

*THE book for radio personalities everywhere!*

# Personality Radio

by Dan O'Day

**VOLUME 1**

***Inside:***  
Rick Dees  
The Greaseman  
Gary Owens  
Harry Shearer  
Howard Stern  
Tons of Tips, Tactics  
& Techniques!



# Personality Radio

by Dan O'Day

Copyright © 1987, 2000 by Dan O'Day  
[www.danoday.com](http://www.danoday.com)

# CONTENTS

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Introduction . . . . .                           | 4 |
| Foreword . . . . .                               | 6 |
| The Air Personality's Ten Commandments . . . . . | 8 |

## SHOW PREP

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Show Prep — Making Every Break Count . . . . . | 11 |
| Building A Bit . . . . .                       | 15 |
| How To Use A Comedy Service . . . . .          | 26 |
| Making Comedy Services Work For You . . . . .  | 29 |
| Using One-Liners Comfortably . . . . .         | 36 |
| How To Use Calendar Bits . . . . .             | 40 |
| On-Air Telephone Calls . . . . .               | 44 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <i>Radio Stories: Gary Owens</i> . . . . . | 49 |
|--|----|

## CHARACTER VOICES

|                                     |    |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| Imitations vs. Characters . . . . . | 50 |
| Creating Character Voices . . . . . | 52 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <i>Radio Stories: Smilin' Jack, Kris Robbins</i> . . . . . | 54 |
|--|----|

## SELF-PROMOTION

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Promoting Your Show Via Classified Adsv . . . . . | 55 |
| Generating Cross-Media Attention . . . . .        | 58 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <i>Radio Stories: Terry Moss</i> . . . . . | 59 |
|--|----|

## RADIO BASICS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Refresher Course for Disc Jockeys . . . . . | 60 |
| The Psychology of Diary-Keepers . . . . .   | 65 |
| Dumb Things Some Jocks Do . . . . .         | 66 |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| <i>Radio Stories: Steve Stucker</i> . . . . . | 68 |
|---|----|

## CRITIQUES

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Owning The Airwaves . . . . .            | 69 |
| Morning Show Critique . . . . .          | 71 |
| Show Critique: Dave Shropshire . . . . . | 80 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <i>Radio Stories: Mike Carta</i> . . . . . | 84 |
|--|----|

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Making Telephone Calls Sound Live...And Sound Good . . . . . | 85 |
|--|----|

## ATTITUDES

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Paying Your Dues . . . . .                            | 86 |
| Being Real Without Being Negative . . . . .           | 87 |
| The "Connection Myth" . . . . .                       | 91 |
| The Folly of Fooling Yourself . . . . .               | 94 |
| Morning Shows: 40 Hours A Week Won't Cut It . . . . . | 96 |
| Good Taste: Who Decides? . . . . .                    | 98 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Making The Most Out of A Convention . . . . .    | 100 |
| <i>Radio Stories: Rasa Kaye</i> . . . . .        | 105 |
| <b>THE SOAPBOX</b>                               |     |
| A Terrible Promotion . . . . .                   | 106 |
| It's Time For A Five-Day Work Week . . . . .     | 109 |
| A Wave of Stupidity . . . . .                    | 112 |
| <i>Radio Stories: Bill Heywood</i> . . . . .     | 116 |
| <b>PROGRAMMERS, MANAGERS &amp; JOCKS</b>         |     |
| The Program Director As Disc Jockey . . . . .    | 117 |
| Finding & Developing Air Personalities . . . . . | 124 |
| Questions for The PD . . . . .                   | 127 |
| Management & Personalities . . . . .             | 129 |
| <i>Radio Stories: Ron Stevens</i> . . . . .      | 133 |
| <b>CONVERSATIONS WITH:</b>                       |     |
| Laurie Allen & Bruce Vidal . . . . .             | 134 |
| Barsky . . . . .                                 | 138 |
| Jonathon Brandmeier . . . . .                    | 141 |
| C.J. Bronson . . . . .                           | 146 |
| E.J. Crummey . . . . .                           | 151 |
| Rick Dees . . . . .                              | 154 |
| The Greaseman . . . . .                          | 166 |
| Johnny Hayes . . . . .                           | 169 |
| Carol Mason . . . . .                            | 173 |
| Dick Orkin . . . . .                             | 177 |
| Gary Owens . . . . .                             | 187 |
| Harry Shearer . . . . .                          | 199 |
| Howard Stern . . . . .                           | 207 |
| Al Wyntor . . . . .                              | 211 |
| <i>Radio Stories: Frank DeSantis</i> . . . . .   | 215 |
| The Job-Hunting Survival Guide . . . . .         | 216 |
| Contracts . . . . .                              | 239 |
| A Bedtime Story . . . . .                        | 252 |
| Questions for The Air Personality . . . . .      | 254 |
| How To Contact Dan O'Day . . . . .               | 256 |

## INTRODUCTION

Dan O'Day — journalist, radio man, mystic, awning inspector, swordsman — has captured many things in this wonderful volume you are about to peruse.

He deals through a series of thrill-packed interviews with some of America's leading broadcasters the struggle with impulse as **James T. Farrell** did with *Studs Lonigan* ....He discusses the radio personality's compromise with reality as did **Nicolai Gogol** in *The Overcoat*....and he occasionally slips in the stark terror of *Flopsy Mopsy and Grunto the Rabbit Boys*, a very exciting book I read when I was a child in the Midwest.

This book explains in very easy terms how to become a personality in radio. I wish this kind of tome had existed when I was starting in the business; it probably would have saved me several years of lateral arabesques.

There are surprising chapters in this book that undoubtedly come from life's own pratfalls — even some of his own, perhaps. One such category would be the chapter entitled “Dumb Things Some Jocks Do.” There is a *career of experience* wrapped up in these pointers if you'll take the time to memorize them.

I know there are many dumb things I did in my first five years of broadcasting. To name just two:

1. I regret having my body tattooed with pictures of KOIL's entire client list.
2. I regret being physically ejected from a KIMN promotional idea meeting at a well-known mortuary, for suggesting a campaign based upon the slogan “Stiff Competition.”

This book has many facets. It is a fascinating overview of some tremendous talents and how they do things. Dan is a talented young man who not only uses his knowledge of our business but also displays his fine talent for writing.

Mr. O'Day's thoughts on comedy are well-put. I agree with his premise that the creators of tv and radio comedy in the '50s — the **Neil Simons**, **Mel Brooks**, **Larry Gelbarts**, **Woody Allens** — grew up as people who were *readers* and not *viewers*.

His point is that those sage scribes, along with previous generations of humorists from **Mark Twain** to **Robert Benchley** to **Ernie Kovacs**, satirized LIFE; today's generation satirizes TELEVISION!

Before I go, I would like to point out that during my interview in this book, I had my fingers crossed. So every fib I told doesn't count....I was *not* really a United Nations delegate to

Denmark, a Guatemalan hijacker or **Rachel Ward's** first date.

**Best Wishes**  
and **Best Wishes FM**,

**Gary Owens**  
**Supreme High Nurgle**  
**Hollywood, California**

## FOREWORD

For years I have joked that when I finally write a book about radio, the first chapter will be entitled, "How To Load A U-Haul Trailer."

Well, I was half-joking. The truth is the average disc jockey has less job security than the average major league baseball manager. Moving around the country from job to job can be fun, even glamorous, when you've just recently left your school and family and set out on your own. But as we get older, most of us begin to desire some stability in our lives. There must be more to life than rent deposits and change of address cards and continually driving around with out-of-state license plates.

When I was 21 years old, I took my first job as a disc jockey. Soon after that I became Nighttime Music Director. At other times and at other stations, I was Music Director, Public Affairs Director, Production Director, News Director, and Program Director.

Through it all, I remained a disc jockey at heart. The rest of it was interesting and even challenging, but I loved being on the air live, pitching my patter between platters, talking to listeners, taking humorous shots at whoever I thought deserved them, and keeping management in a perpetual state of nervousness.

By the time I was 25 years old, I had achieved a certain amount of success as an air personality. I decided to see if other disc jockeys might be willing to pay me for the type of material I had been writing for myself. Luckily, they were...and I've supported myself as a writer ever since.

It wasn't until I left the day-to-day world of radio that I began thinking about what it all means. Other jocks began sending me airchecks and asking for critiques. It wasn't enough for me to say to them, "This bit doesn't work" or "This feature is boring." I had to figure out *why* it didn't work, *why* it was boring.

Every person has a personality. The trick is learning how to project that personality across the airwaves. And that's what I found myself writing about, both in *O'LINERS* and in various other radio publications over the years.

In September, 1983, I happened to run into **John Leader** at a radio convention in New Orleans.

"Hey, John!" I yelled. "When are you guys at *R&R* going to do a column just for disc jockeys?"

"Why don't you write it for us?" he replied.

Several months later, the very first "Air Personalities" column appeared in *R&R*. I've been writing it ever since.

This book is largely based on my first three years of *R&R* articles. Some of the material appeared elsewhere. Quite a bit — especially in the “Conversations” section — never has appeared in print before.

I hate gushy forewords to books. In fact, I hate forewords, period. Let’s just get on with the book, I say. But I must tell you how wonderful an editor **Ken Barnes** has been for me over at *R&R*. During those first three years, I wrote about a wide range of topics. All of them had something to do with the world of the disc jockey. Some of them were extremely opinionated. A few were controversial. Although every now and then something I wrote might have caused Ken a moment of nervousness, he never asked me to back off, to ease up, to be more diplomatic.

Thanks to John for offering me the opportunity to express myself freely. Thanks to Ken for encouraging me in my role as a disc jockey’s advocate. And thanks to *R&R* for helping me reach so many radio people.

So here it is: not a chapter, just a couple of sentences. Load all of your heavy stuff at the very front of the trailer. And be sure to get lots of pads, for use in protecting your furniture.

Through it all, I remain a disc jockey at heart.

Dan O’Day  
Los Angeles, California  
February, 1987



## THE AIR PERSONALITY'S TEN COMMANDMENTS

*Legend has it that many years ago a very holy disc jockey ascended a mystical mountain in Laurel, Maryland. At the top of this mountain, the jock found a fearsome burning bush. Just as the jock was about to flee, the bush spoke unto him, saying, "Do not be afraid." "Do you mean," the flustered personality stammered, "You're... You're...?" "Yes," the bush replied, "I am the all powerful, all knowing. I am...a consultant! Now, take these commandments with you back down the mountain. You'll be receiving a bill for my services."*

### I. THOU SHALT ANSWER THY REQUEST LINE

It's shocking how many jocks routinely ignore the request line. This is your best chance to make direct contact with some of your listeners. Instead, however, many jocks prefer to shmooze with whoever happens to be in the studio or to see what's happening in the trades.

Equally shocking is the percentage of jocks who do answer the request line but are unfriendly or even downright rude to the callers. (And I'm not talking about on-air calls here.) Most of us try to build a "nice guy" image, the kind of person our audience would like to listen to and spend some time with. Why blow that image on the phone by being inconsiderate or impatient?

Why do so many jocks have this counter-productive attitude toward answering the request line and taking the time and energy to *talk* to the people who call? For one thing, it does take energy and effort, and lots of jocks are lazy. For another, they've learned that not all callers are bright, articulate, and interesting; on the contrary, 90% of them seem to be nine-year old girls whose entire repertoire seems to consist of, "Would you play 'Madonna?'"

But I have a hunch there's another reason so many jocks shun the request line: It just ain't hip. They feel it's beneath their star status to talk to just anyone who calls.

But you can learn, among other things, the following information simply by picking up your telephone:

- Demographic information about your listeners: Age, sex, geographic location, education, lifestyle, etc.

- Where they do their listening (home, car, beach, work)

- Whether they listen while working, studying, partying, etc.

- What they're interested in regarding your station and your program ("When will you be reading horoscopes?")

•What elements of your show they respond to (“God, that was a great bit you did about Governor Whoozis!”)

•Why they listen to you (“I just want to say you’re so funny! Whenever I feel down, I know I can listen to you and you’ll make me smile....”)

•Oh, I almost forgot: You might even find out a little about what music they like!

## II. THOU SHALT MAKE IT CLEAR TO EVERYONE THAT THY STUDIO IS NOT FOR SOCIALIZING

You know the routine. You’re on the air, and one of the salespeople pops into the studio to say hello and chat a little. Soon she’s joined by the engineer. Next, one of the other jocks wanders in, and you’ve got a friendly gathering of folks chattering away while you’re trying (or should be trying) to concentrate on your show.

Unfortunately, tact doesn’t always work in trying to make people realize you can’t do your job well with others standing around. Initially you might try a soft approach: “Well, I’d really love to talk, but I’ve got to get back to the show.” If that doesn’t work, go directly to: “Jeff, I really need to concentrate on what I’m doing and I can’t concentrate with anyone else in the studio.”

## III. THOU SHALT READ A DAILY NEWSPAPER TO KEEP INFORMED ON WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THY COMMUNITY AND IN THY WORLD

## IV. THOU SHALT MAKE AN EFFORT TO ESTABLISH RAPPORT WITH THY CO-WORKERS

Instead of turning on your tunnel vision when you enter the station (“I’m here to do my job, that’s all I care about, I’m not interested in what anyone else around me is doing”), expand your field of vision to take in the workings of your overall station operation. Talk to the people in sales, engineering, traffic, management, public affairs. Ideally (and I realize this is an ideal that isn’t achieved often enough) the people at your station work together as a team. If you establish good working relationships with your fellow team members, you’re likely to strengthen your own performance and contributions to that team.

## V. THOU SHALT THINK ABOUT THY CAREER

If you never give any serious thought to where you want to go, you’re likely to wander aimlessly forever. If you know where you want to go but don’t take the time to map out your route, it’s unlikely you’ll ever reach your destination.

## VI. THOU SHALT MEET THY PUBLIC WHENEVER POSSIBLE

Hey, it's great being able to hide behind that microphone, isn't it? You can be witty, sarcastic, profound, knowledgeable, silly...and completely safe. But, probably, you also want good ratings. Every time you go out and meet people during a public appearance, you've got a chance to convert strangers into new listeners. All you have to do is make the effort to be friendly to them. If you do, then *every* public appearance you make will add to your listener base.

#### VII. THOU SHALT WORK THY TAIL OFF TO DO THE BEST JOB POSSIBLE

This applies to every aspect of your job: On-air, in the production room, participating in a promotion. Look, this is a competitive business, and if you want to come out on top you've got to do your best. I'm reminded of a quote by Ed Macauley. He was referring to his own field, basketball, but I suspect you might be able to apply this to your radio career:

*"When you are not practicing, remember, someone somewhere is practicing, and when you meet him he will win."*

#### VIII THOU SHALT TREAT PEOPLE THE WAY THOU WOULDST LIKE TO BE TREATED

I'm not going to give you spiritual, moral or even cosmic reasons for acting ethically. I'll simply point out a fact of radio: Throughout your career, you'll bump into familiar faces. Some of them will have the power to help you. Some will have the power to hurt you. If years ago you screwed them over, which choice do you think they'll make?

#### IX. THOU SHALT BE PREPARED FOR THE WORST

The worst in radio, of course, is being jobless. Prepare by always having a recent, good aircheck safely stashed at home. Read the trades to keep abreast of what's happening in the industry. And try to salt away some money (I don't care how badly paid you are; start saving some of it) to keep you afloat if your station sets you loose without a life raft.

#### X. THOU SHALT NEVER BE SATISFIED WITH THY SHOW

It's okay to be pleased with today's show. It's great to pat yourself on the back when you do an especially good job. But as soon as you say to yourself, "Hey, I've got good ratings, I'm paid a lot of money, and I'm a big celebrity in this town; I can afford to sit back and let the other young punks hustle to try to catch up to *me* now"....Well, it's awfully hard to win a race while resting on your laurels.

## SHOW PREP — MAKING EVERY BREAK COUNT

*In 1985, I was asked to put together and host a panel for the radio programming convention being jointly held by the National Association of Broadcasters and the National Radio Broadcasters Association. I selected the topic of "Show Prep," and I was determined to create a session that would do more than showcase big name, big ego jocks who spend 90 minutes telling radio war stories and boasting about how successful they are.*

*The three panelists were **Ross Brittain** (Z100/New York, WABC/New York, Z93/Atlanta)..... **Chuck Buell** (KHTR/ST. Louis, KRXY/Denver, KIMN/Denver, KFRC/San Francisco, WLS/Chicago).....and **Terry Moss** (Transtar, KHJ/Los Angeles, KZLA/Los Angeles; Publisher of Galaxy magazine).*

*By all accounts, this was one of the convention's most popular and most successful sessions. It was standing room only that day in Dallas, Texas. A 90-minute cassette of the session is available; this is a sampling of what was discussed.*

### OPENING COMMENTS

**BRITTAIN:** To my mind, the biggest thing about a morning show is how it flows. Preparation probably is the single most important key to making it flow. For the last several years I've been using a computer to help me. We go into the studio every day with five pages of single-spaced, typewritten information: Today in History, Celebrity Birthdays, trivia that is generic in nature — things that don't vary a whole lot from year to year. To that we add the pre-recorded bits that we did the day before — or the week or month before — and to that we add the phone calls we get and the drops and everything else. And that's what makes the show what it is.

**BUELL:** I think probably the first thing that needs to be done is to sit down with your program director and say, "What is it that you foresee in this particular show?" Granted, they have more than likely hired you because you allegedly know what you're doing, but you need some direction. He may want you to be more of an expert on music. He may want to be sure that you touch content in your local market more.

The other thing is it doesn't really matter what kind of a show you're doing, even if you're doing a high liner-card format where you've got those locked in pretty well. It still gets down to how you do them or how they tie in.

Show prep is not a matter of sitting down for two hours a day and saying, "All right, I'm going to do my homework for tomorrow." I think it's important that part of that is done, but show prepping is done constantly. If you talk to anybody who's doing mornings, in particular, they're horrible people to read a newspaper or magazine after. They'll find something in there, and it's ripped to shreds. Anything that you read — whether it's the airline magazine when you're flying

back home or whatever — is a source of material that you work into the show. It's something that needs to be done every day.

**MOSS:** *(Terry first administered a simple, 5-question quiz. Almost everyone managed to miss at least one of the "Easy" questions on the quiz.)* Throughout our lives, we all go through this. We sit around, we talk about something, and somebody doesn't get it. It's probably *you* at one time or another, with your friends. You don't understand the joke, you don't follow the teams. Everybody laughs, everyone agrees. You probably do, too, but you don't feel like you're part of it.

The point I'm making is this: Sometimes you can go a little bit too far, where you're talking over the heads of your listeners. You want to find the most common things — not the 12-year old mentality, but things that everybody can relate to. If you assume everyone knows what that big word means or who the newsmaker you're referring to is, you're alienating a lot of people. And they don't have a support group around them. They're listening alone, and they have a dangerous weapon: They can tune out. Bam! — and your show is history.

**BUELL:** Whether you've got a hot recorded bit or a hot audience participation bit, 25 minutes later you've got new people listening who just tuned in and heard something going on. You have to be prepared to reiterate what it is that you're doing without making it sound redundant and without making it sound announcer-ish, like, "*Well, today we're doing this.*" Instead you can say, "*Boy, we've had fun this morning with this; we're trying to do that David Lee Roth thing. I can't do it, John can't do it. Terry, you try it.*" You can't just continue without being prepared to let people know where you are.

### SHOW PREP: WHERE & WHEN

**AUDIENCE QUESTION:** *What do you do before and after your shows at the radio station on a typical day?*

**BRITAIN:** I get to the station at about 4:30 for a 6:00AM start. I go through the daybook on AP to find out what stuff is happening around town. I'll go through the sports & weather and type them up. Then I'll clip the daily papers. After the show, I'll go into the studio or a dark room somewhere and write for a couple of hours and then go produce a couple of bits for the next day. I usually wind up leaving at about 3:00.

**BUELL:** I think with very few refinements, that's going to hold true with anybody. You have to look at stuff before you go on the air. You've already got your show laid out, and you can use the local newspaper to fill the holes. Afterward, the best thing I find to do is to take what you did that day, sort it out, take out the stuff you didn't use that is still good for tomorrow, throw away the stuff that isn't, and file what you need. If you're going to write bits, that might be a good time to do it.

If you're not a good writer when you finish a show because you're just exhausted, the key is to find the time that works best for you. I find I can get a lot more done away from the station, at home, when it gets down to writing things. Wherever you do it, the important thing is that you do it. And if anyone gives you a hard time about how there have been days when you bailed out at 10:05 and what an easy gig you have, let them know they're wrong because you may end up doing three or four hours at home.

**MOSS:** I do almost all of mine at home. I feel more comfortable. Even though we're provided with a place and a typewriter and a subscription to everything ever published, I just like my own environment. I do everything at home and bring it in in a notebook. It takes me 45 minutes to get to the studio, so I almost always listen to the news station while I'm driving in to get my own mental update, to make sure I'm aware of what's going on in the world.

## TELEVISION

**BRITTAIN:** If you watch tv, watch it with a pen in your hand, because a lot of times the tv shows that everybody is watching, you'll watch, too...and there'll be a question that you can use the next day about something that happened. You can follow the tv ratings, breaking it down night by night to find out what the evening's most popular program is, watch ten minutes of it, get a trivia question from it, and then do whatever you want.

**MOSS:** Another good trick when you want to catch something that's on while *you're* on the air or just don't want to watch is to make a cassette recording of the soundtrack of *The Tonight Show* or *David Letterman* or *Dynasty*. There you have an audio version of what's happening on television, and you can just stick it in your car's tape deck when you're driving down to the 7-11.

**AUDIENCE QUESTION:** *How do you prepare for a graveyard show when the newspaper for the following day hasn't come out?*

**BUELL:** You can't limit yourself to just one source. You don't have the option of getting a newspaper; the next best thing to look at is your news wire. They send a lot of stuff across. Any other publications that you have, you still can use...for entertainment news, etc. There's a ton of sources to use for show prep. Don't limit yourself. If you don't have a newspaper, find other sources.

**AUDIENCE QUESTION:** *What about using tabloids — like the National Enquirer?*

**BUELL:** I think I'd be careful how I use that. There are some stories in there that it's hard to figure out if they are totally accurate. The approach can be, very simply, "*Did you see in the Enquirer today...?*" That way you can protect yourself, rather than coming on some morning and saying, "*They found a baby alien in Sweden! It's in the paper!*"

## TERRY'S SECRET SHOW PREP DEVICE

**MOSS:** How often has the record ended at the same time that the traffic girl came in and the hotline rang and the next cart machine just lost power and you lost what you were going to say? You didn't write it down on *a blank piece of paper*. I don't know how many disc jockeys I've watched who don't have a blank piece of paper handy to make a note. How are you going to phrase two words to get from that song to the next bit? Well, make a note; write it down and you've got it in front of you!

**AUDIENCE QUESTION:** *What about non-drive-time jocks? How can they make themselves integrated into the community?*

**BUELL:** Two immediate ways: I'm assuming you have at least one weather set per hour. The weather affects us all. A tie-in to the sporting event — or if you don't have sports, a tie-in for *any* local event — may be of interest. You don't have to do a bit. A lot of personality radio misconceptions deal with the idea that you have to do a lot, talk a lot. Personality, many times, is *how* you say something. You take weather and tie it into an event. If you've got artist information, you can tie it in when you're back-tagging your music or when doing that tease for the next of the upcoming six in a row. If you'll talk to your program director, I think you'll find most of them are looking for a little of that.

**MOSS:** Whether you're doing a full-bore morning show or midnights, you still have to be aware of what's going on in the world. Sometimes it's just a word. If that word relates to what's going on in the world and fits into the 7-second intro, then you have to prepare for that: "*If you're going to the Springsteen concert, bring your umbrella.*"

## BUILDING A BIT

*This originally appeared in R&R as a three-part series, and years later we still get requests for reprints. The response from jocks to this series pleased and surprised me, because I had feared the subject matter would be too “dry” to hold the reader’s attention.*

In this chapter, we’ll explore ways in which you can create a constant source of “bits” for your show. First, let’s define our term: A “bit” is any piece of your program that is produced by you for entertainment purposes. These range from **Larry Lujack’s** “Animal Stories” to **Lohman & Barkley’s** “Light of My Life” soap opera to **Bob & Ray’s** interviews with fictitious people to **Rick Dees’** telephone conversations with wacky characters. Let’s start by looking at two basic guidelines you might find useful in creating on-air bits.

### “HOW LONG SHOULD A BIT BE?”

I’ve been asked this question many times by jocks over the years, and I always answer by quoting **Abe Lincoln’s** reply to the little girl who asked, “How long should a person’s legs be?” His answer: “Long enough to reach the ground.” How long should a bit be? Long enough to reach the ground.

Now, I realize there are some program directors and general managers out there who disagree with that philosophy. “A real pro can be funny in seven seconds,” they’ll say. “Anything over 15 seconds loses the listener’s interest,” they’ll say. What these “experts” overlook is the fact that listeners don’t listen with a stopwatch. *If it’s entertaining, they’ll listen*; if it’s boring or offensive or insulting, they might well tune in someone else.

I once had a GM come to me after a show and say, “I timed that telephone call you did today, and it ran for *4 1/2 minutes!*” It didn’t matter to him that the phone call was hysterically funny, that listener response to it was terrific, and that it undoubtedly created what I consider to be the most valuable kind of advertising: Elevator Talk.

### TIMING YOUR BEST BIT

When doing a morning show, I would schedule my best bit to run at roughly 7:45AM. The secondary reason for choosing 7:45 had to do with quarter-hour maintenance; more on that in another chapter. The primary reason, though, was that at 7:45 many of my listeners were in their cars, just a few minutes away from starting their workdays at 8:00.

My goal was to do a bit so funny, so entertaining, that my typical listener would arrive at work, park his/her car, get onto the elevator, and tell a friend what I’d just done. But at that time of the morning, the elevator would be *full* of people about to start their workdays, and when my listener told a friend what Dan O’Day had done just a few minutes earlier, *everyone in the*



*elevator* would overhear what essentially is an unpaid commercial for my show! That's what I call Elevator Talk: word-of-mouth at maximum efficiency.

Back to the question of length: To put it simply, *the length of a bit is irrelevant*. If it entertains your audience and happens to run five minutes — *and* if by editing the bit you would *weaken* it — then five minutes is fine. But if it offends your audience or bores them, then a seven-second bit is seven seconds too long.

Management types who speak condescendingly of the audience's "small attention span" apparently are unaware that every night of the week, scores of millions of people sit down and watch 30-minute comedies and one- and two-hour dramas on television. The best-selling single the Beatles ever had is *far* too long, in the opinions of these experts. "Hey Jude" exceeds seven minutes, and I'll listen to every beat of it when it comes on the radio. But I won't listen to, say, five seconds of "Coward of the County," because it offends me. Shortening that particular piece of entertainment won't induce me to listen to it, because I don't happen to find it entertaining.

"*It doesn't matter how long a bit is*" — right? Wrong. Wrong! Go back to what Honest Abe had to say: "Long enough to reach the ground" ...and no longer. A successful bit builds and builds, its impact becoming greater as the bit progresses. If you can make a particular bit 30 seconds long or two minutes long and the two-minute version doesn't pack more of a wallop than the shorter one, go with the shorter one.

A rule that seems to be equally important in the entertainment field and in life is, "Leave them wanting more." Many boxing fans agree **Muhammad Ali** was the greatest fighter of all time....but his historical impact would have been even greater if only he had quit at his prime and not dragged out his career several years past its peak. If you hit your peak in the middle of a four-minute bit, those remaining two minutes distract from and lessen the emotional impact on your listeners. This leads us to our second guideline:

## LEARN HOW TO STRUCTURE YOUR BITS

One of the world's most successful screenwriters is **William Goldman**. He wrote the scripts for *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *All The President's Men*, *Harper* and *Marathon Man*, among others. What do you suppose he says is the most important element of a screenplay (pick one)?

- A. Character development
- B. Believable dialogue
- C. Reaching the audience on an emotional level

The answer is...none of the above. In his book, *ADVENTURES IN THE SCREEN TRADE*, Goldman states flatly, "The single most important lesson to be learned about writing for films is:

*screenplays are structure."*

This rule applies to *any* creative work. All the technique, the artistry, the facility, the cleverness in the world are useless unless they have a structure to build upon.

"But," I hear you saying, "I don't *write* my 'bits,' as you call them. I ad-lib a lot of my stuff... and I certainly don't script out my interviews and phone conversations with listeners."

It doesn't matter. Whether your ideas go to paper or not, if you're creating something — either in the production room or on the air — you're going through the writing process. Unless you're a complete idiot, you *always* are planning ahead. Always.

Let's take an example of doing a phone bit on the air. Even when you don't know what the other person is going to say, you're planning ahead to the next moment. It's like driving a car: You might just be driving around aimlessly with no particular route in mind...but you don't wait until you're in the middle of the intersection before you decide whether to continue straight or turn right or left. As you approach the intersection, you quickly make a decision. And in building a bit, you're always looking for the quickest way to reach your destination: a great punchline, a strong finishing statement, a clever lead-in to the next record, etc.

*Structure. Structure. Structure.* Some jocks have bought into that old chestnut that if it's planned in advance, it's somehow less creative than if it were all off-the-cuff. Ain't true! Neither *Annie Hall* nor *Airplane!* was ad-libbed. And it shouldn't burst your bubble to learn that **Richard Pryor** doesn't just walk onstage and *then* ask himself, "What am I gonna talk about??" In 15 years of creating radio comedy, I've learned this about inspiration: It is wonderful. It is exciting. It is invigorating. But *craftsmanship* is what produces quality work.

What is structure? Simply stated, it's a beginning, a middle, and an end...and it includes an answer to the question, "What am I trying to accomplish with this bit?"

### BEGINNING, MIDDLE & END

The Beginning. If you begin with clarity and confidence, your audience will be ready to enjoy whatever you've got in mind. "*We're here at the Poughkeepsie Chemical Waste Site, speaking with the night watchman, Herman P. Twaddle.*" That's all you need to establish the premise; once you've established it, treat it as if your listeners can *see* the setting. You don't have to describe it further, because they *do* see the Chemical Waste Site *in their minds*...with much greater detail than you can provide auditorily. Sound effects that hint at the locale are fine, but *let them speak for themselves.*

The Middle. This is the heart of your bit, constantly building the humor/interest/confrontation. This is where it's most important to know your structure, because this should lead logically to your finish.

The End. This is where most bits fail. Ending a bit well is one of the most demanding creative tasks there is. *Saturday Night Live* offers countless examples of bits that began with a good idea but fizzled and failed because the writers simply didn't know how to wrap it up. *Annie Hall* is a brilliant movie made up of brilliantly conceived vignettes. Writers **Woody Allen** and **Marshall Brickman** could have simply ended it with Allen and **Diane Keaton** bidding each other a tearful farewell and then parting, but instead they ended on a very funny line that acted as a statement representing the film *and* acting as closure for it; it *felt* like an ending. And you can bet it wasn't just an accident; they didn't simply write a funny movie and then say, "What do you think it's about?" They *knew* what it was about, and they built toward that statement ("....because we need the eggs") throughout the screenplay.

Whether it's a movie or a funny story or a one-liner or a serious statement about a subject dear to your heart, you've got to have the structure in mind before you begin it. Structure is like a good road map: If you want to drive from Los Angeles to Des Moines but don't have any idea how you're going to get there, you *could* just get into your car and start driving and eventually you *might* actually end up in Des Moines....but it's likely to be a very long trip.

## HUMOROUS BITS

Now that we've discussed the lengths of bits and the importance of structure, let's take closer looks at four types of humorous bits:

- Phony commercials
- Fake interviews that satirize a current celebrity and/or controversy
- Conversations with characters who are part of your show or who (supposedly) are station staff members
- Produced humorous vignettes

## PHONY COMMERCIALS

This is one of the easiest bits for radio people to do, because most of us at some time in our careers have had to write and produce commercials. When that granddaddy of consultants, **Aesop**, declared that "familiarity breeds contempt," he probably was trying to explain why most jocks at one time or another have come up with their own wild versions of spots...many of them too raunchy for air use! The fact that we know the medium of the 30- and 60-second spot so well makes it easy for us to lampoon it.

Typically the structure of a phony commercial consists of overlaying an obvious commercial

format onto an incongruous subject. All you have to do is ask yourself, “What if...?”

“What if the space race were advertised as a stock car race?” (*Right off the bat I know I’d start it with a reference to next Sunday’s line-up, featuring those two long-time rivals, The Americans (sfx: Bugle Charge) versus The Godless Russian Communist Menace (sfx: “Volga Boatmen”)...and of course the spot would end with directions on how to get to NASA Stadium...and the exhortation to “BE THERE!”*)

“What if Mr. Rogers ran for President?” (“*And if you vote for me, boys and girls, I promise to make our neighborhood as safe as safe can be. Can you say ‘limited first strike as a deterrent to further nuclear war?’*”)

“What if K-Tell came out with a long-playing Congressional Record?” (“*You’ll get H.R. #30117896: (excerpt:) ‘Mr. Chairman, concerning my learned colleague’s bill to name the beaver as America’s national bird.... ‘Senate Bills 443289A and B: ’...and so building this federal dam project in the Mojave Desert is an idea whose time has come....’*”)

The logic of spots like these is self-evident. The most important thing to keep in mind is to *treat it like it’s a real spot*. Most jocks I’ve heard remember this when writing the phony commercial, but many undercut the humorous effect by failing to produce it as though it were real. And that’s a shame, because that’s when a bit like this is funniest — when there’s a marked contrast between the seriousness of the production & presentation and the silliness of the spot’s content. For maximum effectiveness, the production values of your silly spots should match those of your real ones...which means you’ve got to take the time to search out the right music & effects and then balance them properly.

Another aspect of making this type of bit seem real is to *sell* the spot with as much intensity, sincerity and commitment as you would the biggest national voiceover assignment. Don’t feel compelled to laugh at your joke while you’re delivering it; your seriousness helps make it so funny to your listeners. Some jocks use a throw-away delivery when doing such bits...as if to say, “Hey, if you don’t think this is funny, that’s okay ’cause I know I’m just being dumb here.” If you think the idea is dumb or the execution is poor, *don’t do it*. (And if you’re afraid that someone in your audience will think what you’re doing is stupid: relax. You can be sure that someone *will* think just that. Being an entertainer is a risky business...but you knew the job was dangerous when you took it.)

Finally — and I’m surprised at how many air personalities ignore this — *don’t promote a phony commercial*. Treat it like any other commercial message...with the possible exception of not placing it in a spot cluster, depending upon your station’s policy. I don’t see anything wrong with putting your phony spot at the end of a stopset, as long as it doesn’t lampoon one of the other spots in the break. But I can understand the skittishness of some sales managers who worry about clutter or about offending advertisers. But just as you never say, “Coming up this hour I’ll be playing that great new Coca Cola commercial,” neither should you say, “...I’ll be playing that

commercial for the Mr. T School of International Diplomacy.”

## TWO WAYS TO TELL IF YOUR PHONY SPOT IS A SUCCESS:

1. When listeners call to ask when you'll be playing it again.
2. When listeners call up and say, “That last commercial you played wasn't *real*...was it??”

## FAKE INTERVIEWS

These interviews usually take one of two forms: Either you're talking with a celebrity or person in the news, or you're speaking with a spokesperson for a cause or organization in the news. In either case, your interview (that is, the dialogue you fabricate between you and your guest) can develop quite easily if you *remain true to your subject's character*.

This means that when you write your “guest's” dialogue, you write it with his/her voice and not your own. If you want to portray a politician as a free-spending liberal, you *don't* have him say, “Well, Ed, I think the way to solve all of our country's problems is to waste a whole lot more of the taxpayer's money.” Instead, you have him say, “I think the United States as a people must extend equal rights to *all* of its inhabitants, which is why I'm proposing a bill in the U.S. Senate that would allocate \$800,000 for an inquiry into why the tv cat food commercials use only calico cats and never black cats...or tabbies. And what about the Siamese....?”

In a satirical situation like this, you never want the subject of your satire to state *your* position or attitude; you want him/her to state the exact opposite...but in such an exaggerated and ridiculous way that your real attitude is made clear.

If you're going to speak with your subject's (or should I say “victim's”) voice, that means you're going to have to keep that person's dignity intact. Don't take away his/her rationalizations; don't ever have your subject admit to being foolish or petty or dishonest. Remember all those Nixon impressions of the 1970s? Which do you think is funnier — **Richard Nixon** saying “*I'm a dishonest politician,*” or Richard Nixon saying, “*I am not a crook*”? The second statement is the funny one because the words are so true to his character while being so contradictory to the impression many of us have of him.

And what about your characterization of yourself as interviewer? I think it's important to remember not to upstage your guest. It's much too easy — and therefore not very satisfying — to have your guest say inane things and then have you come in and point out the illogic. A far better tactic is to play the role of the considerate interviewer.

**Bob & Ray** always treat their wacko guests with respect. When their “newsman,” Wally Ballou, interviews a cranberry grower who never heard of using cranberries to make juice or sauce,

Ballou doesn't ridicule the guy. Instead he's very patient and sympathetic. And although old Wally might suspect the guy is less than brilliant when he says he's just been selling the cranberries in baskets — “for cranberry shortcake” — the tactful reporter never lets on.

### IMAGINARY CHARACTERS ON YOUR SHOW

Again, the key here is to remain true to the character. All successful comedians rely on character. You won't hear **Steve Martin** joking about how fat **Elizabeth Taylor** is, because that's not consistent with his character, just like it wouldn't be in keeping with **Bob Hope's** character for Bob to make wry observations about the funny ways in which people use four-letter words. When writing (or ad-libbing) lines for a particular character, don't say what *you* want to say; instead, listen for what the *character* would say.

One nice thing about doing character voices is your characters can get away with a lot of stuff that *you* can't — sexual innuendo, political put-downs, you name it.

### PRODUCED HUMOROUS VIGNETTES

This is a genre that is less widely done. These vignettes are small comedy sketches that, again, rely heavily on character. Years ago my on-air partner and I did an irregular feature about the people who shopped at Triple's Market. Often we focused on Mr. Triple's attempts to romance Marge in the frozen food section. Each 30- to 60-second story would come from asking, “What if...?”

“What if Mr. Triple suspected Marge had been shopping at a discount market?” (*This was a real episode, featuring one of my favorite of Marge's lines: “Oh, Mr. Triple, you don't mean that you're accusing me of...of...(organ chord)...shopping around!”* )

In producing these vignettes, it's important not to be heavy-handed in your use of sound effects. If you're using sfx of mosquitoes buzzing, there's no need to say, “Boy, look at those mosquitoes!” A slightly more subtle verbalization would be, “Wouldn't you know I forgot to bring the insect repellent?”

Luckily, once you get to know your characters, all you have to do is put them in a situation and then see how they respond.

### NON-HUMOROUS BITS

In the context of personality radio, a “bit” often brings to mind comedy or humor of some sort... but you don't *have* to be funny in order to be entertaining or simply interesting. Here are some tips and techniques for producing five non-comedy types of bits.

## INTERVIEWS WITH CELEBRITIES OR PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

There are two things you must do if you want to insure a good interview: Prepare and listen.

When preparing your questions in advance, think about what *you* really would like to know about your guest. Next, think about what your audience would really like to know. These two criteria for questions are much more important than knowing what *your guest* wants you to ask. If your guest is a tv actor who's going on about how popular his show is and the morning paper says the show is about to be cancelled, don't ignore that just because you don't want to embarrass or upset your guest. If you fail to ask the obvious questions that everyone in your audience is waiting to hear asked, you'll come across as nothing more than a flack.

Naturally, you should attempt to familiarize yourself with your guest's career/product/ story. Read the book or the news clippings...or, at the very least, the press release! If you regularly interview celebrities or newsmakers, you should make it a point to read constantly — news magazines, newspapers, and the fluffy *People*-type publications. This keeps you aware of what other people are talking about and gives you a very broad overview of what's happening around you. If you're interviewing a childbirth expert and you mention that you recently read a report stating that amniocentesis is being done much earlier in the pregnancy than it used to, your guest will be impressed....your audience will be impressed....and, most importantly, your interview will be the better for it.

On the other hand, an interview with a guest should not be used simply as an opportunity for you to show off. Recently I was listening to an interview being conducted on a local radio station. Here's a direct quote, from the show's host: *"Is it true that when you were a child, your parents used to speak Spanish in front of you when they didn't want you to understand what they were saying, and that's what first got you interested in languages?"*

What's left for the guest to say? "Yes" or "No."

This is a perfect example of the interviewer being more concerned with impressing the guest and/or audience with his/her vast knowledge than with producing a good interview. In this case, the guest simply relied, "Yes."

A much fuller, more interesting and entertaining answer would have been provided if instead the interviewer had asked, *"What first got you interested in languages?"* Or, perhaps, *"When you were growing up, did your parents have any influence on your interest in languages?"*

Either of those two questions would have allowed the guest to tell the story in her own words — probably in a richer, more entertaining way than the interviewer could have done.

But, of course, in that case listeners might not have known just how incredibly knowledgeable

the interviewer is....

## LISTENING

The second requirement is ignored by too many interviewers: to listen. If you're an air personality interviewing a guest, it should be more like a conversation than a formal interview. You should be prepared to depart from your scripted questions when the flow of conversation leads to some other, unforeseen but interesting area.

It's easy to identify a disc jockey who doesn't listen to his/her guest. It usually sounds something like this:

*STAR: You're right, DJ, I do have fun on our television show. Sometimes it gets a bit dangerous, though; why, last year when we went on location in Africa, several crew members were eaten by lions.*

*JOCK: That's great. Tell me, do you do much dating in Hollywood?*

If you listen closely to your guests, sometimes you'll catch them in a contradiction, an exaggeration, or even a lie. Unless you truly do wish to be a PR flack for your guests — and if you do, I suppose there's nothing wrong with that — you've got to call them on it. If you think your guest actually is lying but don't want to come right out and say, "I think you're lying," lay the blame for the question on some other, unidentified person: *"Well, Fred, selling 85 million corn dogs a week out of your trailer is quite an impressive feat, but some people say that number is greatly exaggerated and that in fact you don't sell more than two or three hundred in a month."*

A more direct way to handle that, of course — and one that is more interesting to listen to — is to state your doubts clearly: *"Fred, I'm having trouble believing that you really sell 85 million corn dogs. How many do you really sell?"*

## INTERVIEWS WITH OFFBEAT PEOPLE

These would be people who walk across the country backward, keep rattlesnakes as pets, etc. Again, the key here is to ask the questions your audience would like to ask. A little research will really pay off with specialized interviews like these. If you ask your record collector guest, *"Do you have a mint copy of 'Stormy Weather' by the Five Sharps?"* your guest will be delighted that you know something about his/her field and your listeners will be pleased that their representative (you) was so smart to ask such an informed question.

This next point should be obvious, but I hear too many air personalities who seem not to be aware of it: Don't talk down to your guests. Don't patronize them. If you have decided they are special enough to be on your show, they deserve to be treated with respect.



## TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS WITH LISTENERS

Your job as an air personality is to manipulate your caller either into being entertaining or into setting it up for *you* to be entertaining. The key: *Treat them like people*, not like voices on the request line. When you ask what they do for a living, listen to the answer and make a comment appropriate to your experiences: *"You're a veterinary assistant? Can you tell me how to get my dog to stop barking all the time?"*

Often I hear an air personality talking to a contest winner and not paying any attention to what the winner is saying. It usually goes something like this:

JOCK: *What do you do in El Monte?*

CALLER: *I'm with the Air Force, working on a Top Secret project that interviews aliens when they crash-land in their UFOs.*

JOCK: *Uh-huh. And how do you plan to spend your ten dollars in Y96 Music Money?*

Each of your listeners has something interesting to talk about; it's your job to find out — as quickly as possible, perhaps before you put them on the air — what it is. If you allow your callers to have fun *and* make them look good, then *you'll* look good, too. Remember: When you speak on-the-air with a listener, your audience will identify with the listener, not with the big-time DJ. Treat the caller right and you treat your audience right.

## BLUNT, HONEST PERSONAL EXPRESSIONS

Your own pet peeves, expressed directly and with verve, can establish you in your listeners' minds as an entertainer who isn't all that different from them. A while back, David Letterman had a very funny running bit on his late-night talk show; it concerned his frustration in trying to get cable tv hooked up in his home. The cable company expected him to stay home all day, waiting for them to show up; naturally, they wouldn't give him an estimate of their arrival more specific than "between 8AM and 7PM." Letterman ranted on about how unreasonable the cable company was and pointedly noted that *his* show was on "free tv, which is the way God intended for it to be!" It was very funny, and somehow it was reassuring to hear that even a multimillion-dollar-a-year television star has to put up with some of the same hassles as the rest of us.

## CONFRONTATIONAL PHONE INTERVIEWS

With phone interviews of any kind, don't spend much time on social amenities. A quick "good morning" is all you need at the beginning: *"Good morning, Congressman Smith. Because you are Chairman of the Congressional Ethics Committee, I'm hoping you can explain to me why the committee fired the Chief of Pages for fooling around with a female page when two*

*members of Congress had affairs with pages and they're still on-the-job."*

With these two opening sentences, you've established:

- Who you're calling
- What the subject is
- Why you feel it's important enough to call about

Again, ask the questions that your listeners would ask *and* that are provoked by your guest's answers. Politicians (and PR people, too) are practiced in deflecting a direct question with a mealy-mouthed, meandering answer that sounds impressive but says nothing. Here's a simple and extremely effective way to deal with guests who try to avoid answering your direct questions: Simply repeat the question.

*JOCK: Ms. Smythe, why should we taxpayers be expected to pay for your company's cost overruns when you've promised to do the job for a set price?*

*SMYTHE: A good question, Jock. With the world situation like it is, I think it's important for all of us to concern ourselves not only with producing equipment as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible but also to insure that the quality of the equipment doesn't suffer.*

*JOCK: Yes, but why should we taxpayers be expected to pay for your company's cost-overruns when you've promised to do the job for a set price?*

Keep repeating the question until you get a direct answer; this is an extremely effective interview technique.

ENDING THE INTERVIEW: Interestingly, I believe you should be a bit more polite to your "confrontational" guests than you are to other phone guests. At the end of a confrontational interview, formally identify your guest by name and title, and offer your thanks: *"Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today, Mr. Jonze."*

Why end a confrontational interview with politeness? Well, it suggests a certain amount of class on your part. And even if you totally disagreed with your guest, he or she contributed time, effort and energy to helping build a bit for *your* show.

## HOW TO USE A COMEDY SERVICE

You see the ads in the trades all the time. Comedy material. Jokes, one-liners, gags, bits, funnies, verbal cartoons. Each service assuring you that *their* material will make you a star. What the ads don't say, of course, is that only YOU can make you a star. If you're into humor, outside comedy material can help. If you know how to use that material, it can be a big help. But if you merely take your *O'LINERS* or whatever comedy service you use into the studio and read them cold on-the-air without attempting to assimilate the humor into your own personal style, it'll probably take you right down the tubes.

It's not really that hard to incorporate a comedy service into your show. First, you've got to have a sense of humor. That doesn't mean you have to be a comedy writer yourself; it just means that it'll help a lot if you understand where the punchline is. There are few things as pathetic as a decidedly unfunny soul trying to be comical on-the-air.

Second, you should *personalize* the material. If you give it just a little bit of thought, you'll learn that it's easy. If you've got an insult, apply it to your newsperson or your boss — or yourself. If you've got a funny story, make it sound *real*, as though it *really* happened to you. *Localize* your material. If you're in Altoona and your service has a joke about the Los Angeles smog, switch it to the Pittsburgh smog. Use names of local streets and landmarks. By all means, read your local newspapers! Know what people are talking about.

The set-up of the joke also is important. You can't just come out of a record and say, "*Hey, did I tell you about the girl who...*" Instead, you might say, "*The latest from Barbara Mandrell...I was reading the other day that when Barbara was a little girl, she...*" Gary Owens is a master of using a recording artist or celebrity as a set-up with which to catch his audience off guard.

The most common points of reference for a joke are record titles & lyrics and commercials. Example of using record titles for take-offs:

*"KKED with Engelbert Humperdinck, 'After The Lovin' ...reminds me of that old joke...SHE: Do you smoke after sex? HE: I don't know; I never looked!"*

Commercials offer additional opportunities to tie in a joke. Sometimes you can joke directly about the subject of the spot. But if the station management frowns on fooling around with clients' spots, you still can use the spot as a jumping-off point. Example:

*(SPOT ENDS WITH:) "So be sure to bring the kids to see Santa this Sunday at City Mall! Ho ho ho..."*

*(YOU:) "Gosh, I can't believe it's that time of year already. I didn't realize it was getting that close to Christmas until the other day when our newsboy left the paper right in front of our door — giftwrapped!"*

## INSULT HUMOR

A lot of jocks aren't very comfortable with insult humor. One way to use a funny insult and still maintain your "good guy" image is to aim it at yourself. Here's a good opportunity to exercise your character voices. Cart up a good put-down and keep it ready; punch it up when you've just let loose with a corny joke or stumbled all over your tongue.

## BLUE HUMOR

The same principle holds true for off-color humor. For some reason, a "character" can get away with much more risqué material than the jock can. If you've got a very funny line that's a little too "blue" for comfort — but still not all *that* dirty — give it to your Old Man voice or your Little Girl voice. Then if you want, *you* can react to the remark by chastising the character...thus dissociating yourself from the "shocking" bad taste.

## TOPICAL HUMOR

When it comes to using topical material, *if you're not comfortable with the line, don't use it.* Naturally, this applies to any type of material but especially to topical bits... because in such a case you are *commenting* on the news. No matter how great a comedy service is, you are NOT going to love every single line of every single issue. Some lines just won't seem funny to you; some might seem downright dumb.

This doesn't mean that a line has to agree with say, your political philosophy. Even if you're a long-time conservative, you should still be able to make jokes about prominent conservatives or about the National Rifle Association. And if you're liberal, you should be able to make jokes about prominent liberals or about feminism...as long as you think the humor element is valid and the particular point of view behind it is not repugnant to you.

And unless your management lives in fear of *any* adverse comment from *any* member of *any* group, don't be afraid to deliver a good crisp topical line with some punch to it. If you can lay on your listeners a line about a topic of current interest and controversy, you'll be quoted all over town — and THAT translates into new listeners.

Here's a handy idea I got from **Chris White**, formerly of KEEN in San Jose, California. It's a way to use *old topical lines*: Why not add a regular feature in which you say, "This is what we were laughing at one year ago (or two, or five, etc.) today." Then give a dated line from your comedy service issue of last year: the then-big political scandal, world affairs, etc.

You could even filter the voice and record it ahead of time, as if the voice were coming from the past...and then lead right into a big hit from when the line was current. As Chris says, "*Listeners like a good joke pretty much like they like a good record. Granted they don't like to hear it over*

*and over again, but every once in a while I see no reason why we can't do an 'oldie.'"*

## THIS IS RADIO

There are distinct differences between stand-up and radio comedy. Stand-up offers you invaluable eye contact with your audience. You can judge their reactions and pace yourself accordingly. You can take a bit more time in setting up your punchline; you don't have to worry about a hot clock or an 18-minute spot load.

When doing radio comedy, however, you can protect yourself with sound effects — groans, laughter, horns, etc. But the most valuable tools at your disposal are spots and jingles. These should be used to accentuate your lines, to give them an added crispness. When you've got a funny line, *don't* stop to chuckle about it; go right into that jingle or spot! This technique becomes radio's equivalent to television's blackout sketches. And it's just this "in and out" ability offered by radio that allows you to get away with much cornier material than you could get by with in a nightclub or on tv.

## INSPIRATION

Above all, if you're not comfortable with the material — and you can't rewrite it to fit your own delivery — *don't use it*. Don't try to force another person's style on yourself. Ignore the promotional hype we radio comedy writers engage in; evaluate a humor service solely on the basis of the material's appeal to you. If *you* don't think the stuff is funny, don't try to entertain your audience with it.

Sometimes a subscriber will apologetically tell me, "*I love O'LINERS...but usually I rewrite the lines a little to fit me*" or "*...but I use the lines differently than the way you presented them in the sheet*" or "*Often I don't even use the line as it's printed, but I use it as a thought-starter to create my own line.*" Hey, don't apologize! That's great! Anybody can rip & read (and some of the basic jock lines do lend themselves to that); the creativity comes in when you take that prepared line and make it sound fresh and spontaneous.

## MAKING COMEDY SERVICES WORK FOR YOU

*Don Berns is a well-known major market jock (Buffalo, Dallas, Kansas City, San Diego, Pittsburgh) who wrote to me to share some of his views on the use of comedy services. What follows are both his views and my own ideas (italicized) in response.*

(DON:) Over the past 12 years or so, I have based my on-air approach on the use of comedy services, which some program and general managers consider to be “the easy way out” but which in fact can be just as tough to use as writing your own material on a daily basis. Here are my guidelines for doing a radio show with service material.

### I. BUY SERVICES THAT ARE REPRESENTATIVE OF YOUR OWN SENSE OF HUMOR.

If you laugh out loud when you read the samples, and if when you tell someone else the lines they laugh, too, then the service probably is right for you. If I sat down and wrote my material each day, it would be very similar to the pre-written stuff I use on-the-air.

*Right! Don't buy a service based on those glowing testimonials from other subscribers; all comedy services can trot out those self-serving quotes. And when using a service, don't use a gag that you don't find funny or that you won't feel comfortable delivering.*

II. DON'T JUST READ THE LINES ON-THE-AIR. Incorporate them into your own style and rewrite if you have to. Often you'll have to set the line up; this way your listeners won't be saying, “Oh, here comes another joke out of left field.”

*There are few things as deadly as hearing a jock read a humor service line cold, like a piece of weather copy!*

Also, when rewriting lines, try to localize as much as possible.

*“Localization” and “one-to-one communication” must be the two most used phrases for air personalities...and with good reason. But don't be fooled into thinking a national story can't have local interest as is; national politics, sports, economics or celebrities all are of interest to your local listeners. One excellent way to localize a generic gag is to use specific local references: “I was coming out of the Local Mall when I saw this guy....”*

III. KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO DO AND WHEN. As a basic guideline, I always had a format for myself, employing certain kinds of bits at certain times within the hour. Here's a sample hour:

:05 — Come out of the newscast with a comment on some story. A “kicker” story would be your first choice, followed by some sort of local event, or a national story, sports, or, if you're either really hard up or having some sort of unusual condition, the weather. Some services are

done by category, so it's easy to find whatever you're looking for. Others are a bit of a mishmash, so you may have to mark your lines by category for easy reference.

*To maximize your ability to follow the newscast with a good bit, try doing what too few jocks do: Actually listen to the newscast. Or, better yet, ask your newsperson for an advanced look at the copy. If your newscast is prerecorded, audition it before airing. While it's on-the-air, you'll have a few minutes to find something appropriate for a tie-in at the end.*

:10 — If this is a segue spot, you can use it to promote records coming up in the hour, followed by “Later on I’ll tell you about...” — and then use a generic line that otherwise might be hard to work into regular conversation. (“Later on I’ll tell you how I got my new scenic checks from the bank, although I’m not sure what they’re trying to tell me. The scene on MY checks is of Local State Prison!”) This sort of line can be done over the record following a :10 stop set as well.

*You might also try filling a typewritten page or two with generic lines from your services and bringing them into the studio at the start of your show. Review all the lines for the day, and then keep your eyes & ears open for a reference point for some of them. For instance, you might find a spot for the scenic check line (previous paragraph) following a news report of a sports figure's big new contract...or tagging a record with a money-related subject matter....*

:15 — Assuming this is your first stop set, you can do a news story followed by a caustic or funny comment here. It's a good idea to check the wire services for unusual stories. Or, if you had a stop set at :05 and already did a feature like this, you can do one of two things: “This portion of the Ed Jock Show is brought to you by...” or “WXXX, with Ed Jock and the radio program that notes...” — followed by a generic line (“You know you’re getting old when...”). This line also can be adapted to “The radio program that defines...” or “The radio program that doesn’t understand why...”

*Personally, I prefer to personalize observations. (As opposed to: The Dan O’Day Air Personalities Column prefers to personalize observations.) For one thing, I’d rather hear what a person has to say than what a program says. And when you put it in the first person (“I don’t understand why...”) you’re giving your listeners a bit more of a set-up for the joke, making it less formal and more conversational.*

:20 — Depending on what has gone before, you can use this slot to do the above-mentioned news bit, a comment on the previous newscast (which also serves as a news promo), or a generic bit about the record just played or the one coming up. There may also be a formatic element here that you have to do, like a contest. Where I worked for the past six years, this slot was followed by a jingle, so I never had to worry about doing a bit over the top of the next record.

:25 — This was the weather slot. Temperature always was followed by “On This Day In

History.” Two services, *CONTEMPORARY COMEDY* and *O’LINERS*, always have good bits to use here.

*I always enjoy history bits when well done. I hate hearing them read verbatim and sounding it. Often it sounds like the jock is reading the material for the very first time. A good service will have taken the time to word a sometimes lengthy history feature in a way that is excellent for on-air presentation...but you’ve still got to make it sound like you’re telling it, not reading it. Also, you’ll double the mileage you get out of your history item by promoting it once or twice in advance.*

:30 — ID

:35 — This was our public service slot, which I always did straight unless I had a contest open coming up over the next record; in that case, I would try to find a public service message that I could play with. Stay away from real serious matters if you are going to make light of a PSA.

*Isn’t it a shame that this has to be pointed out? I’ve heard jocks joke about PSAs concerning mental retardation, alcoholism, even child abuse. A single instance like that is enough to make me not want to listen to that jock again.*

If the PSA was done straight, use the intro of the next record to promote another jock. There are tons of put-down lines you can use from services. Just make sure you don’t sound too negative about someone else on-the-air; you run the risk of coming off as a snob if your put-downs are too vicious. (*You can save the really vicious ones either for fictitious characters or for use on yourself by other voices.*) And it’s a good idea to give certain kinds of personae to other jocks: One can be a drinker, the bachelor jock can be a womanizer, the married jock can have things happening at home with the spouse and children, etc.

*If you regularly use your fellow jocks as the focus of put-down humor, you might want to go to each of them and make sure they understand it’s supposed to be in fun and ask them if they’ll be comfortable with it.*

:40 — For us, this was a straight segue, no talk.

:45 — Weather, followed by either a news story that contains a kicker line (AP’s “Where There’s Life” is always good for that, as well as the “News” section of *GALAXY* and the “No Comment Needed” section of *O’LINERS*) or a quick bit which can be a phony letter from a listener, a “handy household tip,” a Carson-type bit of giving first the answer and then the question, or any sort of quick, blackout-style bit. Straight intro, promo or call for contest over the top of the next record.

:50 — A long bit could go here. Unfortunately there aren’t a lot of services that provide long



bits (phony commercials, soap operas, jock bios for their birthdays, etc.). One good one is *OBITS*. If you can't find enough on the outside, you might want to write your own. I did about one per day.

*Again: Promote those funny news items or long-form humor bits: "Right after Madonna I'll tell you about what this guy in California did when a judge ordered him to turn over his car keys." "In just a few minutes we'll be honoring Jock with a special, world-exclusive birthday tribute."*

IV. **BE CREATIVE!** Don't be afraid to experiment by creating new bits and features. Be aware of what's happening in your community and the nation; use this knowledge in creating bits. If you are well-known for your humor, you'll find that listeners like to get involved. This can be perfect for creating contests. Two of my more successful contests are the Dumb Joke of the Day (one contestant per phone line; you pick the best joke of the bunch and put it on the air) and the Class Act of the Day (listeners tell you something stupid or embarrassing they did, and you pick the best one to air). (*Late night television viewers might be familiar with David Letterman's version of this. Utilizing members of the studio audience, he calls this feature "Brush With Stupidity."*)

Other standard bits include Music Trivia. Does everybody know that **Simon & Garfunkel** once were called **Tom & Jerry**? Believe it or not....No! After you establish your authority in that area, let listeners ask you the questions on Stump the Disc Jockey. Recently I added Trivial Pursuit, where the contestant got to choose his/her category. If they got the answer wrong, I'd open up the phone lines for the first correct answer so that there would always be a winner.

*With a little effort, you'll usually be able to find a good line from your comedy service to tie into the subject of the trivia question.*

*I can't stress enough the importance of being "aware of what's happening in your community." Many jocks are much more aware of what's happening within the radio community than in their own cities. The fact that a particular bit or feature or contest was a huge success in one market doesn't mean it'll work in your own. The proliferation and, often, subsequent failure of Zoo Crew clones around the country offer ample evidence of this.*

*Often when an on-air feature doesn't work, there's a tendency to blame the audience for not appreciating it. For some reason, that reminds me of a guy who had great success catching bass in a Florida lake. A few months later he went trout fishing on a river in New England. He spent five days there and never caught a trout. As he packed up his gear to leave, he shouted at the uncaught fish, "What's the matter with all of you? I'm using the exact same bait I used to catch those bass in Florida!"*

V. **BE FLEXIBLE.** If you have a personality oriented show, there is no law that says you have to do every bit you've planned. If something else comes up, run with it. Tomorrow is always

another day in which to do your “regular” bits.

*Some jocks mistakenly believe that if they prepare for their shows, they can't be spontaneous. The truth is that the more prepared you are before turning on the microphone, the more flexible and spontaneous you'll be able to be...secure in the knowledge that when you return from an unexpected jaunt — surprise studio guest, hot news topic, etc. — you'll be able to keep up the pace and excitement throughout your entire show.*

VI. USE YOUR HEAD AND PLAN AHEAD. Not every bit is going to work, but you can't lose by trying. You can, however, lose by not being prepared and just throwing in a line for the sake of saying something. Take chances...but if something you're doing isn't working, drop it. If you are a truly creative person, you'll come up with something else or figure out a new way to use those services that can be tremendously valuable in creating your own unique style.

*Again, we're talking about flexibility. If you've decided to take calls all during your show on the subject of the President's recent operation and during the first hour you get no response from your listeners, feel free to drop it then and there.*

*There's a wonderful comedy/magic act that I've enjoyed for years now: two guys named Penn & Teller. Early in the act, Penn explains that he absolutely hates juggling....and then he proceeds to juggle, grumbling throughout. At one point he announces, "I know this trick isn't very exciting, but I bothered to learn it, so you're darn well going to watch it." That's a funny line and it always gets a laugh...but it wouldn't be funny if the audience truly were bored by it.*

VII. ASSESS EACH LINE OR BIT IN YOUR COMEDY SERVICE INDIVIDUALLY. I always make a check mark by the ones I'm going to use and then “X” the check after I've used the line. And I always use different colors for different years, i.e., blue for the current year, red for the previous year, followed by green, brown and black. This gives me a handy reference as to in which years I've done which bits.

*That's a clever system, Don, but does it need to be so complex? Wouldn't it be easier and just as effective simply to write the year by each line as it's used?*

Other markings include “L” for “Later this hour I'll tell you about...,” “X” for jock plug, “O” for “The radio program that notes...” or “Brought to you by...” And a marking in the margin for general subject topics for quick reference.

VIII. YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE FUNNY EVERY TIME YOU OPEN YOUR MIKE! Some jocks really want to be known as total buffoons, but others prefer to be thought of as humorous personalities who also have something to say.

*Those moments in which you don't try to be funny are crucial to the process of being funny. Any*

*comedian will tell you that the key to good comedy is timing. And the key to entertaining is pacing. It's vitally important that you set up an environment that allows your listeners to enjoy and integrate all the elements of your show: music, news, weather, humor, phone calls, etc.*

.....

O'DAY ANSWERS THE SEVEN MOST-ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT COMEDY SERVICES

*(I write & publish two radio comedy services: OBITS and O'LINERS. These are the questions I hear most often.)*

I. SHOULD EVERY AIR PERSONALITY USE A COMEDY SERVICE?

No. You should use a service only if it adds to the quality of your show and expands it in a direction you want it to take.

II. SHOULD EVERYONE WHO USES A COMEDY SERVICE SUBSCRIBE TO DAN O'DAY'S SERVICES?

No. See answer to Question #1.

III. WHAT IF I FIND A GREAT SERVICE BUT MY STATION WON'T PAY FOR IT?

Gosh, I don't know. I guess you'll just have to find someone who's very interested in the success of your career and have that person pay for it.

IV. HOW DO I DECIDE WHICH ONE SERVICE TO BUY?

Limiting yourself to one service is like limiting your wardrobe to a single shirt. Buy as many services as you can find...*if* they meet the criteria established in Question #1.

V. WHY DON'T THESE SERVICES GUARANTEE ME MARKET EXCLUSIVITY?

For one thing, they'd have to charge you much, much more for your subscription. For another, it's virtually impossible to manage. Let's say you subscribe to "Big Yuks." You leave Centerville for Midvale. But there's already a "Big Yuks" subscriber in Midvale. Does the service drop that subscriber? Does it drop you?

Some services (including mine) do limit their subscribership to one per station. Some sell as many subscriptions as they can, regardless. If this point is important to you, inquire before you buy a particular service.

Naturally, we'd all like to be the only one in our market using a particular service. Heck, we'd like to be the only one in the world using it, if possible. But I invite you to take comfort in the fact that *listeners don't remember one-liners*. They remember that you said something funny, but they don't remember what it was. Test this yourself: Did you see *The Tonight Show* last night? Can you think of a single line from the monologue? (I doubt it. But probably you recall whether the host was funny or whether he bombed.)

Warning: There is one group of people that is likely to hear you do a line they heard on a competing station (or vice-versa). These people will quickly inform you of this fact. These people are your co-workers, especially your fellow jocks and salespeople. That's because, obviously, radio is their business. They listen to more radio more intently than other people do. Be grateful for their input, but never forget that they are *not* representative of your listeners.

VI. I WORK IN A SMALL MARKET. WHY SHOULD I PAY AS MUCH FOR A SERVICE AS A BIG-TIME JOCK IN A MAJOR MARKET PAYS FOR THE SAME SERVICE?

It costs just as much to produce and mail the issue to Beagle Bluff, Iowa, as it does to get it to Chicago.

VII. WILL BUYING A COMEDY SERVICE MAKE ME FUNNY?

Will buying a hammer make you a carpenter?

## USING ONE-LINERS COMFORTABLY

A disc jockey in Houston asks about making natural segues into humorous one-liners: *“What’s the best way to incorporate one-liners into your show without making it sound corny — especially when you’re not doing a morning show and don’t have a newscaster to play off of? I see lots of things in comedy services that really crack me up, but it doesn’t seem like it would sound good if I give the calls and my name and then: ‘I came from a town that’s so small the jail is self-serve’ — that sounds pretty stiff to me. How do we make jokes sound relatable and natural?”*

Here are four basic rules for using prepared material:

1. Don’t use the joke unless *you* think it’s funny.
2. Rewrite the line to fit your own speech patterns. We each have our own way of speaking, and one key method of transforming a joke written by someone else into an expression of your own sense of humor is to put it in your own words.
3. Review your material before beginning your air shift and look for subjects to hook your bits onto: Song titles, news stories, station promotions, weather, PSAs...
4. Deliver the line with confidence. If you sound comfortable with who you are, what you’re doing, and what you’re saying, then your audience will feel comfortable. If you give the message, however — via awkward pauses, stammering, or a self-conscious approach to the material — that you’re unsure of yourself, that you’re unsure of your ability to entertain...then your listeners will have their doubts, too.

It’s actually *easy* to make smooth transitions into prepared one-liners. To illustrate this, I’ve taken a copy of *O’LINERS* along with the two top songs from each of *R&R*’s five major charts from a single issue. My task is to find a gag to tie into each song.

The first thing I look for is a tie-in to the song title, because it’s easy to bring the title into your intro: *“...floating along on ‘THE SEA OF LOVE’ with Ed Jock on KKED....”* In fact, each of these ten examples ties into the title. Other veins to mine for tie-ins include:

- The artist (career, personal life, appearance, image)
- The overall feel of the record (a romantic song might remind you of that *“hot date last night who...”*; a loud song might sound a lot like *“this incredible nightmare I had last night; I dreamed I was....”*)
- Special features of the song’s arrangement: guitar riff, synthesizer, background vocals

*("Doesn't that remind you of the Ronnettes? Man, that takes me back to my high school days. I remember every week in Phys. Ed.....")*

Anyway, here are the examples I came up with. I'm not saying these are the finest, smoothest transitions ever made...but I *did* manage to produce ten serviceable segues in as many minutes.

*"WILD BOYS" — I'm dedicating this one to (Other Jock), who is one of the least wild boys I know. I mean, this guy is so nice that he got kicked off his high school debate team because he kept agreeing with his opponents!*

*"NO MORE LONELY NIGHTS" — I don't have any more lonely nights, either, thanks to those late-night "adult" cable tv channels. I think my personal favorite is XMTV — you know, the one that's devoted exclusively to all-nude aerobics videos!*

*"THE BOYS OF SUMMER" — Whenever I think of summer, I think of my first girlfriend, Mary Lou Reddenbacker. We used to spend every summer out on the lake, late at night, fishing. She was great. She used to keep the live bait warm by holding it in her mouth! (I never did get around to kissing Mary Lou....)*

*"OPERATOR" — I played that in honor of our own KKED switchboard operator, Eloise Florida. That's one lady I don't want to upset. I'm not saying she has a sharp tongue, but she's the only person I know who can cut her own mouth just by licking her lips!*

*"WHY NOT ME" — Yeah, why not me? After all, I've just received a great honor. The California Coroners Association has chosen me as the entertainer upon whom they'd most like to perform an autopsy!*

*"LIKE A VIRGIN" — Talk about a coincidence! Just as this record began, the boss's secretary walked into the studio. She said she wanted to make a mental note of something but couldn't find anything to write it on.*

*"SEA OF LOVE" — Those of us who are single know what it's like to be adrift on the sea of love. You can always recognize single people who are going to spend Friday night alone. They're the ones you see in the 7-11 at 7 o'clock in the evening, purchasing a gallon of ice cream and two eight-pound chocolate chip cookies!*

*"RUN TO YOU" — Speaking of running, can you believe that (OTHER JOCK) actually jogged to work today?? You don't know what silly is until you've seen (JOCK) running down the street wearing his sweatband, jogging suit, and ice skates!*

*"TREAT HER LIKE A LADY" — Sure, that's good advice, but I don't always know just how to act around women. For instance, the other night I went out with this beautiful lady. She*

*invited me in for a drink, turned on some soft music, and said, "Come on, baby, light my fire!" And no matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't find her pilot light!*

*"THE BEST YEAR OF MY LIFE" — I think this is going to be the best year of my life. The worst year of my life was 1979. That's the year I had my first real identity crisis after taking First Place in The Invisible Man Lookalike Contest!*

### TAKING A TIP FROM DR. DON ROSE

**Dr. Don Rose** (WFIL/Philadelphia, KFRC/San Francisco) is the best I've ever heard at getting right to the joke. Here are four samples from an aircheck:

DR. DON (outrouing "My Cherie Amour"): *KFRC... "My Cherie Amour" ...Lot of that going around these days. My aunt Dot was the eager one in my family. She used to go to the county jail and holler up to the prisoners, "Hey! Anybody want me to go your bail??"*

DR. DON (over record intro): *KFRC...with a song for (Other Disc Jockey), who was going to elope last weekend — but his girl couldn't get past the state agricultural inspection!*

DR. DON: *I had a speaking engagement yesterday for the Boys Club of San Francisco and I ran into Mike Hornstein, who's my tax man...and I was just thinking about my uncle's accountant, who put him into a fantastic tax shelter: Leavenworth.*

DR. DON (record outro): *KFRC... "The Tears Of A Clown." Man, I can identify with that, 'cause that's how I grew up. We were so poor that...."*

Look at what Dr. Don has done! He's smoothly slid from a love song into a sleazy sex joke.... from a record (*any* record, because he's "playing it for" someone) to your basic "ugly" joke.... from a quick mention of a real public appearance to a tax/crime joke....and from a sad love song to a "How poor was I?" gag.

Often Dr. Don doesn't even attempt a direct tie-in. He'll simply say, "*That reminds me of...*" and go into the joke, and he simply makes it sound so natural that the listener never stops to wonder, "Why did *that* remind him of *that*?"

### TWO THINGS *NOT* TO DO AFTER DELIVERING A ONE-LINER

1. Don't laugh at your own joke! I mention this because it is one of the most common irritants I hear on the radio. There's one jock in Los Angeles who always laughs at his own jokes, which rarely are funny. My reaction first is to think, "What a dumb remark for someone to make" and then, after hearing him laugh, to think, "How can this jerk think that's funny??" The poor quality of his material is underscored by his insistence on patting himself on the back by

laughing at it.

2. Don't let it just sit there to die! Once you've hit the punchline, go to something else — a spot, jingle, record, something! Leave your listeners still laughing as the jingle begins and you help develop a flow from your personality to the music and the commercials. It's painful to hear a jock deliver a humorous line and then sit there trying to figure out what to do next! Timing is crucial to humor — before, during, and after the delivery of the line.



## HOW TO USE CALENDAR BITS

*“Dear Dan...I wish you wouldn't encourage the use of 'This Day in History' features!*

*“In your critique of Michael & Joey, I saw a glimmer of hope when you described their almanac bit as 'boring.' But you then encouraged them to break it up into four bits! You should have said four boring bits.*

*“There are two big problems with calendar bits in any show: They miss the demographic and they aren't local. Michael & Joey had a chance to hit the local angle with the Texas battle anniversary, but they missed it. They also most likely missed the interests of their target demo by talking about radio in 1928 and ancient Roman festivals. Your suggestion of turning the 'Amos & Andy' anniversary into a trivia question compounds the problem, unless your target demo is 55+ or radio freaks.*

*“Make it local! If it happened in the metro or the state, consider using it. But if you can't develop it (you can't build off the simple anniversary), throw it out.*

*“Hit your demo! If it happened in your demo's lifetime, you can recall tangible moments. Then you can develop it into a trivia question or calls remembering the times.*

*“Dozens of applicants have calendar/almanac features on their audition tapes. I haven't heard one that was interesting.” — Robb Westaby, Program Director, WMBD/Peoria*

I'm glad to have received this letter, because Robb articulately states a commonly held misconception about “localization.” Quite a few jocks, program directors, and consultants (especially the latter two) have taken the helpful concept of localization and turned it into a limiting, dogmatic constraint.

An item doesn't have to have happened in your city to be of local interest. Or in your state. Or even in your lifetime. To be of local interest, the item simply has to be interesting to your local listeners. It's that simple. Localization is nothing more than talking about things the people in your market are talking or thinking or worrying or arguing about...or talking about things those people are likely to find interesting.

If you're working in radio, then you are part of the mass media that greatly affect just what is of interest to your listeners. No matter where you are, you can be sure that many of the people in your community

- watch *The Cosby Show*

- are aware of and have an opinion on the nuclear accident in Chernobyl

- root for one team or the other in the Super Bowl

- are interested in whether the U.S. Senate will succeed in abolishing IRAs for workers who already have another pension plan (well, anywhere in the USA, at least)

- have seen (or at least are familiar with the style and star of) *Rambo*.

*\*These were hit tv show & movies and hot news topics at the time this chapter was written; obviously, each can be replaced by an appropriate item to fit the day on which you're reading this.*

And which of these items is local in that "It happened in the metro or the state?" Unless you live in California or Russia or Washington, D.C., the answer is likely to be, "None."

Would you rather have as a guest on your show:

- A member of your city council...or the President of the United States?

- The captain of your high school basketball team...or the NBA's Most Valuable Player?

- The lounge singer at your local Holiday Inn...or **Bruce Springsteen**?

If you truly believe in the dogma of everything having to be local, than I guess the Prez and the basketball star and The Boss will have to settle for visiting one of your competing stations.

Did your radio station carry the news story about

A) **Clint Eastwood** running for mayor of Carmel, California

B) Clint Eastwood being elected mayor of Carmel?

If so, and if your station doesn't happen to be located in or near Carmel, then why did you run it? *Because you knew it would be interesting to your listeners...even though it will not affect their lives at all and even if they have no idea where Carmel is. Listeners don't ask, "Is it local?" They ask, "Am I interested in what this person is saying?"*

On the other hand, there often (almost always, in fact) are ways to find or create a local angle on a national topic. A good example is the cheap gasoline promotion **Rick Dees** did in Los Angeles. People in all age groups older than 15 care about the price of gasoline, because most of them drive and most of them buy gas. As I recall, Rick offered to give a trip to Hawaii to the gas station proprietor who charged the least amount per gallon. The result was terrific media coverage and great audience response, as hundreds of cars lined up at the dealers who dropped their prices, temporarily, to as low as 9/10 of a cent per gallon.

Rick got that kind of response from a bit based on an issue — the price of gas — that was *not* local. In fact, it wasn't even a hot news topic at the time. But it was so successful that other stations in other markets immediately copied it....And if they did it well, the odds are that they, too, met with success.

Returning specifically to calendar events, if 90 people drowned on this day in 1919 when the city was flooded with molasses (the result of a huge tank of molasses bursting), *that's* interesting even if you don't happen to live in Boston, Massachusetts, where the event took place.

On the other hand, an anniversary can be completely local *and* completely boring. Who cares if it was on this day nine years ago that the County Zoning Commission agreed to renew a waiver allowing the City Reservoir to remain open until 9:00PM instead of 6:00PM?

Hey, Robb, *Amos & Andy* might have debuted in 1928, before the time of most of your listeners, but most of them over the age of 30 certainly are familiar with the duo...if for no other reason than the program subsequently moved to television, and the show ultimately (and controversially) was cancelled due to protests from people who thought it perpetuated negative stereotypes of black Americans. It wouldn't be very hard to connect that to television today, simply by contrasting that show with today's Number One tv hit...which happens to concern itself with a black family.

Who says it has to happen within your listener's lifetime for that listener to be interested? Was everyone who watched "*The Mystery of Al Capone's Vaults* (a huge ratings success) on television alive when **Capone** ruled Chicago? How about the day in the 1880s when the *New York Times* quoted a famous scientist as saying that through his telescope he has seen alien creatures living on Mars? It didn't happen during our lifetime; does that mean it won't amuse your listeners?

Why should anyone care what happened on this day in history? I don't know. Perhaps people have some innate desire to perceive some sort of order to their world. Perhaps that's why we bother with calendars and names and numbers and family histories. Perhaps a good calendar feature can be interesting *and* help put a tiny piece of history in perspective for the listener.

In practical terms, however, there *is* no intrinsic value to almanac features. But there doesn't have to be. Look, if I explained to you that on this night, centuries ago on another continent, people used to believe that the spirits of their dead ancestors arose from the grave and visited the living...and that because of this you should put on a costume and come join a gathering of other costumed people to eat, drink, and play silly games....Well, on logical grounds it would be pretty hard to justify.

But Halloween, in our culture, is just an excuse for a party. It's an excuse to have a good time. And that's all a radio almanac feature really is: An excuse for a good time, a handy opportunity

to offer your listeners something amusing or informative...and, always, interesting.

## TRIVIA QUESTIONS

Like calendar items, trivia questions certainly don't have to be limited to events that occurred within your target demo's lifetime. "In what country was chow mein invented?" It happened before most of your listeners were born, but enough listeners know it's a Chinese-style dish that you can be certain your audience will appreciate the irony of its being created in the United States (New York City)....especially if you present the information in an entertaining manner.

In addition, a decent trivia question gives you a good excuse to talk to some listeners on-the-air. Listeners enjoy hearing others call up to answer trivia questions for three reasons:

1. Listeners enjoy hearing other listeners win prizes.
2. People enjoy learning new things. (That's why they're so eager to share new information with others...which is why people often say to you, "Did you know that..." or "I'll bet you don't know who...")
3. Even those listeners who already know the answer are likely to keep listening to
  - A) confirm their knowledge
  - B) make sure *you've* got the right answer.

And, hopefully, your skills as a communicator can provide a fourth reason: You get an opportunity to create an entertaining verbal exchange with your caller.

## GETTING THE MOST OUT OF ON-AIR TELEPHONE CALLS

*“How about some tips on how to develop a broad base of wacky listeners who would love to contribute to a personality show?”* That’s the request of KWEB/KRCH’s **Jon Dahl**.

As a general rule, you’ll probably find that the larger the market, the more likely you are to discover talented, creative people willing to add to your show.

Because virtually all of these people will make their initial contact with you via telephone, once again I find myself stressing the importance of answering your own phone — as promptly and as cordially as possible.

Be ready to tape any portion of any call on an instant’s notice. Keep your razor blade and splicing tape handy. Too many jocks let good opportunities pass them by simply because it never occurs to them to do some quick, judicious editing.

Here are three devices you can use to assist your callers in being more articulate and pithy.

### LEADING

Often a caller knows where s/he wants to go but doesn’t know how to get there. You’ve experienced this many times in non-radio circumstances, when you’ve gotten the drift of someone’s message long before the person finishes the sentence. Let’s take a non-radio example to illustrate:

PEDESTRIAN: “Excuse me, but I’m trying to find a certain part of Manhattan that I can’t think of what they call it but it’s real well-known and pretty sleazy with lots of theatres and stuff and every New Year’s Eve there’s this big ball that comes down and....”

YOU: “You want directions to Times Square?”

Here you have distilled the person’s original expressions into a concise, easily understandable statement. In real life it’s often rather rude to finish another person’s sentence; in radio, it’s a different story. In radio, time and lucidity are at a premium. So when you sense the caller has a potentially good idea but doesn’t know how to present it, promptly interrupt and offer your assistance.

### EXTENDING

This is similar to leading, although it sometimes can have the opposite effect. Instead of shortening and tightening the person’s message, it can broaden it a bit to make it a fuller communication. With extending, you take an incomplete or inarticulate communication and add

to it. Parents who want to help their toddlers learn to speak better find this useful:

TODDLER: “Doggie!”

PARENT: “Yes, that is a doggie!”

TODDLER: “Hungry!”

PARENT: “Yes, you are hungry. Would you like to eat lunch?”

It’s important to realize that with this technique you’re not correcting the other person’s language; you’re modelling a more elegant form of expression that the other person might (in fact, probably will) choose to adopt.

### RESTATING

Radio humor is primarily auditory. It may sometimes lead listeners to translating the sounds into mental pictures (e.g., a **Dolly Parton** joke most likely will lead to a mental image before the laugh) or feelings (e.g., a comment that ends with, “*...like running her fingernails across a chalkboard*” will, for many of us, lead to a direct kinesthetic response as we cringe at the thought). But it all starts with sound.

This is why for a radio gag (or any type of radio bit, comedic or straight) to work, it has to *sound* good. Attaching a short, clever, descriptive label to a concept makes it much more accessible to your audience. Here are three examples of concepts that have been restated in a more flashy, memorable way.

#1: People who were born in the decade following the end of World War II

*#1A: Baby boomers*

#2: People who were born in the decade following the end of World War II and who now have college degrees, live in large metropolitan areas, and place a high priority on career success and the acquisition of material goods

*#2A: Yuppies*

#3: **President Reagan’s** apparent ability to be surrounded by controversy and to appoint to government service people who frequently do stupid, embarrassing things without it affecting Reagan’s popularity with voters

*#3A: Reagan’s teflon presidency*

*Baby boomers....Yuppies....Teflon presidency.* Those are rather clever examples, and not all of us are expert at coining clever phrases. But any good air personality should be able to restate a good idea that's buried in sloppy language. A few examples:

#4: All those tax breaks and special privileges and stuff that senators and representatives give themselves

*#4A: Congressional perks*

#5: The kind of weather that's real hot but you don't sweat as much as you might expect because the relative humidity is low

*#5A: Dry heat*

#6: Police officials luring someone into committing a crime that the person might never have committed if the police hadn't tried to get him or her to do it in the first place

*#6A: Entrapment*

Okay, let's apply some of these ideas, starting with the unedited version of a call from a typical, friendly yet not very articulate listener.

**CALLER:** "Uh, yeah, Ed? Um, this is Steve over in Oakdale, and I wanted to make a comment, um about **President Bush's**, um, you know, what he wants to do about taxes."

*YOU: "You have a comment about President Bush's tax reform plan?"*

**CALLER:** "Yeah. I mean, it's like the guy has to be crazy or something, you know? If....If, um, I mean, you know how they're talking about not letting people write off those fancy business lunches and stuff?"

*YOU: "You have a comment about the possibility of disallowing seven-martini lunches?"*

**CALLER:** "Yeah! Well, if they do away with those seven-martini lunches it'll just add to our unemployment problem; it's going to put hundreds of hard-working martini farmers out of business!"

This was a case in which the guy had a usable punchline. Perhaps it's not funny enough for *you* to say, but it's clever enough for a listener. But he didn't know how to set it up well, and he wasn't sure how to phrase it. So you did some leading and restating. Here's the air-quality, edited result:

*YOU: "Hey, Steve from Oakdale! You have a comment about President Bush's tax reform*

*program?”*

**CALLER:** “Yeah. The guy has to be crazy. If they do away with those seven-martini lunches, it’ll just add to our unemployment problems; it’s going to put hundreds of hard-working martini farmers out of business!”

Sometimes you’ll want to be very direct in having the caller say something usable. Let’s try a listener calling in with a straight comment.

**CALLER:** “Um, yeah. It’s about what I think about the income taxes and what Bush wants to do with them. I don’t think it’s right if it means that even more rich people won’t have to pay taxes.”

*YOU: “That’s an interesting comment; I’d like to use that. I’ll tell you what: I’m going to turn on the tape recorder and ask you what topic you’d like to comment on and then you can say, ‘Bush’s tax reform bill.’ And then I’ll ask for your comment, and you can repeat what you just said about not wanting to support the bill if it means even more millionaires will get away without paying any taxes.”*

Here’s the end result, ready-for air:

*YOU: “Hi, what subject do you want to comment on?”*

**CALLER:** “Bush’s tax reform bill.”

*YOU: “Okay, shoot.”*

**CALLER:** “I don’t want to support it if that means even more millionaires won’t have to pay any taxes at all!”

Notice that you’ve done some restating here: “Bush’s tax reform bill.” Also, you’ve changed “rich people” to “millionaires,” which is a bit more flashy. Your caller, of course, doesn’t have to use those new words, but he or she probably will choose to simply because they sound better.

Getting back to Jon’s original question about attracting listener contributions: You can’t just go on the air and ask for it. You can’t say, “Anybody out there who’s funny and who wants to become a semi-regular character on my show, please call in.”

But if you go out of your way to find, create and/or salvage entertaining bits from your request line, you’ll be letting your listeners know that you welcome that kind of input.

But let’s say that, for whatever the reason, you’re just not getting as many entertaining calls as



you'd like. Let's also assume you're in a market large enough to offer a regular flux of listener calls. What can you do?

Well, you can have your friends and co-workers call in with bits, gags, funny comments, voices, etc. You might even feed them with specific lines to give back to you on-the-air.

Let all the funny people you come into contact with know that you welcome their input to your show. When you meet a funny person at a party, you might say, "Hey, here's my studio hotline number. Anytime you want to call in with a bit, do it!"

Introduce yourself to comics in local clubs, actors in local plays. Spread the word, making it clear that your show is the place to call when anyone's got anything funny to say.

Remember, too, that you can *place* calls on-the-air. Is your auto mechanic a classic, good ol' country boy whose lazy drawl makes everything seem a bit humorous? Call him up and ask his reaction to a particular item in the day's news. What about that local preacher who's famous for his funny, insightful sermons? What about the woman in the hardware store whose British accent makes everything she says sound terribly upper-crusty? Open your eyes and ears to what's around you...and *use* it.

Just about anybody can be funny in the right context. **Clara Peller** never made people laugh until someone put her in a particular setting (a competing hamburger joint) and gave her a particular line to say ("Where's the beef?"). When she added her own unique vocal style, the whole thing came out funny.

The moral: You don't need to find cadres of professional comedians in order to have people contribute funny bits to your show.

## RADIO STORIES

From Gary Owens:

*I used to have a running battle at KMPC about the air conditioning. We had three separate booths from which the disc jockeys broadcast. Invariably, during the hot summer months the air conditioning in mine was always on the fritz. I'd walk down the hall and it would be 72 degrees; in my booth it would be about 87.*

*I'd work in my t-shirt, and I'd be perspiring and I couldn't think, and nothing would be done. I'd ask each day, "Is the air conditioning fixed?" "Oh, they tell us it's going to be taken care of today." Three months it went on.*

*So one day I came in and was doing "bad air conditioning jokes" on the air: "Because our air conditioning doesn't work, it's so hot in here that..." And they sent a man over from KTLA-TV. He said, "Mr. Owens, I'm here to fix the air conditioning."*

*I said, "Thank God you're here!" He walked around to where my engineer, **Bud Stalker**, was. Stalker was playing the cartridges and stuff, and suddenly Stalker starts laughing. He said to me, "You won't believe what just happened!"*

*I said, "I'll believe anything."*

*"The man walked over here," he said, "and the record was playing. He reached over and turned down the on-air monitor knob...and then he said, 'Is that any cooler?'"*

*And then the guy left! We never saw him again!*

## IMITATIONS vs. CHARACTERS

Television has been blamed for many of society's ills. To that list of things that tv has damaged I would now like to add...Personality Radio.

One big difference that I see between today's generation of comedy creators and the previous generation is that the dominant creative forces of the 1950s were much more *literate* than those of the today. People like **Woody Allen, Larry Gelbart, Neil Simon, Mel Brooks**, and others who created great tv comedy in the '50s and continue to be funny today grew up as readers, not viewers. The world of books is a much broader, diversified, and sophisticated world than the one of television, and as a result the generation that grew up watching tv tends to have a much more narrow view of life. Previous generations of humorists — from **Mark Twain to Robert Benchley to Ernie Kovacs** — satirized life; today's generation satirizes television.

It seems that in every market I visit or hear airchecks from, someone is doing yet another dumb satire on *Leave It To Beaver*. Sure, the Eddie Haskell character is funny. Sure, it's one of my all-time favorite shows. I enjoy occasionally catching one of the old episodes in syndication...but I enjoy it as something nice from my past, not as something that has much relevance to me today.

But jocks continue to crank out bits satirizing *Leave It To Beaver* and *Mr. Rogers* because it's easy. The characters already are fully drawn for them; the creative challenge was met long ago by the writers who created the characters and by the performers who brought them to life. If you spend a lot of your valuable air time doing impressions of famous people, don't kid yourself that you're being creative. You're being *imitative*. Imitation might be the sincerest form of flattery, but it's one of the lower forms of creativity.

I would like to see a law stating that if you're going to do impressions on the radio, you'd better be awfully darn good at it. I can't count the number of mediocre **Reagan** imitations I've heard. I've heard far too many airchecks of jocks who regularly feature **Elvis Presley** as a "character" on their shows. They have "Elvis" come into the studio and they crack jokes about how much Elvis eats. That concept may or may not have been funny a decade ago, but Elvis has been dead a long time now...and, to top it off, the voice imitations usually are not very good!

I've heard one major market jock whose entire "act" consists of his impressions. He imitates dozens and dozens — probably hundreds — of famous people...badly. He's so poor at it that he has to identify each character by name: "*Hi, this is Jimmy Stewart....*" (And how are his ratings? No better than his imitations.)

What radio can do better than any other medium is *create an illusion*. If you're telling people that the President of the United States is on the phone, he'd darn well better sound like the president. Sure, your audience knows it's not really him, but they accept the illusion if it's true enough...just as they accept the illusion of a movie or tv show if it's true enough.

By the way, if you do have access to a good “President” voice and you want to use it in an on-air interview bit, *don’t have him call you!* You see, your listeners are willing to believe that you’re important enough and have enough contacts to be able to reach the President of the United States by telephone...but they’re not gullible enough to believe that he’d call you up on the request line! Sure, once you get into the bit and “Mr. President” starts saying things so dumb that even a *real* president wouldn’t say them, they’ll know for sure it’s a gag. But the gag will be enhanced immeasurably simply by playing it straight. So instead of the President of the United States calling *you*, let your listeners hear *you call him*. Let them hear you dialing the White House, getting the White House switchboard, being transferred to his Executive Secretary, then to his Personal Secretary, and finally to the president himself. By this time, many of your listeners (especially those who’ve never heard you do a Mr. President bit before) will be convinced that you’re actually calling the president! Take the time, thought and energy to set it up well, and your pay-off will be much greater for it.

I have to admit that there are a couple of people who do impressions so phenomenally well that it’s a thrill to witness their craft. **Julie Dees** is a terrific talent, and she adds a lot to her husband’s show on KIIS-FM. In fact, we can use her work to help drive home a point about the importance of characterization: If you’ve got the celebrity voice nailed, make sure your script (whether prepared or ad-libbed) is true to the character.

I think Julie does the best **Barbra Streisand** impression in the business, and I’ve never heard anyone do as perfect a vocal imitation as she does of **Jane Fonda**. The first time I heard her do Fonda, I would have sworn it was Jane herself...if it weren’t for the fact that her character’s name was “Jane Fondle.” On the other hand, a while back she did a call-in as Streisand, and she had her character saying things that Streisand never would say; the dialogue just didn’t fit the character, and it ruined the bit for me.

So what do you do if you want to add interesting, funny characters to your show *and* you want to avoid doing tired imitations? You *create* new characters, original characters that will be all your own. How? Well, you’ll find some great ideas in the next chapter.

## CREATING CHARACTER VOICES: PAT FRALEY

*Patrick Fraley is a top Hollywood voiceover talent who has portrayed more than 200 dogs, ducks & villains on Saturday morning cartoon shows. Among his assignments are recurring roles as Ace in G.I. Joe, Major Ned Talbot in The Incredible Hulk, and Slick the Turtle on The Littles.*

*Pat is a trained actor who has made a close study of vocal performing. He's developed some fascinating techniques for creating character voices. I asked him to explain his techniques.*

**FRALEY:** Sometimes you have to trick yourself into not thinking about a funny voice. Think about other things. Sit in a room, turn on your tape recorder, and look around the room at inanimate objects and make up a voice to fit the object.

You say, "Oh, there's a light bulb. Boy, what's it like to be a light bulb?" (CHARACTER VOICE:) "Oh, I'm sitting here, I'm nice and cool and then they turn me on and I get *real* hot, I get real hot...and then they turn me off, and I sit here alone, I never can be bright when they're gone...." It's anthropomorphic.

*O'DAY: You're really getting into the character of the object...which in turn suggests the voice.*

**FRALEY:** Yes, it does so by projecting your own qualities onto that object. Or you think about the fan, the way it whirrs all day...or a chair being sat on all day. You think of the character. Your objective is to get a voice that's funny. You get a character, and then perhaps when you listen to your tape that voice will be humorous just in its abstraction.

Another real good exercise to jar your consciousness, to trick you into coming up with new voices, is what I call "TV Log." You sit in front of the tv, turn it on, volume low, turn on your audio cassette player, and you keep changing the channel every 15 seconds ...imitating any sound, any verbalization, any music, *anything* that's on the tv during that 15-second period.

So if I turn on the tv and *Charlie's Angels* is on, I'm imitating **Farrah Fawcett, Jacqueline Smith, John Forsythe** — and because his voice is coming over the phone box, it's EQ'd, so I try to make my voice sound like *that*. And I change channels and there's a dog barking, so I bark. And then there's a Spanish disco station, and I imitate the musical sounds. And when I play it all back, I find: That's odd, there's a voice that I never would have thought of doing. My attempt to imitate a voice or sound created a new entity.

Another technique is impressions. Your attempt to do **Edgar Buchanan**, for example, may not ever sound like Edgar Buchanan, but it creates a voice that's interesting in and of itself. If I do **Jimmy Stewart** and no one could guess it's Jimmy Stewart, it's okay... because the voice is just fine the way it is; I've created an entity.

**O'DAY:** *How do you make sure you retain the voices you find interesting, the ones you'd like to keep?*

**FRALEY:** Two ways. Number One is to name the voice. If you try to do Jimmy Stewart and it doesn't sound like Stewart, call him My Jimmy. A friend of mine has a voice that's big and loud that he calls Big Face.

**O'DAY:** *So you come up with your own private label.*

**FRALEY:** Right. When I've got the voices worked out, I name them.

**O'DAY:** *It sounds like the naming makes them become entities. You don't have to try to remember what a friend of yours sounds like, because it's all a part of what he is to you.*

**FRALEY:** Right. So remember *these* friends. Another exercise is to take them for a walk. If you've found a good voice, take him for a walk and talk to the character.

YOU: What do you think of that?

VOICE: I think that looks pretty stupid.

YOU: Well, it's a palm tree, pal.

VOICE: Don't call me pal!

You develop some dimension to the character by engaging it in dialogue. Finally, make a vocal inventory. I have a sheet that I update. If I get a call and they say just do goofy voices, I'll think fine, goofy voices...and sometimes I'll freeze. So I just pull the list out of my pocket and go down the list....

## RADIO STORIES

From Smilin' Jack, WLWI/Montgomery:

*I was News Director at WFMB/Springfield when some of the guys decided to play a little prank on me. They came in while I was on the air, tied me to the chair, and set my news copy on fire. The mike was on, I was blowing on the copy...*

**O'DAY:** If I had been listening, would I have been able to detect anything?

**JACK:** *Yeah! I was trying to do something about it and then I started laughing and had to tell everybody what was going on. I said it was the hottest news story of the day.*

## RADIO STORIES

From Kris Robbins, WNOE/New Orleans:

*This happened when I worked at WNDU in South Bend, at Notre Dame. Notre Dame is an old school, and you have a number of steam tunnels that connect building to building. We routed a lot of closed-circuit television into the priests' residences and into some of the dorm rooms.*

*Our chief engineer was going to track down a problem one time on one of the cables and became rather disoriented. Now, these steam tunnels are about four feet high, so you have to kind of crawl through them. He had on his miner's hat with a light on it, filthy dirty, and he got disoriented in these steam tunnels. There are kick-out panels in various places that end up in basements of various buildings on the campus.*

*His only resort was to kick out one of these panels to find out where he was, because there are no markings inside the tunnels at all. He punched out one of the panels. There happened to be a janitor cleaning the room this guy kicked the panel out of. The engineer stuck his head through the hole, with his miner's light on the top of his head, and said, "Where am I?"*

*The janitor's eyes widened and he said, "You're at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana!" He apparently thought the guy was a lost Appalachian coal miner!*

## PROMOTING YOUR SHOW VIA CLASSIFIED ADS

The odds are your city's major daily newspaper has a "Personals" column in its classified advertising section. A clever personality jock can make use of the "Personals" to create interest in his or her show among people who might not otherwise be exposed to it.

Why the "Personals?" First of all, it's a completely unexpected medium for hyping your show. Most of these ads are devoted to lovers declaring their affection for each other, long-lost friends trying to contact each other, and various other, sometimes obscure, messages from one person to another.

Secondly, these ads are widely read. Many people regularly peruse them, just out of curiosity. (Actually, I have a theory about that: I suspect people read these ads in the faint, unacknowledged hope that one day they'll open the newspaper to discover their *own* names leaping out at them: "*MARJORIE SMITH contact attorney's office 555-1234 regarding large inheritance from uncle you never knew you had.*") I check out these ads in the *Los Angeles Times* almost every day.

Finally, they're an inexpensive way of advertising. Many radio stations trade advertising with the local newspaper; the station might be able to arrange a cash-free exchange that won't dent the promotion budget at all. Or perhaps you can convince management to split the cost of the ads with you.

What I have in mind is creating your own living soap opera, slowly developing two characters who — slyly, at first — promote your show.

Here's a series of fictitious ads to illustrate the idea. The ads would appear on a regular basis, perhaps Monday-Wednesday-Friday or Tuesday-Thursday. Note that, in the beginning, the radio station isn't alluded to at all. This is to hook the readers and, frankly, "con" them into thinking the people are real. (If you develop the characters good-naturedly and don't ever make them too commercialized, the readers will forgive you the sham...as long as you keep them entertained.)

AD #1: "ALEX....I wish I didn't get so tongue-tied when I try to speak of my feelings. Please be patient. STEPHANIE"

AD #2: "*STEPHANIE...It's so frustrating for me, but I'm trying to understand. Why not just say what you feel?* ALEX"

AD #3: "*ALEX....Sometimes a song is best at expressing feelings. I'm dedicating one to you Friday morning on KKED, between 7:30 and 8:00.* STEPHANIE"

(Note the lack of excess station information — no dial position, name of jock, etc. She



simply refers to the station by its commonly used name. For your station, it might be the dial position without the formal call letters; if you've succeeded in hooking the readers, they'll find the station on the dial.)

FRIDAY MORNING: You play some song that fits the situation, introing it very simply as a dedication (it doesn't matter that you don't *do* dedications). Don't do anything else to highlight it, and by all means *never* refer to or acknowledge the newspaper ads. The audience will hear you unknowingly act as a go-between for these two star-crossed lovers.

AD #4: *"STEPHANIE....Thank you for the L. Richie song. I asked KKED if they'd play Beethoven's Ninth for you, but the morning DJ said it's not on the playlist. Keep listening, same time, and I'll come up with one for you. ALEX"*

AD #5: *"ALEX...I've listened each day. Have you forgotten about your promise...or were your suggestions too sexy for KKED? STEPHANIE"*

AD #6: *"STEPHANIE....KKED said sexy is okay, so listen tomorrow morning between 7:30 and 8:00."*

Well, you get the idea. This can develop into a regular soap opera, but without the melodramatic plot twists. They can talk about the weekend they spent together, birthday celebrations, fond memories, wishes for the future. They can even refer — ever briefly and lightly — to the big contest you're running, dreaming about what they'll do if they win the prize money. The goal here is simply to get people to tune you in, to sample your show. If you're entertaining enough, you'll end up with some new regular listeners.

QUESTION: Will readers continue to be interested in Alex and Stephanie even after they've realized (some of them; some of them never will) they're not real people?

ANSWER: Do people continue to be interested in the folks on *General Hospital*, even though the characters aren't real people?

AD #1: *"AM INTERESTED IN FORMING MOVEMENT TO KICK ED JOCK OFF THE AIR! Signed, Mr. B."*

AD #2: *"MR. B.: I agree! Ed Jock is a blight on the radio airwaves! Don't those people have to be licensed? Signed, X"*

AD #3: *"MR. B. & X: Ed Jock might be a jerk, but at least he plays good music. Maybe KKED knows what it's doing. — Pete"*

AD #4: *"How can anyone defend Ed Jock? His satire and ridiculous phone calls prove he has no respect for authority or institutions! I won't even turn on KKED until after 10AM! —"*

R.W.L.”

AD #5: *“Hey, I like Ed Jock! 108.2 isn’t the only place on the FM dial. If you don’t like him, switch to Muzak!”*

A little controversy never hurt an air personality. It’s easy to make the “critical” ads sound real; simply repeat what is said about your show by people who hate it!

## GENERATING CROSS-MEDIA ATTENTION

### SIX WAYS TO GENERATE CROSS-MEDIA ATTENTION FOR YOUR SHOW

1. Invite the daily newspaper's media critic to sit in on your show. (Even if your paper doesn't have an official critic, it has someone who writes about television & radio.)

2. Invite the newspaper's media critic or entertainment editor to dinner.

3. If you're a controversial personality, pull a stunt that's guaranteed to cause controversy...and alert the local tv news people so they can run footage of the fracas. (I know a jock in Arizona who did a funny, inoffensive bit from my *OBITS* comedy service that nonetheless caused him to be picketed by the John Birch Society. He ended up on the 11 O'Clock News and was very grateful for all the free publicity.)

4. Start a running feud with a local, highly visible tv weatherperson: *"Did you see Wilmer Freud last night? That guy can't even pronounce 'cumulus,' much less predict the weather! Why, I could do a better weather forecast blindfolded!"*

After a while, issue ol' Wilmer a challenge: You'll bet you can do *his* job better than he can do *yours*. If he accepts your challenge, he's sure to let his viewers know when he's scheduled to be a disc jockey on your show...and you'll get to introduce yourself to his audience on-camera.

5. Respond in writing to your local paper's article on rock/country/pop/music or radio. If you disagree, do so dramatically and eloquently. If you can't find anything to disagree with, write a letter complimenting them on doing such a fine job of reporting and adding some other piece of information they might find of interest. (*"You're right when you say that country music is here to stay, and I think I know why: People genuinely respond to music that speaks to them honestly and without pretense...."*)

6. Volunteer your on-camera services for your Public Television station's local fundraising drive and/or auction. (But make sure in advance that you'll be used on-camera.)

These are just six ideas. Why not take a few creative minutes to round out this list to an even dozen...and then get to work putting them to use for you?

# RADIO STORIES

From **Terry Moss/L.A. Air Force:**

*This is how I got into radio. When I was in high school, I took a \$25 class that a local disc jockey gave. He taught it at his station, KZIA/Albuquerque; at the time it was a day-timer.*

*The guy who taught us was trying to get ahead in radio, like everyone. Because of the small-town facilities, the only thing the station could record was off the on-air monitor. So to do his audition tape, he would come in late at night, turn the station on the air, and do his tape! They never caught him.*

.....

Question from **Brian Charette, Q101/Harrisonburg:** *“Can a show have too many characters? I currently have four and plan on adding more. (I voice only one of them.)”*

Yes. If there are so many characters that your listeners are confused as to who is saying what, you’ve got too many voices on your show.

One way to prevent this from happening is to make sure each voice is distinctly different from the others. If it’s easy for your listeners to distinguish one character from another solely by the sound of the voice (disregarding the content), the possibility of the confusion will be minimized.

This means, of course, that if you do all or most of the voices yourself, you’d better make sure they don’t all sound like a variation of you. You might want to record the voices and play them for people around the station, asking them to identify the character. If they can’t tell the difference between your Old Man and your Disco Dancer, perhaps it’s time to re-evaluate the effectiveness of your voices.

to a CBS Radio analysis, the *“male radio audience during so-called ‘housewife hours’ is 88% as large as during the 6-10AM morning-drive period and actually exceeds the average of men listening during the 3-7PM afternoon-drive segment.”*

This would seem to have great importance to all those stations that, when 10AM rolls around, plug in some deep-voiced dude who plays **Englebert Humperdinck** all morning. And if ad agencies are paying 50% more for morning drive in order to get the men but are actually getting only 12% more males, perhaps they should rethink their buying policies.

## A REFRESHER COURSE FOR DISC JOCKEYS

*This chapter was prompted by a conversation I happened to overhear in which a major market program director was asked, "Can a person learn how to be an air personality, or are personalities born and not made?" The PD replied, without hesitation, "No, you can't teach someone how to be a personality. I know, because in the past I've tried and couldn't do it."*

*What an amazing thing to say! Because he couldn't teach someone how to do something, therefore it can't be taught...or learned. Do you agree?*

*One reason this subject is of interest to me is that earlier in the year I was asked to teach a class at UCLA. The subject: Personality Radio. The students: Working professionals who wanted to further their careers, plus some people at the beginnings of their careers.*

*Even as I accepted the challenge, I was aware of two important facts. On the one hand, I honestly had no idea if I could "teach" people to be personalities. On the other hand, I had absolutely no idea how I would even attempt to do so in a classroom setting. So it all evened out.*

*The class met once a week, three hours per session, for 12 weeks. Early on I became aware that — in addition to talking about formats, hot clocks, station politics, voice techniques, character development, etc. — we found ourselves discussing things I had never thought much about during my on-air career.*

*As you know, radio is an immediate medium. Every week, sometimes every day, brings its own new crisis that has to be dealt with. A new promotion has to be put together, a new batch of production orders is in the "In" basket with a note that says, "NEED BY 5:00 TONIGHT!"*

*As a jock, I thought a lot about radio. Like most of us, I lived radio. It was second nature for me to keep abreast of what was going on at competing stations and in the rest of our industry, and I always felt a vital interest in contributing to the overall effectiveness of my station.*

*But I gave remarkably little thought to my own role as air personality (other than to get ratings). Frankly, the day-to-day world of commercial radio was so hectic that it never even occurred to me to think about such a theoretical subject.*

*Well, this three-month course at UCLA gave me a chance to get theoretical with a group of jocks and to see the results on a weekly basis. Each week brought a new assignment that had to be completed on tape and played during the next class. Naturally, at the beginning I told the class they'd find the assignments surprisingly valuable and meaningful and useful; this, of course, was merely wishful thinking on my part, because I was just winging it as I went along. Fortunately for me, however, they didn't know that personality radio can't be learned ...so they*

*went ahead and learned some things they were able to put to use on-the-air.*

*For those of you who have been waiting for evidence that I've completely lost touch with the real world of radio, here it is: A theoretical, hypothetical, head-in-the-clouds, pie-in-the-sky chapter filled with all kinds of psychological mumbo jumbo that couldn't possibly be of use to a real-life disc jockey. Unless, of course, you want it to be.*

Those of you who wish to embark on your own ambitious program of on-air personality development might consider giving yourself a new assignment each week. Each weekend, for instance, you might identify for yourself some skill you believe you need to improve...and then be especially aware of opportunities to practice it during the next week.

Perhaps you've realized that when you read a PSA, it's as though your entire show comes to an abrupt halt. Your task that week can be to find ways to personalize, localize, or otherwise energize the basic PSA copy you're working from. Constant airchecking can assist you in identifying areas which could be improved.

The first couple of assignments I'm about to recount are elementary to most of you. (That doesn't mean they can't be of value. Many of us learned all kinds of grammar rules back in elementary school, but some of us's speech sure could use some better improving after all this time have passed.) You PDs who are working with weekend talent, however, might find them to be especially useful.

### OUTROS & INTROS

The very first assignment was easy: Record four different record outros, maximum length 10 seconds. Each one, however, had to be structured differently from the rest. One might feature artist/  
title/time...but then none of the others could. Examples:

1) *"... 'Born In The USA,' as if you didn't know he was...that's The Boss on K107..."*

2) *"...K107 with Springsteen, and I think it's fine that the guy got married as long as he don't neglect his rock 'n' roll..."*

3) *"...a little flag-waving with Bruce Springsteen on K107..."*

4) *"...K107....Springsteen has just agreed to appear on a new record that makes a statement against apartheid; it'll be The Boss and a bunch of other concerned musicians. Some guys talk a good game about social problems, but Springsteen really knows how to put his voice where his mouth is..."*

Each of the above has a different structure than the rest. The first is just a response to the title, certainly not saying anything of substance but enough to get you from here to there ....The second refers to the artist's private life....The third makes a reference to the song's content....And the fourth is your basic "What's next for (Artist)?" blurb.

Maybe *you* never would use any of these outros. Great. Replace the first example with one of your own. And then come up with three more, each having its own structure.

The second assignment requires no further explanation than this: Record four record *intros*, following the same rules as the previous assignment.

### NATURAL WEATHER

Next assignment: Record a "natural" weather forecast. Here's your standard radio forecast, as heard in every city in North America: "(City) weather calling for ( ) skies with a ( )% chance of rain; high today ( ), low tonight ( ), high tomorrow ( ). Right now in downtown (City) it's ( ) degrees."

What's wrong with that? It certainly gives the basic information. The problem is that for any given recitation of the forecast, most of your listeners won't hear it. It'll go right past them, because they automatically tune it out.

Let's pretend you're talking to your brother in another state via telephone. He asks, "So what's the weather like there?" You might say, "Oh, it's been pretty hot the last few days. It's supposed to hit 90 today." It's doubtful, however, that you'd say, "Well, Portland weather calls for partly cloudy skies with a 30% chance of rain..."

If you *tell* the weather rather than recite it, you have a much better chance of keeping your audience with you rather than having them pass into a trance-like state. You jocks in a state like Florida know that the following forecast would be perfectly acceptable to your local listeners on most summer days: "Miami weather: Same as always." Naturally, there are other ways of saying what that message implies: It'll be sunny and hot and maybe it'll rain a bit and then it'll be sunny and hot again.

### PERSONALIZING PSAs

Another assignment was to personalize three different PSAs, three different ways. Three examples utilizing different approaches:

- One jock began a PSA for the Ethiopian Relief Fund by mentioning how it isn't often a person gets the chance to save another person's life.
- Another jock began his spot for the SPCA's pet neutering program by talking about how

much he loves his dog (yeah, that's corny — and how many of you have a real soft spot for your pet?).

•A third mentioned how, when he was a kid, he always imitated his dad...which is why he thinks the National Safety Council knows what it's doing when it asks parents to buckle up for themselves *and* for their children.

### PURELY LOCAL

Another assignment — one of my favorites — was to record five different lines (one for each day of the work week) that could *only* be done in that jock's market. In other words, a localized comment. (I warned the class that the following is *not* an acceptable localization for Los Angeles: "*Boy, how about those Dodgers??*")

One guy made a comment about how great it is driving the Hollywood Freeway at 4:00 in the morning, when it's silent and empty. Another mentioned that when he got off the air he was planning to go out to Zuma Beach. And a third mentioned that a great place to take a date is the laser show over at the Griffith Park Observatory. None of those lines would've made much sense in, say, Pittsburgh.

### SO...?

And still I hear some of you asking, "So what? What the heck is the point of doing some silly exercises?" The point is that if you set up your own program of continuing education, you'll find that you'll start to look for fresh, creative approaches to forecasts, PSAs, intros, time checks...*automatically*. And that means that, no matter how much you've already accomplished, you'll continue to grow as an air personality.

### YOUR OWN PERSONA

Finally, here's a three-part exercise that everyone dreaded doing and everyone reported back as being surprisingly valuable:

- 1) Describe the on-air persona that you want to project.
- 2) List 20 adjectives that describe your own personality as you see it. (No fair going to the thesaurus for those adjectives.)
- 3) Select from that list the characteristics you would like to retain and heighten for your on-air persona...note which desirable characteristics appear to be absent from that list...and think about ways to develop them for yourself.



**In real life, each of us already *is* a personality. In radio, the trick is to discover which aspects of your personality you want to stress when communicating with your audience.**

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DIARY-KEEPERS

*Brian Charette, PD of Q101/Harrisonburg, Virginia, wrote to me with a good question about ratings. The point he raised made sense to me, but I don't pretend to be a ratings expert. So I consulted someone who is: research consultant Jhan Hiber. Here's the query, along with Jhan's response.*

**CHARETTE:** The diaries I've seen don't support the theory that listeners are extremely specific in their diary logging habits. In other words, they enter 7:00 — 7:30 as opposed to 7:07 — 7:21. Does this make negligible the long-standing process of carefully plotting hot clocks to hide spots and sweep quarter-hours for maintenance?

**HIBER:** It sure does. The typical diary keeper doesn't fill out the diary moment-by-moment. He or she probably is recalling listening when they get home or to the office or wherever, filling it in as best as they can remember it. The bottom line of all that is that so many of the programming machinations that people go through to get to :20 past the hour without a stop set to get that extra five minutes...very often aren't getting picked up by the public, which doesn't pay attention to these subtle nuances and just sort of rounds it off to the quarter-hour or the half-hour.

*O'DAY: Is there any kind of quarter-hour maintenance that would have an impact on diary keeping?*

**HIBER:** I think the best way to get diary maintenance is to have good programming.

*O'DAY: Now there's a radical idea! Does it make any sense, then, to try to extend the diary keeper's listening past the half-hour marks? Let's say I've got a great thing coming up at :45 and start promoting it heavily at :25 to get them into the next half-hour?*

**HIBER:** I think that's a good example. Let's say you get into the bottom of an hour and you've got something coming up at :40 to :45. I think that would be worth promoting, and you might even want to think in those quarter-hour terms: "Hey, at 9:45 we'll be...."

*O'DAY: So instead of saying, "...in a few minutes," we should actually plant that specific time in their minds?*

**HIBER:** Yeah, give them a time frame. Diary keeping is a recall methodology, so try to plant time frames in their heads.

## DUMB THINGS SOME JOCKS DO

I heard the first three dumb things during a single 20-minute period of one disc jockey's show.

**DUMB THING #1:** I don't know who the guy was; he didn't give his name once during the 20 minutes I listened.

**DUMB THING #2:** This guy apparently thought everyone in the audience simply couldn't wait for the next local newscast, because he kept them up-to-date with a minute-by-minute countdown after each record:

*"It's 25 of 1:00; Sally Smith will be here in just 25 minutes with all the latest news..." "Sally Smith will be here in just 21 minutes with all the latest news..." "Don't forget, in 11 minutes Sally Smith will be here with all the latest news a 1:00..."*

**DUMB THING #3:** This guy did what appeared to be an ad-libbed spot for a Mexican restaurant. His big pitch was that this restaurant is so good that you should go there *"even if you don't like Mexican food."*

Dumb, dumb, dumb! Does he really think someone who hates Mexican food is going to go there just because he says it's so good? What he could have said was, *"If you love Mexican food but your spouse has never acquired the taste, take your skeptical lover to Manuel's. You're gonna love it...and your spouse just might discover that you've been right all along: You can't beat really good Mexican food!"*

**DUMB THING #4:** This one involves the request line. One jock I've heard habitually says, *"If there's something you'd like to hear, give me a call at 555-5555. I can't promise anything, but I'll see what I can do."*

Look, pal, if you can't promise anything, don't ask people to call in their requests!

**DUMB THING #5:** Then there's the other jock who regularly drives me crazy with, *"This next song is one of my favorites, so I'm going to sit back and listen to it and ignore the phones for the next few minutes, so don't bother to try to call me."* (That's an exact quote.)

Gee, fella, if your audience is intruding upon your leisure time so much, perhaps you should ask them to listen elsewhere!

**DUMB THING #6:** One of the big trends today is for jocks to try to *relate* to what's happening around them. (Good jocks have been doing that all along.) More and more, though, I hear jocks pick up the morning's newspaper and read an article verbatim: *"Say, this is interesting..."*

Even worse is the jock I heard who read an item from the *previous day's* local paper! So after everyone else in town had read the article, he told us all about it as if it were news. The only information the listener gained was that this particular jock is not very bright.

# RADIO STORIES

From Steve Stucker, KNMQ/Santa Fe:

*This was at KCRB in Council Bluffs, Iowa. Bill Matson was on the air and he had to do a live announcement, a seasonal reminder that kids are back in school, drive carefully, etc. This one was "brought to you by the Beem-Felford Funeral Home in Council Bluffs." He had to go straight from that into another live promo: "Tonight it's the premiere of Invasion of the Body Snatchers!"*

.....

**Tom Kennedy** of KISS-FM/Miami talks about the practice of having jocks cut spec spots, *"those little boogers that rarely get on-air but often are used as a tool to get an advertiser to place the buy. I think it would be great to be paid for these babies, but that may be asking too much. How about a little 'bonus' if the spot actually sells the client? I hate to bust my buns on a spec spot and then never hear whether or not the guy liked it.*

*"Recently one of the sales guys here at WKQS sold a client because of the way I did his spec spot. The rep gave me a bottle of wine for helping him make the sale. The thought was nice and I really appreciated it. Needless to say, I probably try a little harder for him now...."*

.....

## OWNING THE AIRWAVES

Let's compare two jocks in the same medium size market, one on a 50,000-watt AM and the other on a 100,000-watt FM; both work afternoon drive. **Kathy** (AM) is a naturally bright, funny and irreverent woman. **Mike** (FM) is a naturally bright, funny and irreverent man. Both have mastered the basics of radio, i.e., their shows are tight, levels good, etc. The two stations play basically the same music.

Mike will always have better ratings than Kathy. Because he's on FM? No. Because he's a man and she's a woman? Of course not.

Then why? Because during his airshift Mike *owns the airwaves*. It's *his show* and it happens to be on K(FM). Sure, he follows format. Sure, he emphasizes call letters and station identity. But 2-6PM on K(FM) is the Mike Jock Show on K(FM).

Kathy, on the other hand, just happens to be the jock who's on the air at K(AM). She's a warm body filling in a chair, a pleasant voice reading the spots and PSAs. But it's *not* the Kathy Jock Show on K(AM); it's the K(AM) Afternoon Drive Show, and she just happens to be there in the studio.

What can Kathy do to translate her natural talents into higher ratings? She can *make every segment of that show her own*. Every segment is there *because she wants it there*, and not because that's what's on the log.

Here are a few illustrations of what I mean.

### NEWSCASTS

INSTEAD OF, "*We'll be right back after the ABC News...*"

TRY, "*I've got the newest from Madonna coming up, but first let's find out what Congress is doing about that proposal to eliminate the marriage penalty tax...*" (Listen to previous newscasts to see what the top stories of the day are. If it's a live, in-house newscast, ask your newscaster earlier in the hour what the top stories will be. And don't forget to read the current wire service copy yourself.)

INSTEAD OF following the news with, "*Well, I'm back...*"

TRY following it with, "*Boy, Congress sounds like they really mean business about curbing taxes, but I think they're gonna have a fight on their hands when it comes to cutting out hot school lunches.*" (This example assumes this was one of the news stories.)

OR, of course, tie one of the news stories into a one-liner for a clever segue back into the entertainment portion of your show.

## WEATHER

INSTEAD OF, *“Here’s the latest weather forecast...”*

TRY, *“If you’re planning to wash your car tomorrow, you might want to think twice...”*

## FEATURES

Kathy’s station airs **Paul Harvey’s** *The Rest of the Story* during her show. For those of you unfamiliar with the 2 1/2 minute program, it attempts to be suspenseful, informative and surprising. Kathy always follows it with the station’s call letters, delivered over music in an upbeat manner that makes it perfectly clear she wasn’t listening to the previous 2 1/2 minutes.

What she *should* do is preview the entire show in advance (it’s taped earlier) so she knows what the subject matter is for the day. Then she should use that knowledge to promo/tease liberally prior to the broadcast. And she should use that knowledge to have prepared a comment of her own to segue from Paul Harvey to the record...to let the listeners know she was listening right along with them.

## MISCELLANEOUS

Psych yourself into *making* the studio your own if necessary. Post a huge sign saying “THE (ED JOCK) SHOW: 2-6PM.” When someone enters the studio during your shift, react as if they’re entering *your office or home*; this is your domain while you’re on the air.

*Don’t* answer the phone with, “KKED.” Answer with, “Ed Jock.” Sure, be a team player. Promote the station. Touch all the bases with the format. But make it clear to *everyone* — yourself, your fellow employees, and most of all to your listeners — that it’s *your show*...and it’s on KKED.

## A MORNING SHOW CRITIQUE

*A while back, I received an aircheck from KPUR/Amarillo's morning team of Michael & Joey. While I could tell they put a lot of effort and preparation into their show, it seemed to me they were doing a few things that tended to sabotage their effectiveness on-the-air. I asked them for permission to critique their tape in print, and they agreed...knowing that I would not be sparing in my criticisms. In certain places I spell words as they were pronounced. The punctuation I use reflects the rhythm of the person's delivery. Interspersed throughout are my own comments, in italics.*

MICHAEL: Good morning.

JOEY: Good morning! (*Joey, by the way, is a woman.*)

MICHAEL: How are you feeling?

JOEY: I feel just wonderful! I'm a little angry at Mother Nature, though. It's really not nice to fool (Station Weatherman) like this....(Michael laughs heartily — but his laugh sounds false.)

*(Joey's remark about fooling the weatherman was cute, but it wasn't funny enough to evoke a natural laugh from Michael. It also wasn't funny enough to evoke a laugh from their audience...which leaves Michael laughing all by himself, hollowly, unnaturally.)*

MICHAEL: (completing forecast) Tomorrow it'll be sunshine and 58. (He waits for Joey to provide current temperature.)

JOEY: (caught off-guard) I don't *know* what the current temperature is....

MICHAEL: (laughing heartily, sounding genuinely surprised) Oh! I thought you were listening....*(What a difference between a genuine laugh and a forced one! There was no joke here, but the spontaneity of the moment and the honest response from Michael made it fun to listen to.)*

---

JOEY: 14KPUR at 12 minutes into the 6 o'clock hour...

MICHAEL: Slowly but surely getting through a Wednesday, The Morning Show with Michael & Joey. Let's take a look at this morning's KPUR Calender for today. (Lighthearted background music begins underneath.) On the calendar for today, Wednesday March the 19th, the Battle of Coledo Creek happened on this date; Fannin's force was in retreat and was confronted by the Mexican army in 1836. *(I'm guessing this refers to a battle during Texas' war for independence*



*from Mexico. But can J&M be sure that everyone listening knows what they're talking about? Why not add just a couple of words to clarify: "General Fannin's force of Texas Rangers..."*

JOEY: In 1831, Englishman Edward Smith walks into the Wall Street City Bank in New York City and forcibly withdraws \$245,000, thus committing the first U.S. bank robbery. *(I know this might sound picky, but how about some structural consistency here? Michael used the past tense ["battle happened...force was in retreat..."]; Joey is using the present tense ["walks into the bank"]. The flow of a good morning show is very important, and this lack of consistency works against establishing a good rhythm.)*

MICHAEL: On this last day of winter, the annual migration of the swallows traditionally arrives at the Mission de San Juan de Capistrano in California....

JOEY: In 1928, *Amos & Andy* debuted on WMAQ Radio in Chicago....

MICHAEL: And speaking of cartoon characters *(Huh? We were speaking of radio show characters, not cartoon characters!)*, Carl Anderson started the famous comic strip *Henry* on this day back in 1932.

JOEY: A famous Roman festival begins today in honor of Athena; she was the goddess of the city, of handicrafts and agriculture...and also of morning disc jockeys....*(A famous Roman festival? If it's so famous, why aren't you or your listeners familiar with it?)*

MICHAEL: And a plot to kidnap **Abraham Lincoln** (music segues to record intro underneath) failed on this date in 1865 when the prez cancelled an appearance at Soldier's Home near Washington, where **John Wilkes Booth** was waiting to kidnap him. Booth of course caught up with Mr. Lincoln and shot him about a month later. That's a look at this morning's calendar on stereo KPUR.

*(How would I describe this feature, in a single word? Boring! The information could be interesting, but it needs to be presented in an interesting manner. First, I'd suggest breaking up this feature into two segments of three or four items each. Part One can be done at 6:;12, Part Two at 7:12...and then they could double their mileage by repeating each segment in the two remaining hours, when they'll have experienced a nearly complete turnover of audience.*

*(Second, I'd get rid of the background music. It gives the feature a "canned" effect that makes it feel anything but spontaneous.*

*(Third, it wouldn't take much effort for them to find something to say about each item to personalize it, to make it their own and not some wire service's. Let's quickly generate a few ideas for making each item their own:*

*(FIRST U.S. BANK ROBBERY: Throw in a one-liner about criminals, defense attorneys, banks....Be outraged that the first U.S. bank robbery was committed not by an American but by a foreigner.*

*(SWALLOWS RETURN: Make a California joke — maybe the swallows go back every year because they're hooked on Tofutti...Speculate as to how they know where & when to fly.*

*(AMOS & ANDY: Turn it into a call-in trivia question: "What two radio characters made their debut today...?" "What did Amos do for a living?" Or they could have one person be in charge of collecting & assigning the calendar items so that the other person can be challenged to guess the answer. For example, if Joey had handled that day's items and had given Michael only those that he himself would be reading, she could have said, "Okay, Michael, what two radio characters made their debut....?" The audience could hear him respond naturally, their enjoyment enhanced because they know his answer is not rehearsed.*

*(HENRY: How can anyone mention Henry without remembering his two most distinctive characteristics: He never spoke, and he had no hair (unusual for a boy). Use those as part of your trivia question...or at least mention them in some way (how about: kind of a cross between Telly Savalas and Marcel Marceau....)*

*(ROMAN FESTIVAL: Pretty boring. Maybe throw in a trivia question asking listeners to identify some other Roman god.*

*(LINCOLN KIDNAP: Now, this is a fairly interesting item, but Joey read it matter-of-factly in a run-together word style. How about giving it just a little bit of the drama it deserves?*

---

MICHAEL: ...6:36 on a Wednesday...

JOEY: And nothing feels as good as a great workout...

MICHAEL: (sounding confused) Huh?

JOEY: (laughing) I went by the Fitness World yesterday and hoisted a few...

MICHAEL: (sounding very interested) Did you?

JOEY: ...weights.

MICHAEL: Okay. Well, I have...You'll be happy to know, I have my workout clothes in the car.

JOEY: All right! What a guy!

MICHAEL: So unless I can come up with a good excuse between now and this afternoon, I'll probably be out there this afternoon and at least look at the weight machines.

JOEY: We will meet you there.

MICHAEL: (briskly, professionally enthusiastic) *And we'd love to have you meet us out there Saturday, the whole KPUR crew is gonna be out from noon to 2 at Fitness World, we're gonna be having a big live remote (Hey, that's radio jargon! Listeners know what a live broadcast is; they don't know what the hell a "remote" is) out there and showing everything that's going on. They've got some neat machines, and the whole set-up at Fitness World is really pretty slick. I like the way it's laid out.*

JOEY: It really is laid out really nice. There's a lot of space; that's one thing that's real nice about it that the amount of spaciousness that there is there and there's a lot of room to stretch out. A lot of gyms don't give you enough room to stretch out, and stretching out before and after the workout is really important to do.

MICHAEL: Maybe I'd better take notes here.

JOEY: (laughing naturally) They have a *lot* of...the, uh, Lifecycle machines...

MICHAEL: (enthusiastically) Oooh, yeah!

JOEY: ...you know, the ones that you punch up Level Five or Level Ten in your case...

MICHAEL: I'd die!

JOEY: ...and those are always a good aerobic workout. And they have two separate rooms, one for the ladies and one for the guys. Of course, everybody switches off because it's a real social atmosphere.

MICHAEL: Sure. It's a lot of fun. They got Nautilus machines, they've got free weights, they've got the aerobics, they've got the cycles, they've got the lap pool which they also do water aerobics in, whirlpool, steam baths, the whole bit. So why don't you come on out and join us this weekend at Fitness World? It's gonna be...a...uh...lot of fun. (Record starts)

*(This could've been a good live spot, but it ended up a jumbled mess. Michael starts out conversationally but then suddenly switches to Mr. Announcer. And I don't believe for a second that he's at all interested in this stuff: "They've got some neat machines, and the whole set-up is pretty slick." When Joey mentions the Lifecycles, he responds with, "Oooh, yeah!" — as though the prospect were as pleasurable as an ice cream sundae.*

*(Joey, on the other hand, sounds like she knows what she's talking about, but for some reason she finds herself babbling on; take another look at her description of the "spaciousness." Then she tries to sell contradictory features of the gym; first she points out that there are separate rooms for men and women, and then she says, "Everybody switches off because it's a real social atmosphere." So which aspect does the client want to promote?)*

---

*"Sports Shorts" (This consists of Michael reading straight sports copy over marching band music. This is a team show; where is Joey during this?)*

---

*(Next, they do a trivia question with prize. They promoted it just once; it should have been teased more to build listener interest.)*

---

**MICHAEL:** Stereo KPUR, The Morning Show with Michael & Joey, 7:33, Hump Day.

**JOEY:** From Lillian Young, author of *Around The World*, these facts on kissing (sfx: crowd goes "oooh!"). Each kiss (music begins: cathedral-type organ music) takes three minutes off your life.

**MICHAEL:** It's all wear & tear on the heart, which beats faster in men than it does in women when the kissing starts. See now, guys, this is another way they're trying to get us.

**JOEY:** The (indecipherable) tribe in the Himalayas have a kissing ritual that lasts a half hour.

**MICHAEL:** (not at all spontaneous) Could you imagine how much money Chapstick could make at a thing like that? The male tries to make as much smacking noise as he can with his lips. The female apparently just tries to smack him.

*(At this point, the bit ends as it began: without any attempt at a transition; they simply go to a commercial. If they really thought this bit was worth doing, they should have promoted it in advance and given it a solid ending.)*

---

**MICHAEL:** 7:39 The Morning Show with Michael & Joey. We've got some birthdays to talk about this morning. ("Happy Birthday" music begins) Locally, happy birthday to Mike Hodges. Mike turns 30 today, works at Ralph Davis Carpet Warehouse. Hope you find your car, Mike.

*(Nice touch, a la A Prairie Home Companion's Garrison Keillor)* Also happy birthday to 7-year old Paul Jones, goes to school at Mesa Verde.

JOEY: **Wyatt Earp** *(I guess they're no longer doing local birthdays!)* was born on this day in 1848.

MICHAEL: **Judge John Sirica** is 82.

JOEY: (very cheerfully) **Adolph Eichmann** would have been 80 years old today. *(Good grief! Why in the world would anyone commemorate Eichmann's birthday in a morning show? From her tone of voice, it sounds like Joey doesn't know who he was; if so, why is she mentioning it at all?)*

MICHAEL: Author **Irving Wallace** is 70.

JOEY: And **Ursula Andres** is 49. (music ends)

MICHAEL: And that's a look at this morning's birthdays. If you are celebrating today...

JOEY & MICHAEL: (singing, with Mike hamming it up cornily) "Happy birthday to you."

MICHAEL: From the whole Caper Crew....

---

MICHAEL: Stick around in 10 minutes Swami Yo Mommy....

JOEY: We also have "Amarillo Hospital"...soap opera, KPUR.

*(Well, at least they're promoting some bits. But can't they come up with a more creative, dramatic way to promote their satirical soap opera? Does ABC plug General Hospital by saying, "Stay tuned for our soap opera, General Hospital?")*

---

"Swami Yo Mommy" *(The Swami gives comedy horoscopes, with sitar music underneath. Pretty dull.)*

---

JOEY: KPUR with the soap opera "Amarillo Hospital" coming up.

MICHAEL: In about ten minutes. In about *five* minutes, we're gonna be talking about famous

last words. Stick around for it, on Amarillo's only stereo AM, KPUR.

*(Gee, that sounds like it could be an interesting bit. Why don't they tell us more about it — and why promote it only minutes before it airs?)*

---

*“Famous Last Words” (M&J read a series of excerpts from a book, in a mechanical manner. These aren't “last words” after all; they're predictions that turned out to be wrong. The music bed they're using runs out in the middle of the bit. The quotes are mostly trite, the bit boring.)*

---

*“Amarillo Hospital” (Soap opera music begins. Mike's recorded voice is the announcer. It sounds like it's recorded at a slower speed, and it's muddy, hard to understand. The announcer's pronouncements are followed by recorded crowd responses, which are out of place — apparently intended to let the audience know the announcer is saying silly things — and which sometimes obscure the dialogue that immediately follows. Joey does a good character voice. Mike does a couple of good character voices. Joey does a good character voice over Mike's announcer voice, making it impossible to hear his words. Mike now is slurring his narration — very un-announcer like. Now the crowd response noises don't even seem to relate to what's just been said. The music ends before the bit ends. As the taped bit ends, Mike comes in live with, “Well, you can be with us some other time for another true-life episode...” His live voice accentuates how muddy the taped bit had been. All in all, this feature was a complete, self-indulgent mess.)*

---

MICHAEL: Question of the Day: Who writes the best love letters?

JOEY: Teenaged boys.

MICHAEL: No! Really!

JOEY: Yeah. The Letter Writing Bureau of England polled young romantics and found that 14% of teenaged boys had written a love letter in the past three months. *(Hey, this doesn't support your lead-in. You're asking who writes love letters more frequently, not who writes the best. And why didn't you promo this bit?)*

MICHAEL: Only seven per cent of the girls had. *(Hey, Mike! A moment ago you sounded shocked at the answer to Joey's lead question; now you're jumping right in with statistics...letting your listeners know you weren't being honest when just a moment ago you*

*expressed surprise.*) Seems a little unfair, doesn't it? Eighty per cent of those interviewed believed a letter was the best way to express, uh, awkward emotions?

JOEY: Yeah, but what is art? Consider this recent example written by...

MICHAEL: A teenaged boy: "Roses are red/Peaches have pits/Will you still love me/If I break out in zits?" (record intro begins) Boy, that just kind of gets you right here, doesn't it? (*Is this actually from the story, or did they make this up as a punchline? I'd guess they made it up, but they did nothing to indicate it was their response to the story. As a result, the "punchline" just kind of sits there....*)

---

MICHAEL: And that's got it done for us today join us tomorrow when we acknowledge Poison Prevention Month with a few tips on what you could do to prevent accidental poisonings. (*Wow! I can see thousands of Amarilloans setting their clock radios and circling their calendars; you can bet they won't want to miss a few tips on what they could do to prevent accidental poisonings. Frankly, if that's going to be the highlight of tomorrow's show, I'd be making a note to find out what the other radio stations in town are doing tomorrow.*)

JOEY: Do join us. We've got a lot planned. We're 14KPUR The Morning Show. (*"Tonight on The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson: Johnny's got a lot planned! Don't miss it!" You've got a lot planned, huh? Tell us about it! Give us a reason to tune in!*)

#### SOME WEAKNESSES TO CONSIDER

1. Putting music beds under all of their bits strips the features of any spark of spontaneity.
2. Having every line of every bit written in advance prevents either Joey or Michael from responding naturally to what's being said. Perhaps the single most powerful aspect of a two-person show is the potential for the listener to feel as though s/he is eavesdropping on a spontaneous conversation. This is a genuine and powerful advantage over a single-voice show, and it's a shame to waste that advantage.
3. Some features seem to be there just for the sake of having a bit. Do M&J really think each bit is entertaining? If not, why do it in the first place?
4. If they do think a feature is worthwhile, they should be promoting it continually.
5. Mike has a tendency toward sloppy diction and sloppy word choice. He runs words together in a non-stop fashion, mechanically, in a non-conversational manner. Sometimes it's as if he's a character in a 1940s B-movie, speaking not in complete sentences but in fragments, staccato-style.

6. Mike also has a tendency to speak in clichés. The first time I heard a disc jockey use the phrase “Hump Day,” I thought it was pretty clever. I was ten years old at the time. Mike used that phrase *repeatedly* throughout the show. It’s trite. It’s not entertaining (except, possibly, to the virginal ears of 10-year old listeners).

7. M&J undercut the impact of entertaining features by hamming it up and by not being consistent within the presentation of a single bit (i.e., changing their perspectives within the bit).

---

If I have so many criticisms, why did I bother to critique their show in the first place? Because I think they both have talent, and from the amount of preparation involved it’s obvious they want to produce a quality show. In order to do so, however, I believe Michael & Joey need to concentrate more on making each bit work and less on simply filling up air time.



## SHOW CRITIQUE: DAVE SHROPSHIRE

(Note: This critique represents my assessment of Dave's show back in 1984. He's since gone on to bigger & better things, to considerable success.)

*"Dear Dan....You may remember back in '81 when I was canned at WKTM in Charleston and you were so helpful and very supportive ....Well, two months later I said goodbye to the Virginia/North Carolina area where I had always lived and made the trek westward to do mornings at Guy Gannett's KSTT.*

*"To make a long story short, here I was, a 'polarizer,' working for a PD who wanted his personalities to make no waves. Luckily for me he decided to move me to afternoons. Although we never hit it off as far as programming ideology goes, this move did give me some time to reflect on what went wrong and on what my true assets are. In other words, getting to know who I really was and what I did best.*

*"Another stroke of good luck occurred when a new PD came aboard who recognized my potential as a personality in the Larry Lujack/ Howard Stern vein and encouraged me to develop my potential. And now here I am, back in AM Drive."*

Dave sent me an aircheck, and I was struck by two things: It had lots of strengths, and it had several areas that needed improvement if his show was to be as good as it could be.

Dave's show opens with the theme music from *The Twilight Zone*. The accompanying voice — a pretty good Rod Serling impression — intones, *"You unlock this door with the key of imagination. Beyond it is another dimension, a dimension of sound, a dimension of sight, a dimension of mind. You're moving into a land of both shadow & substance, of things and ideas. You've just crossed over into the Shropshire Zone."*

I like his open. I've heard similar ones before, but they usually were marred by poor Serling-type voices.

Dave comes across as cheerful and happy to be on the air. My biggest criticism of his show: He does virtually no promoting of upcoming bits or features. For instance, the first feature on this particular show was a "Sports Break," done by someone else. Presumably this feature is aired because lots of people want to know what's happening in the world of sports. If that's the case, shouldn't he be selling it in advance? Instead, he abruptly introduces the feature, and it feels like the show is being interrupted.

Next came a clever idea for a bit: Because he goes to bed too early to watch *Hill Street Blues*, Dave asked for a listener to call in with a synopsis of the previous night's episode. At the time, *Hill Street* was a very popular program, and this offers Dave a way to plug into something that

many of his listeners are interested in.

Unfortunately, the caller was slow-talking and dull, and I couldn't wait for the call to end. Also, Dave didn't sound like he really was interested in what happened on the tv show; he responded with the vocal equivalent of nodding his head. He should have asked questions about what happened to various characters and plot lines and demonstrated a working knowledge of the show.

Also, Dave recorded the phone conversation for later playback; very few disc jockeys actually put callers on the air live. But his voice filtered through the phone sounds so much worse than his voice on-mike that I found it a bit annoying. This technical problem can be rectified by any good engineer by wiring a telephone interface. (A brief discussion of telephone interfaces follows this critique.)

If Dave were able to sound "on-mike" when recording his telephone conversations, his entire show would sound much more spontaneous. It's obvious to his audience that his phone calls are taped because his voice is so different. But if his voice sounded on-mike, he could, for example, go right from a record outro to tape and it would *all* sound live.

Throughout his show, Dave used sound effects of scattered light applause to good effect. Just the right amount, not overdone.

Another fun feature is his Wake-Up Singers — a custom, Dixieland-style recording: "*Wake up, wake up, you little sleepyheads/Get your little buns out of bed/Wake up, wake up, it's time to brush your teeth/And make sure all the kids are fed/Now here's Crazy Dave to say the names of Turkeys who are still in bed....*" After playing the song, Dave's newscaster gave him the names of a couple of sleepy people, and Dave took a call from a listener who had someone he wanted to wake up. A good bit...and one that he should have promoted in advance.

Another clever feature was his Dial-A-Dirty-Joke phone call. He didn't promote it. He announced it, and then we heard the telephone ringing. If he really wanted to create an illusion for the listeners, we would have heard him *dialing the number*. The joke was fairly funny, but Dave immediately followed it with a weather forecast, which diluted the impact of the joke.

Next came a sports trivia question — not promoted in advance.

His newscaster asked if Dave knew what happened three years ago today, and Dave had the answer...but it was obvious that he was *reading* the answer: "*Ronald Reagan escaped death after being shot in the chest by 25-year old gunman John Hinckley, Jr.*" Why not say it rather than read it, put it in his own words: "*It was on this day that John Hinckley tried to assassinate President Reagan....*"

Next came a mock horoscope feature (no promo), using horoscope music from *Cheap Radio Thrills* underneath the bit. He took an on-air call and told the listener his horoscope. Not bad.

At this point, I was shocked to hear Dave was giving away tickets to a **Billy Joel** concert. The first I heard of it was when he told people to call in to win! Why hadn't he been promoting this great prize from the moment he signed on?? I can't stress this enough: If you're trying to build quarter-hour numbers, you're a fool not to promote your best features *heavily*. If you've got Billy Joel tickets, mentioning it at every single break is *not* too often!

I think Dave made another mistake regarding the ticket giveaway. Before airing the winning 20th caller, he aired the caller who *almost* won: "*You're caller number 19. You're so close! But I've got another pair of tickets to give away later.*" Your audience identifies with the listeners you put on the air, and they don't want to identify with losers! Let them hear only the winners; don't make them vicariously share the losers' frustrations.

Next came a "Suburb Spotlight" of a nearby small town. He intro'd it with tympani & fanfare. It could've been a pretty funny bit, but he needed more than a single line to justify it. (His line was, "*How small is Wilton, Iowa? The road map is actual size.*") I'd recommend stringing together three such lines.

He did a very interesting calendar bit that, again, should have been promo'd. Next came birthday greetings from his "Birthday Duck." (I would've strengthened the duck character by giving him a name.) People send in postcards with names of birthday people, and Dave reads them and also notes birthdays of famous people...and then the duck sings "Happy Birthday." Cute bit.

Next came "The Rev. Dr. Pepper," the only bit on tape that I think falls flat. Dr. Pepper does a series of dumb jokes, complete with rimshots, while some very weird, non-church organ music plays in the background. The bit just doesn't make sense to me.

Dave's own homemade jingle — stolen from **Rick Dees** but original to the Davenport market — highlights the time & temperature. Last on the tape is a phone-in bit from an unnamed, **Father Guido Sarducci**-type character who does a typical **Liz Taylor** fat joke. The voice and characterization were okay, the joke was predictable. It wasn't badly done, but it wasn't very original.

### DAVE'S STRENGTHS

- Sounds like he's having fun
- Doesn't talk down to his listeners
- Lots of bits and features

- Good energy level throughout
- Custom production that sets him apart from other jocks
- Sounds intelligent and nice
- Well prepared

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS

- Promote all of your bits 'way in advance!!
- Try to develop some original characters and bits
- Get your engineer working on your phone hook-up.
- Strengthen impacts of your bits by going right to jingle or spot when they're finished.

.....

**One big advantage of airchecking yourself** is spotting verbal habits that you can easily fall into, quite unconsciously. There's one jock in Fresno, for example, who tags all spots by first saying, *"That's right..."* On a department store spot needing a tag, for example, he says, *"That's right, this sale ends Friday!"* Or even worse: *(Spot ends:)* *"The Jiffy-Gadget is available at these stores..."* (JOCK:) *"That's right, at Safeway in Clovis, Ed's Market in Fresno..."*

Of course, more **common verbal traps** to watch for are *"Okay"* and *"You know..."*

If your studio isn't already so equipped, why not ask your PD or engineer to set up an automatic taping system via a cassette player that is activated whenever the microphone is turned on? This way all you have to do is pop in a clean cassette at the beginning of your show, and when you're done you've got a complete, telescoped aircheck...ready to be listened to at your convenience. (And if you do a lot of driving to and from the station, you might put a cassette deck in your car, so you can hear a show while it's still fresh in your mind.)

.....

## RADIO STORIES

Many of us have a Sunday morning horror story from early in our careers. The following one from KVET/Austin's **Mike Carta** is typical:

*I was hired part-time at a little radio station in South Central Kentucky. Part-time turned out to be 45 hours a week. We ran a tape recorded program for this minister out of Cincinnati. You had to cue up to a certain portion of the tape, where he started off "The Prayer Hour." This was a big deal; I mean, people would send in hundreds and thousands of dollars to this guy!*

*On this particular day, it was the second part of the previous week's program. I cued up the tape to the very first audible sound, introduced it — "And now, ladies and gentlemen, it's time for 'The Prayer Hour'" — hit the start button on the recorder...and what you heard was this guy going, "Yeachhh...arrgghhh...uhmmrrr."*

*He cleared his throat for what must've been 15 minutes before he finally went into his sermon.*

*The hotline in the studio rang; it actually was a red phone with a red flashing light on it. I didn't answer it!*

## MAKING TELEPHONE CALLS SOUND LIVE...AND SOUND GOOD

Not being very technically oriented, I asked Terry Moss of the *L.A. Air Force* to explain what's needed to make the air personality's portion of a phone call sound "on mike" rather than "on phone."

Terry told me, "There are telephone interfaces available. If an engineer can't build one, they're not that expensive to buy. Essentially, what they do is take the pre-amp from the microphone and mix it with the telephone, so that they're using the actual control room microphone & the phone line and mixing them together into the tape recorder. When you turn off your microphone, it's actually still live to a certain point and can be used to record telephone conversations between you and the listener."

Terry said a fairly sharp engineer can do this kind of wiring himself, "But if he can't do it or if he's too busy, there are lots of instant plug-in interfaces available."

## PAYING YOUR DUES

The following letter was sent to me by a jock who requested anonymity.

*"I'm currently employed in a Top 10 market, where I'm on the air part-time and also write, voice and produce comedy material for the morning show.*

*"Although I'm happily employed here, I feel that my talents are strong enough that I could be doing all this comedy and production work for my own major market full-time airshift. I did previously have that opportunity as co-host of a 'morning zoo' show for a few months, but it was in a very small market.*

*"Now that I've been doing 'behind the scenes' work for over a year here, I'm itching to move forward. Whatever 'connections' I have in the business have not been able to help me out and I've found, much to my disappointment, that there are very few PDs out there who will hire someone on talent alone. For the most part, you've simply got to know someone.*

*"I've been in the business a little over five years. Do I want too much too soon?"*

**MY REPLY:** Yes, I do think your expectations are unrealistic. From the résumé you sent me, it appears you've had a total of three years of full-time on-air experience, all of it in small markets. A while back I printed a letter from a PD who complained about guys who produce a major market show and then expect to be hired as jocks themselves. This might be a rather harsh metaphor, but it makes me think of someone who expects to be hired as a golf pro at a big country club...because he's worked as a caddy for **Jack Nicklaus**.

You included a tape of production samples, and actually your production work and character voices are above average. But there's a lot more to doing a good morning show than writing and producing. Those two elements simply support the air personality's primary responsibility: Quality live performance. And the ability to deliver a consistently entertaining, well-paced, professional show comes only with experience.

I must say I detect a contradiction in your letter. First you admit that your major market "connections" haven't helped you to land a major market morning gig...and then you complain, "You've simply got to know someone." I think you're fooling yourself.

If your tape is an accurate guide, then yes: You do have talent. But it sounds to me as though you're looking for a shortcut to the top. Occasionally even a cliché can be accurate. In your case, I'd refer you to the old saw about "having to pay your dues."

## BEING REAL WITHOUT BEING NEGATIVE

A while back I received a thoughtful, interesting letter from a jock who feels trapped and frustrated. I've changed a couple of details to protect this person's identity; his situation is common enough that every market probably has at least one program director who'll read this and say, "That sounds like one of my personalities!"

*"Dear Dan...I always enjoy reading about the personality 'greats' in the biz, and your interview with Howard Stern is no exception! Sometimes I get weary hearing 'Merry Sunshine' Radio. I believe listeners are smarter than most programmers give them credit for. They know that most air personalities have relatable problems; we are people, not machines.*

*"A one-to-one communicator has the gift of putting himself on the same level as his average listener emotionally. I think there's a definite place for negatives — if they can be made light of. What person is going to take offense to 'What a cruddy day, weather-wise'? The listener will say, "Yeah, you're right. It ruined all my plans for tonight' or 'Yeah, it rained on my laundry!' I think we as broadcasters tend to anger more people by being noncommittal. Positives are great....Sounding happy is great....But 'smile when you say that' sometimes sounds plastic.*

*"When I came to this market, I was hired to work morning drive on an A/C station. After my arrival, management changed and like magic I was doing 'shut up and read the liners' radio on afternoon drive.*

*"Now after our first book, management says it's okay for me to loosen up and talk a little bit. Now that people think I have no personality, I'm supposed to be super relatable and be myself...but only if I backsell those records and read all the liner cards first!*

*"Right now I'm so disciplined I can hardly get myself to sound natural. I'm hoping to move on to a better market, but how do you put together a winning aircheck if you can't do what you want to do on the air? I know I have the potential to be great, but without that one 'break,' no one will ever know except me!"*

This jock, whom I'll call "Bob," enclosed an aircheck with his letter. I'd like to offer my responses to what I heard on the tape while attempting to tackle some of the questions raised in his letter.

Even if I had heard this aircheck without having read the accompanying letter, I think I would have known immediately that this was *not* an air personality who enjoys what he's doing. There's a negativity, a lack of energy, and a lack of joy which permeates the entire show.

When Bob opens his show, his delivery is so joyless that it sounds almost like an attack. This feeling doesn't come from an act he's putting on; he's not portraying some Don Rickles-type



character. He sounds like he simply doesn't want to be there.

Bob's station programs oldies, but Bob doesn't relate to the music *at all*. After each set, he backsells the titles, artists, and years of the songs. His letter indicates this total information package after every music set is part of the format. This means that he as a personality is the victim of bad programming; certainly there's no need for the audience to be told the year in which every song played first became popular! And surely some songs are well-known enough that the title can be omitted sometimes.

Compare the relative "clutter" effects of these two backsells:

**BACKSELL #1:** *"That's The Beatles and 'She Loves You' from 1964. Before that we heard 'Rocket Man' by Elton John from 1972, and before that Ricky Nelson from 1961 with 'Hello Mary Lou.'"*

**BACKSELL #2:** *I remember when that first came out and the critics said, 'This new group, The Beatles, is terrible! All their lyrics go, "Yeah, yeah, yeah!"' We kicked off the set with Ricky Nelson's 'Hello Mary Lou,' which was a big hit in '61, and then we took a ride with Elton John and his 'Rocket Man.'"*

Backsell #1 covers the three required basics for each song, takes ten seconds, and could be delivered by computer. Backsell #2 takes five seconds longer but offers information in a more interesting and *personable* manner. Do you really think a large segment of your audience is going to call in, demanding, "Hey! What year did 'Rocket Man' come out?? And what was the name of that Beatles song???"

At Bob's station, the music they play is considered to be extremely important. If that's the case, then the station's personalities should be letting us know how and why it's important *to them*, what it means to them.

With oldies, it should be especially easy to relate to the music. With "Hello Mary Lou," my only problem would be choosing which one of the following connections to make on-the-air:

• *Who remembers what the flip side of "Hello Mary Lou" was? I'll give you a hint: It was a Number One Hit for Ricky...*

• *I was 11 years old when I walked over to the La Salle Music Shoppe and bought my very own copy of that record...*

• *It must've been tough when Ricky took Mary Lou to the drive-in. I mean, it's hard making any moves on a girl when Ozzie & Harriet are in the back seat, filming everything for next week's tv show!*

•Rick said the only reason he made his first record was to impress a girl at Hollywood High School...and no, her name was not Mary Lou...

Did you see *The Big Chill*? If so, you might have noticed that the film's most emotional moments were accompanied by a great oldie on the soundtrack. Personally, I thought it was a cop-out on the part of the filmmaker, because he chose to trigger the audience's emotions with music rather than with the actions of the characters. But the oldies *you* play on *your* show offer you easy access to the feeling of your listeners...and you can make a real connection with them by revealing your own connection to the music.

Back to Bob's aircheck: I understand what he means by wanting to admit to his listeners that he has problems, too; the trick here, however, is to acknowledge problems without sounding negative yourself. Who would you rather spend time with: someone who recognizes setbacks and defeats and is able to see humor in them (or to see some positive side to them)...or someone who bitches and moans and complains about everything?

Bob's city had just received a late snow, on St. Patrick's Day. Everyone had put away their shovels and snow chains and was looking forward to Spring. Throughout his show, Bob bitched about the snow. Not in a fun way, not in an entertaining or creative way; he simply bitched about it. He was 100% negative about it. And I don't think his attitude brought any comfort or joy to his listeners. If you're snowed in, having to change social plans, trying to cope with getting the kids home from school, etc., the last thing you need is some guy whining about how awful everything is. On the other hand, you might appreciate someone who can share an optimistic approach with you, who can offer some practical suggestions on how to cope with the situation, or who can help lighten your emotional load by looking on the brighter side.

At one point Bob says, "I don't relish the thought of being stuck here for St. Patrick's Day Eve." Well, of course not! It's obvious he doesn't like being there during his own airshift! He *could* have taken that simple concept — being stranded at the radio station when everyone else is out celebrating — and built some kind of running bit or theme throughout the show: Alternative ways of celebrating for people who can't get to a party, phone conversations with listeners who are similarly stranded, etc.

Bob, you just don't sound like you're enjoying yourself! At another point in the show, you pause, heave a deep sigh, and continue speaking. You sound depressed. I understand *why* you feel depressed, but you can't do a daily show sounding that way!

And now I'm going to get a little rough with you, Bob. First you complain the station won't let you be yourself. I certainly understand your frustration there, especially in view of the fact that they originally hired you to be a real personality. But *now* you're complaining that they *do* want you to be yourself, to be personable!

You've felt frustrated because you weren't given the opportunity to be yourself on the air. Well, now you've got that one "break" you want — belatedly, perhaps, but it's your chance. To be personable while taking care of your format basics is a genuine creative challenge. It's up to you either to meet the challenge...or to resign yourself to time & temp. I guarantee that your listeners won't be calling to complain, "Hey, how come all of a sudden you're warm and friendly and interesting...just when I've gotten used to you being sullen and withdrawn??"

Again, I think the key here is to relate the elements of your show — music, news, weather — to your own life and to share those relationships with your listeners. If you share the positives gleefully and the negatives ruefully (but not bitterly), your listeners will get a chance to know the real you. And from your letter (which I've quoted only partially in this chapter), I can tell the real you is an interesting, warm person....Just the type of person most of us would like to get to know.

## THE “CONNECTION” MYTH

One of the more annoying myths of radio is that to make it to a major market, you’ve got to have a “connection.” “It’s who you know, not what you know.” I’ve always felt the people who say that speak either from ignorance or from a sour grapes attitude. Fortunately, both of those conditions can be corrected *if* the person in question is willing to take an honest look at himself.

This subject was brought to mind by a letter I received from a disc jockey in a small market in Texas:

*“When I first started out in radio in 1973, I was running American Top 40 at ( ) in Phoenix. I idolized the PD. So when I mentioned that the ARB people had gotten in touch with me about doing the diary bit during the book I was thrilled at all the attention I got from the PD and GM. The PD told me to get four diaries. They paid me a whole \$75 for the books, and the PD said he would help me in the hunt for jobs.*

*“I thought, boy, have I made a great connection; what I made was nothing but \$75. The PD and the GM and the sales manager took the books and did their thing. The ratings came back, the station was Number One, and the PD was off and flying. He became Program Director at (several major market stations). The GM went on to become the president of a big radio chain, and the sales manager became the GM of various stations. I was left to fight the job market, while the people I helped out are off to the big time.*

*“The PD has just recently hooked up with ( ) in New York. I ended up being a tinhorn rookie that was used for the benefit of the PD, who was going to be of such great help to me when he got his big break.*

*“I am no great big-voiced radio jock. I work hard, I am a team player, and I don’t have an ego that I blast everyone with. But I am bitter about the way I was left in the dust to read about these guys making more contacts and big money.*

*I realize that it sounds like a big crybaby story, but I really believed the PD when he was being such a buddy to me. It is very irritating to read about how great the PD and GM made out all because I gave them the ARB books; it was the initial step out the door for them to go on to bigger things...and of course to make even more connections along the way...and that is what gets you the majority of jobs: CONNECTIONS!*

*“I love working in radio, but not being a superstar and not having those all-important connections, I sit in this one-horse town trying to figure out how to score a job out west. I have never told anyone about this because I was afraid that the people I helped would somehow stop me from getting any kind of radio job. I know you are not a therapist, but it does help to tell someone about this after all these years.*

*“You could be a fantastic jock, but if you don’t know the right people your tape can end up sitting in a box in the corner of a PD’s office somewhere. If I had known then what I know now about the value of an ARB book, boy, would I have done things differently.*

*“I am no Rick Dees or Don Imus, but I am loyal to my station, I am a good worker, and I only want to be treated fairly. I think I got the raw end of the deal. I still think you need to know the right people to get in the door. But in knowing the right people, you have to know how to use and con them, as was done to me, in order to start up that ladder.”*

MY REPLY: What you’re telling me is you learned the hard way that there is no honor among thieves. You helped your PD and GM to cheat their competitors and defraud Arbitron, and you made only \$75 for your efforts. For you, crime didn’t pay...at least, not enough.

I don’t know of a program director anywhere who would hear an aircheck of a “fantastic jock” — one who was perfect for the PD’s station and who could fill an available airshift — but would refuse to consider hiring the guy just because the jock didn’t “know the right people.”

In geometry class, we were taught that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. There are no short cuts. The straight line that virtually every successful radio personality follows begins in a small market with long hours and low pay, passes through one or more medium markets, and culminates in a major market (or wherever it is the particular personality is aiming his or her career toward). Some personalities travel along that line more quickly than others, but they all make the journey.

Radio is a “people” business. But in this industry, it’s not Who You Know; it’s Who You Meet. Here are some ways in which you meet people who might later help your career.

- You meet the people you work with. If you impress a co-worker with your ability, enthusiasm and professionalism, that co-worker is likely to remember you when he or she moves up to a position of authority — whether at your station or in another market.

- You meet the people you compete with. If you treat your competitors, on a personal level, as hated enemies, they aren’t likely to have much respect for you, either. But if you give them a tough yet fair fight for the ratings, you’ll probably find them friendly once you’re both out of the market.

- You meet people you send airchecks to. Many jocks have been turned down for specific jobs but still impressed the PD enough to be remembered at a later date. By the way, I’ve found it’s as important to be courteous when *refusing* a job offer as it is when trying to land one. My first radio gig came from an ad I placed in the trades. After I had accepted a good-sounding job offer and moved across the country for it, several more offers were forwarded to me. I wrote to each of those stations, explaining that I had found employment, thanking them for their interest,

and expressing the hope that perhaps someday we would work together.

Well, one month later my new employers laid off the entire air staff, and I was out in the cold. (And having moved from Southern California to Virginia in winter, I *do* mean cold.) But I had saved those other letters offering employment, and I decided to contact those stations to see if they still had any openings. The first person I called was the general manager of a station in Florida, and — to my shock — he remembered me instantly. Why? “You’re the only person who’s ever been courteous enough to write back to me after taking a job elsewhere,” he said. What I thought of as simple common courtesy made such a strong, positive impression on a stranger that it ended up helping me land a job!

- You meet people at industry conventions.

- You meet people in other markets by visiting their stations. No matter how small your station or how large the one you visit, if you introduce yourself to the station’s PD or GM and say, “I’m on vacation from Little Town, Massachusetts, where I work for W\_\_\_, and I thought perhaps someone could show me a little of your operation,” the odds are you’ll be greeted warmly. It’s called Professional Courtesy. (If you arrive tape-in-hand, however, you’ll be perceived as a job-seeker and might not be so amiably welcomed.)

Here’s another personal example of a “connection” I made in this business — without trying. I had lost a job and needed a place to make a new aircheck. I introduced myself to the evening jock at a nearby small market station. He let me use the station’s production room. We became friends. The tape I made there landed me a good job in another market. A couple of years later, my friend was looking for work. Although it wasn’t public knowledge, I knew there was about to be an opening at a competing station in my market. I steered my friend toward that station, he was hired as a jock, and soon he was promoted to Program Director. He since has moved up to the PD’s chair in two major markets. If I ever were to look for work as a jock, I guess I could consider him to be a good “contact” or “connection” — but only because, early in our careers, we treated each other kindly and fairly...and with a genuine, mutual respect.

## THE FOLLY OF FOOLING YOURSELF

*“Dear Dan...I have been enjoying your column. I don't have to read between the lines to figure out what people mean when they say 'personality.'*

*“My own sad story is this. I began in radio 12 years ago. When I was in college I did audience research for a station in Pittsburgh, as well as part-time shifts in smaller markets in the area. In my 2 1/2 years there I worked my way into the Research Director's position and did some production, promotions and swing work.*

*“After I graduated I got a job in Colorado, my first full-time job. They promised me 7-Midnight at \$200 a week. I drove four days to get there and they gave me Midnight-6AM, at \$120 per week. I stayed three months and left.*

*“Since then I have done a year managing a mom & pop record shop (my research background paid off) and a year doing TV production. About two years ago I got back into radio, and once again I was promised a whole lot about the job which didn't come true once I got here. But I have stuck it out.*

*“My biggest disappointment is that they want time & temp only. I, on the other hand, want to develop into a personality jock. But no one here knows just what 'personality' means. The main point in my writing to you is that I would like to know how good my aircheck is. I think it is a good tape. I know I don't have a ballsy voice, and I never will. I can't seem to get any response. Even other small markets won't hire me for openings — a college grad, nine years experience and I still take home about \$100 a week.*

*“If you feel like using my name, please call me Phones; that way my present job won't be endangered.”*

First of all, Phones, I don't think your problems have as much to do with your aircheck as they do with your perception of your career. Your claim of “nine years experience” just doesn't hold up. You've worked a total of *two years* as a full-time jock, and as such you're still at the beginning of your career.

Being a college graduate doesn't mean doodly-squat as far as preparing you as an air personality. Neither does working in Research and Promotion...no matter what size market you did the work in. Ditto for managing a record store and for doing production work for a small market television station.

My point here — and I know I'm being harsh with you — is that you're fooling yourself with this “nine years experience” stuff. You had one full-time job. The station lied to you, ripped you off...and after three months you left...and didn't get another full-time radio gig for five years. To

be a successful air personality takes talent, hard work, and dedication. From what you've told me, I have to question seriously just how dedicated you are to your radio career.

Critiquing your aircheck would be pointless, because I don't think you have a realistic idea of what it takes to succeed in this business. I'm certainly not telling you to quit, and I'm not saying you'll never be a success. I *am* saying that you'll need much more drive, determination, and desire than you've shown thus far.



## MORNING SHOWS: 40 HOURS A WEEK WON'T CUT IT

A letter from **Jay Phillippi** (WWSE/Jamestown): *"Your article on show prep was very interesting, but this is where the griping starts. When I saw that you were going to take on show prep I was excited; right now it is the big discussion concerning my morning show, 'The Philipside.' After reading American Comedy Network's Method To The Madness, it was obvious that what I needed was to get organized. Unfortunately we run into the problem there that recurred in your column: Lots on how important it is to prepare...but ideas on how to prep are nowhere to be seen.*

*"Yeah, I know that **Scott Shannon** is said to spend three hours or more a day preparing for his zoo. Wonderful. One, I'm not doing a zoo. Two, what does he do for three hours or more? And Three, I'm glad he's got three hours somewhere to do this stuff.*

*"Just so I can get this off my chest, let's look at the question of time. Nothing makes me drool more than the thought of having time at the station when I can sit down at my typewriter and prep, time in the studio to work on character bits, etc. BUT! In the majority of markets, even the morning people aren't given that kind of time.*

*"I start off with four hours each weekday on the air, usually followed by three hours of production, plus helping to fill out the AM announcing staff. Plus I do a weekend shift. Suddenly I've got to start finding time at home for show prep. No great problem, but now I've got to know what I want to bring with me and know that I've got to make time somewhere to bar myself inside a production studio for the recording.*

*"Now before everyone starts up the strains of 'Poor Poor Pitiful Me,' let's be serious. If entering broadcasting meant sacrificing all my spare time (and what personal life is left), then maybe it's time to split into insurance sales. To be good at anything requires sacrifices, understood, but if I had wanted the life of a monk I would have gone to a monastery...."*

MY RESPONSE: Basically, Jay, I see two major complaints in your letter. First, you think there should be more information available on how to prepare for a radio show. Second, you consider the great time demands required to prepare a top morning show to be excessive.

Your first point is rather easy to address: *No one can tell you how to prep your show, because only you know what you want it to consist of.* There are surprisingly few secrets in personality radio. Do you want to feature a tough, music-related trivia question each hour? Okay; you'll want to sit down with music books the day before and find the questions. Want to do a satire on some current event? Okay; you'd better read the newspaper and listen to or watch the news to find out what people are talking about...and then write your bit. Then go into the studio and produce it.

But I suspect you already know that, Jay, because you devoted two pages of your letter to telling me exactly how you prepare for your show; obviously you've given the subject a lot of thought. My hunch is that what you're seeking is a way to do the work without putting in so much time. And this leads directly to the second point:

I believe a jock should have a life away from the radio station. *And* it is my experience that creating and sustaining a winning morning show requires a tremendous investment of time. If I hear one more person moan about what an easy life Scott Shannon or **Rick Dees** has, I'll scream! Do you think Shannon has lots of free time? Think again! I'll wager that between Shannon and Dees, they spend more hours per week working at radio than any other *five* air personalities in *any* size market.

It doesn't take great sacrifices to be a run-of-the-mill jock. But I honestly don't know how to achieve great success as a personality without spending more than 40 hours per week at your job (including the time at home spent writing, researching, etc.). That kind of success seems to require a tremendous commitment and a willingness to sacrifice. I'm not praising that fact of life; I know that such dedication holds potential harm to your personal life.

You know that beer commercial that says, "You *can* have it all"? Well, I think that's a crock. You can have *some* of it. But a gangbusters career *and* lots of time to pursue your hobbies & sports *and* time to be active in your community *and* time to attend to your physical and mental health needs? The commercial lies. It appears to me that great success in practically any field generally requires more than 40 hours per week.

## GOOD TASTE: WHO DECIDES?

When my *Radio & Records* interview with *Howard Stern* (found elsewhere in this book) first appeared it generated a lot of feedback, including the following letter from WFMD's *Tommy Grunwell*:

"I have to comment on Howard Stern's statement that 'I won't really tackle tragedies.' Perhaps he has forgotten what he said when an airline crashed on taking off from Washington National Airport, killing almost all aboard. In what may have been one of the all-time poor taste bits in the history of radio, Howard called the airline involved and asked how much a one-way ticket was to the 14th Street Bridge (the crash site). Of course, if my character allowed me to do that, I would probably think it funny. Naturally, when trying to impress the readers of your column, I would forget such an incident, too.

"Lest you think I'm a prude, I'm not. I appreciate a dirty joke as much as the next guy. But in 17 years as a morning man, I've learned that you appeal to a broader spectrum of people with class and clean humor. That's what public radio is all about.

"Announcers like Howard Stern are the greatest argument against deregulation there is. Of course, it takes all kinds to make an audience. The scary thing is that there are people out there who think stuff like that is funny."

I'm glad Tommy brought up the airline incident. When I spoke with Stern, he happened to mention that he's most famous for a phone call he never made — the one to the airline. He *did* joke about making such a call, but he says he never actually placed the call.

Does that make his response to the incident any less distasteful? Not to me. My own personal rule is not to try to get laughs out of tragedies ...and one of my definitions of a tragedy is one in which a human life is lost. Whether it's an airline crash or *Princess Grace's* death or *Chappaquiddick*, a sudden, unexpected death invariably is accompanied by great and genuine grief on the part of the deceased's family and friends. I've never liked "sick jokes:" a sick joke is one that laughs at another person's pain.

Interestingly, both Howard Stern and *The Greaseman* (an interview with him also is found in this book) agree about not making light of *certain* tragedies. Each points out that it's a personal decision. The concept of "offensiveness" exists as a continuum. While I avoid joking about tragedies, I'm sure there have been listeners who thought *I* was tasteless and offensive for poking fun at certain institutions and people.

Here's an example of my managing to offend someone quite unexpectedly: Once while working in San Francisco, I experienced some sort of foot problem. I looked in the *Yellow Pages* for a podiatrist, searching the listings of "Physicians." For some reason, podiatrists were not listed

there; they had a separate listing.

Being curious as to why podiatrists aren't listed right alongside, say, gynecologists, I told my story on-the-air, asking, "How come podiatrists are hidden away in their own little section? How dare the phone company shun these fine professionals in such a callous (no pun intended) manner?"

As it happens, one of my listeners was a podiatrist. He called and explained the *Yellow Pages* situation to me — as I recall, a podiatrist is a DPM and a physician is an MD...or something like that. Any way, it gave me a good excuse to talk on-air to a listener, we traded a few quick "foot" jokes, and that was the end of that subject...or so I thought.

When I arrived at the station the next day, the general manager was waiting for me — mad as hell. It seems he had received an angry phone call from a woman whose husband was studying to be a podiatrist, and she was livid over the rude and insulting remarks I had made about the honorable profession of podiatry. She wanted me reported to the FCC, the AMA, the PTA...you name it.

And what did my general manager have to say about all this? Here it is, an exact quote, with no irony or humor intended by the GM: *Damn it, O'Day, you can't expect to get good ratings if you go around insulting podiatrists!"*

Perhaps the moral of this story is this: Do your best to be sensitive to your listeners' feelings. Think twice before saying something that might be offensive. But no matter how hard you try, sooner or later you're gonna put your foot in your mouth.

## MAKING THE MOST OUT OF A CONVENTION

Radio conventions, such as the *R&R*, the *Gavin*, and the annual NAB Programming Convention, can be entertaining, enlightening, and fun. I have made both friends and business connections at conventions. But it wasn't always that way.

My first visit to a convention (perhaps I should call it my first conventional experience) was in 1974, when I was up for a *Billboard* Air Personality of the Year Award. I was working in Florida, and the convention was held in New York City. I didn't know anyone there, and I seem to recall doing a lot of standing around & wishing someone would talk to me.

I also remember how snooty the staff at the Plaza Hotel was, how crummy my room was, and how excruciatingly slow the elevator service was. I didn't have much money at the time, and I was aware of the irony of staying at the high priced Plaza and eating all my meals at the Burger King around the corner. (I didn't know about hospitality suites back then.)

Perhaps you will be attending your first radio convention in the next year or two; or maybe you attended in the past but felt you didn't get quite enough out of it. This chapter is for you.

### WHY SHOULD I ATTEND A CONVENTION?

#### I. To make contacts

Perhaps a better way to express this is, "To make friends." In a business where the product is people (or a people/music/information mix), you never know when or how an old friend might pop up to play an important role in your career.

Potential contacts shouldn't be limited only to major market PDs and famous jocks. One of your primary goals should be to meet (not just to shake hands with but to share ideas with) everyone you can: PDs, jocks, GMs, exhibitors, consultants, syndicators, owners, etc.

This is your opportunity to mingle with lots of people who have lots of expertise in lots of areas. Instead of viewing the convention as an opportunity to try to impress people (there always, alas, are a few people whose interests can be piqued only by the sounds of their own voices), view yourself as a human sponge: You're there to soak up as much information, inspiration and motivation as you can.

#### II. To learn from the experts

You'll have many seminars to choose from, and some of these will be crammed full of solid, imaginative ideas that you'll be able to use back home. Although I'm sure many of them are delighted to have the opportunity to "give something back to the industry," virtually all of the

speakers and panelists are there to promote themselves. And the best way to promote themselves is to make their presentations so valuable that everyone leaves the session saying, “Boy, that John Doe sure knows his programming/promotions/ etc.”

**One good way to convince a room full of radio people that you’re a real jerk:** During one of these sessions, waste everyone’s time by relating a long, rambling, incoherent, and incredibly boring event that happened back home. Typically, the way to do this is to *pretend* to be asking a question while in reality simply trying to draw attention to yourself.

I know you’re going to want people to remember you, but a workshop session is not the place to try to make your impression. The other radio people there have come to see and hear the panelists, and they’ll resent your trying to steal the spotlight from the “stars” of that particular hour. This leads us to the Golden Rule of Convention Workshops:

*“Don’t Speak Unless There’s A Question You Really Want The Experts To Answer.”*

### III. To exchange ideas

For many of you, this is your one time of the year to find out what’s happening in other markets around the country. *You* are an expert on your radio market, and you’re going to meet lots of other experts from lots of other markets. Here’s your chance to compare notes, to see how other stations are handling problems similar to yours. While you should be ready to share your own experiences and thoughts, your primary interest should be in the experiences of others.

Getting another person to talk about his/her station & market is remarkably easy: Simply ask questions.....

- What station is your closest competitor?
- Is (City) a good place to work in?
- What’s it like working for Multiple Station Owner, Inc.?
- Do the stations in your market get along pretty well with one another?

### IV. To take a tax deductible vacation

#### HOW DO I APPROACH BIG SHOTS?

First of all, you should realize that most of the biggest people in radio truly *love* radio, and if they can see that you share that love they’ll be receptive to you. On the other hand, it’s usually not hard to recognize the type of person who simply wants to hang around the big names so s/he

can go back home and brag about how “Big Star and I are just like *that*.”

If you genuinely admire someone’s work, don’t be afraid to say so. We all enjoy hearing honest praise:

“\_\_\_\_\_, my name is Ed Jock. I’ve been listening to you ever since you worked in Seattle, and you’ve been a big inspiration to me.” If you mean it, that’s a darned nice thing to say. Next you’ll need something to follow up with — a specific question or comment, something precise enough to get the other person to reply. This is how conversations start.

(You might be reading this and thinking, “Well, any idiot knows how to start a conversation!” But I’m devoting this much space to the subject because I’ve seen countless jocks at conventions, just standing around, looking forlorn because they’re miles from home with nary a familiar face in sight.)

Another excellent way of approaching a Big Shot is to drop the name of a mutual friend, someone you’ve both worked with: “I used to work with a guy who speaks very highly of you: Ed Mutual.” Big Shot, of course, will reply, “Sure, I remember Ed! How is the ol’ alcoholic lout these days?”

### HOW DO I APPROACH LITTLE SHOTS?

Remember, in a “people” business *everybody* is important. There will be lots of people there who are celebrities in their own markets but unknown in the convention city. They’ll all be wearing name tags (make sure yours always is prominently displayed), and all you have to do is read someone’s name tag and ask, “Where is W\_\_\_ located?” I’ve seen jocks walking around looking for Big Shots, glancing at name tags and responding with boredom when it turns out not to belong to a famous name. Those jocks are missing a lot.

### WHERE SHOULD I STAY?

I recommend staying at the convention’s primary hotel, the one where most or all of the sessions are held and where most of the hospitality suites will be located. The rooms at this hotel won’t be the cheapest, but having a room where the action is means it’ll always be easy to attend a session or event. Otherwise, you’ll find yourself at the mercy of the shuttle buses that will be provided to take you from the ancillary hotels to the main one.

### WHAT ARE HOSPITALITY SUITES?

Hospitality suites are hotel suites that are held by service companies — syndicators, record companies, networks — for the purpose of greeting clients and prospective clients each evening, after most of the workshops have ended. All of these will have open bars (meaning the drinks are

complimentary) and many include hors d'oeuvres. The best hors d'oeuvres (chicken, shrimp, deli sandwiches, ribs) usually can be found at the richest and/or flashiest companies' suites. This would include top record companies, major syndicators, networks, etc. Check your convention directory for a list of hospitality suites; also be sure to check the various printed invitations you'll be given after you arrive.

Many people partake of the food & drink at these suites and then leave. I prefer to make a genuine effort to learn about the host's product or service. I do this both because I want to be polite and because I'm interested. I want to learn all I can about the various aspects of our business.

Here's a trick I've never before shared in print. One night there was very little quality food to be found in the hospitality suites...and I was hungry. Finally I found a suite that had some spare ribs...but not a lot. So I stood along side the table and whenever someone else would come up and peer at the food, thinking about eating some, I'd say something like, "Gee, they don't look spoiled to *me!*" And the person would walk away and I'd have another rib.

### HOW SHOULD I DRESS?

Comfortably, but not like the out-and-out radio slob you might be at heart. Sure, you'll see a few beer bellies bursting the seams of radio station t-shirts, but in general people will be fairly nicely dressed. The people wearing station blazers will be disc jockeys. The people wearing suits will be PDs. The people wearing expensive yet bland suits will be GMs. The people wearing expensive three-piece suits will be PDs who want to be GMs. And the ones wearing cowboy hats and boots, of course, will be the the station owners.

### MISCELLANEOUS NOTES, TIPS & IDEAS

- As soon as you check in, go through your convention program to select the sessions, exhibits, and hospitality suites you want to visit. Construct your convention calendar accordingly.
- Bring a couple of cassette airchecks of your show (along with a portable cassette player, if possible) — just in case someone asks to hear it. Don't be shocked, however, if no one asks.
- Bring business cards with you. If you don't have any, get some simple ones made before you leave home. You'll want to leave one with each new friend/contact you make.
- Ask people you meet for their business cards. That's why they brought them.
- You can tape record any session you attend. At many conventions, you can purchase cassette tapes of the sessions within an hour after they've ended; they usually cost around \$7 per tape.
- Don't ask people for jobs. This is considered to be "bad form." It's okay to ask about their



station's hiring policies, but don't put someone on the spot.

- Do feel free to send a tape (with appropriate cover letter) to a PD you met at the convention...a week after it's over.

- When packing for a trip, leave extra space in your suitcase for the souvenir pens, coffee mugs, and T-shirts you're sure to pick up from generous, promotion-minded exhibitors.

- Want everyone to think you're a hot talent? Well, there's usually a message board where people leave notes for friends & colleagues. Find out what big radio programmer *won't* be at the convention, and post messages to yourself that say, "*ED JOCK...PLEASE CALL MR. BIG SHOT NEW YORK COLLECT IMMEDIATELY!*"

Heck, I've always suspected most of those messages are fake anyway.

## RADIO STORIES

From **Rasa Kaye**, News Director of WLTW/New York:

*I was doing weather service on a high-quality phone line for Compu-Weather. It was my first time on the air with the **Ross & Wilson Show** at WABC. I walked into my little air studio, closed the door, and started talking.*

*Suddenly I noticed three blond, blue-eyed, two-week old kittens crawling up my jeans, up my sweater, and onto my shoulders ...thinking I'm Mom.*

*The door was closed and I was live on-the-air, with no way to get rid of them. They had been asleep in a roll of carpeting in the corner. Apparently Mom Cat had been locked in one of the other air studios overnight. They started crying into the microphone and batting curiously at it. And because they were so young, it wasn't easily distinguishable as a cat noise; it was very squeaky.*

*Within minutes all kinds of helpful types from **Ross Brittain** to **John Maher** (the newsman) to the program director called and said, "You sound great. But you've got to turn down your headphones; they're feeding back!"*

## A TERRIBLE PROMOTION

### 2 DJs dumped in platter-chatter goof

SAN DIEGO (AP) — The phones lit up like a Christmas tree,” Susan Payne recalls, regretfully, the minute she played two songs on the air and then started talking.

Her station, KCBQ-FM, at the time was offering \$10,000 to the first listener who caught a disc jockey playing fewer than three songs in a row. The disc jockeys were warned a mistake would mean their jobs.

Payne made her mistake on March 11 at 8:40 p.m. One day later she was fired.

For another of the eight disc jockeys, Larry Darnell, it was all over on April 1, when he pressed a button that was supposed to run the third straight country-music record. Instead, it produced a commercial.

It took a male listener less than a minute to catch Payne and win his \$10,000. But Darnell sweated out five full minutes after he goofed at 1:50 a.m. on April Fool’s Day.

“Then a lady called and asked if I had played two records,” recalled Darnell.

“I said no, that I had played three,” he said. “After all, my job was on the line. The lady hung up, and I figured I was home safe.”

The woman notified the station later in the day, saying she had reported the matter to police. At that point, Darnell admitted his error. He was fired April 5.

In his memo of Jan. 21, program director Bob McKay said “if anyone plays two records for whatever reason, you will be terminated immediately. That is the ballgame, if someone through carelessness throws away \$10,000. That is non-negotiable.”

Russ Wittberger, executive vice president of the AM-FM stations owned by Charter Broadcasting, said Thursday the contest has been discontinued.

The incident detailed above occurred in 1982. I believe the story is one of inexcusable unprofessionalism...but *not* on the parts of the air personalities who were unfortunate enough to pay the price for the incredible crassness of management.

Any “promotion” that so blatantly endangers the jobs of the persons charged with the responsibility of making it work...simply stinks. In the instance above, KCBQ’s print ads promised \$10,000 “IF YOU HEAR LESS THAN 3 SONGS IN A ROW.” If it were honest, the ad would have read:

*“IF YOU HEAR FEWER THAN THREE SONGS IN ROW, WE’LL PAY YOU \$10,000 AND WE’LL FIRE THE DJ WHO MADE A MISTAKE!”*

This program director was quoted in *R&R* as saying that one jock “was fired because he lied to her...blatantly! He did indeed commit fraud.” Yes, the jock above did lie...but who put that poor guy in that position in the first place? The PD said the guy was fired “because he lied.” And what would have happened to the jock if he hadn’t lied? He *still* would have been fired! Some choice.

The same PD said, “I never would have fired anybody if they hadn’t known the policy right up front. That would have been highly unfair, and I’m not that kind of person. But in these cases, everybody knew what the policy was.” He makes it sound like the jocks *volunteered* to put their jobs on the line. What he really meant, it appears, is that if KCBQ’s jocks didn’t like having to worry every minute of every airshift about losing their jobs...they could have resigned. Again, some choice.

The height of inanity perhaps was reached when this PD (trying to defend indefensible actions) said, "If you're a bank teller and you carelessly give away \$10,000, chances are you'll be fired." But these two jocks did *not* carelessly give away \$10,000; they carelessly opened a mike or hit a wrong cartridge button.

Contrast this guy's defense of his (and his station's) actions with these words from **Chuck Artigue**, General Manager of WUSN/Chicago (which gave away two \$25,000 rewards in a similar promotion): "My point of view is that if I'm the one who dreams up the promotions and I'm the one who as manager has to guarantee the money, then that should be my problem and not some jock who's trying to do the best he can. If he just happens to be running the board when the mistake is made, I can't hold him responsible."

Again, compare that to the words of KCBQ's PD: "So they all knew that up front...If you screw it up unauthorized, it's our way or the highway."

An arrangement whereby an individual is put in constant fear of losing his/her livelihood is no promotion; it's an abomination of radio...and a disgrace.

So when, three years later, I learned that KWK/St. Louis was offering a "10 In A Row or \$10,000 Guarantee" — and that if a jock accidentally failed to play ten in a row the \$10,000 would come out of his or her salary — I became concerned. I spoke with PD C. C. Matthews and voiced my concerns.

*O'DAY: What choice did the disc jockeys have when told, "Sign this thing that says if you fail to play ten in a row you'll forfeit \$10,000 from your pay"?*

**MATTHEWS:** The way I presented it to the airstaff was, "Here's the way it's going to be. We're going to offer a guarantee saying we'll do ten in a row, and we want to prove that what we say is true. We're not planning to give away the money. Should you accidentally slip up and make a mistake, hey....I was a disc jockey once, and there are days when you go in and you're not paying attention as much as you are on other days."

This is just to prevent people from making a mistake. Or from somebody getting an idea in their head of, "Hey, why don't a friend of mine and I split the money?" I'm new here, I don't know these people, and I've seen that happen in other markets. This is to prevent that sort of thing happening.

*O'DAY: If you were a disc jockey working under those terms, do you think that might cause you a lot of anxiety?*

**MATTHEWS:** Well, it depends upon who you're working for. The people here know that I'm a fair individual. I did this as a precautionary thing to prevent mistakes. If something happens

where we go off the air during the ten in a row, obviously the disc jockey won't be responsible. But if he makes a mistake....

It's set up so that he can't help but play ten records in a row before he breaks for commercials. If after five records he hits a spot accidentally, that's his fault. Nobody has come to talk to me about this because they had a problem with it. I don't think there's that much of a problem there. We have our on and off days, and I want our radio station to be on every day; I don't want an off day for my radio station.

•••••

I'm left with three responses to KWK's promotion.

1. Any promotion that unduly puts a jock's job or income in jeopardy is a bad promotion.
2. If a PD has devised a "foolproof" method of insuring that ten records are played in a row and somehow that method fails, shouldn't the person who devised the failed system be penalized at least as much as the jock who screwed up?
3. Everyone — jocks, PDs, managers, even humor service writers & trade columnists — makes mistakes. Even conscientious, hard-working people make mistakes. Ten thousand dollars (or your job) is a heckuva high price to pay for a single moment of imperfection.

## IT'S TIME FOR A FIVE-DAY WORK WEEK

The traditional six-day work week for air personalities has long been a pet peeve of mine. Being a *good* jock takes a lot of work, effort and energy, and most of us are unable to recharge our creative batteries with just one day off per week.

In addition to resting & recharging, jocks need that weekend to go out and live their lives, to expand their own wells of experience so that they can continue to grow as people and continue to be interesting to their listeners.

What I'm about to say will sound harsh to some people...and, possibly, offensive to some station managers.

What we're talking about here is, simply, exploitation. Most stations require their jocks to work six days a week *because they can get away with it*. Stations typically give three reasons for this exploitation:

- 1) We can't afford to pay a part-timer to work the weekend shift.
- 2) We have to maintain a programming consistency.
- 3) It's traditional in radio for jocks to work six days a week.

Reason #1 is, for many stations, a crock. It's no secret that radio broadcasting is a lucrative enterprise. Successful stations turn a *very* healthy profit. There's a big difference between "We can't afford..." and "We're too cheap..."

Reason #2 is a fallacy. If the station truly believes in 100% consistency, then why don't all the jocks work *seven* days a week? Why does the station schedule syndicated programs and public affairs shows on the weekend but not during the week? That's inconsistent. Why do they have special music programming (e.g., oldies weekends) on Saturday and Sunday but not Monday through Friday? Why do they have their big cash giveaways only during the week but no on weekends?

The fact is that listening patterns on weekends differ greatly from those on weekdays. All too often listeners hear the morning jock do a drastically different show on Saturday than during the week; the support people aren't there, the contests aren't there, the news and traffic departments aren't there....Now, *that's* inconsistent!

Reason #3: Tradition. It used to be "traditional" for disc jockeys to program their own music, ably assisted by certain cash incentives from record promoters. Some traditions deserve to die.

•••••

My plea for a five-day work week generated a lot of response. One PD, **John Hudson** of KKCS-FM/Colorado Springs, pointed out that, *"Many stations complain that 'when we get someone good they always move on' or 'we don't have the money to attract or hold top talent.' It seems to me an enlightened station would realize that a five-day work week would be a large incentive to attract and hold talent. Many a jock would trade some bucks for an extra day off."*

And I received this response from **Jay Christian**, PD/OD of WQUT/Johnson City, Tennessee: *"I read your article on the five-day work week with mixed emotions. I agree and disagree with your position. I guess that comes from moving up through the ranks ...from air talent to Operations Manager (though I'm still an air talent.)"*

*"There is one major reason for my belief in the six-day week. Saturdays are usually the second or third highest tune-in times for the entire week. Most smaller and medium market stations don't have good enough part-time talent available to work such high visibility hours. If listeners are used to the higher quality announcers during the week in prime time and then have to listen to much weaker talent on Saturday, they are liable to start searching the dial for something better...and they just might land on a station that has its 'big hitters' on."*

*"To be able to have quality part-timers on the air Saturday, you'd need at least three or four. How many small or medium market stations have that kind of talent available all at one time? Most of us have only one or two good part-timers."*

*"Dan, have you ever been a program director? You said, in essence, that it's not a fair argument to say, 'If I give my morning team a five-day week, I'll have to do it for everyone else!' Have you ever had to deal with announcers who think someone else is getting preferential treatment? It's not fun."*

*"On the other hand, I know a six-day week can be pretty hard on people at times. So let me tell you what we're trying at WQUT. Right now we're blessed with high quality part-timers. So for July and August, without increasing the full-timers' weekly hours or decreasing their pay, we're giving them a five-day week. It's summer, and the weather is conducive to doing things and going places."*

*"We at WQUT are always trying to find ways to benefit the announcers without hurting our ratings. This idea, which came from our general manager, **Ken Maness**, is an effort to say thanks to our announcers. It may not be a five-day work week forever, but whenever we can do it, we will."*

MY REPLY: Some good points there, Jay. First, my compliments to you and your GM for being caring enough and creative enough to give your jocks time to live their private lives on weekends. Let's hope some other PDs are inspired to follow suit.

Second: Yes, I have been a PD. That comment about giving “special” treatment to the morning show was made by **American Comedy Network**. I think it can be valid...and I think it can be awfully hard to implement without upsetting the other jocks.

But the fact is very few stations treat all their full-time jocks alike. Let me ask you a few questions, Jay:

Does your all-night jock make as much money as your afternoon drive jock?

Does your mid-day jock get to talk as much as your morning personality?

Does your evening jock spend more hours on the air (7 to Midnight, perhaps) than your morning jock?

Do all of your jocks have the same latitude in airing phone calls and doing humorous bits? Do they all give away the same amount of money and prizes? Do they get equal on-air support from your news staff?

Or are some of your jocks more equal than others?

Sure, most stations have a comparatively large audience during Saturday middays and afternoons. But their listening patterns are different; the needs of someone listening in the office during the week are different than those of that same person driving around town, doing errands on the weekend. It's your job to provide them with quality programming *every* minute the station's on the air. But if you believed it's imperative for the programming to be exactly the same whenever the person listens, you'd have your jocks working not only Saturdays but Sunday afternoons, too.

Sure, it's a challenge to find good part-timers. Sometimes you have to develop them, which is even more of a challenge. And if you can't find enough good weekenders to fill the bill, you'll want to use other methods to provide your listeners with quality weekend programming: Syndicated programs, original local programs, special music weekends, etc.

Yes, giving certain jocks the weekends off while requiring others to work six days can require smooth handling. (And I should again stress that ideally *all* jocks should work five-day weeks.) Sure, coming up with quality weekend programming is a challenge. But to quote my favorite superhero, **Superchicken**, “You knew the job was dangerous when you took it.” This is part of the challenge a PD has to meet; that's why you pull down those big bucks and get to take home all those promo records.

I sympathize with your struggle. But solving a programming problem is *your* job, not your jocks'.



## A WAVE OF STUPIDITY

From *Love Is Hell*, by Matt Groening:

**“SIX SIMPLE TECHNIQUES TO KEEP YOUR MAIN LOVE RELATIONSHIP ALIVE & KICKING:**

**#6: Temper Your Hostility With Cleverness and Humor.** *You can transform your nastiest feeling into moments of levity by communicating them in the form of subtle, witty jokes. (Example:) ‘I don’t love you any more. Just kidding.’”*

Why would it not be funny to make the above remark to your loved one? I mean, you *do* say you’re kidding, right?

The above remark would not be funny because it would be an expression of hostility, not of humor.

And it is the question of humor vs. hostility that leads me up the steps of my soapbox in this chapter.

During the past few years, a wave of stupidity has washed across a certain segment of our radio community. When a big wave recedes to the ocean, often it leaves behind driftwood and debris. This wave of stupidity brings with it bigotry, nastiness and cruelty.

Riding the crest of this wave is a relatively new popular radio feature: The Disc Jockey As Bully.

I’ll use three real-life examples to illustrate. The first two received wide coverage in radio trade publications and in general newspapers. Rather than attempt to be diplomatic (I think it would simply be coy, not diplomatic), I’ll refer to them by name. The third example comes from an aircheck I happened to hear a couple of years ago. Because this was not any kind of a news story, I’ll omit the jock’s name.

### “THE MEXICAN NATIONAL ANTHEM”

**Randy Miller** was a disc jockey at KSDO-FM/San Diego. For those of you not familiar with California, San Diego is in the southern part of the state, quite close to the Mexican border. Southern California has a large percentage of residents either who were born in Mexico or whose parents or grandparents were born in Mexico.

Miller saw a Cable News Network story about the San Ysidro border between the United States and Mexico. CNN said the border is the number one point of entry for illegal Mexican immigrants “and the leading area for the laundering of drug money and drug trafficking.”

Miller thought it would be funny to put new lyrics to the tune of *She'll Be Coming 'Round The Mountain*. Here are his lyrics:

*"They'll be coming across the border when they come.  
They'll be coming across the border when they come.  
They'll be coming across the border, 'cause there is no law and order  
They'll be coming across the border when they come.*

*"They'll be carrying drugs and handguns, so they can have some real fun;  
They'll be carrying drugs and handguns when they come.*

*"They will not have a green card, but they sure know how to run hard;  
Well, they will not have a green card when they come.*

*"Now all they know is Spanish, and if you don't they will vanish;  
Well, now all they know is Spanish when they come."*

Miller entitled it "The Mexican National Anthem."

One would be hard pressed to find an adult Mexican-American in Southern California who doesn't have at least one relative or acquaintance who once was in this country illegally. Nonetheless, Miller was shocked when some Latino listeners were offended. "I was simply commenting on a social issue and really didn't expect any negatives on it," he said. "Frankly, we all were surprised by the reaction."

With all the lip service program directors and air personalities pay to the importance of knowing the community they're supposed to be serving, he was surprised by the reaction?

Incredible.

KSDO-FM's program director, **Dave Parks**, said Miller created the bit to address "the illegal alien problems specifically" and it was not meant to reflect on the Mexican-American community "in general." And, in fact, after it first aired the title was changed to "The Illegal Alien Anthem."

Okay, I'm all in favor of biting satire that "comments on a social issue" and addresses social "problems specifically." Let's look at Miller's "comments;" perhaps his point of view will offer a perspective that will help us to understand the problems related to the influx of hundreds of thousands of illegal aliens per year.

What insights can we glean from Verse #1? The only comment he makes here is, "They'll be coming across the border, 'cause there is no law and order...." Perhaps that's the reason so many

people risk their lives (many lives *are* lost while trying to sneak into the U.S.; more on that in a moment): because there is no law and order.

Personally, however, I agree with the immigration officials and the sociologists and the illegal aliens themselves, all of whom are unanimous in blaming the problem on Mexico's terrible, seemingly inescapable poverty...and on the desire of some Mexicans to try for a better life in America's fabled Promised Land.

Verse #2 says, "They'll be carrying drugs and handguns, so they can have some real fun." Well, I'm sure drug smugglers do carry both drugs and guns. But this is the "Illegal Alien Anthem," not the "Drug Smugglers Anthem." At the time this bit was aired, Miller had been in San Diego only a few months, so perhaps he didn't know that most Mexicans don't use illegal drugs *or* own guns. And most Mexicans caught trying to sneak across the border carry neither.

As for the "real fun" — well, if paying your life's savings to some guy (known as a *coyote*) for the privilege of being stuffed into his van with 50 other people and hoping you don't suffocate (as some do) during the long, hot, bumpy ride and then hoping that neither you nor your children are robbed, raped or murdered by *banditos* on the American side of the border is what you consider to be "fun"...then I guess I see Miller's point.

Verses #3 & #4: No, they don't have a green card, or a visa. Those are for people with money and connections. The people who risk their lives to cross our border have neither, and many of them speak only their native tongue. (How many languages did Miller's ancestors speak when they first set foot on U.S. soil?)

Do you see anything of value in Miller's "Anthem" — as humor, as satire, or as social comment? If so, then your vision is more acute than mine.

### ASSASSINATING THE PRESIDENT

Then there was **J.C. Corcoran** of KSHE/St. Louis, who joked that he might try to impress actress **Helen Slater** by trying to assassinate **President Reagan**. Corcoran was amazed at the Secret Service's lack of sense of humor. He explained that even "a retarded child" would know it was a joke.

Perhaps that same child would know that "humorously" threatening the life of the president of the United States is a crime, just as "joking" about carrying a bomb aboard an airline is a crime. Instead of admitting that he screwed up, Corcoran sought to blame others (i.e., the Secret Service).

### GAY BASHING

Finally, there's the jock in Chicago who regularly ridicules gay men. The aircheck I heard

featured a gay listener who called to take exception to the jock's taunts. In an intelligent, articulate, respectful way, the caller explained why he found such comments hurtful and destructive. Clearly, he was seeking to communicate his feelings to the jock.

How did the disc jockey respond? Did he say, "*Hmmmm. I can see you've been hurt by this; that wasn't my intention*"? Did he ask, "*How about giving me an example of a 'gay'-related joke that you don't find offensive*"?

No. His response was, "*Jeez, give me a break! You guys just don't have any sense of humor at all!*" — and then he hung up on the caller.

### DISC JOCKEYS AS BULLIES

The disc jockey as bully. The disc jockey as jerk. The disc jockey as bigot who ridicules anyone different from himself. I find it distasteful.

I don't question anyone's right to represent such attitudes on the radio, if they can find a station willing to broadcast them. I think it's a pathetic way to make a living, but I do support freedom of expression.

But at least...*at least*...be honest about it. Don't try to hide your hostility, your bigotry, your callousness behind a cloak of "humor." Bullies aren't funny. They're just bullies.

Some years ago, the producer of *Saturday Night Live* was quoted as saying that no subject is sacred; his show could find humor in any situation. Shortly after **John Belushi** died, he was asked if viewers could expect to see the show doing jokes about Belushi's death.

"No," he said. "*I don't see any humor in that subject.*"

How hypocritical. It's funny *as long as it involves someone else's pain*. Unfortunately, there are some disc jockeys who seem to agree.

I guarantee that in each person's life there are subjects that the person believes should not be made light of. Not laughing at the death of a loved one or at the crippling of a child doesn't indicate a lack of sense of humor; it indicates the presence of human compassion. And if you don't have any compassion, then I suspect that ultimately the one who has no sense of humor...is you.

## RADIO STORIES

From **Bill Heywood**, KOY/Phoenix:

*This was my first radio job, at KSOK in beautiful Arkansas City, Kansas. I'm on the air with a request show from 10 to midnight, "The 1480 Request Show." I would get a record on, run out into the office, answer the phone, write down the requests, and come back in just as the record was ending.*

*After a week of this, someone asked me how things were going. And I said, "Well, everything's great, except that request show is really tough. I need somebody sitting out there to write down the requests and bring them in to me, because it's a hassle running out there to answer the phone."*

*The guy said, "What do you mean? There's a phone right under the console!" But it never rang, and no one had told me it was there!*

## THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR AS DISC JOCKEY ...AND VICE VERSA

*One day I got a call from WSM's Dave Donahue, who asked a simple question: How does an on-air program director get his or her on-air work critiqued? That got me to thinking about the special challenges involved in doing what essentially are two full-time jobs at once. So I got on the phone with eight on-air PDs across the country. Their stations cover five different formats, in markets ranging from small to large. Like most PDs, all were on-air disc jockeys when they tackled their first programming jobs.*

*Our panel:*

**Roger Gaither**, WKQB/Charleston, SC (on-air 10AM-Noon)

**Dan Kiley**, KKRC/Sioux Falls, SD (on-air 6-10AM)

**Tony Dean**, WWDM/Sumter, SC (on-air 5-9AM)

**Mark Larson**, KFMB/San Diego, CA (on-air 2-6PM)

**Bob Buchmann**, WBAB/Long Island, NY (on-air 6-10AM)

**Michael Dalfonzo**, WSHE/ Ft. Lauderdale, FL (on-air 3-6PM)

**Art Sanders**, KDKR/Spokane, WA (on-air 6-9AM)

**Bill Stedman**, KSAN/San Francisco, CA (on-air 10AM-2PM)

**QUESTION: WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO BECOME A PROGRAM DIRECTOR?**

**STEDMAN:** Because I felt that either I knew enough to make it work or I knew enough to do it as well as the previous individual. I thought I could make a contribution in directing a group of folks doing good radio.

**DEAN:** The job became open, and I was the person on the staff who had the most tenure. I was kind of thrust into the situation...and it felt good.

**GAITHER:** Because I think I'm a better programmer or manager than I am a disc jockey.

**SANDERS:** I always wanted to move into programming. That was one of my first intentions when I became a "radio personality," and the opportunity presented itself.

**LARSON:** There were a lot of things that weren't happening that could be, a lot of creative things that I thought we could be doing and which we've implemented over the years.

**KILEY:** I've always had an interest in programming.

**BUCHMANN:** I wanted to put the whole package together: Station image, personalities, music.

**DALFONZO:** I'd been a jock at so many places, and I said, "Hey, I could do this. I've got some pretty good ideas, and I'll bet I could do a pretty good job at this."

**QUESTION: WHEN YOU FIRST TOOK ON YOUR PROGRAMMING DUTIES, DID YOUR AIRWORK SUFFER AT ALL?**

**BUCHMANN:** Yes, it did. Absolutely. At first, my PD work was definitely my big priority, and my public appearances also were a bigger priority than the show itself. So between my office hours and my appearances, I'd be too tired to come to work for show prep and 5 o'clock in the morning. I'd show up at 6 o'clock, and that was no way to run a morning show.

I finally resolved that by sitting down with myself and saying, "Listen, idiot, it's time that you really put the priorities in a dead-even heat: The PD job and the morning show are equally important, and it's time that you curtailed it a little bit at night and got in there at 4:45 and did the prep."

**DALFONZO:** No, I think it actually improved my airwork, because I was thinking, "How can I criticize a jock for screwing up when I do it? I've got to be better than the rest of my air staff."

**SANDERS:** Yes, and it still does. That is one of the ongoing challenges of being an on-air PD: finding the time to prepare your show ...especially if you're doing a morning drive gig. You have so many other responsibilities. You're working with promotions all the time, personnel....Right now I'm programming two radio stations and I'm on one of them. So I spend a lot of time doing things other than preparing my show.

**LARSON:** No. It really works well with me doing both. The time on the air is a therapeutic time for me, even though I still have to chase salesmen out of the studio.

**DEAN:** Initially it did, because I wasn't that well organized. It affected me because I had to spend so much time being the PD that by the time I actually got to the airshift, I was mentally and physically drained.

Learning the tricks of the trade has helped me cope with that. Also, organization has helped quite a bit: Having things organized, being able to delegate responsibilities to my staff.

**GAITHER:** I still feel like it does. Initially, I think both of them suffered a little bit. The programming suffered because I was more into being a disc jockey. Now I feel like maybe the jocking suffers just a little bit because I'm more into being a programmer. I think it's almost humanly impossible to wear both of those hats perfectly. The key is time management; you have to allot a certain amount of time for prepping for your airshift.

**KILEY:** A little. Doing middays, as I was back then, it's really hard to be a program director because there are so many things going on from 10:00 in the morning throughout the afternoon. There are so many people running in and out of the control room that it's hard to concentrate.

**STEDMAN:** In my case, I had been Production Director a long time before that, so I was used to the time pressures. So if my airwork suffered because of my administrative duties, it suffered all along.

**QUESTION:** *DO YOU CENSOR YOURSELF DURING YOUR SHOW MORE THAN YOU WOULD IF YOU WEREN'T ALSO THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR...OR LESS?*

**SANDERS:** More. I find myself strictly adhering to the format, trying to carry it out as perfectly and purely as it was designed...not only because I set it up myself and I believe it works, but also because I want to be an example to other jocks. I want to prove that it works.

**KILEY:** Less. We're in a competitive market, and it's a competitive edge to have good talent. The guys are working hard to be personalities on the air, and if I'm willing to take chances, they will be, too. It's hard to go over a critique with a jock, though, and tell him, "Jeez, you shouldn't have said that," when maybe you said something that bad that morning. I try to go to the edge and not cross over; I want the jock to go right to the edge.

**DALFONZO:** To be very honest, I don't break the format. How can you yell at a disc jockey for playing a record that's not on the list, when you go in and do it yourself? You can say, "Well, because I'm the program director" — but that doesn't work. The rotations are there for a reason, and I should know the reason better than anybody.

**BUCHMANN:** My attitude when I'm on the air is, "Screw the program director." When I'm on the air, I'm not the PD. People don't come in when I'm on the air and ask me a programming question, because they know I'll freak out. I'm two different people; when I'm on the air I'm as irreverent to programming as I can be while maintaining the station's position.

**LARSON:** Sometimes I have to remind myself not to be overly conservative here, wearing my management hat. But I don't think I censor myself more.

**GAITHER:** I probably censor myself more, because I've always made the observation — I think I might have read it in one of your articles — that *a really good jock is always trying to get away with something*. If every jock on my staff follows the letter of the law, then only *my*



ideas are being promulgated.

Ironically, however, I think I probably have a tendency not to do that, for two reasons. One, I don't want that kind of thing to happen too much. Two, I have to set an example for the jocks. If I overstep the line too much, it'll be tougher for me to call them in and get on them about doing something wrong.

**DEAN:** I find that I censor myself less. I know where we want the station to go and what kind of sound we want.

**STEDMAN:** Probably a little more, because I know no matter how close you are to your staff, somewhere along the way we've been conditioned to think of "Us" and "Them." We've got an excellent bunch of people here, and nobody has a problem saying to me, "Look, I heard you do that thing; is that how you wanted it done....?"

*QUESTION: HOW DO YOU GET REGULAR FEEDBACK AND CRITICISM OF YOUR OWN AIR WORK?*

**SANDERS:** That's a great question. I'm the one who critiques my jocks. I also sit back and critique my own airchecks, but it's pretty slanted because the feedback I get is from myself...and from my general manager, and also from my wife. That is one of the main problems of being an on-air PD.

**GAITHER:** Up until I came to Charleston, that had been a problem because my bosses were more sales-oriented general managers or owners. But since I came here, I've been very fortunate to have an owner who was a jock himself in Cleveland for several years, and he's been a programmer. Quite often he and I will sit down and go over an aircheck of mine, or he will critique something I've done on the air.

But getting good feedback *can* be a problem, since you're the one who's charged with critiquing what everybody else does. When you aircheck yourself, you might not catch the little nuances of what you're doing.

**KILEY:** I've been in the market almost eight years, and I've got a lot of friends around town who aren't in the business. They can give me a good idea if I did something that stunk or not. I've got a lot of friends in the business who I can send tapes to. But I think you get a lot better feedback on what you're doing by being out there on the street, talking to people who aren't in the business.

**DEAN:** I talk to other program directors. I exchange tapes with a lot of friends across the country. Also, we use a consultant here, and we speak pretty openly and honestly about my show.

**DALFONZO:** My wife, who is also a disc jockey, will listen to me almost daily. She'll say, "That was a really lousy show today. Was somebody talking to you?" And our VP of Programming for the chain will go over a tape with me now & again. And I listen to my own airchecks, and I get mad as hell at myself when I listen and think, "Jesus, you sound like a rookie from Podunk! You don't sound like a major market disc jockey, let alone a major market PD!" I suspect I'm harder on myself than anyone else would be, because it still sticks in my head: "You're the PD; you're supposed to be doing this by example."

**BUCHMANN:** Basically, from the listeners over the phone. Not only privately, but literally over the air; we do a lot of telephone talk in the morning. We also have an in-house research department, and that plus the appearances out in the field give you a really good handle on it.

**LARSON:** I get it from a variety of sources: The general manager, the news director — who is on-the-air and who we incorporate into a lot of bits....We talk about what worked and what didn't, and why. And, you've got to be your own best critic.

**STEDMAN:** Running my own skimmers, getting bits & pieces of critiques from folks around the country who I respect and to whom I ship a tape of the station. I know enough folks well enough and long enough where nobody's going to pull any punches. If there's a distinct disadvantage, it's that I don't get the input of my radio station's lead player: the program director.

***QUESTION: IF YOU WERE TO GIVE UP YOUR PROGRAMMING DUTIES AND GO BACK TO BEING JUST AN AIR PERSONALITY, WOULD YOUR AIR WORK IMPROVE?***

**DALFONZO:** To be totally honest, I think if I were no longer the PD and just the disc jockey, my air shift might improve a little bit, owing to the fact that no matter how hard you try to eliminate them and no matter how many rules you might make — "I won't take phone calls, don't talk to me, don't bother me" — there are a million interruptions that get to you when you're on the air.

**STEDMAN:** No. Being an on-air PD helps me be a better jock *and* it improves my programming.

**DEAN:** I think so. It's hard to admit that. Even though I delegate responsibilities to people, I still worry about those things. I think if my total concentration were focused on doing a great show, there'd be a lot of energy I'm using to deal with other things that I could just totally concentrate on the show.

**LARSON:** No. The thing I decided when I went back on the air was, "I've got to get a real good handle on time management....and if I don't do that, I'll be dead in two years." I really worked hard at goal-setting. Time management is a constant process. I use the Franklin Planner, which is

great.

**SANDERS:** I think so, because I'd have more time to devote to my show.

**KILEY:** I don't think so. It's nice doing mornings, because the rest of the staff doesn't get to the station until 8:00. Most of the preparation is done the day before.

**GAITHER:** Definitely!

**BUCHMANN:** Maybe by 5%. But the 5% that it would improve, because I'd be able to devote more energy to it, would be counter-balanced by the 5% it would worsen because I wouldn't have as good a handle on the entire station as a package. And I think that's essential to morning jocks. I mean, when I'm on-the-air live with a caller, I know exactly what the radio station did yesterday — *exactly* — and I know exactly what it's going to do tomorrow. So I'm able to package it and do it in a very unique way that I think only the program director can do.

**QUESTION:** *WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A DISC JOCKEY WHO HAS JUST BEEN PROMOTED TO PROGRAM DIRECTOR?*

**DEAN:** Don't over-extend yourself. Relax with your people. Try not to be overbearing, because if you are it'll take too much energy to do both jobs. You're going to need your people's support. Go easy with them and make sure they understand *exactly* what you want done...and make sure you fulfill your end of the bargain, too.

**LARSON:** Be prepared to defend positively your actions. You have to be ready to be challenged by your on-the-air staff, because they're going to come in — especially if you work a drive-time shift — and question something you did. Most people tend to say, "Because I'm the PD!" That doesn't get you any support and doesn't get you the teamwork on-the-air that you need. So you have to be prepared to take time with your people to get them to understand that certain things work in certain dayparts and that you just happen to be doing one of those dayparts where certain things may or may not work.

**GAITHER:** Remember how it feels to be a disc jockey. I think program directors sometimes forget that. Being an on-air PD helps you stay in touch with what is going on. If you're setting up the promotions and typing the liner cards and directing the radio station, sometimes it's good that you get in there and peddle the bike.

**DALFONZO:** Being organized probably is the single best thing you can do for yourself. One of the problems I had when I first became a programmer/air talent was that I would think I could do things more quickly than I really could. So I would try to do more things than I physically could do in a day. That led me to the point where I was constantly trying to catch up.

You're really getting less done that way than if you just take a couple of things off the list and

say, “I’m going to do four things today” instead of six. And you find you get all four done. You have to be very conscious of the amount of time you spend in things that are not as productive as they should be. You have to manage your time very well and delegate a lot of things.

If you have a good music director or music coordinator, it helps! You absolutely have to have a promotions director whom you can trust to do whatever it is you need done as far as promotions.

Delegating responsibility was very hard for me to learn. When you’re a new PD you think, “Well, I’ve got to do all this stuff because I’m the only one who can do it as well as it needs to be done.” I think it kind of grates on a young PD’s ego, having to delegate things and not doing them yourself, because you feel like you’re losing control.

But delegating authority becomes imperative if you’re going to do an airshift and all the other things that a PD has to do. You have to get good people working with you, people you can trust to get the job done. If they have a problem, they come to you. Otherwise, you can assume it’ll be taken care of.

**KILEY:** Don’t get conservative! If you want your station to sound good and have fun, you have to be willing to go right to the edge. You’ve got to let your jocks have that freedom. I think a format is a great thing, but any time you break the format *and* it sounds good, that’s okay with me.

**SANDERS:** Keep your cool. Try to develop some sort of feedback system with your general manager or station owner. If you’re satisfying him, then of course your main duty is to your audience. Aircheck every show, wait a week before you listen to it. Never shortchange the audience; always try to find the time to prepare your show, even though you have other duties.

**STEDMAN:** Combine the two jobs; don’t separate them.

**BUCHMANN:** Get the term “40-hour week” ’way out of your mind. And don’t let any big corporate boss tell you it can’t be done....because it can.

## FINDING & DEVELOPING AIR PERSONALITIES

*In 1986, I was asked to participate in a panel presentation at the annual Country Radio Seminar. The panel was entitled, "AIR PERSONALITIES: HOW TO FIND THEM ...HOW TO BUILD THEM."*

*The moderator was Johnny Biggs of ABC Watermark. The other four panelists were Doug Enlow, PD & PM Drive Jock at WCOS/Columbia; Ron Foster, PD & Morning Jock at KIKK/Houston; Joey Mitchell, Morning Jock at KRAK/Sacramento; and Moon Mullins, Program Director of WHN/New York. Here are some of the session's highlights.*

**MITCHELL:** Personality radio to me isn't just being a crazy guy, because to a lot of very successful personalities it's just communicating, being topical, being part of the community...and also being consistent. That's the hardest part for me. Because I don't have a great voice, I decided I'd better do something to be recognized; I've got to be a little different. I picked the "crazy man" routine — and that's the hardest when you don't feel good, when you're a couple of months late on the Mastercard payment and the bank is waiting outside, when your wife is mad at you, and you go in at 4:00 in the morning and you've got to be the same guy you were yesterday...because the audience doesn't give a damn about your Mastercard payment or if you're having a fight with your wife. They want that radio show that they're used to. So for me personality is consistency and being topical.

**ENLOW:** Not everybody can be funny on the air. But I think we have touched on a very important issue for personalities, and that's consistency. You have to decide what type of personality you're going to be, what you're going to be to your audience, and then be that every day.

***QUESTION:** How do you go about finding and developing talent?*

**FOSTER:** First we look within the staff. Then we go to ads in *R&R*. We go to comedy workshops. But I think most of the talent we've had, especially in our morning show, has come from within the station itself.

**MULLINS:** The most preferable way is part-timers will move into full-time slots. A part-timer can be trained in the station philosophy, the programming elements, the ins and outs of how you want things done. If you don't have the luxury of having a part-timer who will wait that long for you, one of the favorite ways I used to have of recruiting was to get in the car and start driving down through one or two states in the area and spend about a week out on the road, just listening to the different disc jockeys in the smaller markets.

**MITCHELL:** So many times program directors want to form a newly hired jock's personality in the first couple of days. They hired this personality and they say, "Okay, I hired you because I

liked you on your tape, but this is what I want you to be.” The jock ends up confused and out of a job in a while. Give the guy a little while to acclimate to the station, to the format, to the surroundings, and let the people get to know him.

It’s going to take a while. The sales staff is going to have a heart attack if the guy’s a personality. If he’s criticizing a song, the music director’s going to have a heart attack. But if he’s just given some time to develop and to be original, I think he’ll succeed — if he’s good. If you hired him in the first place because you liked him, give him time to express himself.

*QUESTION: How do you know if a younger guy in a smaller market is going to be able to develop into a personality? What traits do you look for?*

**O’DAY:** Someone who first of all has a pretty good idea of who he or she is. *Everyone* has a personality. If you think about people whom you find interesting in real life — whether it’s a co-worker or your mailman or the person who repairs your shoes — odds are they’re not necessarily funny. They might tell a good story, they might have interesting opinions on world affairs, they might just happen to know what’s happening in the neighborhood, they might be good gossips; everyone has a personality.

First you have to decide, “Who am I? What are my strengths? What are my weaknesses? And of those strengths and weaknesses, which do I want to highlight and present to my audience? Which do I want to develop more?” For some people — maybe for most people — being sarcastic is a weakness. There are some jocks who are very successful using their natural tendency to be sarcastic.

So the first thing is who are you, and the second thing is who do you want to be on the air? If I were looking at a jock from a smaller market or at someone who’s in his first couple of years in the business, I would want to make sure that person knows what kind of personality he wants to be and considers himself to be right now. And if he says, “Well, I don’t know, I could be Al Wyntor or Rick Dees or I could just play all music or you tell me and I’ll do it” — I probably wouldn’t hire that person.

**MITCHELL:** I think there has to be an incredible rapport between the program director and the personality. I think there is a magical moment when you hear your disc jockey turn into a personality; you can actually hear it happen.

I have a program director to thank for whatever success I’ve had — and that’s when he told me, “Joey, stop announcing and start talking.” I had to actually visualize one person on the other side of the microphone. Because I was saying, “LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, HAVE I GOT A GREAT SONG FOR YOU...” I was talking to Yankee Stadium. I was just screaming into a microphone and going nowhere.

And then one day I just pictured my wife and I said, “(soft, intimate voice:) *Oh, I’ve got a beautiful song from Don Williams that’s just gonna drive you crazy. It is so nice...*” All of the sudden the phone lit up and people were going, “I really like that song!” I started getting a response, and all of the sudden Yankee Stadium was gone and I was starting to do a one-to-one. That was the turning point for me, when I started communicating instead of announcing.

**MULLINS:** Sometimes when dealing with air talents, who have very sensitive egos, you have to accentuate the positive. You have to go after the things that they’re doing right and just totally ignore what they’re doing wrong. If you can just build on what they do right, automatically those things that are done wrong just start to go away; they dissipate. It’s a beautiful thing to observe.

Then you can start getting together and brainstorming. No matter what idea is presented, you don’t just automatically discount it. You don’t say, “That’s stupid.” Every idea is a good idea; you take them and build upon them. If they’ve been there 20 years or two months, they’ll still respond the same way to positive stroking and positive development. And *forget* about the things they do wrong! Some of the best disc jockeys I’ve ever heard make the biggest boo-boos on the air.

**ENLOW:** Very few people are born personalities; most of them are made. If you’re having problems with a personality who basically is a time & temp jock who wants to read the liner cards but you want to develop his personality, you have to encourage him to take chances. And if he takes the chance and does the bit and it bombs, you don’t jump all over him. You find the good things and you encourage him to take those chances and develop his personality.

*QUESTION: What about show prep?*

**FOSTER:** It’s extremely important to prepare every day and to have a backlog of generic stuff. A couple of days ago there was no particular topic going on, so we came up with the situation where I had not paid my gravity bill, and when I got home everything was on the roof...and the audience played along with it great.

It might be a great bit for you; just open your phone line: “*Have you ever had your gravity shut off? It’s terrible...*” Have some generic stuff like that in your backlog just in case you run into a day when *USA Today* is blank and the local papers are kind of grim.

**ENLOW:** I think it’s important to encourage your air personalities to prepare. Some of them don’t like to do it. When I first started years ago, I didn’t like to do it. I felt like I could go on the air and do my show off-the-cuff. Now if it’s a day when things are so busy that I can’t spend an hour or so preparing my show before I go on the air, I feel naked. I think you can encourage your air personalities to where they’ll get to that point where they’ll want to prepare, and their shows will be much better because of it.

## QUESTIONS FOR THE PD TO ASK HIMSELF/HERSELF

- What, specifically, do I expect the jock to accomplish? How, specifically, will this be measured?
- What skills and abilities do I expect the jock to have *that I don't have*? Am I qualified to recognize and judge those abilities in others?
- How valuable is this airshift to the station? Am I willing to compensate the individual to a degree that reflects this value? Is the station willing to compensate the individual to a degree that reflects this value?
- If I'm hoping to "develop" new talent, am I willing to allow that person to make mistakes?
- If I want a true "personality," am I willing to allow that person to do some things on the air that I don't *personally* agree with?
- Am I willing to back up my air talent in conflicts with sponsors? With sales? With management?
- What is my station willing to do to make it so a good talent wants to stay with us?
- Do I want a jock who reflects my personal vision of radio...or who reflects management's vision...or who reflects his/her own vision (within well-defined parameters spelled out by management *in advance*)?
- Is my station prepared to reward productive air talent in a way equal, financially, to the way it rewards productive sales people?
- Am I afraid of controversy?
- Can my personality jock speak his/her own mind...even when I completely disagree? Even when station management disagrees?
- Is my station willing to make the investment of both time and money required to build a successful show? Are my expectations — of performance and of the length of time allowed — realistic?
- Do I want to mold a personality who will be "just like" somebody else ....or am I willing to accept someone who is a unique air personality?



•Do I see my job as that of someone who tells the talent what to do? Or do I see my job as that of someone who is there to assist the personality in any way possible to create the most effective program?

## MANAGEMENT & PERSONALITIES: NEEDING A BETTER UNDERSTANDING

The 1984 NAB/NRBA Radio Programming Convention included *no* panels or seminars for air personalities. I was outraged, and I said so in my *R&R* column. A short time later, I received the following letter from Dan Mason, Program Director of WMUS-AM & FM/Muskegon, Michigan.

*"Dear Dan....You sure made one hell of a point when you complained about the lack of seminars for air personalities at the recent NAB/NRBA. It's almost beyond belief. It does indeed seem that a lack of respect for jocks in general is running rampant throughout the business, so we must ask ourselves why. As a PD and as a jock, I can offer some thoughts from both sides of the fence.*

*"First, how often have you heard this line: 'If it weren't for the sales department, you jocks wouldn't have a paycheck.' Not only is this a slap in the face, it's just plain unfair. I've always thought radio stations are a lot like sports teams, with everybody contributing to the overall winning effort. Unfortunately, not all general managers feel this way; neither do the salespeople.*

*"If not for the ratings garnered by the air staff, what would salespeople use to sell with — their good looks? That type of statement is pretty dumb, no matter which side it comes from. The bottom line is the station either wins or loses as a team. When it comes to profits, no one department should ever claim all the credit.*

*"Now for the other side of the coin: How many times have you seen an air personality turn in notice to leave for a new job and then not bother to work through that notice? Worse yet, their performance during the notice period is usually crapola because they're in such a damn hurry to get out. Are we professionals or not? If you want to be treated like one, you've got to act the part. I've seen too many egotists instead.*

*"EGO. That's a word that really can get overused, but it's the crux of the entire problem. Everybody thinks they are the next Larry Lujack or Rick Dees. Therefore they don't need to work at learning their craft; they're already stars!*

*"Just the other day I had a kid call on the phone, looking for the PD. He was from Detroit. He proceeded to tell me that his high school radio teacher (formerly a resident of Muskegon, our city) told him he was better than anyone else in the Muskegon market, and he should get a job here for that reason. When I enquired how much experience he had in the business, his reply was ONE YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL RADIO. Who is this idiot trying to kid besides himself?*

*"Again I ask: Why don't jocks get much respect? Because they don't seem to feel they have to work for it. Disc jockeys are not godlike beings who should be worshipped as saviors. It's just a*

*job, and a pretty darn easy one compared to some.*

*“Not all jocks have such inflated opinions of themselves. But as in most any profession, the bad apples always get noticed more than the good ones, and for that reason the air personality has lost a great deal of respect from management. For those bad apples out there I have a message: Do us all a favor and get out of radio. You’re giving those of us who take our careers seriously a bad rap. To owners and general managers, I say this: Don’t judge us all based on the actions of a few amateurs. There are those of us who really do care.”*

To a large degree, I think this is a problem of Which Came First? Does management treat air talent badly because disc jockeys are irresponsible and unreliable? Or do air personalities feel a distinct lack of loyalty to radio stations that deal with them in ways that are less than ethical and treat them like second-class citizens?

First, let’s look at some of the negatives that managers often apply to air personalities.

### THINGS ABOUT DISC JOCKEYS THAT IRRITATE MANAGEMENT

1. Disc jockeys frequently leave to go to another station for more money. This causes managers to believe jocks have no sense of loyalty.
2. Jocks appear to treat the radio station’s operation with more levity than management thinks is appropriate. Many of them actually look like they’re having *fun*, for God’s sake! Don’t they realize this is a business?
3. Air personalities have a tremendous amount of (usually untapped) power while they’re on the air. They can say anything...and sometimes they say things that offend advertisers, politicians, friends of management, and even the accepted conventions of good taste. This power makes managers very nervous. How would *you* like to have your multi-million dollar operation in the hands (and mouth) of a wise-ass 20-year old kid?
4. Speaking of 20-year olds, jocks tend to be younger than managers. Often they’re not well educated. This often leads to an unacknowledged attitude of, “Where does that young punk get off trying to give me advice on my operation?”
5. Many air personalities are temperamental. At least, that’s the word managers use when the jocks complain about 100-degree heat in the studio or about the four consecutive 60-second live spots the traffic department scheduled back-to-back-to-back-to-back.
6. Finally — and perhaps most importantly — being an air personality looks easy. I’ve always envied engineers, because no one tries to tell them how to do their jobs. When is the last time you saw a GM look over the shoulder of an engineer and say, “I don’t like the way you’re wiring

that"? But *everyone knows how to talk*, and because all a jock does is talk, it follows that everyone knows how to be an air personality.

Worst of all, from management's viewpoint, is the fact that some members of the public treat these young, unsophisticated, unrefined jocks as stars! They might rarely admit it, but I suspect many salespeople resent jocks because jocks have, for Pete's sake, *fans!* (Salespeople, on the other hand, have *expense accounts*, and many a jock would gladly trade glamour for cash.)

Now let's look at the other side.

### THINGS THAT MAKE JOCKS FEEL LIKE SECOND-CLASS CITIZENS

1. Most of them are poorly paid, in terms of how hard they work, what they contribute to the station's income, and as compared to what others at the station make. If radio salespeople were as poorly paid as talent, they'd be doing a lot more job-hopping, too.
  2. Most jocks have poor or non-existent benefit packages. Salespeople get company cars, expense accounts, restaurant trades, etc. Jocks get free t-shirts and promo records.
  3. Most jocks work six-day weeks, with no overtime. No matter how much money the station is making (and lots of stations make *lots* of money), management stubbornly refuses to part with a few extra bucks to bring in enough good part-timers to let their full-time jocks rest over the entire weekend.
  4. Most stations offer little chance for advancement. Some never promote from within. At others, the highest a jock can hope to reach is Program Director; if the PD never vacates the job, the jock has nowhere to go...except to another station.
  5. Jocks have no job security. Most work without written contracts. Format change? Fire the airstaff. Ratings down? Fire the airstaff. (Just once I'd like to read about a GM who responds to his station's lousy ratings by saying, "Inasmuch as I am responsible for this operation and therefore for our dismal performance, I hereby resign my position.")
  6. Often jocks are not made to feel as though they're part of the team. This brings to mind an incident that happened years ago in San Francisco, at a station where I worked. The all-night jock had worked there for three years. One afternoon he came in for a staff meeting. As he was walking down the hall, the general manager approached him and said, "May I help you?" The GM didn't have any idea who the guy was...after he'd been a full-time employee there for three years!
- If a manager constantly has unhappy experiences with air talent, then I would have to question that person's skills as a manager. If a jock has had nothing but hassles with every manager s/he's ever worked with, then I'd wonder about the jock's attitude.

As a general principle, I don't believe managers have the right to expect loyalty and enthusiasm from their air talent unless and until the station is willing to share the benefits of the operation more equitably ...in terms of dollars, in terms of benefits & perks, in terms of respect, and in terms of appreciation for doing a demanding and — if it's being done well — a difficult job.

## RADIO STORIES

In addition to being a classic Radio Story, the following anecdote should be shared with every program director or manager who wants to learn how to inspire loyalty and dedication among the station's airstaff. It comes from **Ron Stevens** of the comedy team of **Stevens & Grdnic**:

*This happened during my second week at KSHE/St. Louis, where I was doing weekends. We had these old GE transmitters that were guaranteed to kick off once every 12 hours, at which time the jock would have to go turn 'em back on again.*

*It was a Saturday morning, and **Richard Fennelman** was about to do a newscast. I was on the air, and he was walking down the hallway when the transmitters kicked off. A light in the studio came on, letting me know we were off. I knew we were off the air, but Richard didn't know that.*

*So he came into the studio to do his newscast and I immediately turned on the mike and started talking, so he thought I was on the air. I said something like, "It's 10:15, good morning, this is KSHE95. Fennelman's here — what a fucking asshole this guy is!" Naturally, Fennelman's going crazy.*

***Shelly Grafman**, who was the vice president of Century Broadcasting and the general manager of KSHE, called me on the hotline. He said, "Ron, how you doing?"*

*"Fine."*

*"Listen, there's something I wanted to tell you, because you're new and you don't know this: When the transmitters kick off, there's an auxiliary transmitter that automatically kicks in...and when that happens, you can still be heard for about a 25-mile radius. I'd just like you to know that in case anything ever happens." And he hung up.*

*I gained quite an appreciation for that man that day. He had a choice to make. He could have done what a lot of people would do; he could have called me up and raved and went nuts and fired me. But he knew I didn't know. And he knew that now I did know, and I would never forget. And, obviously, I haven't forgotten!*

## LAURIE ALLEN & BRUCE VIDAL

*When this conversation took place, Laurie Allen and Bruce Vidal were competitors in the Los Angeles radio market. Laurie worked 6-10PM at KMGG; Bruce held down the same shift at #1 rated KIIS-FM. Although they worked for competing radio stations, they had a lot of respect for each other. In fact, they even seemed to like each other. They also happened to be married to each other.*

**BRUCE:** I was born & raised in L.A., and I was a KHJ freak. I knew all the jingles, all the jock line-ups. I would drive along with friends and read billboards like a Boss Jock, and they'd say, "Gosh, you really sound like those guys." When I was 22, I went to Career Academy's School of Broadcasting. They got me my first job at KCII in Washington, Iowa.

It was a real good learning experience. I did everything. I think these days there's not as many young people getting into the business who are willing to do that, to go in and really pay their dues and learn their craft.

*O'DAY: I tell people who want to get into radio that they'd better love it, because that's all that will carry them through the first few years. You've got to have something that makes you want to go into the production room after hours and learn all this stuff....*

**BRUCE:** Oh, yeah. I used to have a collection of jingle tags from WLS and KHJ, and when we'd turn the station off the air, the news director and I would go into the control room. I would run the board for him, playing the big time radio jingles, and he would try to do breaks like the guys in Chicago and Los Angeles.

*O'DAY: Where'd you go from there?*

**BRUCE:** I got the big ego. After two years I thought I was really a great disc jockey and was ready for the big time. So I decided to come back to Los Angeles. Well, my tape was terrible. It was great in Washington, Iowa, but it wasn't playing in L.A. Finally I called the guy who owned the chain of stations I'd worked for in Iowa, and he said he'd take me at their station in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota — KDLM. I stayed there for a couple of years, and that's where I met Laurie.

**LAURIE:** I grew up in the plains area of Minnesota, on a farm. I'd listen to WLS at night, KDWB during the day. I always wanted to be on the radio. When I was 14 I went down to the local station in a nearby town of about 5,000 (Morris, Minnesota) and was told, "You're a good girl, Laurie, but radio isn't for girls like you."

So I went to the local businesses and asked if I could write and record their commercials for them. The night jock at KMRS, **John Messenger**, let me come in there at night. I would rewrite these people's commercials and record them. I charged them 25¢. After two years of doing that,

my rates went up to \$10 per commercial.

Eventually I went to the Brown Institute of Broadcasting in Minneapolis. My first radio job was at KDLM, where I met Bruce. We've been best friends since that first day we met. That was nine years ago.

**BRUCE:** About six months after we met, the chain bought KCLD in St. Cloud, MN. They wanted me to do mornings, which meant I had to learn how to be a personality.

**LAURIE:** I couldn't get a job in St. Cloud, but I got one at a country station a friend of mine ran about 45 minutes south, in Princeton. I did afternoons there for a while, at \$3 an hour. Actually, once they said they were having financial problems and asked if I would take a pay cut. I said no!

**BRUCE:** A buddy of mine, **Jerry Dean**, became the program director at KGGO/Des Moines. He called and asked if I wanted to do middays, and I said, "Hell, yeah." I knew that would be a good launching pad, and I was right because seven weeks later I got a call from **Steve Brown**. He'd been driving around listening to radio stations, heard me, and wanted me to do middays at KOIL.

**LAURIE:** They said, "We'll probably hire your wife, too," but when we got down there they said, "We don't think Omaha is ready for a female disc jockey." They made me write commercials, be a receptionist, run the FM tapes, do their public affairs spots...and I hated it. Finally the PD got fired and **Jimmy O'Neil** was made PD. I made Jimmy come into my office and shut the door and wouldn't let him out until he promised to put me on 10PM-2AM.

**BRUCE:** We were in Omaha about 2 1/2 years and then spent 2 1/2 years in St. Louis, where I worked at KWK.

**LAURIE:** I worked for KMOX-FM until the PD told me the sales department didn't think I sounded good at middays...and he fired me. I went across the street to KSD-FM where **Gerry DeFrancesco** was the new PD, and he put me on 7-Midnight. After four or five months Bruce came home and said he'd gotten an offer from KIOI in San Francisco ...and I really didn't want to go. I'd finally gotten a job where I could be talking over music and having a good time and I loved the people. Our first ratings book was great. But Bruce really wanted to go, and he talked me into quitting and going to San Francisco.

**BRUCE:** I shouldn't have done that. I'll never make her do anything like that again, because she was out of work in San Francisco for eight months.

**LAURIE:** I couldn't find a job. Finally I cleaned toilets for a condominium association.



**O'DAY:** *So, Bruce, if you were back in the same situation, what would you do?*

**BRUCE:** I would stay in St. Louis.

**LAURIE:** But you know, Bruce, I never would've asked you to stay. But I wanted you to make a provision that if you got the job, they'd have to hire me part-time or something. Just something to hang onto until I could make my own way in San Francisco.

**BRUCE:** I probably didn't assert myself enough. Ultimately she wound up working at KIOI.

**LAURIE:** Yeah, they did hire me part-time. It took me a long time to talk him into it, but I called **Rob Sherwood** constantly: "When you gonna put me on, Rob?" Then I repaid them shortly after that by quitting and taking my husband with me! I went to Los Angeles to work for KIIS-FM.

**O'DAY:** *You didn't have a job when you came to L.A., did you, Bruce?*

**BRUCE:** No. After a couple of weeks, they put me on part-time at KIIS. So far I've done every shift on this station. When they put me on 6-10PM, I started having the most fun I've ever had.

**LAURIE:** KIIS decided to change format to become more hit-oriented, and they thought I didn't fit the format. So I got a job doing middays at KNX-FM. Then they changed to KKHR, and I got fired. I was without a job for nearly a year before getting hired at KMGG. This job is so marvelous. They actually want me to do a high energy show, and they really believe in me.

**O'DAY:** *Do your listeners know you guys are married to each other?*

**BRUCE:** No.

**LAURIE:** Some of them do.

**BRUCE:** Some of them do, but we don't talk about each other on the air. We're competitors.

**O'DAY:** *How have you influenced each other in terms of what you do on the air?*

**LAURIE:** We always critique each other's tapes. Usually Sunday night is our radio night. I tell him what I'm doing wrong when we listen to my tape, and he tells me what I'm doing right. And then we listen to his tape and he mercilessly criticizes himself and I tell him what he's doing right.

**O'DAY:** *It seems nice that you each have somebody whom you trust and who knows radio and knows your career.*

**BRUCE:** We've been lucky in that respect. I had an off-night last night. A damn record ran out on me while I was editing the "Boogie Line." When I got in the car that night, I was so pissed off about that five or ten seconds of dead air that I was completely overwrought. And Laurie was able to smooth it out, to tell me, "Look, what makes you think you're better than anyone else? Do you think you're the only guy who ever let a record run out?" And it really helped to hear another professional telling me, "It's okay. We all do that."

*O'DAY: Laurie, what would happen if tomorrow you were offered that job you've always dreamed of at WLS?*

**LAURIE:** I'd say, "Well, if I can work a part-time situation for my husband...."

**BRUCE:** I'll tell you one thing: If she wanted to go, we'd go whether I had a job or not.

## BARSKY

*One day I received an aircheck from Scott Walker, Program Director of WCAU-FM/Philadelphia, along with a note: "Dan...Here's a sample of our morning man, Barsky. He's one of the new breed — proving that a personality can be creative, entertaining and very funny without rambling on for five minutes. It's a good example of how a 'jock' can be a 'personality' within the limitations of a 'Hot Hits' style format."*

*Well, I'd never heard of Barsky...but his tape blew me away. He's fast & funny & exceptionally creative in putting together satirical production pieces that don't lose their punch after just one listen. So I called him up, and our conversation follows.*

**BARSKY:** I grew up in New York, listening to guys like **Dan Ingram**. But I didn't grow up wanting to be in radio. I got into radio because it seemed like fun, playing records and getting paid for it. What I really was interested in was comedy, and I was influenced by people like **Robert Klein, Richard Pryor, Lenny Bruce, George Carlin**. In fact, I got into the disc jockey thing by imitating Carlin's "Wonderful WINO" bit.

When I first got into the business, my main concern was how deep my voice sounded. At that stage in your career, everyone wants to be **Charlie Van Dyke**. But then I decided that the only way I'd get to where I want to be and make the kind of money I want to make and achieve the recognition I want is to be myself. I began to concentrate more on *what* I say rather than on how it sounds.

*O'DAY: You started in college radio?*

**BARSKY:** Yeah, at Brockport State (New York). I did college radio for about a month. It was a time when everybody was doing the album rock thing, and I was the only guy doing a mass appeal thing. I took a job with WWBK in Brockton for about a month, where I was doing some outrageous stuff on the air, and I more or less moved on into Rochester. It happened so fast for me. Three months after I got on the air, I was working in Rochester at WAXC, which is now defunct. Then I went to WBBF, part-time. I was still in college full-time. After I graduated college, I landed a full-time evening slot at WHFM in Rochester.

*O'DAY: What is your degree in?*

**BARSKY:** Originally it was supposed to be Social Work, and then I switched to Communications. No offense to anybody, but I have to say I didn't learn a damn thing in school — except how to throw up and not hit my shoes.

*O'DAY: That is a valuable thing to know.*

**BARSKY:** WHFM is where I really started to get into my own character. I came to WHFM in 1978, doing 7-Midnight. We did real well. I started doing a lot of bits. I was working for Rust Communications; they give you a ten buck raise after ten years of service. I decided to take my act across the street to WBBF, which was the premiere Top 40 station in Rochester.

I really liked Rochester, because I was able to do anything I wanted on the air. I had a piece of a side business up there, so I was making money off-the-air, too.

I got a call in 1982 from **Rick Sklar** for Super Radio. He had heard about me and was looking for an undiscovered air talent that he was going to bill as the up-and-coming personality of the '80s. The other guys they had were **Dan Ingram**, **Larry Lujack**, people like that; I was the only unknown they hired. Financially it was one of those deals that I just couldn't turn down, so I went for it. For about two months we had a dry run period where all of us were in the studio, getting used to the format...and they pulled the service about a week before it was set to go on.

After that I was in limbo for about a month, and Rick Sklar was talking to a lot of people about me. CBS called, wanting to hear a tape. All along nobody knew who I was; they'd never even heard of me. *Still* no one knows who I am; Sklar calls me radio's best-kept secret!

WCAU-FM was doing a strict Hot Hits format, and I told them, "I know what you do and you know what I do; can we put it together? I don't know if I can do your format." They said that down the line they wanted to evolve from Hot Hits into more of a mass appeal radio station, and they wanted a high profile personality who would evolve with them gradually. During the year-and-a-half I've been here, it's been a very gradual evolution toward a full-service show.

*O'DAY: How would you describe your show to someone who's never heard it?*

**BARSKY:** I call it controlled insanity. I try to be as outrageous as I possibly can without really hurting somebody. I try to be funny, to be natural, to relate to people in terms of what they're thinking. Sometimes I may tend to go a little too hip for the mainstream.

*O'DAY: You're very plugged into show biz-type humor.*

**BARSKY:** Yeah. I'm a comedian. I try to be a person having a good time on-the-air, the kind of guy you'd like to hang out with. I don't do something just for shock value. In the produced stuff I do, I'm just trying to be creative. It doesn't have to be hilarious.

*O'DAY: You do lots of Jewish ethnic references and voices on the show. Is there a heavy Jewish population in Philadelphia?*

**BARSKY:** Yeah, and I'm Jewish, so it seems to be okay with them. I do it all tongue-in-cheek. I do black voices, Italian, gay, everybody. It's all in fun. When I first came here, people took me

seriously and there were lots of complaint calls. But now they're used to it. The other day I was thinking, "Jeez, I'm not getting any complaints any more; am I doing something wrong??"

*O'DAY: Even with the gay stuff? That's the only thing of yours I've heard that I did find offensive, because it seemed to be a real stereotyped attitude. I mean, you do Jewish voices but not Jewish stereotypes...but the gay stuff you do seems to rely on negative stereotypes.*

**BARSKY:** The bit you're talking about was, in a way. But at the time there was a hassle with the gays in town, petitioning radio & television stations for discriminating against them. They wanted gay public service shows. It was a real big story. So I said the hell with this; I'll take a couple of shots here. It was a little racy, and it might have been offensive.

Something like "Kosher Club" (a Barsky take-off on *Boy George's "Culture Club,"* not to be confused with the *Rhino Records* release), on the other hand, is really cute. One guy called up to tell me he was offended and that if I weren't Jewish he'd really raise a stink...but because I am, he figured it was okay.

*O'DAY: It's a shame he couldn't make that judgment based on the material and not on your background.*

**BARSKY:** Exactly. When **Richard Pryor** goofs on black people, it's okay...But it's not okay for some white comic; then it's seen as prejudice. Anyway, I think now everyone's used to me, they know what I'm doing...and if I go over the line, I hear about it.

*O'DAY: What do you do for show prep?*

**BARSKY:** I do my produced stuff the night before. I get off the air at 9:00, and then I'll take two hours working on new ideas. I go home, take a nap. I come back around 6:00 or 7:00 and work on my produced stuff...for as long as it takes.

*O'DAY: Some of the bits you do are very long for a Hot Hits format.*

**BARSKY:** When I came on here, I had a 15-second limit...which was the toughest chore of my life. It was incredibly tough, and I had some real battles with my program director. But we worked together on it, and it was a gradual evolution. I think a major factor in determining whether you're going to be successful as a personality is whether or not the management has trust in what you're doing. They have to trust you.

## JONATHON BRANDMEIER

*I first heard of Jonathon Brandmeier when he was doing mornings at WYBR/Rockford, Illinois, in the late '70s. Since then his career has become a bit more high-profile, highlighted by great ratings successes first in Phoenix and now in that legendary radio city, Chicago. As the morning jock at WLUP, he rose from the bottom of the ratings to the top...in less than four years. I asked Johnny whom he grew up listening to on the radio.*

**BRANDMEIER:** Oh, Larry Lujack! I remember when his book, *Superjock*, came out. I was working at WOSH/Oshkosh. I called WCFL, not expecting ever to get Lujack. But he answered the phone, and I almost had a heart attack!

He said, “(Lujack-type voice:) Heh-low!”

“Hello, um, I’m calling from Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and I was wondering where I could get the new Larry Lujack book.”

He said, “From *where*??”

“Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.”

And he said, “Your live bait shop!”

And he hung up on me! I thought, “What the hell was that?”

And then I turned on my little transistor radio and there I was, coming out of “You’re No Good” by Linda Ronstadt, talking to Larry Lujack via the tape recorder. I couldn’t believe it; I thought that was the coolest thing I’d ever heard!

I grew up in Fond du Lac, and everyone I listened to was at WLS because it was the big, 50,000-watt clear channel station. And all the guys I listened to turned out to be my competition: Lujack, Fred Winston, Landecker....

**O’DAY:** *What brought you into radio?*

**BRANDMEIER:** I was 15 years old and playing drums with the general manger of WFON/Fond du Lac. I said, “Hey, I’d like to go to school to learn how to be a radio personality.” Ever since I could remember, I’d been entertaining people. He said, “Just come in and watch these guys and see what they do.”

So I came in and they gave me a weekend shift. That was in 1973. When I was 16, I had my own night show.

From there I went to WOSH/Oshkosh — and you have to understand, that was like, Oh my god! That was the big AM! The dream was for me to go to OshKosh to Milwaukee and then to Chicago.

What happened, though, was I went from WOSH to nights at KLIV/San Jose, and then I played for four or five months in a band that toured the midwest. Then I joined WYBR and then went to WOKY/Milwaukee. I went there to do nights, and they moved me into middays.

The Charter Company tried to get me to go to Miami to do mornings, to Detroit...I wouldn't move. You see, I always was very particular about where I wanted to go. Most disc jockeys throw something in the back of a U-Haul at the drop of a hat. But you've got to be happy personally before you can be happy on the air.

But I never really thought about me being "in radio;" I just thought I was entertaining people. It's very funny the way my career went, because I entertained when I was 15 through 17, and then when I got to the "big" stations they told me to shut up and play the hits. At WOKY my program director told me, "If you don't stay off the phones, your career is over."

Then in 1980 I won the Drake-Chenault Top 5 Talent Contest. I never got so many calls in my life as a result! But I didn't want to leave. I was in Milwaukee with all my friends, family, favorite bars; I was happier than hell.

I remember sitting in a car in Milwaukee with **Don Benson**, who was programming KZZP/Phoenix. He said to me, "You know, John, you can never get too comfortable. If opportunity knocks and you don't answer, you may never get another chance."

And I'm thinking, "That sure sounds stupid, but he may be right."

And then he said to me, "And we'll double your salary."

And that made a hell of a lot more sense than any stupid cliché! He said, "We'll double your salary, we'll give you a contract, and we'll give you enough rope to hang yourself." I couldn't believe finally someone was going to let me do what I wanted to do. I was at KZZP for exactly two years, and then in '83 I went to The Loop.

*O'DAY: How would you describe your show to someone who never has heard of it?*

**BRANDMEIER:** Reality. There's nothing funnier to me than real people. On my show, people call me up because they're not afraid of me. They figure if *I* can do it, *they* can do it. I'm a ringmaster, and it's an open circus every morning.

Nowadays you see people all over the country who get on the air and say, "Penis! Ha ha ha!" —

for no reason. “I’ve got a big *penis!* Ha ha ha!” Well, big deal! Anybody can say that! I don’t do that; I’m not into shock radio. I can be obnoxious, I guess, but I’m not mean. I like to have fun.

*O’DAY: In the past it’s sounded to me like you’ve been influenced by Johnny Carson and more recently by David Letterman.*

**BRANDMEIER:** Somebody wrote an article in which they said I’m like a radio Letterman. I don’t really watch David Letterman, but if there’s anything you could compare me to it probably would be him, because he’s not afraid to get the people involved. He’s not afraid to show that something isn’t working. And on my show, I never know what’s going to happen.

*O’DAY: Are you saying, then, that you go on the air without having planned anything in advance?*

**BRANDMEIER:** Absolutely not. I remember in Phoenix when things really got big, I thought that whatever I said was good enough. And I think that’s one of the biggest mistakes somebody could make. Now I’ll go home for the weekend and I’ll say, “All right. When you come back in on Monday, act like you’ve never done it before.”

In Chicago, you’re picking up new listeners *every day*. There are so many people that we’ve yet to hit. So you’ve got to keep performing like the first day you got the job.

So...There *are* some regular, recurring bits we do, and now you can write about them so everyone in the country can steal them!

We do “Answering Machine Olympics,” in which people send me the phone numbers for their answering machines and we play the Olympics theme and call them up. We have judges who rate the machine messages from 1 to 10.

We do a thing called “Celebrity Extortion.” For example, a while back **Michael J. Fox** was doing a movie in town. So I went on the air and said, “Hey Michael — Johnny. I know you’re listening, so I’ll give you one day to call me back and stop in the studio. I’m not going to go through your people to set up an interview. You’ve got to just call me and come over here. Let’s talk!”

Every hour I would say, “Hey, Michael J. Fox...Hey! Johnny here! Looking for you!”

He didn’t call. So 15 minutes before 10, I said, “That’s it, Michael. Your time’s up. Celebrity Blackmail!”

I have listeners all over the place, and they call me up and say, “Johnny! Michael J. Fox is filming today at a hospital outside of Chicago” — and they name the hospital.



So I said, "I want my listeners to follow you on the set of your movie today." I announced on-the-air exactly where he was going to be. And he had people hassling him all day: "Michael, call Johnny! Michael, call Johnny!"

The next day he just walked in and said, "I oughta ring your neck!" And he sat down and we did two hours of radio. It's cool to be in downtown Chicago, in the John Hancock Building. Not many stars were driving out in the desert when I was working in Phoenix, so we couldn't do stuff like this on a regular basis.

Friday is "Dr. Brandmeier," when I do Primal Scream therapy of the airwaves. I'll let people get on the air and tell their boss to take this job and shove it, and it becomes one of the most unbelievable things. These people go out of their minds!

We have "Meet A Friend At A Phone Booth." I'll say, "All right. The first person to call me from a phone booth and tell me where you are will meet some friends."

We'll go to some commercials and come out and it'll be a total zoo out there: people all over the place, beeping their horns, screaming, going nuts. We did this in Phoenix, too, but to do it in Chicago is so much more exciting. That's what makes me the happiest, to get listeners involved in the show.

*O'DAY: A lot has been written about your concerts. You and your band ("Johnny & The Leisure Suits") have become a huge drawing card in Chicago.*

**BRANDMEIER:** Yeah! In Phoenix we'd get 3,000 people paying five bucks a piece to see us...but sometimes we'd give the tickets away. In Chicago it's \$17.50 plus parking. I don't think there is another radio personality in the country who can sell 5,000 tickets to a show at \$17.50.

*O'DAY: What draws so many people to pay to see your concert? Would you say it's the musical performance, the comedy, the overall entertainment aspect...?*

**BRANDMEIER:** First, I believe they come to see the guy on the radio. But when I go onstage, I try to bring them a totally different personality. When someone pays 17 bucks, why should I go onstage and say, "(Announcer Voice:) Hi, everybody, Jonathon Brandmeier, how ya doin', good to see you!" and expect everybody to be happy? I go out there and *kick* for 2 1/2 hours. We work hard. It's musical, it's fun, it's videos...a fast-paced, high energy show.

This is the stuff that really excites me, because you get to go out and actually *see* these people. If there's a disc jockey out there who reads this and says, "Well, I don't like to go out and perform, I don't like to be with the people" — then buddy, you're in the wrong business! You'd better find something else to do, because the people are what's listening to your radio show. If you can't get out there and be among your people, then you've got a problem.

I'm not saying you have to have a band or you have to do stand-up comedy. I'm just saying you have to be able to relate to these people in some way. If you can't entertain them in person, how are you going to entertain them on the radio?

*O'DAY: What if some jock were to respond to that by saying he really likes creating the illusion of radio and that he doesn't want to go out there and have it ruined by people seeing that he's just an average guy?*

**BRANDMEIER:** There's a point to that. But that's the kind of show I don't enjoy listening to.

*O'DAY: Last subject: You were a big success in Phoenix and now a huge success in Chicago. But when you first hit Chicago, it wasn't that way...not for quite a while.*

**BRANDMEIER:** Right. But the thing is, if you look at the books you'll see that the ratings did nothing but go up. Slowly but surely, up.

*O'DAY: But for the first year-and-a-half, it was going up very slowly.*

**BRANDMEIER:** Right, real slow. But I also want you to think about this: One, we're in a city the size of Chicago. Two, when I came to The Loop, it was 55 minutes per hour of the loudest, head-bangingest rock music you've ever heard: **Ozzy Osbourne, Judas Priest**....And here comes Jonathon Brandmeier and this new image of an adult radio station. For the year before I got there, they did not talk at all on WLUP.

*O'DAY: How did it feel when you were working hard and doing a creative, adult entertainment show and the ratings stayed real low?*

**BRANDMEIER:** I never, ever felt it...because there always was a buzz in the street. Even in the first year, I was in the newspapers, on television.

If I walked into a restaurant today and didn't hear someone talking about me or went out to do a personal appearance and somebody didn't come up to me and say, "Hey, Johnny, when you did that thing today..." — then I'd know that my show is not happening any more. If a year from now they tell me I'm Number One on paper but nobody talks about me any more, this show will *not* be Number One.

## C.J. BRONSON

*C.J. Bronson has long been one of my favorite air personalities. Whenever someone asks me how to be fun and funny while at the same time being real, I say, "Listen to C.J." I began my conversation with CJ in the traditional way: at the beginning. I asked where she began her radio career.*

**CJ:** KSTP-AM, St. Paul. I did two weekend shifts, then I was pulled off the air because Hubbard Broadcasting didn't want a woman on the air; that's what I was told, not by Hubbard but by the PD. The morning man then used me as his "mystery woman." I wasn't paid for this, but he'd call me up and I'd do bits with him. Then I moved to Sacramento: KCRA, KROY, KEZS, KROI...and then to KNBR/San Francisco in 1976.

*O'DAY: Did you always do a personality-oriented show?*

**CJ:** No, not at KROY or KROI; they were time & temp.

*O'DAY: Tell me about your show these days.*

**CJ:** It's from 4:00 to 7:00PM.

*O'DAY: I guess that covers it pretty well. What do you do for show prep?*

**CJ:** I go through three or four newspapers a day. I'm constantly aware of what entertainment is going on in town. I do a lot of phoners with people who are in town performing.

*O'DAY: Do you have a producer who lines up those interviews for you?*

**CJ:** No, I do everything. I also have local comedians come in and record drop-in lines. Once a week I have a comedy co-host — either someone nationally known who's in town or a local comedian. **Sandra Bernhardt** was here, and it was great fun. **Robin Williams** called up while she was on. I have a lot of freedom to have something wonderful like that happen.

I have Dr. Goodtimes, a resident shrink. People can call up and speak to him. Now, this is on a cart with about seven or eight stop-punches. Dr. Goodtimes says, "Hello, tell me how you feel." The next one is, "Ummm, hmmm, go on." The next one is, "Oh, very interesting." And the person talks about whatever is stressing him, and it's very funny.

I also have a Former Bluebird Hall of Fame for women who were Bluebirds.

*O'DAY: Bluebirds?*

**CJ:** Bluebirds are to Campfire Girls as Brownies are to Girl Scouts. Each Tuesday I ask former Bluebirds to call in, and I pick a phone call and the woman gives me a Bluebird Memory and then gives me her Bluebird Indian name. I have about two bars of “Pomp & Circumstance,” and it fades down and there are little birds singing, “*Tweet tweet tweet!*” And we induct her into the Former Bluebird Hall of Fame, and we send her this special packet from the Campfire Girls. It’s so stupid that it’s hilarious.

**O’DAY:** *And what was your Bluebird Indian name?*

**CJ:** Skuwaneeka.

**O’DAY:** *Does that mean something?*

**CJ:** Laughing Waters.

**O’DAY:** *I like it. I wonder why I’ve never heard of Bluebirds?*

**CJ:** It’s due to bad press, and it pisses me off! They never get any attention. I think mostly liberals entered the Bluebirds, and Republicans went into the Brownies. Former Bluebirds are delighted by this feature, and there are a lot of them out there.

I also have CJ’s Spotlight, which runs five times a day, five days a week; it’s me reviewing plays and movies and restaurants and events and anything that’s happening. I have the Dumb Joke Corner, which is four dumb jokes a day. Listeners call a lot of them in, and I put a rim shot after each one.

I’m using a lot more sound effects, going for the old imagination, brightening things up. Like the other day was the anniversary of FDR’s first fireside chat. So I had this fire crackling when **Bob Lazich**, our newsman, came to sit down, and I said, “*Let’s chat informally about economics.*” He said, “*Well, I’ve got \$1.23 in my pocket,*” and I said, “*Well, let’s draw a big pie. Ten cents of that is for defense; that’ll go toward deodorant....*” We chatted informally about economics, and then he did the news with this fire roaring in the background. And that kind of thing, I think, is real entertaining. Rather than saying, “*On this day in history...*” and going into the record.

If I do an animal story, I play an instrumental version of “Old MacDonald” in the background. It’s not overwhelming. It’s just got a kind of tasteful irreverence about it.

**O’DAY:** *It sounds like it helps to keep the show unpredictable.*

**CJ:** Exactly. And we still play the old “*C.J. sounds like someone you’d like to know*” jingle. That’s what they’re after with me.

*O'DAY: You sound very natural on-the-air. Was that something you had to learn in terms of projecting more of you and less of, say, an "announcer"-type?*

**CJ:** No.

*O'DAY: So you always were you on-the-air.*

**CJ:** I think so. I think that's why I didn't work well in Top 40, why it was difficult for me. Technically it was fun, getting things in in eight seconds, but I never had the punch and the announcery type of voice.

*O'DAY: How else do you work with your support people in your show?*

**CJ:** Well, I always talk to my sports commentator. Getting into the news and out of the spots, we usually have some sort of a nice rapport. Sometimes I'll just tell a joke and they'll laugh...or they won't laugh. I always tell **Ralph Barbieri**, our sports guy, how many seconds we have over the intro of the next song, and we do whatever we do. Bob is a wonderful newsman, and Ralph is very, very bright. Today I described him as the centerfold for *Roger's Thesaurus*.

Another thing about the afternoon show that's becoming very apparent is that people know if they're listening in the afternoon, they will hear what is going on in the Bay Area. There are ways of integrating that so that it's not just an entertainment calendar. There's getting a phone call here or getting some sound from something that's happening in town. Even if the listeners want to go home and sit on their couches for the weekend, they feel hip because they know what's happening. They're not going to read about it Monday and say, "What?? That happened??"

*O'DAY: Have you ever had major disagreements with management over programming aspects of your show?*

**CJ:** Not this management, not this PD. The one before him I did.

*O'DAY: What were the issues?*

**CJ:** He didn't like me.

*O'DAY: That one's kind of hard to negotiate.*

**CJ:** Yeah, it was real difficult. He put me down to one day a week. He just didn't like me. But **Bob Reynolds** is the PD right now, and he has the marvelous ability to understand the technical aspects of radio and to understand the more ethereal, creative aspects of radio and to be in tune with the listener and to know how to handle the different personalities he has *and* to deal with upper management. He's amazing.

**O'DAY:** *Have you noticed any advantages to being a female personality?*

**CJ:** Yes. More people like you ask me what it's like to be a woman air personality and give me press. On the other hand, that's sad because there are many men who are as good or better than I am as a personality and they're not getting written about, but *I* am because I'm a woman. And I think, "What does it feel like being a woman in radio?" is a silly question. Let me reverse it: What does it feel like being a man in radio?

**O'DAY:** *I've never had anyone tell me I shouldn't be a personality jock because I'm a man. It seems to be assumed that that's okay. But I do know some female jocks who've said to me, "Gee, I'm so depressed because I apply for jobs and they say, 'Well, we like you but audiences just don't like funny women.'" And getting back to your question, I've never had a PD or GM say, "Dan, you really shouldn't do humor because audiences don't like funny men."*

**CJ:** No one's ever told me that about humor; no one's ever said don't be funny. They always encourage me to be more entertaining. Maybe "Don't be cutesy" is something I've heard. But yes, there are things that have upset me. One of the things is I have a friend who is looking for work now, and she's being told that the station "has its woman." They've already got their full-time woman, their quota. That's irritating. That hurts. People with that kind of mentality aren't talking to women as personalities; they're just looking for other men because they've already got their woman. There are some women who say, "God, they've already got two women — one part-time and one full-time; I'm not going to apply there." I know women who are going through that right now. So there are people who see you as a "girl" and not as a personality; that does exist.

**O'DAY:** *I've been listening to you for years, and I've always thought you're very funny and entertaining. I know that for several years you were doing overnight relief; do you think if you were a man you possibly could have moved into a drive-time shift earlier?*

**CJ:** That's difficult to answer, and I'll tell you why: In Sacramento at KCRA, I started in overnights and it took me a couple of months before I was doing 7 to Midnight. Then there were lay-offs, which were done by seniority, so I was out the door. The other stations I worked for at brief periods again were evening or overnight shifts, but when I got to KNBR — well, that station is a dinosaur! The morning man has been there for 20 years. I am *still* the newest employee, and I've been there over eight years! Now I'm working a nice, 3-hour afternoon drive shift, but it took time for the openings to come up.

**O'DAY:** *What has your audience feedback been like?*

**CJ:** It takes time for people to accept something different, and a woman on the air is different. And then they're so proud of themselves when they finally decide they like you. I think women listeners come around easier than men lately, and I think that's because women are not seeing

other women as competition any more. They read other women like autobiographies they can learn from. Women who listen to me love the fact that I feel good about my life and about what I'm doing, and they get off on it. That's wonderful. Ten years ago it might have been true when people said, "Women don't want to listen to a woman on the air," but I don't think that's true today.

*O'DAY: You're in a major market that many people visit; how does it feel, knowing that young women and girls are hearing you and that some of them are being influenced by you?*

**CJ:** Oh, I love it! I speak at schools, women call me up...I love it! And I tell them what great fun it is, and how it keeps you youthful and how you can make your whole life tax deductible....

*O'DAY: And it also helps get you named on of San Francisco's "100 Most Eligible Bachelorettes."*

**CJ:** If you remain lonely! I call that list "The 100 Most Lonely Women in San Francisco!"

## **E.J. CRUMMEY: WORKING WITH THE WOLFMAN**

*When this interview took place, New York City's WNBC broadcast "The Wolfman Jack Show" five days a week, from midnight until 5:25AM. The Wolfman was on tape, not live; it was his syndicated show. But unlike its counterparts elsewhere, the WNBC version gave him an on-air partner: E.J. Crummy.*

*E.J. (real name: Edward Joseph Crumme) began his professional career at WHEB/Portsmouth in 1972. Before coming to WNBC, he did mornings at New York's WAPP. "I try to approach the show as though I'm a morning man," he said. "I want the all-night show to sound hot."*

*What made this show unique was the fact that listeners were able to "talk to" Wolfman Jack on the request line, on-the-air. I asked E.J. to describe his role on the show.*

**EJ:** It's definitely the Wolfman's show. I'm kind of like his master of ceremonies, although I do a lot of funny stuff. Basically mine is a support role for the Wolfman, to allow him to get through to his listeners, to give him some immediacy.

.....

**CALLER:** Hey, this is Alan from Staten Island. How's the Wolfman doing tonight?

**EJ:** Hey, Wolfman, how you doing, babe?

**WOLFMAN:** Request Line Speaking.

**CALLER:** I want to year "Maybe I'm Amazed."

**WOLFMAN:** You got it!

**EJ:** Hey Wolfman! (Record intro begins) They've got a party on Staten Island tonight!

**WOLFMAN:** (laughs, howls)

.....

**EJ:** Even though it's a taped show, we go out of our way to make it sound as live as possible. Some people don't know he's taped and some people do. To me it doesn't make any difference as long as everybody is having a good time.

.....



**CALLER:** Hey, I'm calling from Cleveland!

**EJ:** And what do you do in Cleveland?

**CALLER:** I work for Viacom cable company.

**WOLFMAN:** What do you want to hear??

**CALLER:** How about some **R.E.O. Speedwagon**, "Can't Fight The Feeling?"

**WOLFMAN:** We're looking for it right now baby! Keep listening on 66 WNBC!

.....

**EJ:** In the beginning, I used to try to make it seem as though Wolfman is live. And I found that when I really tried to adhere to that, I couldn't have as much fun. So I try not to concern myself with that. I try to concern myself with, "Are the calls sounding wild & crazy? Are people excited? Are the calls coming in? Is that energy flowing?" And when that's happening, it doesn't seem to make any difference anymore whether he's there or not...and ironically, once you let go of that it starts to sound more wild & crazy and the net effect is he does start to sound like he's there.

.....

**CALLER:** Yeah, I'm calling to talk to the Wolfman.

**EJ:** Who's this?

**CALLER:** This is Karen, from Brooklyn. My husband's out there working, so I wanted to say hello to him.

**EJ:** Yeah, it only costs you 50 cents per dedication.

**CALLER:** It costs 50 cents for a dedication? How you gonna get the 50 cents from me?

**EJ:** I don't know. Wolfer, how are we gonna get that money?

**WOLFMAN:** (laughs)

**EJ:** So you want to talk to the Wolfer?

**CALLER:** Sure.

**WOLFMAN:** Hi, who's this on the Wolfman Jack WNBC lust line?

**CALLER:** Hello?

**WOLFMAN:** What do you want me to play for you tonight, sweet baby?

**CALLER:** I want you to play "Different Drum" by **Linda Ronstadt**.

**WOLFMAN:** You got it! What's your favorite radio station?

**CALLER:** WNBC!

.....

**EJ:** I've had people who, in the middle of the phone call, say stuff like, "Oh, I know he's not really there," and then I'll play the Wolfman saying something to the guy, and he'll start responding to the tape as though he's really talking to the Wolfman! If somebody calls up and says, "I know he's not really there," I'll say, "What?? You don't think the Wolfman is here???" And then I'll play the Wolfman saying something.

.....

**WOLFMAN:** WNBC lust line!

**CALLER:** This is Amy.

**WOLFMAN:** What do you want me to play for you here tonight, sweet baby?

**CALLER:** I want to here "I'm Just A Gigolo" by **David Lee Roth**.

**WOLFMAN:** (record intro begins) What's your favorite radio station?

**CALLER:** Uh....66 WNBC!

**EJ:** You sound pretty excited about it, Amy!

**WOLFMAN:** Bye! (vocal begins)

## RICK DEES

*When I first came to Los Angeles in 1969, I noticed an intriguing phenomenon: I kept over-hearing these weird conversations:*

*“Did you hear what the Rabbit said last night?”*

*“Tuna was so funny this morning....”*

*Tuna? The Rabbit? Well, I soon learned that **Charlie Tuna** was KHJ's morning disc jockey, and **Jimmy Rabbit** worked evenings at KRLA. And people actually talked about what these “DJs” were doing!*

*Since that time, it's seemed to me that radio personalities have had little effect on the consciousness of Los Angeles...until Rick Dees came to KIIS-FM. According to the Spring 1984 Arbitron ratings (the approximate time my conversation with Rick took place), over 20% of the radio audience aged 18-34 tuned in Rick Dees every morning ...along with almost 16% of Adults 18-49 and 11.3% of all adults. In Los Angeles in the 1980s, 11.3 was phenomenal for a music station.*

*Rick's radio career had its genesis at Grimsley High School in Greensboro, North Carolina....*

**DEES:** I sat behind a guy in history class who had the biggest adam's apple I've ever seen. I thought he had swallowed a watermelon whole. His name was **Paul Allen**, and he did the announcing on WGBG, a country station in Greensboro. They had him do the announcements for the class plays, which I was involved in, and I used to imitate him. Finally he realized I was putting him on — he had this *deep* voice — and he said, “If you think you're so great, why don't you come down to the station and try out?” I said, “What does it take to be a DJ?”

By the way, I loved the term “DJ” then but I hate it now. I mean, here I am trying to write a film and be on tv, and I get introduced at parties with, “You know Rick Dees. He's that DJ.”

**O'DAY:** *The only thing worse that “DJ” in print is “Deejay.”*

**DEES:** Oh, God, that's even worse! Anytime I'm in a magazine or national publication, it's “Rick Dees, deejay.”

**O'DAY:** *Why do you suppose we react that way to the term “DJ?” I mean, you can call me a jock or an air personality, and that's okay....*

**DEES:** I don't understand why that is. I love being called a clown, a host, an entertainer, a comedian, an idiot, a satirist...

*O'DAY: How about "slimebag?"*

**DEES:** Sure. "Scumbag" is good, too. But I hate being called a DJ. Anyway....I was 17. I went to the station and made an audition tape. It has to be the worst tape ever made. But I passed the audition. One of the reasons for my departure from the station was I was in the back production room, with the lights out, on the floor, with a beautiful secretary. All of the sudden the lights were switched on and the general manager was there. I tried to pull some clothes on and said, "Oh, hi! We're just doing some production." He looked at me and said, "Looks more like reproduction to me."

*O'DAY: (groaning) Is this a real story?*

**DEES:** Honest to God.

*O'DAY: What was your position..um, let me rephrase that: What was your job title back then?*

**DEES:** I was the weekend guy. I played the **Billy Graham** tapes on Sunday mornings.

*O'DAY: Didn't something happen with those tapes one day, something that "livened up" the program?*

**DEES:** Yes. In small radio stations, there's not an overabundance of tape. I had to use this one tape over and over again to record Billy Graham's "Hour of Decision" off the network each week. What I didn't know this particular time was that, the night before, **Paul Allen** and a guy named **Taylor Green** had been recording on that same tape. They were using echo and reverb and saying things like, "Eat one! Shit on my face! You are a sonofabitch asshole!" So I cued up to where I thought Billy Graham began, to the first sound, and announced, "And now, 'The Hour of Decision'"...followed by "Eat one! Shit on my face!" Complete with echo and reverb.

*O'DAY: Were you monitoring what you were broadcasting?*

**DEES:** Well, I was new, so I didn't know how to get it off the air real fast. It aired totally. And this is what amazed me and let me know where my career was going: No one ever called about it.

*O'DAY: And the station manager didn't hear it?*

**DEES:** Well, he would have, but he was in the production room with the secretary!

*O'DAY: Moving right along....Why did you leave WGBG?*

**DEES:** I went to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I worked for the campus radio station there, and that's where the radio bug really bit me bad. I got a job at WCOG in

Greensboro.

*O'DAY: As I recall, that's where you met the man who changed your life: Jay Howard.*

**DEES:** Jay Howard changed my life! He was so talented! What happened was they made me change my name. That was back when if you used your real name, you weren't a star. A guy named **Dusty Dunn** said, "You have to be Jay Howard." He's the one who came up with that name, and if I see him, I'll kill him!

I was Jay Howard for a year, and it just drove me crazy. I wanted to use Rig Dees — "Rigdon" is my name. I was in my hometown and I wanted everyone to know I was on the radio, and I couldn't. I was so depressed, because nobody knew.

After about a year, **Glen Powers** and **George Williams** hired me to do weekends at WTOB in Winston-Salem. I drove 240 miles roundtrip each weekend. Paying for the gas to get me there and back, I actually lost money on the deal. But I was Rick Dees at WTOB.

*O'DAY: Up to this point, had you done anything that you would consider personality?*

**DEES:** A little bit. But they were still wanting to be just like the old KHJ. Then my roommate in college, **Steve Roddy**, went from part-time at WTOB to afternoon drive at WKIX in Raleigh. I used to try to copy his style, because he was so great. He talked WKIX into hiring me for 6-9 at night.

*O'DAY: What year was this?*

**DEES:** 1972. I was still in school, majoring in radio/tv/motion pictures. Every night I was so nervous, I was so intimidated by this. **Frank Marucca** and George Williams called me in and said, "You sound so nervous!" They almost let me go, and by not letting me go they changed my life. They moved me to 9-Midnight.

For me, that was the breaking point. The airshift meant I couldn't do anything at night, I couldn't have a dating life, I couldn't participate in the fraternity I had joined; everything crashed down on me and I felt just terrible. It was the greatest thing in the world, because I started to say, "Aw, what the hell." I loosened up and started being a little bit more "me" within that format, and it got much better. So much so that they said, "Would you like to do the afternoon show at our station in Birmingham, WSGN?"

So I went there to do afternoon drive. The second before I got there, their morning man quit. Glen Powers took a chance on me and put me on mornings. I ended up copying **Pat Patterson**, who was *very* talented. That *is* a form of flattery, but I can see how Pat might say, "Who is this little punk doing me, badly?" I *was* doing him badly. I still wasn't myself. I didn't act like myself.

I do feel, though, that when you're first starting out you have to copy ...until you arrive at what *you* are as a personality. So all during my stay in Birmingham, I was trying to be Pat Patterson.

For some reason I got lucky and was offered a job in Memphis, at WMPS. It was great. Roy Mack and Art Wander said to me, "You have to stop trying to be somebody else. Loosen up. If something happens, if you drop your tape on the floor or something, make a comment about it." They said, "Just be yourself."

*O'DAY: What do you suppose it was that told them you had it in you to be funny? Were you funny when you were off the air?*

**DEES:** Yeah, always. I've always been a clown. So Art Wander said, "Why don't you try just putting some people on the phone, why don't you do some outrageous stunts?"

He gave me the idea. If I didn't pick up the ball, then it wouldn't have happened. But something clicked, and I started listening and reacting. Then I started my personal appearance spree, which has never ended.

*O'DAY: When you were still building your reputation, how did you line up your personal appearances?*

**DEES:** The first thing I did was ask the people at the radio station if they would print up some flyers. They said, "What for?" and I said, "Well, I'm going to put them up on the bulletin boards of businesses all over Memphis, saying I'll come to your office and we'll have a coffee break together, I'll bring record albums, etc."

*O'DAY: This was a totally off-air promotion?*

**DEES:** Yeah. I put the flyers up on bulletin boards in laundromats. I had high school kids put them underneath the windshield wiper blades on cars: "Rick Dees wants to come have coffee with you and bring you free albums."

People started calling and saying, "Hey, would you come out to International Harvester?" So the day before, I'd call the company and say, "Hey, I'm going to be coming out tomorrow and I'll be talking about you on the radio." They'd put it on their inter-office memo so that the whole office staff would be listening.

Well, you have to hit only about 50 major businesses before you realize that somebody out there has a diary. And my gosh, when the ratings book came out, the sales manager came in and his face was *white* — which was tough, 'cause he was a black man! He said, "I can't believe it! You are #1 in this city after six months!" And that's when it started. That's when the confidence kicked in and "Rick Dees" really was born.

That triggered interest in me from other people. When I'd go out and do appearances, I'd try to give them a show. So I did "The Rick Dees X-Rated Puppets" and a lot of things I have to ask forgiveness for from time to time! Finally **Estelle Axton** of Stax Records called and wanted me to do a couple of comedy songs that they would release locally. I did one called "The National Wet-Off." It was about wet t-shirts, and it was terrible, just awful.

The disco thing was starting to hit, so I came up with an idea. There was a song called "Do the Duck" back in 1966. It didn't have any quack-quacks in it, but I remembered it and thought, "Gee, what great alliteration: 'Disco Duck.'" I looked at **Bobby Manuel** when we had the track down, and I said, "My gosh! That could be a smash!"

*O'DAY: Who was the voice of the duck?*

**DEES: Ken Pruett.** So we released it locally. They played it on WMPS one time, and the phones burned out. **Roy Mack**, the program director, flew to L.A. and met with **Al Coury** of RSO Records. Al Coury took it home and played it for his kids, who thought it was the greatest record ever recorded. He bought the master, released it internationally, and by now it's sold nearly four million copies worldwide.

*O'DAY: How did WMPS feel about all this? It certainly sounds like they backed you with the record in the beginning.*

**DEES:** Shortly thereafter, Roy Mack quit the station. When I mentioned that my record was #8 nationally but wasn't being played in Memphis — none of the other stations would play it because it promoted me — WMPS fired me. They felt it was a conflict of interest.

*O'DAY: With their morning jock having a national hit record, you'd think they'd be very excited.*

**DEES:** I know. What happened was they had a general manager who made a judgment that it was a conflict of interest. The company that owns Plough Broadcasting is a drug company, and they're used to being extremely conservative.

*O'DAY: I was under the impression you had been warned not to mention the record and that you disobeyed that directive.*

**DEES:** I don't recall that.

*O'DAY: And how long after being fired did it take for WHBQ to sign you?*

**DEES:** A week.

**O'DAY:** *I tell people that one of the most impressive things I have seen in modern radio history is that you pretty much took your ratings across the street with you. Is that accurate?*

**DEES:** Yes, and it was wonderful. This was back in 1977, 1978. WHBQ had a 5 or 6 share in the morning before I got there. In the next book, they had an 18.3.

**O'DAY:** *And I'd guess they played "Disco Duck."*

**DEES:** All the time! I could play it any time I wanted.

**O'DAY:** *And WMPS ended up changing formats, to country music. And eventually you left Memphis for Los Angeles.*

**DEES:** I came to KHJ based on the success of WHBQ. This was 1979. **Dwight Case** and **Chuck Martin** and **Tim Sullivan** were instrumental in bringing me out here. All three were very hard-working people who really wanted to win. But I've said this over and over: I think AM is dead. I don't care how many Motorola AM Stereos they make, AM radio is dead.

**O'DAY:** *Does that mean you think KHJ did everything they could have, did everything right, but simply was on the wrong radio band?*

**DEES:** KHJ was "the station I used to listen to." Plus, I was working with my wife (*noted voiceover talent Julie Dees*). I love my wife, but how would you like to be around your wife 24 hours a day?

**O'DAY:** *Did that affect you personally or professionally or both?*

**DEES:** Both. My wife before noon is the biggest jerk in the world. After noon, she's the most wonderful person in the world.

**O'DAY:** *The figure mentioned prominently in the trades was \$200,000 a year at KHJ. Was that accurate?*

**DEES:** If you include mowing Dwight Case's lawn...and he's got a big yard. No, actually it wasn't \$200,000. It was closer to what I was making back at WHBQ (*reportedly \$100,000*). But I think it's good to hype. Everybody loves to talk about money. They want to know how much you're making. I mean, I work real hard. I make a decent living. But there's a *tremendous* amount of postage & handling!

**O'DAY:** *You were a huge success in Memphis. You came to L.A., you still were good, you had the talent, but the ratings weren't there. How did that feel?*

**DEES:** It felt just terrible. I wanted to make it in the big market so much. I got here and I found



out I couldn't just come in and win over the market in 30 days.

*O'DAY: Did KHJ think you could do it in such a short time?*

**DEES:** I guess they did. I worked there for the 18-month contract, and they let my contract expire. I was sitting in the general manager's office and his secretary said, "We've decided not to renew your contract." His secretary! He (*Neil Rockoff*) was out of town. I was hoping he'd at least call.

That's when it changed for me in L.A., and for ten months I gave up radio. I said, "Doggone it, I'm going to be an actor, I'm going to be a comedian, whatever it takes." And I did it. I did voiceovers for CBS and made more money during those ten months than I'd made at KHJ the previous year.

After nine months, **Don Benson** called from KIIS-FM. Now, this is the same station that had been called about 20 times by my attorney. My attorney called all 80 stations in Los Angeles — including the Spanish stations — literally begging them to put Rick Dees on the radio. And they all said, "He's just not talented enough. He doesn't have what it takes to make it in the big market."

And now all those people from other radio stations come up to me and say, "Gosh, if we had only known!" I think that's the greatest feeling in the world. It can all explode and blow up in our faces now, but they can't take away what's already happened. Once you've hit Number One on the charts, even if you're....Who's a one-time artist?

*O'DAY: Um...Daniel Boone. "Beautiful Sunday."*

**DEES:** Right. Even if you're Daniel Boone singing "Beautiful Sunday," they can never take away from him his one big hit. I mean, I couldn't have *dreamed* a career like this. How can you dream having a 12 1/4 share in Los Angeles? How can you dream having a contract with Paramount Pictures, of being on Atlantic Records?

*O'DAY: I have a hunch there are lots of disc jockeys who see your numbers here, they hear your "Weekly Top 40," they see you hosting Solid Gold...and they're saying, "Well, sure, all that just comes to him. If I were doing mornings at KIIS-FM, I'd be doing just as well." They seem to think all of these people just came to you and said, "Rick, would you mind hosting this show, doing these voiceovers?" Is that how it happened?*

**DEES:** No. It's a tremendous undertaking. I knew what I wanted to do and how I wanted to accomplish it, but it takes years. I wound up with a wonderful agent, **Bernie Carneol**, and the greatest manager in the world, **Sandy Gallin**. They put together a game plan, and we've stuck with it. It takes a long time.

I've felt, "Gee, I've accomplished this, I've accomplished that," but it's amazing how many people don't have any concept of what we're doing ...including some radio people. There's so much competition in every market, there's no way to take time away from our own market to see what's going on in L.A. I think the thing that flatters me the most is people who tape our show.

*O'DAY: Speaking of people from other markets taping your show, I hear a lot of Rick Dees rip-offs. How do you feel about that?*

**DEES:** To me, it's a very sincere form of flattery.

*O'DAY: What about to the point of copying your homemade jingles? Do you think, "Hey, I created this! Where do these guys get off?"*

**DEES:** It makes me feel like Coca Cola must've felt when they found out there was a C&C Cola. Well, Coke's always going to be innovative and go on to the next level, probably before C&C Cola will. It's just a compliment. I'm always onto something new.

*O'DAY: So you're not tempted to tell your lawyer to write a letter to some of these guys...?*

**DEES:** Not at all. I've stolen jokes and ideas, like everybody in this business has. The only thing that would bother me would be if they stole it and put it on *before* I did.

*O'DAY: For people who believe everything they read in the newspapers, let's set one thing straight: You didn't say a damn thing that got you in trouble at KIIS-FM, did you?*

**DEES:** Actually, it was one of the greatest promotional stunts in the history of Los Angeles. It was Rick Dees grasping for straws, because I had to do something to make people know what station I was on and what we were doing.

Don Benson and Jay Cook came up with an idea they had done with Dr. Don Rose in Philadelphia 15 years ago. They took him off the air and aired a disclaimer, saying they apologize to anyone who may have been offended by remarks he made. We had only \$10,000 to spend on tv, and in Los Angeles that doesn't go very far. With \$10,000 we caused more talk than this city has ever seen.

*O'DAY: Did you skip an airshift as part of the gag?*

**DEES:** Yes. I was filming the whole week at 20th Century Fox, as an actor on *Love Boat*. I had to get off at 8 o'clock every morning to go to the set. So Don and Jay told me just to leave at 8:00 and then they'd apologize for what I said. And still, three years after that time, people still come up to me and say, "What did you say that got you kicked off the radio?"

*O'DAY: And what do you say?*

**DEES:** I make up something. I'll say either, "Well, we were joking about Queen Elizabeth's crown marks on the headboard," or "We had five people telling dirty jokes on the phone at one time and didn't know it was going over the air."

*O'DAY: How about a quick run-through of some of your show's cast of characters?*

**DEES:** Sure. There's Willard Wizeman. Willard is really sleazy. In fact, he's from Sleazy Valley. He's the type who would hang around a bus station. He's shiftless. He sleeps in the basement of the radio station. All you hear is this zipper; he's "Mr. Flash" himself. I do Willard's voice, but I prerecord it a lot of times so I can talk to myself. Then people say, "Well, Willard couldn't be Rick Dees because they overlap."

L.A. has a heavy Mexican population, so we have Chuy from La Puente. He's a working man. He lives with a girl and always calls up with his woman problems.

*O'DAY: Have you had any feedback on Chuy from the Mexican-American community?*

**DEES:** Yes, all positive. I've made more appearances in the Mexican community because of Chuy! They think I'm part Mexican, and I say, "(rich Mexican accent:) Yo soy Ricardo Diaz."

Then there's John Revolting, who wears a lime green leisure suit and chains from Chains R Us. He sounds kind of like John Travolta. My "agent," Bernie Shelley, is played by Ronnie Schell. He's always got a bigger name on the other line; he's always saying things like, "Just a moment — tell Gary Puckett & The Union Gap I'll be right there!"

There's Leonard Moon, done by Jeff Altman. He'll say "My name is Leonard Moon and I don't have the brains of an ice cube."

*O'DAY: This is a black dialect.*

**DEES:** Yeah, but I don't get any flack. None at all. He'll do some old joke, like, "As a child I was a bed wetter." And I'll say, "Well, Leonard, a lot of people wet the bed," and he'll say, "Yeah, but I did it from the dresser."

I try to keep up with the trends. For example, we had a punk Billy Idol-type girl; that was Julie. Julie also does Candy Plastique, who is a career receptionist, Michael Jackson, Joan Rivers, Streisand, Jane Fonda....

*O'DAY: Has KIIS ever said to you, nicely or not so nicely, "Rick, this is too much. You went too far here"?*

**DEES:** You see, this is the key to a great and long-standing relationship with any station. I think

a personality has got to swallow his or her pride and listen to why people are complaining about something. I've taken a couple of characters off the show because of some negative response. One was Abe from Fairfax.

*O'DAY: For the benefit of people outside of L.A., we should explain that the Fairfax District is a heavily Jewish section of Hollywood. And "Abe" spoke with a Jewish accent.*

**DEES:** The Jewish Defense League called about that. They thought it stereotyped Jews.

*O'DAY: I don't recall you doing any "Jewish" jokes with Abe.*

**DEES:** Not at all. But it offended some people. **Steve Bluestein**, who did that character for me, is Jewish, and he couldn't figure out why the JDL would call. But **Wally Clark** and **Gerry DeFrancesco** asked if I'd think about it. And you can see how professional they are. Rather than saying, "Don't do this" and creating an adversary relationship, they say, "What do you think about it?" We try to meet each other halfway. And I took the character off.

*O'DAY: Now that "Candid Phone" (in which Dees calls someone up and pretends to be someone else) is an established bit, I'm sure you have no trouble getting leads for them. How did you originally launch the bit? Where did you get the calls?*

**DEES:** If somebody called on the request line, I'd say, "Do you have a friend...?" and set it up that way. Now the reason it works is the audience can hear the friend setting up somebody else. That way, I'm not to blame for it; I'm just carrying out the deed.

*O'DAY: How do you feel about comedy services? Some people claim they're the worst thing in the world for developing a personality, that they stifle your creativity....*

**DEES:** I absolutely disagree. I take as many services as I can. I think that when you find a good joke and get a great reaction to it, you subconsciously study the structure of it and it helps you write you *own* jokes better. If you get a comedy sheet and go through it and find good jokes and apply them to your own city or cast or characters or family it can only help you get better. These are tools of the trade. I use all the services I can, because it makes my show better.

*O'DAY: In addition to being well-prepared, your show strikes me as being very well-paced.*

**DEES:** I'm lucky that I can structure as I go, but I have a producer named **Paul Josephs** who comes in over an hour earlier than I and prepares everything for me — from when the sun rises to what Michael Jackson is up to today. He's got it all written out for me.

*O'DAY: It sounds like a presidential briefing.*

**DEES:** Exactly. **L.A. Larry** works on our trivia questions. **Liz Fulton**, who does news, has a group that helps her; these are mainly interns from local colleges. Any station in any market can go to the local community college and find out who wants to help write or produce; they're looking for on-the-job training.

*O'DAY: And they don't get paid.*

**DEES:** Right. And **Charleye Wright** is the classic journalist and a great personality; he does the sports.

*O'DAY: What kinds of off-air preparation do you do?*

**DEES:** I read a lot. I watch the news every day. I listen to the all-news stations in town, KNX and KFWB.

*O'DAY: Have you always run your own board?*

**DEES:** Yeah, always. I have a 1967 RCA stereo console with the rotary pots. I run things so fast I just can't use slide pots; they're not fast enough for me.

*O'DAY: Why do you run your own board?*

**DEES:** It's much faster and much easier. I don't have to go through a middleman. The timing in our show is so important.

*O'DAY: If I ask you about money, how badly will you lie to me?*

**DEES:** (laughing) Ask me.

*O'DAY: Okay. How much is KIIS-FM paying you?*

**DEES:** Not enough!

*O'DAY: You've said during this conversation that you'll always be a DJ. But I recently read an interview in which you said you don't think of yourself as a disc jockey.*

**DEES:** That's right. I think of myself as being the court jester, the clown. I love to surprise people and make them laugh. It happens that I love to do it on radio, but I never started out *just* to do it on radio. I always wanted to do it on records and everything else. I think it's so wonderful that I've made records and other disc jockeys have actually played them. These are people in the same business, and they're saying, "Gee, here's another guy who does what we do but he's also involved in records..."

**O'DAY:** *That brings up another subject. Hollywood tends to see you as one thing. It's perfectly willing to recognize you as a great air personality or a great writer, but if you want to do something else....There's only one jock I know of who successfully became an actor, and that's **Bob Crane**. A helluva lot of people have gone for it but not succeeded.*

**DEES:** And because Hollywood will allow you to do just one thing, I've chosen just one thing: Comedy.

**O'DAY:** *Right, but you want to star in movies, television...*

**DEES:** Oh, sure. Everyone wants to do everything.

**O'DAY:** *Do you have a plan to beat the system?*

**DEES:** Yeah.

**O'DAY:** *Your résumé says you acted in The Glass Menagerie. Where was that?*

**DEES:** I made it up! I mean, I did it in my acting class at Chapel Hill.

**O'DAY:** *I hear you turned down the opportunity to be the host of a tv game show.*

**DEES:** Yeah. Several shows, in fact.

**O'DAY:** *I know they offered you a lot of money. Why'd you turn it down?*

**DEES:** You talked about pigeon-holing somebody, putting a handle on somebody. Doing a game show, to me, is saying, "Well, this is where I want to stay for most of my life." I'd rather use my talents to do legitimate comedy.

**O'DAY:** *Getting back to your radio career...Let's be honest: If you are successful in motion pictures, won't you leave radio behind?*

**DEES:** I wouldn't want to. I love this business. It's such a personal, intimate medium. Radio is one-on-one. It's in your bathroom in your bedroom, it's there when you're undressing....

**O'DAY:** *I turn my radio off when I undress.*

**DEES:** Dan O'Day turns his radio off when he undresses!

**O'DAY:** *Or I turn it to the wall....*

## THE GREASEMAN

*How do you describe someone who is indescribable? If you've never heard DC101's **The Greaseman**, it's impossible for me to give you an idea of what this guy is like on the air. I first became aware of **The Greaseman** when he was working at WAPE in Jacksonville, Florida. Upon learning that he'd just signed a reported 5-year, \$600,000 contract in a market the size of Jacksonville (in the late '70s), my interest was piqued. When I heard an aircheck of him, I realized he's well worth the bread.*

*His character is outrageous. His voice is fascinatingly obscene. But what really makes his act work is the intelligence behind it. The bits he does are clever, well-prepared and well-constructed. He's definitely the kind of air personality the listener either loves or hates; I suspect very few people have no opinion after hearing him.*

*And now a confession: My conversation with the Greaseman was the setting for one of my most embarrassing professional moments. We spoke on the phone — with me in Los Angeles and him in Washington, D.C. — and I recorded the conversation by using the "2-way record" feature of my new answering machine.*

*My new answering machine was a fancier version of my old one. On my old machine, I set the switch, pushed a white button, and was ready to record. I followed that procedure with the new machine, and sure enough that dependable, annoying periodic "beep" came on the line.*

*We talked for, oh, maybe 30 minutes or more. Just as we were wrapping up, I checked the cassette tape to see if it was in danger of running out. There was no such danger, because the machine had not been recording.*

*It turns out that with the new machine, it would automatically record unless I pushed that white button. I then was left with the task of telling **The Greaseman** that none of our conversation had been recorded, and would he mind going over some of the same material again so I could quote him accurately...?*

*I could tell he wasn't very impressed with my command of the tools of the interviewer's trade...but he agreed to repeat himself. To this day, I'm sure he thinks I'm one of the dumber people in this business.*

*I began by asking **The Greaseman** how he "gets away with" using material that might be considered to risqué for other jocks.*

**GM:** I don't feel that I'm doing a dirty show. Number One, I feel that audience complaints are all relative to how you present it. It's not *what* you say; it's how you say it ....and I'm not on the air just to see what outrage I can perpetrate on the listening audience. I feel that's a kind of one-

upmanship, the idea that each day you have to better yourself until the only thing you have left to say is “fuck.” So I’ve gone in a different direction since I’ve been here in DC. I still do an adult, unusual-type show, but rather than go for the cheap shot I tend to do a different kind of bit these days.

*O’DAY: You’ve indicated that you’ve backed off a little from the types of bits you used to do in Jacksonville. Can you give me an example of a type of bit or feature that you did there that you would no longer do?*

**GM:** I’ve just changed the tone of my delivery, because I felt my Jacksonville stuff was good, too. I’m just tailoring myself to be a more marketable but still unusual boss jock. When I got to DC, I was told that my predecessor (*Howard Stern*) did a lot of ethnic humor, and it was one of the big listener complaints. So after he was gone I figured well, let’s just not do that. I don’t want to be like him. The DC audience doesn’t know anything about Jacksonville. They heard me for the first time when I walked in the door here. They don’t know about my past 14 years of shrieking. So, consequently, I didn’t want them comparing me to the last guy....So I do nothing that he did.

*O’DAY: What guidelines do you follow for self-censorship? What subjects won’t you joke about on-the-air?*

**GM:** Marines getting buried under rubble in Lebanon.

*O’DAY: Because it’s a tragedy or also because of the political implications?*

**GM:** Because it’s a tragedy. It’s just one of those tragedies that grab you more than other tragedies. Some people make jokes about anything. Like **Princess Grace** — no sooner had she met her tragic end than people were saying, “What’s the national anthem in Monaco? *“She’ll Be Coming ’Round The Mountain When She Comes.”*”

*O’DAY: Did you do that on-the-air?*

**GM:** Yeah. It’s just something you have to feel. I’ve been doing this for 14 years now, and I’ve never gotten in trouble with the FCC, I’ve never been fired for anything I’ve said, I’ve never really had a substantial loss of advertising revenue because of my content. Here in DC I’ve had no advertising loss and made great advertising gains.

*O’DAY: Have you ever felt in retrospect that you went too far with a particular bit?*

**GM:** Never. I don’t think about mistakes. Something I learned early on in my “boss jock” career is that the second you screw up, the best thing to do is dismiss it from your mind and go on. Because I always work under the philosophy that after I’ve screwed up, especially in a town this



size, another 150,000 people have just turned on their radios seconds after I've screwed up; they didn't even hear it.

They want to hear The Greaseman's wacky funfest, and if I'm bummed out over something I've screwed up, it'll just screw up everything else for this new crop of people. I make mental notes on things. I tell myself that's one thing I'll never do again, and then I just put it in my subconscious and let that govern me.

*O'DAY: Did you ever do a regular old radio show, one in which you were not at all controversial?*

**GM:** No. Even on the college station I did this.

*O'DAY: And from the beginning, management said, "Fine"?*

**GM:** No. In the early days I met with some resistance. When you're starting out as a personality jock, people are going to say to you, "Hey, who do you think you are — Don Imus?" Well, then if you're good enough and five or six years go by, they start saying to other people, "Hey, who do you think you are — The Greaseman?"

*O'DAY: It sounds like it takes tremendous resilience to reach the point where people say, "Oh, yeah, that's The Greaseman, that's what he does."*

**GM:** I guess so. You have to believe in and have faith in what you're doing, because people are going to resist you. Anytime you do something unusual, everybody's going to give you 15 reasons why it can't be done.

## JOHNNY HAYES

*I was listening to my car radio when the disc jockey followed an oldie with his memory of buying that particular record when he was a kid. He bought records with the money he earned from his paper route, and it was tough getting enough to buy all those records ...especially when several new records with the word "teenager" in the title were released, because of course he had to buy any record about teenagers....*

*And that started me thinking about the very first record I ever bought, at the age of ten: "Running Scared" by Roy Orbison. I walked to the La Salle Record Shoppe in the West Hartford Center, and....*

*Prompting an unseen listener into a thoughtful journey through his own memories is quite a feat of communication. The communicator in this case was **Johnny Hayes**, whose midday show on oldies-formatted KRLA/Pasadena includes his daily, hour-long Countdown Show. Hayes began his career as an 18-year old disc jockey at WNEX/ Macon in 1958. Three years later a young program director named **Bill Drake** hired him for WAKE/Atlanta. Hayes next moved to WYDE/Birmingham and then rejoined Drake at KYA/San Francisco and again followed him to KGB/San Diego. From there he joined KRLA, in 1965. Except for a three-month absence in the late '60s, he's been there ever since. I asked Johnny what originally let him to the world of radio.*

**HAYES:** One of the reasons I got into radio was because I loved music so much. I grew up in Macon, Georgia, and at times I'd be the only white person at these black rock shows that used to come to town. I found it very exciting when I found out these groups were real people and not just records. I wanted to learn as much about them as I possibly could.

The disc jockey in town who turned me on to black records was a black bandleader who was hired by a white radio station, WBML. His name was **King Bee**, and he was fabulous. The Ku Klux Klan burned a cross in front of the radio station when King Bee was hired.

I used to love **John McCormick**, "The man who walks and talks at midnight," on KMOX in St. Louis. He's the man who got me fascinated with people talking on the radio ...and he's still there! Down in Macon you could listen to stations a thousand miles away. I listened to *Moonglow with Martin* at WWL in New Orleans, and he taught me jazz. Occasionally WABC in New York would come through...WCKY in Cincinnati...WOWO in Ft. Wayne, Indiana...WNOE in New Orleans.

I loved listening to the radio, and what I discovered was that records sounded different according to how they were presented by a disc jockey. It's interesting that even today very few disc jockeys talk about the records, the musicians on the sessions, and things of this nature.

*O'DAY: When did you begin developing your style of lots of artist information and your own personal insights into the music?*

**HAYES:** I'll tell you exactly when it happened: December of 1961. Bill Drake left WAKE to become program director at KYA in San Francisco, and the station just was not the same without him. I asked for a transfer to a sister station in Birmingham, Alabama: WYDE.

WYDE had a semi-circle driveway where teenagers could come by and talk to me from their cars. They'd request a song, and I'd put it on the air. Some of them would say, "Hey, when you get off we'll be down at such-and-such a place, why don't you come on down? We'd love to talk about records with you."

What I discovered was the town was absolutely nuts over **Buddy Holly** and **Bo Diddley** and **Jimmy Reed**. I was made Music Director within a few weeks, and these white kids said, "You know, you like those black records; you really ought to meet **Jack the Bellboy**," who was a black disc jockey in town. He owned a record shop as well, and I drove out to the black section of town and went in and met this guy. He gave me a lot of black records that had been popular in Birmingham but had never charted nationally.

I started relating to the kids on the air and mentioning their names, and I started talking about some of these records I had heard about ...and that's really where it started. I really got into the whole thing of community and of people loving records there.

*O'DAY: How would you describe the Countdown Show?*

**HAYES:** It's like breaking open a time capsule. I play the Big 11 Songs; we happen to be 1110 on the dial, so I play eleven. Each day represents the same month in any given year between 1955 and 1975. We might start off the month of May with May, 1964, and then the next day will be May, 1972, and then we'll go back to 1967....We mix 'em all up in there, plus we do at least one special of the month. And there will be some repeats.

I also play some records that are bubbling under or new records or extras of the day...and they may or may not be records that went on to become very popular. They might be records where you say, "Oh, I remember that" but that never went anywhere. People love to hear records that never were successful. I also give current events, but in a story fashion. I may mention a new car that's out, how much gasoline costs....

*O'DAY: And you do it in the present tense.*

**HAYES:** I tell it in the present tense. From time to time I've been offered the services of college kids or kids from broadcast school, and they could never grasp the concept of using the present tense.

*O'DAY: So they understood the informational aspect but not the dramatic aspect of your presentation?*

**HAYES:** Yes. I think it really is more dramatic if, for example, today I talked about the **Beatles** having just got rejected for a contract with Decca Records and they're scheduled to meet this morning with **George Martin**, a producer with EMI....I think that's better than if I say, "The Beatles did this and that."

*O'DAY: How do you research and prepare for your daily show?*

**HAYES:** Well, I've been building files for a number of years. No matter where I go, I carry a legal pad with me and a pencil and I write things down. I have an incredible memory about the '50s. A lot of the stuff is not from a book or anything; it's just from my personal recollection.

As I said, I've always been fascinated with personnel, musicians in groups, etc., and I naturally have all of the books on rock. I also spend a considerable amount of time in the library, going through microfilm of *Time* and *Newsweek* and the *L.A. Times*. This is not just my livelihood; this is how I get my fun. I don't want to talk too much about the national budget on the Countdown Show; I talk about who married and things that are fascinating to a general public, that you can tell in 10 or 15 seconds. And I have quite an intricate filing system.

It is hard work, but it's a lot of fun if you enjoy those things. I enjoy trivia, I enjoy gossip, and I love sharing those ideas with people. When I talk about having a paper route and getting two cents and the newspaper getting three, I don't do that to tell people about my life; I'm trying to get them to think of something that reminds them of *their* childhoods. I try to be as non-specific as possible. I try to speak in generalities when I speak about my childhood.

*O'DAY: When do you begin preparing a specific day's show?*

**HAYES:** If I have a special coming up, I might write it over a period of a week or two. Otherwise, I start the night before, organizing my material for the countdown show. Then the next morning I work on it again at the house. When I go on the air, I have several books with me, including the **Whitburn** book which has all the records that were ever out and what labels they were on.

I work from, sometimes, 10, 15, 30 pieces of paper during that hour. So the whole time a record or the commercials are playing, I'm organizing for my next break and deciding what stories I might want to tell and in what order I want to tell them. I do a lot of preparation that I don't use on the show. I may throw something out at the last minute, or I may think of a story that hadn't come to me earlier and I'll just tell that off the top of my head.

*O'DAY: Do you have a method of knowing when you last used a piece of information, so you'll know when it's okay to use it again?*

**HAYES:** I just have sort of a gut feeling about when a story should be repeated. What I do is tell it differently every time. That's one thing I pride myself on; my contribution to the show, hopefully, is the ability to tell a good story. I don't read it off the paper; I just *tell* the story. So it never comes out the same way twice.

*O'DAY: What reasons would you give to explain your great longevity at KRLA, when everyone else has come and gone over the past 20 years?*

**HAYES:** Well, I've worked with a lot of hotheaded disc jockeys over the years, guys who are real cocky. I see those guys make a big splash, and then all of the sudden they're gone because there's some conflict with their boss. I'd rather channel my efforts and energies into my show, rather than competing with the ego of the program director in the hall. The only thing that makes me mad is when the air conditioning doesn't work, and I do get crazy about that.

I'm a radio man, totally. I just adore the medium. Like **Stan Freberg** said: Radio is the big screen. The television was limited to 17 or 19 inches, while radio was as big as you wanted it to be. I agree with him; we paint pictures with words.

## CAROL MASON

*When you're an air personality, putting yourself on the line on a daily basis, your attitude is an extremely important factor in determining your professional success. It's easy to have an enthusiastic, upbeat attitude when you're doing mornings on the #1 station in the market, with complete freedom over your show, a big promotional budget, and the total support of management. But what if you're not doing a drive-time shift? What if you're doing — horrors! — all-nights?*

*Before you start bitching about being relegated to such an aural wasteland, you might want to pick up a few pointers from WYNY/New York's Carol Mason, who has accepted the night shift as a genuine, exciting creative challenge. I asked Carol where she began her radio career...*

**MASON:** I began as a part-timer at WFBL in Syracuse. I was there for a year and a half. Then I went to WFMS/Indianapolis.

**O'DAY:** *How did you get to Indianapolis?*

**MASON:** I went to Buffalo with some friends for a weekend, and WKBW happened to have an opening in 7-Midnight. Even though I knew I wouldn't get the job, because they already had a woman working all-nights, I wanted to hear what someone else thought of my work. So I took a tape over to **Sandy Beach**, and he told me to get out of Syracuse. He kept my tape, and about a month later I got a call from the general manager of WFMS. They were looking for a female disc jockey, and he happened to be friendly with Sandy's GM and asked me to send a tape. I knew nothing about country music. I told the guy that, and he said, "I don't care. It's what you say between the songs." So I sent the tape, and a week later they hired me.

**O'DAY:** *You said something interesting I'd like to go back to: What is the relevance of the fact that Sandy already had a woman working all-nights?*

**MASON:** Today I think it would be a little different, but at that time (1978)...Well, let me put it this way: In 1978, I was the only female in the entire Syracuse market. So having one full-time female jock was considered very good, but I don't think you'd ever find more than one at a single station.

**O'DAY:** *So you went to WFMS and did country.*

**MASON:** For four months...and I loved it. I think it is important that you know the music you're playing, and I went to a library immediately and looked up **Gentleman Jim Reeves**, **Ernest Tubb**....I wanted to know who I was playing. But when I arrived at WFMS, I knew nothing about country music.

My first night there, I pulled every crossover song I could find: **John Denver**, **Glen Campbell**, etc. And the clock that timed the carts broke...and I did not know when each song was going to end. And not only that, but I also found out there was a tornado watch that night. I was a New Yorker, thinking tornadoes happened only in Kansas. I was scared. What do you do when a tornado hits? All I could do was laugh. My PD, **Herb Allen**, was there with me for the first couple of hours, and he was a doll. He told me just to relax and take it easy.

Anyway, the fourth month I was there I got a phone call from a guy who said his name was **Craig Scott** from Plough Broadcasting. We got to talking for a while. He asked me my astrological sign — which is Aquarius — and he asked if I'd ever consider leaving Indianapolis. Thinking he was a listener, I didn't want to say my major goal was eventually to get back to New York.

I said, "Well, right now I love it here," which was true. Then he told me to keep it confidential, but his company was starting a live country station in Chicago. I said to him, "Look, I'm on the air; can you call me back at midnight?" In the meantime, I called WMPS in Memphis to find out if this guy was for real. And sure enough, they said Craig Scott was out of town, they thought he was in Indianapolis...So I knew he was real. And to make a long story short, two days later I flew to Chicago and got hired to come to WJEZ.

I worked all-nights there. When I asked, "Who else is on the staff?" he said, "Well, you're it so far." They originally had thought of putting me 7-Midnight, but — and I think this was the major turning point in my career — I told him, "Look, in Indianapolis they always seem to throw on all-night people who don't care or aren't any good. Without television, I'm stuck listening to radio all night, and there's nothing on the radio I can listen to." And I think I talked my way into the all-night shift.

*O'DAY: You're one of the few people I know who were offered an earlier airshift and had to fight for all-nights.*

**MASON:** Well, I was happy to get it. It was a challenge to me, and I'll tell you why: I took the all-night shift as an afternoon drive shift for all-nighters. I turned a negative into a positive.

We started an All-Nighters Club, which we called the FIGIT Club — Friends In Giving Invite Togetherness. From 2 to 5, the format was relaxed. I could put phone calls on the air. I called it the Number One shift because we started the day, we didn't end it. I had a State of the All-Nighters Address, which we did once a month, getting restaurants to serve french fries at six in the morning so that all nighters could eat, too....and it really caught on.

At first the thing you had to accept in being an All-Nighter was you cannot do your show and go right to sleep, because that's like being a Day Person trying to work all-nights. You have to be an All-Nighter. You have to go to sleep at noon and live those hours; that's the key. You really have

to adjust to that schedule, and you find that people up at that hour are really different from the norm. Because let's face it, the norm is not up at that time. One of my major things was trying to find a dry cleaner at 3 o'clock in the morning — which was *our* lunch hour.

I loved it. With the All-Nighters, there's more of a one-on-one communication. And, again, it was more relaxed. For example, the morning man in Chicago had meteorologists from local tv stations. You know what we did? We had our own All-Nighter meteorologist, whose name was Gil. He worked at a canning company, and he always called with the temperature. I made him our Official All-Night Meteorologist. He'd call me on the phone, I'd give him the forecast, then I'd record him and play it back at one in the morning, and then we'd do another one at 4 o'clock.

*O'DAY: It sounds like you became very important to your listeners; you were really there for them...as opposed to being there simply because you couldn't get a "better" shift.*

**MASON:** I love my job. I think people are people, no matter whether they're in Indianapolis or Chicago or New York. And I think the key to personality radio is being yourself. That and honesty; those are the two big things. My audience knows I'm a Yankee fan, I lived in Chicago, I like the White Sox; they know I like the Rangers more than I do the Islanders, they know all these things. They know about me and I know about them. At WYNY I'm working 9PM-1AM. If somebody calls me up and says, "Gee, my kids are listening tonight," I'll mention that ...within the format of the station. I think listeners can tell if you're not being yourself.

*O'DAY: Simply because you're on the air, though, I think there has to be a barrier of sorts between you and your audience....*

**MASON:** Of course.

*O'DAY: But from what you're describing, it sounds like with you the barrier is a lot smaller than with a lot of other jocks. It sounds like you're trying to let them know you as much as you possibly can within the limitations of the format.*

**MASON:** Exactly.

*O'DAY: What don't you let them know about you?*

**MASON:** Well, when Syracuse played St. John's, I wanted to see Syracuse beat St. John's, which is a local team here in the city. So on-the-air I said, "Gee, who do you root for?" They know the dilemma ....But I didn't go on the air and say, "Gee, I hope St. John's gets creamed!"

*O'DAY: So you try to let them know where you stand without alienating them?*

**MASON:** Absolutely.



*O'DAY: What about politics?*

**MASON:** I don't get into politics. I'll talk about the positive. I'll talk about **Mayor Koch** if he writes a book, but I won't discuss his politics.

*O'DAY: Why is that?*

**MASON:** Again, not to alienate the audience.

*O'DAY: Has anyone ever told you, "You can't do that on the air because you're a woman"?*

**MASON:** No. But I understand where people draw the line. Certain women come across as a woman trying to be a disc jockey, as opposed to a disc jockey who happens to be a woman.

*O'DAY: How do the differences make themselves apparent?*

**MASON:** For example, when I'm on the air my feeling is that my audience is female and male, and I'm being myself and talking to them about everything that's relevant: sports, fashion, cooking; there's no difference. I'm talking to males *and* females, moms and dads, single people, whatever.

*O'DAY: Before we go, let's talk a little about feet pajamas.*

**MASON:** (laughing) I wear feet pajamas on Christmas. It's a ritual. I mean, why not? The listeners can't see me. So I wear my feet pajamas on-the-air every Christmas. One year some guys from a bagel shop in Brooklyn brought me a bunch of bagels for Christmas. So I invited them up and they joined me on-the-air, eating bagels.

*O'DAY: With you wearing your feet pajamas.*

**MASON:** Of course. Oh, and I've got to mention my favorite radio story. It was my first night back at WYNY; I had been away for about a year. It was midnight. One of the cleaning crew — her name was Mary — apparently didn't notice the ON AIR light outside the studio. She came running in while I was doing a live commercial and yelled, "You're back! My baby's back!" She was hugging me, I was trying to get through the commercial, my engineer was laughing his head off. "Let me look at you! See, I can still pick her up!"

Is it any wonder I love radio??

## DICK ORKIN

*Dick Orkin heads up Dick Orkin Creative Services, Inc., located in Hollywood, California. To radio folks, Dick Orkin is a legend first for having created, written, produced and starred as Chickenman...and then again as the creator and voice of some of the funniest radio commercials ever made. This interview also was attended by Christine Coyle of D.O.C.S.I.*

**O'DAY:** *A little background first. Where are you from?*

**ORKIN:** The East Coast. I was raised in southern Pennsylvania. I spent a lot of time at home, playing radio announcer with a curtain rod as the microphone. I began working in broadcasting at a very early age when my father heard me reading the radio commercials for his gift store in Sunbury, Pennsylvania, into the curtain rod. He said, "I want to take you up to WKOK and have you do the commercials," because he felt I could do a better job than the announcers at the radio station.

Not only did they allow me to do the commercials, but they hired me to be their summertime DJ. I worked there as the radio announcer during the summer months and sometimes on a part-time basis. And I stayed in broadcasting on a part-time basis all through my high school and college career. I was interested in theatre, acting, playwrighting and all that kind of stuff.

After spending four years in college where I thought theatre was going to be my life, I went off to Yale Drama School, where I spent three years preparing for the stage. I came out and discovered there weren't any jobs. So I went back to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where I had gone to college, and got a job as the news director at a radio station. So I spent most of my pre-advertising career in radio.

**O'DAY:** *In Lancaster, was that at WLAN?*

**ORKIN:** WLAN and WGAL. I was Farm Editor, Women's Fashion Editor, Religion Editor, and then I was News Director. And then I went back to being the farm editor again, because I didn't like being the news director. I spent, I think, five years there, and I started freelancing as a radio writer-producer while I was there. That is to say, I went out and found people who wanted better commercials than the commercials just being read by me. I found that people were interested in having them produced.

That was the time of **Bob & Ray** and **Stan Freberg**, who was just beginning. And with them as models, I began writing and producing spots for people in Lancaster who felt they wanted something special in radio, and that really gave me my first experience acting as a writer-producer. Of course, I voiced all the spots as well.

And then I went from there to Cleveland, where I was News Director/Public Affairs Director for

Westinghouse Broadcasting for three years. And then I went from there to Chicago, where I was hired as Public Affairs Director *but* I was on the air. I wasn't on the air in Cleveland; they wouldn't permit me to go on the air due to the union.

*O'DAY: The call letters of the Cleveland station were...?*

**ORKIN:** It was KYW then. Now it's the NBC station; I don't know what the call letters are now. Then I went to Chicago with the promise I could go on the air, which I really wanted. I went on the air as a public affairs producer who could voice the contest promos and do anything I wanted to do. And I created *Chickenman* while I was there...and *The Tooth Fairy* and stuff like that.

*O'DAY: I first heard Chickenman in the mid-to-late 60s. When did he come about?*

**ORKIN:** '67.

*O'DAY: Were you the sole creator?*

**ORKIN:** Yes.

*O'DAY: How did that happen?*

**ORKIN:** In 1966 television brought back *Batman*, and the word was "camp." My program director suggested that I do a parody of *Batman* for all of our DJs. I created a different superhero parody for each of the DJs. *Chickenman* was one of them; I designed him for the morning man, **Jim Runyon**, and his later wife, Jane. We did it together; I wrote them, and they came into the studio with me and produced them.

I was supposed to be Public Affairs Director, and my assignment was to create important public affairs shows. But four or five week after *Chickenman* hit the airwaves, it became obvious that it was more important than anything else the station was doing and I became the full-time writer/producer of the series called *Chickenman*. I worked on it all day long; I had no time for anything else.

*O'DAY: You were doing one episode a day, five days a week?*

**ORKIN:** I was writing two episodes a day, five days a week, to get a little ahead. They were airing one episode a day, ten times daily.

*O'DAY: When Chickenman became syndicated, were you partners with the radio station?*

**ORKIN:** I was in partnership with the radio station, and then when I left the station in 1969 I

bought the series from them.

**O'DAY:** *When you moved to L.A. in 1978, you were still working with Bert ("Dick & Bert"), right?*

**ORKIN:** Right.

**O'DAY:** *Was there a breakthrough spot for the two of you that made you more than popular talent in the midwest, that made you national?*

**ORKIN:** I think there were a couple of national spots that we did that called attention to us. La Choy Chinese Foods was one. I had done some before Bert joined me, in Chicago, that really started making people pay attention to me...for a gasoline called Bulko. They were really my first commercials after I left the radio station and went to work for myself.

Bert was one of the voices on the Bulko spot. He was working at a local agency. Bert had asked me to help do some spots that he wrote for a client. In fact, the first spot we ever worked on together was the City National Bank of Detroit. I was the talking bank. That was a big campaign, because it took the bank from like #6 in the market to #2 in a period of two years. About two or three years later, Bert decided to leave advertising and didn't know what he wanted to do. Because of our earlier relationship, where he did voices for me and I did voices for him, he began hanging around the office and I suggested that maybe what we ought to do is go out and pitch advertising agencies together.

**O'DAY:** *I've never heard you do a non-humorous spot.*

**ORKIN:** Well, I've done some, but people laughed at them!

**O'DAY:** *Let's talk a little about character. I generally hear you do a similar type of character on your spots, similar to Chickenman. Can you describe who that character is, what kind of guy he is?*

**ORKIN:** He's pretty much me. He has an inflated notion of his own importance. What people identify with when they hear him is, "Here's a guy who's gonna get his. I just know it's coming." That's how *Chickenman* worked, by the way, because when a guy walks around saying, "Yes, I'm the wonderful white-winged warrior," it suggests to you that this guy really thinks the whole world revolves around him and that everything's going to work out okay — and of course it never does.

So I think he's just kind of Everyman. His embarrassment, his frustration, his hesitation, his basic uncertainty about everything he does I think reaches out and touches something the audience responds to. There is a tendency when they hear that voice for people to say, "There but for the grace of God go I."

**COYLE:** Also, I think there is an element of vulnerability, in which you think, “Oh, no, he’s not going to...Oh, he *did* do that!”

**ORKIN:** I think a lot of our humor, a lot of the spots we write are based on that vulnerability idea — that someone’s going to come into conflict, that their personality as opposed to their action is going to come into conflict with some kind of problem...within 60 seconds.

*O’DAY: Your character is something of a fool, but we don’t necessarily dislike him.*

**ORKIN:** No. I don’t think the guy has ever been unlikable. I really believe that’s the secret to most good humor and especially good humor advertising — that the people you hear be likable. They should be real, they should be believable, and they should be likable. If I have problems with spots at all— including that one you saw in the studio this morning — it’s that people sometimes don’t sound believable; they sound like caricatures. I have trouble buying that as a commercial concept, so I had trouble with that spot. But on the other hand we do a lot of spots like that and people seem to like them, so who am I to know?

*O’DAY: We talked earlier (before the interview “officially” began) about “joke oriented” spots. You seem to do funny characters, but your listeners don’t walk away quoting a funny line.*

**ORKIN:** No. Sometimes that happens, but for the most part no, they’re not gags. We really do characters.

*O’DAY: Do you think that helps with the spots’ wear factor?*

**ORKIN:** Yes, positively. The best stuff Freberg did, Bob & Ray did, aren’t really funny one-liners; they’re characters. Some of them do have some interesting lines, but...

**COYLE:** Most of our stuff comes out of real-life situations. They’re *extended* real-life situations. It comes out of the various relationships we’ve had in our lives, when someone will come up and say, “You won’t believe this person who was in front of me in the grocery line today,” or “You won’t believe this guy I went out with this weekend.” So they’re based in credibility. A lot of times I get scripts from writers who say, “I know just how to write your stuff.” And inevitably, what it is is line-line-line-joke, line-line-line-joke. There’s not characters listening to each other, there’s not natural response.

*O’DAY: What about believability of the dialogue itself? I hear a lot of spots using words and phrases that people...*

**COYLE:** ...would never say in real life. Exactly. That happened with the spot this morning when we had to cut that line. We were trying to put that copy line in there. The spot went along nicely and all of the sudden you had this one line that you could tell was “copy point time.” We

give actors a certain amount of freedom, also, when we record. Sometimes they feel the line in the script is not the right response for the character.

*O'DAY: We heard an actor today change just a single word...*

**COYLE:** "Sonny."

*O'DAY: He made it "Sonny" and it added a lot.*

**COYLE:** Exactly. And that does happen.

**ORKIN:** I think also the actors who work for us are not the actors who work for a lot of the other people. I don't think the people who appear in our commercials are typical voiceover people.

*O'DAY: What are typical voiceover people?*

**ORKIN:** Well, this is not intended to be denigrating, although it will appear to some that way. Anyone who reads this will say, "Well, I'll never work for him now!" But I don't really like people who think they do trick voices. "Trick voices" is a term that's been used in the industry for a long time. People who do trick voices are people who really believe that they do imitations, impressions....I mean, Jimmy (*actor James Hampton*) would regard that voice he did today as a trick voice, and I didn't care for it. My reason wasn't that I didn't think it was a good trick voice; my reason is I don't think it makes for a good voice in a commercial. What happens is you spend all your time listening to the funny voice and you don't spend your time listening to the commercial message. Or the humor doesn't work in terms of the kind of humor we believe really sells the products and services.

But there are a lot of people out there who come to us and say, "Here's another voice I do, here's one more voice, I'll try this voice for you." They'll come in and have 35 voices and I've often said to them, "What do *you* sound like? I really don't care about your 35 voices. I want to hear you as an actor listen to the other actor and respond to the situation. I want you to believe in the situation and not do the voices."

Actors who just do voices are a dime a dozen, frankly. There are literally thousands of people in Hollywood, Chicago, and New York who can come in and just do trick voices. I've never cared for trick voices because I really believe they're overused, they're a cliché, every other commercial usually has a trick voice in it and what I want our commercials to sound like are real people the listeners can identify with. We don't always do that, but I think we make more of an effort than most people do.

If you look at the people who work for us regularly, you'll discover they're just damn good

actors. And a lot of them don't do a lot of voices. I don't think Jimmy Hampton does a lot of voices; I think Jimmy basically plays himself. We just asked him to do a voice he happened to be able to do.

**COYLE:** We very rarely cast people because of their voices.

*O'DAY: What qualities do strike you, then, when somebody comes in and says, "I want to work for you"?*

**ORKIN:** Good actor, comedy sense, sense of being able to serve the commercial purpose. A lot of actors come in and they listen to their own voice, look for their own lines. They look at the script and say, "I say this and I say this and I say this," and they have no idea of what the punchline is or of where the whole spot's going, because they're so totally focused on their own lines and their own roles that they'll forget they're part of a larger, dramatic whole that they're serving. And as a result they don't serve it very well. And I usually can tell those people very quickly.

**COYLE:** Somebody very wise once said that 90% of acting is reacting. And I think some of my favorite moments in a radio commercial are when somebody has said something and because of this wonderful little pause, you can tell just within the first 1/10 of a second of when he responds what's happening within that beat. You can visualize it. And too many actors get caught up in just underlining their parts and they can't wait until they get to what they consider to be their big number. They're more caught up with the way they're going to stress the word than how they're going to respond as though it were conversation.

The highest compliments we're paid is when disc jockeys will call and tell me, "We love the spot. As a matter of fact, we're getting calls to put it on the air again." People tend to turn our spots up on the radio rather than turn them off, and I think that does hinge back to the kinds of actors we use. And I usually look for vulnerability in an actor; I don't know if you can define what that is.

*O'DAY: Are there some basic tenets that you can identify as far as writing a comedy spot?*

**ORKIN:** Three hundred twenty-five. One...(Laughter) For writing a spot?

*O'DAY: For creating a spot. I hear a lot of would-be funny spots that are very ponderous, that don't work, and I'd much rather hear a straight spot done well than a comedy spot done badly.*

**ORKIN:** I can more easily tell why a comedy spot is not working. Usually the people are just making a lot of noise; they're not listening to one another. The situation probably isn't good in the first place; the basic situation just isn't believable. No, forget believable; *the basic premise does not grab the listeners' attention* and drag them into it for whatever reason: because it's believable, because it's outrageous, because it's peculiar ....It hasn't provoked enough interest in

the first five or ten seconds of the spot to make you listen. And some of the things that happen are the voices get too big, the lines are cliché lines, the timing is way off.

**COYLE:** It's too copy-laden.

**ORKIN:** Yeah, there's too much commercial copy....

*O'DAY: One thing I tend to hear on some spots that do have a good punchline is telegraphing it. And I don't think I ever hear that on your stuff.*

**ORKIN:** Surprise is the element of comedy. And you can't surprise people if you've set it up in a way that says, Uh-oh, here comes the joke. That's as opposed to the turn-around, which is really the end of the spot, that's the reward. But all through the spot, it's the unpredictable that marks comedy work anyway.

*O'DAY: I know quite a few people who consider themselves humorous and work for radio stations or ad agencies, and they all sit around Friday nights and say, "By golly, let's get out of this and start our own shop." And very few manage to get it off the ground. What does it take to start a one- or two-person shop?*

**ORKIN:** Stupidity. That would be a considerable help. Oh, I don't know. I think it takes clients; before you start opening your doors you've got to know you've got someone who's going to give you some business. I don't think you can simply say, "I'm going to go into business" and not have a client.

I was lucky when I got started. When I decided I was going into business, I really had already *been* in business. When I was working at the radio station, I had five or six people that I could count on to remain with me. So when I opened my doors in a formal way, I was making a formal announcement of being in business, but as far as the five people I already was working with were concerned, I'd *been* in business. So I think it helps to have clients. I don't know that anything else I could say about staying in business is more true to the radio or advertising business than it is to any other business.

*O'DAY: Let me ask you about money.*

**ORKIN:** No, I'm not paying you for doing this.

*O'DAY: If a national account — Toyota or whoever — came to you and wanted to do a complete campaign, what kinds of figures are involved there?*

**ORKIN:** It would range anywhere from as low as, for a national test campaign, \$7,000 ...to as high as \$20,000, depending upon how long they're going to use it, where they're going to use it,



whether they want an exclusive on it....I mean, it's not a one-price answer because not all the situations are single situations; they're always very complex.

Every time somebody says they want to do something, there are about 30 questions you ask them. For how long do you want to do it? Do you want my voice to be on it? Do you want it to be exclusive to you or may we take another product in the same category? Do we currently have a category like this?

And if it's one that's really a major category....Take automobiles: If an automobile manufacturer comes to us, then doing that means for the next five or more years we couldn't do another automobile because our voices are so identified. *Time* magazine's a good example; I'm so clearly identified with *Time* that I couldn't do another publication for a long time. Doing that requires that people pay more money. Prices are all scaled according to the circumstances.

*O'DAY: Are there some spots that stand out as most successful for you?*

**ORKIN:** I think maybe *Time* and The Gap, Lawnwood lawn mowers, Ace Hardware, Minolta copiers

*O'DAY: When you take on a new client, the client tells you what results they want their advertising to achieve, and somehow you get from their fact sheets and their research and their goals to the copy. Can you describe this process?*

**ORKIN:** We sit around the table and we say, "How can we best demonstrate this objective?" Let's find one that's on the air at the moment...

**COYLE:** Well, we could go with one of The Gap ideas. There's the "mood pants," which came in with the idea that they had cords in 10 or 12 different colors; a cord for every mood. So we came up with a guy who designed a pair of pants along the line of mood rings. Whatever mood you're in, it changes, so you don't need all 10 or 12 of The Gap's pants.

**ORKIN:** All we were trying to do there was demonstrate the variety of colors, and that's all they wanted to talk about. So we said okay, how can we create a humorous spot that will demonstrate the number of colors?

*O'DAY: For the young actor or disc jockey, either in L.A. or Kansas City or Chicago who wants to do voice spots and maybe create them and all of that...What do you recommend that he or she do?*

**ORKIN:** What they need is experience. People who have no experience in writing never understand that there are certain rules regarding advertising; there are some things you just can't say in advertising. And they won't know that unless they go and work in advertising for a while and discover there are certain things you can't say and certain ways you can't say things. It has

nothing to do with humor, it has nothing to do with format; it only has to do with advertising rules.

If you're doing a commercial about food, you don't want to talk about bugs. I can't tell you how many spots we've gotten submitted to us through the years from people who don't understand why unappetizing words shouldn't be in a food spot. We've had people who will quote or mention famous people in the spot, and we have to say to them, "You can't mention **Frank Sinatra's** name in a spot because he didn't give permission." Those are general rules of advertising that you won't know.

Also, people think that one of the ways you write advertising is by saying, "I have a terrific idea for Coke, and here it is." What you find yourself doing is sitting down and explaining to them that we don't send ideas to Coke; Coke comes up with a general strategy and campaign concept and then solicits people to come up with ways of executing it. That's the way the advertising business works. So to learn that, you have to go to work in advertising, for an ad agency, for a radio or television station, for a production company, for a recording studio...any place where you can become familiar with the materials and the techniques of broadcasting and advertising.

**COYLE:** I think also when they feel they're ready to move into a larger market, what happens with a lot of the voice tapes that I get is they're a marathon of length, and nobody takes longer to listen than 3 1/2 minutes. You do hear experimenting in you smaller markets. But when it comes time to compete in a large market, you have to know what you do very well and do that. I'll get tapes that have a person who says, "I do great old ladies. I do a great little kid." We don't need that! There's a lot of old ladies in Hollywood that you can pull from, there's a lot of little kids. Focus in on what you think is your strong point rather than spreading yourself so thin.

**ORKIN:** There's a lot of people who really shouldn't be in the business.

**COYLE:** It's kind of a microcosm of show business in general. There's a lot of people to whom, unfortunately, somebody once said, "You know, you're so funny. That little voice you do is so good...." And what ends up happening is that's all they hear and without realizing all the pitfalls involved, they don't approach it as a business — which ultimately is what it is. You'd better know what you have to market and market it well.

**ORKIN:** I was on a tv shoot a couple of weeks ago. I was one of the on-camera actors. Since I wrote the spot and had to be there, I cast myself in a minor role. And the extras were trying to figure out who I was, because more than just trying to play the role I also was giving directions. They were trying to figure out why a guy cast in a minor role was giving directions and seemed to have so much say...because *they* did not. So finally someone figured out who I was. And from that moment, he didn't stop with the shtick. He was doing voices — ostensibly for other people there, but for my benefit. You know what I mean?

**O'DAY:** *He was auditioning for you.*

**ORKIN:** He was auditioning for me. And it doesn't work that way.

**O'DAY:** *One last question: By the time you get a spot on the air, one that you've worked on from the beginning and spent so much time on from concept through writing and through production....When you first hear it on the air, do you laugh?*

**ORKIN:** Oh, yeah. Yeah. If the spot works, I laugh every time I hear it.

## GARY OWENS

*Most of us are familiar with Gary Owens' credits: The voice of tens of thousands of radio & television commercials and animated cartoons, the Emmy he won for his contributions to Rowan & Martin's Laugh In, his comedy records, his early careers as cartoonist & sportswriter. For me, however, he will always be the premiere disc jockey. In this conversation, Gary talks about his early radio years, **Todd Storz**, **Gordon McLendon**, and **Chuck Blore**...about employers as small as KORN in Mitchell, South Dakota, and as large as KMPC in Los Angeles...about silly jokes and blue material...and about successes and disappointments. I spoke with Owens just a few days before he began his new assignment as the morning air personality at KFII/Los Angeles.*

**O'DAY:** *Your dad was a sheriff?*

**OWENS:** Yes, my father was a sheriff; my mother was an English teacher. My father had a stroke and was very ill for the last 15 years of his life, so he couldn't sheriff any more. So my mother had to get a job that paid more than an English teacher made. So she ran for office and won as County Auditor in Plankinton, South Dakota. Plankinton sounds like something that would wash up on shore.

**O'DAY:** *Yeah, it sounds like something Jacques Costeau might eat.*

**OWENS:** Yes, he ate the whole town, and it caused \$1.49 in damages.

**O'DAY:** *Tell me about your first radio job, at KORN.*

**OWENS:** I was still in high school when I started there, doing summer replacement newscasting. A gentleman named **Bob Wood** was the news director at the station. He did seven newscasts a day, in addition to a sportscast. One day he phoned from California, where he had gone on vacation, and said, "I'm not coming back. I've decided to take a job in California." So I got the job full-time, even though I probably wasn't ready for it yet.

**O'DAY:** *Before getting involved in news, had you ever thought about being a disc jockey or an entertainer of some sort?*

**OWENS:** No....Well, entertainer, yeah...because there really wasn't that much difference between being, say, a cartoonist and writing gags for cartoons and doing them on-the-air or on television or in movies.

**O'DAY:** *Was it at KORN that you were asked if you'd ever done disc jockey work....?*

**OWENS:** No, that was when I went to Omaha. I applied for a job as a newscaster at KOIL,

where I met **Don Burden** and **Chick Crabtree**. Chick was a man with a tremendous voice, and Don was a man with a tremendous temper. I didn't know that Don even existed; Chick hired me as a newscaster to work the early morning show. Then suddenly the morning disc jockey quit.

They were understaffed at the time, so they said, "You know how to run these turntables, don't you?" And I said, "Of course I do." I had no idea how to run a turntable. There were six turntables — three on each side — a lavalier microphone, two Magnecorder recorders...and you had to stand during the whole show.

This was around 1956, and it was a very fast-paced station, because they were competing with **Todd Storz**. That first day was the most horrible time I can remember. I kept goosing every record. During the first five minutes on the air, I probably made five technical errors.

At that point, Don was back in town. He stormed into the booth and said, "Oh, God! You are the shittiest disc jockey I've ever heard in my life! How did you ever get hired here?" I didn't know who he was, so I said, "Well, thanks a lot." I didn't know he was the owner of the station. So I continued in my myriad of technical difficulties. Afterward Don was just shaking his head, muttering, "Oh, God!" There's no question about it: I really was bad.

So I went back to our apartment — our dingy little tarpaper lean-to apartment — and rang the doorbell. **Arleta**, my wife, says I just stood there while a tear trickled from my eye, and I said I wanted to go back and write for Associated Press, which I had done while I was in school. She said, "Well, just give yourself one month. If you don't improve, you can always go back. But give yourself 30 days."

And I did, and I guess I became pretty good because I did beat Todd Storz in the morning. That was at the very beginning of rock & roll, and it was very competitive. I remember at the Christmas Party that year at the Blackstone Hotel in Omaha, one of the waiters brought Storz beer. That's the Storz family, and Burden got so angry he picked up one of the bottles of beer and threw it through a stained glass window!

I'll never forget the second day I was there. I'm in an office which I shared with **George Dunlevy** and **Jim Price**, who were disc jockeys there. I've been a diabetic since I was nine years old, and I'm taking an insulin injection. Burden opens the door to my office, and here I am with a needle in my hand, ready to inject myself in the arm. So not only does Burden think I'm a lousy disc jockey, but now I have to explain this, too.

*O'DAY: You mentioned writing for AP while you were at school; where did you attend college?*

**OWENS:** Dakota Wesleyan University, which was only 25 miles from our town. It was there that some very famous folk were teaching at the time. **Joseph Robbie** was Professor of

Economics at the school; he now owns the Miami Dolphins football team. **Senator George McGovern** was my speech teacher.

I was majoring in speech. But I wanted to become a psychiatrist; that was my first desire. I wanted to deal with people's minds.

*O'DAY: Back to Omaha...After KOIL, your next job was at KIMN in Denver?*

**OWENS:** Yes. **Ted Nelson** was the program director there. Now he's Vice President of the Hilton Hotel in Las Vegas, and years later I asked him, "How did you know about me when I was in Omaha?" He said, "I got a tape on you." I said, "I never sent you a tape." "No," he said, "Todd Storz sent it."

*O'DAY: Storz wanted you out of the market.*

**OWENS:** That's right, and it was great for me. I went to a large city for more money.

*O'DAY: During those first few years as a disc jockey, were you formulating any kind of plan in your mind?*

**OWENS:** I was just taking it from day to day. The only plan was I wanted to work in California. When I was 14 years old, my buddy, **Lee Harris** — who is a psychiatrist in San Diego — and I both drove out here, and I fell in love with Santa Monica. We came in at 3:00 in the morning and saw the palm trees and the ocean, heard the waves crash against the shore, and I said, "This is where I want to live."

*O'DAY: Where did you go after KIMN?*

**OWENS:** The next stop was for **Gordon McLendon** and **Don Keyes**, who was Gordon's national program director. I learned a lot about radio there, too. I learned how to have a good time as a disc jockey, to make it succinct, make it happen — but also make it funny. That's what they stressed. And McLendon always told me, "You should prepare an hour off the air for every hour on the air." And I've always kept by those tenets...pretty much.

*O'DAY: But you don't still do that today, with your schedule...?*

**OWENS:** Well, almost that. At least 40 minutes for every hour.

*O'DAY: What did you do for McLendon?*

**OWENS:** I was kind of a trouble-shooter for Gordon's chain. I worked for all of his stations, except for the one in El Paso. I worked in New Orleans at WNOE and at KTSA/San Antonio.... **KLIF** and **KILT** very briefly...and then I worked for **WIL** in St. Louis; I was on in the mornings

and **Jack Carney** was on in the afternoons.

*O'DAY: What brought you to California from St. Louis?*

**OWENS:** **Chuck Blore**, who was head of programming for the Crowell-Collier stations, called me one day and said, "Gary, we're going to do in San Francisco what we've done in Los Angeles with KFWB. We've just purchased KEWB, a classical music station in Oakland, and we're going to make it into rock & roll, and we'd like to have you be the morning man."

I said, "That's great, Chuck! Tell me about it!" And he said, "Well, let's talk about everything except money." It was about \$12,000 a year less than I was making in St. Louis.

I talked to my wife about it. I said, "I don't know what to do," and she said, "Well, let's think about it." That evening a tornado leveled the place next to ours, and guess who got on the phone the next morning! I said, "Chuck, I'm sure there's a bonus that can be worked out." And there was. He said he'd give me a \$5,000 bonus if I could beat **Don Sherwood**, who did mornings at KSFO in San Francisco and had never been beaten.

Don was a powerhouse. I didn't know how hard it would be to get that \$5,000, but within the first year I did beat Sherwood. I believe I had a 25 share, and he had a 24. We had a great total sound, as you must with a successful CHR station, and we became #1 in a very short period of time.

*O'DAY: What was Chuck like to work for?*

**OWENS:** As a program director, he was a very methodical man who had great vibrancy and great euphoria. We'd have program meetings, and he'd be filled with kinetic energy: "C'mon, gang, let's go get 'em!" It was euphoric; he would bring our spirits up to say, "Yeah! We *are* the best, we *are* number one, we're the top radio station in the world!" He was a very good leader.

*O'DAY: Given that Chuck was a methodical person who liked to plot things out, did that type of personality allow you to go on the air and break the rules?*

**OWENS:** Well, I never really was one to break rules.

*O'DAY: I guess I'm asking if you ever felt stifled there.*

**OWENS:** No, I didn't, because what he said made sense. It was like the McLendon format, to make things succinct. But if you wanted to tell a joke, you'd tell a joke. If the joke took 30 seconds, that was okay. He did leave room for a lot of levity, a lot of freedom of creativity. So you knew the format up front: You had to play 17 or 18 records per hour or whatever it was, and if you had 17 commercials an hour, then you knew up front that your job was to make that

program as entertaining as you could, given the limitations.

Even in those days I would have the opening line and the end line of each commercial written out for me by the traffic department. So if I was going into, say, a Chevrolet commercial that opened with, "*We haven't heard anything that good in 50 years,*" then I might say something like, "*You know, I really don't feel good today. As a matter of fact, I'm going to go hang myself with an eel down in La Jolla.*" And the announcer would say, "*We haven't heard anything that good in 50 years!*"

So I could write intro and outro lines. It's like the Question Man, which **Bob Arbogast** created many years ago for Steve Allen. Since then it's been followed by the "Carnac The Magnificent" on *The Tonight Show* and the game show, *Jeopardy*, where you work inside out. You've already got the line; now make something funny happen with it.

*O'DAY: After KEWB, you went to KFVB/Los Angeles, and then to KMPC. Why did you make that move to KMPC?*

**OWENS:** At that time, there was a little bit of a stigma about being a rock & roll disc jockey. You would do the Clearasil commercials and the dance party commercials, but in those days they seldom used a rock & roll disc jockey to be a spokesman for Xerox or General Motors. I felt it was a little limiting, and that's the main reason I went over to KMPC. Because once I was in Hollywood, I knew I wanted to make my living in other areas as well as radio.

I always loved radio, and I still do, but I wanted to experiment more with television as an actor, a performer, a writer, a voiceover person ...and KMPC was perfect for that because it was the great middle-of-the-road station in the United States and was heard by most of the producers of tv shows and motion pictures in those days. So they'd say, "Oh, yeah, sure...use Owens on that thing. I hear him on the way home every afternoon." And KMPC did promote me very well; I was on a lot of billboards and bus cards, and so on.

*O'DAY: It was about that time that you achieved a wonderful credit: You worked on Bullwinkle. How did that happen?*

**OWENS:** It was the early '60s. **Alan Burns** was a radio fan of mine, and he was one of the writers for *Fractured Flickers* and *Bullwinkle*. They were starting to do a new show called *The Nut House*. So they hired about 10 of us as freelance writers to come over to **Jay Ward** Productions. A very funny group of people, including **Bill Scott**, who was the voice of *Bullwinkle* and was a great writer...a tremendous writer and a tremendous voice man, too. He and Jay had done *Crusader Rabbit* prior to all this.

It was a great thrill for me; here I am, just coming into this market and after the first couple of months on the air getting a phone call saying, "We love what you do because you're silly and



off-the-wall, and we'd like to have you write for this."

It was a magic time that lasted less than a year, but it was a part of history. In a way, *Nut House* was a precursor to *Laugh In*. *Roger Ramjet* was really the first full-time animated cartoon I did. **Ted Knight** and I were both working in animated cartoons in the early '60s. Ted was Aquaman. We had the same style of voice — basically the superhero put-on type of voice — so we would take turns. He would be a superhero one week and I'd be the villain, and we'd trade back and forth.

*O'DAY: You were at KMPC from 1962 until 1982. What happened that caused you to leave after 20 years?*

**OWENS:** There were changes. It was a difficult time. New people had come into the radio division who had not been in radio before, and they referred to it as the Grand Hotel, meaning that it was this great hotel that was ornate and elegant but which they felt was not keeping up with the times. So instead of using a slow process, they immediately decided they were going to have an influx of rock records...for an audience that had grown up with **Sinatra** and **Benny Goodman** and **Henry Mancini**. And they pretty much chased the audience away in a pretty short period of time. Then they went talk....

*O'DAY: During the Great Talk Radio Scare of 1982.*

**OWENS:** Yes! And it was during that period of time that I was a little disenchanted. They wanted to go in another direction, but I don't think they knew in *what* direction.

*O'DAY: What was it that told them changes needed to be made?*

**OWENS:** Their new boss.

*O'DAY: And what was it that told him that?*

**OWENS:** I don't know.

*O'DAY: As I recall, the ratings weren't at the top of the market, but the billings were —*

**OWENS:** The billings were very, very high. KMPC was never a #1 rated station in total ratings but always did very well in 25-54, which is a great demographic. It always made millions and millions of dollars. It was a very, very successful radio station for a long, long time. I came there pretty much as a kid and left as a middle-aged man. Then I joined Gannett. **Wally Clark** came in from St. Louis to KIIS-FM and KPRZ, which was a religious station that he decided to change to Music of Your Life. So he hired me for mornings.

*O'DAY: How did that feel, going from KMPC to a relatively unknown entity in the*

*marketplace?*

**OWENS:** Well, the feeling would not be one of diminution, but it wasn't the same. It becomes second nature to you: You drive into the same parking lot for 20 years, you go to the same parking space...and suddenly you're with a new organization. A very good organization, a giant. Gannett is the biggest all-media corporation in the world.

But I don't change easily. If I've been going to the same restaurant for 10 years and suddenly a brand new restaurant opens up next door, it takes me longer than other people to go to that new restaurant. I get set in my ways. So there was that feeling for the first five or six months, of saying, "Why did all that happen?"

*O'DAY: I think there were a lot of people who never really found out you were at KPRZ.*

**OWENS:** That's true. Most people didn't know what had happened to me, and to this day most people say, "Oh, yeah. You were on that Valley station!" They thought KPRZ was somewhere in the San Fernando Valley; they never really were sure of its identity.

*O'DAY: You were on KPRZ for three years?*

**OWENS:** That's right.

*O'DAY: And then they decided to simulcast KPRZ with KIIS-FM.*

**OWENS:** That's right. The plan was to try capture the same success they'd had with KIIS-FM.

*O'DAY: Then you moved over to KKGO. If we were to go back and look at clippings in the L.A. Times or in R&R from six months ago, we'd find you saying how wonderful it was at KKGO...and then all of the sudden you're leaving for KFI. What caused that?*

**OWENS:** That's a very good question. I perhaps ask myself that at times, because it was wonderful there. KKGO is a great radio station, and I enjoyed it very, very much. I know sometimes when people read an interview with me, they get the impression that I'm kind of a "Happy Face" button, that I think everybody is swell. But in truth, they were very nice to me at KKGO. KFI simply made me an outstanding offer. As part of the deal, I get **Pat Sajak's** birthday off.

*O'DAY: It seemed that, demographically, you had an audience that you could reap in terms of their being upscale, educated....*

**OWENS:** They were. Although it's kind of interesting: A jazz audience doesn't necessarily go along with humor as much as other audiences, because they are so much into the music.

*O'DAY: They're purists.*

**OWENS:** Yeah. Not puritanical, but there is a purist attitude toward both classical and jazz that is not necessarily true of other forms of music, where maybe you can have a little more fun with it.

KFI is a mainstream kind of radio station. When you're Middle of the Road or Adult Contemporary, it's a larger audience base. Plus the station covers 17 states. KFI is a very powerful radio station that has a lot of history behind it. **Lohman and Barkley** (*the popular morning team that Owens replaced after they broke up after nearly 20 years*) are very close friends of mine. In fact, I introduced the two of them in 1961, just down the street here at Sunset & Vine.

Al Lohman and I were coming out of Coffee Dan's restaurant, which doesn't exist any more, and we were walking by Wallach's Music City, which also doesn't exist any more. Roger Barkley was coming around the corner, and even though they grew up 30 miles apart in Iowa, they had not met each other. Roger was the new PD at KLAC, and Al had just come in from New York. For 18 1/2 years, Al and Roger were a wonderful morning team at KFI. They're very talented people.

*O'DAY: What are the pros & cons of stepping into a show that was another fixture in Los Angeles? I always had the feeling that Lohman & Barkley must've had extremely loyal listeners, because in a way they were kind of an underdog; they had their listeners, and that was it...Whereas you had loyal listeners and also people knew you from tv and voiceovers.*

**OWENS:** I don't know. I don't think I've ever taken over a show from someone who had a giant following like that before. But whatever it is, I'll still do *my* show. But the truth of the matter is we're all from the same part of the country and all learned from **Bob & Ray**, who were our heroes. I would hope that we could retain a lot of their audience.

*O'DAY: Who else influenced you?*

**OWENS:** **Henry Morgan, Edward R. Murrow, Fred Allen, Jack Benny, Robert Benchley, S. J. Perelman.** A new biography of Perelman is out, suggesting that he wasn't really a very nice man. I met him over at Gilbert's Books in Hollywood. That's one of the nice things about working in Hollywood; I've met most of my heroes over the years.

*O'DAY: You raised an interesting idea when you mentioned that Perelman apparently was not the nicest of human beings — and probably not the happiest. Robert Benchley had a very tragic childhood....Do you believe in the claim that all great humorists have unhappy childhoods? Do you know what makes you funny?*

**OWENS:** Well, I don't know. My childhood was not a happy one. I was never well; that was

the main thing. Being a diabetic, I always said, “Why do I have to not ever feel well?” Juvenile diabetes is much more difficult than adult diabetes. Compared to juvenile diabetes, the other is basically a piece of cake.

*O'DAY: No pun intended.*

**OWENS:** Yes, that's right: a sugar-free piece of cake! There are not too many diabetics in show business, mainly because they don't survive with juvenile diabetes. They do now more than they did when I was a kid. But it was extremely difficult for me.

At the age of nine, I went into the hospital in a complete coma, and they thought I'd never come out of the darn thing. I overheard a deep-voiced doctor saying there wasn't much hope for this kid. Now, to hear that, you say, “Wow! Either give up, or let's prove this bastard wrong.” And I proved him wrong. But when you have a chronic illness, it takes its toll in many ways. And perhaps that's why many great comedy minds react in that situation by coming up with a fantasy world. There is a fantasy that we need to create, little islands in our minds.

Diabetes is one of those illnesses where you can look at a person and say, “Hey, they look okay to me.” But it leaves so many psychological scars, because there are so many things a little kid can't do. When I would go to the drugstore in the '50s and everybody else would be having a Coke, there weren't any Diet Cokes like today. So I'd have a glass of water, which did tend to stand out. The only fun I had as a child was sports, cartooning, and reading books and comic books.

*O'DAY: Over the years quite a few talented young people introduced themselves to you and later on became stars.*

**OWENS:** Yes, and a number of people have worked for me over the years. **Albert Brooks** used to work for me at KMPC. **Ken Levine** used to work with me on the show...

*O'DAY: ...Aka “Beaver Cleaver” on KTNQ...*

**OWENS:** ...and now one of the top television producers in the country. And **Tom Straw**, who now is Story Editor for *Night Court*. **Dennis Palumbo** came in from Pittsburgh and worked for my syndicated radio show; he later wrote *My Favorite Year*.

I'm a pack rat; I usually save correspondence for many, many years. A while back I was trying to find a photo from *The Gong Show*, of which I was the original host. I looked in the files, back to 1976, 1975, and in the 1975 file I found 10 or 12 unopened letters. It was one of those things where you put them on your desk and say to your secretary, “Will you set these aside and I'll get to them Monday?”

So here I am in 1986, looking at unopened 1975 mail. Most of them were song requests. But there also was a large manila envelope that contained a *Mary Tyler Moore* script and a *M\*A\*S\*H* script and ten or twelve pieces of material written in the Gary Owens style ...and a menu from Indianapolis. A letter with it said, "*Dear Mr. Owens ....Thank you so much for your kind comments about my material. I'm sending you some more. Please let me know what you think. Signed, David Letterman, Moorpark Avenue, North Hollywood, California.*"

I felt terrible! I mean, here's a kid waiting to hear from me and thinking, "What kind of a schmuck is that!" So I packaged it up and sent it to him with a note of apology, and I said if I had opened it sooner he would've been a star by now.

*O'DAY: Instead of having to work nights.*

**OWENS:** That's right!

*O'DAY: There are thousands of disc jockeys in this country who are in smaller markets, and they look at your career and think, "My god! He's the best-known disc jockey there is, he makes a lot of money, he does all that voiceover work and writing and performing, and his friends are big Hollywood stars..." They probably couldn't imagine there ever being any kinds of career setbacks. Are they right?*

**OWENS:** Well, of course there always have been career setbacks. It may not seem that way on the surface, but there are many times when you will take jobs that may not turn out to be what you think they are. From day to day, there are setbacks. There are things that you think will happen that don't happen.

A year ago I was up for a few tv pilots, and none of them sold. It was a great disappointment. When you're in a business like show business, the degree of frustration and the degree of depression are much higher, because the rewards are much higher. If you own a drugstore and you say, "Well, I hope to increase my billing by 10% next year" and it goes up by only 5%, it's a disappointment but the world doesn't know about it. If you're a baseball player, your box score is in the paper every day. And if you see somebody in show business and they're hoping for a new series and suddenly it doesn't sell....The disappointment level is very high.

*O'DAY: You said that in some ways you're slow to change. Is your radio show any different now than when it was during your heyday at KMPC?*

**OWENS:** Well, I was a little different at KKKGO, because I sensed that the audience over there didn't want as much silliness. I purposefully became more anecdotal.

*O'DAY: Let's say you're going to do a bit tomorrow, whether it's topical or a silly commercial or whatever; are there any ways that are different from the way you would have done it 15 years*

ago?

**OWENS:** Yes. I think perhaps I've matured a little bit more, and my knowledge base is much stronger. I use the telephone more frequently than 15 years ago, and my editing is much faster. I might talk about something a little bit longer now. I might take 30 or 40 seconds to do a joke or story that would've taken 20 seconds back then. I might make a bit last up to a minute, because you can still make the jokes happen one after the other ...*or* they don't have to be there until the very last line.

I think one thing that has happened to me over the years is I've become a little more topical within the framework of humor, even in the recorded bits. So if someone is in the news, I include it in the bit ...whereas in the past I might have used it as a topical throw-away line.

**O'DAY:** *I don't recall ever hearing any stories about something you did on the air that caused any kind of brouhaha, problem with a sponsor, problem with management. I'm guessing that in 30 years, however, there must've been one time when somebody didn't like something you said.*

**OWENS:** I don't ever do anything purposely controversial. My feelings are always on my sleeve. I do have a lot of empathy for people, and I never purposely hurt anybody. And I've always tried to be as commercial as possible. I know who pays the bills. If you don't have advertisers, you don't pay those bills. So I've always tried to protect the advertisers, the clients, if possible.

**O'DAY:** *How do you feel about using blue material on the air?*

**OWENS:** Well, I think we're living in a different time than we did even, say, 10 years ago. Howard Stern might try to get two lesbians fixed up on a date; I can't do that kind of a show, because it isn't what I do. I may get not a blue line but sometimes a double entendre line that just occurs in general conversation, but I never plan it that way. And there are certain things that may sound dirty that are *not* dirty: "premature jubilation." There's nothing wrong with that, but people will say, "Hey, I heard him say *that* on the radio!"

I suppose anything and everything has a place in radio, except that you have to alter to fit your room. If you're appearing in person as a comic or an emcee, you probably wouldn't do blue material at a D.A.R. convention. You *would* do blue material at the Friar's Club. The only problem with radio is you don't know who's listening, so you have to go for that grey in-between.

**O'DAY:** *What about political?*

**OWENS:** I try to stay away from it as much as possible, because half the people are Democrats and half are Republicans....

*O'DAY: And the other half probably don't care...*

**OWENS:** That's right; the other half is unaccounted for.

*O'DAY: Speaking of Howard Stern, what do you think of him?*

**OWENS:** I listen to Howard when I'm in New York, and I listen to **Joey Reynolds** and **Don Imus** and **Scott Shannon** there, to see what's happening. They're all very talented.

*O'DAY: Any opinions about Zoo formats?*

**OWENS:** I think they've helped radio a lot. Morning shows a couple of years ago had gotten kind of dull. I think they probably did brighten up a lot of spots. I think there's been an excitement added to radio because of Zoo-type shows.

*O'DAY: When you are listening to the radio, perhaps in your car, what makes you tune out?*

**OWENS:** Forgetting basics. If I want to know the time, to see if my car clock is correct, and I hear a span of maybe 12 minutes go by without a time check, that is a turn-off to me. Disc jockeys who don't know what they're talking about.

*O'DAY: How long do you plan to stay in daily radio?*

**OWENS:** I love daily radio; it still excites me every day. So I guess I'll stay for as long as it remains exciting for me.

## HARRY SHEARER

*What can you find on the radio at 11:00 on a Sunday morning? Syndicated countdown shows? Religious programming? Public affairs shows? Weekend jocks following the format as they try to work into a fulltime gig?*

*At 11:00 on Sunday mornings in Los Angeles, quite a few people tune in to what I consider to be the finest and funniest satire being produced on radio. What station broadcasts this consistently funny and often brilliant show? KCRW. If you're not from L.A. and you've never heard of it, I'm not surprised; KCRW is a public radio station owned by Santa Monica College. (Santa Monica is a suburb of Los Angeles.)*

*The program is called "Le Show." The host, writer, producer, and music director (he brings in all his own music from his home nearby) is **Harry Shearer**.*

*Shearer might be best known to tv viewers for his two seasons as writer/performer on Saturday Night Live. Movie fans might know him as one of the writers/stars of This Is Spinal Tap. (He's the one who sets off the airport alarms with the foil-wrapped cucumber in his trousers.) But he began his show biz career in radio, at the age of seven...as an actor on The Jack Benny Program.*

*In 1968, at the age of 24, he joined the recently formed Credibility Gap on KRLA/Pasadena. For the next few years, the Gap created some legendary radio satire, first at KRLA and then at KPPC/Pasadena and at KMET/Los Angeles.*

*Our conversation began with a discussion of the beginnings of the Credibility Gap (CG).*

**SHEARER:** This group had just started at KRLA. I don't think they were even calling themselves the CG yet. They'd started in June of '68, and I joined them in October. The original Gap was all newsmen who'd been working as straight newsmen in radio for years: **Richard Beebe**, **Tom Beck**, **John Gilliland**, and **Lew Irwin**. They just sort of got the green light to start playing around, and they began to cast the net more widely for people to sustain. At the time they were doing three ten-minute shows a day, which is a lot of stuff to write and perform.

So I was the first of the non-newsmen brought in, and then about two months later **David L. Lander** came in, and then we brought **Michael McKeon** aboard later.

**O'DAY:** *Was Len Chandler a regular member then?*

**SHEARER:** Yeah, Len was a member the first year, and then there was a shake-up that basically we believed — or at least were led to believe — involved certain anti-black sentiments by the station management.



*O'DAY: That must have been on a purely personal level, because on-the-air there was no way of knowing that Len is black.*

**SHEARER:** No, no. They just weren't hot about having him; there was a political ruckus. Anyway, Lew and Len left, and Michael was a musician as well and we felt we needed somebody else to do music. And that lasted for two years on KRLA, and then we did another year on KPPC.

*O'DAY: A couple of months after the Gap left KRLA, Leo McElroy (the news director) told me the station wanted you to do satire of news, and you were getting more and more into character comedy.*

**SHEARER:** No, that was a line they'd borrowed from **Lew Irwin**, who'd been the original news director and was forced out after the first year by management. Naturally, as people who are actual actors, we were going to be paying more attention to characterizations than newsmen doing imitations of **LBJ**. So yeah, there was more concern for craft, but still our material was the news of the day. That's all we ever used as our material.

We didn't recognize the need to be strictly political, because sports and entertainment were part of the news, so we figured why should we exclude that from our compass? Closer to the mark, I would say, would be the actual statement given to the *L.A. Times* by the general manager of KRLA when he fired us: "The times are too serious for humor."

So we went to KPPC, which was like a dream. We did one show a day, repeated twice, nominally a 15-minute show that was scheduled to start at 6:00PM but went on the air anywhere from 6:00 to 6:45 and ran anywhere from eight to 22 minutes.

We'd stayed totally out of station politics. There was a big buzz around the station that there was going to be a big shake-up, and the jocks on the air promoted it, told the audience to come on down to the station and try to help them save the station the way it was.

We stayed as far away as we could from it; we didn't go near the place. The climax of this long weekend of agony came Sunday night. Right on schedule, the program director came in and confronted this staff and their listeners who had camped out in the station and said, "You're all fired." And one of the jocks piped up and said, "Well, what about the *Credibility Gap*?" And the PD said, "Well, they're fired, too."

*O'DAY: One thing that's always puzzled me, knowing how cheap radio tends to be: KRLA funded you guys on a full-time basis, and then KPPC paid four guys full-time to do what radio would consider to be silly stuff. Was that easy to accomplish?*

**SHEARER:** Well, at KRLA it was easy because they'd had these positions there; it was the

News Department. All they had to do was define us as newsmen. KPPC was very unusual. It was just a fluke; they really thought we would help put them on the map, and they thought it was worth it.

*O'DAY: And then where? KMET?*

**SHEARER:** We did some stuff for KMET. We were never on the air daily there; they would never commit to us on a daily basis. We did some specials, we did Rose Parade coverage for a few years there.

*O'DAY: I heard a story about you getting fired from KMET for saying "penis" on-the-air.*

**SHEARER:** Yeah, that was my show, not the *CG*. On my show I did a take-off on **Bill Balance** and his "Feminine Forum." One of the things Bill was notorious for was his baroque synonyms for penis. I just cut through the fog. (General Manager) **David Moorehead** said, "I would have understood if you had said 'shit' or 'fuck' — that's part of the language — but 'penis!'"

*O'DAY: So a part of the language is okay, but a part of the body is not. When did you start doing your own radio show?*

**SHEARER:** Before the *Gap* started doing shows at KPPC, I started doing a show by myself there, because I wanted an outlet for stuff that was less political and more personal. And also I liked the form of a DJ show; I just didn't like the way they were being done. So I continued to do that for a year at KPPC, and then I did it for two stints at KMET in 1972 & 1975. The second time I got bumped because they were having a "tighten up" and apparently they got mad because I played a **Mel Tormé** record at KMET.

*O'DAY: Was that supposed to be a provocative act?*

**SHEARER:** No! I just played music I liked. I always took the position that I'm on once a week for an hour or two; you guys have got a whole week to do your format, so leave me alone. If an hour a week will bust your format, then you don't have a real strong hold on your listeners' loyalty. And since they were busting the format for **(Dr.) Demento** anyway....

So I had abandoned the idea of getting back into radio until this woman I'd known from KPPC, **Dierdre**, started working at KCRW. She'd remembered my shows and sort of simultaneously I'd been a listener to KCRW and had thought, gee, that would be a place where I could do what I want. That started in December of 1983 as a two-hour show, then I went to New York for eight months (*to do Saturday Night Live*), and when I came back they gave me an hour back.

*O'DAY: How would you describe "Le Show?"*

**SHEARER:** An affront to conventional radio wisdom.

*O'DAY: It seems to be very media-oriented.*

**SHEARER:** Yeah. Especially after my experience with Saturday Night Live, I was left with a hunger to do topical and political material, which I wasn't allowed to do there. So this show is whatever the media covered during the week, with a certain leaning toward the political side of it.

*O'DAY: How much time do you spend writing and producing the show?*

**SHEARER:** I try to keep it down, because otherwise it seems insane to me. But usually it's about five or six hours a week.

*O'DAY: If you were to attempt this kind of a show in a more traditional, commercial radio framework, I would expect to hear PDs say, "Well, this stuff goes way over the heads of the mass audience. You're on a specialized station in a real liberal, educated market...."*

**SHEARER:** Well, that's the thing that was interesting about doing WLS, where I filled in for **Steve & Gary** for two weeks. I brought tapes of pieces I'd done here. Basically I was doing my show, and the audience response I'd get on the phones was great. I wasn't out ahead of them. They weren't calling and saying, "What are you doing? Play more music!" And that's AM radio in Chicago, pretty young audience, Top 40 format. Radio always underestimates the intelligence of the audience.

All you can do is just go out there and show them that the audience you can reach digs it and say, "Prove to me that they don't really like it." I don't think research means shit in this area, all that methodology originally was designed to elicit feelings about advertising. And advertising is not something that you're meant to enjoy. It's methodology designed to measure the effectiveness of strategies to surmount that initial response.

Entertainment is totally different. People don't approach entertainment with the same resistance that they approach advertising. And to evaluate entertainment with the same methodology is, to me, meaningless. What advertisers want to know is whether people's attitudes toward a product changed as a result of a certain number of exposures. To know if people like something that's supposed to be entertaining, just stand in a room with them when they're watching it or listening to it.

Anything that engenders strong feelings will engender strong feelings both ways, positive & negative. It's the fear of strong feelings that results in the kind of radio we have. They'd rather not have the strong negative, because they're not willing to assume there'll be a strong positive that goes along with that.

*O'DAY: Let's talk about some of your recurring features.*

**SHEARER:** There are three things I've done several times. I've done a few "Mr. Blackwell" shows on the program. He's the designer best known for his Ten Worst Dressed List every year. He used to actually do a radio show in L.A., and it was by far the funniest radio show I've ever heard. I just became obsessed with him as a character and determined that, since he was no longer being allowed to do his show, I should do it for him.

Another of the things I do with any regularity comes from the fact that I've always been amazed by these commercials that **Vin Scully** does for "Farmer John" (*a brand of luncheon meats*) that are so clumsily tied into holidays of the summer season. So I determined that since the Dodgers weren't on during the rest of the year, I'd fill in the holidays he hadn't covered. So I did a spot tying **Martin Luther King's** Birthday to pork sausage ...or St. Patrick's Day: "St. Patty's or St. Links!"

The third thing is "Hellcats of the White House." I was trying to think of an interesting frame in which to do **Reagan** material. There is some question as to what percentage of Reagan's brain is in the real world as opposed to in the melodramatic world of B movies. His speeches draw heavily from old movies, as has been amply documented; whether you think he's a good or a bad president, he does live in that world. So from that came a style of doing these pieces that is basically melodramatic. It's realistic subject matter in terms of what's going on in the lives of the Reagans, but it's written and especially performed in a melodramatic style...as if they're actually walking through a world of old movies in their heads.

*O'DAY: One thing that makes it stand out for me is in radio you can't turn on a station without someone doing a mediocre or even a good impression of Reagan, and the words just don't fit the character. And although my guess is you're definitely not a Reagan fan, you deal with him from his point of view, as opposed to portraying him as bad or as altogether stupid. And often you show real affection between him and Nancy...*

**SHEARER:** Yeah. Well, that's the difference between when actors do these people and when people who don't happen to have acting skills do them. You can do impersonations of people without acting. Acting involves getting into the head of that person. I write them from that perspective because I know what makes it possible for me to do a good character.

I mean, when we were doing **Nixon** stuff at the *Credibility Gap* and we thought we were being kind of vicious — or, at least, unrelenting — I remember getting letters from real committed left-wing people saying, "You're making him too likable." There are so many permutations of this. One of the enduring problems that I have with tv and movie people is that they're constantly talking about likability as though it's some sort of ingredient that you can just pour into the character...

*O'DAY: You give him a dog...*

**SHEARER:** You give him a dog, give him a funny brother-in-law....And all you have to do to make a character likable is play him from the inside, and now he's a human being.

*O'DAY: When you're doing a topical piece, what is your assumption regarding the audience's awareness?*

**SHEARER:** That's a good question. The *CG* had a perfect set-up for dealing with that: We told them the story first. On my show, if I think that it's about something that may have missed most people's attention, I'll tend to talk about it in an adlibbed, undirected manner earlier in the show, planting the seed. I'll talk about it within the framework of two or three things that happened that week that struck me as interesting or particularly goofy. But yeah, I think it's important to clue people in. I have no desire to keep people from enjoying it by dealing with something that they don't know the subject matter of.

*O'DAY: What kinds of complaints do you get from your audience these days?*

**SHEARER:** I know that whenever I do anything on the subject of South Africa I will get angry phone calls. That and an interview that purported to be with **Cathleen Webb** and **Gary Dodson**. (*Webb is the woman who made headlines by confessing that her testimony that sent Dodson to prison for allegedly raping her was false.*) The premise of that was they were coming out with a new story in which she was admitting that *she* raped *him*.

Those are the only subjects on which I've gotten even negative phone calls from anybody in the audience, and very often when I talk to these people it turns out they've tuned in the middle and haven't gotten the idea.

*O'DAY: Who influenced you in radio?*

**SHEARER:** **Bob & Ray**....**Freberg**...and the *Goon Shows*. Freberg's production values are unparalleled.

*O'DAY: Is there anybody you listen to now in radio whom you especially respect?*

**SHEARER:** Yeah, there's a guy who does shows for KCRW and/or NPR (*National Public Radio*) every once in a great while, named **Joe Frank**. He's not a funny guy, necessarily, but he's a really good writer and he does audio short stories.

I've heard **Howard Stern** do one or two funny things. I mean, when he did "Lesbian Dial-A-Date" I had to admit the boundaries of AM radio were being stretched...and the stretch marks are still there. And **Ian Shole**'s stuff with *Duck's Breath Mystery Theatre*....and before he became famous and went soft, I would listen to **Garrison Keillor** (*A Prairie Home Companion*) on

occasion.

*O'DAY: Why does one choose to do world-class comedy on a college radio station, public radio, with a relatively limited number of listeners for what I'm guessing is no money...*

**SHEARER:** Right.

*O'DAY: ...when one obviously can go other places?*

**SHEARER:** You do it where you can do it. I gravitate to the area of greatest freedom, especially with radio. Radio to me is like a maraschino cherry on the sundae of life. I have plenty of meetings and arguments involving motion pictures and television, and those are long and impassioned and horrible and draining and depressing. I don't want to spend any time having meetings or arguments involving radio. So to me the value of radio is that it lets me make a rough sketch of an idea real quickly.

I mean, I'm not going to make — unless I did daily radio, which I'm not going to do — the kind of money that I would regard as interesting. I get offers from commercial stations, but what's a commercial station going to pay for a once-a-week show?

*O'DAY: I would guess that somebody has kicked around the idea of putting you on National Public Radio.*

**SHEARER:** Yeah. NPR is very scared of the political stuff. They were getting the show shipped to them for possible use, and every time I did a Reagan thing I would talk to somebody back there and they would say, "Well, you know what our situation is here..." I think they're a little pusillanimous when it comes to that.

The *Credibility Gap's* problem in getting syndicated was basically the same problem I have: Radio syndication thrives in a 2- or 3-minute programette, and as a group we never wanted to be restricted to that form, and I don't either. Anybody who wants to carry the whole hour a week is more than welcome to it, but I don't want to be put into a situation where it's five 2-minute things a week. That's not what I'm into radio for.

I mean, I did this one-man show in New York in October, a live theatrical show, and about 3/4 of the material in that show was based on stuff I had done on the radio. I did a special for Cinemax last summer, and about half of the material in that show was originally from radio. When things are going slowly or badly in other areas and I'd be tempted out of depression to sit around morosely and do nothing but watch tv, this forces me to write every week and every once in a while come up with a new character or play with my synthesizer or whatever.

But it's basically play for me. Going to WLS for a couple of weeks and doing the show there

gave me a taste of both what it would be like to do it on a regular basis and the advantages of not doing it on a regular basis. I was treated much better as a guest than I would be as a member of the regular staff. I could take advantage much more of the freedom I had than if they had real power over me. I mean, if I didn't play the playlist, what were they going to do — make me leave on Thursday instead of Friday? But if you're there as a job, it's very different.

A friend of mine was trying to get me into a station he worked at in San Francisco about five or six years ago. I went up and had a nice meeting with the PD. This was after I'd done *Saturday Night Live* the first time, and he was astonished that I'd be willing to fly up to San Francisco to do a radio show every week. It was like a sketch:

He said, "You know, it's a five-hour shift," and I said, "That's okay. But you know, I'll do *my* show. I'll do whatever I want and I'll play the records I want." And he said, "Well, you can play whatever record you want."

And he took me to the jocks' studio and showed me this card file and said, "They have 150 albums to choose from!" And he showed me the clock and said, "All you have to do is play a red, and then a green...." And I said, "Thank you...."

## HOWARD STERN

*Howard Stern has to be one of the most outrageous jocks in the business. His on-air persona is outspoken, blunt, clever, acerbic...and, according to some, insulting, insensitive, and offensive. When I spoke with Howard, he was the afternoon drive personality at WNBC/New York. I asked him to describe his technique....*

**STERN:** I don't worry about the consequences. I just go on the air and say whatever I want, and ultimately people want that. I don't worry about offending anyone; I assume I'm going to offend *everyone* at one point or another.

*O'DAY: Is it really true that you go on the air and say what you want without giving it any thought at all? You have to do some editing.*

**STERN:** Of course. You can't go on and do certain kinds of material on the radio. When you're working at a station like WNBC, you've got to keep in mind that it's an adult-oriented radio station. There are certain parameters that exist, but within those parameters — which aren't all that strict — you can just about let loose. I think after doing personality radio for a while, you develop an inner warning light that goes off and says, "Well, maybe I stepped over the line." But hopefully you don't step over it too much. You can say just what pops into your head, but you've got to have some semblance of what's proper.

*O'DAY: How are you able to get away with using material that a lot of jocks simply wouldn't be allowed to touch?*

**STERN:** It probably means I'm funny when I do it. If there weren't a degree of humor in it, if I got on and was just really acidic and really harsh and didn't give you a laugh, you'd probably have a very severe reaction to me. Because I'm doing it through humor, people assume it's okay. Also, I'm doing it in afternoon drive, mixed in with music; people assume it's comedy. Not *all* of them assume it, but the vast majority do and they get hip to it. When I first got on we must've gotten a million hate letters a day. And that's true of any station I go to, because people aren't sure, at first, if I'm a comedian or what. They don't know if they should laugh, how they should respond. But now we've got them trained; they understand. They're like a bunch of seals; they all clap when you tell them to.

*O'DAY: How does management respond to complaints from listeners and advertisers?*

**STERN:** Advertising response has been tremendous because we have ratings. Also, I won't really tackle tragedies. You can find humor in certain tragedies, but I think that's one of the places where you do draw the line.

*O'DAY: How about some examples of things you would not touch?*



**STERN:** When **Princess Grace** drove off the cliff. I didn't go on the air and make **Princess Grace** jokes. I could have.

*O'DAY: After **Natalie Wood** died, did you make **Natalie Wood** jokes?*

**STERN:** I didn't make jokes specifically about **Natalie Wood**, but I did make jokes about something in the *Enquirer* with **Robert Wagner** and **Christopher Walken**. When **Karen Carpenter** died, I didn't go on the air and talk about **anorexia nervosa**.

*O'DAY: But you do racial and ethnic stuff...*

**STERN:** Yeah, I'll do anything. Just about anything.

*O'DAY: In retrospect, can you think of anything you went too far with?*

**STERN:** No. If I went too far with it, it's because I felt I had a good reason to do it. Sometimes management, when they get upset, they'll come back a day later and say, "Well, this pissed someone off and we're not comfortable with it," but nine times out of ten I still think I was right.

*O'DAY: So you say advertisers aren't kicking because the ratings are good. How is management treating you?*

**STERN:** Management's been treating me great. We have a new general manager, **Randy Bongarten**, who really knows how to handle personality radio.

*O'DAY: Is that simply to let you do what you want to do?*

**STERN:** No. He knows how to give you a creative environment. I don't think there's any general manager that's better at this than he is. He knows you need a certain amount of creative freedom; he knows he has to instill a certain amount of trust in the personality. There's nothing worse than a paranoid GM, because he makes the whole show paranoid.

The people who work on my show — **Robin** and **Fred** — they would get completely crazy when they felt paranoid, and so would I, and the show would sound shitty. He's let us know what he's comfortable with and he's let us get loose with it. He's not afraid to break format. He knows my show has been successful because I *have* broken format.

Yesterday on NBC radio I played **Led Zeppelin** records because I'd decided I was going to play my own music for the day. It was fabulous! We played all '60s stuff: **Hendrix**, **The Who**, **Stones**. That's what we wanted to do. Now, a lot of paranoid GMs would start worrying about, "Oh my God, it's a Thursday, the day they mail out the diaries, etc." You don't worry about that kind of crap if you're really going to do personality radio.

**O'DAY:** *Earlier in your career, did you ever do a regular old radio show without being controversial?*

**STERN:** I did, and I was horrible at it. I never really wanted to do a regular show, but I felt like maybe I should learn the basics first.

**O'DAY:** *Where was that?*

**STERN:** At WRNW/Westchester. They made me the midday guy, but I was a *terrible* straight announcer. I don't have that unbelievable desire that some jocks have to learn how to deliver the WNBC call letters with excitement and fervor even though I'm feeling lousy. I believe in sounding natural, and I hate the way some disc jockeys sound when they all sound yucky.

**O'DAY:** *How do you act during personal appearances? Are you as obnoxious in person as you are on the air?*

**STERN:** Yeah.

**O'DAY:** *You don't soften your approach at all?*

**STERN:** Well, I just think I'm being myself on the radio, so why should I be different in person?

**O'DAY:** *How about when listeners approach you? I would imagine some listeners would be afraid to.*

**STERN:** A lot of them are. But I tell them that we won't mistreat someone who acts normal. It's just that you get angry with the people who are assholes. Anybody in real life would be angry with someone who's an asshole. We're just trying to be real, to remove the barrier of the microphone and stop sounding phony...all that shit we've been taught to do.

**O'DAY:** *You're at a network station. Does the legal department ever step in and say, "Hey, you're exposing us to charges of slander or personal attack?"*

**STERN:** No, I don't get too many hassles with them. You see, I know how far I can go. I'm good at that. I've never been sued — never.

**O'DAY:** *But you must've been threatened with physical violence.*

**STERN:** Yeah. We did "Gay Dial-A-Date" about two weeks ago, and there must've been about five bomb threats. And in Washington someone was going to kill me for something. They had to get guards to escort me into the station for about a week. I think the guy was just generally mad at me.

*O'DAY: You no longer do "Fartman," which you used to do in Washington. What types of things are you doing in New York that might be pushing your show to its limit?*

**STERN:** Hmmmm...It's really funny what upsets people. We did a thing about a black newscaster in town, to the tune of *Bette Davis Eyes*. It was called "Sue Simmons' Hair" and was about whether "She's mulatto and has the brains of a potato," and that caused a lot of controversy. She was all upset and everyone was all upset but it was great.

The Jewish community got a little upset about "Hillel Street Blues" — the story of Jewish cops who were kind of cowardly. We did a Lone Ranger thing with "Homo Sabe" that got the gay community upset. But everybody's liable to get upset.

*O'DAY: It's nice to hear you've mellowed out.*

**STERN:** Never!

## AL WYNTOR

*While attending the Country Radio Seminar in 1986, I happened to hear an aircheck of Al Wyntor, who at the time was the morning jock on that city's WSM. I was quite impressed. Wyntor began his career in his hometown of Carrington, North Dakota, in 1966. After working "in a lot of little towns you never heard of," he did nights at WDAF/Kansas City and middays at WHK/Cleveland before coming to Nashville in 1984.*

*O'DAY: The only thing I hear on your show that sounds specifically "Country" is the music you play.*

**WYNTOR:** I take that as a compliment. I don't think of our listeners as country music fans. They happen to like the kind of music we're playing; that doesn't mean they've got their heads in the sand and don't know current events or aren't concerned about their town or don't have dry wit. It's just a taste in music; the people are the same as other radio listeners.

There are people out there who don't appreciate what I do. I'll do a parody on Brother Bobby, who's the pastor of the Church of the Holy Roller Derby (and who also operates the Foundation for Oriental Women Who Want To Learn More About Country Music), and maybe that conflicts with some people's traditional values. But there are just as many people who can laugh at themselves. In fact, there are more of them.

*O'DAY: More than one jock has complained to me about a PD or GM who insisted, "You can't be funny on country radio. The listeners aren't sophisticated enough."*

**WYNTOR:** I don't doubt that, because there are a lot of crazy conceptions that go around. And you know where those come from? It's because very few people have the benefit of starting out in a big market. If you go to work in a small fish tank where you've got to be more responsive to a few people, you're going to get called more often by those few people who aren't really the majority but who carry a lot more weight. And those beliefs follow you as a manager, as a programmer, as an air personality, as you grow into a bigger market.

That's one of the weaknesses of country radio. You've seen it in all the debate about the music; shoot, let the public decide. They always have. We've sat and developed our own "conventional wisdom," but the public has always been the final arbiter of, "Is Al Wyntor or Gerry House funny? Is Ricky Skaggs country music? Is Exile country music?"

*O'DAY: I would guess that to the average listener the question, "Is it country music?" is much less important than the question, "Do I like listening to it?"*

**WYNTOR:** Sure. And they're not like a concert audience. Sometimes we think we're playing to an audience that is critiquing us constantly on our music, and that's not true. These people don't

pay anything to hear our morning show. If I paid 12 bucks to hear **George Jones**, I'd want to hear George Jones and I wouldn't accept any substitutes. But if I'm going to work in the morning and I want to know what the roads are like and they don't tell me, I'm going to go find a station that will. Or if I want to hear a funny bit or if I associate what some guy's doing with the way I lead my life — if he's somebody I identify with — then I'll stay.

*O'DAY: What people inspired or influenced your style?*

**WYNTOR:** Well, I was so far out of reach for a while that I couldn't hear many great jocks. In the late 60s & early 70s there was a guy named **Don Dresser** at **WDAY** in Fargo and his buddy named **Earl Williams**, who I thought were terrific. They were funny, and they could have gone places had they wanted to. I admire **Rick Dees** a whole bunch. I think **Lujack's** great. I love **The Greaseman**.

*O'DAY: How do you prepare for your show?*

**WYNTOR:** I'll take a look at some of the humor sheets and get a newspaper in the afternoon, sit down at my trusty little Japanese typewriter and try to give myself at least 15 ways to involve myself in what's going on....or talk about me and the terrible time my kid's having....or anything that goes on that relates to me a little bit. Then I'll try to expand on that. I'll come up with a Question of the Day: "What would you do if...?" Then I'll take a look in the newspaper and find somebody who did something good, and I'll salute them: "If you see So-and-So today, tell him 'good job!'"

Program directors generally feel it's good to be local, and that's true. But then again some people aren't very aware locally; there's a lot of apathy. Some people are lucky if they read the headlines. So if you do **Khadafy** jokes, that's great because at least they'll know who he is. I go on the air at five in the morning. I'll get there around 3:30, take another look at what I've got, run through the wires, get an early paper ...and then I'll go in the production room around 4:00 and produce any scripts I've created for fake spots, drop-ins, etc. By 5:00 I've got myself laden down with all kinds of stuff, half of which I won't use.

*O'DAY: How much time in all would you say you spend preparing for your four-hour airshift?*

**WYNTOR:** About four hours. It's been said before that it takes an hour of prep for every hour on the air. If I *don't* do prep, I feel like shit and it tells on the air. If I do the four hours of prep I can get the job done. If you really want to, you can base your entire life on that show. But I've got four kids and a wife who's been nothing short of terrific for 17 years, and they're more important than my job. Although my job serves a purpose, I don't want it to take over what my life really is about.

SOME AL WYNTOR SAMPLES (SHOW EXCERPTS)

(Dramatic MUSIC UP) "He's *back*. Al Wyntor Pictures presents *Bambi II*. Yes, that frightened, innocent, saucer-eyed little fawn is now a 500-pound stag, and he's ready to kick some butt! Look out poachers, look out trappers, look out you hunters: Bambi's back in the woods and he's spoiling for a fight! *Bambi II* — starring **Fred Williamson** as Bambi, **Ruth Gordon** as Thumper, and **Mayor Fulton** as The Antler. *Bambi II* — rated G; may be too gamey for wimps!"

•••••

It's St. Patrick's Day, 1986. You can check that in your almanac if you like. I don't really think it's necessary, though, 'cause we have this trust relationship built up...."

•••••

"Hello again, friends. this is your announcer/pastor, Brother Bobby, speaking today on behalf of my Irish brethern & sistern & their childern. You know, my goal has been to end the violence in Ireland, and I have had a vision. I'm going to do it with recreation. Idle hands are the devil's workshop. but we can stop all the bombin' and the shootin' and the drinkin'.

"In two weeks I'll be opening the doors to my new mission. I call it Brother Bobby's Belfast Karate Dojo. We'll teach 'em chops, kicks & finger bendin' until they're too pooped to pop. And you can be part of it.

"Your love gift of \$49.95 will sponsor an entire Irish family of four for a whole month's karate classes at Brother Bobby's Belfast Karate Dojo. Reach out with me now, fight fire with fire, end violence with violence. As soon as I cash your check for \$49.95, I'll send you actual photographs of your little Irish family kicking the daylights out of each other, your own kelly-green karate pajamas, and a little black belt book marker. And if you act before midnight tonight, we'll have one of 'em break a board in two in your honor. Our address is simply: Brother Bobby's Belfast Karate Dojo, Del Rio, Texas!"

•••••

(Dramatic MUSIC UP) "A young couple tenderly embraces in the moonlight. The breeze rushes through the leaves around them on Lover's Lane. Or...is it just the breeze? Their romance is about to turn into terror, as they encounter the deadliest farm animal known to man. Just when you thought it was safe to go back to the farm....*Porka, The Killer Swine!*

(Voice #2:) Gee, whatever happened to Old Ben?

(Voice #3:) I dunno. Maybe the hogs ate him....

“Scientists call it Pigus Outacus...or the Great White Hog. You’ll call it horror. Coming this summer...Steven Shpielberg’s *Porka, The Killer Swine!*”

•••••

“I like a slow song like that on a morning like this because you probably didn’t know it, but ol’ Al tried to kick the cigarettes this weekend. I made it through Saturday, but I fell down on Sunday. What I tried to do was substitute Life Savers for cigarettes. And I’ll tell you, I got so sick of the smell of burning candy....”

## RADIO STORIES

This one comes from Westwood One's Frank DeSantis, recalling his days as Music Director of KZOZ/San Luis Obispo, California:

*I was on the air. Our sales manager stopped by while I was doing my shift and wanted to know how come KSLY — our main competitor — was giving away Boz Scaggs albums while we weren't.*

*Naturally, I didn't take that too well. I said, "Number One, I don't know why they're giving away Boz Scaggs albums. Number Two, get the hell out of the studio. I'm doing my shift; I don't want to hear about this right now."*

*He was a big, ex-Marine type. He got right up to my face and said, "Hey, you don't talk to me like that."*

*I said, "Yeah, I do. When I'm on the air and you're in the studio, I can tell you exactly what to do," and I pushed him, saying, "Get away from me."*

*The next thing I knew I was being dragged out of the studio into the hallway and was in a brawl with the guy...while a record was spinning in the studio. He had me down on the floor, choking me. Luckily the program director came along and pulled the guy off me. If it hadn't been for my PD, the record would've run out on-the-air and I would've gotten my face beat in.*



# THE JOB-HUNTING SURVIVAL GUIDE

## WHEN TO LOOK FOR A NEW JOB

There are four good reasons for actively seeking new employment at another radio station. You know it's time to look for another gig when:

1. *Your present job no longer offers you any challenge and you feel you've learned all you can there.* This is an especially good gauge to use in the first few years of your career. Most personalities start in small markets and have hopes of moving up to increasingly larger ones. But there's no point in leaving a good situation solely because the new job is in a bigger market.

When you start your first radio job, you're almost overwhelmed by the task of competing with the more experienced "pros" in your market. After a while, however, you realize most of those guys aren't all that good. Your first few years, especially, should be ones of continued growth. One way to measure that growth is to aircheck yourself daily and save the tapes for future reference. If you're continually improving, you'll probably find that the "great" aircheck you made six months ago is filled with flaws...just as today's "great" aircheck will pale by comparison with what you'll be doing another six months from now.

But if you've met with success in your market and discover that meeting or beating the competition no longer is much of a challenge, then it might be time to start looking around for bigger things.

2. *You're unhappy with your present job.* Sure, this should be obvious, but the inverse of this rule should be considered: If you are *happy* where you are, perhaps you should stay there. Having a job that you enjoy, working with people you respect, and living in a community that suits your personal and social needs are riches that shouldn't be given up lightly. It's important not to let your natural ambition catapult you out of an enjoyable position and into a better paying or more prestigious one that isn't right for you. Do you absolutely hate the snow? Then why leave St. Petersburg for Detroit? Do you relish your freedom to do extended on-air phone bits? Then why leave your happy medium market job for a major market time & temp gig?

I know a jock who for years held down a drive-time shift at a major Los Angeles station. He made good money, had a good home, was highly visible in the market and had a fairly secure position. He was offered a job in New York City. The people offering the job were rather vague about what they wanted him to do, but they were willing to pay more than he could get in L.A.

He took the gig. As soon as he went on the air in New York, his new management told him he couldn't do any of the daily features he'd developed so successfully in L.A. He became frustrated there; his new station didn't seem to know what to do with him. After a few months, he left New York and has moved around through a few other large markets since then. Was it worth

it?

3. *Your job appears to be in jeopardy.* Too many jocks are shocked to find themselves unemployed when they should have seen it coming: constant hassles with management, credible rumors of a major format change, serious personality conflict with the PD. The insecurity and unpredictability of life as an air personality constitute the other good reason to aircheck yourself every day. Keep the five best telescoped shows *at home*. Review them each month to keep them up to date.

4. *You lose your job.* Obviously, looking for a new job when you're unemployed is a lot harder than when you're working. Psychologically, you're at a disadvantage. You're much more desperate to land something, and this can make you more likely to take a chance on a gig you otherwise wouldn't consider. Also, an employed air personality is more attractive to a program director than an unemployed one. It's easy to understand why most PDs would rather "steal away" a jock from another station than hire someone who's just been rejected by his or her employer.

### IF YOU LOSE YOUR JOB

You haven't been getting along with management. Personality clash, philosophical difference, whatever you want to call it. The PD or GM calls you into his office and says, "*Ed, we're really unhappy with your work. I think you've got an attitude problem.*"

An attitude problem?? Hell, you've been busting your back for this station, putting in very long hours for very low pay. The PD's a jerk and the GM doesn't know the first thing about radio. And now they're about to pull the plug on you. Your immediate shock quickly is followed by a feeling of anger. You want to tell them what they can do with their job: "*You can't fire me; I quit!*" You then stride purposefully from the room, pride intact, door slamming behind you.

**WRONG!** Unless you've got an independent and adequate source of income, you *never resign* in that situation! If you quit, you won't qualify for unemployment compensation ...and if you're being "let go" or "phased out" or "terminated" due to reasons beyond your control (ratings, economics, politics, format changes, etc), you're entitled to your unemployment benefits.

It's not unheard of for management to try to maneuver you into quitting. *Don't take the bait!* I know of a station in the southwest that wanted to fire an air personality, who happened to be a woman. The PD decided women don't belong on the air, at least not as disc jockeys. Instead of saying, "We're letting you go," the PD told the jock he wanted her to be News Director...even though the jock in question had no experience in news and no desire to change her career in that manner.

"*Just try it out for a week or so,*" the PD said. What should the jock have done?

Well, the jock had a contract that specified her job as “disc jockey.” She wasn’t described as “general announcer” or “member of air staff” or “on-air employee;” she was described *only* as a “disc jockey.” Had she agreed to try being a newsperson and ended up quitting, she probably would not have qualified for unemployment compensation. The station had, after all, given her another job.

She told the PD, *“I’m not qualified to be News Director.”* The PD replied, *“So you’re quitting, then?”*

*“No,”* she said. *“I’m willing to continue in my job as a disc jockey and, in fact, I would like to continue in that job.”*

They went back and forth like that for some time, until finally the PD uttered the fateful words: *“We’ll have to let you go, then.”*

### THE GRACIOUS & THE GUILTY

So.... You haven’t quit; you’ve been fired. *Now* you can let the PD know what you think of him and his operation? No. Because you still need the PD’s assistance, and the time to ask for it is *immediately* after you’ve been terminated, while he’s still feeling guilty and uncomfortable. The first thing you ask for is a letter of recommendation. It’s important to ask for and get that letter the same day you’re fired, if at all possible, because that’s when the PD (and the GM, too) will be most likely to be generous with you. After all, guilt can be a powerful motivator.

Be both direct and gentle: *“Well, I guess I’d better start looking for another job. Would you mind giving me an honest letter of recommendation so I can show prospective employers that we parted on good terms?”* Usually the PD will graciously agree, and when he does you add, *“Great! Why don’t I get my things together while you type up the letter?”*

At this point the PD might indicate that you should come back later in the week for the letter. It’s crucial for you to be firm on this point: *“Gee, I’m really feeling overwhelmed at suddenly being unemployed, and I’d like to start sending out tapes this afternoon. I don’t mind waiting around for it.”*

Remember, the PD wants to be let off the hook and is grateful to you for not making a scene. He’s so grateful, in fact, that you hit him up for another “favor”: *“I really wasn’t prepared for this. Would it be okay with you if I were to use the production room a couple of nights this week to dub off airchecks? I’ll provide my own tape, of course.”*

Get the PD’s commitment *before* he has second thoughts and posts a notice informing all employees that Ed Jock no longer is allowed on the premises.

Getting fired is an unsettling and upsetting experience. It takes character to see it through with

some style and class...and it builds professional points that may help lead to your next job.

## HOW TO FIND JOB OPENINGS

That most obvious place to look for jobs is in “the trades,” that is, radio trade publications. *Radio & Records* is, in my opinion, the best source of fresh openings in major and medium markets. Another good source is *The Gavin Report*.

If you’re planning to respond to an ad in the trades, do so *quickly*. The better job opportunities attract upwards of a hundred applicants. With those kinds of odds to beat, it’s amazing how many jocks respond to ads that appeared six weeks ago.

Both *R&R* and *Broadcasting* accept “blind box” ads, in which the identity of the advertiser is withheld from the reader. In these cases, the job seeker sends the tape & résumé (T&R) to the box number in care of the publication, which forwards it to the advertiser.

Why do employers use blind boxes? Obviously, they want to remain anonymous to the general public. This might be because they don’t want to be bothered with unwanted phone calls from applicants. Perhaps they’re planning to replace a jock who is unaware that he or she is on the way out. Maybe the opening is occurring due to an upcoming format change, which the station wants to keep secret from its competitors.

The one obvious danger of replying to a blind box ad is that you might be sending a T&R to your own station...or to another station in your chain. If your current employer knows you’re looking around, then you don’t have to worry. But most of us tend to keep our inquiries confidential. For this reason, it’s important to read the blind box ad carefully; if the description of the station could reasonably fit your own, it may be wise to forego replying. (Usually the ad will offer some specifics, e.g., market size, format, geographic location.)

## RUNNING YOUR OWN AD

You can use the trades to place your own ad, too. *Gavin* and *R&R* will list you for free. (For a fee, *R&R* will assign you your own blind box number and forward any replies to you in confidence.) *Broadcasting* accepts paid advertisements only, with or without a blind box. Your ad in *Broadcasting* is most likely to be read by small market program directors and station managers.

If you run your own “Position Wanted” ad, be sure to indicate what you’re looking for in terms of market size, format and geographic location. If you’re out of work or if your employer knows you’re looking, by all means include your name and phone number. A surprising number of ads lists only a phone number, and I suspect the average program director isn’t fond of calling a number without knowing even the name of the person s/he’s calling. And if there isn’t someone

available to answer the phone during normal business hours, pick up a cheap telephone answering machine and plug it in.

### PERSONAL CONTACTS

A secondary method of learning of job openings is through personal contacts. Let your friends in other markets know you're on the lookout for a good opportunity. (But make sure they're your friends before you confide in them; some people just love spreading gossip.) Local and regional record promoters often are among the first to hear of personnel changes at other stations; make it a habit to ask your promo people, "What's new?"

### PERSONAL VISITS

Another method is to visit stations and markets in which you'd like to work. I know a guy who stopped by a San Francisco station during his vacation. The station manager took him on a tour of the facilities, and at the end of the tour he offered the guy a job doing all-nights. The guy accepted...and a few months later he became Program Director. And remember, he didn't show up looking for a job; he simply wanted to see what the station was like.

### TARGETING SPECIFIC STATIONS

A fifth method involves some time, effort and expense. But it can be effective, especially in small and medium markets. Decide in which markets you're most interested in working. Select your target stations in those markets. To find out which stations are market leaders, check the ratings reports in *R&R*. You might also look up the station's listings in either *Standard Rate & Data Service (SRDS)* or the annual *Broadcasting Yearbook*. Check to see which station(s) in your format has the highest advertising rate card; odds are the higher-priced stations also are more highly rated.

Next, telephone the station. Because the personnel listings in both *SRDS* and *Broadcasting Yearbook* often are outdated, you need to find out who the program director is. Do *not* simply call the station and ask for the program director. First find out the PD's name. Call the station and have the receptionist spell and pronounce the name for you. (Or, to save money, call after 11PM and have the night jock give you the information.) Then, *in a separate phone call*, on another day, call the program director *person-to-person*. You call person-to-person because

- 1) You won't have to pay for the call unless you actually reach the PD. Program directors tend to be very busy, and you might call a few times before you get yours on the line.

- 2) Nosy, obstructive secretaries are less likely to demand, "What are you calling in reference to?" when it's a person-to-person call.

So....You've got the PD on the line. "Hello," you begin. "My name is Ed Jock. I'm a jock at KKED in Maple Falls, and I heard you might be having an opening for an air personality soon."

The PD might reply, "Where did you hear that?"

"Oh, another jock by the name of (Any Name) mentioned it, but he wasn't sure."

Or the PD might reply, "No, I'm afraid there are no openings."

To this you respond, "Oh. Another false lead. While I've got you on the line, do you happen to know of any good openings in the area?" Regardless of the response to this last question, you then thank the PD and end the conversation.

Every now and then, however, the PD will answer your original question with, "Yes, we do have an opening."

"Great!" you say. "I've been doing morning drive here for the past two years, and if it's okay with you I'd like to send you my tape and résumé."

At this point the PD will either ask you a few questions or simply tell you to send the tape. Don't try to sell yourself during this phone call; you're simply trying to get someone to listen to your aircheck. Here's an example of an annoying phone call, courtesy of KDWB's **Dave Anthony**:

"Hello, is this the program director?"

"Yes, I'm David Anthony, the program manager....What can I do for you?"

"Well, a friend of mine said you have an opening and I have a tape that I'd like to get your comments on. I've worked at XXXX and XXXX and would like to apply. I can do it, I know what you want, I know I can make it, I know I can do it."

"Please send me a cassette and résumé to P.O. Box XXXX, and I'll get back in touch with you after I review it."

"Oh....I thought I could just drive by and talk with you first."

As Dave points out, there's really nothing to talk about until *after* he's heard the tape.

## THE AIRCHECK

I surveyed program directors across the country and found an overwhelming preference for

cassettes over reels. Typical of PDs' comments are those of Dave Anthony:

*"Cassettes are now universal. I haven't had a functional reel-to-reel deck in my office for years. Go use the production room? Good luck. Either somebody's producing something brilliant or dubbing music to cart (or the engineer's got the room torn up). I have cassette players in my office, at home, in my car and strapped to my waist."*

This isn't to suggest that reels won't be listened to. But as WZOZ's **Joe Moss** points out, "always listen to the cassette tapes before I get to applicants who send reels."

Remember, you want to do everything you can to set the stage for the PD to be in a good mood when listening to your tape.

Quite a few PDs complained of receiving badly dubbed tapes. "*Jocks should be very careful of cassette quality,*" says WOOS's **Rick Singer**. "*A lot of people/stations don't have good quality facilities to dub cassettes. If it's going to sound muffled, distorted or (and this happens a lot) the cassette runs at the wrong speed, you'd better go for a reel.*"

If you're not trying to keep a secret of your job-hunting, a local cassette duplication company should be able to run quality dubs for you at affordable prices.

Instead of using a plain, unadorned label with your printed or typed name on it, consider making a classier impression, as recommended by Brown Institute Broadcast Placement Director **Mike Kronforst**: "*Have some custom cassette labels printed up. It really dresses up the overall package.*"

I agree. If you're going up against stiff competition, you've got to make every aspect of your sales pitch (i.e., your job application) sparkle.

Because most air personalities (excluding some of the top talent in the top markets) do both airwork and production, the standard job-seeking tape consists of these two elements, in that order. In most cases, the aircheck portion should run two to four minutes. No competent program director will hire a jock from that single tape alone; this aircheck serves as your calling card. If the PD likes the tape, he or she will ask for more. At that time a smart PD might ask for two more tapes: a complete telescoped show from last week and one from *tomorrow*.

People disagree as to what should go into the roughly three minutes of aircheck. Some believe in using a real one-hour segment that typifies your work. Others "cherry pick" when putting together the tape, i.e., they pick and choose from among their best moments.

Given the intense competition for this industry's best jobs, I strongly recommend putting together a terrific three minutes representing your best air work. Think about it: Does a comedian

auditioning for *The Tonight Show* rely on just “average” material for fear of misleading his potential employer, or does he use only his very best stuff?

Your initial aircheck is meant to impress and entertain the PD. I recommend constructing a tape that sounds like a real hour of your show. Don't have your time checks, weather mentions, or calendar items contradict each other. Your tape should contain at least (and usually no more than) one of each of the basics: time, weather, station promo line, etc.

Is it dishonest to take bits & pieces and make it sound like a single show? Well, I suppose it's dishonest if you include with your T&R a notarized statement guaranteeing it's a non-edited, telescoped show. The only time “cherry picking” leads to problems, however, is when you can't produce in real life what's represented on the tape. Your aircheck should represent you at the top of your form. (And, obviously, if you already have a great one-hour segment from a recent show that fills the bill, then there's no need to cherry pick.)

Cute “narrations” of airchecks tend to be distracting and annoying. Similarly unnecessary is the splicing in of electronic tone beeps at each edit point. Program directors have heard enough airchecks to understand that some time has elapsed between the first two bars of a song and the jock's outro.

While we're discussing editing: Keep the music to an absolute minimum. I'm amazed at how many jocks devote ten valuable seconds of their audition to a record fading out.

Your production samples should be different in style from each other: one hard sell, one soft sell, one humorous, one with sound effects, etc. You don't have to include a spot in its entirety; instead consider putting together a 90-second montage of spots, fading from one to the next.

Your cassette should be clearly and neatly labeled with your name and phone number. Protect it with a plastic box (they cost about a dime each) and mail it in a padded envelope. (I receive quite a few cassettes mailed in #10 business envelopes. Some of them arrived damaged. Every now and then I receive the envelope minus the cassette.)

## TWO COMMENTS ON AIRCHECKS

From **George D. Nice**, Director of Broadcast Operations at WCAU-FM/Philadelphia:  
*“Never offer a prospective employer anything other than samples of your very best work.”*

From **Rick Singer**: *“A real pet peeve I have with tapes is when it is not an aircheck but a cutesy little story or performance with the talk breaks and commercials woven into the story line. (This is a technique I believe some of the broadcast schools teach.)”*



## THE COVER LETTER

Many PDs have complained to me about applicants' lack of attention in preparing the cover letter. To begin with, it's a matter of courtesy. The PD is taking the time to listen to your tape; the least you can do is say, "Thanks for listening."

A good cover letter is contained on a single page. It identifies the sender, addresses the PD by name (if that information is available), identifies the job being applied for and why, and thanks the PD for listening. On the following page is a sample of a basic cover letter (with my footnoted comments following).

1930 Century Park West  
Los Angeles, California 90067  
(213) 553-4330

February 22, 2001

Dear Mr. Grammerpro:

Having spotted your R&R ad for a morning personality, I am enclosing a recent aircheck and résumé.

As you'll hear, I believe in entertaining my audience without forgetting that they still want to hear the music.<sup>1</sup>

After three years here at KKED, I'm itching to move on to a bigger challenge.<sup>2</sup> And because I'm originally from the East Coast, I'd be especially interested in returning to the New England area.<sup>3</sup>

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Ed Jock

1. Frankly, this sentence is just B.S., and you'll want to substitute your own line of B.S. or leave it out entirely. Whatever you do, avoid editorializing: *"Unlike many foul-mouthed jocks who offend their listeners & advertisers, I don't think a personality has to be obscene to get good ratings."*

2. This, too, is optional. If you can conveniently sum up your professional status in a single sentence like this, great. I would, however, avoid explanations like, *"Due to an incredibly incompetent (and, I might add, dishonest) station manager, I find myself in desperate need of employment."*

3. If you can say something specific about the PD's station, market or region without being patronizing, do so. This is not the place for insincere flattery: *"I've always heard that Boise has the most exciting and innovative radio in the world, and I've always dreamed of someday working in your city."*

You'll note that those three sentences are optional. If you left them out of this letter, what would you be left with? A short, very concise letter...which is all you need.

Here are four sample statements that might be used, listed in ascending order of their probable effectiveness.

#1: *"I'd like to work for your radio station."*

#2: *"I'd love to be part of the kind of radio you're doing at KKED."*

#3: *"I know your Extra Spicy Hits format at KKED is very exciting to listen to, and I think it would be even more exciting to be part of it."*

#4: *"I can recall how impressed I was when you first debuted your Extra Spicy Hits concept back in Detroit. From what I've heard of your refinements in Chicago, I'm even more excited at the prospect of joining your team."*

By the way, if you're answering a blind ad, it is not advisable to begin your letter with, "Dear Sir." Certain program directors of either sex will consider it sexist. If a title is listed in the ad, address your letter to the title: "Dear Program Director" .... "Dear Operations Director". If no title is given, it's entirely permissible to open with a simple, "Hello...."

### THREE COMMENTS ON COVER LETTERS

From Rick Singer: *"First impressions mean a lot, and you sure don't get a good first impression when you open a package and find a cover letter and/or résumé that is poorly handwritten (in several cases the notes have been scratched on binder-type lined paper)."*

From Joe Moss: *"Pet peeves include tapes and résumés sent without cover letters ...and people who don't take the time to spell my name correctly (and mine is easy to spell) or don't proofread their letters, which often have terrible spelling or embarrassing grammar. Would I hire someone who might speak as badly as he or she writes?"*

And again from Rick Singer: *"A classic example of a bad cover letter is having a jock write to say how he/she would love to work at your great radio station...and then proceed to explain that you should hire them because they know how they could make your radio station better to listen to. I'm looking for a jock to execute the format...not a consultant."*

### THE RÉSUMÉ

Mason Williams once said, "If a thing is worth saying, it can be said on a single page." That applies to most résumés. Your résumé should include the following:

- Your name, address, and phone number at the top

- A listing of the stations where you've worked, beginning with the current or most recent one and working backward

- The job titles you held at each station

That's really all you need. If you've won some industry awards, it won't hurt to mention them.

On the following page, you'll find a basic, sample résumé. It is much simpler than many. It's not designed to impress; it's designed to inform. You'll note that it does *not* list educational background (I've yet to meet the PD you says, "*What I really want is a midday jock who has a B.A. in Communication*") or hobbies. The PD simply wants to know where you've worked, how long you worked there, and what you did there.

There is one way to make a good impression with your résumé, and that's to have it typeset and reproduced either by offset printing or by *high quality* photocopying. At the very least, it should be neatly typed and centered.

## TWO COMMENTS ON RÉSUMÉS

From Lee Martin, EAZY101: "*I will not even consider a résumé which states the objective as, 'Seeking to utilize my talents and skills in Communications, Public Relations, or related fields.' If you come to me, you should know specifically what you're after and have the talent and experience to back it up.*"

Joe Moss: "*Another pet peeve is the person who is a jack-of-all-trades. The one who can do mornings or be my copywriter, production manager, news director, salesperson, sportscaster, etc. I'd rather have someone who is an expert in one field than an amateur in six.*"

## SHOULD YOU ENCLOSE A PHOTO?

Should you enclose a photo of yourself? Opinions on this vary. Personally, I'm not particularly drawn to the idea of enclosing a photo, but that might be because of my complete lack of resemblance to Mel Gibson.

Many PDs like to see a photo before they bring you out for an interview — especially if they're hoping you'll be making lots of personal appearances on behalf of the station. But inasmuch as only a few PDs are going to ask for an in-person interview, I think you can afford to wait for them to ask for an additional tape w/photo.

The main reason I don't see much value in photos is the potential harm they can do outweighs

**ED JOCK**  
1234 Bonnie Lane  
Doverville, Mississippi 38953

Age: 27  
Marital Status: single

(801) 526-8989

**WORK HISTORY**

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| 1982 - present | KKED, Winona, Minnesota<br>Morning personality, production                       |
| 1980 - 1982    | WKED, Hartford, Connecticut<br>Morning personality, Music Director, Production   |
| 1978 - 1980    | KEKD, Barstow, California<br>Program Director, air personality                   |
| 1977 - 1978    | WEKD, Chatham, Virginia<br>Air personality, production, Assistant Music Director |

**AWARDS**

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 1983 | CMA Air Personality of the Year                                   |
| 1982 | Air Personality of the Year, Connecticut Broadcasters Association |
| 1980 | Honorable Mention, Galaxy Production Competition                  |

**REFERENCES**

Dan Grammerpro  
Program Director, WKED  
123 Washington Street  
Hartford, CT 06103  
(203) 123-4567

Mary Mangen  
General Manager, KEKD  
456 Dusty Street  
Barstow, CA 92311  
(714) 747-9675

Paul Famous  
Famous Consultants  
765 Peachtree Street  
Atlanta, GA 30303  
(404) 635-5759

**CAREER GOALS**

I'm seeking a morning position with a contemporary music station.

the good. Let's contrast two scenarios:

*(PD LOOKING AT PHOTO OF ATTRACTIVE-LOOKING JOCK WHOSE AIRCHECK S/HE'S JUST HEARD:)* "Pretty good tape...Oh, and *here's* a photo. Not a bad-looking guy..."

*(PD LOOKING AT PHOTO OF UGLY JOCK WHOSE AIRCHECK S/HE'S JUST HEARD:)* "Pretty good tape...but, oh, look at this guy! What a barfer! Let's put him back on the bottom of the pile..." But if this PD were to talk to the jock *before* seeing the picture, the PD might get a chance to like the guy...which can influence his response when he does finally see what the jock looks like.

I think WJBR's **Stewart McRae** has the best idea for those who want to give some indication of what they look like without going the 8 x 10 glossy route: "I personally like to see Xeroxed copies of newspaper clippings. Instead of a basic photo of you, why not send a clipping of you and the mayor at a grand opening? It shows you can get the good local press."

If you do insist on enclosing a photo, here are some handy guidelines on what type of appearance is preferred by each major format, compiled with the assistance of our good friend, **Terry Moss**.

#### THE RADIO JOB-HUNTER'S GUIDE TO FORMAT PHOTOS

**AOR:** The two key elements for an AOR jock are the mustache and the t-shirt. All AOR jocks should sport mustaches — including women. Your t-shirt should feature an unassailably hip rock group. (Leave your **DeFranco Family** shirt in the closet for this photo session.)

**CHR:** No mustache...unless you have the type of mustache that no one ever realizes is there. Wear a *clean* t-shirt, preferably showcasing your station's call letters, dial position, and slogan.

**C&W:** Full beard (the **Hank, Jr.** look). Any t-shirt will do, as long as it promotes a beer. (But don't wear a "lite beer" t-shirt unless you're angling for a crossover C&W gig.) Cowboy hats? Too obvious. I asked country programmer **Charlie Cook** about bandanas, and he replied, "Only if you're applying for a management position."

**A/C:** Lush mustaches are okay; otherwise go clean-shaven. Your hair (and your lush mustache, if you have one) should be blow-dried. And, of course, you don't wear a t-shirt; wear a sweater and try to make it look like it doesn't make you itch.

**URBAN CONTEMPORARY:** **Billy Dee Williams** mustache, curly-looking hair. The steely, serious expression in your eyes should be reinforced by your white shirt & tie.

**JAZZ:** Wear shades. Your hair isn't important. What *is* important is that you be shown listening

reverently to the sounds of **Charlie Parker**. (It's not necessary to display the record cover; just be sure to *look* like you're listening to The Bird.)

*NEWS/TALK*: Obviously, a suit & tie. And be *sure* to show lots of teeth. Employers often fear close-lipped applicants are trying to hide the ravages of gum disease, which can both turn off your guests and lessen your chances of cross-promoting the station by co-hosting *PM Magazine*.

### MAILING THE PACKAGE

Send the package via First Class Mail. If the job is on the other side of the country and you're convinced it's *the* job for you, you might even use one of the next-day delivery services. You'll save money by sending it via the Fourth Class rate for sound recordings, but it'll take longer to get there...often weeks longer.

Unfortunately, very few stations return tapes sent by job seekers. (I always did when I was a PD — unless I hired the person or wanted to keep the tape on file for future openings.) If you're on a tight budget, you might want to enclose a self-addressed, stamped padded mailing envelope with your application.

### FOLLOWING UP YOUR T&R

After you've sent your T&R to a PD, your anxiety level is likely to increase as each day passes without your telephone ringing. There's nothing wrong with calling the PD *after* your tape has arrived (figure out how long it should take to get there and then call three or four days later) and saying, "*Hi, this is Ed Jock. I sent you a tape & résumé about ten days ago, and I'm just calling to make sure it arrived safely.*"

What you *really* mean is, "*Hi, this is Ed Jock. Did you like my tape? Are you gonna hire me? You haven't already hired someone else, have you?*" The PD knows that's what you really mean. If you're lucky, you'll be told one of two things:

1) "*Yeah, I listened to it the other day and liked it. You're in the running.*"

or

2) "*Yeah. You're not what we're looking for.*"

The first answer will give a big boost to your ego. The second will allow you to stop worrying about that particular job and concentrate on another one.

What you want to avoid is calling the PD every couple of days to find out if you've got the job. Let's face it: If a PD wants you on the air staff, he or she will pick up the phone and call you.

## THE INTERVIEW

You've sent out your tapes. You've waited by the phone. At last, a program director calls and says, "Hey, I really like your tape! How'd you like to work here?"

Your natural tendency is to jump at the offer — especially if you're already unemployed. Before you jump, please take the time to remember:

### YOU HAVE MORE TO LOSE THAN THE STATION DOES.

If you take a new job and it doesn't work out, the station simply replaces you. Sure, they might be out a few bucks if they helped with your moving expenses...and perhaps a few more bucks if they buy off your contract or pay severance. But even after you've gone, the station will chug merrily upon its way.

You, on the other hand, have done some or all of the following:

You've packed up your belongings, left your house or apartment, and moved across the country. As you get older, this process tends to become increasingly expensive, both financially (because you acquire more possessions) and emotionally.

- Your spouse has quit his/her job.

- You've turned you back on other job offers you might have been considering or ones you might have received after you took the new one.

- You've left what has become your home. You've left your friends & familiar surroundings for a new place where you know no one.

Psychologists have devised a checklist that measures the relative amount of stress a person is likely to suffer. Major causes of stress, according to this list, include:

- Losing your job

- Moving to another state

- Suffering a serious financial setback

Now, these are listed as events that can lead to great stress when they happen to someone within a single year. But *all* often happen *at once* when you take a new radio job.



So if after a few weeks your new employer tells you, “It’s not working out,” you’re up the creek. Unemployed in a new town. It’s much harder for a jock to rebound from a mistake in hiring than for the station itself to recover.

What can you do to protect yourself?

### YOU CAN INTERVIEW THE STATION

You should not even consider accepting a job without first having met the people and toured the facilities. This is true regardless of how long you’ve been out of work, how wonderful the station’s reputation is, and what a big name the PD is. Having communicated via phone & mail, what you’ve got so far is nothing more than a blind date....And we all know how disastrous those can be.

Before meeting your blind date, you can begin *your interview of them* on the phone. Beware if the PD or GM is reluctant to discuss details over the telephone. If they’re prepared to offer you a job, there’s no reason why they should refuse to tell you what it pays, what the airshift is, etc. Here’s what happened a while back to a disc jockey — who asks to remain anonymous — who gave the benefit of the doubt to a closed-mouth prospective employer:

*“A few weeks back I was offered a position in Wheeling, West Virginia, but they insisted on an interview at my expense. I tried to talk with them about some of the details of the job over the phone first, but they refused. I made a ten-hour drive only to find out that I would have to take a cut in pay, pay for my own move, and work a 60-hour week. I would have done all this if it had been the type of experience I was hoping for, but as I was shown around the station I noticed the jock on the air was reading a book....”*

The station probably will request that you come for an interview. Any classy operation will pay your way. This seems only fair, inasmuch as the financial resources of a successful radio station are vastly greater than those of most jocks.

If the station won’t pay your way but the job still sounds good to you, suggest to them that you split the cost of your airfare with them and that they put you up in a local hotel during your visit. (Undoubtedly they’ll have a hotel to arrange a trade with.) If they won’t do even that much, you might want to ask yourself, “Is this the type of operation I want to work with? Do they seem to care about the welfare of their jocks? Are they financially sound?”

### TURNING THE TABLES DURING THE INTERVIEW

The station thinks you’re coming to “audition” for the job. In reality, you’re there to audition them. I don’t mean you should be defensive and demanding and arrogant. I do mean you should ask lots of questions about the station’s operation and how you would be expected to fit into it. Relevant questions include:

- What will be the exact hours (and days) of my airshift?
- What will be my salary?
- Is weekend airwork voluntary, mandatory or non-existent?
- If there is weekend work, what is the policy regarding overtime pay?
- What happened to the jock who previously held this shift?
- What are my other duties, in addition to my airshift?
- During what hours am I expected to perform those other duties?
- Am I allowed to do outside voicework (i.e., for agencies or individual clients for a local television station, etc.)?
- To whom do I answer as a jock? (Will it be just the PD critiquing my show, or will I also be receiving regular instructions and/or input from the general manager...or even the sales manager...or the engineer...or the owner...)
- How does the station see its position in the market?
- How does the station see its future in this market?
- What is the company itself like to work for? (This is appropriate both for a local operation and for one owned by a larger chain.)
- How long have you been Program Director? How much autonomy do you have in running your department?
- In my show, I do a lot of *(fill in whatever you do a lot of here)*. How do you feel about my doing that here? How will the station manager and the owner feel about that?
- How much influence does your sales manager have over programming?
- Is there room for advancement within the station or within the chain?
- What results, specifically, do you expect to see by putting me in this airshift? How will you know if you've gotten those results? How long do you expect it to take to achieve those results? (If the station truly expects to turn around its ratings in a single book, you might want to wish

them luck and then leave.)

- Will you pay my moving expenses?

Perhaps I can best illustrate the effectiveness of this technique by describing a job interview I had many years ago. I was working in a small market, and a major market station asked me to come for an interview. I was terribly excited about the prospect of jumping from a Top 200 market to a Top 5 market. But all through the morning and afternoon talks with the program director, I continually asked him questions...despite the fact that I was asked to come so *they* could decide if they wanted *me*.

Finally the PD said to me, "Look, do you want the job or not?" I graciously accepted the offer.

### GET IT IN WRITING

Okay, they've offered the job and you've accepted. Before you go home, give notice to your employer and landlord, and start packing....Get It In Writing.

At many stations there is no written contract. We'll cover this subject much more fully in the next chapter. But it's never too soon for you to learn this important rule: Even if the station doesn't "use" a contract ....Get It In Writing. Here's how.

YOU (at the end of your successful interview): *Before I go, it would be very helpful for me if you would put the details of what we discussed in a letter that I can take with me.*

(The PD or GM might readily agree. Or they might balk. If the latter occurs, continue as follows.)

PD: *Well....We don't use contracts here...*

YOU: *Oh, I don't expect you to write out a contract! Just an informal note on station letterhead that mentions the major points we've discussed: Salary, airshift, moving expenses....*

Again, let's look at what happened to our anonymous (but very real) disc jockey friend:

*"I drove eight hours to get to a station in another small town for an interview. I spent the day with the GM. He offered me the job three times during our conversation and told me and my wife to look over the town, talk about the position on the way home and let them know my decision on Monday. Well, on Monday I called and was told the position was filled. Luckily we got back the five hundred dollar deposit we had put down on a place to live there."*

Remember the immortal words of Samuel Goldwyn: "An oral contract isn't worth the paper it's written on."

## PERSISTENCE PAYS

**Kelly Kincaid**, News Director at 96Rock/Atlanta, says she landed her present job through *“persistence and professionalism. My current boss, Alan Sneed, admits the main thing that convinced him he should hire me was my undying interest in working for him. I called, wrote, sent tapes every week or two. This man didn’t know me and had only a few friends who knew me...and I was working a different job in a very different format. I have talent; I knew I could do the job, but he didn’t.*

*“So I pestered him, professionally and gently, until he hired me part-time...and put me on full-time two months later. The point is: Find the place you want to work, find the person you want to work for, and KEEP IN TOUCH. Do so confidently, not by whining, ‘Gee, don’t you have a job for me??’”*

## DOLLARS FOR DONUTS

**George D. Nice** offers a clever method of making your aircheck stand out from the rest of the pile on the desk of the program director you’re trying to impress:

*“Here’s an idea which worked very well for me when I was a jock: Enclose a \$1.00 bill with your cover letter, but don’t mention anything about it until the very end of your letter. Then write that the dollar is for coffee and donuts, on you, for the PD to enjoy while listening to your tape. Nine times out of ten, the PD will return your \$1.00 with a thank-you...and a critique of your tape. It’s definitely an attention-getter.”*

## PDs’ PET PEEVES

Judging from the input I’ve received from program directors across the county, job-seeking pet peeves of PDs include:

- Handwritten cover letters and/or résumés
- Poorly recorded or dubbed airchecks
- Absence of cover letter
- Non-personalized (often photocopied) cover letters

•Résumés that say “Tape on request.” As KDWB’s Dave Anthony points out, *“With 50 other envelopes containing tapes, it’s too easy to just forget about this one. Besides, how serious can someone be when they don’t send a tape?”*

## PREPARING FOR THE PHONE CALL

WOOS's Rick Singer brings up a point many jocks never think of: *"The jock should be prepared for the call from the PD. Make sure whoever answers your phone at home knows how to react. It doesn't help your job prospects when Mom, Dad, Wife, Sister, Daughter or Whoever doesn't seem to care that the PD is calling and doesn't offer to take a message. Stress upon them the importance of taking a clear message and making sure the message is passed along. We PDs will try to get in touch only so many times before it appears to us you're not all that interested."*

## SHOULD I FIB ABOUT MY SALARY?

A jock from the Virgin Islands asks, *"If you're coming out of a small market and a prospective employer asks about your salary history, what do you tell him? The job might actually pay more than the jock expects."*

Tell the truth. Your salary at the new gig should depend on what that particular job pays, not on what you made elsewhere. When reporting your present or most recent salary, however, I think it's okay to include in that base whatever regular station trades you might be privy to — especially if you've got a trade for gasoline, rent or groceries (yes, all of those *do* exist).

On the other hand, if a prospective employer asks how much money you want, I recommend you reply with an honest and appropriate question of your own: "How much does the job pay?"

## KARYN KASI'S GLOSSARY FOR RADIO HELP WANTED ADS

"Young" = *low pay*

"Hungry" = *low pay*

"Energetic" = *a lot of work...and low pay*

"T & R & photo" = *lots of remotes and low pay*

"Sunbelt, palm trees, coastal, away from the snow" = *low pay*

"5 years experience required" = *they'll take 2 1/2 years experience if you'll take low pay*

**(Karyn Kasi is a young, hungry, energetic, sunbelt market jock at K106/Beaumont, Texas.)**

## APPLYING FOR A DIFFERENT FORMAT

From a jock in Texas: *"I started out in CHR, went to AOR, worked an A/C, and now I'm doing Country. My tape, naturally, is Country, but I'm applying to CHR and A/C stations. Should I trust PDs enough to recognize talent despite the format of the tape, or will I risk losing a shot at a job because the tape is outside the format? I believe in my talent to work any format, but I am an honest man...and contrived tapes to suit a specific format are not entirely honest."*

You have two workable options available to you. The first is to include, on the reverse of your cassette, a good aircheck from your CHR or AOR or A/C days, depending upon the job you're up for. This assumes that the old aircheck isn't so old that it no longer represents your abilities; you don't want to include a tape of you being lousy in the right format.

If your previous airchecks aren't representative of your present abilities, I'd suggest going into the studio and doing a one-hour "show" in the appropriate format...and putting *that* on the back of your cassette.

In either case, be sure to make clear in your cover letter what you're doing. If you're including (in addition to your current one) a dummy show, let the PD know that up front. And clearly label the cassette itself so the PD knows what's on it.

## CHECKING A STATION'S REFERENCES

Question from a jock in Nebraska: *"Someone who applies for a position at a radio station is asked to supply references and a complete work history. How does someone turn the tables and check up on the radio station?"*

One way is simply to pick up the phone and call jocks at competing stations: *"Hi...I've been offered a job at KKED, and I'm curious to know what kind of reputation they have in your market. Have you ever worked there? What do you think of their overall air sound? How well do they treat their jocks? What have you heard about management there? Is it a pretty stable operation? Do they seem to have frequent format changes? Is there a swinging door for jocks?"*

Often you'll find jocks are very willing to be helpful; they've been in your situation. Sometimes they might ask what your name is. I recommend being prepared to give a phony name. (I know it's not nice to lie. It's also not nice to lose a job just because some jock mouthed off around town with *your* name on his/her lips.)

If you're asked what airshift you're being considered for, I think it's appropriate to respect your prospective employer's privacy by saying, "I don't think it would be right for me to divulge that before they've made the announcement."

## A CHEAP TAPE TIP

**Phil Beckman** passes along this tip: *“This is for job seekers in need of good quality cassettes. Check the cutout bins at your nearby K-Mart or record store. The stiff cassettes available for under a dollar each are of good or better quality and cheaper than Radio Shack’s 30-minute tapes. The printed-on labels usually come off with denatured alcohol.”*

## ONE FINAL PIECE OF ADVICE

When you’ve completed your aircheck — the one you’re going to try to land a new gig with — play it for one or two radio people whose judgments you trust. If you all agree the tape is a good one, write yourself a note that says, **“THIS IS A GOOD TAPE!”**

Why? Because after you’ve dubbed it off 50 times — monitoring each dub to make sure the PD receives a good tape — you’re going to get sick of it. After several weeks without a job offer, you’re going to become convinced that that aircheck is the worst that’s ever been recorded.

When you’re about to panic...When you start to get depressed and despair of ever landing a new job....Read the note you wrote for yourself: **“THIS IS A GOOD TAPE!”**

And then go back into the studio and dub off a dozen more.

## CONTRACTS

*One day I received a phone call from an old radio friend who was bursting with the news of her new job: A good airshift, twice her present salary, in a market 1500 miles away from her current gig.*

*“Did you meet with your new employers in person?” I asked.*

*No. They spoke on the telephone.*

*“Did you visit the radio station itself, meet any of the other jocks?”*

*No. The next question was merely a formality; I knew what the answer would be, and I knew I wouldn't like it.*

*“Do you have any kind of written employment agreement with the new station?”*

*No...But she could tell they're nice people. They got along really well on the telephone. And the money was so good...And it was the airshift she wanted ....And....And....*

*...And besides, disc jockeys almost never work under a contract, right?*

*Wrong. That's what this chapter is all about.*

### EVERYONE HAS ONE

Virtually everyone who is employed has a contract.

“‘Contract’ is simply another work for ‘agreement,’” says New York City broadcast attorney **Barry Skidelsky**. “Agreements can be oral or written. Certain agreements require writings; many or most do not.

“The distinction between the oral and written contract, apart from any requirement that the contract be in writing, is simply a matter of proof. So it's always better to get it in writing. An oral contract for employment may be enforceable under state law, but without a writing the problem comes down to how do you prove that agreement? Testimony is one way. You give testimony, but the other side can simply deny it.”

So if you're working somewhere, you've got a contract. It may or may not be in writing, but both you and your employer have agreed to certain obligations to each other. If you're not offered a written contract, it's incumbent upon you to request — and insist upon, if necessary — one.



## ASKING FOR IT IN WRITING

*"Oh," your new program director says, "We don't need a formal contract. You'll be treated fairly here."*

*"I'm sure I will" you reply. "I can see KKED is an honorable business. And as you know, in any business arrangement it's best for everyone to put it in writing."*

*"Don't you trust me?" asks the PD, genuinely hurt.*

*"Of course I do!" you reply. "I wouldn't consider taking this job if I didn't have a lot of respect for you. In fact, someone as talented as you might well be snatched up by some bigger company after I get here...and your successor will find it very helpful to be able to see what we agreed to in writing."*

*"We don't give your jocks contracts here."*

*"Well, we don't need a contract. I'll tell you what: I'll just put down on paper everything we've agreed to, you and I both will check it over carefully, and then we'll both sign it. And we'll each have a copy for our files."*

And if they still refuse to budge? If they refuse to give you anything in writing? Well, you can quit your present job, take the new one, move across the country, and hope for the best. Or you can hold out for a job where your employer respects you enough to put everything in writing.

## "OUR STANDARD CONTRACT" = THEIR OPENING OFFER

When there is a written contract offered, most jocks assume they have two choices: They can sign it or they can refuse the job.

*"This is a fallacious assumption under which disc jockeys and many other employees falsely labor," says Skidelsky, whose pre-law background includes experience as a radio air personality, program director, sales manager, general manager, and national sales rep.*

*"Management will say, 'Here you go, Jock. Here's the contract; sign it.' I would advise all DJs to say, 'If you don't mind, I'd like to take a couple of days and maybe have my lawyer look it over.'"*

And what if management says, *"Oh, this is our standard contract"*? Then, Skidelsky suggests, you should say, *"Fine, then there shouldn't be any problem."*

*"No one should be rushed into signing any writing, particularly a contract, without the*

opportunity to at least read it. First of all, if I don't read it and sign it, then I have no knowledge of that to which I allegedly have given my consent...and therefore it's not enforceable."

Is that a possible loophole with which to get out of a contract, if it's a rather complex contract that you just scrawled your name on in the manager's office?

"Yes and no," Skidelsky replies, "A typical lawyer's answer. The problem is if you say, '*I signed the contract under duress*' — let's say economic duress, that may prove to be a valid defense to excuse you from the contract should you want to rescind it. But the facts of the case may say, 'Okay, you didn't read it, you signed it under economic duress. But such time has elapsed whereby you now know from the duties of the employment and the daily activities involved what was expected of you and all the material terms & conditions and now have in effect ratified this agreement by continuing in the employment without objection.'"

It's important to remember that "standard contract" is simply the station's opening offer. It might not necessarily be unfair, but it's unlikely to reflect all of your best interests. Here are some of the areas that should be covered explicitly by your employment contract.

### AIRSHIFT

"*Afternoon Drive.*" We all know what that means, right? It means 2:00PM — 6:00PM ...except, of course, when it means 3:00PM — 7:00PM...or 2:00PM — 6:45PM...or 12:00N — 6:00PM...or whatever you or your employer decides it means. The exact hours of your airshift should be stipulated in your contract.

### WORKDAY

"*Airshift plus production and promotion duties.*" How much production? How many hours are you required to spend in the production room? For whom are you required to do production — just your station? Or your station and its AM or FM counterpart? Or any station in your group owner's chain? Or your sister tv station?

And while we're on the subject, does "production" mean the producing and recording of commercial, PSA, and promotional copy ...or does it also include the writing of the copy? Do "promotional duties" include live remotes, driving around town in the station van, going out for drinks with advertising clients?

### WORK WEEK

Are you expected to work five or six days a week? Are your duties the same on the sixth as on the other five? Do you get paid overtime for the sixth day? If so, is such overtime optional...and if it's optional, at whose option? Are you guaranteed a certain amount of weekend overtime? Do you have the right to refuse paid overtime on the weekend?

## FORMAT

What happens if the station changes format? Often a format change is used as an excuse to abrogate a jock's contract. If you're working CHR and the station changes to Adult Contemporary, do you want a chance to stay on and continue with the new format? If so, you'd better have that spelled out in your contract. Insert a clause specifying that the terms of the agreement will remain in effect regardless of any future changes of station format or management.

On the other hand, you might be a country jock who wouldn't ever want to work anything but country. In that case, insert a clause stipulating that the contract can be abrogated by the disc jockey in the event that the station ceases to program country music. (They'll probably insist on making that an option for both sides. But if you allow them to insist on adding wording that gives them that same right, you'll be able to show how flexible and reasonable you are by readily agreeing to it.)

## DUTIES WITHIN YOUR AIRSHIFT

Everyone knows what a disc jockey does, right? A disc jockey plays records. And introduces or back-announces them. And reads the weather. Does he also read the news? Does she record network feeds while the record is playing? Does he *write* the news as well as read it? Does she have to adhere to some kind of on-air dress code? Does he have to interview local dignitaries/merchants-whom-the-boss-wants-to-woo? Is the jock expected to throw a record on the turntable, race into the newsroom, rip the latest headline summary off the wire, run into the production room, and record a one-minute, hourly "news update" for the FM or AM sister station?

## SALARY

During your telephone negotiations, the PD told you the job pays \$500 per week. You get your contract to sign, and there it is in black & white: "\$2,000 per month." Same thing, right? Nope. \$500 per week averages out to \$2,150 per month. If you sign the contract as-is, you're settling for \$1,800 per year less than what you'd been offered.

Have you been promised an "automatic" raise after six months? Great. Make sure you've got it in writing.

## BONUS INCENTIVES

*"The salary might not be as high as we'd like at the moment, but if you bring us the ratings we expect, you'll soon be making a lot more money."* Great. Have that all spelled out in the contract. For example, the contract of one jock in New York City specified a bonus of \$10,000

for each 1/10th of a point above that airshift's ratings before he came aboard.

The odds are you'll have to scale down those numbers a bit to fit your own situation, but it should give you something to think about. And define exactly which ratings service will be the instrument of measurement. Are you talking about cumes or quarter-hours? A specific age group or 12+?

On the other hand, you probably won't want a clause that says, "*Air Talent's salary will fluctuate in direct proportion with the overall ratings of his airshift.*" If the station goes all-recipe format and drops five points, you'll pay a big price.

A cautionary tale about bonus money: Several years ago a program director in Fresno signed a contract tying his salary increases to ratings increases, with the dollars vs. points ratio explicitly defined. Within the space of a year, this PD took the station from a 3.0 to well over a 10...and, under the conditions of his contract, found himself making more money than the station's general manager.

This didn't sit well with the GM. Unfortunately for the PD, the contract was liberal with financial benefits but very stingy when it came to job security; the station had the right to sever the employment contract at any time. The highly successful PD soon found himself unemployed. And this leads us to the next area of negotiation.

### DURATION OF CONTRACT

When is a "five-year contract" not *really* a five year contract? When it's filled with unilateral options, like the one at a New York City station that tied the talent to the station for five years but gave the station the opportunity to end the contract when each six-month "option" came up. You've got to be crazy — or, more often, simply desperate — to sign an agreement like that. Your employer doesn't want to lose you? Great. Have them give you an equal amount of security in exchange for locking up your services over the long term.

Generally speaking, if you've already got a good gig, I think it would be foolish of you to give it up for a job that isn't guaranteed for at least a year.

### PERKS

Some people think employers actually are required to provide health insurance plans for their employees. Those people are wrong. Have the type of plan identified in your contract, along with wording preventing the employer from dropping that plan in favor of a much less attractive one: "*...or comparable health insurance plan with comparable benefits.*"

Have you been promised access to station trade-outs: dinners, merchandise, services? Great!

Let's get that in writing. If one or more of the trades are so significant as to be an important aspect of your remuneration, include a clause describing alternatives in case the trade becomes no longer available. Some stations, for instance, actually trade out apartment or condominium space for a jock. If you're depending upon such a trade, you'll want to include language along the lines of "*...if said arrangement for living quarters ceases, station will provide comparable living space or additional cash payment to provide for comparable living space.*"

Has the station promised to provide you with subscriptions to trade publications of your choosing? Get it in writing. (One way to handle that is to include an annual budget for the purchase of trade newspapers, comedy services, etc. The jock would have complete discretion over the choice of subscriptions, up to an aggregate cost of \$1,000 per year.)

Do you want to be allowed time off from work to attend industry conventions? If so, will you expect to be paid for those days off? Will you expect the station to pay all or part of your expenses involved in attending conventions? Get it all in writing.

### OVERTIME

I touched on this earlier. Most states have laws that set minimum standards for overtime work. Some of those states exempt disc jockeys from those laws. And many stations in many states ignore those laws.

As we know, the job of an air personality is not your typical 8-hour day, 40-hour week. If you're voluntarily spending extra hours in the production room, working on bits for your show or brushing up on your production skills, the station understandably won't wish to pay you overtime for that.

On the other hand, you shouldn't be expected to work a 40-hour, five-day week followed by a six-hour weekend airshift and be paid for only 40 hours. You should get overtime whenever your required work day exceeds eight hours or whenever your required work week exceeds the number of hours you've already agreed upon.

### VACATION & SICK DAYS

Actually, these are just two more perks. Don't assume you get two weeks vacation per year. Don't assume you're allowed a few sick days off with pay.

Who chooses your vacation time? Can you take it in one-week increments? In two-week increments? In less-than-one or less-than-two week increments?

### OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Naturally, your employer doesn't want you to spend your spare time doing an airshift at the

station across the street. But what about radio & tv voiceovers? (Believe it or not, some stations won't allow their jocks' voices to appear on any other radio station, even if it's in an agency-produced commercial.)

You can't work for direct competitors, but can you voice a commercial that appears on a competing station but not on your own? Can you "booth announce" for a local television station...even if it's the sister station of a competitor *or* a competitor of your sister tv station? Can you make on-camera appearances on a local tv show? Can you host or regularly appear on a local tv show, regardless of which tv station it's on?

Are you free to lend your voice and/or production skills to a syndicated radio show? Probably not if it airs in competition with your station...but what if it airs in another market, in competition with one of your sister stations?

Are you allowed to further your public image via the local print media? What about writing a regular column for the local paper (even if it's owned by a competitor)? What about freelancing articles to an area-wide magazine?

Do you just assume that any station would allow you to pursue other activities that don't compete with the station? Then you haven't seen the "standard contract" offered by a chain of small market stations in New England: *"During the term of Employee's employment, the Employee shall devote all of his time and attention exclusively to the business and interests of Employer."* (Let's hope your attorney is better than the one who wrote this; an employee could violate this contract by, say, going to church or painting his front porch!)

### YOUR NAME

Here's one you might not have considered: Who "owns" your name? Let's say the station decides to introduce you under a new airname: Johnny B. Jock. If sometime later you leave the station's employ, can you continue to work on the air (in the same or in another market) under that name? Or is it to be considered the property of the radio station?

If you achieve some success as Johnny B. Jock and then are forced to relinquish the name, you're giving up the name value you've built up during your tenure there — name value that might extend beyond your market and into the radio community in general.

Or you might find yourself with the opposite concern: You've worked for years to build your reputation within the industry. You report for your first day of work at your new station. The PD welcomes you and then mentions, almost as an after-thought, *"By the way, we've decided that 'Johnny B. Jock' doesn't fit our station image. So from now on you'll be known as 'Tommy Tonsils.'"*

It might sound silly, but it happens. If you don't want it to happen to you, get it in writing.

### SEVERANCE PAY

It doesn't matter what the employer's "standard procedure" for severance pay is. What matters is what the two of you agree upon. One reasonable standard to shoot for: If your employment is terminated by your employer "without cause" (which means they're not firing you because they caught you embezzling coffee money or due to other blatantly unacceptable behavior on your part), you get one week's severance pay for each month you've worked there.

This doesn't mean the station has to cut you a check equal to 36 weeks' pay if they let you go after three years. The station probably will want it worded so that they simply have to give you that much notice in advance of your last days work. This would give you, in the case cited above, nine months in which to secure other employment. If you find a new job and leave before the 36 weeks are up, the station may or may not have to pay off the rest of your severance...depending, of course, upon the wording of your contract.

### NON-COMPLETE CLAUSES

Two key issues often arise with "covenants not to compete." The first is the content. Most non-compete clauses offered by radio stations say, in effect, that if you leave the station's employ *for any reason*, you may not work for any other station within a specified geographic area for a specified length of time. A typical clause might prohibit the jock from working within a 50-mile radius of the station for the twelve months immediately following his or her termination.

I can understand a station wanting to protect itself from being raided by its competitors, from having its best talent lured away. But why in the world should a station want to prohibit a jock from getting a job elsewhere in the market if the jock is terminated against his will?

On the one hand, the station fires the air personality because of lack of audience response, or "poor ratings." The jock, they say, just wasn't cutting it. Then they turn around and say that during his tenure at KKED, the guy has become too well known and too popular to allow him to work for the competition.

My opinion: If you sign a non-compete clause that bars you from working in the area even if they fire you without cause (e.g., change of format, change of ownership, change of management, ratings considerations), you're setting yourself up to get screwed. (I tried to think of the legal term for that and failed.)

Here's some language from a "standard contract" offered by that same chain of small market stations in New England: *"The Employee agrees that he will not for the next one year after such employment ceases or terminates for any reason enter the employment of, or render any services to, any other person, partnership, association or corporation engaged in the business*

*of operating a radio station located within a radius of 35 miles from the principal place of business or transmitter of the Employer or any affiliate of the Employer (emphasis mine)."*

According to the contract cited above, not only is a terminated employee prohibited from getting another radio job in town; the poor guy can't even look for work in any town that's located within 35 miles of any of his former employer's sister stations! In this particular case, a map was attached to the contract, showing the locations of the four cities in two states in which the chain's radio stations are located.

The second issue concerns *when* you are asked to sign the covenant not to compete. All too often the jock is handed the non-compete clause *after* accepting employment and reporting for work. He or she simply is told, "Sign this." Is that legal?

"Well," says attorney Skidelsky, "One of the elements for a contract to be binding and enforceable is consideration. One could make an argument that this was a post-employment commencement condition for which no consideration was given." In other words, if you're asked to sign such an agreement without receiving anything extra in return, you might be able to argue in court that such a contract is not enforceable.

I know a jock in Atlanta who was handed what he believed to be an unreasonable non-compete agreement to sign. He said, "I'll have to have my attorney look this over for me." He never signed the agreement, and the station never asked him about it again.

## MISCELLANEOUS

There are other areas of interest that can be covered in your employment contract: Show promotion, budget for support staff, etc. Regardless of the details of your contract, remember three things:

1. You *do* have an employment contract (even if it's not in written form).
2. When a station hands you a contract to sign, it's simply making an offer that is open to negotiation.
3. It is possible to have a contract that pleases both parties. To quote attorney Skidelsky once more, "The best deal is one in which both parties walk away happy in a mutually satisfactory arrangement, a win-win situation."

## A REAL CASE HISTORY

In this chapter, we have discussed certain goals to shoot for in your own employment situation. How realistic are those goals? Well, you might be inspired by the contractual agreement reached



a few years ago by **Bill Heywood** and his employer, KOY/Phoenix. The five-year contract offers financial rewards to Bill, but it also guarantees him something a bit more unusual: Creative control. I asked Bill to share with us some of the details of his contract.

**HEYWOOD:** I've been at KOY eleven years now. They wanted a five-year contract and I wanted two years. So we compromised. I said five was okay if I can get what I want; one of the main things I wanted was creative control.

Creative control refers to the elements of my show. For example, one of the characters on our program is Ranger Bob. He takes you on a Trip of the Week. If they said, "Hey, we really like that Ranger Bob bit. We want you to do one of those per day," I could say, "No. I only want to do one a week." They could say, "But we have it sold and we'd really like it every day." And I'd say, "Well, I've got 50 to 60 different elements in the program. I want it only once a week, and that's the way it is."

When it comes to music or news, it's their ballgame. But when it comes to comedy within the show and there's a disagreement, I win.

*O'DAY: Can they tell you how much music to play?*

**HEYWOOD:** They can *suggest* that I get in more records, but they can't tell me how many to play. They can tell me what records to play but not how many. You have to understand, too, that it's all a very friendly arrangement; there's no animosity here. **Gary Edens**, the owner, and **Mike Horne**, our station manager, are my friends. We all want to do good.

*O'DAY: They must have had a lot of trust in you in the first place.*

**HEYWOOD:** Yeah, I think that basically what happens in the business is somebody like me — and there are a lot of guys who have been doing this for 25, 26 years — knows more about the show than management does. Why should a station manager who's been here only three or four years know more about my radio show than I do after 26 years?

*O'DAY: Is this a benefit that has pretty much been a psychological one for you? Were there times in the past when this was an issue?*

**HEYWOOD:** There really weren't times when we had any disagreement. Generally speaking, management is so sharp at this radio station that when I found myself thinking something was too much or too little, *they* were thinking it simultaneously.

*O'DAY: Then is there a practical benefit other than the good feeling of having that in writing?*

**HEYWOOD:** It's a good feeling to have it in writing, and I think you take more responsibility

for your show. It's like having a piece of the action at the station. Money never was a problem. The creative control clause was the deciding factor, and it was a big decision for management to give that up.

*O'DAY: Was that the only thing they conceded to get you to make the jump from two to five years?*

**HEYWOOD:** Yes, because I get real tired of program directors coming in every year and making sweeping changes. Before this contract, I went through a sweeping change where I could have stayed home and phoned the show in. So now program directors can come and go, and they can change the music, they can go CHR or Gay Country or All Sound Effects Request; I don't care. I have creative control over what I do, and they can't make me do anything that's not *me*.

### OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF HEYWOOD'S CONTRACT

The contract gives Bill "*creative promotional control*," guaranteeing that "*KOY shall continue to promote Heywood in each year of this agreement in a manner consistent with its practices since the commencement of Heywood's employment with KOY.*"

The question of creative promotional control came up a while back, when the station launched a new billboard campaign for Heywood. Bill thought the billboards needed a picture of him; KOY's advertising and art people disagreed. They printed the billboard sheets without pictures. Bill looked at them and said. "I think they need a picture." The original sheets were scrapped, and the new billboards featured Heywood's smiling countenance.

### RELEASE OF PRODUCT ENDORSEMENT & OUTSIDE TALENT WORK

Heywood is free to do any product endorsement or outside talent work (as long as it doesn't promote another radio station) without needing KOY's approval.

### FIVE-DAY WEEK

Heywood works a five-day week but is required to provide KOY with a sixth-day show. Working with a young "production genius" named **Mike Murry**, Bill puts together taped highlights of each week's shows. He records show opens and closes, time checks, breaks, PSAs, weather intros, news intros, contest intros & outros...even contest phone bits — "*Hi, who's this?*" "*Congratulations! You have just won...*" — all of which makes the weekend show sound live.

### LIVE SPOTS

KOY doesn't pay its air talent extra for live commercials performed within the jock's show. This could conceivably lead to a personality feeling like he or she is being exploited: The salesperson

sells an advertising package to a client, clinching the deal by promising that Ed Jock will read the copy live each day. It's Ed Jock that really closed the sale, but Ed doesn't get any of the money.

That potential problem is minimized by the following clause: *"Heywood shall be under no obligation to perform more than four live 30- or 60-second commercials during any one hour of the radio program."*

## THE NEGOTIATION

Although this contract was negotiated over a period of nearly six months, Bill says it was all done very cordially. Although he didn't negotiate it personally, he was confident the person who acted as his agent had his best interests at heart; his agent is none other than his wife, Susan. She negotiated the terms of the agreement, and they then brought in a contract lawyer to put it into "legalese."

## HEYWOOD'S CONTRACT EXCERPTS — VERBATIM

**CREATIVE CONTROL:** *"Heywood and KOY management shall have joint and equal authority over the creative contents of the Heywood morning show except that Heywood shall have final approval in the event that Heywood and KOY are unable to agree."*

**CREATIVE PROMOTIONAL CONTROL:** *"In connection with the KOY promotion duties, such duties (which may include joint promotions with other on-air KOY personalities) shall be expressly subject to Heywood's prior consent, which consent shall not be unreasonably withheld; provided, however, that in the event a promotion is determined by Heywood to be inconsistent with Heywood's on-air personality, Heywood shall be entitled to withhold his consent."*

## MAKING A CONTRACT STICK

A jock from the Midwest wrote to me with a question:

*"Let's say you have an agreement that you're working a 2 — 6PM airshift plus production and other duties for a certain amount of money for a 40-hour work week, with overtime pay for more than 40 hours. After you've been there a while, the boss says no more overtime. Or perhaps he says he's changing your shift to 2 — 7 for no more money."*

*"The jock says, 'But we had an agreement,' to which the boss responds, 'Radio is a changing business; we have to be flexible.' Then you get the lecture about being a team player, if you want to work a 40-hour week you shouldn't be in radio, etc. Of course, with an agreement you could take legal action, but that really isn't very practical. For that matter, working over 40 hours without overtime pay isn't legal, but again practicality seems to dictate that you have to*

*either live with it or move.*

*“So my question is: Do you have any advice for this type of situation? If not, is there really a need for a contract in most markets?”*

MY REPLY: The points raised by this jock are quite valid. I suppose one overall piece of advice isn't always easy to follow: Enter into agreements only with honorable people. (Obviously, often one doesn't know the other party is less than honorable until it's too late.) If it's against the law for an employer in your state not to pay overtime when an employee works more than 40 hours a week, I would refuse to do it. Being a team player is one thing, and an important one; being illegally exploited is another.

If you have been savvy enough to get a written employment contract (and that is the frame within which this jock's scenario is based), then presumably you have had spelled out the length of the agreement, severance, etc. If it's a one-year contract, for example, and after six months the boss wants to break it, you can politely insist that it be honored. The station can honor the agreement... Or it can pay you off for the remaining six months of the contract... Or it can offer to renegotiate with you. But a renegotiation will require them to offer you something of value in exchange for your agreement to new terms of employment. If they attempt simply to terminate your employment without compensation, you can sue.

I understand that the thought of having to sue your employer for what's rightfully yours is abhorrent. I recommend this as a last resort, after good-faith negotiation has failed. But just as *you* have no desire to enter into a lawsuit, neither does your employer...especially when, in the hypothetical case above, they're odds-on favorites to lose.

“Radio is a changing business.” So what? Can you imagine management telling your chief engineer that from now on he's going to have to work an extra ten hours a week with no raise in pay, because “Radio is a changing business”? How about the station's attorney? How about saying to an advertiser, “We know we signed a contract guaranteeing you this spot rate for a full year, but radio is a changing business; from now on we're doubling your rate”?

*Many* businesses are changing businesses. How's this: “Mr. Station Manager, I know that, in my capacity as Bank President, I signed a loan agreement under which your station agreed to pay off its mortgage over a 30-year period at a fixed annual interest rate of 10%. But you have to understand that banking is a changing business, which is why from now on you have to pay it all back in 15 years, at 18% interest per year.”

When faced with the demands of a bully, you have two choices. You can give in to his demands, or you can stand up for your rights. Sometimes when you stand up to a bully, you get beat up. But not always. And when you stand up to a bully, win or lose, at least you walk (or hobble or crawl, depending on your outcome) away with your self-respect.

## A BEDTIME STORY

*Some time ago, I was asked to appear on a panel at the annual Country Music Seminar in Nashville. Rather than make an opening statement, I decided to tell the audience a story. Here it is.*

*But first a word of warning. This story has nothing to do with radio. Program directors especially are advised not to try to find any meaning in it.*

Once upon a time, there was a chicken farmer. This chicken farmer wanted his chicken farm to be known as the very best chicken farm in the entire county. "How could I achieve this?" he asked himself. The first thing he tried doing was to put up a billboard. The billboard said, "THIS IS THE BEST CHICKEN FARM IN THE ENTIRE COUNTY." Now, some people saw this billboard and weren't convinced. Most people, however, didn't even see the billboard because the farmer put it up in a cow pasture, and when you're walking in a cow pasture you don't look up at billboards.

So the next thing he decided to do was gather all his chickens together and have a meeting. So he gathered all his chickens in the spare production room and he said, "Look, I want this to be the best chicken farm it can be, so I want you all to be the best chickens that you possibly can be." The chickens said, "That's a great idea! How do we do that?" The farmer replied, "I don't know. I'm just a farmer. You're the chickens. Now go be the best chickens you can be."

That didn't work either, so finally the farmer did what all farmers do in this situation: He brought in a consultant. The consultant looked at the operation and looked at the other farms in the area and said, "What you need here is a rooster, because there are no roosters in this county."

The farmer said, "Well, a rooster....That sounds like an interesting idea, but roosters cost a lot of money. I really can't afford a professional rooster." The consultant replied, "What we'll do is get you a novice rooster, a rooster-to-be."

So they advertised in the farming trades, and they set up an interview with a talented, young novice rooster who wanted to come work on the farm. They said to the rooster-to-be, "Tell us about your dreams." And the rooster-to-be said, "Well, I want to have a glorious red tuft atop my head, so when I stroll around the barnyard people will know that I'm a real rooster." They said, "That sounds good." "I also want to stroll around the barnyard with a hen on each wing," he said, "Because that's what roosters do. And finally, I want to fill the countryside with my clear, clarion call every morning. That's my dream."

The consultant and the farmer looked at each other and they nodded and decided to give this rooster-to-be a contract. They put him to work on the farm, and everything was fine until the consultant started having critiquing sessions with the rooster-to-be. The first thing he told the

rooster-to-be was, "Look, you've got to get rid of that red tuft. It just doesn't fit in with the color scheme here."

And then the consultant said, "You can't be strolling around with all these hens, because this is a family farm we're running and that's not the right image."

And finally he told the rooster-to-be, "For God's sake, you've got to stop that cock-a-doodle-doing each morning, because it wakes people up." The rooster-to-be said, "Wait a minute! This is farm country. Everyone gets up at the crack of dawn." And the consultant replied, "I don't."

So the rooster-to-be stopped performing all those rooster-like behaviors, and his career didn't really go all that well.

What's the result of this story? Well, egg production on the farm dropped 37%. Of course, the farmer and the consultant agreed they could blame it on television and the local newspapers.

No one knows what happened to the rooster-to-be; he became just another one of the chickens. The consultant, flushed with what he perceived as his success, decided to consult other farms across the state and around the country. He even consulted a couple of farms in New Zealand. Of course, they have sheep in New Zealand, not chickens. But as the consultant said, "Sheep, chickens....What's it matter as long as they've got feathers?"

The farmer is still on his farm. It's still a chicken farm. It's not a very good one. It certainly is not known as the best one in the county, and he still dreams of having the best chicken farm in the county. Every now and then a stranger will say, "Gee, if you want the best chicken farm in the county, why don't you try getting yourself a real good rooster?"

And the farmer looks him in the eye and says, "A rooster? Hell, we tried that, and it don't work!"

## QUESTIONS FOR THE AIR PERSONALITY TO ASK HIMSELF/HERSELF

- Why have I chosen the field of radio? Why have I chosen to be an air personality?
- How long do I plan to stay in radio? In what capacity?
- What do I need to achieve in order to be happy with my career, in terms of:
  - Market size
  - Salary
  - Airshift
  - Lifestyle
  - Free time
  - Fringe benefits
  - Ratings
  - Status of station
  - Workweek (number of hours & days)
- How do I perceive myself? What type of person do I think I am? Do other people see me this way?
- How would I *like* to be? Can I succeed in changing into the person I'd like to be? How will I know I've become the person I'd like to be? How will other people know?
- What aspects of my personality do I want to highlight and present to my audience?
- What aspect of my personality would I like to minimize vis-a-vis my audience?
- What do I owe my listeners?
- What do I owe my fellow jocks?
- What can I offer my listeners that no other jock can?
- Do I aircheck myself every day?
- When I do my airchecks, do I simply enjoy my best bits...or do I look for weaknesses in my presentation?
- Am I really willing to invest the time, effort, energy and money required to build a successful radio career? (Or am I always putting off doing things, hoping someone will come up with some

new “shortcut” for me to try?)

- If I plan to stay in radio indefinitely, how do I plan to arrange for my financial security later in life?
- What do I want to be doing — and where — two years from now? Ten? Twenty?
- Some people say that to make radio your career, you’d better absolutely love it. Do you absolutely love radio?



---

## DANODAY@danoday.com

- To contact Dan O'Day with your comments or questions
- To inquire about having Dan consult or coach your station's high-profile program
- To inquire about having Dan conduct a customized seminar for your radio station, group or association

---

## www.danoday.com

- Tons of career advice from Dan O'Day (*free*)
- Lots of great radio-related articles by Dan O'Day and guest experts (*free*)
- Downloadable software (*free*)
- Cool online audio airchecks (*free*)
- Online audio demos of every L.A. Air Force production package (*free*)
- Historical radio audio (*free*)
- Original radio comedy & satire (*free*)
- **Online catalogue** of radio books, tapes, CDs, software, t-shirts and other goodies
- Dan's updated seminar schedule
- Inspiration & rejuvenation for radio pros everywhere (*priceless*)
- Up-to-date contact info (telephone, fax, mailing address)



# Personality Radio

by Dan O'Day



This is THE book for disc jockeys and show hosts who want to make the most out of their careers...and for program directors and managers who want to make the most out of their air talent.

Dan O'Day is a former award-winning, major market radio personality. At the age of 25, he left the day-to-day world of radio to launch his own comedy service, *O'LINERS*, which went on to become radio's most-subscribed-to humor service.

Since 1987 he has presented intensive, information-packed air talent workshops for radio stations, group owners and conventions around the world. In addition to working with radio stations all over North America, Dan has worked with stations in England, Sweden, Norway, Italy, Belgium, Wales, Scotland, Denmark, Finland, The Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, Poland, Latvia, Australia, New Zealand and South America.

Dan also consults a limited number of top radio morning shows.

*PERSONALITY RADIO* is an insider's guide to on-air radio success...written by the person who has become synonymous with the concept and execution of that most magical part of radio: *Personality* Radio.

Please visit our website at [www.danoday.com](http://www.danoday.com)

- Show Prep
- Building A Bit
- Creating & Using Comedy
- Creating Character Voices
- On-Air Telephone Calls
- Morning Show Critiques
- How to Use Calendar Bits
- Generating Cross-Media Attention
- Conventions
- Using One-Liners Comfortably
- Owning the Airwaves
- The Air Personality's Ten Commandments
- The Psychology of Diary-Keepers
- Paying Your Dues
- The Program Director as Disc Jockey
- Finding & Developing Air Personalities
- Management & Personalities
- Contracts
- The Job-Hunting Survival Guide

## PLUS

- Interviews with 14 top personalities (including Howard Stern, Rick Dees, Gary Owens, and The Greaseman)

...and a ton of inspiration for radio professionals everywhere!