's an actor, he has a nonprofit. There are so many different things that he wants to do, so having Range's support has been incredible]. No manager knows everything, so if we can team up with people who are just as passionate about this industry as we are, it makes sense. It's just like any investment, you're going to give away some [commission] to gain a lot more in the future. And at the same time, you're learning a lot more.

The end goal for Neelam

I'd love to be able to create a full entity for Jack, as far as having his own label, pushing his own artists, and being able to put him in a space where he can move freely for, like, ten years. He's in such a [good] space. He can experiment. If he wants to hide for two years, he can do that. [It's about] putting him in a position of power, but also letting him relax and enjoy his life.

I'd be interested in working with another female artist, but I've been very picky about who I work with. But at this point, there is that sense of contentment. I don't see Jack slowing down anytime soon.

Sky's the limit for him.