

VALERIE GELLER



Creating

POWERFUL
RADIO

A Communicator's Handbook

NEWS
TALK
INFORMATION
PERSONALITY

“Now there’s finally a book
I can recommend!”

Denise McIntee
Operations Manager
WABC, New York

“This is the book I hope my
competitors don’t read.
It’s required reading for my staff.”

Jerry Bell
News Director
KOA/KTLK, Denver, CO

“Our industry has needed a book like
this for a long time...save years of
experience in one reading. I’ll use
Creating Powerful Radio™ as a reference
for years to come!”

Jim Casale
Program Director
KVI, Seattle, WA

“Anyone even considering a career in
News/Talk broadcasting should read this!”

Adele Scheele, PhD
Director, The Career Center
California State University, Northridge
Author, Skills for Success
Career expert, NBC’s, “Today Show”

“Taking her ***Creating Powerful Radio™***
workshop changed how I approach
my entire show!”

Mike Fleming
Fleming & Company
WMC and TV-5, Memphis, TN

CHAPTER 1

Creating Powerful Radio

"I think the experimental test of whether this art is great or good, or minor or abysmal is the effect it has on your own sense of the world and of yourself. Great art changes you."

Art Historian Sister Wendy Beckett from BBC Radio 2, 1994.

"Art is accusation, expression, passion."

Gunter Grass b. 1927, from "The Tin Drum."

Sitting on a shelf or in a car dashboard, it's merely a box full of wires and silicon chips. It may or may not look handsome, the outward appearance giving little indication of the magic contained within. The radio is clearly one of the most ingenious devices ever created, yet to understand its power fully, it may help to view radio with primitive eyes.

You've no doubt heard the story of natives in Papua, New Guinea, or elsewhere, who, upon seeing and hearing their first radio, demand to see the little man inside. A *magic* man, obviously, to fit inside so small a box. In the Pidgin of Papua, radio is in fact known as "Bokis, he cry" (the box that cries). Primitive, perhaps, but positively accurate in a philosophical sense.

The radio is a magical extension of the human spirit. It can “cry out” and make a listener feel, laugh, think, and cry. Powerful radio rings true and evokes a reaction. It also makes the listener want to keep listening in the hope that it will happen again.

Radio is very, very personal. People don't sit around in groups listening (not anymore). Today, much listening is done alone, almost in secret, through Walkman headphones or in the steel-and-glass-enclosed privacy of a car. One by one, the listener is hunting for that connection, that powerful magic which is often missing from radio today. Watching the average listener punch through the buttons on the car radio is proof of that. One station after another is rejected. Many of these stations are simply unknown to the listener. In the U.S., often the entire AM band is unknown to the listener. Once that magic contact is made, the listener won't go unless they're given a reason to leave. Your job as a radio professional is to entice the listener through the radio door, and then keep them coming back. This calls for powerful radio.

What is powerful radio? “I always know it when I hear it...” is the answer most programmers give when you ask them to define it. But when asked to break down the specific elements, they often can't express it in words.

In working with stations around the world, I've noticed that certain common threads run through each great radio moment.

First, the audience must care about what is said. It must matter to them. It must touch their lives. The content or topic must reach them in a real and true way. And the topic can *never* be boring, or the audience will tune out.

Before anything goes on air ask yourself: Is it *relevant*? Does it *matter*? Do you *care*? Do your *listeners* care?

While it may be the music or the news that first touches a listener, I believe the richest source of powerful radio comes from the personalities of the on-air performers.

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Creating

POWERFUL
RADIO

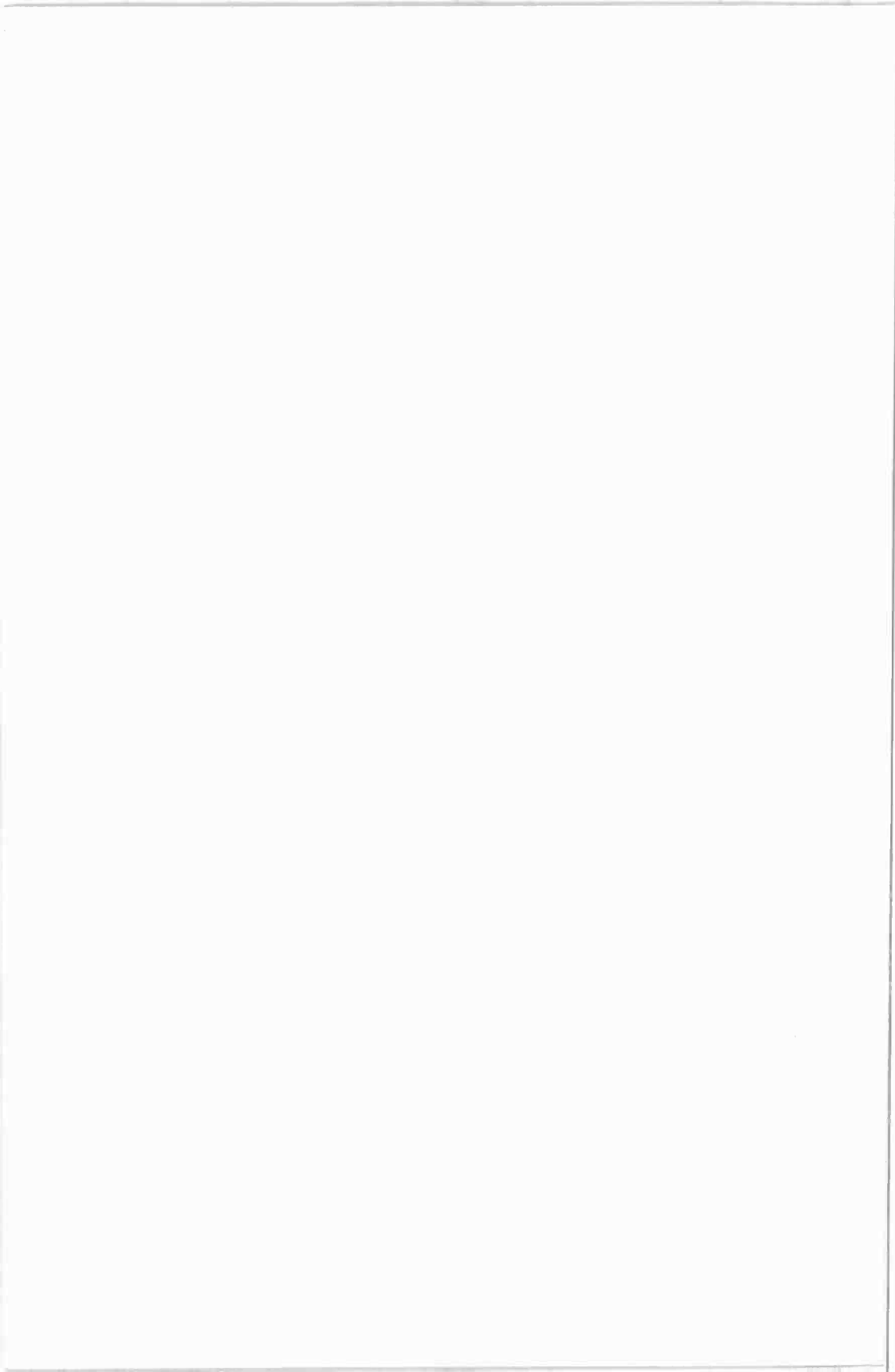
VALERIE GELLER

NEW YORK

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PUBLICATIONS

NASHVILLE

For my parents, Lyla and Fred, who
have never stopped believing in me.



FOREWORD

*From M Street Journal Publisher
Pat McCrummen*

There's so much written about radio. There are books about the "business" side of the business: how to execute great promotions, hiring and training good managers, or finding talented salespeople. Programming books tend to focus on audience-building through formatic "structure" and formulas for properly executing each programming element. However, there's been very little written about how to find, train, and develop *talent*.

You can spend hundreds of dollars to attend long, boring seminars to find the only good thing you got out of it was breakfast. You're lucky to walk away with one or two usable ideas.

You can pay a consultant a couple thousand dollars to solve your problems, but the solutions they offer are good for the moment, not necessarily the long term.

Many PD's know what good radio is when they hear it, but they can't say *why*. Valerie Geller not only *explains* why, she offers dozens of practical solutions to try when either programming or talent gets off track.

Although Valerie is known for her years of expertise in News/Talk, the techniques she developed and teaches in this book apply to all formats and all types of radio. Music, news or talk. Commercial or non-commercial. Anyone who does radio anywhere can benefit.

This book will inspire and renew you. It reminds you *why* radio is in your blood.

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When you take on a book, it is not a thing you do alone. I am grateful in this life for the people my career has given me. I am thankful for their love, support, help and belief in this book:

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I would also like to thank the editors of *Music & Media* magazine. Some original concepts in this book were explored in articles I wrote that first appeared there.

Håkan Svensson, I thank you for the idea of incorporating the **Creating Powerful Radio™** workshops into book form, an idea that was encouraged and supported by my friend, client and "guardian angel," Anne Chaabane with Sveriges Radio.

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Creating Powerful Radio

INTRODUCTION

Creating Powerful Radio

“Art happens—no hovel is safe from it, no prince may depend upon it, the vastest intelligence cannot bring it about.”

James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903)

The idea was Håkan Svensson’s, then PD at Radio Malmöhus. We were in Malmo, Sweden, having lunch at a seafood place after a productive morning seminar. Håkan asked me if it would be OK to translate some of my ideas into Swedish for other stations in the Swedish Radio chain. He also asked if I’d thought about writing a book. He wanted to know if I knew of any books that dealt with the workshop materials I had developed to strengthen air talent, teach talk radio, explore ways to make the news more alive and interesting, and marry it all together. Other than Mervin Block’s *Writing Broadcast News*, I said, “No.”

This is MY STUFF based on my life and 20 years of experience in radio: programming, management, news, talk, reporting and anchoring, hosting and producing shows, doing some TV, finding and developing new talent and finally consulting. It’s practical stuff that works because we’ve tried it.

Håkan looked at me with a smile on his face and said; “If you wrote a book, I’d buy it.” I began keeping a notebook the next day.

At first, I thought this would just be for clients, sort of a “written summary” of ideas we’d worked with to get stations and air personalities up to the next level. I wanted to leave something tangible and permanent that would last after a *Creating Powerful Radio*™ workshop. Something to avoid that “back to normal slump” that hits a few weeks after the consultant leaves.

I’m always in touch with clients, but I live in New York, my family is in California, I work all over the world and I travel all the time. It’s not exactly convenient to hop in the car and zip off to Sweden or New Zealand, Scotland, Germany, Finland, or Japan!

So the book got written. It’s done now. But it’s not finished. The work I do continuously evolves, almost daily. I change; I encounter creative people around the world who influence me; I get new ideas. I want to keep growing. Today’s methods might not work tomorrow.

I don’t ever want to stand still. The nature of radio is capturing and chronicling right now, today. I like the changes. I love satellite delivery, the digital technology that lets us work cleaner and faster and better. And I love that today, talk, news and information radio has finally come into its own. We can break the rules now, though the only real “rules” are that there are no rules—No “right or wrong.” There is what works and what doesn’t work. Tell the truth, never be boring and you’ve got it.

I’ve asked some people whose work I respect to contribute a few of their ideas and suggestions for *Creating Powerful Radio*™ as well.

So, altogether, you’ll be reading about a thousand years of experience packed into this little book. But. . .

Creating Powerful Radio

These are ideas. Not answers.

This is not particularly a book for beginners. This is a book for people whose job is to face the blank page with only their talent, personalities, listening skills and powers of observation as communicators to get them by.

Creating Powerful Radio is a personal thing. Your show is unique. No one can tell you how to do it. You have to find your way. So, here it is in writing. Do your best. Make it count. Don't waste a moment of it.

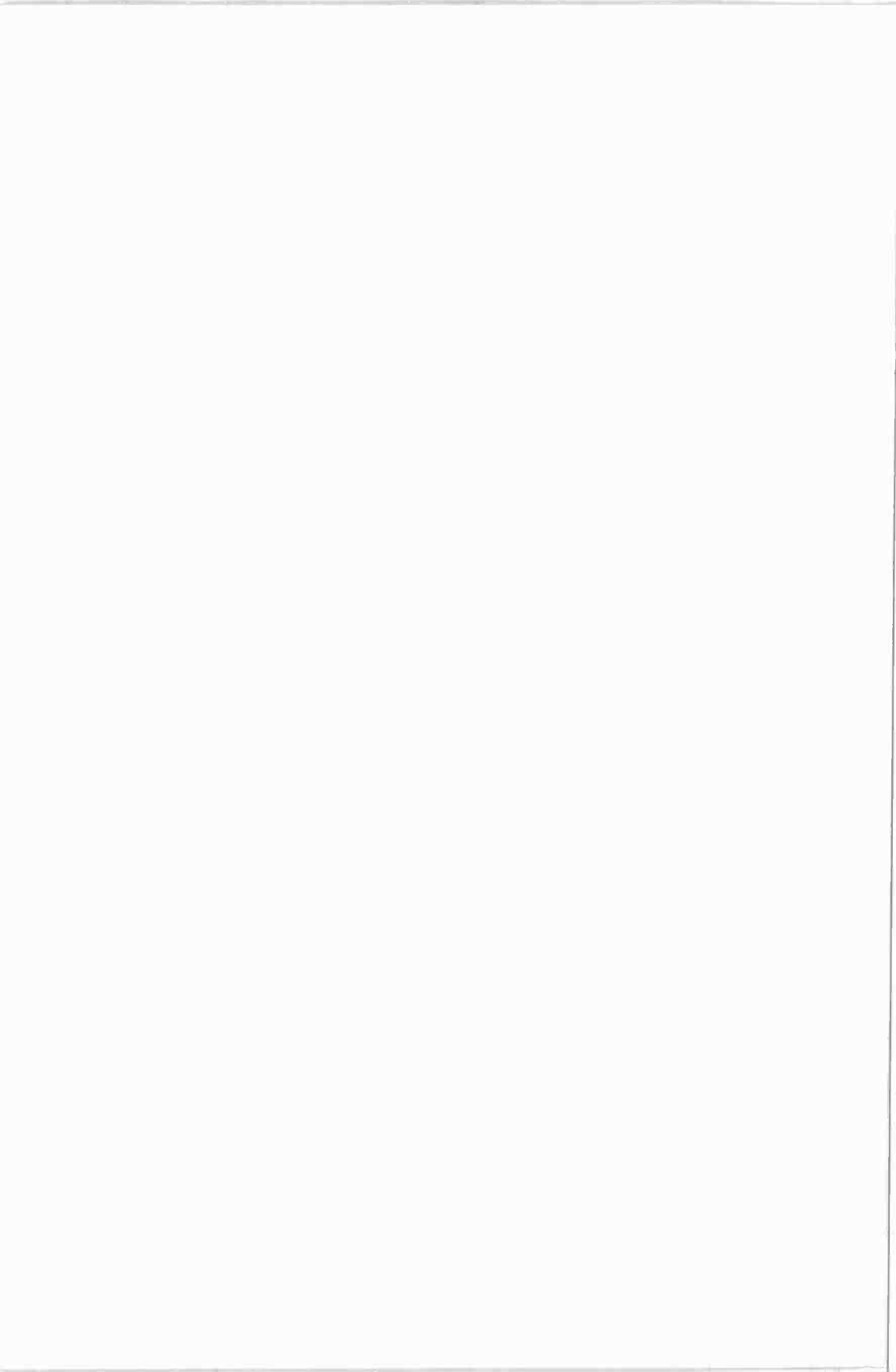
A colleague of mine, David G. Hall, PD at KFI/Los Angeles, paid me a very high compliment. He said, "This is the book I wish someone had given me when I first got into radio..."

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The Producers Workshop
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Creating Powerful Radio

The key to personality radio is having a personality. This means having a rich, full life, drawing on all of your life experiences. How you relate to life is how your audience will relate to you. The best broadcasters are great observers of life. They filter what they see going on around them through their unique creative process, and give it back out over the airwaves. They talk about what they see, notice, think and feel. They share themselves, their *real* selves. They mention what irritates them, what excites them, what saddens them. They react honestly to the news, current events and the music they play. They are good storytellers.

If an air personality is doing the job right, the audience will feel that he or she is talking to them one-on-one; the words “Hello, everybody,” or “Good morning, St. Louis.” will likely not be heard. The listener should feel that the person behind the microphone is really with them, speaking to them like a friend. The air-personality won’t seem like a star but more like someone they’d know in real life—a person with daily struggles, life experiences and problems.

Humor helps. You don’t have to be a funny person to recognize a funny moment and run with it, the way you might with a friend. This is a key element in creating powerful radio.

As I said earlier, most programmers know powerful radio when they hear it. Every element of *Creating Powerful Radio* relates back to these ideas. Think of it as a recipe for powerful radio. These ideas can be applied to all the facets of on-air work, including music presentation, talk shows, news, commercials, public service announcements, promotions and more:

**Valerie Geller's Guidelines
for Creating Powerful Radio:**

- Speak in terms your listener can “picture.” Use details. Describe the little things so your audience can “see” what you are talking about, theater of the mind. Go from black and white into color. Take them “there.”

- Always start your show with something *very* interesting. This ought to be obvious but often isn't.

- Tell the truth. Listeners can tell when you're not.

- Never be boring. If you are, your audience will be too.

- If something big or important is happening today, go with it. It may be a pain to change your program or reschedule a guest, but it's worth the trouble.

- Listen to your station, even when you're not on.

- Make your program matter. Use your own life as a show resource.

Creating Powerful Radio

- Bury the dead. If a topic is overdone, drop it.
- If you're live on-air, anything goes! But anything on tape should be perfect. NO excuses.
- It's okay to brag about your stuff—if it's good. Promote it.
- Brag about other people's stuff. If another host on your station had a "magic moment," talk about that too.
- If you don't know something, it's okay to say so. Actually, audiences love it when they sense that you're like them.
- Do smooth and interesting segues and transitions to other hosts and shows. Support them sincerely.
- Be who you are on the radio.
- Risk. Try things. Dare to be great!

CHAPTER 2

Creating Powerful Radio: From Rock to Talk

"A man paints with his brains, not with his hands..."

Michaelangelo (1475-1564)

As music radio evolves into a high tech (and sometimes humanless) tightly-formatted presentation, the personality element tends to be restricted to morning drive only, or forbidden altogether. But, morning shows tend to be filled with so many other elements—news, heavy spot load, traffic, weather, liners and cross promotion for other dayparts—that, even then, there is often little *time* for personality to emerge.

More and more, FM DJs are looking to talk radio as a place they can be free to express themselves for more than forty five seconds at a time.

Creative radio personalities find it frustrating to do nothing but read liner cards. Howard Stern, Gary Burbank, Rush Limbaugh, Phil Hendrie and Steve Dahl, among others, were all jocks playing music before they came to talk.

These are all very different individuals, but the common element is that they have strong opinions, they are funny and they have things to say. They stay topical, are interested in listeners' opinions, and enjoy talking with people. They're also a bit younger than traditional talk hosts and can bring in coveted younger demographics.

Many creative people were drawn into radio because they were powerfully moved by the music. It said something. Some say twenty or so years ago the music was more meaningful and reflected the times. Much of the music on the radio was smart and real.

That is most of what talk radio is about. It's what radio is about. It's what relationships are about. And it is what sharing your life with other people and not feeling alone in this life is about.

It hit me years ago hosting overnights on talk station KOA/Denver. Taking those late calls from people all over America in 38 states (KOA is a 50,000 watt, clear channel station) I learned how people *needed* to be heard. How it eased the collective loneliness of listeners glued to their radio dials all night long. How powerful radio could be. In his book Radio Waves, Jim Ladd calls it, "sitting around the glow of the radio campfire, hungry for the sound of the tribal drum."

It struck a chord when Bruce Springsteen sang about factories closing down, the lack of hope among young people, youthful rebellion, hypocrisy in the culture—"grab your girl, get on your motorcycle and get out of town," or make love right now, because there might not be a tomorrow.

Some call that music art. Others call it journalism set to poetry and music. Those same listeners today might want to hear those same topics discussed in a talk show format—unthinkable in the 1970s form of more traditional talk radio. Many former DJs turned out to be just the right people to handle the "new" talk radio, which is hotter, hipper, more creative, personality-oriented, music-influenced talk radio.

Of course, if you knew where to look in the late '60s and early '70s you could hear some pretty provocative stuff on FM stations like WBAI/New York, KMET/Los Angeles, KSAN/San Francisco, KPFK/Los Angeles and KPFA/Berkeley. Songs about ending the war in Vietnam, about drugs, rebellion, politics and that vague concept of "freedom." Again, this was the "youth journalism" of the time, set to song. If you hosted one of those music shows, you could talk, be an advocate, take calls, say what you thought, had access to "newsmakers," and were in the thick of the journalistic action.

Things are different now, but also kind of the same. The '60s style of the traditional commercial talk radio host, an often colorless moderator without opinions, is pretty much history, replaced by the kind of strong personality, host-advocates heard on those colorful FM "hippie"-type music stations.

Maintaining an audience requires great storytelling. The old songs met the challenge. They mixed the personal experiences of the writer/performer with excellent storytelling. And that is the essence of great talk radio.

Probably the most famous, so far, of these "rock-to-talk" guys is syndicated host Rush Limbaugh. His show advocates an agenda in much the same way the '60s FM radio picked up on politics, pop culture, and issues of the day. He also adds the element of fun and excitement to his show by employing music radio production values, produced bits, jingles and parody songs, all mixed in with a heavy dose of conservative politics—an area previously unblemished by humor. Rush took something that had been traditionally stodgy and made it fun.



RUSH LIMBAUGH

I worked with Rush at WABC/New York in 1990. He did a two hour local show for us in addition to his then two hour network show for EFM.

People ask me all the time, "What's Rush like?" The thing I remember best about working with him is that he was a pro. I never had to worry about him. He was not a problem person. He was nice and polite—well behaved in a midwestern way—and he worked hard. He'd be in that office early—hours before his show, going through dozens of newspapers looking for material and doing show prep. His needs were few. He wanted his own office. He wanted his own phone extension. He wanted an occasional cigar. And he was a fun guy to have a cheeseburger with.

Limbaugh explains his success in his book, The Way Things Ought to Be. He says his big break came back in 1984 in Sacramento, Calif., on KFBK radio. He feels the show worked because, "I was allowed to be myself." He says it was the first time in seventeen years on the radio he was allowed to be *who he was* on the air. Limbaugh warns, "You'll never be your best doing it someone else's way."

Limbaugh claims his show is so successful because he entertains audiences, not because of his right wing politics. Although he acknowledges that people love his political point of view, it's Rush's *radio* instincts that are on target. He presented a "hip" view for conservatives, gave them a voice, and made it fun and personal. And it worked. Striking a chord across America, listeners responded by the millions. Rush now has over 650 stations carrying his show and has been credited with "saving" AM radio.

The only other conservative political radio guy with the same kind of following is news man and commentator Paul Harvey. And for almost the same reasons. Each has his own unique creativity expressed in his own style. Harvey is a master storyteller and is fun to listen to. You can see people parked in lots during the lunch hour sitting in their cars listening to Paul Harvey, mesmerized until he's finished.

The moral for success here: Be unique. Be yourself. Create your own style.

Play the calls like the hits

Another secret of Limbaugh's success, he "plays" callers like a DJ plays the songs. He figured out that talk radio was not public service radio, just because someone *called* the show did not mean they had a God-given *right* to be *heard* on air. He says:

"The primary purpose of callers on my show is to make me look good, not allow a forum for the public to make speeches. I, after all, am the reason people listen....two minutes of a boring caller is the same as playing a record nobody likes. What do you do when a song you don't like is played? You go looking for a song you do like."

Despite the emphasis on youth with this new, "hotter" talk radio style—and programmers desperately grabbing for those much-valued younger audience demos—don't let it affect your judgment of talent. It pays to remember: Whether a person is 18 or 80, if they captivate with original thought and storytelling, can relate their own take on the truth, and communicate their interest in life, you'll have a winner!

What else does a rock jock bring to the talk table?

Talent can take you a long way, but it must be strengthened by experience.

Timing

A real advantage the rock-to-talkers have is timing. You can hear the polish and experience of a guy like Limbaugh or Howard Stern. They have an instinct for timing, trained by years of short segment breaks on air. They know how to hit the point, get to it fast, and get out of it.

Less is more

Former music jocks have learned when to end a bit, then move on to the next thing. In listening to tapes, you can hear the difference between an experienced talent who has fought the clock and won and a talented beginner who doesn't quite yet get the timing. That training, which only comes from experience, is invaluable and shines through in talk radio, even without the tight restrictions of records and a format clock. The lesson here: just because you get a couple of hours to play with, don't waste it!



PHIL HENDRIE

How to rock the talk

Another DJ who made the transition is WIOD/Miami's Phil Hendrie. After a successful twenty year career in music radio, including a list of top American FM stations and Westwood One network projects, he was feeling cramped at the lack of freedom and tight formatics while doing morning drive at KLSX-FM/Los Angeles. When his station decided to make a change, it was 1988, and Cox-owned KFI/Los Angeles had just turned "hot" talk. KFI gave him a weekend show in Los Angeles.

Back then, Hendrie was a creative guy with huge potential. After a while, he moved to KVEN/Ventura, Calif., for a weekday afternoon talk show, which is where he honed his act and got great. He went on to WSB/Atlanta, WCCO/Minneapolis and finally to the top news-talker in Miami. He's creative, funny, has a definite dark side, does a million character voices with points of view and interesting stuff to say, loves sports, really likes

women as human beings, and reveals who he is and what he thinks about to the audience. Hendrie observes life, filters what he sees through his creative process and lets it roll. He's now at a station where they appreciate and believe in him and he's developed into an amazing talent. (If you are curious and want to hear his work, WIOD/Miami has put out a couple of CDs of the "Best of Hendrie.")

Phil Hendrie on CREATING POWERFUL RADIO:

- *Get in there and flop.* Try everything. Powerful radio is experimentation. If the station you're now at doesn't appreciate it, sooner or later you'll find one that does.
- *Be a popular culture junkie, but not just TV and movies.* It means noticing dress, road signs, vending machines, faces, accents, window tinting, house plants, snippets of conversations, drool, etc. Record all of it.
- *Forget callers.* Prep your show so that the material is interesting to *you* first, your *listeners* second and your *callers* third.
- *Be absolutely clear and focused as to what your show is about.* Management tends to push around and over consult talent that isn't. You'll be getting and taking a lot of bad advice.
- *Keep your show lean.* It's about you. If you don't need them, lose the sidekicks, the happy talk with the newsperson, the chronic callers.
- *Don't pre-record bits.* Do them live. So what if you screw up a sound effect or a line. Your chances of succeeding with a bit go up a

hundred percent when you do it live. And don't overwrite. Keep your ad-libbing skills sharp.

- *Throw away the listener mail.* If they have something to say, they'll call. Listeners who write to talk show hosts are oddballs.
- *Listen to one air-check a month maximum.* Listening to too many air checks will only depress you as you nit-pick every little thing. If you hit a home run on the air, you'll feel it.

How do I break into talk?

I get calls every day from broadcasters working in music formats or newsrooms who want to give open-phone talk radio a try. Their problem is getting ON somewhere to prove they can do it. They usually don't have any experience at talk, much less an aircheck tape. And a Sunday community affairs interview program doesn't cut it here.

Without an aircheck, it's tough to find a program director who will take a risk putting you on the air. And when PDs hear a music tape, they tend not to pay attention. Good voices in talk radio are secondary. It's what you say that matters first here.

So how do you come up with some kind of tape that will showcase your personality and potential as a talk host? Or, how can you convince a programmer to put you on as a substitute host to "audition" on the air? And, are you sure you *want* to do an audition on the air?

***DJs: ARE YOU READY TO
MAKE THE MOVE TO TALK?***

DO YOU . . .

- Listen to talk radio and like it better than music radio?
- Get really mad when things are chopped out of the newspapers or you can't find anything heavier than USA Today or Playboy around the station?
- Have a home subscription to 10 or more magazines or newspapers?
- Find yourself calling talk shows?
- Resent your PD telling you to "shut up, do your liners and stick to the order of the songs on the log?"
- Resent the "hits?"
- Check your watch a lot and feel mostly bored during your airshift?
- Enjoy taking calls on the air or do more phone bits than you're supposed to?
- Like doing interviews and wish you could do more?
- Wish you had more air time to talk about things that matter—what's happening in the news, in town, etc.?

Trial by fire is not for everyone

Even if you get a chance for that on-air audition, it may not be the best way to “strut your stuff.” An audition is not the best of circumstances. Being on the “hot seat” is a nervous thing. It’s been my experience that people who audition well are a bit like people who do well on tests at school. Those who “ace the tests” are good test takers. But they are not necessarily the smartest or best and brightest talents.

Programmers can be fooled. They can hear a great tape or audition night, hire the person, and then be very sorry later when they are never as good as their audition or tape.

Ex-music-jock Turi Ryder expresses it another way. “Every person in the world is capable of three good talk shows. Each individual has a few things that he or she cares passionately about, at least for a few hours. After that, it gets much harder. Creative people constantly find new interests, new subjects—they need to entertain themselves. That is how they come up with different shows every day.”

My favorite tapes to listen to are not necessarily airchecks. Although airchecks are important, they can be heavily edited to sound great. I like to tape interviews with potential talk show hosts or, if that is not possible, I ask the host to interview himself or herself on tape. It can be done at home on a pocket tape recorder. If the cat meows in the background, be prepared to use it as part of your show.

Think of this tape as a spoken biography, where you are free to tell your favorite stories about you and your life. This not only showcases your storytelling ability—a very important part of talk radio—it lets people get to know you in a very personal and powerful way. Some of the best tapes tell of meaningful experiences that have changed or moved people, experiences that have made them the way they are. The more personal a story, the more universal it is.

Creating Powerful Radio: From Rock to Talk

Another thought for programmers is to give the potential host a hypothetical talk show. Ask, “what would you talk about if given a few hours on air?” Ask the host why he or she cares about that subject, why is it interesting? You might do an actual “mock” opening of a show, an introduction to the subject. The tape would contain a few minutes of an opening monologue or “churn,” with opinions and personal stories and how some current event of the day matters to you and your listeners. The more personal the story or issue, the more universal it is.

I once had a client, a news anchor and author who was an expert in finance, who had never before hosted a talk radio show and wanted to try it. She taped a charming story of two little old ladies who came to her for financial help and discovered they were nearly millionaires as a result of their hobby of collecting antique dishes. Her ten minute tape got her the opportunity to audition and substitute host on some of the top stations and networks in the country, without actual talk radio experience.



TURI RYDER

Turi Ryder was a jock on CHR KIIS-FM/Los Angeles when I met her. She had quite a resume. Her top-40 DJ days included some of the best stations in America. (WLS-AM/Chicago and KFRC & KIOI/San Francisco.) She was bright, fun, loud, and lovable, but with a definite dark side. I thought she'd be perfect for talk radio. She went on to mornings at KGW/Portland then to KSTP/Minneapolis. Today, she's back home in Chicago doing talk radio at WLS.

Here are a few more tips from rock-to-talker Turi Ryder:

- Audition as the entertainer you are, not as the host you think “they” want.
- Don’t be afraid to say “I don’t know” on the air. Audiences prefer honesty and ignorance to artifice and arrogance.
- A little silence can be a valuable thing.
- “Nice” is a luxury you can’t always afford.
- Establish rules for your show, then play by them.
- You have 50,000 watts and a mic, the callers have only a phone and a radio. Give them a break.
- Never make fun of a caller after he or she is gone. Exception: If he or she hung up on you.
- Changing the names of stores and people lets you tell more of the truth or bigger, better lies.
- Not everyone who has done something interesting, IS interesting.
- **EVERYTHING IS MATERIAL!**

CHAPTER 3

Creating Powerful Radio: Talk Shows

"A picture is nothing but a bridge between the soul of the artist and that of the spectator."

Eugene Delacroix (1798-1863)

"Talkradio -- Because all great minds don't think alike."

WMC/Memphis slogan, 1994

Talk radio in America wasn't born. It evolved from music radio. A few music hosts began taking calls on-air between records, particularly on AM stations with strong personalities. Soon, there were fewer records and more listener phone calls. When it drew the listeners and advertisers, a few stations allowed talk to stay, either in selected dayparts, or in rare cases, around the clock.

Talk radio, when talk radio wasn't cool

When I entered the talk radio arena some 20 years ago, it was a format perceived by many as expensive, boring and useful only for older demographics. Conventional wisdom held that talk

listeners lived alone, were unhip and too poor to have a real life. Some assumed the audience cared only about events in their hometown.

Those of us doing talk knew this wasn't true. Our listeners were savvy, upscale and worldly. Many were exceptionally well-read and well-informed. Generally, talk stations produced healthy ratings, high revenues and strong response for advertisers.

Even so, traditional talk radio stereotypes persisted until the early 1990s. That's when satellite program distribution and station economics helped to propel a talk radio revolution.

The *Rush* to AM radio; The '90s News-Talk explosion

The catalyst was Rush Limbaugh, whose unique combination of politics and wit brought unprecedented success to the format and demolished a lot of the "conventional wisdom" about talk radio. The seismic impact of Limbaugh's nationally-syndicated talk show, which drew large daytime shares on hundreds of stations, collapsed the notion that talk had to be local. Content matters, addresses don't.

Previous talk offerings such as Larry King and Talknet had applied this principle and succeeded by syndicating on large numbers of stations in nighttime hours. Limbaugh amplified it and shattered the network talk taboo in the lucrative daytime hours.

The critics of talk radio were wrong and the numbers proved it. Limbaugh's talk listeners were young, hip and savvy. And, as station managers quickly noticed, there were lots of them.

When Limbaugh's syndicated show debuted in the late '80s, it was carried on fewer than 100 stations; by the mid-'90s, it was carried on more than 650 stations. Program suppliers rushed to meet the demand, offering station operators easy access to satellite-delivered talk programming at all hours.

The News-Talk format exploded. Once dominant AM music stations, whose audiences had deserted them for FM, suddenly began doing talk. In the U.S., markets that had one talk outlet suddenly found themselves with as many as five. News-Talk is now the second most popular format in the United States. More stations are picking up the News-Talk format than any other format.

Talk saved many moribund stations from oblivion. But, prospering in an ocean of talk competition means providing a better product than one's competitors. Fortunately, like all good radio, talk radio doesn't have to be more expensive to be more powerful.

Radio Rule #1:

Find out what the audience wants and give it to them

Talk radio listeners are curious people. They want to know nearly everything: what is going on in their town, their country, their world. They tend to listen when they are by themselves, so the more personal the host gets, the better it is.

Talk radio is intimate while being anonymous. It allows listeners and callers to interact without exposing themselves to the dangers that might arise in a real life confrontation. It's a strange sort of freedom. The results can get "real" pretty *fast*. Maintain control and remember, *you own the show*. When a personal truth is well articulated, the more it touches the caller, host and listener. It has universal and mass appeal.

Who will "make it?"

It's hard to predict who "has it" as a host and who does not. Talent does shine through, but talent must be combined with a skill for communicating, watching and listening.

Some of the best, most talented and original "talkers" are *lousy* communicators because they don't listen. On the other

hand, some of the most brilliant minds are boring in a talk radio setting because they can't talk. The only way to know whether a host will work is to see how the audience responds.

Jack Swanson, Program Director of KGO-AM/San Francisco, one of the most successful talk stations in America, gives this sage and important warning, "Never be fooled into thinking that what *you* like is what your *audience* likes." An example is KGO's overnight personality. He gets huge ratings, but many sane and reasonable people find him hard to take for an extended period. However, he pulls in 25 shares, and you can't argue with that.

As a program director, you need to determine what you want from your talk show and what your listeners expect.

Listeners expect a talk show to present a point of view. Audiences also expect a talk show to expose them to new ideas so that they can learn new things. Famed CBS journalist Edward R. Murrow once said of TV (but true for radio as well), "*This instrument can teach, it can illuminate and it can inspire.*" A listener once commented in an Arbitron diary, "I didn't go to a college or university—*talk radio is my college education.*"

NPR's Susan Stamberg writes in her book Talk:

"Talk radio is a 'rear view mirror' [of our time]. The talk comes from rage, frustration, pain, pride, exhilaration. It's public talk absorbed in private. That private experience called radio. It's also talk between strangers, although it can sometimes sound like friends. The 'unearned intimacy' (photographer Richard Avedon's phrase) of a call or interview on a radio show can make deep connections, two people who have never met—trying together in a brief period of time for clarity, understanding."

Listeners expect talk radio to both validate and challenge their beliefs. Most of all, they want it to be interesting and fun. They want this entire process to be entertaining and a little bigger than life. When these expectations have been met, you have created powerful talk radio!

The formula

John Mainelli, a longtime colleague and former program director of WABC/New York says: “Entertain informatively and inform entertainingly.”

Here is how to select and handle topics on the air. This will make your approach both personal and powerful.

Set powerful bait

The talk show monologue or “churn” sets the scene for the show. The monologue, like the first page of a great book, should capture the audience with an original approach to your subject. There is *no such thing* as a *boring* topic, just boring hosts, and dull, unimaginative approaches to the topics.

Much like a fisherman baiting his hook and then casting the fly, the host must first tempt the listener to engage, and then think about the information, so that he or she wants to hear more. The churn must entice listeners.

It’s up to you as the host to make everything you use work. Peel back each subject like an onion and find the most interesting ways to present your ideas. If the topic is truly interesting, it will also be genuinely interesting to you. And if it is interesting to you, you will find a way to make it interesting to the audience. *Only use material you care about. If you can’t make yourself care about it, don’t use it.*

Don’t waste a minute of the listener’s time on a list of boring stuff you feel you *MUST* discuss. The talk radio police will not be waiting outside to take you away should you forfeit discussing some big story of the day. For instance, if your show starts at 10:00 PM and all day long, the TV news, the morning and afternoon papers have covered a story, CNN’s been hammering it for 24 hours and it’s been on your station all day, do *you* really want to keep talking about it? Do you have a unique view of what has been happening? Anything else to add or say? Think how your audience must feel. Think twice about using something

you are already sick and tired of. Don't be an "actor." Real always works. Keep it fresh for you. Tell the truth. Focus. Use effective storytelling techniques and your show will never be boring.

How do I pick topics that will work?

Ever hear that old expression, "God gave you two ears but just the one mouth?" The most effective and powerful talk show hosts talk less and listen more to the world around them. Start each and every day with this question: What are people doing—really doing—and what are they talking about—really talking about. You can also USE YOUR OWN LIFE as show prep. If you spent an hour waiting in a wrong line for a new driver's license, chances are other people have too. If you have something to say about it, use it. If your child is having trouble learning the new math, chances are you're not the only bleary-eyed parent. In all radio, but especially in talk, the audience feels they know you personally. You and your views are the product here. You have your life to work from. You are the quarter-hour maintenance. Being personal *works*.

It doesn't take much to see how it works. A popular talk host I regularly work with recently had a baby. After a brief announcement on the air that she would be taking extra time off because her new baby girl had to undergo a complicated surgical procedure, she was flabbergasted to receive thousands of cards, letters and gifts from listeners. Most of the cards and letters began, "You don't know me, but I listen to your show every night and consider you a friend..." This host could not believe the level of support and, yes, even love, that came from total strangers who felt they knew her from listening to her talk show.

In addition to your own personal life and experiences, you can, and should, use the wires, newspapers, magazines, and the Internet to scan for stories that outrage, sadden, amuse or frustrate you. If it makes you laugh, cry, or bang your fist on the steering wheel, chances are it will have the same affect on your listeners and send them flying to the phones.

How to do a powerful open or “churn:” The Monologue Method

In *Creating Powerful Radio* seminars or working one-on-one coaching individual hosts, shows, and producers, I break it down into the following list:

DO:

- **Focus.**
What is the issue or topic? What are you trying to say? Know your subject and know why you are talking about it.
- **Engage the listeners.**
What do you want them to do with it?
How do you want them to respond?
- **Give an opinion.**
What is your position on the subject?
What do you think about it. Why do you care?
- **Tell the truth.**
Find your truth. It works every time.
- **Personalize the opinion.**
...with *your own* storytelling.

DO NOT:

- **Ramble.**
- **Appear aimless, scattered, or out of control.**
- **Do topics you don't care about.**
(even if you feel you should care.)
- **Go too long before the punch.**
- **Be boring!**

Scott T. Borden grew up as a preacher's kid who loved radio. He is a client and valued colleague. Although he manages a non-commercial public radio station, he has the same desire for developing and keeping audience ratings that successful commercial station managers do. He programs WNYC-AM & FM/New York City, the highest rated and most-listened-to public radio station in the United States.



SCOTT T. BORDEN

Scott's background includes West Virginia Public Radio and WKYU/Bowling Green, Ky. He says, "My life in radio began in high school working on an independent program aired on WPTR/Albany, N.Y. I thought at the time it was just a hobby."

Here are Scott T. Borden's "Creating Powerful Talk Radio" tips:

- Radio is totally personal. When I listen, I should feel like it's just me and the person on the other end of the radio.
- People listen to radio in groups of one. Never talk to a bigger group.
- Radio, especially talk radio, is part of the "information age." We have to define our unique information niche and work it like crazy.

- Every listener letter represents exactly one listener. Every listener phone call represents exactly one listener.
- Talk show callers do not represent the talk show audience. They are NOT as important as the host who is the thing that all the listeners have in common. Callers are only good if they help the host.
- American radio legend Rick Sklar pointed out that the problem with modern research is it asks people to tell you what they think and do. When asked, people often lie about these things. Actions speak louder than words.
- Good radio is like obscenity-you can't define it, but you know it when you hear it. Sometimes you have to trust your gut instincts.
- People treasure memories. And the things we remember are the things that go really right or really wrong. Make the most of these moments.
- It's radio, not brain surgery. Failure does not equal a dead body on the table. It has to be fun for us too!
- You have to have a great plan for every moment on the air. And you have to be prepared to scrap this plan entirely the first chance you get.

CHAPTER 4

Creating Powerful Radio: Talent

“Every artist dips his brush into his own soul and paints his own nature into his pictures.”

Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887)

Is talent created or is it born? What is that essence of the creative spirit and soul that can move us, change us and entice us?

Whether the work is heard on the radio or displayed on the gallery wall, people are drawn to talent like a moth to the flame. And talent is what stations need to create powerful radio. The essence of the artist and the broadcaster is the same. It is the need to express oneself, to be heard, to create.

Station managers constantly complain that fresh, up-and-coming talent is hard to find. Where are the Howard Sterns, Rush Limbaughs, the Fabulous Sports Babes and Don Imus' of the future? Since talent is born, not “created,” how do we find them? Then, how do we develop and keep them once we've found them?

These are questions program directors and consultants grapple with daily. As more and more stations turn to syndicated programming, there's concern that the traditional smaller market “farm team” method of growing tomorrow's talent, is disappearing. Using a syndicated show may be cheaper in the

short-run, but developing your own talent can pay off down the line in ratings, revenue and good will.

Despite the spectacular growth of talk radio, relatively few stars have developed at the local or network levels. Often shows have gone to individuals who didn't have much training or talent, but did have some degree of fame, particularly in politics. A lot of programmers were seduced by using a big "name" to draw an audience. Usually, this didn't work out. Most *successful* hosts have been people with strong backgrounds in radio.

When developing talent, one of the challenges for overworked GMs and PDs is coping with the "personalities." Top radio talent can be sensitive, volatile, ego-driven, self absorbed, insecure, and infantile. In other words, hard to manage. They need a lot of time, attention and positive feedback. These same "pains in the neck" can be likable and charming. They perform and connect with the audience, bringing in huge numbers of listeners. This means it's up to the manager to decide to make the effort to manage them.

It's worth developing people. If you can afford it, financially and emotionally, try it. When it doesn't work, remember that every kick is a boost! Even the failures can teach you something. Don't dismiss it, or worse, not try again, just because it is the more challenging, risky route.

Program Directors: What to look for in a talent.

So how do you get on the talent development track while continuing to provide a decent level of programming today? There is no easy answer. Asking experts in the field for help and advice is one way. Many PD's use the weekend, fill-in, or late night shifts to find and develop people. Another is to steal promising talent from the competition. If it works, you're a genius. If not, remember this is radio, not brain surgery. If you screw up, usually nobody dies. Don't be too perfect. Allow your faults to show. That's what makes people interesting.



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somebody fun, interesting, topical, and loaded with personality. I listened to hundreds of tapes from all over the country and auditioned several people. None of them proved “right” for the specific profile of the station we were building.

When our afternoon call screener/board operator expressed interest in hosting a show, no one took him seriously, at first. Then we talked to him. He had studied acting at Yale, had a real feel for radio and a wonderful ability to do impressions. He could sing and write parody songs, was original and creative and was up on current events. He was also funny. His idol was the afternoon host, Bob Grant, for whom he was running the board. We tried him out and his show was a riot. The Jay Diamond show is still burning hot on WABC.

The non-radio folk who make it have all the traits of the good radio professionals. WABC’s current morning man, Lionel, was a lawyer who called the talk shows. He was so talented, verbal and funny that the PD of a Florida station gave him a shot on the air. He wound up drawing such huge audiences, he was offered the job in New York.



JAY DIAMOND

Another example is Danny Bonaduce, a former child actor from the popular 1970’s TV show “The Partridge Family.” Chicago radio personality Jonathon Brandmeier had a regular “Where Are They Now” feature on his show. Brandmeier discovered Danny Partridge, alias Danny Bonaduce, in Danny’s own words, “broke and starving” as a Maitre ‘D at an L.A. restaurant. Brandmeier thought Bonaduce such an engaging personality that he helped him land a radio shift at a Philadelphia station.

Although talented, Danny still had serious problems. His next radio job was in Phoenix. It ended after a conviction for beating up a male transvestite hooker in a hotel room. After jail, Bonaduce made the rounds of TV and radio talk shows as proof of the hard times Hollywood kids can face. Eventually, he cleaned up his act, and is now a star in Chicago with a radio show on WLUP-AM and does national television, as well.



DANNY BONADUCE

I've found talent in all kinds of unlikely places. I've worked with comedians, bartenders, teachers, talented callers-turned-host, bus drivers, actors, musicians, newscasters, writers, reporters, scientists, lawyers, doctors, university professors, pet groomers, athletes, stewardesses, pro-team coaches, priests and ministers, cops and housewives, all of whom had personality plus and original things to say. Even those who did not work out were worth a try. The moral is *always be on the lookout for talent*. Look everywhere, from the experts who make guest appearances on your station to the "life" of the next party you attend.

Researching Personality

GM's and PD's would love to have a crystal ball they could consult to find out which personalities will work and which will flop. But, there's just no way to do it with new talent the public hasn't had a chance to experience.

Take a chance, give a talented prospect a shot on the air. Make it a weekend or fill-in slot. See how he or she sounds and trust your instincts. Don't pull the plug too soon. If you believe in a talent, stick it out for a while, even if not everyone in the building shares your belief.

A tip that can save you two ways: never judge the talent on just one show. A talented host should be versatile and able to switch from light to heavy topics. I once heard a guy do a pretty decent show on the right way to hang the toilet paper. The next day he was interviewing Henry Kissinger. It's just as important to know that the quality is consistent even if the topics vary wildly.

Sometimes it's the venue that's to blame. Not everyone is right for every job. The talent may be GREAT, but the setting, or the city or the station is wrong.

One example is funny man Jay Thomas, a talented DJ who never achieved substantial ratings in New York. But when he moved on to Los Angeles, he became the number one personality in morning radio. Now he's acting on TV and is a spokesman for several national products.

Consider David Letterman's first TV talk show. They stuck him on mid-days, playing to harried housewives. Needless to say, it didn't work very well. But the folks at NBC felt they had *something* and gave him another time slot. The rest is history. Less resolute managers might have thrown Letterman on the heap of former TV talk hosts. Believe in talent and take the risk.

Finally, since "talent" encompasses more than just on-the-air, I asked one of the most successful radio guys I know for his thoughts. Jim Arcara is the President of Disney-owned Capital Cities/ABC Radio.

Arcara says, "*Hire smart people...put that ten times.*"

"No, seriously, that's all the advice or tips I can give anyone. I tell young people who want to get into the business, 'find the smartest people you can and go work for them.' How does a

great surgeon become great? That surgeon probably trained under great surgeons to learn. If you are working for wrong people, a dictator type or someone who isn't smart, it's tough." If there is a lack of creative radio, it's usually because people who run things are not that smart."



JIM ARCARA

Arcara says, "Look at what is happening in Europe now. Most radio there was public radio and the people who ran it were bureaucrats. Now with commercial radio in Europe, there's freedom and creative people are getting involved!"

Tips For Finding And Developing Talent:

- Radio can be taught, but talent is rare. If you find the real thing...**MAKE THE HIRE!**
- Look for talent in non-traditional areas.
- Make your choice and then stick by it.
- Don't pull the plug if you don't see immediate results.
- Have faith.
- Motivate the talent with honest feedback and encouragement.

CHAPTER 5

Creating Powerful Radio: Managing Difficult, High-Ego Talent

“Creativity takes courage.”

Henri Matisse (1869-1954)

One of the biggest challenges in Creating Powerful Radio is managing *powerfully creative people*. Often, great radio personalities have large egos and are not the easiest people to work with. Allowing your station’s professional atmosphere to be blighted by tantrums is *not* the best way of working, and it is certainly not the only way of working. With a little consideration on the part of the personality and the managers involved, lots of grief can be avoided.

Not too long ago, I was taking a break in the lunch room of one of my client stations. In between bites of sandwiches, staffers were talking about one of the station’s most talented and successful broadcasters. Actually, he was one of the station’s most talented *former* broadcasters, as he had just been fired.

“But he was so good on the air. I just don’t get it,” lamented the newest member of the air staff. “I listened to him all the time. He was brilliant, funny and spontaneous. A real original. What

happened?” The room went silent. I was thinking the guy must have done something awful, like being caught in a compromising position with a barnyard animal. Finally one of the producers said, “Well he was kind of hard to work with...” Another staffer chimed in, “Yeah, he could really get on your nerves. He complained all the time about everything.” A quiet young woman who had been working as an assistant producer to the ousted personality added, “If you weren’t a big shot, he’d ignore you. It was like I was dirt instead of a professional there to help with the show. I felt like his personal slave. He’d order me to move his car or run outside to put money in the parking meter. He’d never ask or say please, just ‘do it!’”

Having worked herself into a righteous frenzy, the young producer continued. “Whenever something went wrong on the show, like missing a network join, or a spot, or losing a guest on the phone, it was never his fault. He made a huge stink about it and blamed other people. He went through six producers in a year and a half.”

“But the audience loved him!” argued the new guy. “We didn’t.” said the PD, who walked into the lunchroom at that point, ending the discussion.

It has always been my belief that if the people are difficult, but truly talented artists, then it is worth the extra effort to put up with their nonsense, to a point. In the real world, hard-to-get-along-with-people won’t last long. On the other hand, I believe that artists are different kinds of folk. Talent is special, and since gifts in this life are not distributed evenly, the person with abundant talent may be at a deficit in the social skills department.

In her song about Bob Dylan, artist Joan Baez wrote, “A savior’s a nuisance to live with at home.” And she’s mostly right. Just ask Mrs. Picasso. True artists can be difficult to be around day to day. We love and respond to their work, talent, and art, but we have little use for their real life anger, need for attention, lack of respect for authority, and compulsion to win all the time.

How can managers effectively handle this type of personality? The answer is *very carefully*. The first thing is to recognize that, while the talent in question is an adult, legally speaking, that 40-year-old body may hide the emotions of a six-year-old. Don't be fooled by the long legs and beard. You can learn a lot about managing difficult talent by hanging around kids. Like a child, he or she may be very insecure. This is often the price of great talent.

The PD at the aforementioned station admitted that he shut and locked his door or dove for the phone when he saw his "problem" air talent walking down the hall in his direction. I felt bad about this guy, because losing him hurt both the personality and the station. But, I'm just the consultant and they had to live with him every day. The station succumbed to the temptation of hiring a lesser talent because he was easier to live with.

I walked in a day too late for this one, and I still feel very frustrated about it. Had I had a chance to sit down and work with this talent and his management before the situation blew up, here are a few of the points I would like to have gotten across:

- Don't be a talkaholic. People are busy. Don't distract them. Let them go about their work.
- Pick your fights carefully. Don't fight every battle. Save your energies for the important issues.
- Don't question authority until you've given the matter proper consideration.
- Have a little patience. Don't overreact.

- Your boss is not a mindreader. Tell your manager when you need attention. Set a time. It can't always be now.
- Don't ignore or mistreat those people "below" you.
- Be a human being. Have a heart. Be sensitive to others.
- Save your show for on air, not in the hall!

WHEN TWO WORLDS COLLIDE

For a group of professional communicators, we don't do a very good job of it amongst ourselves. On the following page is a typical silent communication between a manager and an on-air talent.

TALENT	vs.	MANAGEMENT
Pay attention to me!		You make a good salary. What more do you want?
I'm important. Make me feel that way, NOW!		I have 10 other things to do right now!
I don't like anyone telling me what to do!		You leave me emotionally exhausted every time we argue!
I want you listen to my show every day and respond, NOW!		I just spent half an hour on the phone with an angry listener. I don't need your confrontation!
I need positive feedback. Nobody appreciates me!		I get this from my three-year-old at home. I don't need it at work from you.
I want to make a difference. I want to be great!		Why can't you just do your job like everyone else?
Look at me. Listen to me. I want input. I want to count!		We just talked about this 2 days ago. I'm not changing my mind!

Don't pull a trigger

Never, and I mean *never*, hotline the host while the show is in progress. A hotline call in the middle of the show intimidates the host. He or she stops thinking creatively and begins worrying.

It's best if the manager makes a note, considers the problem overnight, and then requests a meeting with the talent the following day. Try not to let talent stew overnight or worry for hours with an, "I want to see you in my office" call that doesn't make the purpose of the meeting clear. Ideally, an aircheck of the program in question should be available for the meeting and managers must be prepared to listen to talent's reasons for handling something in a particular way.

Once again, please *resist* the temptation to hotline your talent while he or she is on the air. The hotline should be used only for programming which is likely to cost the station either it's broadcast license or millions of dollars. The hot line is not a rolled-up newspaper with which you may strike the talent on his or her nose. Learn how to bridge the gap between management and talent by understanding the other persons' viewpoint. Address his or her concerns while calmly explaining yours, no matter how often you have to do it.

I can't tell you how many times I've come across people who were great on the air, always got big ratings, but never kept a job for any substantial length of time. They "station-hopped" because they had demanding personalities and were tough to deal with *off* the air. They lost and their stations lost because of the talent's attitude and behavior. Managers had no patience for this kind of act and looked for the first opportunity to dump them.

While managers need the skills to deal with touchy talent, no one can save a truly immature host from him or herself. People who want to make a career on the air need to keep this in mind. Managers should remember this when considering hiring a talent who has a "reputation."

CHAPTER 6

Creating Powerful Radio: Producers--Tips on Finding the Right One

"The artist is the person who makes life more interesting or beautiful, more understandable or mysterious or probably in the best sense, more wonderful."
George Bellows (1882-1926)

The producer's job is vital in talk radio. I get calls all the time from station managers and talent looking for the "right" producer. I also get calls from producers who hate their hosts and want the equivalent of a radio "divorce" but can't leave because of the "children," meaning the show itself. Some simply need the job. Producer jobs are hard to get. There is often little reward, low pay, and the hours are long and stressful.

Like all good relationships, the producer and host must listen to each other. Both should share the same goals for the show. Hosts and producers spend a lot of time together. It's almost a marriage. One of my favorite hosts in talk radio once said, "It was easier to find my wife than find the right producer."

Sometimes you get lucky and the right producer finds you. Some things to remember in the host/producer relationship:

- 1) Be patient.
- 2) Be willing to work it out, not walk out.

The following ideas are guidelines. Professionals can work with just about anyone. Of course, you do not have to like your host to produce a hot show, but it helps. If a host knows he or she has the support of a fine, sharp and talented producer, the show works better.

Get one that likes you

When you are on the air, it's almost like being naked in public. You are exposed and vulnerable. It is just you, the phones and that "blank page." At times, you will feel closer to your producer than you do to your spouse. You need a producer that is on your side, supportive when you feel alone on-air, a presence beyond the glass wall. A producer is someone who believes in you and your show and wants to make you and the product sound great.

Grow your own

Great producers are not born, they are developed. If someone wants to produce a show, look for his or her promise and potential. Is this person bright? Good at handling pressure? Fearless? Can he or she pick up the phone and get the White House as easily as the local dog catcher? Can he or she get along with the news department? Can this person say no? Does he or she like listening to talk radio *and* like listening to you?

Keep the good ones

Many radio stations are sloppy about hiring and hanging on to good producers. They tend to promote secretaries, hire minimum wage students, or people's relatives. The good ones go to TV or leave when they ask to be paid, or paid more. There is very little producer training or job security available. It's a trial by fire and if you find a good one, do *whatever* it takes to keep him or her. Make your producer feel valued. And finally, today's producers are tomorrow's program directors. When I look for PDs, I always take a serious look at who is behind the scenes screening and producing the hot shows.

Hire right

A good producer can add tremendously, helping make your show powerful radio; A bad or angry one can kill you. Try not to get them mad for no reason.

Share the wealth

Treat producers nicely. You get the glory, they're underpaid. You get the credit, they get yelled at. Share the perks, the books, the free tickets, and free meals. Take them to lunch or dinner. Give them honest feedback. If you blow up at them, apologize, and don't wait too long to do it.

Thank them publicly

Howard Stern always takes a few minutes to plug his "helpers" on the show. So do many of the other top hosts. At the end of the show, take a few seconds to thank your producer by name, the screener and board operator (call him or her the "director" of the show). Do this at the same time you thank your guests and listeners. It takes little time, but your producer and board op will be grateful, and happy, and that's worth it.

Don't hire a blind date

Get to know your producer. Try him or her out before you make the final hire. Interns sometimes work out very well as producers after they get to know the ropes. Insist on having input into the hiring process. Again, get one who actually likes to listen to your show.

Hire someone with good judgment; who you respect and can still fight with

Expecting not to have huge disagreements with your producer is unrealistic, kind of like expecting never to fight with your spouse. The producer-host relationship is *intense*. The fights never feel fair because most of the time, THE HOST wins. Conflict can be healthy. A host should be able to freely express him or herself with the producer. The producer should be able to do the same if the relationship is fairly honest going in. A “kiss up” trying to please you or agreeing with you all the time does not really help the show.

The nice way to say “no”

Niceness does not count. Get a tough person with a backbone to screen your on-air calls. I don't mean rude, but I do mean firm. Get one who can tell people “no.” Hire someone who *knows* when to blow off boring or potentially boring calls and makes a fast decision to get rid of them.

You certainly don't want a producer to anger your audience. However, the producer, along with the callers and host, must understand that only 1% of your listeners will ever pick up the phone and call. The show is for the other 99% who listen.

Use your list

Your callers are your “active listeners.” They are loyal, listen regularly, and are not too shy to call. A sharp producer in Florida actually made up a database of the “hot,” powerful callers to his show. He kept this list in the computer. Every now and then, when the board was slow and the night was long, he’d phone up those people and ask them, by chance, if they were listening. If not, they’d tune in right away and usually come up with some good comments to move the show forward.

This producer also kept a second database of active listeners, including their phone numbers, faxes and addresses. When the host was scheduled to make a public appearance or speech, he would mail an announcement to those listeners, knowing that they liked to be included. Many turned up at these events, much to the pleasure of the host and sponsors on-hand.

This is show biz

Choose a producer who knows you are doing a radio *show*, and that it must be fun, entertaining, and not a bully pulpit for the guest. Your producer should *never* promise a guest more than ten minutes on the air. If guests are boring, have the producer dump them. Thank them and *get rid of them*. Great guests can always stay and finish out an hour.

Formatics count

It is especially important when the host is new to talk radio to have a producer who understands the importance of formatics. Lots of producers know the basics but are never told why they matter so much. Why is it important to say the call letters before every call, every few minutes, and before a stopset? Researcher Steve Apel with Media Perspectives explains the ratings are based, “...on the listener’s ability to *recall* radio listening.

Apel says, “Memory is an imperfect thing, especially when it comes to a ‘low commitment’ behavior like radio listening. As a result, some radio listening is never counted in the ratings. Listener’s fail to note this listening when they complete their ratings diary or talk to a market research interviewer.”

The best way to solve this problem is to make your audience remember and write down your call letters and station name by *repeating* them on the air as often as possible. It helps if your producer understands the rationale behind other structured formatics as well.

Find a producer who reads the paper

Use your producer for topic selection. Another set of eyes and ears can only help you. Have him or her go through newspapers, books, magazine articles, and the Internet. Talk to your producer about what her or she has been doing and observing. Let’s say for example that you are an older male and your producer is a young female student. You have a couple of perspectives here that can only help the show.

Get a flexible, not a rigid person

Make sure your producers understand that a great talk show does not always stick to one topic. Sometimes, a great show meanders like a river. It does not always move from point “A” to point “B.” A spontaneous incident on the air or a wacky call can sometimes take the show in a whole new, and better, direction.

To illustrate this, here is a real-life story. Three politicians were having an on-air discussion on economic reform.

The show was putting me to sleep. A listener called in with a question. In the background dogs were barking so loudly, they

could not be ignored. The host asked about the size of a dog that could make that big of racket. It turned out to be a rottweiler, and there were several, because the caller was in the rottweiler-breeding business. After some discussion of pets, another listener, this one a psychologist, rang through. He wanted to know what type of pets the politicians had. This psychologist had a theory about power and pet ownership. He reasoned that “cat people” need less control, because cats “do what they want.” On the other hand, control freaks tend to have dogs because dogs respond to commands better than cats. And what kind of pets did these politicians have? They all had dogs.

It’s a good thing the producer didn’t screen out that “magic moment”—a caller who was slightly off the point.

In February 1995, Geller Media International sponsored the first ever “Producer’s Workshop” for news/talk radio. Producers, hosts, talent agents, managers, and other media people from all over the world gathered in New York to share ideas and learn. These are some ideas that emerged from the seminar.

Tips for Talk Show Producers and Screeners:

- Focus on your audience, not the one percent of the listeners who call in.
- Make sure your host has material to talk about if there are no calls coming in. Plan your show as if there will be no calls.
- Don’t let all your lines jam up. Screen out weak calls and keep some lines open so better calls can come in.
- If you don’t understand a caller, nobody else will either. Get rid of the call!

- Get your callers relaxed and talking, but don't promise them that they will be on the air.
- Build a database of sources that you can use during shows for alternate/opposing opinions, or for emergency guests if the planned guest cancels. Cross-reference by areas of expertise, affiliations, etc.
- Be sure to give guests specific instructions on how to get to the studio or, if the interview is by phone, who will make the call. Make sure they have a number where you can be reached if the studio doors are locked or in case of emergency.
- Try to get guests to send clippings/background materials ahead of time for the host to study.
- Make sure your guests understand who their audience will be.
- Make sure guests know that the host will take care of all promotion for their book, their seminar or whatever. There's nothing worse than a guest trying to plug themselves, especially since they usually don't do it smoothly.
- If something major occurs, don't be afraid to cancel a guest! Radio's greatest asset is immediacy. Go with what's happening now and reschedule the guest.

CHAPTER 7

Creating Powerful Radio: Morning Shows

"An artist's working life is marked by intensive application and intense discipline."

John F. Kennedy (1917-1963)

Why is the morning show different from the rest of the day?

Morning drive is traditionally the most-listened-to daypart in radio. It starts the day, commands the highest ad rates, and requires the most up to date information so the listener can get out the door and face the day. A solid morning show can set the foundation for a solid radio station. On music stations, morning drive is the last bastion of personality radio. Usually, stations can come up with the basic elements that drive a morning show (news, weather, traffic updates, music, promos for the rest of the dayparts and topical goings-on), but what is unique to each show are the *hosts* and *personalities*. That is what the "other" stations cannot duplicate.

**“Toothbrush Radio,” or
“I hate to get up in the morning.”**

A favorite research survey I read asked people in one American midwestern city about their morning routines. The purpose was to look at listener needs, i.e. how each used his or her time in the morning, in order to improve programming during morning drive.

A warning, however. This particular survey showed *listener habits* and may only apply to this *specific* city, but here is what that study found to be a “typical morning routine,” for a “typical listener”:

THE ROUTINE

5:30 AM	the alarm clock rings
5:45 AM	the snooze alarm rings
5:50 AM	actually get up
5:51 AM	go to bathroom
5:55 AM	start coffee
6:00 AM	feed dog
6:02 AM	enter shower
6:08 AM	shave/brush teeth/blow dry hair
6:20 AM	drink first cup of coffee, look at newspaper headlines
6:21 AM	listen for weather report
6:32 AM	wake the kids
6:35 AM	get the kids in and out of bathroom/get dressed for the day
6:58 AM	feed the kids and eat breakfast
7:15 AM	pack lunches.
7:20 AM	Organize the kid’s stuff for school and various other activities for today
7:25 AM	Organize your own stuff for the day. Find kid’s lost sock.
7:35 AM	Final house check, grab jacket, check for wallet, keys/lock door/out.
7:40 AM	Drive to work

Of course, habits vary and this list is a sample composite but, the research did show that people are creatures of habit and *rarely vary* from their personal morning routine.

Based on years of experience, here is my analysis of listener's morning habits:

Attitude

- People do not like to get up in the morning. They are tired, groggy, and do not feel like hopping out of bed on a dark, cold winter morning if they do not absolutely have to.
- People feel that from the moment the alarm rings to the moment they get to their jobs, they are on their *boss's* time, not their own. Many people do not love their jobs and there is resentment of the morning rush. Because of this, humor on the radio in the mornings is *especially* important. If you can make a bunch of grouchy, groggy people smile or laugh when they don't feel like moving, you keep them listening!

Reality

- If the radio gets boring, listeners tune out and turn on TV in the background. TV has gotten smarter, too. Those morning or "breakfast" shows now offer all the elements a radio show has—with the option of pictures.

- People want and *need* to know what time it is. Yes, they do have clocks in every room and some even wear watches. But it is easier if the radio tells you every couple of minutes what time it is so you know if you are on your morning schedule or running late.

What they need

- When people wake up to face the day, they need to know basic stuff: What happened while I was asleep? Did they drop the bomb? Are we fighting World War III? Can we drink the water? Is it safe to go out and pick up the newspaper? What will everyone be talking about today at work? (If I don't have time to read the paper this morning, I still don't want to look like an uninformed fool.) Also, what can I hear on the radio that will put me a bit ahead of my colleagues at work?
- Give the time and weather a lot, listeners want to know: How cold is it out there? Where are my boots? Do I need a raincoat? How do I dress the kids? Will it take extra time to get to work?

More reality

- *People are creatures of habit.* Personally conservative, they do not like changes at any time, least of all in the morning, when they are tired and cranky.

Other suggestions for powerful morning radio

Up the pace for morning drive. Move it along. The people listening now are in a hurry and don't have the time to get deeply involved in long, in-depth interviews or ongoing sagas. Understand your listeners, less is more in mornings. But, make what you do count!

Mornings are when show prep and planning your air time matters the most. Your awareness of the brevity of the listener's attention span in this daypart is key.

Jonathon Brandmeier from "the Loop" in Chicago (WLUP) explains his method for success in mornings. *"I break my show down into hours. Every hour should be a different show. If you continue something you did from 6-7 all the way until 9-10, the guy from 9-10 just waking up doesn't know what you're talking about."*



JONATHON BRANDMEIER

Segmentation

Consultant E. Karl wrote in his 1985 "State of the Art," *In the morning, if you get your listeners listening for an average of 15 minutes an hour, you're doing pretty well. So, look at each hour as a package that has FOUR 15 minute shows in it...Each segment [should] contain all of the key elements you would have in any one whole hour of a morning show, e.g. entertainment, music, news, weather and the other services."*

Remember, it's important to:

- Prepare.
- Read everything.
- Make it matter.
- Have things to say.
- Be real.
- Have fun.

It's hard to get up in the morning

Don't mention how tired you are. It's your job to get the listeners out the door, with your morning show to motivate and get them going. If it is already a drag to get up early and get out, the least you can do for people is give them some help in facing the day. Maybe they'll feel better about it because they heard your show. And don't get too wired on coffee. Frenetic energy makes people nervous.

What time is it?

Give the service elements a lot: time, weather, traffic updates and quick news headlines. Tell the truth, never be boring, and give people what they can use both now and during the day.

Mornings are the place where music radio and talk radio most intersect. Here are some thoughts and ideas from those who know what it takes to create a powerful morning show.



MATTSIEGEL

Matt Siegel is the morning man at WXKS (KISS-108 FM) in Boston. He charms audiences with his funny, warm personality. The points he makes on the following list are a very important part of creating powerful radio, no matter what your format or daypart. Here is his top ten list of what it takes:

- *Be Honest.* Praise what you like...rip up what you hate...don't lie for the sake of a joke. This is how the audience gets to know you.
- *Use your own life as a source of material.* It's amazing how the audience always seems to know what's real. If they don't get to know something about you, they won't be loyal.
- *Be funny.* Don't forget you are entertaining them. This is radio, not therapy.
- *Be specific.** Name names—your wife's name, your boss' name, your friend's names, etc. That's what makes it real, thus scary, thus interesting.
- *Be vulnerable.* Say something that you think might be inappropriate or a little personal.

- *Be a grown up.* You can play New Kids On the Block and you can talk about them, but if you act like you are 18 when you are 35, you sound like a jerk.
- *Don't put women down.* It's easy, it's cheap and you are better than that.
- *Be nice.* No matter how far you want to go, no matter how wild your act is, let the audience see something in you they like or, eventually, you will start to annoy them.
- *Don't be a wimp.* If you think it's funny or important, say it. Stop looking over your shoulder.
- **Never ever, ever say, "Good Mornin' to ya!"**

**A reminder: In America, there are rules about slander and libel. Be aware of the possible legal ramifications when using specific people, companies, products, etc. in your show. When in doubt, use a pseudonym or leave out identifiable details.*

Sean Ross has worked with and written about radio for years, first at Radio & Records, then Billboard magazine. He worked in A&R finding artists for Profile Records in New York City. Ross programmed WGCI-AM/Chicago and was Creative Director at WDRE/Long Island.



SEAN ROSS

Ross' two favorite formats are oldies and urban, but his thoughts on creating powerful radio are valuable for programmers and morning shows of any stripe.

- Program for yourself. Despite all the dogma about thinking like a listener and not a radio programmer, if you don't enjoy the product yourself, how can anybody else?
- Use your special gift. If you're going to do something anybody else can do on the radio, why did they need to hire you?
- Some of those old wives were pretty smart. Don't reject the "old wives tales" of programming out of hand. A station won't live or die if there is a power record out of the stopset, tempo at the top of the hour, etc. But it WILL sound better.
- When you become the 800th person to defy a cliché, you're not defying a cliché. If your taxi driver is really a natural, put him on the radio. But if 799 other people have already cluttered the airwaves with local politicians, punk rockers, and their orthodontist, a good DJ will be just fine.
- Hire writers. Only somebody who can write is going to be able to sell the same record, the same contest, the same crossplug 37 times and do it 37 different ways.

- Yes, talented people ARE supposed to be difficult. But don't waste your time on anybody who abuses the privilege.

- These could be the last days of locally programmed, non-satellite radio. Use the station you now have to do great local radio that entertains or touches the listeners with every break. In five years, you'll be allowed to wax nostalgic for local radio. The broadcasters who threw their station on satellite or the hard-drive won't.

- You gotta believe. The world is full of successful stations with no money, bad signals, etc. Clearly, nobody told them they had a problem.

- Don't use the signal to hurt people. There ARE listeners who will let their dog eat dog food out of their mouth to win concert tickets if you insist on searching them out. It's no big deal to them, since many folks with REAL jobs endure degrading existences anyway. But wouldn't you rather make people feel better than feel stupid? Hint, the latter takes a lot more talent, especially now.

- Every generation's music will become an oldies format someday. Start carting the library for "classic rap" now. It's closer than you think.

Dave Sholin is Top 40 Editor at Gavin in San Francisco. Although Sholin is a legendary disc jockey, he's been a PD and helped a lot of budding young talents become more powerful broadcasters. Sholin figured out early on that the secret is to "be yourself." He always makes time to talk with, or hear tapes from, radio beginners.



DAVE SHOLIN

Here are Dave Sholin's Creating Powerful Radio tips:

- Always keep in mind the first eight letters of the word "personality": P-E-R-S-O-N-A-L. Whether one million listeners or 100, each one should feel the conversation is being directed to them.
- Trendiness has a short shelf life. Reflecting trends is quite different from embracing the flavor-of-the-month approach.
- Origination always beats imitation. Allowing unique and likable qualities of your personality is the goal.
- Don't feel the need to be funny on every break. Forced humor often sounds that way.

- Try and avoid the echo technique, repeating what the caller just said.

Example:

“Hi, who’s this?”

“John.”

“Well John, Where do you live?”

“Hillview.”

“Oh, Hillview, etc...”

- Don’t be afraid to push the envelope and try different or improper techniques. Though batting 1.000 is unlikely, play the percentages.
- Anyone in a music format needs to remember the music is the star. Leave the negative personal opinions at the door. The songs must be great, otherwise, why play them?
- Become an expert on the varied interests of the local community. Get connected to those in the know. Before mentioning any well-known local figure or local town, make sure your pronunciation is correct.
- Less is more. The fewer the words, the greater the impact.
- So-called rules should be considered as guidelines. In some cases, they need to be twisted or broken.

Air Personality Ross Brittain has been on stations around the country and knows how to be a morning man, combining humor, heart, and reality with an edge. He's currently waking up the people of Hartford, Conn. at WKSS. This list comes from his days doing mornings on WHTZ (Z-100)/New York.



ROSS BRITTAIN

Here are Ross Brittain's tips for jocks:

- Over-prepare the day before.
- Do the things your listeners do.
- Make things bigger than they really are. (Theater of the mind—produce BIG or overproduce).
- Structure your breaks BEFORE the mic opens. (Use post-it notes to remind yourself, etc.)
- Remember your audience composition when building in features.
- Don't get caught up in "Information Overload." DELEGATE!

- Cluster your commercials correctly and clean up your talk breaks to avoid clutter.
- Speak concisely. Edit copy or write down important items so you won't get lost.
- Remember to use your sense of forward motion to move, or not move your show.

CHAPTER 8

Creating Powerful Radio: Avoiding Burnout

“What was any art but a mold in which to imprison for a moment the shining elusive element which is life itself—life hurrying past us and running away, too strong to stop, too sweet to lose.”

Willa Cather (1876-1947) from “The Song of the Lark”

For coal miners, it’s black lung. For musicians, it’s drug overdoses. For postal workers, it’s disgruntled former employees. But, for air personalities, the number one occupational hazard is creative burnout.

How can you tell when talented people are suffering from burnout? They complain, they call in sick, they’re late for work. The ideas don’t come as easily. They watch the clock. They fear the blank page and begin to rely more on other people’s ideas than their own. They want more guests, interviews, and “easy” stuff. They seem less “into” their jobs. Their shows aren’t as good as they used to be and they just don’t seem too excited anymore.

When I wanted to learn more about creative burnout, I hosted a dinner party at my home. I invited actors, artists, a

psychologist, a film director, a textile designer, an architect, and some radio and TV people. Everyone in attendance made his or her living by facing the blank page and finding things to fill it. What did *they* do when the ideas stopped flowing? I gave everyone a pencil and paper. They began to write, talk and argue. Here's what emerged:

Get real

Lower your expectations. Nobody is at his or her most creative all the time. Now may be the time to tap into the creativity of those around you. If your fire is burning low, rekindle yourself with the fires of others.

Right job? Right now?

Proper casting. Are you doing the right work for *you*, right now? Determine what you enjoy about what you do. If the list is short, it may be time to rethink your job and find something else. As scary as change can be, it's better to make the switch than burn out in a job that's not right for you.

Understanding, humane managers

Artists, on the radio or elsewhere, need the right environment to grow. Managers need to understand that creative people are sensitive, introspective and often insecure. Talent needs to understand that since you don't come with a list of "care and feeding" instructions, open communication with management is critical. An environment that doesn't take those factors into account will contribute to burnout.

Get a life

Do not become your work. Do other things that make you feel good and give you a sense of accomplishment. Create a balance in your life. Burnout occurs when you can no longer

grow as a person. Don't let that happen. Challenge yourself to do new things outside of work.

Avoid energy vampires

You know the type, people who seem to suck the life right out of you by overwhelming you with their problems. Surround yourself with people who nourish you, who give, not just take.

Feed your head

Look at art. Go to a movie or attend the theater. Read. Talk to your kids. If you don't have kids, talk to someone else's. Get out that set of watercolor paints up in the closet and make some art. Listen to music. Try gardening. Attend the theater. Do something, anything, that will stimulate your own creativity and sustain you, even if you are not "in the mood right now."

Do what you want

On the air, when possible, do only what truly interests you. Give others assignments that you don't particularly care about. Stick to what interests and matters to you.

Remember why you came

Rediscover your professional and personal roots. Take a look at what motivated you at the beginning of your career. What got you interested in doing this work in the first place. Why did you like being on the radio in the beginning? Why was it fun? Remember what led you down this long and winding road, and, if appropriate, try to get back to the start.

Follow your heart

Follow your true interests. Look at what really drives you, makes you feel energized and passionate about life. Do those things.

Take a break

Take some time away; a day, a week, a month, a year. You may just need a brief change of pace to break the monotony of your daily routine and put it back in perspective.

Managing against burnout

Program directors and other managers of artists and broadcasters have a special responsibility to guard against burnout in key talent. The Appleton Broadcasting Company newsletter, "Radio Sales Analyst," offered some worthwhile suggestions in this area under the heading "Principles of Motivation:"

- The employee's behavior is functionally related to the way you treat them.
- People don't resist their own ideas.
- People will live up (or down) to your expectations of them.
- You must know the individuals you are trying to motivate.
- People will change only when they think they have to.
- Productive activity that is ignored will tend to decrease over time.
- Achievement and recognition are the top motivators at all levels.

Burnout; The radio life can be “rootless”

“You can always tell how well a broadcaster is doing by the size of the U-Haul trailer behind his car.”

“Radio is like pinball. If you win, you get to play another round.”

“The only job security is the ability to ‘secure’ another job.”

Radio in the United States is not the most stable of careers. Often, you must move to a new city to have a chance to move up. You might find yourself out of a job at any time for just about any reason.

This insecurity plays an important part in adding stress and havoc to the already fragile life of the radio artist. Humor is one way to deal with this tough side of the business, which generates a lot of burnout. Some broadcasters can't take it, give up, and find other work. It follows that making your job a bit more secure would cut down on some of the burnout.

KFWB/Los Angeles reporter and journalist Sheri Inglis addresses the issue. She calls it: “Pursuing a Career in Radio and Living to Tell About It.”

Sheri Inglis has worked as PD at talk-formatted KPSI/Palm Springs; been an anchor and news reporter at KRTH/Los Angeles and in San Diego; and served as Executive Producer at Christian talk-formatted KKLA-FM/Los Angeles. She now works as an anchor-news reporter for KFWB/Los Angeles, “All News 98.” She also writes



SHERI INGLIS

news for KCOP-TV, channel 13, in Los Angeles. She's smart about the business and knows how to be a *whole* person, not just a radio person.

She says: "These are for those who want to work in radio and survive."

- Look for a career in radio as you would a marriage partner. Don't get in because you think you can live with it. Get in only if you feel you can't live without it.
- DIVERSIFY! This is the single most important key to surviving the long haul in radio. Someone told me when I first began my career, "There ain't no gold watch in this business." Aside from a few rare exceptions, they were right. Resist the temptation to launch headlong into an exciting career as a disc jockey, talk host, news reporter or anchor etc. and leave it at that.

While you're pursuing your radio career, also learn and grow another professional skill. Whether it's public relations, marketing, script writing, real estate sales, flower arranging, court reporting or teaching scuba lessons, you need something else to fall back on. I don't know of a single radio veteran who hasn't nursed a bruised ego at least a few times following an ownership change, budget cut, format shift or political fall from grace.

Pursuing a second career admittedly takes extraordinary determination, but you'll save yourself and your family added financial devastation if you have a back up plan up and running. By not putting all your "eggs" in one basket, you also empower yourself to move on and, often, up in your radio career rather than simply accepting a bad or unchallenging situation at a given station out of fear of unemployment.

- Always have a usable tape and resume ready to send or deliver at all times, no matter how happy or popular you are in your present gig. New opportunities will often arise without notice and little response time. Be prepared!
- Don't get involved in station gossip or politics. You increase your chances of being spared through ratings dips and managerial changes if you keep your mouth shut and your nose clean.
- Keep a good attitude about the station. No matter how messed up things are, avoid complaining to management or co-workers. Be very selective about the battles you want to fight, then fight them with the highest level of dignity, professionalism and maturity possible. If you are unhappy at a given station, "MOVE ON!"

CHAPTER 9

Creating Powerful Radio: Show Prep or, “On a Dull Day...”

“...creating is never given to us all by itself. It always goes hand in hand with the gift of observation. And the true creator may be recognized by his ability to find about him, in the commonest and humblest thing, items worth of note.”

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

Radio is easy when there is a lot going on and plenty to talk about. The real challenge of creating powerful radio is making it work on those days when *nothing* is happening. Sometimes it's hard to find things to talk about that are meaningful, entertaining, relevant and significant.

The last thing you should do on a dull Monday is to start scouring last Thursday's paper for material. The urge to do this is often powerful. Resist! Use your own life experience instead.

Look inward

Everything that happens in your life is show prep. San Francisco disc jockey Melissa McConnell uses her *whole life* as show prep. “24-hours a day, seven days a week—every conscious



"IT'S COME TO OUR ATTENTION THAT YOU HAVE A LIFE OUTSIDE THE OFFICE."

waking moment—[I'm] gathering information to recall later to use on my show."

Try using stories you have heard from family members or friends. One host got on the air and told about his grandparents, both in their '80s and somewhat forgetful. They resolved to keep lists of things to do. One day, Grandma asked Grandpa to be a sport and satisfy a craving. Could he pick up some ice cream at the store? "Do you need to write it down?" she inquired. "No, just the ice cream?" he asked. "Yes," she replied. "I'll remember," he said. Grandpa came back with a dozen eggs, orange juice, a loaf of bread and waffle mix. "I told you to write it down," said his wife. "You forgot the bacon!"

This sort of thing goes on in every family, and the more personal the story, often the more universal it turns out to be. When I was running a news department in the 1980's, I was trying to explain the concept to my staff that when there isn't much happening on the outside, it's time to look inward—to your own life—for original stories and material.

An opportunity to teach them presented itself naturally. One of our new reporters was a young woman who was constantly on the phone with her boyfriend asking him if he missed her. One night, he failed to come home. She came into work crying and could barely concentrate. I took her aside and asked, "Why not look at what is going on with you? What are you feeling?" She said, "I'm going crazy, I can't stand it! I'm jealous. I just know he's with another woman." I suggested that she turn her feelings of jealousy into a story for the radio.

She came up with the idea: "Can a man be satisfied by, and be faithful to, one woman?" Everyone seemed *very* interested in the topic, and many people had something to say on the subject. She interviewed a priest, a psychologist, an author of a book on jealousy, and her neighbor, who had been happily married for 47 years. She took an on-air survey of single men and women and got great material. The majority of young men who had *not* asked their girlfriends to marry said they secretly felt somebody

better might come along so they had decided to wait. The women, meantime, tended to say things like, “I know he’s got faults—he’s not perfect—but if he asks, I’ll marry him.”

The series was so successful that it generated a huge volume of calls and letters, as well as follow-up stories, and a feature news award. It came directly from the reporter’s own life. The more personal you get, the deeper you go, the more likely you are to strike a universal chord. Look to your own life for show content—it works!

The big ear (and eye)

Sometimes you may overhear usable material. A writer, who was supposed to meet her husband at an appointed time, showed up hours late. He was rather upset when she finally arrived, but she offered this explanation: “I’m so sorry, but I was riding the bus and when my stop came, the people sitting in front of me were right in the middle of a story, and I just had to hear how it ended. I couldn’t get off the bus!” Sparked by this story, she wrote a book which was then turned into a movie. Today she is fabulously famous and wealthy all because she overheard a conversation in a bus that she could use as material.

Real life stories are all around us! Train your ears and eyes to catch them. Learn how to translate them for the radio. If a story interests you, find a way to make it interesting on the air. If it bores you, it will bore the listeners, too.

Real life characters

Another way to jazz up your show is to include interesting folks from your community. Sprinkle some characters into your on-air cast.

Many of the big morning show hosts in America have made stars (of sorts) out of peculiar people they encountered in real life. Jonathon Brandmeier of WLUP in Chicago gets enormous

mileage out of "Piranha Man," a Pakistani immigrant who operated a donut shop. "Piranha Man," with his thick accent and his foreign ways, was endlessly amusing, but he also helped to familiarize other Chicagoans with a rather misunderstood ethnic group. "Piranha Man" eventually had his own theme song ("Talk Like A Pakistanian") and even came out with his own line of cologne.

Sometimes international boundaries can be crossed. One of the BBC local stations in England uses a cab driver in New York ("The Gabby Cabby") to keep up to date on what's going on in America. Since he drives people around New York City all day, the Gabby Cabby knows the cool things that are happening in the city. His reports deal with pop culture, weird people, and odd occurrences. On the day of Jackie Kennedy's funeral, he captured a poignant moment as he drove by her former home early in the morning. On the steps of her Fifth Avenue apartment, several mourners were leaving flowers and milling about in silence. It never occurred to the "real" journalists there to record this touching scene for posterity.

How did the station find this guy? He happened to be on duty when the PD and several hosts visited New York. He entertained them with stories as they drove around the city.

Since this cab driver calls into the station from his car phone, he is quite accessible and has become a regular part of the station. In fact, when listeners visit the Big Apple from England, they request "The Gabby Cabby."

Another station uses a retired stewardess as a consumer/travel expert. Twice each week, she gives her humorous inside tips on the travel industry and, like the cabby, she's developed into a genuine station personality. On Fridays or before holidays, her material really fits in and makes her station sound "in touch." "Rita from the Beauty Parlor" is another genuine personality. She's funny and spirited. Rita reviews movies, gossips, and gives love advice, all based on what she's learned while doing women's hair.

You can find these people everywhere. The only requirements are that they have lots of personality, are fun, and are good talkers.

Don't exclude people who might be considered mentally ill. As it's known in politically correct circles, their "alternative reality" can offer a refreshing change from the everyday reality the rest of us have to deal with. If a listener insists that he's Napoleon, and seems sincere, give him a spin. Experiment, try people out. If it works, you'll feel it right away.

After you've used up everything in your own life, create powerful brainstorming sessions

Contrary to rumors, genius is sometimes a collective thing. Ideas can be built upon and they can come from anywhere. A "bad" idea can quickly become a good one if a couple of heads get together on it. Some of the best ideas come from the least likely sources.

Some stations experiment with brainstorming, often making the "price" to enter the building "one idea." It does not even have to be a *good* idea, just an *idea*, because when you brainstorm with talented people, it usually leads to the *great* ideas. This works for programming, sales, promotion, research—just about everything you do, on-the-air and off.

One example from San Francisco: Our news department had just completed a ten-part documentary series on the downslump in the computer business in the Silicon Valley, which affected a huge part of our listening audience. My entire, brilliant, creative staff sat around racking their brains trying to come up with a title for that series. We came up with a lot of dumb ideas. Then, our blonde, 18-year-old receptionist looked up from filing her fingernails and drinking her coffee and quietly asked, "How about, 'When the Chips Are Down?'" There was silence, then yells and applause. That series won a couple of

significant awards. The catchy title from that inter-
“brainstorm” session helped us out. You never know...and
that’s part of the fun.

Where do the ideas come from?

I met Michael Haas in Europe while he was programming Antenne Bayern, one of the most successful commercial radio stations in Germany, (average cume, 6.5 million). Even so, he was always looking for a better way to do things. It was clear he had broadcasting in his blood.



MICHAEL H. HAAS

Haas, an American with a German father, grew up in Sheboygan, Wis. He served his military time in Germany before moving there permanently. He brought me to Munich to work with his staff.

It is never an accident when a station is #1. It takes hard work and dedication. Too bad radio lost Michael H. Haas. He now manages TV in Berlin.

Mike Haas teaches his staff that a *good* “bit” on the radio includes:

1. Statement (headline)
2. Elaboration (details)
3. Kicker (climax and punchline)

He also teaches his staff these “method acting” principles:

“The actor has to convince himself before he convinces the audience.”

“If you are a regular source of feelings and emotions, you’ve got a relationship.”

Michael Haas is a big believer in the brainstorming method. At Antenne Bayern, they lock the doors to the conference room and let it roll:

Here are Michael H. Haas’ rules of brainstorming:

- During the brainstorm, there must be no judgment of ideas. No evaluation or criticism is allowed.
- Freewheeling is allowed and encouraged. The wilder and more outrageous the idea, the better.
- Look for quantity rather than quality. Try to end up with a long list of ideas. In brainstorming, quantity produces quality.
- Combine ideas. Make each idea better. In this case, only positive building is allowed.
- Every idea must be written down. If you choose not to write something down, you will have judged it, which violates the first rule.
- Every person taking part in the brainstorm is equal in rank. There are no bosses, no leaders, no hierarchy.

In order to come prepared to the brainstorming table, Haas reminds broadcasters to *get a life*. Listen to people and other stations. Read newspapers, books and magazines. Watch TV. Notice billboards, commercials, and labels for ideas. Use your life's experience, both private and professional, for material. Make friends outside the media world. Maintain your health with physical fitness and watch for stress. Bring some fantasy and idealism to the session. Have a positive attitude. Use empathy and people skills. Watch for trends. Keep in contact with listeners (drink at their bars, shop where they shop, etc.)

Scott Shannon on show prep

One man who never seems to run out of show prep ideas is New York City's WPLJ (95.5 FM) PD and morning man Scott Shannon.

He's worked all over the country. I got hooked listening to him on Q-105's "Q-Zoo" in Tampa, Florida. You feel you know him when you listen to his work.



SCOTT SHANNON

In a recent interview, he told *Radio & Records* magazine:

"There is no cookie cutter formula. You have to hit the listeners over the head with what you are doing...make your station sound different. I've always been able to figure out what people like, what's going to catch on and be popular...stay ahead of the curve. You could call me a 'superactive consumer.'"

Shannon is also a genius at putting together the right combinations of radio “teams.” He’s had huge success, survived a blow or two, and still remains a risk-taker.

Here is Scott Shannon’s top ten Creating Powerful Radio list:

- Carry a recording device at all times.
- Carry spare batteries for the recording device at all times.
- Read everything.
- Watch everything.
- Learn to work your computer.
- Answer your own telephones and talk to listeners.
- Hang out with normal people.
- Seize the moment.
- Create talk.
- Always remember these three words:
PREPARATION, CONCENTRATION
AND MODERATION.

CHAPTER 10

Creating Powerful Radio: Interviews

“There are no words to adequately describe what it is to be free with another person. It is most often a sensing that someone will let us be all of what we are at that moment.”

Carl A. Faber, Ph.D. from On Listening

Interviews can make or break a show. They are a necessary part of the information gathering process for both news and talk. A powerful interview can rivet the audience to their radios; a boring one can make them disappear.

Remember, whether your guests are rock stars, artists, politicians, or just “common” men or women with stories to tell, when they show up at your radio station they may be nervous. You go on the air every day and it seems routine to crack open the microphone and talk to thousands of people (one at a time, of course). However, this experience can be terrifying to “civilians,” who may forget what they want to say. They can become unsure of where they’re heading with a point and become boring—talking endlessly, and saying nothing.

The purpose of an interview is to get the interviewee to talk to you, open up, and tell you things of interest. You may even get the person to reveal things he or she does not ordinarily discuss in a public forum. You want your guest to share information, to *tell stories*.

A good interviewer knows that in order to get the most out of any interview, the person being interviewed must feel comfortable. Ideally, he or she should forget about the microphone. He or she should feel *heard*. If you catch your guest looking at his or her watch, there's a problem, since, during a good interview, time should fly.

It is up to you, as the interviewer, to maintain control. If the interview heads in a dull direction, grab it, and steer the discussion elsewhere. For example:

"I'm sure there are people listening now who fully understand the details of the photosynthesis process, but in layman's terms, could you explain why it's a bad idea to cut down the rain forests?"

Your audience will appreciate it if you can keep your guests away from intricate and technical answers.

Often, you will be faced with an uncooperative interviewee, particularly in news situations. For example, politicians are notorious for not wanting to tell you anything substantive. They have their own agendas and want to use you and your airwaves to promote their ideas. Dealing with this tactic can be tricky.

Here is one method to get them to talk. It comes from Stig-Arne Nordström, a newsman from Radio Norrbotten/Luleå in Sweden. He uses a technique he calls, "getting it a little bit wrong."

Let's say you have a politician who is downplaying the significance of a proposed tax hike. You might say, "So your plan means no tax increases for anyone?" The politician will then feel frustrated and misunderstood. People in his profession

can't stand that. He might come back with something like, "No, no, no, my plan would mean a uniform tax increase for almost everyone!" You've accomplished several things here. You got him to talk and explain it in a short form that is easily understood and you've landed the perfect radio interview sound statement. It is short, to the point, and cuts through the smoke and mirrors your interviewee was trying to use to hide his true agenda. Don't worry about the audience thinking that you're an idiot for "misunderstanding" your interviewee. If the interview is on tape, you can cut out the "dumb" question and just air the tight, succinct answer.

CNN's Larry King is notorious for asking the "dumb question." He claims he doesn't read the books of the authors he's interviewing. He also doesn't admit to much in the way of show preparation. Larry King's key is to ask the questions members of his audience would ask as if they had the chance to sit down and interview the guest. His audience loves it.

This should not, by the way, be construed as an argument against show prep, in which I strongly believe—but more on that later.

Here is another, somewhat controversial, trick for taped interviews. If a guest is nervous and the answers are too formal, stilted, long, and boring, try this:

Wrap up your interview. Leave the recorder running (hopefully your guest won't notice). Then say, "Just to make *sure* I've got this right, could we go over it one more time?" The guest, now relaxed because the interview is "over," will often tell you, in a very conversational way, what the key points were. You can then "notice" that you left the recorder running and ask permission to use *that* interview, instead of the first, formal session. I don't believe this is an unethical technique. After all, your guest knew that he or she was talking to you for a broadcast interview, and this tape is often much better. Interview subjects are frequently grateful and will thank you for making them "sound so good."

The art of the interview; Powerful Listening

National Public Radio's Susan Stamberg got it right about interviews in her book, Talk:

“Talk always begins with a question. Listening. Listening for what’s being said and for what is NOT said, listening for the silences, the cracks between the words, the hesitations, the contradictions, the glorious expositions.”

Stamberg, like all good interviewers understands that in an interview, the “star” is the topic or the guest, not the host. It helps if you, as the host, can sublimate your ego somewhat and focus completely on what your guest is trying to say. Listening is the key.

The interview will go much better if the topic is something you care about, as opposed to something you think will be of interest to your audience. Remember, interested is interesting. If you are bored by the topic, odds are your audience will be, too. Listeners can tell the difference between affected and genuine curiosity.

Like a fisherman going for the catch, it is sometimes necessary to use a variety of baits and lures for different types of interviews. Your opening questions will depend on the circumstances. Sometimes it pays to be tough. Other times, kindness, empathy, or humor serve you best. There is no one “right approach” to getting a great interview. Part of the skill and art of the job is to gauge the method needed to get the interviewee to open up and talk. That “sense of approach” is a skill you develop *by listening*.

Uh, Uh, Uh...Nervous guests?

Some stations actually hand out a list of helpful hints for guests to read before going on the air. If you would like to try this, here are some points to include.

Dear Interviewees...

1. Please be available and flexible. If the interview time has to be changed, go with it. The station may call you in an emergency, if another guest has canceled, or if the station is in need of your expertise right now. Be willing to appear. The host and station will appreciate and remember you.

2. If you want to make sure you get a copy of the show, bring your own cassette.

3. If you're an author, *PLEASE* don't repeat the name of your new book over and over. Listeners will get annoyed. Your job is to be so fascinating that the listeners stay until the end of the interview because they want to hear the host repeat the title of your book.

4. Forget that there is a larger audience. You will be much more effective if you speak to the host one-on-one, instead of addressing all those listeners "out there." The audience listens one at a time. Try to relax. Be yourself. Radio is personal and intimate. Listeners like to be spoken to that way.

5. Watch your language. This is not a living room and certain expressions could slip out if you aren't careful!

6. Keep to the point. If you don't have anything interesting to say, ask the host for another question.

7. Do not bring in a lot of notes to the studio and read from them. Hosts hate this and it can be boring.

8. Ask for what you need. Do you have your reading glasses? A pen or pencil? Kleenex? A glass of water? Do you understand the process? You should feel in control as much as possible. Ask how to you use the cough button, just in case. Can you stop anytime? Is this on tape, or is it live, direct, and "anything goes?" By the way, have you eaten? There's nothing more embarrassing than a microphone picking up the growling of your hungry stomach. Do you need to use the toilet? It's better to be comfortable than sitting there squirming around.

9. Don't be rigid. As in normal conversation, the interview may take a turn that has nothing to do with your agenda. Be a good guest. The discussion may lead to even better things than you were originally prepared to talk about. A skilled interviewer does not stick with a script.

10. Listen to the questions and answer them. If the host seems unprepared or unfamiliar with your topic, don't express anger or frustration. The audience is probably in the same boat. Just speak to the host as you would to the friendly, but uninformed, stranger you met at that cocktail party or in the next seat on an airplane. If you can genuinely interest the host in your topic, you will also interest the audience, and have a very good chance of being asked back.

Thoughts for hosts and interviewers:

- Forget the "long" hello. Keep the introduction and greeting short and to the point.
- Listening is the key to successful interviews. Don't stick to a list. Often the best next question will come from the answer to the last one.
- Try not to ask "yes or no" questions. Ask the "how or why" questions. Ask how people *feel*, and to explain things.
- If you didn't get enough of an answer, don't be afraid to ask again. This is especially important in pre-taped interviews when you are looking for that perfect sound bite.
- Curiosity counts. If you are genuinely curious about the topic, the interview will work.

- Ask “dumb” questions. Don’t be embarrassed to appear as if you don’t know all the answers, the audience probably doesn’t either. That’s why you’re doing the interview.
- Get to the point. Don’t clutter up the interview with lots of chit-chat. The audience cares about how what is being said affects their lives.
- Control the interview. Steer the subject in a better direction if the interview starts to get boring. Don’t let slick-talking, verbally-skilled guests get around you and not answer questions. Ask your questions again and again until you get answers, then move on.
- Focus on solutions, not just problems. Even if your guests have some pie-in-the-sky solutions or can offer nothing more than a phone number to call, that’s better than ending an interview on some hopeless, downward note.
- Respect responses. Everyone is entitled to his or her opinion. If he or she is an idiot, that will come through loud and clear all by itself.
- End your interviews cleanly. Do a short good-bye. You don’t need to recap points made during the interview. Trust that the listeners “got it” and move on.

On listening

Because listening is such a part of creating powerful radio, it's worth looking at separately. Years ago, at UCLA, a friend gave me a book called, On Listening by psychologist Carl Faber. When I read the passage quoted below, I was stunned. The book expressed what I felt in my heart about radio; about connecting and communicating.

On rough days, I still go back and re-read that book. It always helps. Creating Powerful Radio is about creating powerful communication. That means powerful listening.

Dr. Carl Faber teaches about relationships, myths, men, and women. Tapes of his early UCLA lectures were broadcast on Pacifica Radio in Los Angeles, but he became disillusioned by censorship, and stopped broadcasting.

Here is an excerpt from his book, On Listening:

“Most people have never really been listened to. They live in a lonely silence—no one knowing what they feel, how they live or what they have done. They are prisoners of the eyes of others, of the stereotyped, limited, superficial and often distorted ways that others see them.

There are no words to adequately describe what it is to be free with another person. It is most often a sensing that someone will let us be all of what we are at that moment. We can talk about whatever we wish, express in any way whatever feelings are in our hearts. We can take as much time as we need. We can sit, stand, pace, yell, cry, pound the floor, dance or weep for joy. Whatever and however we are at the moment is accepted and respected...

This experience of freedom and communion helps us to feel that someone is for us. And it is this deep sensing of someone, somewhere, being for us that breaks into the silent loneliness of our lives and encourages us in the struggle to be human. It helps us to break the tyranny of the strangers' eyes and to give to our lives all that we are capable of giving. Because listening can bring about such powerful healing, it is one of the most beautiful gifts that people can give and receive."

CHAPTER 11

Creating Powerful Radio: Integrating News and Talk

“...Art is a means of communication by which mind reaches out to mind across great gaps of space and time...”

Francis Hoyland from, A Painter's Diary.

“Share, and share alike.”

Anonymous.

Image is not reality. In America, due to tight budgets and restrictive formats, many full-time News-Talk radio news rooms consist of only two to four people, sometimes fewer, and not all of them are full-time. It is not the ideal situation. Of course, it would be better to have a bigger news staff. But if you've got a couple of dedicated, talented news reporters and anchors, you *can* make it work.

The name of the format is News-Talk. According to research, most audiences perceive *both* as equally important. It is possible to maintain a news image with very little actual newscasting and reporting, because when talk hosts discuss news

stories and current issues on their programs, the station conveys the impression of being “on top of the news.”

News-Talk stations short on people use a lot of “smoke and mirrors.” They may have any or all of the following: several network news services, special reports from the field, people with mobile phones calling in to report traffic tie-ups or as eye witnesses to breaking news stories. Some stations use their talk hosts in live remote broadcasts from places where news is happening. Savvy radio news people and talk hosts call on their friends and connections at newspapers, TV stations, and magazines to “debrief” them on the air about stories they may be covering. Good reporters and news presenters work very, very hard. The fact that due to budgetary constraints, most stations now have smaller news staffs does not mean less work, it means *more*. Radio news is not for the lazy. Being number one is never an “accident.” It takes *work*.

Break down the brick wall

Have you ever noticed a psychological “brick wall” between the news and programming departments? It bears mentioning because news and talk should always work together, but often don’t. Somehow, the news department got separated from “the rest of the programming.” This is the old, “Let’s take a break for the news” routine. In the news-talk format, this is not a good thing. You must break down that brick wall, or at least put some holes in it.

Remember, your *audience* does not know there are two “camps” at work here, they only know that their radio is on, and if you’re lucky, they know *which station* they’re listening to. They want interesting, relevant talk. Listeners don’t care whether they get their information from a guy wearing a news hat or a talk hat. Fight the war against the competition, not each other.

“What we have here is a failure to communicate...”

Why don't we talk to each other? Because:

Talk and programming says: *“The news guys are always busy, we don't want to bug them.”*

The news department says: *“The talk hosts are in their own world and don't bother to talk or listen to us.”*

Management says: *“Keep them separate because news is fact, talk is opinion and entertainment. We don't want to mix that with credible news.”*

On winning talk stations, however, news reporters, anchors, and hosts talk to each other both on and off the air. They share resources, knowing their product is a marriage. In fact, the best news-talk radio happens during times of crisis. The lines of demarcation blur, and everyone does what they can to help each other get it on the air quickly.

News is the chronicling of events. Talk is the discussion, the “why” behind the events and how people feel about them. But, if the truth is told, it will be accepted by the audience, no matter who tells it.

A perfect example of integrating news and talk is New York syndicated morning host Don Imus and his newsman Charles McCord, a credible “news personality.” There are no brick walls here. Imus is at his best discussing the news of the day, and McCord is an integral part of the show. McCord retains total news credibility.

Unarguably, the best part of the Howard Stern Show is when Robin Quivers does the “news,” albeit in a non-traditional style.

Longtime ABC-syndicated radio commentator Paul Harvey has blurred the lines between personality and newsman, as well.

A word about the credibility factor: Audiences today are much more sophisticated. They know the difference between a newsperson being serious and one who is fooling around. When

a huge event affects the lives of listeners—a war, an earthquake, a flood, radioactive leaks—*there is no fooling around*. News anchors and presenters today have come to understand that much of the news is in place as an insurance policy. It's there in case you need it. Of course, when you need the news, it had better be there.

Another way to build the relationship between the news and talk staffs is for the news persons to keep a lookout for “discussable” news items. There is not much to say about a fire, flood, or breaking story other than facts and information as they become available. After the facts are in about the massive car crash on the bridge, the talk show topic may actually be: *Why are citizens willing to endure life-threatening conditions to save ten minutes on their commute?*

A hard news story can generate a softer talk topic. Train your people to save the stories about Supreme Court decisions or any polls or items about which people are likely to have strong views. Peel the “onion” that is your story to find material for an in-depth, open-phone talk show.

The crossover talents

Opinion traditionally has no place in the news. On the other hand, talk has not been a forum for chronicling the facts. So, hybrid news-talkers like Dave Ross are rare talents. Wearing both hats, they manage to bridge the gap. A listener can tell what Dave thinks from his newscast, but also knows what an objective and conscientious newsman he is when hearing his talk show.



DAVE ROSS

Ross hosts a daily talk show on KIRO/Seattle and has a two-minute daily news/feature/commentary on the CBS Radio Network. KIRO sends him around the world to cover big news events, like the fall of the Berlin Wall. He's reported on Operation Desert Shield and the violence in Los Angeles during the riots. Dave has found the equation to marry news to talk: keep a unique voice and retain credibility in both.

It is impossible to describe Dave Ross' creativity. Sometimes he sings his commentaries, often uses humor, and has a cynical "bright eye" on the world around him. Here is a script from a CBS Radio News commentary. It's an interesting twist on the health care cost issue in America. Try reading it out loud.

"Health Care That's Always There"

"The simple solution to health care costs. I'm Dave Ross on the CBS Radio Network.

It's an appealing motto, "health care that's always there." The big unknown is at what cost?

The President says that the savings are obvious. You can cut paperwork to one claim form, encourage preventive care and end the billions of dollars of unnecessary medical tests.

Well, I understand the paperwork, the insurance industry is ready to do that anyway, I understand preventive care, but how will you stop the testing? If a patient wants a test, does a doctor say no and risk a lawsuit? The key is to get the patient not to want the test. But how?

I was talking with Dr. Nancy Dickey with the American Medical Association, also a family physician in Texas, and she told me an interesting thing.

Whenever she offers her patients a medical test, the first thing they ask is not, "How much will

this cost,” since the cost is usually covered by insurance. What they ask is: “WILL THIS HURT?” That’s what they want to know, will this hurt! And I suddenly realized that’s it!

We’ve been going about it all wrong. For years, doctors have been saying, “This won’t hurt a bit.” WRONG! The doctors should say, “Well, yeah, this is gonna hurt a little,” and he kinda glances toward a big old four inch long needle sitting over by the sink.

That’s why people didn’t have as many tests thirty years ago, because those tests hurt! “Health care that’s always there” is a great quote, but here’s another one. “You bet that test is paid for, I’ll just go and get the needle!”

KIRO/Seattle puts out a nominally-priced cassette each year of Dave Ross’ work. Write to Dave Ross, c/o The Dave Ross Show, CBS Radio, 51 W. 52nd St., New York, NY 10019 USA.

If you want to integrate your news-talk product, it takes extra effort. Here is a system to develop news-talk integration.

Develop a daily system

- *Work together.* Meet with the producers, talk show hosts and news assignment manager or news director every day. Compare what you know about the news and events of the day. If it can’t be done in person, do it for five minutes on the phone or by computer.

- *Take today.* Go through the list of today’s topics, discuss:
 - What will news do with the stories?
 - What will talk do with the stories?
 - Any ideas that anyone else has.

- *Prospect for gold. Share the loot.* Everyone should look through the wires, newspapers, and any other usual source materials. Talk about multi-version reports or anything that can be done in short-form news, and then moved into a long-form talk.

- *Pick the right talent for the subject.* If a news person or host has an affinity for a specific topic, he or she will do a better job. Why not send your baseball fanatic out to do the baseball story? Utilize your talent's natural interests, background, and experiences. This will require you to really get to know your talent. If you don't know, ask. "Is anyone interested in gun control?" Again, interested is interesting and powerful.

- *Be flexible.* Things change quickly. You've got to be ready to "go with it."

- *Listen to everyone's ideas.* If people are assigned stories or topics they don't like, ask them to give you better ideas. People always work better when it's their own idea.

- *Communicate.* If things change news-wise or events happen throughout the day, talk to each other. This is a team effort and the listeners don't know there is a brick wall between the news room and the talent area.

- *Listen to each other.* News departments, when they can, ought to be aware of the content of the various talk shows and whatever else is on air. Keep the radio on at the station. Talk hosts: LISTEN TO THE NEWS!
- *Create a future file.* When notices arrive in the mail regarding future events, designate a person to file them in the computer in daily calendar form. Both news and talk should utilize these lists for topic and story ideas. Newspapers work these files as much as five years ahead.
- *Create a follow-up file.* On dull days when not much is going on, look back. Did the station cover any stories that need to be updated? New stories might ask: where are they now? Did the child in the custody fight live happily ever after? What happened to the neighborhood after the rapist was released? Looking ahead is good, but you can also do mighty powerful radio when you look backward.
- *Don't fight over guests.* If there is a guest or an interview that a news person has set up and the talk host wants to interview him herself, work it out. Protect the on-air product, not your territory. Perhaps just a snippet or a piece of that interview from the news will be enough to get the discussion going for a powerful talk show. Perhaps the newsperson's interview is just fine.

On the flip side, if something noteworthy is said during one of the station's talk shows, use it in the news! You'll have an exclusive that other stations won't have. Producers, endear your host to the news staff by flagging that tape and bringing it in to the newsroom fast!

Be a team. Be a station. Be number one!

Work together. Cooperate. Powerful radio is a collective effort. William Shakespeare said, "The Play is the Thing." Put egos aside. Forget the players. Focus on the play.

Let the news people know what types of material you're seeking for your show. Ask them to save anything they come across. Talk hosts, do the same for your news team.

People are usually glad to help, and may have a lot of ideas and material that may not be appropriate for their own department or show, but could work for you.

Break format when news breaks

This is when News-Talk is at it's best, so during times of national or local catastrophe, go ahead and break format. Have a procedure (whom to call, commercials to move, etc.) in the event of an urgent news story. Get the information on air, right now. Nobody cares about your "cover story" or "topic A" when all hell is breaking loose and lives and property are at stake. Drop what you planned and go with the hot thing. Debrief news reporters on-air. Ask them questions about the breaking story. If possible, have them stay on the show with you and take calls. Talk hosts, give the news department all the time it needs to get information on the air, even if it cuts heavily into your show.

One final word, don't forget to roll tape on every moment.

Some of the most effective news-talk managers are those who have been on-air themselves and know what it takes to get it done. Bob Christopher is one of those people. I worked with him years ago when he was morning anchor at News-Talk KTAR/Phoenix. He'd already run the Florida State Network. I wasn't surprised when the next time I talked with Bob, he'd moved up to Operations Manager. A few years later, he was running top rated News-Talk WWL/New Orleans. He also runs co-owned WSMB and two other stations owned by River City Communications. WWL is the more traditional, conservative talk station. WSMB has a more liberal approach. One newsroom serves all four stations.



BOB CHRISTOPHER

Here are his points on
Creating Powerful Radio:

- Understand your listeners: where they live, where they shop, and what they want and need from you.
- Create an emotional bond with your audience.
- As often as possible, deliver *more* than you promise to listeners and advertisers.
- Surround yourself with people who want to win.
- Take time to talk to them and smile at them in the hall.

- Develop personalities your listeners will love.
- Focus on the positives in your corner of the world.
- Dream up fascinating promotions or special events.
- Remember, it's marketing!
- Know your competitors.

CHAPTER 12

Creating Powerful Radio News

“The essence of entertainment will not change. What has always counted is the story and the skill with which it is told.”

Michael Eisner, CEO
The Walt Disney Company

Radio news can be much more exciting than many people realize. By doing what radio does best—getting on the air from a scene quickly, and describing an event so listeners can visualize what is happening—we are using the most powerful tools we possess: immediacy and imagery.

If you tell the truth in an interesting and, when appropriate, entertaining way, you can keep the attention of your listeners and deliver the information to those who need to hear it. A reporter who covers a fire so descriptively, listeners almost *taste* the smoke in the backs of their throats. When you create “word pictures,” your news story is almost like a movie. It is great storytelling. It is *never* boring.

There is concern within news organizations, especially in Europe, about keeping the news very serious and credible. I

sympathize, to a point. But, it does no good to be serious and credible if the results are so boring that listeners tune out.

Here are some tips and techniques to bridge the gap:

The sound of the story

The power and glory of a story often lies in its sound. Whenever possible, record and use natural sound. If you are covering a parade, festival, or demonstration, this is obvious. Use the sound of the event underneath your report to give listeners the feel of “being on the scene.” Less obvious, and less frequently heard, is sound from more routine events. Think creatively. Use it to help you tell the story. If you are doing a story on day-care centers, it makes just as much sense to record children at play and run that underneath your report.

Here’s an example, a potentially boring story *everybody* does twice a year:

“Daylight savings time is over. Don’t forget to turn your clock back an hour at 2 AM.”

But when a reporter went to a clock store and recorded the clocks at noon, the story came alive with the sound of chimes, bells, and cuckoo clocks under the lead:

“...That is the sound of time. Remember to turn your clock back an hour tonight.”

That’s more powerful. The sound makes it work better, even for a story that happens twice a year like clockwork. Don’t settle. It doesn’t have to be boring.

Television has pictures, but in radio we have something even more powerful in our arsenal. We have *imagination*. By using sound and describing events and people in detail, we can stimulate the imagination in a way television simply can not.

One example comes from my former newsroom in San Francisco. A young reporter had spent all night covering a fire

and was now back at the station recording his reports for the morning newscasts. While the fire he'd covered was exciting, his reports were rather dull. I chalked it up to his inexperience, and made a note to talk with him about it later.

His story sounded something like this:

"The fire burned throughout the night at the intersection of Powell and Main. The home was completely destroyed. No one was injured. It took two fire companies to extinguish the flames. The damage is estimated at 400 thousand dollars. No one knows what started the fire."

After the reporter was done recording his stories, he picked up the newsroom phone and called his girlfriend. After all, he had been out all night and needed to explain where he had been.

"You should have seen the fire! It was incredible! There was a full moon and you could see the black smoke billowing for miles around! All these people were out in their bathrobes and underwear watching it burn, with kids and dogs running around wild. They needed two fire companies to put out the flames because the first company couldn't get their hoses to work. So, they lost the house and everyone had to wait for back-up firefighters to show up. At one point, they thought there was a cat in the house, so all these firemen went in with oxygen masks to find the cat, but she was hiding under a car a block away! You could hardly breathe because the smoke was so thick and the wind kept changing, and they still don't know what started it. And that house! It's completely destroyed, nothing but ashes. They say it was worth 400 thousand dollars! Can you imagine, even in that neighborhood, prices are up that high?"

I impolitely grabbed the phone from the reporter's hand and asked why he couldn't put all that good stuff in his reports, instead of saving it for his girlfriend.

That reporter "got it." He has since gone on to work for two national networks and has a wall covered with news awards. He now makes powerful radio.

Trying to convince a group of journalists (practicing Journalism with a capital "J") that news does not have to be boring can be tough. They assume that some "important" details of a story have to be included, even if those details are not interesting. If such details do not interest you at the human level, it's likely that those details won't interest your listeners and they will probably tune out, leaving you and your "important" details behind.

Recently at a workshop in Finland with a group of radio journalists, I played them a 10 minute tape of their newscast from the previous day.

The group was sitting quietly and appeared to be listening intently. When the tape was over, they were asked, "What was the first story?"

Dead silence hung over the room. Not one journalist could remember. By the way, these were the same people who, the day before, had written, produced, and presented this newscast.

"What about the second story?" Silence. "How about the third?" No one said a word. Even though the group had listened to the newscast, the stories were so boring that nobody remembered them. They had mentally tuned out.

Finally, I asked them, "Does anyone remember *anything* from this newscast?"

The only story anyone remembered concerned a church that was urging people to cremate their dead because it was cheaper than burial and the cemeteries were filled to capacity. The only story they could recall was a weird, interesting piece about burning dead people. Lesson: If you don't make the news

interesting, listeners may “hear” the stories, but they won’t sink in.

One reporter who is *never* boring is Mike Sugerman of KCBS/San Francisco.

Mike Sugerman is known for taking the duller stories and bringing them to life. He was awarded a coveted Benton Journalism Fellowship at the University of Chicago, has a wall filled with awards, and is popular with his listeners.



MIKE SUGERMAN

Sugerman is equally as good on hard news and features because of his creativity. For example, take a “perennial” story like the Academy Awards. Every year, reporters cover that story the *same* way: celebrity interviews and lists of nominees. Mike Sugerman adds a unique dimension by doing his own “Oscar Poll.” He asks guys named “Oscar” who ought to win. It’s great.

When Sugerman does a story on the homeless, he gets into their world; he lives among them, gains their trust, and gets unique perspectives. Once he did a story on garbage by accompanying an eaten apple to the dump. He uses sound and humor. He’s real. He retains his humanity and is never above the audience. He uses his imagination and is a master storyteller.

Sugerman advises reporters to take risks. He says, “First, learn the rules of traditional journalism. Then break them. After you learn what you are supposed to do, you can cover a story and figure out what all the other reporters will be doing. Then do something different. Often, the resulting story will generate comments such as, “What the hell was that?” But eventually the

comments turn into, “Hey, that was good, how did you think of that?” Occasionally, you’ll still hear, “What the hell was that?” But, if you don’t make mistakes now and then, you aren’t pushing the envelope far enough.”

Sugerman has only one warning: “Avoid making mistakes with *actual facts*. If you are factually-challenged too often, you’ll lose credibility, which is all a reporter owns.”



WARREN LEVINSON

Another amazingly creative reporter is Warren Levinson who heads the Associated Press Radio Bureau in New York City. He is also co-host of AP’s nationally-syndicated news show, *Newsweek on Air*. Levinson specializes in taking seemingly boring stories and making them fascinating. Because of his credibility and expertise as a newsman, he’s managed to do some of the most creative news work on the Associated Press, the old

gray lady of American news. One trick that he created and still uses occasionally makes even the most forgettable story unforgettable!

Although Levinson keeps all the traditional facts in his story, he plays with the *form* to make it come alive. Here’s an example:

This story concerned reaction some time after a huge water main burst under the city of New York. There was still no water in many neighborhoods and subways remained flooded. The city was a mess, and the story had run for days. People were sick of hearing about the problem, but since it was still news, it was going on the radio.

Try reading this aloud:

WARREN LEVINSON'S AP POETRY-STYLE STORY:

(Open with background sounds of loud jackhammers, running water, and construction noise.)

"There are time bombs under New York, aged a century or more.

The one that went off Thursday was put in nineteen-four.

The water mains under 42nd Street gave way...

Q...some of our older mains, that's safe to say

Dick Gaynor is a deputy of H-2-0 supply.

Half gainer is the sort of thing that you or he or I

might have been tempted to attempt instead of catch the train,

since what subway tracks were under equaled forty weeks of rain.

And subway riders feeling more than usually harassed sought detours. Were they mad?

Q..."No, New Yorkers are adaptable, they adjust fast."

Manuel Martinez got them round the crippled four and five train

while road and track were closed to anything that has a drive train.

We don't white water raft here, but you could bob like a cork,

as you whoosh down forty-second,

Warren Levinson, New York."

(Close with sound: more running water, jack hammers, construction noises.)

The story has all the required news information—who, what, where, why, when and it's fun to listen to, even if you've heard it all day (or all week)!

Levinson reminds reporters that the story is the main event here, not the storyteller. "Newsmakers in their own words and their own voices are vital to good radio, but never forget that you are the storyteller. I have seen any number of reporters do verbal backflips just to work in a piece of tape better left on the cutting room floor. If you think that your voice cannot carry a story by itself, look to improve your writing or delivery."

That said, he emphasizes the importance of ambient sound. "Don't overlook the sound that does not come in quotes: the street sounds of a fire rescue story, the special acoustics of an art gallery or museum." Levinson advises, "Don't use background sound for its own sake, but ask yourself, 'Are there sounds that can tell an aspect of this story more concisely than I can do in words?'"

Sometimes it works very well when a reporter expresses genuine feelings about a story. Stay *objective* with the facts, but if you can personalize the story in some way, the audience will be more likely to remember your work.

One example comes from Radio Jämtland in Sweden. There had been a "mobbing" in a local school. A child had been forced down and beaten, then nearly drowned when his head was held in a toilet. The reporter remembered mobbing attacks from when she was a school girl and how scary they had been. As it turned out, her daughter attended the school where the incident occurred. Like any decent mother, she was afraid for her child. She reported the story, but also told the audience she had special concerns about the safety of her own child. She brought her own life experience to the job. Any parent could relate to this story, and it likely evoked a strong emotional response.

Wherever there is a personal connection to a story on the part of the reporter, there is the potential for more powerful radio.

The art of the interview

The interview is the heart of the news story. When a reporter comes armed with a list of questions for an expert, spokesperson, or victim, it's easy to forget the most important thing...listening. The reporter is so eager to get to the next topic, the "real" story might be missed.

How many times have you listened to an interview and heard something like, "So, what is new with your scientific research?" The scientist replies, "*Well we seem to have come up with a cure for cancer and a way to safely dispose of nuclear waste.*" The interviewer then consults "the list" and asks, "*How long have you been involved in this kind of research?*" The interviewer totally missed it!

While this is a slightly exaggerated example, this failure to listen goes on all the time. Your most important tools are your listening skills and natural curiosity. Often, if you dispose of your "list" and simply listen to what your interviewee has to say, you'll ask better questions, get much better answers, and present a better story. Ask simpler questions to generate simpler answers.

When interviewing experts, there is a tendency to let them get away with giving long, drawn out, complex and incomprehensible answers. The problem is that "Journalists" don't like to admit that they don't know something or don't understand a complicated answer. Think about it. If you, as a broadcast professional, don't "get it," what are the odds the audience will? The best policy is to keep the information as simple as possible, within reason. Again, many "journalists" refuse to follow this policy because they wish to appear intelligent and capable of understanding complex material.

This cheats the audience, and sometimes the experts. After all, even an “expert” wants to be heard and understood.

If you present the news in an interesting, topical and relevant way, the audience will consider it a reason to tune in, not tune out. Listeners may also become “addicted” and feel that they can’t go a day without finding out what’s going on, as explained through your newscast.

Tips from top reporters.

Things they never taught you in journalism school.

Reporters from various newsrooms around the world added to my list. Here is what they came up with:

- Talk to one listener at a time.
- Use silence. It’s powerful.
- Avoid clichés.
- Get new ideas from calling on old story sources.
- Off the record means off the record. Don’t “burn” your sources.
- Is an actuality or interview tape worth the effort? Look at your use of time. Especially if you have a small staff. Do you need that sound to best tell the story? Or, can you better use what little time you’ve got on another story?
- Localize. Know your city and use familiar terms for things.

Creating Powerful Radio: News

- Keep a tease a tease. Make them want more later.
- Don't use the same lead that the reporter uses. It's lazy, boring and makes you look stupid.
- REWRITE, use multi-versions. REWRITE the wire. Don't use the 8:00 a.m. copy at 9:00 a.m.
- Use one thought per sentence, one thought per actuality.
- Write to be heard. Maintain a sense of speech rhythm in your writing and read it out loud before you read it on-air.
- Avoid statistics if you can. Listeners don't usually remember them.
- *Don't be afraid of the cutting room floor!* No one knows what is in your tape recorder but you. Only use the best and most powerful tape. Leave the rest.
- *Work fast!* Save time by listening to the tape on the way back from a story in the car. Mentally have your multi-versions ready to go before you walk back into the station.
- Make a decision. You will never get every detail in the story. So, be the almighty and powerful "Radio News God" and decide what goes into each version of a story.

**Valerie Geller's Top 10 Tips
For Creating Powerful Radio News**

- In the case of an urgent news story, get your facts first, then worry about your presentation.
- Describe things visually; paint word pictures.
- Write shorter! Use fewer words but make them count, so the audience remembers what you said.
- Use effective storytelling techniques; tell stories the way you would tell them to friends.
- Use natural sound.
- Stay objective! Keep your opinion out of the story, but put yourself into it.
- Really listen when you are interviewing.
- Ask simpler questions (“what and how,” not “yes or no” questions).
- Know what you’re talking about. Understand your story well enough that if the copy blew away, you could continue with the report.
- Make the news part of your station’s programming, not an interruption. Tease upcoming news content between newscasts.

More great news tips come from KFYI/Phoenix News and Program Director and morning co-host Ed Walsh. Prior to KFYI, he was PD at WOR/New York and News Director at WRKO/Boston. Walsh is a consummate authoritative news man with the hip, relaxed conversational style that dominates news radio in the United States.



ED WALSH

Walsh shares some of his practical wisdom and news experience:

- Never pass up a chance to go to the bathroom. (Ever staked out a story in the early morning after having had too much coffee?)
- Always say, “Yes!” when they offer you free food and drink.
- Know when to file! In the United States, radio news deadlines are rarely more than an hour away and the appetite of the news monster is insatiable. Better to give it something (accurate) to chew on while you’re collecting additional information for a follow-up report.
- Wearing comfortable shoes cannot be over-emphasized.

- The value of most press releases received through the mail rarely exceeds the price of the postage, regardless of whether they've been sent FedEx or regular mail.
- In real estate, the top three attributes of a property are "location, location, location." In radio news, it's "local, local, local." That often means developing local angles to national or international stories.
- No verb in newswriting is more over-used than "say" (as in, "officials say..."). Put some life into your copy! They don't "say"; they "insist," "maintain," "claim," etc.
- Avoid over-attribution. The name of the press flack for an agency is, in the vast majority of stories, not necessary to report. Officer Smith, in his capacity as spokesman, *is* "the police."
- *Never* lapse into non-conversational transitional phrases such as, "closer to home" or "in other news." If you can't develop a clear, declarative lead, pose an interrogatory (*a la* Andy Rooney's "Have you ever...", if you must). It makes a much more plausible transition between stories.
- Establish presence by pre-filing when you won't be able to phone-in, radio-in or microwave-in at the time of an event. If reporter Lee Harris is to be at the airport for the arrival of the Pope at 11:00, and he can't file at 11:00, pre-file ("The Pope is expected here shortly...").

- Remember, we're doing *news*, not history. Use the present tense wherever possible. Don't refer to "yesterday" unless the chronology is crucial.
- Tell me a story (a true one, but a story).



SHARON KATCHEN

Another reporter with great tips and useful ideas is Sharon Katchen. She's worked as a news reporter at KIMN, KNUS and KOA radio, all in Denver, before moving to Los Angeles, where she now heads the Orange County Bureau of All News 98, KFWB.

Her diverse talent is well utilized by KFWB's 24-hour-a-day all news format, designed in 22 minute segments with headlines, sports, weather, traffic updates, commercials and special reports. Their slogan is, "Give us 22 minutes and we'll give you the world,"

Katchen can get a lot done in 22 minutes. One of the station's all news competitors has three people to do the same job Sharon does. I once heard her file 27 reports in a single day. In addition to her work as a news reporter, she is also a 10K marathon runner. She picked up some of her Golden Mike awards for running the Los Angeles Marathon while broadcasting live.

Here is Sharon Katchen's Creating Powerful Radio News list:

- Quality never goes out of style.
- Don't run with rumors.
- Keep your views out of the news.
- Take notes; tape recorders can fail.
- Accuracy; Accuracy; Accuracy.
- Report fully and fairly. Omitting major facts or viewpoints is bad reporting.
- It's not news to barge into a disaster or crime scene and ask a victim "How do you feel?"
- Listen. The best questions come from answers.
- Good reporting and good sound mean good radio.
- If it is not clear to you, it's not clear to the listeners.

Award-winning newsman Mark Howell has good ideas to share. Currently he is news director and morning anchor at KUZZ/KCWR, Bakersfield, Calif. He worked in San Francisco as a reporter for many years before opting to run his own department and live a quiet life in a smaller town. Country music legend Buck Owens and his family own and run KCWR/KUZZ radio.

In addition to news, Howell's true passions emerge when he takes off his tie, dons his black leather jacket and becomes the "voice" of the annual automobile drag races in Bakersfield.

Here are Mark Howell's top ten ideas for *Creating Powerful Radio* news:



MARK HOWELL

- Don't pull punches. Reject euphemisms. Speak the language of the common people, but clean up the grammar.
- Do not trust the police or the politicians.
- Natural sound is often better than interviews in helping you tell a story.
- A good newscast has a subtle, almost subliminal rhythm created by phrasing and proper placement of sound.
- Grab 'em with the lead. If you don't get their attention with the first sentence of a story, you've lost them.
- When interviewing, concentrate more on what your interviewee says than on what you're going to say next. Use each answer to lead to another question. The only stupid question is the one you didn't ask.

- Read out-of-town and alternative papers. Surf the Internet. Listen to shortwave radio. You'll find story ideas that haven't been done in your town. Keep them in a file and pull them out on slow news days.
- Don't waste time pursuing a story the local newspaper and/or TV has already done unless you can genuinely advance it, not just repeat it with a sound bite. Spend your time on stories they haven't done.
- Get professional voice training. It's worth the cost.
- Understand the technical basics of sound reproduction and develop an ear for high fidelity. Then, don't accept bad audio in your own work. Make sure you know how to use equipment, and be very meticulous about maintenance.

Denise Jimenez Adams is an award-winning reporter with experience in both radio and television. She's been a news anchor at all-news WBBM/Chicago, WCBS/New York and others. Based in Chicago, the San Francisco native is married to voice-over artist George Adams.



DENISE JIMENEZ ADAMS

Her no-nonsense approach, straight news image and reputation for excellence are well known in the industry.

Here are her words of advice:

- Work as hard at communicating with your bosses and co-workers as you do with your audience because communication is not an art well-practiced in the broadcast business.
- Know your boundaries..and your station's.
- Practice, practice, practice ad-libbing factually, so your spontaneity with the news doesn't tarnish your station's reputation or your own.
- Words can be swords. Choose them carefully for an impact that enhances understanding of the story, not of you.
- Wire services are important resources, but not always an appropriate style to emulate.
- Read, read, read, for content and style, for emulation and information. Be a sponge forever!
- Don't assume:
 - A) that you know more than your audience.
 - B) that your audience knows more than you.
 - C) that your opinion is welcome or important.
- Create your OWN style in writing and delivery.

- Experience what your audience experiences so you can ask the questions that matter. Communicate the facts that are needed and tailor the emotion to the situation.
- FEEL... and they will feel with you.

Talent does run in families. Lynn Jimenez (Denise's sister) is the business correspondent for KGO News-Talk radio and KGO television/San Francisco. She works on the floor of the Pacific Stock Exchange. Prior to KGO, she worked as Media Relations Manager for Pacific Bell. Before her "break" from broadcasting into the



LYNN JIMENEZ

world of business, she had been afternoon news co-anchor on all-news KCBS/San Francisco; reporter at KIRO/Seattle and KXRX/San Jose. She is married to TV broadcast manager John Catchings. Here are her Creating Powerful Radio Tips:

- Take a breath.
- You don't have to sound like Walter Cronkite.
- Pace yourself.
- Learn how to fix any equipment you use.

Creating Powerful Radio: News

- Never throw away any phone number—**NEVER.**
- The news crew is not your family, no matter what management says.
- Be comfortable with change because versatility means survival.
- You're a human being. You're worthwhile and so is everyone else.
- Broadcasting is a small world. Remember that.
- Have fun.

CHAPTER 13

Creating Powerful Radio: Newswriting Words from Mervin Block

“Write to express, not to impress.”

Mervin Block, Writing Broadcast News

The long and short of it

Anyone who writes knows it's harder to write shorter, but less is often more effective. Newspapers specialize in detail. Radio cannot compete for sheer tonnage of information. Radio's job, and yours, is to get information out *quickly* and *succinctly*. When you hear it on the radio, it's news. When you read it in the paper, it's history. Put in the big stuff, the important things that you would tell friends. Give enough information so listeners can think about a story and discuss it at their dinner tables.

Author George Orwell was deeply concerned with the effect of words, especially those which cause confusion. In his essay, “Politics and the English Language,” Mr. Orwell set down some

writing rules that will probably serve you well, regardless of which language you are using:

'Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech you are used to seeing in print. Never use a long word where a short one will do. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out. Never use a passive phrase where you can use the active. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.'

Mervin Block is America's news writing guru. He wrote the news for CBS Television's Walter Cronkite for years. Today he gives seminars on news writing at Columbia University in New York and works with TV newsrooms. He has written several books. What follows is taken from Writing Broadcast News.



MERVIN BLOCK

Bad news

Don't label news as good or bad. What may be bad for some listeners is good for others. Heavy rain may be bad for pedestrians, motorists and sunbathers, but it can be good for farmers, taxi drivers and umbrella vendors.

"Good news" abounds on broadcasts when the prime rate drops, but for listeners, a drop in the prime can be either positive or negative. Anyone who takes out a home improvement loan will benefit from lower prime rates and could save on adjustable rate home mortgages and similar borrowings.

However, for other listeners, lower rates are “bad news.” Many consumers *like* high interest rates because they are able to earn strong returns on investments like money market funds or U.S. government securities.

Don't tell your audience that a story is distressing, interesting, or amusing. The best policy is to stick to the facts, tell the news, and let the listeners decide.

If the “good news” or “bad news” is tied to a specific person or group, characterizing the news may be valid. For example: “Mayor Murphy received good news today from his doctor.” Or, “The IRS has bad news for taxpayers.”

Lead in, lead outs

There are some definite do's and many don'ts for writing into and out of correspondent's reports and actualities. In Writing Broadcast News, Mervin Block teaches us:

Don't use the same key words the reporter uses, and don't introduce him or any speaker with the very words he starts with. Violation of this rule produces “the echo-chamber effect.” It sounds-and resounds like this: “Good evening. Governor Goober warned today he's fed up with state employees who loaf on the job.” Instantly, we hear Goober say: “I'm fed up with state employees who loaf on the job.” Listener: “Haven't I heard that somewhere before?”

Don't steal the reporter's thunder. Although the lead-in for a hard news story should hit a few highlights, the anchor shouldn't skim off all the reporter's best material. Otherwise, the reporter's account will seem anticlimactic, and it will seem as though the reporter got his news from the anchor.

Don't write a soft lead-in for a hard-news story. A soft lead-in may work for a feature story, but a hard news story calls for a hard lead-in. A lead-in is something like a store's display window. A dime store doesn't dress a window with diamonds,

and a diamond merchant doesn't display dimes. Hard news, like diamonds, deserves an appropriate showcase.

Don't write a lead-in that conflicts with the reporter's script. This may seem basic, but every once in a while we hear a reporter say something that contradicts what the anchor's lead-in has said. That's a mislead-in.

Don't overstate or oversell. The lead-in should not promise or suggest more than the reporter is going to deliver. It should adhere to standards of journalism, not hucksterism.

Don't be vague. Sometimes, because of the way newscasts are put together, we don't know precisely what the reporter in the field is going to be saying, or which segment of a speech is going to be used. We have to write "blind" (i.e. without saying anything specific.) We put down only enough words to allow the report to start: "The chairman of the city transit agency, Lionel Train, spoke out today on the agency's problems..." Writing "blind," like flying "blind," can be risky. Wherever you can, say something substantive: "The chairman of the city transit agency, Lionel Train, said today he'll clean up the agency's problems within six months..."

Don't use a faulty "throw line" at the end of the lead-in to introduce a reporter. If the next voice we're going to hear is not that of the reporter, but of a woman taking an oath of office, you'd confuse a listener by saying, "Jerry Jarvis has the story." One way to handle that "throw line" is to say, "Jerry Jarvis looked on as Mary Barton took the oath..."

Most lead-ins run less than 20 seconds, and a few run barely five seconds. No matter what it takes to do the job, no matter what the length, every word matters. The shorter the lead-in, the greater the need for every word to carry its weight.

CHAPTER 14

Creating Powerful Radio: Multi-version

"One theme with endless variations, like life itself."

Alfred Steiglitz [on photography]

Multi-what?

It's a given that good newsrooms update stories as new information becomes available. The multi-version method is different.

Multiple-version or multi-version reporting is the evolution of a news or feature story over time or the retelling of a single news story in a variety of different ways by using a different mix of writing and tape in each version. The story takes on new forms, angles, and voices each time it is presented to the audience. This replaces the former technique of simply recycling and repeating the identical story in full detail for hours at a time.

Any one version of a story written in this manner will leave out some details and include others. In this way, each multi-version piece should be able to exist alone, containing who, what, why, when, where, and how. However, if listeners hear all the parts of a multi-version story, they should have a deeper and more complete comprehension than one could get from any single part.

In America, multi-version reporting is fairly standard. It's not uncommon for a news reporter on his or her way out to a story to ask the assignment manager these two questions:

"When do you need it?"

"How many do you want?"

Why multi-version?

Multi-version became popular in America in the 1980's. For years, news had been the venue through which most stations fulfilled the majority of their federally-mandated public service requirements. All of a sudden, the Federal Communications Commission deregulated, removing many of these long-standing rules.

Since news was expensive, many stations immediately cut their news staffs down to the bone. Thousands of FM stations were left with just one morning news reader. It became clear that if news was going to be part of commercial radio at all, it would have to earn its keep by generating both audience and revenue, just like any other element of the station's programming.

Why did they put the news back if they didn't have to have it?

Some stations discovered, after shaving their news departments down to nearly nothing, people in the audience

wanted their radio news back. They *preferred* their radio as a source of news and information. When news happened and no one was around to cover it for radio, stations lost listeners and credibility. It is no accident that the top-rated stations in the top fifty American markets are News-Talk. Talk programmers and hosts are grateful for the interested and informed audience that a successful multi-version newscast can bring.

The theory of evolution: adapt or die

The result is that American news is now packaged better than it was before deregulation. People want news, and they know how to get it. They can pick up a newspaper, turn on CNN, or they can use their radios. Your station is competing with these and many other news sources. Your presentation must be shorter, sharper, faster-paced and very interesting.

And let them know

In any market, it's not uncommon to find a station proudly exclaiming, not just on the air, but on buses, billboards, and, if the station can afford it, TV, "If it's happening, you'll hear it here, on Z-97." Since for many stations five minutes has been cut to three, two, or even one minute of news every half-hour or hour, that news better be damn good radio. If your station has a news commitment, work hard to promote it.

What can multi-version do for me?

At the moment, there is a lot of European interest in American-style multi-version reporting. Why? Because, while Europe has historically been dominated by public service radio, with the advent of new commercial stations, there is now competition for listeners.

The multi-version method gives a story variety. It breaks the story up into pieces to keep people listening longer. The reason is a good multi-version report is powerful radio; it prevents the audience from being bored and tuning out.

Multi-version can serve as an audience teaser to get the listeners tuning back or staying tuned. For example, “Coming up in the news at five, part three of our series on rabid, three-headed, man-eating alligators loose in the park...” Who would want to miss that?

Local builds on what national radio sends

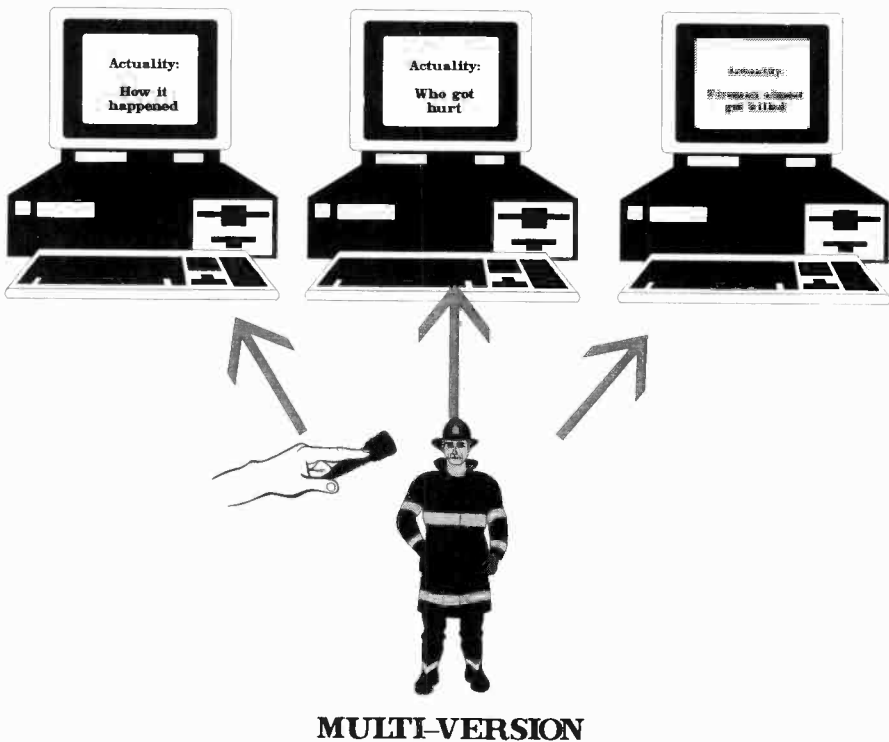
Here is another way multi-version can work for you. Your local newsroom can now build on what national network news is sending. For example, if there is a big trial involving a violent gang, your local newsroom might add the hometown angle of that story in a multi-version format. You can promote that hometown angle and save some feature pieces for the next day’s morning news. (“Our neighborhood park, overrun by gangs...Join us tomorrow morning for part four of ‘Your Kids and Crime’ after the news at 7:00 AM”). It’s another way of Creating Powerful Radio through multi-version writing, reporting and story telling.

Multi-version can also be your secret weapon against Monday morning “no-news” doldrums. Leaving a multi-version feature in progress guarantees a few minutes of interesting material on a day when there may not be much happening.

Multi-version can be applied another way. When a story is going to be part of your news all day long, you don’t want the audience to get tired of it, even if the basic information isn’t changing. By rewriting lead-ins and changing the actualities, you can make sound different enough to hold the audience’s interest.

The method

Everyone figures out his or her own way to do multi-version. I actually make notes on four pieces of paper, one for each version, before putting them into the computer. I like to have four versions when I begin, instead of going back four times to write the different versions. Plug in all the facts about the story on each page (who, what, when, why, where, and how), then assign each page a different angle and it's own custom tape covering a different part of the interview. No two pieces should be the same. If the listener hears only one version of your report, he or she should feel "satisfied," but if listeners hear all of the parts, they should feel "full." Taken all together, the collective minutes of your multi-version reports should resemble an in-depth documentary piece.



In the case of a feature story, you can think of multi-version reporting as a miniature soap-opera. Build your audience through the morning and leave them with a “cliff-hanger” to bring them back tomorrow. Multi-version is ideal for features that can be held over. For example, “Now that we’ve told you about the shocking death of the baby monkey, be listening tomorrow at 8:00, as the drama of animal abuse at the city zoo continues to unfold.”

A caution: If you bring your audience back for a second helping, there must be something new and substantial in your next feature segment. Don’t just rearrange a few words.

Lee Harris, who’s job as morning anchor on 1010 WINS all-news radio in New York City requires a constant updating of running news stories, offers his tips on the multi-version method as applied to breaking news:



LEE HARRIS

While covering a news conference or other event, start writing the story in your head while the information is conveyed. Listen for usable cuts. Mark them on your tape counter. When you have five or six of them, presumably the most exciting of the bunch, you have the ingredients you need to produce multiple versions of your story.

Here’s how you can crank out three or four versions of the same simple news story in a hurry: Use a lead-in, then an actuality [taped interview statements]. In the next story, paraphrase that actuality, then use a new actuality. Work your way through your best tape in this fashion, creating as many versions as you need, or until the story changes.

Advanced techniques

Sometimes on a “charge and reaction” story, you can create several versions by focusing alternately on the charge, then the denial. Let’s say for example an attractive, successful fashion model has mysteriously disappeared. Police are investigating the photographer of her last known assignment. Story one could be an interview with the police officer leading the investigation talking about why their evidence points to the photographer. At the end of the story, you would mention that the photographer has hired an attorney and has denied all charges. Your second piece might feature tape from the suspect’s attorney talking about what an insult it is that his client is even being considered as a suspect in this alleged crime. At the close of version two, you might mention that the police are continuing to pursue their investigation of the photographer as their prime suspect. In both stories, the information conveyed is essentially the same but the stories will sound different because the narrators are so diverse in their voices and views.

Another multi-version technique that can give your reporting depth and set it apart is to briefly give the meat of your story, then focus on an interesting element.

For example: A building full of housing code violations bursts into flame. One of the firefighters working on the blaze is killed. Sad as the story is, it doesn’t take too long to give the hard facts. You have a sound bite from someone who lived in the building. The woman sobbed that the building was a death trap just waiting to kill somebody. Using that tape adds depth to your story without detracting from the necessary information that must be conveyed. With this technique, the entire story can be colorfully told in several different ways in under a minute each. Multiple versions might include tape of: reaction of the firefighters, reaction of eyewitnesses, the arson investigator, the housing officials, and a spokesperson for the Red Cross describing emergency services available to the building’s residents.

If time permits, you can let the news anchor handle the hard news story and select one of the angles with or without an accompanying actuality. The anchor will then hand the story off to a reporter who can add yet another angle with or without a taped actuality. By mixing the angles and assigned introductions, still other multi-versions of a story can be created. If there's less time, the anchor can handle the hard facts and the sidebar multi-versions can be done by the reporter in the field. Again, this works best if the anchor can handle the basics of the story in his or her lead. Remember, the key to multi-version is alternation.

Example: "A tragic fire has taken the life of 26-year-old John Jones, a seven year fire department veteran. It happened in a downtown apartment building this morning. The building had multiple housing code violations and the fire is considered suspicious."

Now that the anchor has given the basics, the reporter is now free to do multiple versions of follow up.

Here are a few multi-versions that aired on 1010 WINS/New York one snowy day in New York City. The station already had aired reports on the traffic tie-ups, interviewed storm experts, and city officials, and reported on electrical outages. In short, all the "hard news" on the blizzard had been reported, yet the snow still came down. Harris' assignment was to get the "human angle."

Harris went underground to the subway train station, one place in New York where people were sheltered from the storm. He filed these four reports, which work well with all the parts together, and equally well with the individual pieces alone, the hallmark of a good multi-version.

Here are scripts of his multi-version reports:

**WINS RADIO
HARRIS REPORT
NEW YORK BLIZZARD**

MULTI-VERSION ONE

(This first version uses no tape. It just describes the scene.)

“The Columbus Circle Station is a pretty strong argument for placing the rest of the city underground and having New Yorkers evolve into a race of mole people. I mean it’s dirty and you can’t understand the announcements, but at least there’s no slipping and sliding down here, because there’s no snow down here. About the only hint of the weather above is that a lot of folks are dressed in clothing usually associated with arctic exploration. But nobody looks any more testy or miserable than they usually do.

Lee Harris, 1010 WINS, at the Columbus Circle Station.”

WINS RADIO
HARRIS REPORT
NEW YORK BLIZZARD

MULTI-VERSION TWO

(Lee uses a quote here, but the woman is difficult to understand, so he repeats her question and leaves it in the tape.)

“Well, there’s no snow down here in the Columbus Circle Station. In fact, there’s very little indication of the situation topside at all, other than the arctic explorer look favored by many of the commuters this morning. And the above average number of homeless people who came down to get out of the storm. This 35-year-old woman says she actually likes this kind of weather because it tends to make people more generous, and she needs the help:

Q...’I’m off the streets and I’m eight months pregnant. Welfare’s finding me a place pretty soon.’

HARRIS: ‘You are eight months pregnant and you slept on the street last night?’

Q...’I sleep on the street, that’s right.’

HARRIS: ‘And she says she slept on the street the last time she was pregnant.’

Lee Harris, 1010 WINS, at the Columbus Circle Station.”

**WINS RADIO
HARRIS REPORT
NEW YORK BLIZZARD**

MULTI-VERSION THREE

HARRIS: "Well, on top of everything else, the weather is apparently making a bad impression on some of our foreign visitors. This businessman from Hong Kong just doesn't see the charm in having his flight delayed thirty-six hours, and waiting almost that long to get a cab.

Q... 'Well, it's interesting. But it's not...very impressive.'

HARRIS: 'oh, uh, I suppose the weather is better in Hong Kong?'

Q.... 'well we are having a tropical climate over in Hong Kong. So hot, wet, wintertime you are up to like 50-60 degrees!'

HARRIS: 'that's OK if you like being comfortable. And that sort of thing.'

Lee Harris, 1010 WINS, at the cab line at the Sheraton, New York."

WINS RADIO
HARRIS REPORT
NEW YORK BLIZZARD

MULTI-VERSION FOUR

(We're back at the subway station with the woman who's pregnant and homeless.)

“One of the reasons the subway was put below ground was to make it impervious to days like today. And below ground it looks like just another day. Including the usual contingent of people who call the subway home night after night. This woman says she's been homeless for eight years but weather like this has its advantages.

Q... 'Even though it's colder, street people have a tendency to be more friendlier.

If it's snowing, if you're homeless. And they do help you out more than when the weather's nicer.'

HARRIS: 'By the way, that woman claims to be and appears to be, eight months pregnant.'

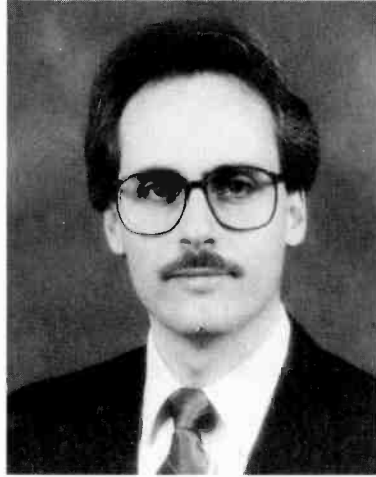
Q... 'With my last kid, I slept on the street also.'

Lee Harris, 1010 WINS, in the Columbus Circle Station.”

Most news professionals have found individual ways to make their news fascinating and thorough. At a time when news departments are struggling to make their product shorter, but still maintain journalistic integrity with fewer staff and less airtime, multi-version reporting has proven itself. Another master of the art is Jim Chenevey.

Fitting it all in

If you have done broadcast news, you know it is harder to write shorter. Jim Chenevey, currently a news anchor at the CBS Radio Network, has developed multi-version and “writing short” to an art form. Chenevey proves you can write short and make it work.



JIM CHENEVEY

He's a master of the six word story. Example, “Guess who turns fifty. Hugh Hefner.” Chenevey's talent is understanding that you cannot explain every detail of a story. He is part of the baby boom generation, speaks to them, and uses the culture for material. He's also a digger, finding stories that are not necessarily off the Associated Press wire. Chenevey reads magazines and surfs the Internet for stories.

The CBS Spectrum cast is geared for FM music-oriented stations, but many News-Talkers use it at the half hour. Chenevey's job is tough because the Spectrum cast, in some cases, compliments six-minute top-of-the-hour newscasts and in others satisfies the *entire news needs* of an audience listening to a music station.

At CBS, Chenevey does eight one minute newscasts per morning on the Spectrum network. Chenevey's advice to news writers and anchors, “Cut out extra words, write the piece, then go back and CUT.”

In each cast, Chenevey averages between five and six stories, a kicker of some type, plus a piece of sound, all in one minute. The style is conversational. If you've heard one, you have not heard them all. He varies the tape and rotates the good stories, just as is done with the music in music formats. Chenevey has "A," "B," and "C" stories in each cast, varying the rest. He adds the new breaking stories into the mix, but uses multi-versions of the ones that will run all morning. The best way to illustrate this is to actually show you his scripts. What follows are five, one-minute "Chenevey" newscasts that aired October 15, 1994 on CBS Spectrum.

6:00 AM

"Good morning. This is a CBS Newsbrief. The Toronto Blue Jays have won the American league pennant...

'q...it was a tough year and they came through for us...'

One of the ecstatic Toronto fans. The Jays will play either Philly or Atlanta in the World Series beginning Saturday night.

Bell Atlantic has scheduled a news conference this morning, reportedly to announce it's agreed to buy Tele-Communications Incorporated, the nation's largest cable TV outlet. This would create a mega-media company, number six on the Fortune 500.

President Clinton has cleared 65 million dollars in emergency funds to help fight public health problems resulting from the flooding in the Midwest.

In Sydney, Australia, a twin-engine cargo plane crashed after hitting two kangaroos on the runway. No one was hurt.

In Concord, California, voters will cast ballots for or against a school voucher program. But one group plans to cast spells. A coven of witches wants to open a pagan school under the voucher program and hopes to whip up some votes with a little black magic.

From CBS News, I'm Jim Chenevey."

**CBS SPECTRUM
CHENEVEY NEWSCAST
10/15/94**

6:30 AM

“Good morning. Here’s a CBS Newsbrief.

Two more Americans are Nobel Prize winners. Russel Hulse and Joseph Taylor of Princeton have won the prize for their studies of gravity. Doctor Taylor I presume:

‘q...It certainly is a great honor and it’s a very humbling one.’

Bell Atlantic reportedly wants to buy Tele-Communications Incorporated, the nation’s biggest cable company. The deal would create a sixty billion dollar media giant.

Toronto has won the American league pennant, beating Chicago last night six to three to take that series four games to two.

Several students at Oakland University in suburban Detroit are being tested for HIV. They were not informed that a lab they were using was also being used for AIDS research, utilizing a live virus. So far, none has tested positive

Police in Schenectady, New York, are looking for a few good ‘Johns’—men who would be willing to hit the streets looking for sex, as part of an undercover prostitution investigation.

From CBS News, I’m Jim Chenevey.”

CBS SPECTRUM
CHENEVEY NEWSCAST
10/15/94

7:00 AM

“Good morning. Here’s a CBS Newsbrief.

A “Monster Merger” is in the works, it could be the biggest ever:

‘q...Bell-Atlantic Corporation, Tele-Communications Incorporated and Liberty Media Corporation today announced that they have signed a letter of intent to merge.’

She’s with Bell-Atlantic. If approved, the deal would create a sixty billion dollar multi-media giant. Number six in the Fortune 500.

American scientists Russel Hulse and Joseph Taylor of Princeton University have won the Nobel Prize in physics. This for their work on the study of pulsars and Einstein’s theories. Relatively speaking...

Toronto has won the American League pennant, beating Chicago last night to win the series in six games.

Fire officials in Austin, Texas, say three recent fires were set by kids who say they got the idea from MTV’s ‘Beavis and Butt-head’ cartoon.

The mayor of New Haven, Connecticut, says it felt like a bee sting, but it was a bullet that hit him in the leg. Police say it went through two steel doors and a wall before it bounced off Mayor Losure’s leg. He’s OK.

From CBS News, I’m Jim Chenevey”

**CBS SPECTRUM
CHENEVEY NEWSCAST
10/15/94**

7:30 AM

“Good morning. Here’s a CBS Newsbrief.

Bell-Atlantic has announced a major merger. It plans to buy cable giant Tele-Communications Incorporated and it’s Liberty Media subsidiary.

Russel Hulse and Joseph Taylor, both of Princeton University, have won the 1993 Nobel Physics prize for their studies on Einstein’s theories.

Some students at Oakland University in suburban Detroit are upset about not being informed that a lab they were using was also home to AIDS research using a live virus...

‘q....We have absolutely no indication that any of these students were exposed, however we are discussing this matter with the students to alleviate their concerns.’

The school’s David Dissen.

Rats are nothing new to ships, but this ship is the space shuttle Columbia. 48 rats are now on board the orbiter, preparing for tomorrow’s scheduled launch.

Deputies in Citrus County Florida were chasing Daniel Benock, wanted on a probation violation. When Benock jumped into a lake and tried to swim to freedom: That was until he saw a seven foot alligator floating nearby. He’s now in jail. Glad to be there.

From CBS News, I’m Jim Chenevey”

CBS SPECTRUM
CHENEVEY NEWSCAST
10/15/94

8:00 AM

“Good morning. Here’s a CBS Newsbrief.

Somali warlord Mohammed Farah Adid has today vowed to release captured U.S. pilot Michael Durant and a Nigerian peace-keeper. Adid says the two hostages will be released today or tomorrow.

The Philadelphia Phillies will take on Toronto’s Blue Jays in the World Series beginning Saturday night. The Phillies beating the Braves six to three last night to win the National League pennant. Phillies Manager Jim Fergosi:

‘q...I guess we’re going to be the underdogs again. It’s not a bad way to go.’

The space shuttle’s fueled—and so far all systems go for the launch later this morning.

The Right-Aid and Revco Drugstore chains are expected to announce today they’re suing several drug makers for alleged price fixing.

Quite a scene during a radio debate featuring Nylo Yuri, a candidate for mayor of Hialeah, Florida, and suspended incumbent mayor Raul Martinez. Yuri claims that during the debate, Martinez stood up and spat at him. Martinez says he was just blowing. A third candidate, Salvatore De Angelos, says it was all very embarrassing.

From CBS News, I’m Jim Chenevey.”

CHAPTER 15

Creating Powerful Radio News: Integrating Radio and TV

“The business of every art is to bring something into existence...”

Aristotle

A lot of radio broadcasters are curious about working with pictures and would like to give television a try. Many TV people look back wistfully, remembering their days in radio as their happiest, when they did their best work.

TV is here, we like it, we watch it and *we* need to use it! I’ve noticed that every time I have conversations with TV news directors, they all say the same thing, “Our best people came from radio.” That’s because radio people know how to *communicate, tell stories, and spontaneously improvise.*

TV is really just radio with the pictures. Smart broadcasters use TV for what it does best, showing events as they happen. Radio should also be used for its strongest assets, immediacy and imagination. In your mind’s eye, radio can take you anywhere.

I'm seeing more and more TV and radio newsrooms around the world moving toward combining their efforts into an integrated product. In Europe, they call it "bi-media." Bi-media started as a cost-cutting measure, but I think it can be beneficial overall. When a TV and radio station are under the same roof, or even on the same floor, it makes little sense to send two sets of reporters to the same press conferences, the same fire stories, and to interview the same local figures or celebrities.

But what if he or she has "a face for radio?"

Talented radio people can and do make it on television. Radio broadcasters should take it upon themselves to do as much as possible not to discourage television stations from utilizing them. If your radio station is often a source for television footage, always be ready to make an appearance. Managers, don't give up. A small amount of coaching, grooming, and effort may be all it takes to convert that wildly successful radio talent into a shining personality on your television station. Don't overlook the recent triumphs of "average-looking" people on television.

TV to radio: Not as easy as it looks

Talented TV people can be taught to speak "visually" for radio reports or "debriefed" (i.e. give short interviews about their story) between their TV shots. A good assignment manager for either TV or radio can decide which stories naturally lend themselves to which medium. There's another great benefit: TV and radio can promote each other, increasing visibility and audiences for both.

A lot of TV interview, discussion, or "talking head" programs are really just talk radio shows with cameras pointed at them. It's not such a big deal to break down the brick wall. You can enhance the level of creativity for those doing the work and the excitement for the audience, whether they have stereos or big screens.

In the 1980's, CNN was first to try the all-news radio format on TV, with enormous success. To do this, CNN hired a lot of radio reporters. They worked cheaper, and they had the necessary skills. CNN realized that the basics for both radio and television are the same. You must tell an interesting story in a fascinating way. Each medium has assets and drawbacks. On radio, if you want to talk about a pink elephant, all you need to do is describe one and people "see" it. On television, if you want to talk about a pink elephant, you must actually produce one.

In the early days of television, reporters and hosts alike had backgrounds in either print or radio. Where is it written that broadcasters cannot be great at both TV *and* radio? Now is as good a time as any to get our feet wet in each other's ponds. It's definitely worth a try. Here are techniques to make the transition easier:

FROM TV TO RADIO

- When on radio, speak *visually*. Paint word pictures. Don't refer to the picture, since we can't see it.
- If it is easier to answer a question from someone than to write a separate report, do that. Do it anyway you think you can get the story on the air effectively.
- Use TV to promote radio and radio to promote TV. On the morning or "breakfast" TV shows, some hosts actually say, "When you get in your car on your way to work this morning, don't miss the interview coming up on Z-97. The mayor, his mistress, his wife, and his mother will all be on live with host Jim Smiley."

- It's OK to promote your TV news coming up on the radio. Most people now in their cars will be checking out the pictures tonight on the TV news anyway. Why not send them to your channel?
- Whether on radio or TV, *promote within your programming*. Let your audience know what is coming up next. Tease them with exciting tidbits about upcoming stories so they stay with you.
- It can be fun to actually use the TV anchors and special reporters as regulars on radio shows. They get a chance to express themselves as people instead of sticking to a tight script. Conversely, television viewers are often curious to see what their favorite radio personalities look like. At several stations I work with, the meteorologist, the sports guys, and the traffic cop all do both radio and TV. If you have talent, that's all that matters. Tammy Haddad, who produced the Larry King Live show, first for Mutual Radio, then for CNN Television says, "This whole business revolves around one thing. *Talent*. If someone has talent, they can make it on radio or they can make it on television."
- Make sure there is a radio monitor that comes in clearly in your TV newsroom so the reporters can actually hear themselves on the radio air. A TV monitor in the radio studio is helpful, too. You wouldn't believe what a difference it can make!
- *Use multi-version*. We've covered this for radio, but it's an important tool in television as well. Break up long and involved stories into pieces so you make the most of a news story or series of reports. Remember, you may need extra footage and additional comments. Use the added visual element

to create several versions of a story in a snappier, shorter package.

- *Tell stories* in a human and relatable way. Put your *self* into a story, but keep your *opinion* out of it. Use details, small things that you notice. Remind the audience whenever possible how the story affects them.
- Remember to make it matter. Ask yourself, “Why is this story on the air? Why is it important?” Make sure your story explains this.

More ideas come from John Catchings who’s background includes both radio and television. He programmed KFRC Radio and KSFX-FM, both in San Francisco. Catchings was Executive News Producer at KGO-TV, also in San Francisco, for 20 years. Now at Group W-owned KPIX-TV, San Francisco, John worked first in news, then in programming. He’s now operations director for TV, but works closely with KPIX’s radio outlets.



JOHN CATCHINGS

Catchings is a brilliant problem-solver, never taking “it can’t be done” for an answer. Since he has worked so extensively in both radio and TV, I asked him to contribute some tips for *Creating Powerful Radio* on television:

- Play to the Visual. You witnessed it, but the photographer missed it! Never assume that because you saw it with your own eyes that the picture was taken. Look at what the camera is capturing. Do this while you are on a story. Do not wait until you are back at the studio editing and realizing you do not have the right shots! (Catchings warns, “It’s better to make your photographer mad at *you* than your news director, or worse, not do your best for the story!”)

- Start with the best video. Be the “director” of the piece and use your best pictures. Avoid the temptation to start the story with a stand-up shot.

- Do not be a human mike stand! Get involved. Choreograph the shot, be involved, demonstrate your points. Keep it moving forward. Walk around, move, point. Put movement into each shot.

- Let the pictures tell the story, but let the story breathe. Do not allow it to become boring. Watch for length.

- Make good use of natural sound.

- Do not overwrite.

- Use graphics, charts and your own imagination to jazz up less interesting stories.

- When you edit, do not hang on too long to the good shots. It's tempting, but keep it moving. Be creative.
- The essence is storytelling. Never forget that. Do what it takes to tell the story.

Grab the spotlight. Promote your station on TV.

Money can't buy happiness, but it can buy TV exposure. If you can afford it, purchase commercials for your radio station to be aired on TV. Use TV spots as a way to bring in those "couch potatoes" who are stuck in front of the tube. Television promotion is a good way to stimulate recall and position the image of your station. I've heard spots on TV that invite new listeners in by saying, "57 channels and nothing on? Tune in to Z-97 for more stimulating talk radio." A TV ad campaign is expensive, but if it draws in new listeners and brings higher ratings, it's worth it.

All this having been said, the most time-honored use by American radio of American television has always been promotion. Get all the *free* TV publicity you can! Do things on your radio station that are newsworthy and attention-getting, and the TV stations will come knocking on your studio door. When they come in, make sure they see your call letters. American radio stations learned the "mike flag" trick long ago. Most mike flags are now designed with television coverage in mind.

When the station is taking calls from listeners on issues of the day, it makes a good TV "public opinion" story. Many TV assignment managers have learned to send a reporter and camera in to tape live radio talk shows for multi-versions of hot news stories. Radio managers, don't be shy. Call up the TV stations in town when a particularly controversial or important subject is being discussed on your airwaves, especially if TV coverage on the story has been intense.

Finally, television and radio should work together. Listeners already use both television and radio for information, entertainment, and as a “window on the world.” Since local television covers local communities and your radio station is part of that local community, there’s no reason why your radio station and its activities shouldn’t be covered on TV. Be fair. If the local TV station does something really noteworthy, it’s not a bad idea to mention it on your radio station. Anything that enhances the idea of your station as a “good neighbor” is useful promotion.

CHAPTER 16

Creating Powerful Radio: Public Service Announcements

"I have always believed, and still believe that artists who live and work with spiritual values cannot and should not remain indifferent to a conflict in which the highest values of humanity and civilization are at stake."

Pablo Picasso (1881-1973)

"It is better to give than to receive."

The Bible

It's generally understood that radio stations are licensed to serve the public. This has been interpreted to mean everything from educational programming to shock jocks reading one line public service announcements. It can be radio at its best, or worst.

In Europe, as well as the United States, radio has a specific charter to define what public service is and decide how to work within the structure of it.

Commercial stations are a little different. Ascertainments, or statements, are solicited from the community to determine its needs. Smart commercial broadcasters know that assessing the

true concerns of a community and addressing those issues can enhance a station's image and raise its public profile. Public service works best when the entire station is involved and the campaign is tied in to news, features, sponsorships, announcements, liners, and long-form programming to achieve a specific goal.

Let's say your audience is 25-54 year-olds and you discover that their principal worry about their community is its school system. Your station might then "adopt" a local school and help meet its needs by putting together a publicity campaign bringing in volunteers, needed supplies, money, computers, etc. Older listeners might have different concerns about their community. Fit your public service to your target audience.

"Community service activities can be of tremendous benefit towards developing listener loyalty," says Chris Berry, Director of News and Programming at WBBM-AM/Chicago. His station runs the "Wreath of Hope" campaign every year which raises money for a variety of local non-profit agencies. The show hosts broadcast live from shopping centers around the area while volunteers accept donations for the charities. Heavily promoted on the air, the appearances help the charities, increase awareness of the station's personalities, and bring the call letters into the listeners' backyards.

At KGO/San Francisco, an entire programming day each year is devoted to the Leukemia "Cure-a-thon." It raises money for research and victims of the disease. Producers and hosts design shows explaining the illness, the latest research findings, and the need for funding. KGO's sister station, WLS/Chicago, holds its Cure-a-thon in a public place so listeners and organization volunteers can feel a part of the event and meet their favorite personalities. Doctors, researchers, survivors, and families of victims are interviewed. The Cure-a-thon always has some very moving moments as family members thank the organization and the radio station for its help and describe the struggles of their

loved ones. The special public service programming raises hundreds of thousands of dollars and the staff really feels good about participating.

WABC/New York, is among many stations helping listeners fight fraud and wrongdoing by hooking them up with attorneys or volunteer agencies like Call for Action. Aggrieved listeners can call a volunteer-staffed consumer line with their complaints. The station then uses its firepower and contacts the business, employer, or other parties involved on the listener's behalf. They usually get results.

In 1995, KFVB/Los Angeles made earthquake preparedness its issue. Entire broadcast days were turned over to reports and interview shows devoted to earthquake safety. KFVB reporter, Jack Popejoy, an earthquake safety expert, anchored the coverage. KFVB published a free newsletter outlining everything from safety precautions to earthquake-proofing. The pamphlets were available free to listeners from the station or at sponsors' stores.

Take advantage of your staff's creativity. One way to encourage hosts to support your public service commitment is to have *them* come up with their own ideas for a promotion or campaign. Sam Walton, who founded the Walmart chain of stores said, "*People always support ideas they help create.*" Most hosts already have a "pet" charity or cause they would like to endorse. If he or she feels the organization or issue is important, they can really get their listeners excited about joining it.

The key to community service is to approach it like all other forms of powerful radio. Powerful public service programming is interesting, relatable, and *it matters*. Include public service events on your daily or weekly calendar. Hold up the mirror that is your station and reflect back the true needs and concerns of your community. Be known as the station that *always* has something going on.

Local or not

There is no wrong way to do good work. Local concerns or issues usually work better, but stations that raise money for food drops in Africa or medical supplies in Bosnia also create good feelings in their communities. There are no rules here, but by finding a charity or cause about which your staff feels passionate, you'll do both your community and your station some good.

The *powerful* public service announcement

Most people hate PSAs, and with good reason. They've traditionally been used as filler and treated that way. This need not and *should* not be. Every moment on the radio counts, even those devoted to PSAs. Here are two PSAs on the same subject. They were heard within minutes of each other on different stations in the same market. Which do you think is more powerful?

Station 1:

"St. John's Hospital needs type O blood. If you're type O, here's the phone number to call..."

Station 2:

"There's a little girl, six years old, who's been badly hurt in a car crash. Both of her parents were killed. She's lying in a bed right now at St. John's Hospital fighting for her life. She might not make it, because she needs type O blood and the hospital has a shortage. If you're type O and want to help this little girl live, call us here at Z-97, and we'll tell you what to do. Z-97, the station that cares about our town."

If you can bring life to the story, your listeners will care about it, too.

You'll probably want to shy away from "produced" PSA's provided by outside agencies, unless one of these organizations has come up with a *great* campaign. For samples of the great ones, you also might want to listen to some of Dick Orkin's Radio Ranch spots or vintage Stan Freberg as examples of the good ones. If you can customize a campaign to make it sound like it's part of your station, you can make it work.

By being selective about the kind of public service announcements you use on your station, and by using human and dramatic touches, you will turn what has long been perceived as a "tune-out" into an audience- and image-builder for your station.

CHAPTER 17

Creating Powerful Radio: Promotion

"Promotion is the exploitation of opportunity."

Doug Harris, radio event marketer

What is radio promotion? Simply, promotion is anything that puts the word out about your station. Promotion gets people talking about and listening to your product.

Radio promotion has two goals. First, to draw in *new* listeners, and second, to get current listeners listening *more often*. In the United States, promotion has also evolved into a sales tool. Many promotional ideas are tied in with an advertising client, creating additional revenue while expanding the station's audience.

Product, permanence, and promotion

Your product is what you do. Ideally, you have a great station with creative elements, good shows, interesting news and information plus top personalities.

Permanence involves keeping those shows consistent by running them at regular times so the audience can develop the habit of listening.

Then there's promotion, the third attribute of any successful business. In the case of radio, it's letting the audience know where you are and what you are doing. You can promote any element of your radio station, as long as it's good, interesting radio. Don't knock yourself out barking people into the tent if the circus isn't great.

Promotions have to be the best and most creative part of what the station does, so if your station is intense, dynamic, creative, funny, and passionate. Your promos should be too, or at least reflect that. If they don't, you're selling something other than what you do best.

A powerful promotion should:

- Promote the station's image as well its product.
- Build passion, emotion, and listener loyalty.
- Involve your listeners.
- Ensure that people who are not participating will still enjoy hearing the contest.

In the United States, it makes sense to run promotions in connection with the big Arbitron ratings books. Many stations have had success beginning their promotions on Thursdays because that's when listeners begin keeping track of what they're listening to in the Arbitron diaries.

Promoting the news

Your own airwaves can be one of the best vehicles available for marketing the news and information you offer. Take a small excerpt from a reporter's "magic moment" on the air, or a piece

of a great interview on a breaking story, and create a powerful image-enhancing promo. It might sound like this:

“If you weren’t listening to Z-97 news yesterday at noon, here’s what you missed: (insert tape of magic moment) For news as it happens, it’s Z-97!”

This “performance promo” lets the audience know that if they’re not listening to you, they’re really missing out. This method applies to more than news programming. Roll tape on *everything*. Save “magic moments” from talk shows, contests, and monologues. They make great promos! Note: If your production director doesn’t recognize a moment when he or she hears one, or can’t spend time listening during the day, it’s something a good producer should save or flag.

You can also create promos around specific station personalities. At KTAR in Phoenix Ariz., a news promotion was built around individual reporters, including the morning police reporter, Rod Petersen. The basic script:

“While you’re asleep, KTAR’s Rod Petersen is out cruising the streets, looking for trouble...’And I’ll find it too.’ (says Rod). The best police and crime coverage on KTAR, Newsradio 620.”

Another way to engage your listeners while promoting your news product is to ask the audience to help you. While I was working as News Director at a major market music station, our promotion director came up with this idea: “A scoop for a scoop.” We hooked up an extra phone line and an answering machine in the newsroom and asked listeners to help out and call with news tips. If the station used the tip, the caller would receive a coupon good for free ice cream. People like to win anything, *even if the prize isn’t major*. They also like to be involved. Listeners from three counties called in to get those free scoops of ice cream. Most U.S. news stations employ some version of this “news tips line” technique.

You cannot buy the audience. In the late 1970's, WFYR-FM in Chicago conducted a promotion called "The Million Dollar Minute." A million dollars in cash was scattered on the floor of a bank vault and a single listener was given sixty seconds to scoop up as much as she could. The station figured the woman selected would walk away with about \$10,000. But, owing to a series of errors, the winner managed to grab \$106,083. *Oops...and the station dropped in the ratings.* Many stations have tried giving away huge cash prizes, cars, and cruises, only to find listeners deserting the station once the prize has been awarded.

Lots of small prizes often work better than one major prize. More people can win, and more important, more people *believe* they can win. These promotions are more cost-effective and they achieve the same goal of getting people to talk about what's happening on your station. Added up, the more winners, the more people are thinking good thoughts and spreading the word about your station.

The Bake Sale

Some of the best promotions in radio are spontaneous, developing from programming on the air. Here's a wonderful example: Dan's Bake Sale.

The idea for Dan's Bake Sale came from a conversation between a listener and Rush Limbaugh on Rush's show. Rush publishes his own newsletter which costs \$29 per year. "Dan the Listener" from Fort Collins, Colo., said he'd like a subscription but was short on money and couldn't afford one. In keeping with Rush's political philosophy and sense of humor, he decided to have a "bake" sale, selling chocolate chip cookies to raise money for Dan's subscription.

It became a huge event. Newspapers reported all flights into Fort Collins booked for the weekend of the "bake sale." People planned camping trips just to be there. Rush showed up for the weekend and thousands of fans turned out to meet him.

It was huge, it was fun, it promoted Rush's show and created a "news event" covered by TV, radio and the national press. It also sold a lot of subscriptions to Rush's newsletter!

Other favorite promotions

Some of the best promotions tie into public service, benefiting your community while getting the word out about your radio station. It doesn't have to be expensive. A good promotion generates press that your station couldn't possibly buy. Here are a few favorite success stories:

Orange Barrel Holiday

In the early 1980's, Albuquerque, New Mexico, was plagued by road construction projects. Traffic was a mess. Drivers were going crazy trying to maneuver around orange construction barrels, which were closing off lanes and streets everywhere.

The market's top full-service station, KOB, decided to have some fun with a bad situation. The station contacted the company that made the orange barrels and devised the "Orange Barrel Holiday." Listeners signed up to win an all-expense-paid trip to the small town in Indiana where the barrels are manufactured. Highlights included a tour of the barrel factory and lunch in the plant cafeteria. The promotion worked by combining a sense of community involvement with a sense of humor.

The Ugliest Weed

One drought-stricken summer in California's San Joaquin Valley, radio station KFBK/Sacramento urged its listeners to send in the ugliest weed growing in their fields or gardens. This idea struck a chord in the largely agricultural area. Listeners responded in a big way. KFBK got so many tumorous growths, many of them enormous, that they filled up several storerooms and part of a warehouse.

The grower of the ugliest weed won a cash prize, some free gardening supplies from the sponsor, and became a local celebrity. People in town talked about the contest, and it generated free publicity for the station on local television and in the newspapers. This is a great example of a promotion fitting a station and its community.

Mystery History

(It helps a lot if a talented production director puts this contest together. We used it on WABC, New York.)

At the same time each morning, bits of tape from an actual historic moment were played. Listeners had to guess who was speaking to win small cash prizes and a set of encyclopedias. Since politics, news and discussion of current events filled much of the broadcast day, "Mystery History" was perfect for WABC's news-talk adult audience. It would probably work well on any news-heavy station.

Singles Night at Safeway

This promotion combined a knowledge of audience lifestyle with practical considerations like sex, food and revenue. The sponsor was the largest supermarket chain in California. The station, KIOI-FM/San Francisco, broadcast live from a store location and invited its target listeners, baby-boomer in their 20's and 30's, many of them single, to meet the disc jockeys and each other. KIOI-FM handed out free T-shirts with the station logo, and listeners wore them as they pushed their shopping carts through the aisles. Over a thousand listeners turned out, several romantic relationships and one marriage resulted. The promotion showed the sponsor that KIOI could bring lots of people to its supermarkets and got people in the town talking about the station.

WMIR Wants You To Go To Hell

This falls under the category of “geography joke” promotions. Stations often give away trips to the usual places. With a little creativity and an atlas, however, you can go the extra mile. WMIR in Lake Geneva, Wisc., used this as a Halloween promotion. A check of the map turned up the town of Hell, in nearby Michigan. On-air promos promised listeners an all-expense-paid trip to Hell on Halloween, complete with dinner at the Devil’s Den restaurant. The fact that this particular “Hell” was in Michigan was mentioned only once in each promo, and not very prominently.

The promotion set the town “on fire.” Thousands of people signed up for the opportunity to go to Hell...and come back. A check of the map may turn up many such opportunities within driving distance of your station...“Win a free trip to Tokyo” (*Nebraska*), etc.

“Promotions and contests are the best ways of introducing new listeners to your radio station. Your Promotions/Marketing manager is the ‘PD’ of the off-air side of the radio station,” says Michael Hedges, who is brilliant at promoting his stations. He successfully programmed Dallas adult contemporary KVIL using strong emphasis on community involvement



MICHAEL HEDGES

and promotion. Hedges has also programmed KRLD/Dallas and spent time as an executive at Fairbanks Communications. He also researched audiences for companies as varied as the Olive Garden restaurant chain and CNN.

Here are Michael Hedges' tips on Creating Powerful Radio Promotions:

- *Ask, "Does this promotion make sense?"* Every promotion must make sense within the marketing objectives of the radio station.
- *Less is truly more.* Choose your promotions carefully. When presented with five [major] promotional ideas for a month, choose the ONE which has the greatest likelihood of succeeding. Do that one.
- *Dammit, they remember!* Every time the radio station is presented to the public, an impression is made. These impressions are cumulative on the mind of the dearest listener. [Listeners] are equally likely to remember your faults as well as your merits. Your very polite listeners will never call to tell you how disgusting and dirty the remote van looked, but you can bet one will tell ten friends that your station looked tacky.
- *When designing a promotion always ask yourself how it can be made bigger.* Radio is show biz. Show it to them!
- *Don't outsmart yourself.* Complicated promotions rarely succeed because listeners just don't have time to engage the information. You can build interest in a promotion only to the extent that the listeners see a pay off. The promotion will fail if the length of the rules promo goes over :30 seconds.

- *It's the details.* Think thirty times about each step through which the gentle listener must pass to play the game, attend the event and win the prize. Use their eyes and ears, not yours. The wrong telephone number on an entry form is totally inexcusable.
- *Remember the payoff.* Sales promotions can work if, and only if, each and every listener participant comes away from the event feeling that the time and energy they spent participating was in some way compensated.
- *Remember to get paid.* Plan for local media coverage. Think of ways to make your promotion interesting to them. Make sure that every local editor knows about your promotion well in advance. Get a photo of every contest winner published in the local or community newspaper.
- *The promo is better than the bit.* KVIL's top rated morning man, Ron Chapman's, "first and only law of promotion:" *The production must be the best element on your radio station. The writing must be tight, smart and crisp.* If a promotion, event or contest doesn't sound exciting on your radio station, listeners will never *hear* it.
- *All promotions are equal.* Listeners don't [necessarily] know the difference between programming promotions and sales promotions and they don't mind being sold products or services compatible with their expectations of the radio station. Anything sold in an entertaining way is, well, entertaining.

Steer clear of contest junkies

Warning: Aided by speed dialing, there is a group of people who live to play radio contests. Make sure your contest is legal and restrictions are clear. You can tailor your rules in order to weed out the contest addicts. Your rules should be structured in such a way as to give the average person the best chance of winning.

Avoid disasters

Whatever your promotion, plan it carefully. Do a little informal research. Run your promotion idea by a few people around the office. See if they can spot any obvious flaws.

Do you remember a story dramatized on “WKRP in Cincinnati,” a TV show that ran in the early 1980’s? The story, which may or may not be true, made me laugh because it reminded me so much of station promotions that have gone horribly wrong.

It was the old Thanksgiving Turkey Giveaway promotion, with a twist. The live turkeys would be dropped from a helicopter to glide down to listeners waiting in a parking lot below. Unfortunately, the promotion department overlooked one important consideration...turkeys can’t fly. As newsman Les Nessman reported live on the air, “turkeys are hitting the ground like bags of wet cement!” Be certain your promotion will “fly” before you drop it on the public.

CHAPTER 18

Creating Powerful Radio: Sales and Commercials

“Do anything you want on the air...but you still have to be able to sell it. If a sponsor is afraid to be associated with it, you lose.”

The Greaseman (Doug Tracht), syndicated talk personality, Infinity Broadcasting

Why should someone on the air care about commercials? This is how we pay the bills. An understanding of commercial mechanics; *why* a spot works and what is good about the product, combined with personal creativity; can make you a more valuable asset to your station.

It’s remarkable how little some air personalities know or care about the importance of commercials. They see the spots as a “break” in the programming instead of an integral part of the on-air package. A poorly done or boring commercial can be as much of a tune out as any other programming.

Turn it up!

Salespeople listen to and look at the station differently than the rest of the staff. I learned this while heading to dinner with a couple of friends from sales. The car radio was on. Suddenly the conversation was loudly interrupted. “Quiet, turn it up!” A

client's spot was on. Salespeople are the only people I know who turn the radio *up* during commercial breaks. That's *their* work. It's what they care about. It's how they and their stations make money. Creative, effective, powerful commercials are *very* important.

All Creating Powerful Radio principles apply to commercials as well. Paint word pictures. Think and speak visually. Personalize, be a story-teller. Keep the message clever and to the point, and you'll never be boring.

The live copy advantage: Personality sells

Some of the most effective spots are ad-libbed or "live copy" because there's room for fun, spontaneity, and personalization. Here's how it works: The host may be given a fact sheet or commercial "platform." He or she highlights what is best about the product or service being advertised. Story-telling skills and personal experience are worked into the sell. If the host is trusted, the spots are entertaining, and the product is decent, listeners are likely to buy. That, above all else, makes advertisers happy.

Credibility is paramount. Howard Stern's sponsors pay enormous rates for his live spots, even though he sometimes seems not to be selling the product at all. Once in a live spot for a life insurance company, Stern characteristically created a brilliant show "bit." He advised male heads of households *not* to buy *too much* life insurance from his sponsor. As he explained it, after you die, your wife's new boyfriend will convince her to give him the insurance money to start a mail order business, which will subsequently fail, and then, bankrupt, your children will starve or wind up on the streets as teenage hookers.

The moral of Stern's commercial: you need this life insurance, but don't buy too much of it. That is an original and powerful commercial, and it was funny, too.

Many products like Snapple Beverages and Brother “P-Touch” label makers are on the map today because of the personal selling and live copy spots done for them by Rush Limbaugh and Howard Stern.

A brilliant originator of live spots is talk show host Mike Siegel of KVI/Seattle. I have used his work in client sessions to teach talk show hosts and managers how to do effective on-air live spots.



MIKE SIEGEL

The live copy advantage: Job security

Mike Siegel is quick to point out that tying air talent to advertisers through live copy spots makes it easier to ride out a couple of bad books. The advertiser feels it's the talent's *personality* that is selling the product. This creates financial security both for the station and the air talent. Even if numbers are down-trending, if you're bringing in big dollars for live spots, management will be reluctant to get rid of you.

There are two kinds of live spots, ad-libbed and scripted. In the case of an ad-libbed spot, basic information will be on the page, some contributed by the client, some from the account executive, and some notes from the talent. The combination and presentation of these elements is up to the talent. In the case of scripted copy spots, the text is prearranged but the delivery and small modifications are up to the host. Be sure that, if the account executive or the client are writing a script for the campaign, the talent has had a chance to read the copy, give feedback, and give suggestions for modifications. (Clients also love to get tape of

their live copy spots.) Always check with the client to make sure not only that the script is satisfactory but that the spots are *working* for him or her.

Siegel believes that if you're selling a product, you'd better *know* it and *use* it. Eat at the restaurant. Drink the Washington State-grown cherry juice. Drive the car. Get the skylight installers to put one in your house. Mike warns, "Don't endorse a product you don't know, and don't endorse a product you don't like. The spots won't ring true. The audience won't believe you, and they won't buy the product."

I remember a TV segment done about legendary commentator Paul Harvey, one of the most listened to voices on American radio. Harvey is known for his innovative live commercials. Most of Paul Harvey's sponsors have been with him for decades and listeners have come to associate these products with Paul Harvey. As a test of the listener's devotion, the reporter traveled to a rural factory and asked a group of women working on the production line to describe their feelings about his show. At the end, the reporter asked these women to show him their thermal beverage container. Each woman proudly displayed one made by Aladdin/Stanley, the brand advertised and recommended and endorsed on-air by Paul Harvey. That's the power of creative live copy selling.

Go along on the sales call

Mike Siegel recommends going out with the account executive to meet your sponsors, and getting to know them personally. Siegel suggests raising any questions you may have about any possible flaws or problems with the product or service at that time. He says to learn enough to be able to convey your personal enthusiasm. Consider including a brief interview with your client in the spot. Be sure you only endorse *one* product in each advertising category. (This is one of the reasons live spots demand premium pricing.) Follow up on any listener complaints. Again, Siegel warns, investigate thoroughly before endorsing.

He says if a spot doesn't work one way, be flexible and willing to change the approach. Don't treat commercials like a separate part of your show. The audience is sophisticated enough to know why the commercials are there. If the products and services are good, and properly targeted at your audience, you can make the commercials as informative and entertaining as the rest of your show.

All of this seems like a lot of work, but when handled properly, live spots can be a gold mine for everyone involved! After people hear a great live spot, they usually get excited and want to give it a try.

Produced spots

Even though you may not always have the opportunity to become as familiar with a client buying produced copy spots, it still helps to know what you're talking about. The Radio Advertising Bureau suggests that all radio spots do the following.

- The most important rule in radio advertising: Mention the client often. Make sure the listeners know where to find the client.

- Play up the advantage to the listener. What's the unique selling proposition of the product or service? What does it offer that is not available elsewhere?

- Grab attention. Use noise, music, unusual voices, whatever's appropriate.

- Zero in. Pitch directly to your target listener. "If you own an aging, overweight cat, listen to this!"

- Be easily understood. Copy writers who use big words gratuitously (there's one now!) often lose the audience.
- Get to the point! Don't delay the unique selling proposition.
- Use action words. "Now" and "today" when you're announcing a sale. Radio's greatest strength is its immediacy...use it!
- Make the listener part of a word picture. Don't just talk about that new car. Using sound effects and music creates a mood and puts your listener behind the wheel.
- Avoid clichés like "We're known for our excellent quality and great customer service." Try, "Our quality sucks and we'll ignore you from the moment you come in until you leave in a huff." The audience will pay attention.
- Be accurate. Make sure the spot is checked by the client or other responsible party *before* it hits the air. Nothing says, "We're sloppy and don't deserve your money" more than a spot with factual errors that's rushed onto the air.



Photo: Sandy Calvin

DAVID BARONFELD

Selling the talk

David Baronfeld is the VP/General Manager of KHOW-AM, KHOW-2 and KHIH-FM in Denver, Colo. He also co-hosts an “Ask the Management” show. Baronfeld was one of the first to apply Top 40 selling techniques to News-Talk radio. Early in his career, he was the youngest DJ at WPIX/New York and went on to serve as PD at several major market Top 40

stations. He then moved into management at KIMN/Denver. In 1991, Baronfeld created “The World’s Greatest Hits,” an internationally-syndicated program playing English-language music. Baronfeld also consults WMAQ/Chicago, Radio Øslofjord in Norway, and SW Networks.

Baronfeld is a believer in selling News-Talk, “Because of how deeply listeners *hear* the station, [News-Talk] works better for sales than other formats, including the higher-rated in-office passive music stations.” Here are his thoughts:

1. Create promotional alliances

Target 25 high-quality, high-profile local businesses. Multiple locations are preferable however, a strong single location store can act as a magnet. Find one company per category and create an annual or semi-annual promotional event that you can do together for years. Examples would include: banks, department stores, home improvement stores, car dealerships, electronic, furniture, and jewelry stores, fast-food restaurants, etc.

2. Create media partnerships

In this era where phone companies join with cable companies, it is no longer taboo for radio to join forces with competing media. Newspapers and TV have resources and value that are incalculable. Most importantly, they provide incredible name recognition and raise the level of your station's credibility with your listeners through such an association. The TV station's weatherperson can become your weatherperson. The newspaper's TV columnist can become a weekend talk show host. Imagine getting a 300 Gross Rating Point ad schedule every week for 52 weeks in the newspaper and on TV for free!

3. Think brand names

Brand selling is different than a co-op or vendor deal. By prospecting for business generically, millions of dollars go unspent. Prospecting should be focused. When asked, "What's your favorite soft drink?" People don't say, "I'm a cola drinker." They say, "I like Coke."

4. Take a good look at your listeners

"Years ago, I worked with an AOR station to help improve their local sales effort. The sales people couldn't get beyond their image of the audience's 'Van Halen T-shirts and bad teeth,' but they had to make their budgets. So I brought a camera to the next station promotion and took pictures of their listeners. One visual emerged. No matter what they wore, their hair was fabulous.

Two days later, I walked into a sales meeting, showed the pictures, and suggested they call on the Conair blow dryers guy, the Aveda shampoo rep, and the distributor for Head and Shoulders. Less than 72 hours later, the station closed an annual contract, worth nearly six figures, with the area's largest beauty supply house. That's just hair. Think about all the opportunities that existed with other personal grooming products. Multiply it

out to food, clothes, home improvement, travel, etc. Think how much money you could generate.

5. Understand your advertiser's needs

The people I like to sell to are people that are *accountable* for hitting or over-achieving their budgets. It makes most sense to talk about using radio directly with the people who are responsible for maximizing those sales. Shoot for the top. Call or write the company's president or CEO. Tell him or her you have an idea that can maximize sales and save them money. Nine times out of 10, you'll get the appointment.

6. Let your talent sell for you--Part I

This is the sales perspective that talent Mike Siegel talks about. Everybody loves to meet the station's prime talent. Take your key air-talent on sales calls. They can be deal closers. Bring along a camera, and chances are good that a picture of him or her (ideally, wearing your station logo) and the client will occupy a prominent wall position. Do this in 50 companies with more than 50 employees. Soon you'll have thousands of "impressions" per week in the workplace. Make the goal to be in 500 offices in the next three years. Lots of exposure, at little cost.

7. Let your talent sell for you--Part II

If you allow and encourage talent to earn income from revenue streams separate from salary (i.e. promotion fees, endorsements, live copy, etc.) you'll be viewed as talent-friendly, which is a good thing, especially at contract renewal time. Most air personalities understand that the better their relationship with the sales staff, the more the account executives will pitch them to clients, and the more money they'll make. Studies show that air talent who spend at least five hours a week with station sales people can almost always equal and sometimes double their regular salaries.

8. Let your talent sell for you--Part III

Perhaps you remember the late Alan Berg. He's the host on whom the movie *Talkradio* was based. I worked with him in Denver and spent a great deal of time selling his commercial endorsements. Once we had two sales calls to make. The first was with the owner of a Chinese restaurant. We walked in and made some small talk. In just minutes, Alan jumped in and said, "I can only endorse one Chinese restaurant. And if you'd like me to endorse yours, you'll need to buy a 26 week schedule." In less than :30 seconds we had the order.

Twenty minutes later, we're meeting with the owners of a rattan furniture store. As I begin my presentation, Alan says, "I can only endorse one furniture store. And if you'd like me to endorse yours, you'll need to buy a 26-week schedule." Again, within two minutes of the start of the meeting, we closed the deal. All I had said was, "Hello."

Alan was one of this country's most talented talkers until he was murdered in a political assassination in Denver, Colo.

Selling Alan, or rather letting Alan sell, was truly extraordinary. [Look around you. Your best salesperson may be a member of your air staff.]

9. Hire a sales staff that lives a News-Talk lifestyle

Don't hire a group of 20-to-30-year-olds trying to convey what it's like to be 50 to a 50-year-old client. Instead, assemble a staff of sellers who love the format and can describe its attributes, understand the variety of people to whom they will be selling, have similar backgrounds to the client (for example, hire a former business owner or someone who is changing careers), and finally, hire someone who has some life experience compared to those who are just starting out.

I'm not saying that 20-30 year olds can't sell this format, just don't have a sales staff comprised entirely of "Generation X'ers."

10. Create as many premium-priced avails as possible

Each week in this incredible format, there are several hundred premium avails for sale. Make sure your sales staff understands just how valuable these spots are. Live spots, business and sports sponsorships, traffic and weather reports, news updates: don't let these golden nuggets go to waste. Everybody wins when these are sold:

- THE CLIENT gets high profile association, usually in a fixed position slot during morning or afternoon drive.
- THE SALESPERSON gets extra pay for selling a premium product for a long period of time.
- THE STATION gets both a happy sales person and a happy client (and happy managers who make budget).

11. Have fun

If you sell News-Talk, you are involved in a format that appeals to more potential advertisers than any other in town. The old army radio ads suggested that if you enlisted, fun was around the corner. With a catchy jingle and a great hook, folks were off to join the Army for years of fun and games? Call me a skeptic, but I had a hard time believing that concept even with free college tuition and the G.I. Bill offered as incentives. That just illustrates the power of radio. Your air-talent is the *best* known. Your listeners are the *most* active. Welcome to radio utopia.

CHAPTER 19

Creating Powerful Radio: Research

"You know the station is a success when people who don't listen lie and say they do."

Overheard at an NAB convention

People love to look at research. We tear open USA Today and gobble up those Gallup polls, pie charts and percentages of who is doing what. We like statistics, finished products, *results*. Everyone knows that it's not the research itself, but how you interpret the results that counts.

Applying research to radio is a challenge. It's easiest with music radio. You ask a group of people what they think about a song, a DJ or a jingle. Interpreting personality or News-Talk research is tougher. The reason? You can only research what has gone *before*. There is no way to predict in a research study what people are going to respond to *tomorrow*.

Working in talk radio is not for the faint-hearted. It elicits strong reactions. Your listeners will love you or hate you. They're active, and they'll let you know with calls, faxes, flowers, e-mail, boycotts, and threats.

One difference is clear between News-Talk programming research and music programming research. Here, polarization can be a good thing. Strong listener reaction to talent is positive, if there is a *balance*. Don't be afraid of this intense reaction, it's one of the strengths of talk radio.

In talk radio, negative reaction *can* be a good thing, if balanced by an equal and opposite positive reaction. There is cause for concern if 97% of the audience hates your host or show and 3% love it. If the polarization is balanced, it's a sign that whether they love it or hate it, they're listening.

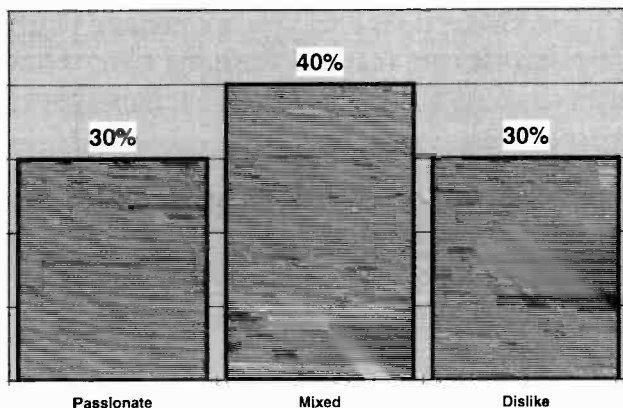
Take Rush Limbaugh or Howard Stern for example. People either love them or hate them, but each has *millions* of listeners. The natural instinct of programmers is that they want their stations to be liked. They do not enjoy calming angry listeners or spending their time at work answering letters from irate audience members. However, if a programmer can fight the instinct, it bears keeping in mind that it takes a while to grow a show. If the show has value, even if it's controversial, it's worth it.

Listeners are creatures of habit and they do not like change. They like it the old way. It's only when the new way has a chance to "kick in" that it becomes a habit for them. So 1) if they don't like the host today, they might tomorrow, and 2) if they hate him but they listen (and write it in their diary), that's OK.

A healthy polarization when researching personalities might look like this:

Creating Powerful Radio: Research

Talk Radio's Listener Relationships



Just about every radio market can tell the story of a beloved host whose name is known to all in the community, but who is listened to by few. Conversely, the mention of certain hosts causes dramatic negative response among many who would never miss a show. Don't be alarmed when your research shows that the audience has strong opinions about the hosts on your station. Controversy is not necessarily a *bad* thing. At WMC/ Memphis, the T-shirts say, "listen to talk radio because all great minds *don't* think alike."

In America, news and talk are very different formats. Obviously both benefit when there is a lot of news happening—a natural disaster, a political crisis, a war, a huge trial or an election. Talk radio tends to be personality and opinion driven, news radio is current-event driven.

A third format, now the fastest growing, is the hybrid of these two, or News-Talk. This has now splintered into several specifically-targeted formats. Under the News-Talk umbrella, you can hear hot talk, self-help talk, sports talk, right- or left-wing political talk, Christian talk, male- or female-oriented talk, and youth-oriented talk, among others. Clearly, talk radio programmers have taken a clue from their music-oriented counterparts and fragmented the format, targeting specific demographic groups for their stations.

What research *can* do is help you understand your audience and its lifestyles. It can answer questions like: How can my station better serve my audience? Or: What have they responded to in the past?

One of my favorite research projects came from Frank Magid & Associates in Marion, Iowa. They did a presentation years ago on the topics people would always listen to on the air. Those main topics include:

- HEALTH (safety)
- HEART (emotional stories that touch the “heart”)
- POCKETBOOK (money)

When you look at the content of stories that people remember over a week, this list remains fairly accurate.

Research can also be an incredible tool for programmers and managers in working with on-air talent and sales people. One project I took on involved a Religious Talk station where a minister, a priest and an attorney all hosted shows. I was called in to “fix” those shows because they were dull and people were tuning out, even people with a lot of faith.

Here’s why. The hosts were talking *at* the listeners. They were lecturing, orating and preaching, but not *communicating*. These men held themselves *above* their audience. Although each considered himself to be a good listener, not one of them really heard what his audience was saying. As a result, it was not personal, intimate, interesting or meaningful, and it was very boring radio.

I met with these hosts as a group, then one-on-one, and just could not seem to get them to understand that they were not communicating powerfully. Well-educated, always treated with great respect, and with fairly high self-images, these men refused to believe that they were not getting through.

It was a focus group research project that saved these shows. We hid our hosts behind a two-way mirror and watched the

proceedings. The focus group began to listen in their headphones to the first radio program. Within minutes, most had removed the headphones and were talking amongst themselves.

The priest was outraged. “But I’m just getting to the important part. They’re not paying attention!” He was shocked that people had tuned him out. I pointed out that in church no one, and I mean NO ONE, would dare get up and leave on a Sunday morning even if the sermon was dull. They’d all sit there, politely bored, pretending to listen. But alone in their cars, at home or in a listening focus group, listeners do what they please, which is to tune out if the show is boring or irrelevant to their lives.

It was only after all three of the hosts experienced the tune-outs that they were ready to learn the techniques of creating powerful radio: storytelling, showing their hearts, being more personal, and listening. All three are successful today because they were led to understand that they must become more powerful communicators.

Research is a necessary tool of business today. Can you imagine Volvo putting out a new car without “test marketing” it first? Big money is at stake and people in business want data before they take a gamble introducing a new product. They need a realistic sense of how the audience or consumer will react. Radio is no different. In Germany, the GFK, the researchers for Colgate and other products, have begun researching radio.

Many products we don’t think twice about today are in our lives because of quantitative research: single-serving frozen dinners, zipper lock vegetable bags, automobile cup holders, tire patch in a can.

In America, there are pages and pages of names of broadcasting researchers in the radio directories. Anyone can hang out a shingle and call him or herself a researcher. I’ve worked with many and recommended few.

Sometimes, it's a combination of skills and personality that will work for you with research. A recent client and I were very pleased with a Vallie-Gallup poll. Dan Vallie is the radio broadcaster and consultant, while Gallup's Rick Garlick is a pure researcher with multiple advanced university degrees. The results not only verified what we all felt in our "guts" about the



STEVE APEL

radio station, it pointed out some specific problem areas, such as huge unreported listening (phantom cume), that were easily fixed.

Another impressive researcher is Media Perspectives President Steve Apel, based in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. He's an innovative, studious person with a successful research background in both commercial and public radio, and TV.

No crystal ball

If done right, research *can* help you get ratings, but Steve Apel emphasizes that market research can't predict consumer behavior. "If it could, no product backed by research would ever fail. What research can do, if used properly, is identify public trends and tendencies." In radio, this means giving your listeners something they've been missing or more of what they say they like.



MAT HUDSON

There are many research techniques, but the basic process involves:

1. Asking the right questions.
2. Compiling the data.
3. Analyzing and interpreting the results.

Don't get intimidated by the language of research.

Apel advises that if you've hired a research professional who is using advanced analytical techniques to interpret a study, ask him or her to explain the technique used. Be sure you're comfortable with his or her logic. After all, you need to understand and have confidence in this interpretation if you are using it to make changes in your station.

Matt Hudson is an executive at Cox-owned research company The Eagle Group in Denver, Colo. Hudson warns research alone is no way to make your programming decisions. He says, "*[It] does not prove or disprove anything. We still need creative minds to understand, interpret and implement the findings.*"

Here, Hudson defines some research terms and talks generally about radio research. In some cases, I've provided some examples to illustrate the definitions:

Qualitative vs. quantitative

"*Qualitative* studies, such as focus groups, involve ten to twelve people, which are used to collect indicators that will be tested in a more statistically-reliable research project (e.g. a

phone study). *Quantitative* studies, such as format searches or perceptual telephone studies are large sample procedures which yield quantitative results. These can be generalized to the population from which the sample was selected.”

In other words, you've only got 28 people at your station and you already know their opinions about everything anyway. So, you get a few people you don't know gathered in a room who really *like* talk radio, then you ask them in great depth and detail whatever you're interested in finding out. These twelve people are a flashlight in the dark. They will illuminate new areas and point you in the direction you need to go for your larger or quantitative study. This group is like gold. They can teach you things you never believed possible about your radio station, and the deeper you go, the better it gets. Just as in the focus group that taught the religious broadcasters how to communicate, when you really listen to these twelve people, powerful things can happen. However, you shouldn't make big decisions like firing someone because twelve people don't like him. That calls for a bigger, quantitative study.

The questions based on the insight gained in the qualitative study can lead you in a direction of seeking trends in the quantitative study.

Let's say a station's evening talk host is the subject of a small focus group study. Turns out, some of the listeners find him so irritating they put up with static to hear another host on a station hundreds of miles away. Up until then, the station's management had no idea the distant station could even be heard in the market. Thanks to the small focus group's *qualitative* results, *quantitative* questions about the distant station can be asked in the larger perceptual study.

Some researchers say you should never base programming decisions on qualitative research, and all agree, unless designed to do so, results from qualitative research should not be the sole factor in decision making. Let's say you wanted to build a new bakery in New York City. If you ask nine people which bakery

has the best bread in New York, you'd get nine different answers. They could give you some great ideas on what they like to see in the bakery, or whether they prefer store-bought bread. But, you certainly wouldn't want to use the results of your nine person study to determine where you'd put your new store, what types of bread you would bake, or how much you should charge. To make these kinds of decisions, you'd have to ask many more people than that.

Phantom cume

In the United States, radio measures listening by listeners who either write down what they listen to in a diary or remember what they've heard and then verbally relate this information by phone to a data collection company. Neither of these methods captures "real-time" listening, that is, listening as it's happening. So, every radio station has a number of listeners for whom they'll never get credit. This phenomenon is called phantom cume. It's the percentage of your cume who do not mention your radio station when asked to recall which stations they have listened to in the past week. A healthy phantom cume seems to be around 25-30% over your reported cume. However, we are seeing many stations with phantom cume reaching 70% of reported cume! Radio stations are presently experimenting with some new techniques to lower their phantom cume and get the ratings credit they deserve.

Validity

A test or study should measure what it is intended to measure. The ideal research situation is to have a valid test or study that is also reliable. It is actually possible to have a valid test that is unreliable or an invalid test that is reliable.

As an example, you can ask all the morning host's friends if they like the show. You can do everything right. You can make

sure the responses aren't influenced by one another and your demos are properly sampled, but your sample is still a group of your host's friends. The study is perfectly valid, it's just not reliable. If you really want to know what the community thinks of your morning host, don't recruit a group of his biggest fans.

Because you know your market, work with your researcher to ensure validity. Ask about the criteria your research company uses to select the group. Do a mission statement for your study, then make sure you ask questions that will give you the answers you need. Even though they may not be the answers you want, ask yourself: Is it skewed in any way? Is it biased? Does it really measure what we want?

Prestige bias

Respondents tend to give answers that will make them seem more educated, successful, hip, financially stable or otherwise prestigious. A good researcher can control this problem by asking and directing the questions correctly.

Researcher bias

In this case respondents provide specific answers because the answers are the ones they feel the researcher is looking for. They want to impress and please the researcher. Again, this is easily managed by a skilled researcher.

Random sample

Every person has an equal chance of being selected to participate in a focus group, music test, or telephone perceptual study. A station database is NOT a random sample. If someone has volunteered for your study, he or she could not really have been chosen at random.

What is a “statistically-reliable sample size?”

It depends on the error rate you are willing to accept. Generally, between 75 and 100 people should participate in your perceptual study for each demographic group, or “cell,” you want to measure. For instance, if you want to do a study measuring adults 25-44, you’ll want approximately the following number of participants:

- Women 25-34 (at least 75 respondents)
- Men 25-34 (at least 75 respondents)
- Women 35-44 (at least 75 respondents)
- Men 35-44 (at least 75 respondents)

This yields a total of 300 participants, generally considered adequate for this type of study.

How to use a focus group

These results should NOT be used to make major decisions. This small sample research technique gives you an indication, points you in a direction if you will, to the next questions you should be asking a larger group for a telephone perceptual study.

When should we do research?

Hudson concludes conducting research to coincide with the start of a ratings period is not logical. Listeners don’t try a new station when the ratings book begins. Broadcasters should think of research as a preventative strategic weapon rather than as a Band Aid. While the results of your research can be had almost immediately, it can take several months for the effects of the programming changes to show. Programming changes should be in place long before you enter a ratings measurement period.

What to find out

Steve Apel suggests that, “Through questions that probe listener knowledge and impressions, you can get a feel of whether people perceive your station’s programming the way you intend.” What he means by this is that by asking the same question in a number of different ways, using for example different descriptive terms, you can get a clearer picture of what listeners really think. The picture “enable[s] you to assess whether or not your station is on target and provide[s] a basic guide for modifying the station to better suit [your] listeners’ needs, tastes, and expectations.”

For example, during a perceptual study, you might ask the following questions: Which station plays the best rock? Which station plays the widest variety of rock? Which station plays the hottest rock? Which station plays your favorite rock? A skilled researcher will be able to interpret the differences in the responses to give you more than just a simple “call letter” answer to the question.

Ask your own people

Gannett’s publishing division did a smart thing. They developed a concept of a “fast food” newspaper targeted to, among others, travelers, business people, and TV viewers. This would be a paper for people without a lot of time to read who just wanted the news headlines, sports, and gossipy “water cooler” features. They chose an easy-to-read style accompanied by photos and colorful graphics.

Gannett used demographic research of the U.S. population and hired well-qualified reporters in proportion to the ethnic makeup of the United States; 52% women, 48% men, 18% African-American, etc. They hoped and speculated that the staffers would bring their own background experiences and unique perspectives to the stories they covered, as well as to story selection and story ideas. The concept worked. While derided by many “journalism experts,” *USA Today* is omnipresent in airports, hotels, offices, and newsstands across America.

A lesson can be learned here for radio. It never hurts to have your target demo represented in your work place. And it can't hurt to ask anyone with an opinion to spend a few minutes giving his or her thoughts to you. Be aware, however, of who's speaking. If your chief engineer, a known classical music buff, can't stand your afternoon sex therapy advice show, don't be surprised or make any programming decisions as a result. If however, your chief engineer is a twice divorced woman known for her romantic prowess, and she finds that same afternoon show dry or pompous, you might want her to elaborate.

A final thought: *Research is just a tool*. It is one of the many weapons in your arsenal for creating a powerful radio station. You can have all the research results in the world, but it always comes down to people. You have to use your judgment every step of the way, not just in choosing your airstaff but choosing your researchers and the participants in your research project. Apply all your creative skills. The rules for *Creating Powerful Radio* apply to research as well.

CHAPTER 20

Creating Powerful Radio: Final Notes to Creative Talent

"If at first you don't succeed, try, try again."

Childhood Proverb

In talk radio, as in all radio, don't forget the important stuff. Use your life experience. Prepare, do formatics, state your opinion, be courageous, and use humor.

Don't waste a minute of your time on the air. Say your station's name and call letters with pride! Be glad to be there. Tell the truth as you know it to be. Do every show with the enthusiasm of your first, knowing it could be your last. Don't get caught up in pettiness at work.

This is a great job, with no heavy lifting. In what other profession do you get paid to tell the stories of life, chronicle the times we live in, find the most interesting people alive, meet them, and talk to them?

It's easy to get disillusioned and jaded when concern for profit seems to make creativity a luxury, if not a vice. But those running the business side of radio need you. They are basing their station's financial future on one idea, namely that people will listen to what they have put on their radio stations, and that is you. Your thoughts, your ideas, your words and your personality are the product they are selling. *You matter.* It is up to you to seize your own creative power and make what is on the radio matter.

Denis Diderot (1713-1784) made this plea to artists:

"...move me, surprise me, rend my heart, make me tremble, weep, shudder, outrage me, ...then delight me if you can."

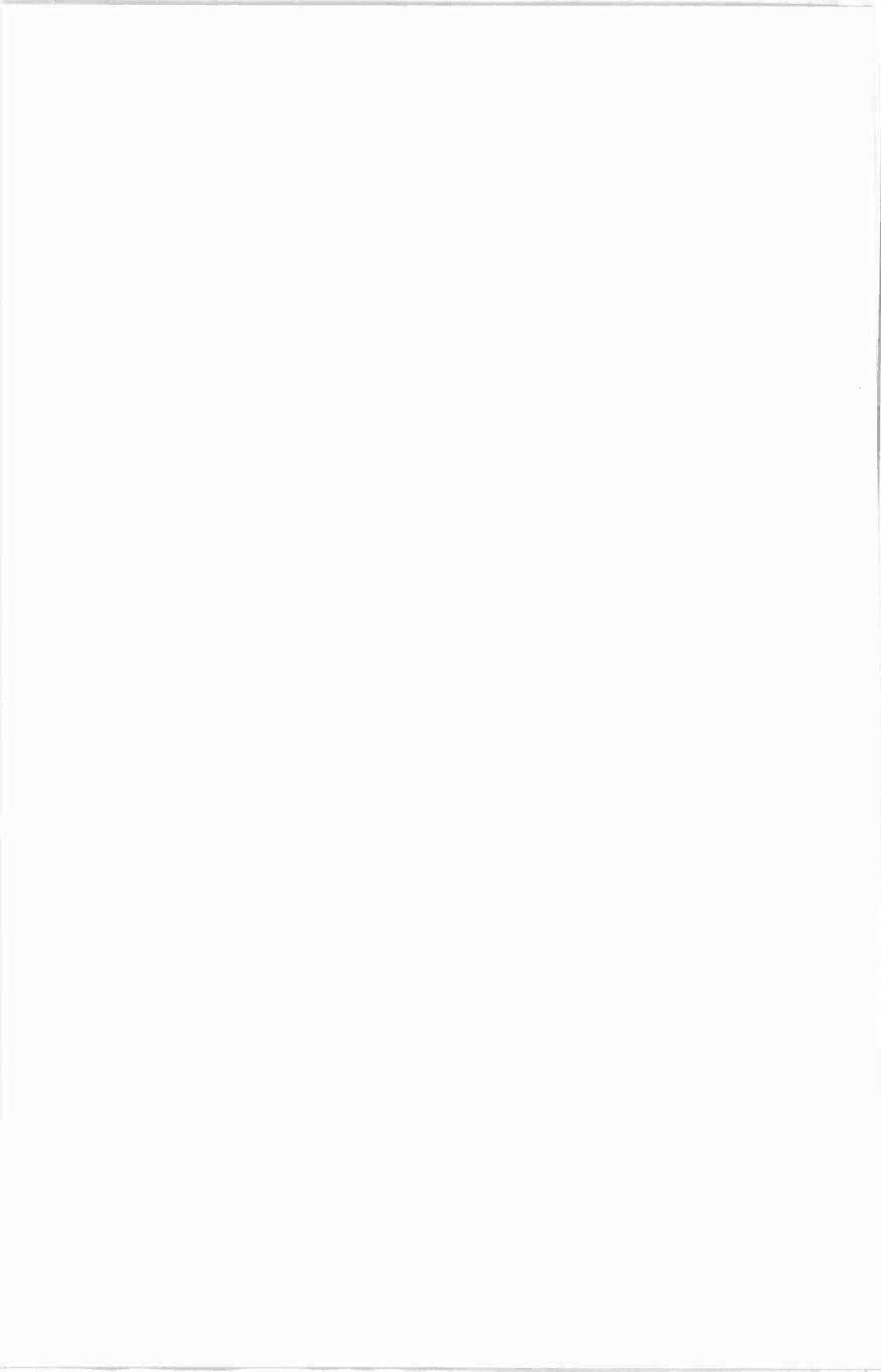
Creating Powerful Radio: Final Notes

If you would like further information on
Geller Media International[™] or the
Creating Powerful Radio[™] workshops or
The Producers Workshop
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fax +1-212-787-6279

email Vgeller@aol.com
Internet <http://www.gellermedia.com>



APPENDIX:

Creating Powerful Radio: Resources

The Internet

The Internet is emerging as a powerful tool for broadcasters. It provides research opportunities for show prep, allows listeners to communicate with broadcasters in a convenient, concise manner, and lets radio professionals all over the world share information.

Owing to the wonderful, unstructured nature of the net, it's impossible to provide a complete or even extensive listing of all the great websites, news groups and mailing lists dealing with broadcasting.

Your best bet for finding websites is to access a powerful search engine like Lycos from Carnegie Mellon University (<http://www.lycos.com>). Lycos and other search engines can point you

to individual station websites and other specific areas of interest. A growing number of station websites actually offer real-time audio of the station's air product.

Here are a couple of useful websites:

Airwaves: The premier radio broadcasting website with tons of information and loads of links to interesting media-related sites. (<http://radio.aiss.uiuc.edu/~rrb/index2.html>)

440 International Page: Features a who's who of broadcasters, past and present, where they've worked and where they can be found, including e-mail addresses. Links to other great radio websites. (<http://www.440int.com>)

And, of course, you can always visit the Geller Media International World Wide Web site at <http://www.gellermedia.com>.

Newsgroups or Usenet

Important information changes hands in these electronic forums. They're resources for getting advice and finding long lost colleagues.

The premier radio newsgroup is `rec.radio.broadcasting`. Dozens of articles are posted daily and contributors are usually friendly and helpful.

For a compendium of business news about radio and broadcasting in general try: `clari.biz industry.broadcasting`.

If you have an interest in pirate radio, there's even a news group for you: `alt.radio.pirate`.

There are a number of mailing lists dealing with radio and broadcast journalism in general. These lists boil down information from newsgroups and other sources and send it right to your electronic mail box, usually on a daily basis, and usually for free.

Tops for radio broadcasting is the *Airwaves* list. Send e-mail to: `Subscribe@airwaves.com`.

The nature of websites dictates they're in a constant state of flux. The only way to keep up is to get on-line and check out the world.

Recommended reading list:

M Street Radio Directory

P.O. Box 2041

New York, NY 10159

Published by M Street Corporation

Phone +1-800-248-4242 or +1-615-865-1525

Fax +1-615-865-2598

US \$48.95. US \$49.95 Canada.

US \$59.95 elsewhere.

Price includes shipping.

The 860+ page directory includes every U.S. and Canadian radio station and its call letters, format, address, phone and fax numbers, along with the names of the people in charge. It has great resource data!

Writing Broadcast News

by Mervin Block

Published by Bonus Books

160 Illinois Street

Chicago, IL 60611

Phone +1-312-467-0580

Fax +1-312-467-9271

\$24.95

Author of several books, Mervin Block is the American radio news writing guru. This first book emphasizes newswriting in the English language. I recommend it for every newsroom. For Europeans, his theory and philosophy of writing shorter, sharper and better news is useful.

On Listening

by Carl A. Faber, Ph.D.

Published by Perseus Press

1100 Glendon Avenue, Suite #1721

Los Angeles, CA 90024

Psychologist Carl A. Faber has valuable observations on true listening. He is an artist in his field.

The Green Book

"Songs Classified by Subject"

by Jeff Green

Published by Professional Desk References

4815 Trousdale Drive, Suite #576

Nashville, TN 37220-1324

\$64.95 Hardcover

\$49.95 Softcover

plus \$3.50 for USA postage; \$10.00 International
postage

Phone +1-615-832-1942

Fax +1-615-331-1410

Every English language song you can imagine referenced by name and topic.

Reporting for Radio

"A Manual for Radio Reporters and Writers"

by Chuck Crouse

Published by Bonus Books

160 East Illinois Street

Chicago, Illinois 60611

Good if you're starting out, from the one-man or one-woman newsroom to a fully-staffed operation. A basic guideline book written by someone who's walked the beat. Ideal for newsrooms and interns.

Basic News Reporting

by Michael Ryan and James W. Tankard, Jr.

Published by Mayfield Publishing Company

285 Hamilton Avenue

Palo Alto, CA 94301

For the beginner. This is an oldie but goodie. You'll find it at the library. Published in 1977, this textbook's main focus is on newspaper reporting. But, there is good, basic technique that you can apply to radio, particularly covering the rules of effective interviewing, using social science techniques in reporting (such as opinion polling, and systematic study of records), lead writing, and bias and distortion in the news. Before you can creatively "break the rules," you must first *learn* them!

The Way Things Ought To Be

by Rush Limbaugh

Published by Pocketbooks

1230 Avenue of the Americas

New York, NY 10020

\$22.00

Rush's own story, in his own words. Right-wing politics, baseball, rock n' roll and radio. Also available in a less expensive paperback.

The Rush Limbaugh Story

by Paul Colford

Published by St. Martins Press

175 Fifth Ave.

New York, NY 10010

\$5.99

A newspaper man, New York-based radio columnist and reporter Paul Colford spent years of his life researching Rush's story. This book turned out to be a folk history of modern day American talk radio, as well as a tale of Rush Limbaugh.

Television and Radio Announcing

by Stuart W. Hyde

San Francisco State College

Published by Houghton Mifflin Company

Boston, Atlanta, Geneva, Illinois, Dallas,

Palo Alto

A very good textbook with lots of examples. Geared towards students. The library will have a copy, or you can order it.

Private Parts

by Howard Stern

Published by Simon & Shuster

Rockefeller Center

1230 Avenue Of the America

New York, NY 10020

\$23.00

Howard Stern is one of the most outrageous personalities on the air. This is his story.

Talk

"NPR's Susan Stamberg Considers All Things"

by Susan Stamberg

Published by Turtle Bay Books,

a division of Random House

New York, NY 10022

The diva and ex-host of "All Things Considered" on National Public Radio. This book is written like, and feels like a radio show.

Radio Waves

“Life and the Revolution on the FM Dial”

by Jim Ladd

Published by St. Martin's Press

175 5th Avenue

New York, NY 10010

\$12.95

Jim Ladd was a DJ for years in Los Angeles on KMET-FM. His book chronicles that station from it's personality rock days to its end.

The Associated Press Broadcast News Handbook

Compiled and Edited by James R. Hood

and Brad Kalbfeld

Incorporates the AP Libel Manual

Published by Associated Press

50 Rockefeller Center

New York, NY 10020

\$8.95

Learn the rules before you break them. A must for serious news reporters and broadcast journalists.

How to Talk to Absolutely Anyone About

Absolutely Anything

by Barbara Walters

Lots of tips on interviewing by the woman famous for asking tough and often very personal questions... and getting answers.

It Only Hurts When I Laugh

by Stan Freberg

Published by Times-Books

A Division of Random House

New York, NY 10022

Cost \$19.95

Written by the man who pioneered funny commercials for radio. Delightfully weird. Freberg pioneered "Theater of the Mind" as a concept for his work. This is his own story. If you are not familiar with his work, check out his tapes and CDs too.

The Art Book of Quotes

Compiled by Helen Exley

Published by Exley Publications, Ltd.

16 Chalk Hill

Watford, Herts, WD1 4BN

UK Phone + 44-1923-250-505

\$6.99 (U.S. currency)

If you took all these quotes, substituted the word "radio" for art and "broadcaster" for artist you will see how appropriate these quotes on the artist and talent are. Radio is an art form and expression as valid as any other art form out there.

One Minute Manager Meets the Monkey

"Don't Take On A Problem If the Problem Isn't Yours"

by Kenneth Blanchard

William Oncken, Jr. and Hal Burrows

Published by William Morrow

105 Madison Ave.

New York, NY 10016

\$16.95

If you find yourself working weekends, exhausted, bugged by your staff and burnt out as a manager, check this book out. Radio will become fun again.

The Courage to Create

by Rollo May

Published by Bantam paperbacks

New York, NY

An oldie, but goodie. For artistic, creative people.

Risking

by David Viscott, M.D.

Published by Pocketbooks

1230 Avenue of the Americas

New York, NY 10020

\$4.99

Dr. David Viscott hosts his own radio show on SW Networks, dealing with personal problems, psychological issues, and relationships. You can apply this book to radio work.

Bird By Bird

Some Instructions on Writing and Life

by Anne Lamott

Published by Pantheon Books

New York and San Francisco

\$21.00

If your work has you facing a "blank page" on-air or paper. Excellent work on creativity.

The Artist's Way

by Julia Cameron

Published by JP Tarcher, New York

a division of Putnam

Ten Stupid Things Women Do to Mess Up Their
Lives

by Dr. Laura Schlessinger
Published by Villard Books
A division of Random House
New York, NY
\$19.95

“Dr. Laura” hosts a daily show on KFI-AM 640 in Los Angeles and is syndicated around the United States. This book is like turning on your radio and listening to five hours of her on the air.

Also noted:

Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus

by John Gray
Published by Harper Collins
New York, NY and San Francisco, CA
\$25.00

I've seen versions of it at airport bookstores all over the world in many languages so I know it is easily obtainable.

You Just Don't Understand
“Women and Men in Conversation”

by Deborah Tannen
Published by Ballantine Books
New York, NY
\$10.00

As long as men and women have to work and be together, we might as well get the language right.

Other resources -- voicework

Bobby Ocean, Inc.
Professional Creative Services
224 Blackstone Drive
San Rafael, CA 94903
Demo +1-415-472-7045
Phone +1-415-472-5625
Fax +1-415-472-1686

Other resources -- creative PSA's and commercials

Dick Orkin's Radio Ranch
Creative Services
1140 N. La Brea Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90088
Phone +1-213-462-4966
Fax +1-213-856-4311
e-mail <http://www.radio-ranch.com>

Call for a free demo tape of creative spots, as mentioned in chapter 16.

Radio trade publications

Radio industry "trade" publications can be quite useful. You can keep up on trends in the industry, indulge in gossip and usually pick up one or two points per issue that you can actually apply at work in each of the following:

M STREET JOURNAL

P.O. Box 2041

New York, NY 10159

Published 51 weeks per year

by M Street Corporation

Phone +1-800-248-4242 or +1-615-865-1525

Fax +1-615-865-2598

US \$119 per year. US \$139 Canada.

US \$169 elsewhere.

The Journal covers what is happening in North America each week. The *M Street Radio Directory* is included *free* with every annual Journal subscription. Billed as, "Radio's Journal of Record."

RADIO INK MAGAZINE

B. Eric Rhoads, Publisher

8000 North Federal Highway

Boca Raton, FL 33487

\$99.00 for a one year subscription

Phone +1-800-226-7857

Fax +1-407-995-8498

Articles on managing a radio station, advice from a host of hungry consultants and the latest in trends in the United States, all from a man who loves radio, Eric Rhoads.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA MAGAZINE

740 N. Rush Street

Chicago, IL 60611

\$93.00 per year or \$2.50 per issue

Covers both radio & TV.

TALKERS MAGAZINE

P.O. Box 60781

Longmeadow, MA 01116

Phone +1-413-567-3189

Fax +1-413-567-3168

Cost \$75.00 per year

Michael Harrison is the Publisher/Editor of this magazine geared for talk radio show hosts.

RADIO WORLD

Published by Marketing Advisory Services

5827 Columbia Pike, Suite # 310

Falls Church, VA

Phone +1-703-998-7600

Fax +1-703-998-2966

Much on engineering here. The letters to the editor are great. A dialogue for the industry. Radio World comes about every other week and it's *free*.

RADIO BUSINESS REPORT

P.O. Box 782

Springfield, VA 22150

Phone +1-703-719-9500.

Cost \$195.00 per year

An insider's look at the workings of the American radio industry with special attention to Washington and regulatory affairs.

Valerie Geller

BROADCASTING & CABLE

1705 DeSales Street, N.W.

Washington DC 20036

Phone +1-202-659-2340 or +1-800-554-5729

Fax +1-202-429-0651

The focus here is on broadcast and cable TV, but the radio material is good.

RTNDA COMMUNICATOR

Published by the

RADIO-TV NEWS DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

1000 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 615

Washington, DC 20036

Phone +1-202-659-6510

RTNDA is an organization of TV and radio news directors, public relations people, producers, and colleges and university communications department faculties. They hold a conference with seminars once a year, lately combined with the National Association of Broadcasters Radio Conference.

The RTNDA is a good pipeline for ideas. It's also a place to network for jobs if you want to move on. When you join, you get the monthly Communicator, edited by Joe Tiernan. Mervin Block writes a regular column.

Music trade publications

GAVIN

Published 50 weeks a year
by Miller Freeman Entertainment Group
140 Second Street
San Francisco, CA 94105
phone +1-415-495-1990
\$325 per year

Dave Sholin writes for Gavin. The focus here is on music.

BILLBOARD & AIRPLAY MONITOR

1515 Broadway
New York, NY 10036
+1-212-764-7300
+1-800-745-8922 for subscriptions
U.S. \$265. Canada \$275. Europe \$595.
Prices vary on other continents.

Mostly music, but if you need to be up on the latest in charts, listings and general entertainment, as well as news of the music industry in America and internationally, they're very thorough.

MUSIC MONITOR

23 Ridgmount Street
London, WC1E 7AH
U.K.
phone +44-171-323-6686
fax +44-171-323-2314/16

\$175 US per year. £89 U.K per year. £109 Continental Europe per year. The radio and music scene plus charts in the U.K. Edited by Adam White.

MUSIC & MEDIA
P.O. Box 9027
1006 AA Amsterdam
The Netherlands
phone +31-20-487-5105
fax +31-20-487-5141

It's also under the BPI umbrella. \$275 US per year. Published in Amsterdam. Covers the European record, radio and music scene.

RADIO & RECORDS
10100 Santa Monica Blvd
Los Angeles, CA 90067
+1-310-553-4330
\$299 per year

Music charts, format pages, chatty radio industry gossip, and tons of record company news. A regular column on American News-Talk. Good directories and resource data. Published weekly.

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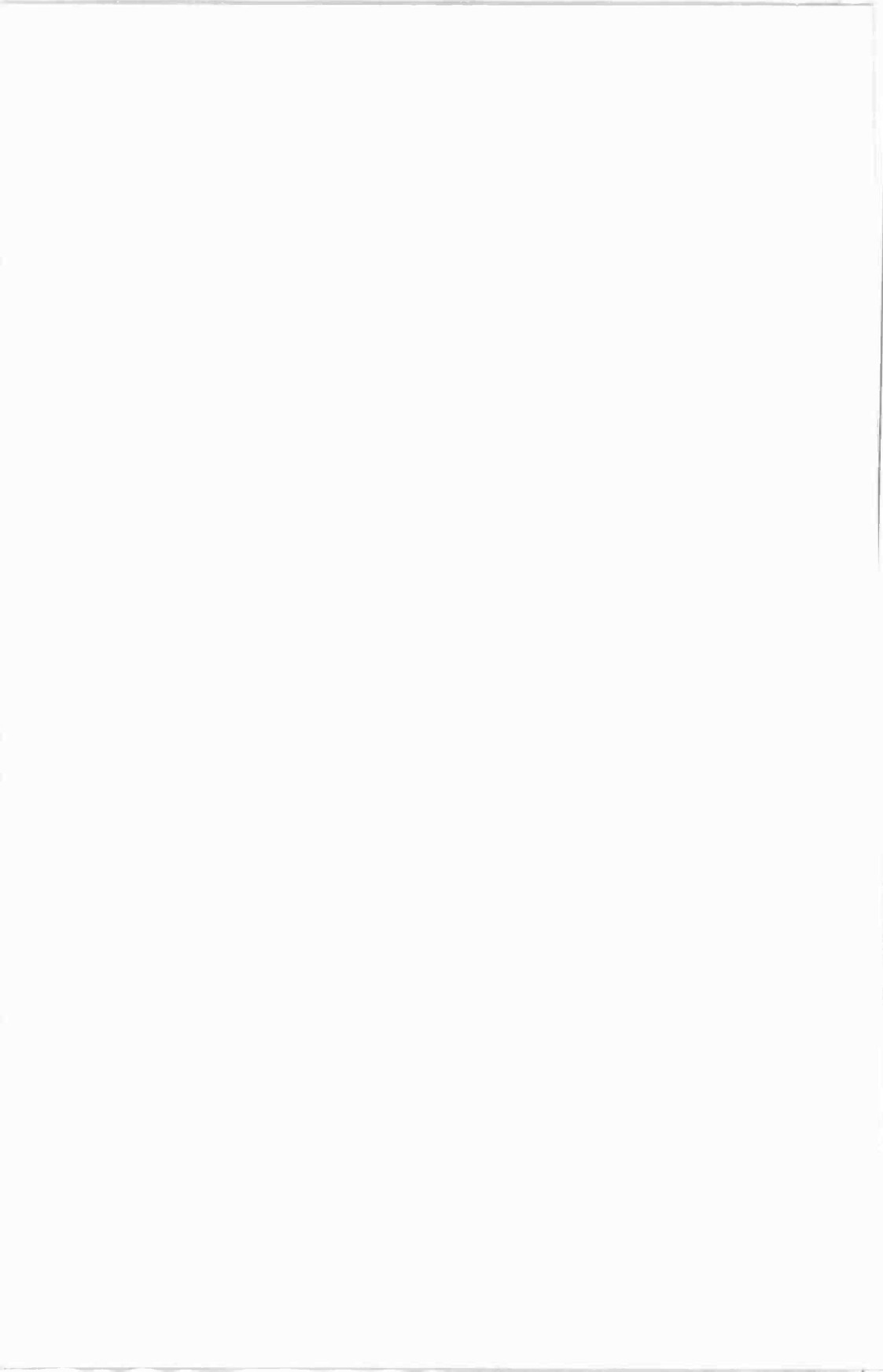
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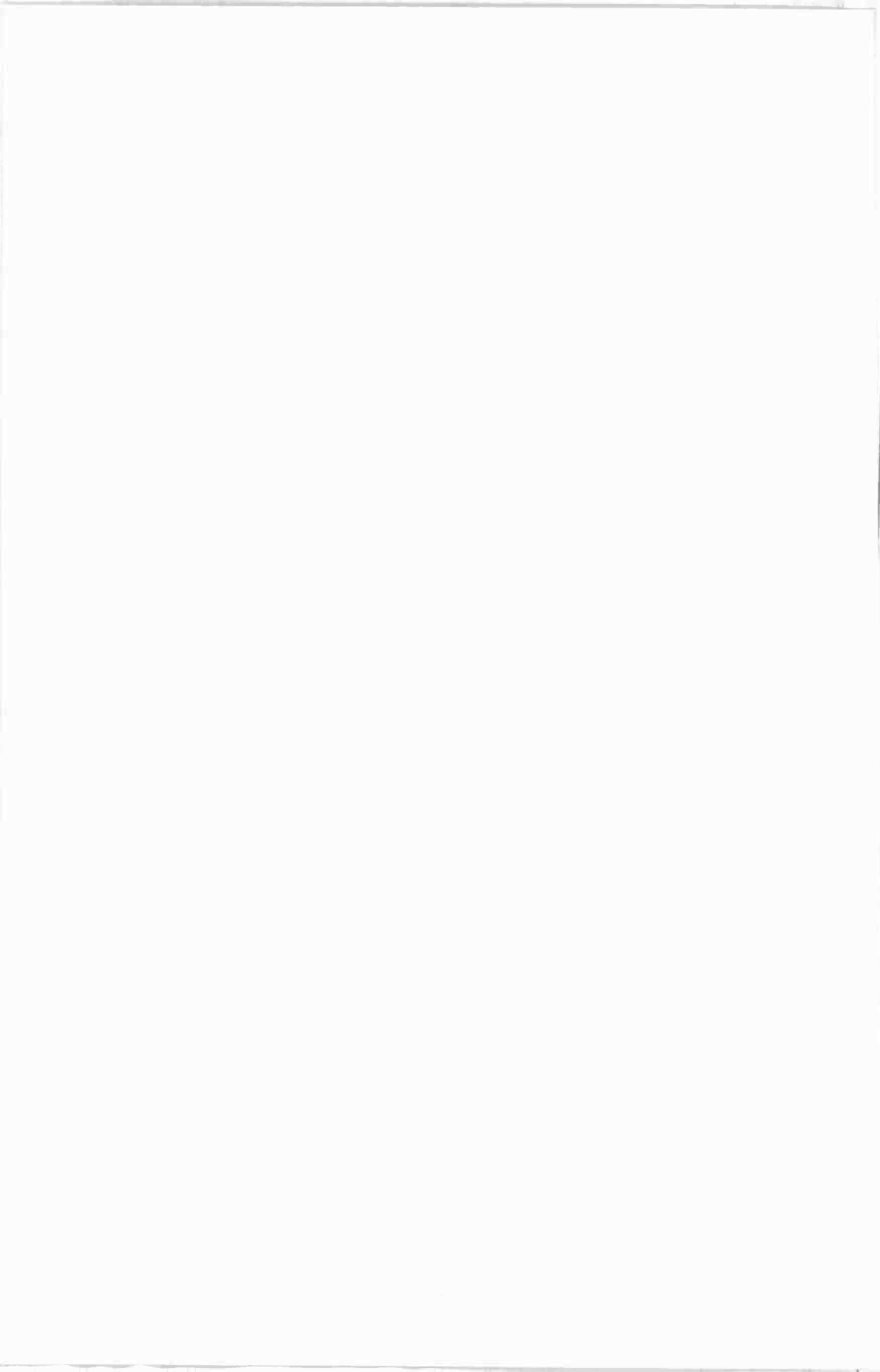
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Valerie Geller, is president of **Geller Media International**,™ a broadcast consulting firm specializing in News-Talk and personality radio, working with some of the top stations and broadcast groups in the United States and Europe.

Based in New York City, Geller divides her time between Europe and the United States working in radio and television, consulting stations, working one-on-one with talent and conducting **Creating Powerful Radio**™ workshops. She has worked in news, talk, and personality radio in Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Holland, and the UK; clients include the **BBC**, **Danmarks Radio**, the **YLE**, **Sveriges Radio**, **Antenne Bayern**, **FFH**, **Radio Hamburg**, **OK Radio**, **Charivari**, and **P-4/Oslo**.

She has spoken before the **European Broadcasters Union**, **The Swedish Radio Academy**, **Cologne's Medien Forum**, and the **International Radio Symposium** in **Montreux**.

Her background includes programming **WABC/New York**; setting up the talk format at **KFI/Los Angeles**, numerous awards as a broadcast journalist and News Director, and various management and on-air positions at radio stations around the country including: **KIOI/San Francisco**, **KRTH/Los Angeles**, **KOA/Denver**, **KTAR/Phoenix**, **KOST/Los Angeles**, and **WPLP/Tampa-St. Petersburg**.

In addition, she served as an elected board member of the **Associated Press Broadcasters** and the **NORCAL Radio & Television News Directors Association**. She has written for various publications about talk radio including **Billboard**, **R&R**, and **Music & Media**.

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