



The
PD Chronicles

BLATANT CONFESSIONS OF A RADIO GUY

JACK JAMES

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A Radio Guy*

Jack James

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*TO MY WIFE AND THE GIRLS, WHO PUT UP WITH ALL
THE MOVING. TO MOM AND DAD.*

INTRODUCTION

You may be wondering how I ever got into the radio business.

It goes back a few years when I was young and impressionable and living in Los Angeles. While my peers were studying to become doctors, lawyers, and teachers, I was exploring ways I could get paid for having fun at a job. I'll never forget the advice of a college counselor: "Do what you love. Love what you do."

To me, radio was a powerful, mood-altering drug. You turned it on, it turned you on. One night, as I sat alone in my room listening to a rock station on the AM dial, I heard a DJ whose friendly, infectious patter compelled me to do something I never imagined—call a radio station request line. In fact, I invited myself over.

I pulled into KDAY's pitch-black parking lot, near Dodger Stadium, walked up to the entrance and rang the buzzer. Peering through a narrow window adjacent to the door, I could make out a tall, lanky figure making his way up a stairway to the main lobby. I figured it must be the janitor. He was longhaired and barefoot, wearing what looked like an ensemble off the clothing rack of a Goodwill store—a badly faded blue T-shirt and tattered blue jeans.

"Hey man, how's it going?" he said with a grin. "My record's about to run out. Come on."

I followed the middle-aged DJ back down the stairs to a tiny but cozy on-air studio, where he carefully cued up his next song on a turntable (remember them?) and then—voilà!—manipulated buttons and knobs to execute a delicious sounding cross fade. It was like getting a peek behind the Wizard of Oz's curtain. The flickering lights on the console, the spinning turntables, and the needles dancing back and forth on the audiometers mesmerized

me. I couldn't believe the DJ's massive record collection; albums lined an entire wall of the studio. I envied his freedom. No rules. No regulations. No dress code. This was my kind of corporate culture.

On the table next to the console were a half-empty six-pack and a bag of nuts.

"Want some?" he asked.

Before I could get out an answer, he punched up his speakerphone and, without missing a beat, finished up a conversation I'd apparently interrupted with a sultry sounding woman named Cassandra.

That was it. Radio was for me.

This book is a compilation of *The PD Chronicles*, which began in 1999 as a weekly column about the radio industry for the Web-site RadioDigest.com. It has since moved to www.AllAccess.com.

All of the material in this book is true and based on actual events, either told through my personal experiences as an on-air talent and program director, or related to me by the various participants. Most of the names—and call letters—have been changed to protect the innocent (or, in some cases, the very guilty).

As I write this, I am an active PD at a major market station in the United States. However, Jack James is a pseudonym, for reasons that will become apparent as you read on.

Jack James

Somewhere, USA

CHAPTER 1

Hot Water Blues

One of our sales account executives is in hot water with the station's general manager (GM), who, not coincidentally, is the owner's son.

The account exec (AE) was handing out tattoos of our station's logo over the weekend at a big local sporting event. I don't know how much beer he'd had to drink, but I do know that at one point he decided that it would be fun to "install" the temporary tattoos on good looking, well endowed women who stopped by our booth.

Wouldn't you know it? Our GM came around the corner and surprised the AE just as he was wetting the tattoo in his cup of beer and masterfully applying it to the right breast of a lovely blonde in a bikini. The GM, sounding like a cop, shouted at him to "Withdraw," and to "Disconnect," which made the incident sound a lot worse than it was. The startled woman tried to explain to the GM that she wanted the tattoo, but apparently all the GM could think about was a possible sexual harassment lawsuit.

Next day, eyebrows were raised as a memo circulated the station, explaining how it was now against corporate policy to "touch anyone's body" during promotional events. Translation? No more tattooing.

The new rule would make it more difficult for the single guys at the station to hit on women. The temporary tattoos helped break the ice. And, truth be told, most guys got into radio for one reason: Girls.

The hot rumor is that the woman working at our front desk, the unofficial “Director of First Impressions”—you know, receptionist?—is a heroin junkie. I’m suspicious of anyone with a perky attitude first thing in the morning who doesn’t drink coffee, yet makes frequent trips to the bathroom. But heroin? I chalk it up to someone’s wild imagination.

With all the mental patients walking around, I can’t believe we don’t have a better security system at our station. You can enter our front lobby and head through doors leading into either the sales department or the on-air studios for two of our FM stations. I try telling the GM that this is not good, that sometime, someday, some nut job will walk in and take over one of our stations. Of course, I’m also thinking how that might be great for our ratings, but I don’t tell that to him or anyone on our air staff. .

Anyway, sure enough, just the other day a young, longhaired, unshaven, leather-wearing, malodorous, rock star wannabe with a foul mouth walks into the lobby demanding to see our music director (MD).

Bad timing. It was Wednesday, the one day of every week that our MD has a long, free lunch on some record company whose looking to get airplay on our station for the next big rock ‘n roll band.

Mr. Leather insists he isn’t gonna leave until he gets his band’s song played on our rock station. He’ll sit and wait. I hear the receptionist over the intercom announce “Phone call for George Havelina,” which is the code name in our building for lobby emergency—everybody, get your butt up to the front desk, now!

As we race from all directions to the lobby area, the guy is exiting, but not before unleashing a string of curse words on our

poor, dear Director of First Impressions. The owner's son is the first to confront him.

"Hey, you owe her an apology for that kind of language," he says, to which the potty-mouthed musician replies, "Suck my dick" Stunned, the owner's son shoves the guy with both hands. Envisioning a lawsuit, and not wanting to wind up working for this miscreant, a couple of us guys restrain the owner's son and advise him to back off. The punk continues with a string of four-letter words, insulting the owner about his manhood and his mother.

"Go ahead, hit me, I'll fucking own all your radio stations. I dare you!"

He walked off. Haven't seen him since.

And no, he and his band won't be getting airplay on our rock station anytime soon.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: We have a new PD coming in next month. We don't really know anything about him, but he was quoted in one of the trades as saying that he doesn't anticipate any changes. Should we be concerned?—Sweating Bullets, West Coast

Dear KP: Only if your station's copying machine doesn't work. Take a number and start running off your resume. It's a lot cheaper than doing it at Kinko's.

Dear PD: I've been working as a \$6 an hour board op the last two years. Our stations are going digital this Fall. We're supposed to get training, but I've heard rumors that the new equipment will replace a lot of bodies. Any suggestions?—Button Monkey, Midwest Talk station.

Dear Button Monkey: The digital equipment will make you about as valuable as a guy who works in a cart factory. Repeat after me, "Would you like fries with your order?"

Nowadays, McDonald's and Burger King pay more than what most board ops make. And here's the best part: If an egomaniacal morning talk show host gives you crap at the counter, you can refuse service!

CHAPTER 2

Sick Joke Central

Now it can be told.

Some of the sickest jokes about horrible tragedies—like the Challenger explosion and the massacre at Columbine High in Colorado—originate from inside radio stations.

“We should get a plaque with pictures of the two shooters and make them employees of the month if the ratings go up,” quipped a newscaster in the hallway of my radio station on the day after 13 people were shot to death in Colorado. Another staffer questioned why President Clinton was dispatching VP Al Gore to Littleton. “Don’t they already have enough stiffs there?” he deadpanned.

Insensitive? Uncaring? Cold? You don’t understand. What I’ve observed over the years is that a sometimes sick, morbid sense of humor helps insulate the people on the front lines from awful stories that might otherwise reduce them to mush. The enormity of the tragedy at Columbine High didn’t hit me personally until the night I got home and started watching the reports on TV. By the end of that week, most of us at the station felt numb and emotionally drained.

A big lug of a talk show host confided to me the day after the shootings that he’d lost it. “I got off work, got in my car, and I drove about two blocks, when I started sobbing at a stop light. I couldn’t stop.”

Never neglect your radio station's contest rules. CYA—Cover Your Ass. I should know.

We were about a week out from giving away a brand new vehicle to a lucky listener. I was going over the list of names of more than 90 qualifiers when I spotted *her* name. It was a woman who'd won a \$15,000 Jeep Wrangler from our station just shy of a year ago. I told my colleagues at the promotion meeting that with our luck, she'd probably win again.

The comment elicited laughter from around the conference table. Only I was dead serious.

I looked at the contest rules. My favorite was #5—"All rules may be changed or modified at any time during the promotion." I firmly suggested that we take advantage of it. Make it so that anyone who won a prize worth \$1,000 or more would have to wait a year before participating in another contest. "You're overreacting," the GM told me. "What are the odds of the same woman winning again?"

Cut to our car giveaway party. A Mustang convertible, filled with one liter of gas, is, after five laps around a ring of 92 vehicles, finally sputtering to a halt. I'm in a golf cart behind it, video taping the climactic moment. I zoom in on the exuberant winner, who is jumping up and down next to her \$35,000 fully loaded Ford Explorer. My heart sinks.

"Oh shit!" I mutter to myself in disbelief. HER. Again.

That rumor about our receptionist being a heroin addict? She got fired. Seems Accounts Payable was having an embarrassing problem with collections. Angry clients insisted they never received any bills from us. They were right. Our receptionist admitted under duress that she hadn't taken the billing envelopes to the post office in the last three months. Instead, she'd tossed them in the trash.

What was she, on drugs or something?

What the hell is this? I stare incredulously at the hotel bill piled up by a prospective talent I'd flown into town for two days. \$488.14—when the room was \$74 a night?

Six movies at \$10 apiece? How 'bout spending the time listening to the radio and studying our market?! A dozen long, and I do mean long, distance calls, most around \$30 apiece?! Look, I'd probably be willing to let it go if the guy was a hot shot morning talent. But he's up for nights. NIGHTS!!!

I mean, he *was* up for nights.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: What did you think of the flap over Howard Stern's comments about the shootings at Columbine High? Do you think he did it for the publicity?—Stern Hater, San Diego, Calif.

Dear Stern Hater: Let's see. Howard's comments, as insensitive and revolting as they may be to people over the age of 34 and out of Howard's demographic, made it to television, newspapers, and radio talk shows around the nation. And you're asking if he did it for the publicity? Does the Pope wear a beanie? Does the engineer at your radio station wear a pocket protector?

Dear PD: My cousin gets released from prison next month after doing three years for perjury, theft, assault and battery, and forgery. He'll need a job, but is afraid no one will hire him with his record. Any suggestions?—Puzzled in Palo Alto, Calif.

Dear Puzzled: What am I, Dear Abby? Sounds like he's perfectly qualified to work as a jock or sales person at any radio station in the country!

CHAPTER 3

Down the Cinco

Excuses, excuses.

The phone rings a little after 6 AM. It's the Morning Guy, informing me he has no news. That's because our news guy is AWOL. Not surprising, inasmuch as it's Seis de Mayo.

I figure he's either hung over or still passed out from ingesting massive quantities of tequila. It's two-and-a-half hours into morning drive before Mr. News checks in. Says he can't make it in because, well, his grandmother died. But late that afternoon, apparently suffering from a guilty conscience, he calls me with a startling confession. "I just got out of jail."

As Mr. News tells it, he was the designated driver for a bunch of friends who went Cinco de Mayo'ing. On the drive home, a cop pulled him over.

"I swear, I didn't have anything to drink, but I panicked. I got out of my car and started running as fast as I could."

In a scene right out of the TV show "Cops," he sprinted about five blocks before three of the city's finest tackled him, cuffed him, and brought him back to a black-and-white for transportation to the police station.

Stunned, I tell him he should come in tomorrow morning, do the news, and then we'll talk. "I'm so sorry," a whimpering voice says on the other end of the phone. "Please don't tell anyone what happened. I'll make it up to you. I don't want to lose my job."

Next morning around 6, my phone rings. Another rude awakening. Mr. News is a no show. It's well into the 8 o'clock hour

before he finally calls the jock, blaming a faulty alarm clock for his tardiness.

I call him at home with some news of my own.
“You’re fired.”

Most of us would rather catch the latest nasty strain of the flu than face the old man.

You know a visit from the owner is imminent when you get that memo from the GM asking us to clean up our work areas. He’s one of those old-school, I-made-my-millions-the-old-fashioned-way—by screwing a lot of people out of their money—kind of guys. He demands respect but doesn’t earn it. He still refers to women as “honey,” “sweetheart,” and “baby.”

Rumor is, he paid a huge settlement to an AE at a station in another market for making a comment about his race. He belittles the air talent with caustic remarks like, “You know, if you won’t keep your breaks to under a minute, I will. Ever hear of automation?”

Makes you want to call in sick.

My feeling of hopefulness has deteriorated to hopelessness.

I’ve just finished listening to a box of tapes Radio and Records magazine has forwarded me in response to my blind ad, directed to a post office box at the periodical. All of them have one thing in common—they’re dreadful. No hint of energy, excitement, passion, or creativity. Are PDs coaching their people anymore? Where is the future afternoon drive star currently trapped in anonymity on nights or overnights?

Oh, yeah. I forgot. Their jobs were eliminated by digital computerized equipment.

It just cost me \$250 to get \$20 worth of cassette tapes I can record over with music that I like.

Our poor controller.

Besides balancing the books, she has the unfortunate task of changing the front door code every time someone quits or gets canned. There's been an ungodly turnover involving sales people and on-air talent of late. She's gone through our street address, zip code, dial position, birthdays, anniversaries, phone numbers—*everything!*

Late one night on my way out of the office, I run into her entering yet another new code in the key pad. She tells me this one will be easy to remember: 1-2-3-4.

I joke with her that if things don't settle down, she'll run out of combinations.

Radio management is the king of spin control, always looking for that silver lining in every dark cloud.

At virtually every commercial station in the country, PDs and GMs use what appears to be the same terse memo to address terminations. Only the names change.

Here's a copy of the quintessential firing memo, along with a translation of what it should really say:

To: Staff

Fr: PD

Re: Joe Blow

Joe Blow has decided to pursue other opportunities. (We fired Joe's butt. Did you see his latest ratings? They were lower than whale poop, and that's at the bottom of the ocean). We wish him well in his future endeavors. (Severance shmeverance. Out of sight, out of mind. He has about as much a chance of getting a good reference from us as Howard Stern does from the people of Denver.) A replacement will

FIELD CHRONICLES

be named sometime soon. (We don't have a clue who'll take Joe's place. You think it's easy finding someone to work overnights, six days a week, for \$15,500 a year?).

We should play the theme from "The Godfather" over the intercom.

When our elderly owner shows up, he has an air about him that makes you wonder whether there's a body or two in the trunk of his rental car. He's a tiny man, maybe 5'1, with white hair and a crooked smile that turns out to be, on closer inspection, a perpetual smirk.

Sebastiano, I'll call him, isn't in the building more than a minute before he begins terrorizing my staff. He doesn't so much walk as shuffle into each of the on-air studios in our building, startling the air talent, then lecturing them on how—he thinks—they can get higher ratings.

"Every break should include time and temperature," he bellows. "When people get up in the morning, they wanna know how they should dress."

He does an inspection of offices and cubicles, ripping down from walls and throwing into the trash any personal items—pictures, cartoons, and newspaper clippings—he feels are in bad taste.

Invasion of privacy? "I own this son-of-a-bitch," he frequently reminds everyone.

He's been casing my office all morning, eyeing the activity from the front lobby. Finally, he comes in to confront me.

"You're spending much too much time with your air talent," he asserts.

"Well, sir, that's my job," I reply.

Astonishingly, he orders me to remove all the chairs in my office except the one at my desk.

"If they have to stand when they come into your office, they'll leave sooner."

Later on in the day, our gazillionaire owner tells me he thinks I'm too nice to be a PD.

"Never compliment the talent," he says in a hushed tone. "If you give them praise, all they'll do is ask for more money."

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: A woman with a really sexy voice keeps calling me during my night show. We've talked off and on for about three weeks. She told me she's a 10. Do I dare meet her outside the station?—In Love, CHR Station, San Diego, Calif.

Dear In Love: Remember this simple radio formula—the sexier they sound on the request line, the more likely they are to outweigh even Rosie.

CHAPTER 4

Going For Broker

The big news around our station? We finally hired a new receptionist to replace the one that was rumored to be a heroin junkie.

And what an improvement. This one's a perky, former beauty pageant winner; a tall, peroxide blonde with a husky voice—like Demi Moore's—and a penchant for wearing very short skirts.

In just a few days, I've noticed a dramatic increase in traffic and loitering around the front lobby. Especially when winners come by to pick up their prizes.

Our nimble receptionist has to climb up on a stepstool behind her desk and stand on her tippy-toes to reach a shelf where we keep the stash of new CDs.

"Hey, Richie!" I yell, waiting for a reaction.

Thud. My startled overnight guy, the caretaker of our stations when they're on auto pilot, bangs his head underneath the metal desk where he's been snoozing for who knows how long.

"Uh, ah, oh . . . I know it's here somewhere," he mumbled, attempting to make it appear he was under the desk looking for something.

"Nice try," I said coldly. "You were sleeping on the job again, weren't you?"

For Richie, who looks strikingly similar to the nerdy character Jerry Lewis plays in the original "Nutty Professor," this is strike

three. Several employees have told on him, including one who said he couldn't get the door to the production room open because Richie was in front of it, sound asleep. I had reprimanded him and followed it up with a strongly worded memo, the kind you use to build a paper trail against a problem worker. Of course, he promised it would never happen again. On this particular day, I decided to pay a surprise visit around 12:30 AM

"You got me this time boss," he said. "I was sleeping, but only because I'm just not feeling very well. I should've called in sick."

"Yeah, you should've, but now it's too late," I responded. "You can go home now. I'll call you and let you know when you can come back in to pick up your final check."

"You wouldn't want to give a guy a break, would ya?" he asked, already knowing the answer. "I didn't think so."

Maybe the job is jinxed. The guy I originally hired disappeared a few months ago. He's still in jail on some outstanding warrants.

I'm not a violent person by nature. But I swear, if I ever meet the sales person who came up with the concept for "brokered" radio shows, I'll strangle him with my necktie.

Brokered programs, in case you're wondering, are radio's answer to TV infomercials. 99.9% of them are dreadful. I fought hard to keep one off an AM station I was managing, but the sales department won. Ultimately, though, I was able to say, "I told you so."

They sold an hour Monday through Friday night to a financial guy who claimed that he could steer listeners to money-making investments . . . using his crystal ball. Hello? To me, such boasting raised a giant red flag. Sales only saw dollar signs.

I met the financial whiz in my office. You know how some people can immediately give you the creeps? I wanted to wash my hand the minute I shook his. We're talking major bad vibes. My intuition told me not to run any promos for his show. There would

also be no call-ins by the host to our morning business show; I wanted to maintain credibility in morning drive.

"You're overreacting," I was told by the station's general sales manger.

No, just protecting the product, thank you. See, about two months into the paid program, a local newspaper columnist did some digging. Seems Mr. Stock Expert had a rap sheet, which included a prison record for embezzling money from clients.

"Why weren't you honest with us in the beginning?" I asked him, after I ordered his show off the air. "Because I wanted to put all that stuff behind me," he replied. "Besides, I knew if I told you I was a convicted felon, I'd never get a radio show."

Finally, an accurate prediction.

Spring (Arbitron) ratings are about to shake out, and that usually signals changes at many radio stations across the land. Like NFL coaches, PDs scramble between now and the start of the fall book in September to strengthen their teams at the weakest positions.

The courtship process between radio station and talent is often bittersweet. Here's what I mean.

Years ago, I was flown first class into Chicago to interview for the co-host position on an adult contemporary station. I mean, I got the red carpet treatment: Limo from the airport to the station, lodging at a four star hotel, and a love letter from my prospective employer, gushing about how great he thought I was and how together we were destined for great ratings and financial rewards.

Now, usually, a PD doesn't go to all that trouble and expense unless he's fallen head-over-heels in lust with you as a talent. And so I wasn't surprised when, the morning after I'd visited the station, passed a chemistry test with the morning host, and said all the rights things at dinner with the PD and GM at Oprah's restaurant (where, not coincidentally, the menu features lots of rich, fattening

food), my would-be boss stopped by on his way to the gym with an envelope for me.

It was a contract, along with another love letter from the PD that officially welcomed me to the station as its new morning co-host. “With your addition, we’ll become the market leader in our format.”

I called my wife to tell her about the offer. It was generous, all right. Great money. Moving expenses. Temporary housing for up to two months. Paid vacation. Reasonable family medical and dental. And I’d be working in Chicago, a superlative radio town.

Trouble is, my gut told me to pass on the opportunity.

When I got home, I didn’t feel any differently. I gave it another 24 hours before I finally mustered the nerve to call the PD and break the news to him. It was like a boyfriend-girlfriend breaking up. When I told the PD that I’d be accepting an offer from another station in the city where I lived, a smaller market, the PD turned Satan.

“You’re making a huge mistake,” he warned me. “But do what you want.”

“Look, I’m very sorry, I wish you well with your station, but I just wanted you to know so you could get on with your job search.”

I expected—no, hoped—he’d wish me well and say something like “I hope we’ll have another opportunity to work together in the future.”

Not quite. Instead, his parting shot left me dazed, confused, and disappointed.

“Do me a favor, okay,” he scolded. “Next time, if you’re not serious about taking a job, don’t make someone jump through all those hoops. Goodbye.”

Click. Our divorce was final. I knew I’d never have the chance to work for him again. I was now on his shit list.

After that phone conversation, I knew I’d made the right decision.

I do my best to play with sales people, honest I do.

But they keep doing really stupid things. Like the other morning. I find five people in the control room distracting the technical producer, the person who sits in front of a wide panel of buttons, knobs, lights, and slide pots, choreographing the sound of the show. One of the intruders points to an object on the control board and asks, "What's that for?"

Oops. Some dead air.

My first impulse is to scream, "Get the fuck out!" Instead, I calmly ask during the commercial break, "Is there a tour going on here that no one told me about?"

The visitors seem startled. One of our account executives, an aging, diminutive dim-wit, smiles at me with what appears to be a mouth full of badly fitting dentures. I don't smile back. Instead, I gesture to her with a wave of an index finger to follow me up the hall, out of the earshot of her guests.

"Who are those people!?" I demand to know.

"Those are my clients," the account exec replies, unaware that she's committed a cardinal sin of radio broadcasting: You don't set foot in that control room unless you have something to contribute to the programming.

"Do you realize we're in the middle of morning drive, in a ratings book, and you're conducting a friggin' tour? Don't ever interrupt one of my radio shows again. If you want to schmooze with the air talent or board op, do it before or after their shift."

Aghast, the indignant AE rounds up her clients and leaves.

Later, that same afternoon, an arrogant AE with a snooty prospective client in tow confronts me in the hallway outside the control room.

"Your air talent just told my client to get the fuck out of here. This gentleman is a prominent attorney in town. The two of us just wanted to pop in to the on-air studio and say 'hi.' We shouldn't be treated like that. We're owed an apology."

I don't know if smoke was coming out of my nostrils at that moment, but it sure felt like it.

"We're 10 minutes into afternoon drive," I stated. "If you want to meet with the talent, arrange it before or after the show." He should've known better than to walk in on the most focused—and temperamental—talent in the building.

I make eye contact with the lawyer. "No one ever dared walk on stage while Sinatra was performing. You don't go into the on-air studio of a radio station during a show."

The AE says something about how he's gonna go back and tell his boss, the general sales manager, what happened. He and his client stalk off. I hope he's learned his lesson. It's an expensive one, that's for sure. We lose what would have been a \$14,000 buy.

I tape signs to the control room and on-air studio doors that say, "Authorized Personnel Only."

The signs work—for a week.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I'm PD of a talk station in a medium sized market. I keep hearing rumors that my morning talk show host is shopping for a job. Should I confront him?—Nervous in the Midwest.

Dear Nervous: Here's my advice. Take out a blind box ad in R&R. Mention big bucks and great benefits. If you get a T&R (tape and resume) from your Morning Guy, you'll know his days are numbered. On the bright side, your ad should generate a T&R from the guy's eventual replacement.

Dear PD: I work for a GM who used to be friendly and complimentary of my work, but lately he's been giving me the cold shoulder. No smile, no "hello" in the hallways. When he does talk to me, it's about everything that's wrong

with my station. What's your take?—Paranoid on the East Coast.

Dear Paranoid: Your ratings must be down. Start looking for a new job. NOW!

CHAPTER 5

The Zen of Rejection

You hurriedly start reading it. And your heart sinks with the first paragraph.

If you've been on the air talent side of radio for any length of time, you've seen it. You've anxiously awaited its arrival for days, maybe even weeks. And then, it finally arrives in your mailbox.

"Thanks for your interest . . . but your sound isn't quite what we're looking for . . . Best of luck in your career search. . . ."

It's a standard rejection letter from a PD. Now, you could let it discourage you. You could give up, say 'to hell with radio,' and think about going back to school—to get that G.E.D.

Or, you could put that bottle of Jack Daniels back in the cupboard, spit out the handful of sleeping pills you popped into your mouth, tear up the suicide note, and have a little fun with that thanks-but-no-thanks note from the PD who wouldn't know good talent if it took a dump on the middle of his desk. Note my ultimate response to a rejection letter:

Date

Program Director

Station that rejected you

Address

Dear Program Director:

Thank you for your rejection letter; you're to be congratulated on its standard form. After careful consideration I regret to inform you that I am unable to

accept your refusal to offer me employment with (station's call letters). Over the past few months I have been particularly fortunate in receiving an unusually large number of rejection letters. With such a varied and promising field of candidates it is impossible for me to accept all refusals. Despite your company's outstanding qualifications and previous experience in rejecting applicants, I find that your rejection does not meet with my needs at this time. Therefore, I will continue to pester you for employment at once. You can look forward to my stalking you until I'm hired.

Best of luck in rejecting future candidates!

Sincerely,

John Q. Jock

If you feel daring, copy the letter, sign it, and mail it back to the PD who burst your bubble. If he has a sense of humor, your rejection of the rejection letter might get you second consideration for a job.

Our company has a wonderful drug rehab policy. If you have a substance abuse problem, you get to take an all expenses paid trip to Camp Cocaine.

Our midday guy just called in from there on horseback via cell phone. He's having a great time. Besides horseback riding, they have a pool, Jacuzzi, exercise room, TV, movies, canoeing, and great food. Plus, he's meeting lots of really neat drug addicts like himself—people from all walks of life. Would you believe . . . he ran into a lawyer he knew who's trying to get off the nose candy?

Coincidentally, this is their second time together at Camp Cocaine.

Interviews are underway for a sales assistant's job. We know this because we have a chatty receptionist who tells us that the well dressed, athletic-looking brunette seated in the lobby is among the candidates.

"She doesn't have a chance," a wise-cracking account exec says to the rest of us standing in the hallway outside the reception area.

"Why is that?" I ask, playing straight man to our comic sales genius.

"She doesn't make the weight classification," he deadpans.

The other three sales assistants in our building tip the scales at around 200 pounds apiece.

Another day, another firing. This one will be easier than most because it involves a mental patient.

When I first got here, I heard rumors that Cindi was into the occult. During her first day on the job she reportedly lit candles, burned incense, and concocted some sort of strange brew to drive off any evil spirits that might be lurking in the on-air studio. She was what you'd call a "high maintenance" employee.

Most air personalities get it after you tell them something once or twice. Not Cindi. I'd admonished her for smuggling in her New Age CDs and playing them as beds during her jock talk. On a country station!!! I even had our production guy cart up two dozen, format appropriate, music beds from which she could choose.

And then, just the other day, the GM comes rushing into my office. "She's doing it again," he screamed. "She's playing that bleeping Yanni crap. Get her outta here."

I rushed to the on-air studio and confronted her. "What are you thinking?" I asked.

She gave me a deer-in-the-headlights look.

“Come see me after your show,” I told her.

Later, I gave Cindi some career advice.

“You might think about looking for work at one of those smooth jazz stations.”

So our midday guy returns from his second stint at Club Cocaine. And our Morning Guy has a special welcome back surprise waiting for him.

Just before the shift change, Kevin dashes to the kitchen, borrows an open can of Coffee Mate, makes a mad dash back to the on-air studio, then neatly pours out six straight lines of the white powdery substance across the front of the board, placing a razor blade next to it. No one from the morning show sticks around to see the midday guy's reaction.

We all just hope we aren't to blame if he returns to rehab—this time, for an addiction to non-dairy creamer.

They say it's hell on your nose.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: Why is it our GM hogs the only copy of Radio and Records that comes to the station every week? I haven't seen a new R&R in months.—Job Hunting, Birmingham, Alabama.

Dear Job Hunting: Your GM is no dummy. Keeping R&R away from the air talent is the best way to keep them from leaving.

Dear PD: Your PD Chronicles feature is exactly what we in radio have tried to rid our business of—wise-ass employees demeaning the day to day operation of a fine

business. And people wonder why the business world looks at us as the bottom feeders of media—J.M. Ade

Dear JM: Sounds like last week's column struck a nerve, eh? Now go back to your sales cubicle where you belong.

Dear PD: Just wanted to drop a line and say your articles are incredible. It helps me get through the day knowing that someone else is going through the same crud I go through. Keep it up and keep the sales-holes in line—Tampa Kid

Dear Tampa Kid: Check's in the mail! I think those of us in radio love this business because of the unpredictable stuff that makes every day different.

Dear PD: We've just hired a new morning man. We need a promotion that will get him some publicity, but we don't have a lot of money to play with. Got any bright ideas?—Headline Hunter, Chico, Calif.

Dear Headline Hunter: Where's your consultant when you need him? Try something I once did. Promote the hell out of his arrival. Then, on his first morning, have him call in late and pretend to be lost. Offer a \$1,000 bounty to the first listener who finds him and brings him in. Have the Morning Guy call in and describe landmarks and scenery. You should be able to milk the promotion through afternoon drive. It's simple, fun, inexpensive, and will cause lots of street talk.

CHAPTER 6

Little Boo Hoo

I'm not a psychiatrist, but I play one at work. For some reason, I am a magnet for troubled employees. "That'll be \$90," I kid them after they've spilled their guts to me in my office.

I guess they value my common-sense approach to problem solving. Plus, the CIA would envy the way I can keep a secret.

Anyway, our new receptionist—you know, the perky ex-beauty pageant winner who replaced the alleged heroin junkie at our front desk—is in a world of trouble. She was driving home from a party at a sales person's house when she noticed the red lights of a police car in her rear view mirror.

Fortunately, one of our engineers bailed her out of jail. I fronted her the \$150 to get her car out of the police impound yard. I also gave her the home phone number of the local attorney who hosts a legal advice show on our news/talk station.

While dabbing with a Kleenex at the tears rolling down her cheeks, she tells me how this is the second time she's been popped for drunken driving. A divorced mom with custody of her two kids, "Carola" confesses that she's ignored a court date and now has a warrant out for her arrest.

She faces possible jail time and, even worse, the loss of her children.

Sometimes I think we should change the call letters to K-PMS.

Kathy, the chubby, butch-looking assistant to the owner's son, is sobbing in the front lobby as another office worker tries to console her. Kathy and the three sales assistants in the building are referred to derogatorily by some of the other female office workers as "The Sunshine Girls." They all put on happy faces and excel in the art of office politics and brown-nosing, but deep down are miserable working for the owner's ill-tempered son. The slightest thing will touch off a crying spell.

This time, Kathy is upset because one of the other ladies beat her to the market and bought a birthday cake for the owner's son.

"I'm his assistant," Kathy sniffed. "She had no right to get his cake. That's my job."

Apprised of the latest drama, the receptionist upstairs offers no sympathy. She shakes her head and says to a group of us loitering around her desk, "Well boo-effing-hoo! Too bad."

Now I know why he isn't in medical school.

One of our new board operators had difficulty last weekend taking the meter readings of the station. During his training, he was told the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) required the readings. Somehow, those three letters got lost in the translation.

When he couldn't execute his duty, he grabbed a phone book, found the number for the Federal Aviation Administration, and reached someone at the other end who was as confused as he was.

"Sorry about your problem with the meter readings," the FAA employee told him, "but unless those meters are on an airliner, I can't help ya."

The Art of Firing, radio style.

It was the perfect plan. Or so we thought. We'd terminate the host of the morning show tomorrow. His successor was already hired and ready to go. The owner's son meandered down the outside walkway to the offices of our Oldies station. As he walked to the jock lounge in the back of the building, he noticed that Jon was cleaning out his desk.

"What's up?" he asked him.

Jon didn't miss a beat.

"I know you're firing me after the show tomorrow morning, so I want to get all of my stuff now. I quit."

"Oh," is all the owner's son could say.

Oh, shit, is what he was thinking to himself.

Seems 15 minutes earlier Jon had been down to the other end of our building, loitering in the kitchen, where he overheard the owner's son telling the controller to get Jon's final paycheck ready for his termination tomorrow. Jon heard everything through the controller's paper-thin walls.

From now on, whenever we go into the controller's office, we have to shut the door and whisper.

Apocryphal firing stories I've heard (yes, from reliable sources): On the day the Challenger exploded, a GM told his pink-slipped staff, "Hey, it could be worse. You could've been up there today."

In LA, after firing four members of a morning show, a GM told them in all sincerity, "I envy your freedom."

That's show biz.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: Some air talent use agents to land them their contracts. Do you think that's a good idea?—Zachary, Chicago, Ill.

Dear Zachary: All depends on your comfort level and confidence dealing with management. At the very least, have a lawyer look over your proposed contract.

Dear PD: I've been responding to ads for air talent in the radio trade magazines, but with zero results. What gives?—Danny O'Shea, Port Arthur, Texas

Dear Danny: Re-evaluate your tape and resume. Is the presentation something that will get a prospective employer's attention? Also, remember that possibly hundreds of people respond to each want ad in the top industry publications. You might have better luck just cold calling the stations where you'd like to work.

CHAPTER 7

Have A Bleeping Nice Day

Unpredictable things can—and do—happen at radio station remotes.

Like the one our station did at a local bank on Main Street one Saturday morning. Listeners were invited to drop by, open a new savings or checking account, and they'd get \$100 automatically credited to their account.

We expected a good crowd for the event. What we couldn't have expected was that a young woman in an old Cadillac would slowly drive by, yelling obscenities out her car window. "Go fuck yourself," she screamed at the top of her lungs. "You son-of-a-bitch, mother fucking whore!"

Those of us standing by the station's E-Z Up tent in front of the bank looked at one another in horror. We watched as the Caddy made a U-turn, headed back in our direction, then pulled into the bank's parking lot. We could plainly see a blue and white bumper sticker on the back of her car. It read, "Don't Hate Me. I have Tourette's Syndrome."

Our worst fears were soon realized. The driver entered the bank lobby, shouting out a variety of four-letter words that stopped customers in their tracks.

The woman, who was well-dressed and looked, well, normal, conducted her business at a teller's window, then made her way back through the lobby to the exit. Our account exec rushed to open the door for her, anxious for the embarrassment to end.

"Thanks," the woman politely said on her way out. But then

she stopped suddenly in the doorway, wheeled around, looked the AE right in the eyes, and screamed out, "Bitch!"

Fortunately, we weren't broadcasting live at the time.

We refer to the station owner's son, our GM, as "Dr. Jekyll-Mr. Hyde."

You never know which personality will rear its ugly head on a given day around our broadcasting complex.

This afternoon, the irrational, illogical, PD-wannabe side of him came charging into our Music Director's office. I happened to be standing there, along with our Morning Guy, when the owner's son went postal.

"What was that song I heard five minutes ago when I was driving back from lunch?" he demanded to know. We explained that it was the number one song on the album charts, a core artist, and, what's more, our consultant—the owners' right hand man—had given the tune his blessing.

"I don't care about any of that!" he yelled. "The song is a piece of crap. This is MY station and I want it off. Now!"

"Steve, we're not going to pull that song off the air," I protested. "It's a hit."

Steve, suddenly speechless, stalked off to his office downstairs. But the damage had been done. It was as if a human tornado had just struck. Our young music director was clearly rattled.

"I can't work for that SOB anymore," he said bitterly.

After a half hour cooling off period, I approached Steve's office. I was expecting hostility. Instead, he motioned me into his office and offered an apology, sort of.

"I just want to thank you guys for standing up to me," he said. "I like that in my employees. Good job."

Like that will make it all better. It won't.

I have this great view of the lobby area out my office window.

I can see everything that goes on. As I look up from my desk, I make immediate eye contact with a tall, slim brunette in a flowered mini-skirt. Turns out she used to work at our station as an account exec before starting her own promotions and marketing company.

She's visiting our station this time under the guise of pitching a promotional idea to the new Morning Guy at our rock station. What I later find out is that Layla is our own local version of Monica Lewinsky. Her mission? To be able to say she's pleased every jock on every station in our town.

On this day, her timing is bad. Our receptionist explains to her that the morning dude left early today—to drive his *wife* to the airport.

A married man? To Layla, that makes Bobby an even more exciting, potential new conquest.

If you're keeping count, we're on our third receptionist in as many months. They're almost as difficult to keep as board ops.

Number Two—the ex-beauty queen, single mom with two boys—was fired for being habitually late to work. It was always an excuse—her car wouldn't start or one of her kids was sick. Sympathetic co-workers tried to cover for her. Once, they even sent Carola home “sick” after her breath reeked of alcohol. And remember, this was at 9 in the morning.

There was a time when she could bat her eyelashes and get out of virtually any predicament, but that was 15 years ago when she wore a crown, had naturally blonde hair, was single, and about 30 pounds lighter.

Anyway, not only does Carola face unemployment, but there is also a warrant out for her arrest. Seems she skipped a court appearance over a prior drunken driving charge. A couple of us

helped her take her belongings from the front desk down to her car.

We tell her to stay in touch, even though we know we'll probably never hear from her again.

We're looking for a new night guy for our rock station. And music director. He quit today after another run-in with the owner's son.

Kevin had just arrived at work shortly before noon when the GM confronted him in the corridor outside the second floor of our building. Veins bulging in his neck, the GM told Kevin that he'd heard his show the night before and didn't appreciate the language he used.

"You were talking about sexual intercourse and I won't tolerate that on any of my stations," he shouted, his face reddening by the second.

"What are you talking about?" Kevin asked in shock.

"You were talking about how it looked like one of the guys in an Aerosmith video put his *thing* in a woman's *pooter*. You use the word *pooter* again, and you're through. Understand?"

"Don't worry," said Kevin, who decided on the spot that this latest incident would be the last straw. "I can promise you I'll never say that again." He went straight to his computer, typed his letter of resignation, and then gathered up his personal belongings.

We weren't paying him enough to endure verbal abuse from the GM.

Teddy, our engineer, approaches me in my office. From his nervous body language, I can tell it's urgent.

He asks if I've heard from our fired receptionist, who, come to think of it, still owes me \$150 for getting her car out of the police impound yard. She had called from a pay phone a few days ago,

asking if I'd loan her money to get her telephone service restored. The way she was slurring her words, I could tell she was using alcohol to handle unemployment.

I told her I'd loan her money for the phone bill, provided she see the lawyer I recommended and take care of that warrant for her arrest. She mentioned suicide during the course of our conversation. When I pressed for her to seek help, she muttered an epithet and hung up on me.

Now Teddy tells me he's out \$2,000 because Carola has skipped bail. He drove over to her apartment to settle things, but the landlord told him Carola vanished a few days after she'd been fired from our station.

She had dumped her kids off at her ex-husband's house and never returned to get them.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: Love the PD Chronicles—been in this business off and on for 20 years. I'm a sales rep, and we think PDs are just as annoying as they think we are! However, that internal edgy synergy is part of what makes it fun. Gotta go and make some money to keep the revenue stream going so that programming can continue to execute their on-air ideas—M. Griffiths

Dear M: Seems to me you sales folks wouldn't have anything to sell if it wasn't for the product we put on the air. But that's just me, an annoying PD.

Dear PD: Out of radio for 10+ years; former award-winning PD and air personality, now in TV full time. Consultants are a-holes, period. They know nothing about you, your audience or your market as a whole. They are only in it for the money. Whatever you can do to convince your local GM or owners to do local market research will be more

beneficial to you and your station than anything they—
consultants—bring to the table. My advice: learn, watch,
listen, ask questions, and network—Bubble Chick

Dear Bubble Chick: What are you wearing?

CHAPTER 8

The Money Demo

Get the ratings up . . . but watch your expenses.

Deja radio all over again. The revenue stream isn't what it should be. The GM wants me to hack at least \$50,000 from my budget. Wait 'til the guys on my struggling afternoon show find out they'll be getting no TV or direct marketing for the fall.

If they protest too loudly, I'll remind them it could be worse. I could be cutting *them* from the budget.

The night guy calls me at 7 AM.

I can tell from his voice that he's had little sleep. I give him a verbal pat on the back, commending him for a good show last night.

"Were you listening in the ten o'clock hour?" he asks.

"Why?"

Max carried over into the last hour of his show a caller who claimed to be a pedophile. It was riveting radio. The lines were jammed. Several psychiatrists called in on their car phones to talk to the guy. He had them convinced he was a bona fide sicko, beyond just about anybody's help.

As the show was ending, Max asked the pedophile if he had anything else to say. "I gotta tell ya," he chuckled over the phone, "this has been a lot of fun. Ever hear of the Phil Hendrie show on KFI 640 Los Angeles, more stimulating radio? I do this sort of thing all the time. It's been a ruse."

Click.

If only Max or his board op had hit the dump button. No one would have been the wiser. I chew out Max for the mental lapse. Part of me also wishes he had the caller's name and phone number.

He was so good, I might offer him his own talk show.

The joke in the newsroom is that there's a suicide watch underway for George. Some joke.

Veteran staffers don't have to see the latest trends to know where their station stands. It's written all over George's tanned, craggy face. He wore a scowl when he entered the new-room today.

"How ya doin', George?"

"We're fucking doomed," he growled.

He said all of three words to his co-anchor and the sports guy on the morning show.

"Make sure you keep all sharp objects away from him the rest of this week," the sports dude tells the desk editor. "George is in one of his moods again."

He's convinced he'll be fired because the trends are down a half-a-point 25-54 adults, radio's money demo. George has gone through these mood swings countless times before. Sure, one day he'll be fired, just like most everyone in radio. But this is his 12th year at the station!

We all should last so long at one radio station.

"Did I hear what I think I just heard?"

A listener wants to know if I caught the traffic report during the 3 PM news.

"I could swear I heard someone say the F-word," the caller says.

I go back to the equipment rack and reach for the digital logger, which stores up to a month of aired programming for each of our

stations. I skip through the 3 o'clock news to the traffic, where, sure enough, while the traffic reporter is doing her thing, I can hear the airplane pilot say, under his breath, "I'm gonna miss this fuckin' job."

Probably a good thing it was his last day.

Kari approaches the doorway to my office. She's young, bright, talented, overworked, and, naturally, feels entitled to more money.

"Can I talk to you for a minute," she inquires, jerking her head to the side to get her long brown hair out of her face. I gesture her in, she closes the door, then wastes no time presenting her case.

"I think I'm doing a really good job, and I think you think I'm doing a really good job," she says.

"You're doing terrific work," I interrupt before she can go on. "And you want a raise, don't you?"

"You must be psychic," Kari says with a bright smile.

But the impromptu meeting turns serious when Kari asks for \$10,000 more a year. I swing my chair over to a filing cabinet, open the bottom drawer, and pull out my secret weapon—the annual radio salary survey from Radio and Records magazine.

I walk over to her, point out the average salary figure for someone in her position and market size, and watch as her jaw drops to the floor. She's already earning what her counterparts are making in similar sized markets.

Then I give Kari, whom I inherited when I got this job, some free advice. In fact, I'll share this with everyone in radio: **Always ask for what you want going in the door!!! Make sure it's something you can live with and get by on. Don't expect to ever make a nickel more—unless you have it in writing.**

About the last thing a PD wants to hear is an air talent whining about his or her salary—weeks after the deal has been cut.

Now hear this: Negotiate for what you want, or hire an agent to do the dirty work for you.

That salary is *your* problem.

Days like this I ask myself why I got into management.

The phone in my office rings. "Can you come to the studio when you have a sec?"

I sense the urgency in Jason's voice, so I hightrail it to the on-air booth, which is about 60 yards down the hall from where I sit.

"How's it going?" I inquire. Without hesitation, Jason drops a bombshell. Moments earlier, he had a \$1,000 winner on his show. The lucky ninth caller just happens to be . . . his girlfriend. I'm flabbergasted. He insists it was an accident.

"I swear I didn't recognize her voice. It didn't register with me until I started taking down the information on the winner's sheet."

I want to believe Jason, but I have lingering doubts.

"You've been dating her for a year and you don't know her voice?"

"What are we going to do?" he asks.

I decide to turn things around. "Why don't you think about how you're going to handle the problem? Call me when you think of something."

I return to my office, terrible thoughts racing through my mind. Did Jason think he could get away with cheating on a contest, and then come clean for fear someone might see the paperwork and recognize his girlfriend's name? My phone rings.

"I told Nicole that you'd fire me and I'd never work in radio again unless she agreed to disqualify herself from the contest," Jason tells me.

Whew. Our license is saved.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: Thanks for the smiles and laughs. Nothing's funnier than when sales folks come in and say, "I have a client who wants to do one of those clicky things to his e-mail or something. Do we have a Web site?" when one has been up for a year. I guess my point is that the reason I stay in radio is for the logical fallacies, ironies, and oxymorons you point out in your column. Hell, I laugh about them every day. It's like living chaos theory. I would just hate to get a normal job. Again, thanks for making a lot of us laugh. For those who find no humor in themselves, work or life, well, they can live in their own hell. I prefer mine with a smile!—Radio Web Guy, Denver

Dear Web Guy: Thanks. Like I told a relative who asked me the other day, "When are you gonna get a real job?" Never!

Dear PD: I've been at my station—it's talk—for almost three years. My General Manager has never taken the time to say anything to me unless he's mad about the on-air content. I don't think he likes me. What should I do?—Paranoid, Philly

Dear Paranoid: As soon as you line up a new job, give away a piece of his office furniture on the air.

Dear PD: Our new ownership has instituted a bunch of new policies, including random drug testing. Can they do that?—Don Franklin, Los Angeles

Dear Don: Start practicing for that drug test, dude. Keep practicing until you can hit the cup on your first try.

CHAPTER 9

Webbed Feat

You're starting up your radio station's web page.

Someone comes up with a bright idea: Put a message board on it so that anyone—yes, anyone, including competitors and disgruntled employees—can post nasty comments anonymously.

A certain person is savaging the new Morning Guy on our rock station. Dude has a pretty thick skin. But how'd you like it if, first thing in the morning, you logged on to your station's web site, only to find yourself reading posts that said "You suck!"

Two weeks go by before Bobby brings it to my attention. "I can take criticism," he tells me, "but how can you allow this crap to be on OUR web for everyone to see?"

Not only that, but Bobby tells me the night guy disparaged him on the air, too

"He said don't bother listening to Bobby in the morning, you'll just want to switch the dial to another station."

I'm irate. But after my blood pressure returns to normal, I go into my Lt. Columbo mode. I remember that Angela, our promotions director, has left me a bunch of negative postings about Bobby that she printed out from the web site. She left the GM copies of them, too. Hmmm. . . .

I call our night guy. I ask him if he has a grudge against Bobby because he wasn't offered mornings? "No, man."

I challenge him to explain why he'd make derogatory remarks about our new morning show.

“Well, Angela told me everyone hates him, so I just should just be honest with listeners and say he sucks.”

No surprise. Turns out the bitter, conniving Angela—who has been at the station longer than anyone and has conveniently “forgotten” to get prizes for the new Morning Guy to give away—was the author of those nasty postings. Meantime, our night guy is doing a terrific job getting listeners to wake up in the morning to Bobby, who went #1 with 25-54 adults his first ratings book with the station.

Moral to the story? Don't do the bulletin board thing—unless you have someone who can go through the postings and edit them *before* they make it onto your web site. Save yourself the grief.

Can't we all just get along?

Our morning show producer and promotions helper, Michael, shows up early at a sports stadium for a major music concert. A promotions assistant from the “other” station is also there.

Michael decides to warm up the crowd by throwing some of our T-shirts into the stands. He's focusing on the most animated of the patrons, the one's waving their hands, yelling, and jumping up and down, when his counterpart sneaks up behind him, snatches a pile of about 20 shirts from the stadium turf, and runs for his life. Booming from the crowd alerts my guy that something's gone awry.

Let me explain something. Michael is a recent University of Minnesota grad, where he played football. He's a sinewy 6-5, 250. He can still run a 4.8 40. The other guy was a 5-10, 160-pound radio promotions geek. He picked the wrong person to mess with.

Back at the station, Michael is a legend. Everyone who was there is still talking about the way he took the guy down with a running-leaping tackle that would've made Junior Seau proud.

And yes, we recovered all of our T-shirts.

Shaun can't come in to do the late night show tonight. He called in with a dental problem.

Seems he slipped in his shower and accidentally knocked out two of his front teeth.

Actually, he could do his show. There'd just be a lot of whistling when he talked.

We've got a rat inside the station.

The *other* kind of rat. Someone is supplying dirt to the local newspaper columnist who writes about radio and TV. A story comes out saying we've cold-heartedly fired one of the AM station's news reporters; cut him loose without any severance pay.

Fact is, he was habitually late for work and was spending more time in the front lobby, flirting with the new receptionist, than in the newsroom. Despite multiple warnings, the behavior persisted. He was cut loose with two weeks' severance.

That's the real news.

Shaun won't be coming back to work. He's confessed that he has a problem with "speed."

His two front teeth were knocked out during the consummation of a drug deal. His grandmother, who he's been living with, called the cops and had him arrested.

Shaun, who's 25 and a budding late-night radio talent, will be checking into a drug rehab center.

"I've been on speed since I was 13," he admits. "It's time I finally did something about it."

It's war. Radio war.

While we're inside a night club doing an off-air remote, the evil forces from the "other" station are out in the parking lot, tearing down our banners, putting their bumper stickers on cars.

Do they have any idea what they've started?

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I have a suspicion that I'm underpaid. Is there any way I can find out what on-air Music Directors are being paid in markets similar to mine?—Starving, El Paso, Texas

Dear Starving: You could call around and just ask. Most people in radio have loose lips when it comes to what's on their paycheck stub. Or, dig up an old copy of Radio and Records magazine. They publish an annual salary survey.

Dear PD: Our OM and PD are taking long lunches together. Both are married. They leave for lunch together, disappear for 2-2 ½ hours, and then return together. Think something's up?—Big Mouth, Baltimore, Maryland

Dear Big Mouth: I think something WAS up. Rim-shot, please. Next time they come back from a long lunch, be really brave and check to see if the guy's zipper is open.

CHAPTER 10

Porno-Graph-Ick

This should discourage anyone from asking for more money.

The owner's son had his secretary produce a large, color graph, showing expenses versus revenue for our stations. Our ratings are up. Several of our stations are sold out. Yet, the graph posted on a wall in the kitchen indicates . . . we're struggling to make ends meet.

What is this, Hollywood?

"Did you see the tits on Emily?" asks a balding, overweight, middle-aged talk show producer with crooked yellow teeth. "The way she dresses, she wants you to notice. My god, her breasts, they're incredible!"

Ah yes, it must be summer time. Lust is in the air. Young, nubile interns like 19-year-old Emily—a dead ringer for Meg Ryan—have converged on the station from colleges all over the country.

"Man, if I were 20 years younger . . ."

I finish his sentence for him. "You still wouldn't have a chance."

Our receptionist sticks her head into my office, ready to dish the latest dirt

“Steve is selling his BMW and he’s asking \$25,000,” she gushes. And she reveals our GM is using the station’s main number in his classified ad.

“What’s he gonna do for wheels?” I wonder. I’m told he’s gonna buy a brand new Beamer, but the receptionist reveals that he’s already hiding a limited edition, \$45,000 Porsche Boxter at home in his garage. One of our employees spotted him driving it last Saturday.

“Don’t tell anyone,” the receptionist cautions, “he doesn’t want anyone to know.”

Lest someone ask for a raise.

Remember Shaun, inhabitant of late nights on our rock station?

I’m shocked to see him working at Home Depot. It’s been all of two weeks since he left the station to enter rehab for an addiction to speed.

“I’m fighting it on my own,” he cheerfully tells me. “Do you think there’s a chance I could get back on the radio?”

“Let’s see how it goes,” I say to him, knowing that even if he’s off drugs at this minute, it’s likely only temporary.

No fucking way, I think to myself.

You gotta love radio consolidation.

Big companies swallowing up the little companies, owning anywhere from six to eight stations in a single market. For the worker bees, it means fewer jobs, lower salaries, more hours, multiple—and then some—tasks.

You could say, “Enough is enough,” or, to borrow from Johnny Paycheck, “Take this job and shove it.”

On days when the owner’s son gets to me, I’ve thought about cleaning out my office and walking across the street. Uh, except

that nowadays, chances are your owner—We Control Everything Broadcasting—also owns virtually every other station in town. And controls the salary structure.

Quit to work for the competition and you run the risk that W.C.E.B. will come back to haunt you—as your new old owner. Think your former manager won't exact revenge by making sure you're the first to be let go? Think again. Worse yet, you could be blackballed.

Trust me, these guys are vindictive.

Two months into the controversial new morning show on our rock station—and the memorable day after George Michael was arrested for spankin' the monkey in a public restroom.

I'm in my office around 7:30, only because the years I labored getting up at 3:30 AM to work on my own morning show have forever thrown off my internal body clock. Anyway, I'm cracking up listening to callers answer the question, "Where's the most unusual place you've ever George Michael'd yourself."

One woman tells the jock that she, uh, pleasures herself in the chair of a local dentist's office while the dentist, who, she claims, is as handsome as Tom Cruise, attends to a patient in an adjacent room.

But the owner's son, who startles me when he appears in my doorway, isn't getting off on the show.

"Do you hear what's going on?" he demands of me, knowing damn well that I've been listening. "I don't want that smut on my radio station. He's talking about masturbation. Get Bobby off the air and send him home, now!" he snarls.

"Who'll do the show?" I ask.

"Have his producer play CDs, I don't care."

"Listen," I tell him, "if I send him home, you won't have a morning show anymore because he won't come back. Fact is, the show is hilarious, Seinfeld did a whole episode about masturbation,

the phone lines are lit up like a Christmas tree, and, trust me, his ratings are growing by the minute. This is a rock station, remember?"

He stares at me, his face engulfed in rage.

"What's gotten into you?" he demands. "I've heard promos on our stations with words in them like *bell* and *crap*. We're a family ownership. My dad doesn't think there's a place for that kind of language on the radio. Neither do I. Now send him home!"

He marches back downstairs to his office. My first impulse is to pack my stuff and get out. I've had it with Richie Rich sticking his nose in programming.

I wait until the show is over at 9 AM to resolve the situation. I walk downstairs, step into his office, and let him know that I'm not suspending my Morning Guy. I'm half expecting to be fired for insubordination.

"Thanks for holding your ground," the owner's son tells me. "You're right."

What? Had he just taken his Prozac?

"Just remember one thing," he says before I leave his office. "It's not your morning show, or Bobby's morning show. It's MY morning show."

Obviously, ownership has its privileges

Sales strikes again!

There are certain sales-slugs who ignore protocol and sneak questionable sales promotions past the programming department. They know we'll reject the ones that don't do a thing for the ratings.

The latest end around took some time to surface. A pretty young account executive arranged with a homebuilder for giveaways of boom boxes and TVs for new homebuyers.

I can hear the conversation in the sales office: "The house is \$175,000? I dunno. Oh, but you say you'll throw in a \$150 boom box? I'll take it!"

Anyway, our sales promotions director got a call from a woman whose home was closing escrow. She wondered when she could come by for her boom box. What boom box? We were dismayed to discover that the giveaways involved the use of our station's call letters. And get this—the supplier of the prizes is the AE's fiancé, who works for a major electronics company and, well, you get the idea.

She'll get a slap on the wrist from our general sales manager, nothing more severe.

After all, she's our station's top biller.

I've been thumbing through old albums stored in cardboard boxes down in my basement. I know that in one of the boxes is the George Carlin comedy album about the seven dirty words you can't say on TV—or radio.

I'm going to make copies of the bit and distribute them to our jocks and board ops. Like the night guy on the FM station who said "shit."

"I didn't think it was a problem," he told me, "because I'm on a rock station."

I pointed out that FCC regulations apply to every radio format.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I was promised promotions and marketing for my morning show when I started. I haven't seen a billboard, TV commercial or newspaper ad for my show—and my ratings are slipping. What can I do?—Morning Dude, West Coast AOR Station

Dear Morning Dude: Always get it in writing! Meantime, take the initiative. Be creative and visible. Do

something on the streets that will cause talk, but won't lose the station's license.

Dear PD: What criteria should I consider before moving to another job? I'm fed up where I am.—Moving Man, SLC, Utah.

Dear Moving Man: In no particular order, consider market size, responsibilities, opportunity for advancement, ownership, and, of course, money. TVjobs.com has a cost-of-living comparison scale on its web site. You don't want to make a move, only to have your healthy raise eaten up by a higher cost of living.

CHAPTER 11

Mr Happy's Splendid Adventures

My first death threat, I think.

I was sitting at my desk this afternoon when a co-worker informed me that someone had a package in the lobby that only I could sign for.

"It isn't ticking, I don't think," he joked.

Security was the last thing on my mind. I strode into the lobby, where there was a nondescript guy standing at the receptionist's desk holding a manila envelope sealed with tape.

"Are you Jack?" he asked me.

"Yup."

He looked me over, and then handed over the envelope. I waited for him to ask me for my signature, but he was empty handed. As if on cue, the elevator doors in our lobby opened. He vanished like some alien creature on the X Files. After tearing through two layers of Scotch tape, I finally opened the package, only to discover that the contents consisted entirely of a half-dozen blank white sheets of paper. I started laughing.

"What an idiot!" I said.

The receptionist seemed alarmed.

"He just wanted to see what you looked like."

I shrugged it off, chalking it up to a full moon. Jokingly, I pulled out my car keys and asked one of the sales guys in the lobby if he'd mind going down to the parking garage to start my car. Everyone laughed.

But that night, I tossed and turned in bed, thinking about the

late Alan Berg, the Denver talk show host who was gunned down outside his home.

Guaranteed insomnia.

"Been married three times," laments a pot bellied, 60-ish black man with a gray Afro. He's busily shining the shoes of a friend of mine in the lobby of a hotel where I'm staying.

"First one had a son who was out of control," he said. "He kept coming into the bedroom. I told him I was gonna get my gun if he did it again. The bitch kicked me out when I pulled a gun on him.

"Second one, she didn't do nothin'," he continued. "I'd come home from work and there was nuffin' on the dinner table. The house was a mess. I kicked her butt out."

My friend and I smiled at each other. We're both thinking this guy should have his own talk show.

"Third one, she let me bring women home," he picked up with the story. "She'd say, 'Go on, bedroom's right over there.' Hell, after a while, I got a guilty conscience. I couldn't live with myself, so I had to move out."

"So, I guess you're not getting married again?" I interjected.

"Sheeet, I got four girlfriends right now. None over the age of 40," he replied.

He interrupts buffing my friend's shoes, reaches into his pocket, and retrieves a medicine bottle.

"See this?" he asks, emptying out a bunch of pills into his shoe polish-stained right hand. "Those little white ones are for my heart," he explained to us. "Nitro." He shook the bottle and out flew a bigger blue pill. "That's what I use when Mr. Happy's having trouble. At my age, you need all the help you can get."

Forget the talk show. This guy could replace Bob Dole on the Viagra commercials.

The payroll checks came in late on Friday, so someone from the accounting department decided to leave them in the employee mailboxes.

Monday morning, several of us noticed that the envelopes had been opened. Evidently, a fellow employee decided he was going to learn the salary structure of our company.

The next day, coincidentally, Sam, the station's disgruntled news guy and resident black militant, drops in on the general manager and complains about his pay. He claims to know that several other people doing comparable work are earning more money. To the GM's astonishment, Sam cites specific examples—rounded off to the exact dollar.

We know he opened our mail. Unfortunately, we can't prove it. But we'll never trust him again. Payroll checks will never be left in mailboxes, either.

And Sam? He won't be getting a raise anytime soon, even though he's coming up on his first anniversary with the company.

We got a call at the station that a popular syndicated talk show was being pre-empted by another show at around two or three every weekday morning. We just figured the listener got his stations mixed up.

And then we took another call from a guy who wanted demographic and ratings information for the station because, he said, he was booked as a guest on a talk show at three tomorrow morning.

The assistant program director volunteers to listen. He sets his alarm clock for 3 AM. Sure enough, just after the top of the hour news, a voice comes on the radio that clearly isn't the popular syndicated talk show host who should be on the air. Can it really be . . . the board operator, doing his own program?

The Asst. PD gets dressed, drives to the station, and confronts the board op during a break. Turns out, it's the third night of the Danny Dark After Dark extravaganza. He's ordered to dismiss his guest on the phone.

"Can I at least finish my show?" he protested.

On my plane ride back home, I strike up a conversation with the garrulous passenger next to me in first class. He looks at the haggard flight attendant walking our way up the aisle.

"Christ, she's older than dirt," he says in amazement.

I must admit, I've never seen a gray-haired flight attendant before. She looks old enough to be my grandma—and she's dead. If the plane goes down, we'll have to help *her* to safety.

"You know, in the old days, stewardesses worked 'til they were 26, then the airline dumped 'em," my new friend explained. "If they got a zit or got married, they were out."

He should know. He's an off-duty pilot for the airline. The more Bloody Marys he downs, the more information he volunteers about his personal life, including a busted marriage.

"The fucking Viper got my house in San Diego," he says, pointing out that "the Viper, in case you didn't know, is my ex-wife."

He tells me he'd like to write a book for guys that would help them avoid what he's gone through.

"When the thighs close, it's over," he says philosophically. "You need to pack up your shit and get out."

I'm thinking, this guy must have been some fun to live with. But I'm not about to pry. He goes on.

"You married?"

"Yeah, happily," I reply.

"You're lucky," he says, his speech slurring from a third Bloody Mary. "But if something goes wrong, here's something else I'd put in my book: Don't even effing think that it'll be okay. 'Oh, honey,

let's be friends, we can work everything out.' Bullshit! You get your ass to the lawyer before she can, otherwise she'll strike like the Viper did."

I'm relieved he's not flying the plane.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: There's a part-timer at our station that keeps showing up late for his shifts. I'd like to fire him right now, but I don't have enough paper on him yet. Any suggestions?—Mad As Hell in Michigan

Dear Mad As Hell: How about unscheduling him from shifts? Reduce his hours to . . . zero. If you're lucky, he'll just go away.

Dear PD: Do you think satellite radio will put all of us in commercial radio out of business?—Worried in Southern California

Dear Worried: When it comes to a jukebox versus local, personality-driven radio with great promotions, I'll put my money on commercial radio.

CHAPTER 12

The Crying Game

There are tears in Ronnie's eyes.

Yes, this roly-poly, full-grown DJ has been bawling like a baby. And what, you ask, precipitated it? Automation? A fight with his girlfriend? Termination?

Nope.

The owner's son, who stayed past 5 tonight, caught him and some other part-timers eating food in the on-air studio. That's a no-no at most radio stations.

Ronnie simply thought he was doing the right thing. He'd shown great initiative, organizing an after-hours gathering of part-timers and interns to teach them how to run our finicky computer system, which tends to lock up for no reason at all, creating dead air.

Food was ordered in. Ronnie thought he could at least feed the troops if he couldn't pay them. Which he couldn't, because the company's too cheap.

Anyway, the gang was in the midst of a tutorial, when the door to the control room suddenly burst open. It was the owner's son, and he was breathing fire like a dragon.

"Get that fucking food out of the control room, now !" he screamed, glaring at Ronnie. The five people with him in the control room froze. They didn't know whether to run or hide.

"Let me explain," Ronnie said. "I'm teaching these guys about the equipment, and we . . ."

The owner's son interrupted. "I've spent hundreds of thousands

on this equipment, and you bring food in here. What the hell is wrong with you? Get that shit out of here! Just do it! You bring food in here again, you're fired."

Quickly, teacher and pupils gather up the salad and pizza containers and head for the kitchen. I come down the hall from my office after hearing all the commotion.

The owner's son focuses his rage on me. We're standing inches apart.

"Can't you control your people?" he yells in my face. "You need to start paying attention to what's going on here!" And he storms off.

Ronnie approaches me in the hallway, tears streaming down his cheeks. Thoroughly embarrassed, he's told everyone to go home, class is over. Now he starts screaming at me like a madman.

"I'm not gonna put up with this shit from Steve," he shouted at the top of his lungs. "He just made a fool of me. Either he apologizes to me, or I'm outta here. I've fucking had it!"

I head down to Steve's office, figuring we'll all be canned and he'll automate the station.

"You should be ashamed of the way you behaved upstairs," I tell him as he's cooling off at his desk. "You thoroughly humiliated Ronnie and you owe him an apology."

Before he could respond, I remind him about our previous disagreement.

"What did I tell you last time you went off on an employee? I said if you have a problem with someone, run it by me. Let me take care of it. That's what I'm here for. You have zero people skills."

I wait a few seconds, anticipating that I'll hear the words "You're fired."

"Jack," he said calmly, "you're so right. I overreacted and I'm really sorry. Thanks for standing up to me again. I like that in a manager. Go tell Ronnie that I apologize. But please, let's keep food out of the studios."

Dr. Jekyll-Mr. Hyde strikes again.

I'm talking with someone in the production room, where a window overlooks the station's parking lot from the third floor. And I see Jetana. She's the night jock on one of our FM music stations and she has a reputation for being, how shall I say, loose? Now, from the looks of things down in the parking lot, it appears she's supplementing her income with some freelance work.

A guy standing next to a pick-up truck starts unzipping his pants as he climbs into the driver's seat of the vehicle. I see him place a cardboard shade across his front window, establishing privacy. Jetana enters the pick-up on the passenger side. Her head goes down. His stays up.

Uh-oh.

At about the same time Jetana resurfaces for air, another guy approaches the parking lot from the sidewalk. It's . . . her boyfriend. I can see he's yelling something at her. She gets out of the truck and yells something back. Their arms are flailing in the air. They argue for about a minute, he flips her off, then he walks off.

A blown relationship.

It's the stuff of which legends are made at radio stations.

This incident will be tough to top. One of the guys who screens calls for a talk show is in hot water. Should be, after this twisted episode. Seems he dismissed a youthful caller by telling her, "Why don't you put your dad's dick in your mouth?"

He didn't count on the kid repeating it to his father, who called the General Manager to complain. Confronted by the allegation, the screener pleaded guilty and was suspended without pay for two days. Upon his return, he'll be banished to radio's Siberia—overnights.

Granted, I wasn't an eyewitness, but several sources have confirmed the story, so it must be true.

One night last week, in a remarkable show of bad judgment, the night guy on one of our FM music stations solicited volunteers to help his college intern lose his virginity.

If you give them concert tickets or CDs, they will come. And they came. In the conference room. Three women and the intern. Actually two women, a 17-year-old girl, and the intern. Unfortunately, the intern didn't know the one girl was underage until the next day, when her mom called the station.

The GM has the video of the menage-a-trois in his office for safekeeping.

Or until the police ask for it.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I love radio, but I can't decide whether I should pay to enroll in one of those broadcasting schools—or major in English. What would you do?—Confused, Boston, MA

Dear Confused: Forget the broadcast classes. If I were you, I'd get my foot in the door of a radio station ASAP. You'll learn more working day to day at a station than you will taking a class from someone whose only contact with the industry is the station tour he takes his classes on once a year.

Dear PD: My GM nixed us going to the Radio and Records convention this year. He says all conventions are a waste of time. How can we change his mind?—Puzzled, Modesto, Calif.

Dear Puzzled: Is your GM related to the Grinch? Tell

him you won't ever go to another convention if you don't bring something back that helps your station improve its ratings or revenue. If the answer is still no, start saving for next year's R&R (Radio and Records magazine) convention. Take plenty of tapes and resumes with you.

CHAPTER 13

Missing In Action

About 3:30 AM, the phone rang at the editor's desk in the newsroom. It was the police, asking did anyone at the station know the whereabouts of a certain prominent talk radio host.

The last anyone had seen of "Paul" was at our election coverage the night before, which he'd anchored. The middle-aged talk host with the bad skin signed off the broadcast, then split with a stunning intern; she had long, silky brown hair, huge breasts, and Cindy Margolis' body. Paul's wife called the cops and filed a missing person's report.

Why a coed young enough to be his daughter would find this guy appealing, let alone sexy, is beyond most of us at the station. Maybe she thinks she'll sleep her way to a full-time job as his producer. Maybe it's the money. He has lots of it. Or perhaps it's just so she can say she's sleeping with a local celebrity, who, publicly, is "happily" married and has a couple of kids.

In any event, the talk host and the intern spent the night at a local motel. Fortunately, it didn't make the papers.

One of these days, Paul will get caught. Or maybe his wife will continue to look the other way. Why blow a good thing like shopping sprees at Nordstrom, parties with the city's upper crust, or the summerhouse on the beach? Paul likes to bet with fellow employees that he can bed down all the new interns within their first week at the station.

He's yet to lose that I know of. Money, I mean.

Respect for him among his co-workers was lost long ago.

I just know it. We've scared away the leading candidate to become PD of our group-owned Oldies station.

The interview was going along great, until Dan, the Vietnam Vet with the glass eye on our staff, started comparing radio station programming to "massacring gooks" in 'Nam.

I could see the would-be PD start to squirm in his chair. I think he thought Dan was going to have a 'Nam flashback on him. Then he hit him with this zinger: "What music do you think we should be playing on the station? Pre Tet or post Tet?"

The job seeker, obviously not up on history of the Tet Offensive, looked at his watch, stood up, and explained to his three inquisitors that he had to go. Something about needing to pick up his daughter from school.

Now.

The latest gossip in the station hallways is that Cassandra, the night chick, wears a wig because of an illness that's left her as bald as Mr. Clean. I scoff at the notion.

But then yesterday, Cassandra was running 15 minutes late for a promotions meeting. We were all waiting for her in the conference room when she finally rushed in out of breath.

Cassandra looked disheveled. She'd just taken her seat when all of us noticed something really different about her. Whatever it was that was on her head, it was on wrong—tilted back and slightly to the right, revealing a massive forehead and the start of a bald scalp.

Was that a dead muskrat on her head, or what?

We all just kind of looked down at the conference table, knowing that eye contact might trigger an inappropriate outburst of laughter.

She'd discover the problem later when she looked in a mirror in the bathroom.

In radio the saying is “Don’t buy a house.”

I can go one step further. Don’t rent out your house. Especially if you live in another city.

For once, I had some extra money, a rarity in radio. I mean, usually, if you get a decent severance check or have anything saved from your last gig, you wind up using it all before you get your next job. It just happens that way.

Anyway, I bought this sprawling, four bedroom house with a swimming pool in a suburb of Phoenix, thinking that in the short term it would be a good tax write-off, and in the long term I might, for the first time in my life, actually make a killing off real estate. I fancied myself as the next Donald Trump.

I had it all planned. First, as an absentee, out of state landlord, I hired a rental property manager to pre-screen prospective tenants, collect the monthly rent check, and make sure my future gold mine was kept in tip-top shape. Then, I made small talk with the next-door neighbors, asking them if they’d please call me—collect—if they noticed anything unusual going on at my house.

I got great news from the rental property agent. They found a family moving to Arizona from New York City. A credit check revealed an annual income of more than \$100,000 a year AND a history of paying all their bills on time. As Marv Albert would say, “Yesssss!”

The first rent check rolled in right on time. Money in the bank.

Two weeks later, I got a call from the next-door neighbors.

“We thought you should know that your house seems to be Grand Central Station for guys in different cars every night,” the neighbor reported. “It starts around 9 or 10 PM and men keep coming to the front door until 3 or 4 in the morning.”

“Thanks,” I said, a sinking feeling overcoming me.

An unannounced visit by the rental property agent revealed my—and any landlord’s—worst nightmare. The “family” that moved into my house was comprised of four hookers. “Dad,” the one reporting a six-figure income, was a pimp. Holes had been

punched into bedroom and bathroom walls. Countless cigarette burns ruined the new blue carpeting. The kitchen was a disaster area. There were used condoms and condom wrappers strewn about the bedrooms. My new rental house was a wreck. And so was I.

Eviction was the solution. And the end of my days as a would-be real estate mogul. I took a \$15,000 hit when I sold the house.

Donald Trump? More like Donald Chump.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: A bunch of us want streaming audio on our station's web site, but we were told by management that it costs too much. They don't see how increased web site traffic can make some money. Have any suggestions?—Frustrated in Houston

Dear Frustrated: This is one of those times when the sales department can be your best friend. Get them to find you a sponsor for streaming audio. At last resort, get a trade agreement going with a web site producer.

Dear PD: I'm in my mid-20s and production director at a relatively new independent, aka, poor station in a major market. I also work on air as a part time air talent. I want to move from my part-time status to full time. We have a shortage of talent and the current night guy is mediocre, the late night guy should be the janitor. My question: Should I pursue one of the night gigs and, if so, how best to get my PD to consider me?—Starving For Attention

Dear Starving: What do you want to be when you grow up? I don't know any great promo/imaging guys in major markets who also jock. But, from your letter, it seems you'd rather be on-air. If that's the case, go see the PD. Be direct and tell him what you want. Give him your tape. Get an answer. If it's no, you need to look elsewhere.

CHAPTER 14

Jock Itch

I knew there was something wrong the minute I plopped the guy's tape in my cassette machine and hit the play button.

It was a tape of the jock's work, circa 1980. But he sounded pretty good.

"I'm staying at the Good Night Inn," he told me during a follow-up call. "I can be at the station within the hour."

What the hell, I figured. At best, he still had his chops and might be able to do fill-in work on one of our music stations. At worst, I'd meet him and give him a quick brush off.

He arrived about 45 minutes after phoning me. "Doug Adams is here to see you," the receptionist said. I walked out to the front lobby and introduced myself to a disheveled, middle-aged man in a faded green polo shirt and a shabby pair of slacks. I noticed a little girl sitting with him.

"That's my eight-year-old daughter," he said proudly. "We took the bus here."

"Great," I replied.

He handed me a three-page resume. It was scribbled in black pen on Good Night Inn stationary, the sheets of white paper you find in the top drawer of the desk in your motel room. I noticed several sections were crossed out and re-written. I thought to myself, here's a guy who takes pride in his work.

Doug claimed he worked at some heavyweight Top 40 stations back in the '80s, but I noticed there was a six year lag time between his last gig—at some station in Michigan—and now. Under

“Acting,” he noted that he’d played “an insane man” on TV’s “Murder She Wrote.” (I wondered whether he had any acting skills, or if insanity just came naturally). Then I thanked him for his time and told him I’d get back to him if something popped open.

Even though I knew I never would.

A thief is at work in our building.

We were in the middle of our weekly department head managers meeting when something got the Chief Engineer’s attention. He looked up at the ceiling.

“What happened to the surround-sound speakers that were in here?” he wondered.

On closer inspection, it turned out that someone had removed the bolts from the ceiling and ripped off the speakers. Co-workers in the meeting remembered that several pieces of artwork were missing from the walls. Headphones had been disappearing from the production room.

The General Manager advises us to keep an eye on things.

“If you have anything really valuable, keep it locked up in your office—or take it home.”

Radio station thievery is nothing new. It’s happened at every place I’ve worked. In fact, I can recall a PD putting out a memo begging for the return of his autographed Mickey Mantle picture, which was stolen from his office. I’m not saying it’s right, because it isn’t, but my guess is that the least paid employees, like \$6-an-hour board ops, feel they’re entitled to whatever isn’t nailed down or locked up.

Makes up for their small paycheck, they reason.

A board op we fired for being habitually late for work has volleyed back with charges of sexual harassment. Several of her superiors have been ordered to testify before the Labor Commission.

Upon further investigation, turns out the board op was doing the harassing. Three of the overnight guys 'fessed up that "Linda" had given them a free striptease show about six months ago. She took it off, all off, in the middle of the news room.

The story is conveyed back to Linda through her attorney.
Case closed.

You would think sales people would pay attention to what goes on at their own station. But that's not always the case.

My news guy is in the news booth one afternoon. He'd just finished his 3 PM 'cast and cracked the door back open, when Sal the sales guy approached with a client.

"Like you to meet Franklyn Davis. He runs the big Dodge agency on Main. He's looking at news sponsorships."

Then the sales guy asked a really dumb question of the news guy, right in front of the visitor: "Is our news live in the afternoons?"

Doh!

The news guy resisted the temptation of saying, "No, I just come in for my health."

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I love promotions, that's what I want to do in radio. My question is, how can I pitch ideas to management without looking like an arrogant bastard? I'm currently an

intern so I don't want to rock the boat.—Intern at Major Market Station with a Format Change Looming.

Dear Intern: Don't be shy. Speak up. Hasn't one of your college professors taught you yet "the squeaky wheel gets the grease?" You need to promote yourself, but you can do it by offering suggestions for promotions. Do it in a memo, but position it as suggestions to help the station. Management loses when it doesn't consider ideas from everyone at the station.

Dear PD: Heard any sick JFK Jr. jokes around your news-room lately?—Bad Taste, Classic Rocker, Los Angeles, CA.

Dear Bad Taste: Why you insensitive bastard, you should be ashamed of yourself for asking that! But since you did, here goes:

—What was JFK Junior's favorite drink? Ocean Spray.

—Where do the Kennedy's go for their vacation? All over Martha's Vineyard.

—How did JFK Junior learn how to fly? Crash course.

—How are the Kennedy's like oil? They don't mix well with water.

—Why didn't JFK Junior shower before the plane flight? He figured he'd just wash up on shore.

CHAPTER 15

Bad Breaks

Torture comes in many different forms. But there's only one I know in radio.

It's called the aircheck critique session. You wanna strike fear into the heart of an air personality? Invite them into your—the PD's—office for an air-check session. That's where you take the tape of their last show, put it in your cassette machine, and then play it back in short bursts—while the victim nervously squirms in his chair.

Rewinding and playing back bad breaks is sort of like sticking a knife into the subject—and twisting it. Get the picture?

Actually, I did something that might have violated the Geneva Convention. I invited the crusty old morning man on our news/talk station to take a ride with me. In preparation for the drive, I'd edited bits from a really good morning show on another station and placed them next to his on a cassette.

Buckled into our seats, I hit the automatic door locks on my car and we were off. It was as if I was transporting a prisoner to jail. We'd barely pulled out of the station's parking lot when Gordon became fidgety and suddenly remembered that he had something really important to do this morning. "This isn't gonna take long, is it?" he asked. I gave him a quick overview of where I thought his show was, how it could improve, and invited him to sit back, relax, and listen to the air-check I'd produced.

I popped the tape into my car's cassette machine. On came an incredible show open for a news/talk station that I'd long admired.

The co-hosts were bright, tight, and informative. The production elements jumped out of the tiny speakers in my Acura. Then on came the air-check of Gordon's show open—he stumbled, fumbled, and told a bad joke.

What I didn't realize is that this was Gordon's first air-check critique session in about 15 years. He was so uncomfortable with the approach, his strategy clearly was to keep talking, so neither of us would be able to hear what was on the tape.

"Shouldn't we be getting back to the station?" he wondered. "Isn't this the day of your department head meeting? Pull over here. I need a smoke."

What I discovered is that the air-check critique session isn't for everyone. For Gordon, it really was torture. Later, one-on-one, in an informal meeting, we discussed some points about his show that he took to heart the very next morning.

He'd taught this PD a very important lesson.

The stuff that goes on at our FMs . . .

I wasn't a witness, but the word in the hallways is that Vinnie is no longer with us because, well, he literally got pissed off.

According to someone who *was* an eyewitness, Vinnie, angry that the GM berated him at a staff meeting, got up in front of everyone in the conference room, climbed up on the table, unzipped his fly, whipped it out, and, yep, urinated on the table.

Post script. Two months later, Vinnie is working at a rock station across the street. It's been discovered that he left a message on his old phone number at our station, informing callers that *our* FM rocker sucks, telling them that they should make the switch to his new station. Nice promo.

Management will be quicker to delete phone numbers when employees leave from now on.

The call came in from an author who expected to hear his interview on our public affairs show Sunday at 4 AM.

Instead, he heard a Doobie Brothers song. I won't bore you with why we play public affairs programs, except to say that such community programming usually helps when it comes time for a station to renew its FCC license.

Thanks to modern technology, you can go back in time at a radio station and listen to old programming on a machine called a digital logger. We went back to Sunday at 4 AM. Doobie Brothers. Then we went back to the previous Sunday. More music. Not a single public affairs show aired in the last 60 days, which is as far back as the logger went.

A call to Sylvia, the Sunday overnight jock, cleared up the mystery.

"Oh, I've been playing music," she confessed.

"Why would you do that, when the programming log clearly indicates you run public affairs shows between 4 and 5 AM?" I asked.

"I didn't think the shows were very interesting."

Everyone wants to be the PD.

Flashback. I worked as news guy/sidekick with this wacky Morning Guy who, at least once a week, tried a different prank to break my concentration.

Mooning didn't work. God, he was butt ugly, too. Lighting my script on fire with his Zippo didn't faze me, either.

One morning, he threw to me, I started my 'cast with my usual open, and then the on-air studio went dark. Ross had flipped off the light switch on his way out of the studio. I couldn't see a thing. My script. The cart machines. Nothing.

A lesser broadcaster might have suffered incontinence. But this

was about my fourth 'cast of the morning. I knew everything that was going on in the world, so I just ad-libbed my entire two-minute newscast.

Ross re-appeared in the studio just as I was ending my 'cast. The SOB had been listening to everything on a monitor in the hallway outside the on-air studio. He cracked open the mike, laughed, but then acted as if nothing had happened.

Off air, he shot me a look of disbelief, then grinned.

"Damn!" he said. "I'll get you next time."

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: How can I get a busy PD's attention with my tape and resume?—Need A Gig, Detroit, Michigan.

Dear Need A Gig: Get creative. Be a marketing genius. Try unusual packaging. I got a Super Soaker in the mail from a couple of guys who put their names on it. They slapped a computer-generated label on it that read "Give us a shot."

Dear PD: I loved last week's PD Chronicles, except for the JFK Jr. jokes.—Easily Offended, Des Moines, Iowa

Dear Easily Offended: What are you doing in radio?

Dear PD: JFK Jr. jokes you left out in last week's column:

"Who does he think he is, John Kennedy?" "Nope, John Denver."

My Bonnie Lies Under the Ocean . . . My Bonnie Lies Under The Sea, My Bonnie Lies Under the Ocean . . . Right next to John F. Ken-ne-dy.—Al, San Diego, Calif.

Dear Al: Are you available for mornings?

CHAPTER 16

Interview With the Vampire

It was, as job interviews go, weird, man, really weird.

I'd been flown into a major market city, so I figured I already had the gig. See, most radio stations are cheap. They don't waste the money on airfare and hotel unless they want you. The Operations Manager of this cluster of stations, who oversees the PDs and is second in command to the station General Manager, wanted to make sure I didn't have two heads.

When I deplaned, the OM was waiting for me in the terminal. "Johnny?" I asked, making eye contact with a lean, middle-aged guy who was in jeans, a polo shirt, and had collar-length brown hair. "Hey man, welcome!"

We power-walked to the parking lot, where, trying not to gasp for breath, I threw my bag into the trunk of the OM's car and got in. We made small talk. Very small. In an instant, he was on his car phone, dogging out an air talent.

"If you fucking do that on your show again, I'll blow your ass out of here, got it?"

I had a feeling he wasn't a nominee for Boss of the Year.

At the station, he parked me in a chair in his office-and went back to the phone. I swear 20 minutes went by before he remembered I was there. "Want something to drink?"

I got a tour of the facility, which is always an awkward thing, because the other employees at the station are looking you over, wondering if you'll be coming in to fire them. What they didn't know was that, even though I was a program director, I was seriously

considering going back to my roots—joining a high profile morning show as the sidekick.

We stopped by the GM's office just long enough for him to shake my hand and size me up. He excused himself when his phone rang.

The OM deposited me in that chair outside his office. I could hear him on the phone again. Yelling. Several people went into his office. He yelled at them. I've spent less time in doctors' waiting rooms.

Eventually, the OM drove me to a hotel, checked me in, and said he'd be back in a few hours to take me to dinner. I'd get to meet Scooter, the egotistical Morning Guy with the reputation for being rude, crude, and obnoxious—not unlike many morning personalities

I hate sushi, so it figured . . . we went to a sushi bar. The Morning Guy was already sitting at the bar when the OM and I walked in. We were introduced, and the Chemistry Test was underway. He passed me a plate of raw fish that looked like it should be put on fishing hooks as bait. "Sorry, I don't eat that," I explained. "Do they have burgers?" I joked. He didn't laugh. "You know, Johnny likes guys who are wild," the morning dude told me. "I got the job after I peed into the trash can in his office."

I wasn't going to urinate in a trash can for a job. What's more, I refused to throw a game of Pac Man against the OM. "Let him win," the morning maniac forewarned me, "he's very competitive and doesn't like losing."

I kicked his butt, two out of three games.

Johnny never called me back.

It's hard to keep good employees.

Richard, a competent news guy with good pipes, has decided to give up radio. He's 46, married, has a grown son, and is thinking

about his retirement. In radio, it's . . . what retirement? Most us will probably end up eating Alpo in our old age.

Anyway, Richard's given his two weeks' notice. He'll be difficult to replace. He works 10-11 hours a day, comes in on weekends and during emergencies, and has a great attitude. For \$22,000 a year.

He's accepted a job that will start him at \$35,000 and comes with fully paid medical and dental. Plus there's a pension plan so he won't have to eat Alpo when he turns 66.

We wish him well in his new job. Prison guard.

The receptionist is no longer speaking to the Morning Guy on our rock station. He phoned her on the air this morning and, posing as an angry listener, complained about his show.

"What do you think of him?" the phony phone caller asked.

"I don't really care for him at all," the receptionist confessed. "I listen to the soft rock station in town."

The Morning Guy had a laugh. But the receptionist was livid when a salesperson told her she'd been had.

See if the morning man gets his phone messages.

Chet looks really nervous. He's made several passes by my office, so I know it's something pressing.

"I hope you won't fire me," he starts out the conversation.

Chet had downed a few beers while manning our radio station booth at a motor speedway last Sunday. That was in violation of the company's policy prohibiting employees from drinking alcoholic beverages when they're working promotions. Worse, Chet was assigned to drive our van back to the station after the event. Pulling out of our assigned space, he managed to scrape the van against a red pole.

“How could you be so irresponsible?” I asked him. “Wasn’t there anyone else from the station who could’ve driven?”

We walked out to the parking lot to inspect the damage. It wasn’t as bad as I’d feared, but there was some slight damage.

“I screwed up, I’m sorry,” Chet said. “It won’t happen again.” I had Chet report the accident to our controller. And this time, I overlooked the drunken driving.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I need a job. Any recommendations on putting together an audition tape?—Unemployed, Green Bay, Wisconsin

Dear Unemployed: If you aren’t skilled at editing, pay someone—preferably, an imaging or production director friend—to cut the tape for you. Make sure you wow ‘em at the beginning of the tape, or it’ll go in the reject pile.

Dear PD: My PD has confided in me that a friend of mine at the station is going to lose her job—and I’m going to take her shift. Ethically, I think I need to tell her what’s going to happen. I know she can keep a secret. Am I doing the right thing?—Angel, Fresno, Calif.

Dear Angel: Don’t count on her keeping a secret—it could cost you your job, too. I know I’m sounding like Dr. Laura, but in this case play dumb.

CHAPTER 17

Gorilla Marketing

“Did you hear the message Don left on the voice mail system?”

A sales person with a Cheshire cat grin burst into my office, alerting me to the latest crisis in the building. Our voice mail system has this nifty feature that allows employees at the push of a button to voice mail everyone at the same time. This time, the technology bit us in the ass.

Call it the revenge of the fired sales account executive. After he got the ax, Don walked into a vacant studio and produced his goodbye speech, which he recorded onto voice mail. His parting shot began with a few seconds of the Johnny Paycheck song, “Take This Job and Shove It,” then featured Don going off on station ownership—“You fucking losers!”—and his sales manager, whose shrill, nasally voice he mimicked, pretending she was summoning him into her office. She sounded like a donkey when she called out his name. “Donnnnnnnn-allllllld!”

“Maybe he should’ve been in production instead of sales,” I quipped. “That was pretty well-produced.” The messenger chuckled. Then Don’s boss, Eileen, materialized in my doorway. She stood there staring at us. Her eyes were moist. Rivers of mascara left black trails down her cheeks. I broke the awkward silence. “I’m so sorry,” was all I could think of to say. She started trembling. “I’ve been . . . humiliated,” she sniffed. “How could he do such a thing? How can I face anyone here now?”

I had no answers.

They call it guerrilla marketing.

You go guerrilla when the other station wins a big concert or community event that you wanted. Since the other guys get their banners up all over the place, you come in the back door and hand out your T-shirts, bumper stickers, and whatever other propaganda you can—before you get kicked out.

The promotions genius on our rock station is the king of guerrilla marketing. He'll go to virtually any lengths to upstage the competition. Which is exactly what you want in a promotions director.

He had a station employee show up at a concert in a wheelchair. After he was escorted to a special section of the arena for handicapped patrons, the promotions assistant used a hand-held device—concealed under a blanket on his lap—to project our station's logo on the wall behind the stage. The competing station's staffers went nuts trying to figure out where it was coming from. It was really embarrassing when one of their jocks went onstage to welcome the crowd, and there was our logo directly behind him.

Another time, Rocky slipped a specially-produced cassette and some cash to someone familiar with the sound system at an outdoor beer festival. "Welcome to the 1999 Taste of Suds Festival," the recording blared over the PA system. "Everybody, 1-2-3, the Q sucks. The Q sucks. The Q sucks . . ." The crew from the other station was mortified. It took them about three minutes to pinpoint where the sound was coming from. By then, the damage had already been done.

It can get even nastier. Like the time Rocky sent two of his operatives to a concert, armed with Super Soakers filled with grape Kool Aid.

The poor promotions helpers from the competing station regretted wearing white T-shirts that night.

So I get a call from our engineer. He asks me if I heard anything strange on the station last Sunday.

“Nothing stranger than usual,” I responded.

“Then I guess you didn’t hear the Rush Limbaugh replay?”

One of our neophyte board operators had trouble playing back the show. A malfunctioning reel-to-reel tape machine made it a disaster. Rather than use another tape machine in the control room, one that worked, the frazzled board op used his index fingers to manually make the reels of tape go around and around on the busted tape deck.

As a consequence, Rush’s voice alternated between sounding like Darth Vader and Alvin of the Chipmunks. After three hours, it’s a wonder the board ops’ fingers weren’t reduced to a bloody pulp.

“Where do these weekend people come from?” the engineer asked me.

“They’re the one’s who couldn’t get jobs at McDonalds.”

In my head, I’m hearing the catchy jingle from ESPN sports. *Dub-dub-dub, dub-dub-dub!*

The station owner’s son summons me to his office. He’s come up with this idea he says is really cool. No, actually, what he said was “I’ve had an epiphany.” He wants to pretend that it’s NFL draft day. He’d like me to compile a list of our top draft picks from inside the building. In other words, rank the employees, best to worst. I have until tomorrow afternoon, when he’ll compare our notes.

When draft day arrives, the GM and I compare our lists, ranking the on-air talent from one to 15. He tells me the goal of the exercise is to spread our best talent on multiple stations and get rid of the dead weight.

Five “players” fail to make the final cut.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I'm a PD who's fallen head over heels for my evening jock. I'm thinking about asking her out, but I don't want it getting around the building. Any advice?—
Infatuated, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Dear Wondering: Danger, danger! What's that saying about don't dip your quill in the company ink? This is radio: if you date an employee, it'll be all over the building. You'll be accused of favoritism. What's worse, if the relationship goes sour, it could make your life a living hell at work. Date someone else. Does she have a good-looking sister?

Dear PD: I'm close to signing with an AC station, but I'm fighting with them over a non-compete clause. It would prevent me from working for another station in the metro area for six months if I quit or get fired. They said they'd never enforce it, that I should just go ahead and sign it. What do you think?—Perplexed in Grand Island, Nebraska

Dear Perplexed: I'm not a lawyer, but I play one on RadioDigest.com. Don't take the chance that they'll never enforce the non-compete. You might become the exception. Tell them if they'll never enforce it, strike it from the deal. Or, if push comes to shove, make them pay you for any time you'd have to sit out. When in doubt, pay the \$90 and talk to a real attorney.

CHAPTER 18

Clock-A-Doodle-Do

Radio is all about watching the clock. Keeping on time. Squeezing in all the songs, bits, listener phone calls, news, weather, traffic, more bits, and, of course, those damned commercials . . . 60 minutes at a time.

Radio is also about showing up on time for your shift. It is a sin to be late. Pulling a no show is a great way to get fired. Or banished to weekend overnights.

Brian showed up at my office door around 9:30 AM. He'd been conspicuous by his absence from his seven-to-midnight shift the night before. We didn't even get a courtesy call.

"Are you okay?" I asked, concealing my anger.

"No, not really," he said in a hushed tone.

Brian explained that he was still reeling from a horrible automobile accident. His close friend, who'd been driving the car, was hospitalized in critical condition, Brian said. Their vehicle had been hit broadside by a red light runner.

I went along with the story, nodding my head, even though I knew Brian was spinning a whopper of a tall tale. Earlier in the morning, our station receptionist revealed to me that she'd seen Brian partying hard with friends at a local nightspot. She'd also spotted him leaving, alone, in his own car.

"Brian, where's your friend hospitalized?" I asked.

"St. Francis," he said.

I reached on a shelf in my office for the phone book, flipped through the White Pages to St. Francis Memorial Hospital, then

pretended to dial up the number. I'd really called a recorded time and temperature service.

"What are you doing?" Brian asked nervously.

"I think we should check on your friend," I said. "What's his name?"

"Uh, um, it's, uh, Larry Jacobson."

I acted liked I was on the phone with the critical care unit of the hospital, waited a few beats, then laid it on thick. "Hi, I'm a close friend of Larry Jacobson. I wondered if you could tell me how he's doing?"

I waited another few beats, dramatic pause. "No, it can't be. You're joking, right? No? Okay. Thanks. No, no, I'm fine. I'll be okay. Bye."

"What'd they say?" Brian begged to know. He was now on the edge of his seat.

"Your friend died about a half an hour ago," I said softly.

He just looked at me, I looked at him, and then he quickly decided to come clean.

"You can't fault me for trying, can you?"

I think he's working at another radio station now. In sales.

"Can I talk to you for a second?"

The GM motions me into his office. I can't possibly see what's coming.

"One of our big clients was listening to the morning show," he says, looking around me to make sure no one can eavesdrop on the conversation. "He was really offended by the topic."

The topic? It was early, I'd been button pushing, monitoring the other morning shows in the market on my way into work. Honestly, I couldn't recall anything on our morning show that jumped out at me as offensive.

"Having callers talk about weird fetishes," the GM said. "Sex with women's shoes? Kids could be listening."

I could feel my heart start to pound. My blood was boiling. I wanted to let him have it. But I knew better. I took a deep breath and counted to three, to myself. Then, calmly, I pointed out to my GM that the morning show on our rock station was for 18-44 year-old adult males, not “kids.” And I reminded him how ours was the fastest growing new morning show in the market.

“Is the client getting traffic from the spots he’s running on our morning show?” I asked.

“He’s getting lots of business, but . . . ”

“The show’s working,” I reminded him. “Remember, you promised me if I brought in this new morning guy, you’d get a thick skin.”

I figured the caller who talked about the shoe ferish probably struck a nerve with our client, who, rumor had it, liked to frequent a certain gay bar in town.

I won this battle. But the war was far from over.

Flashback. A few years ago in a top 15 market.

The GM decided he was going to “tweak” our station’s format. We were a modestly successful Adult Contemporary station.

But the GM’s wife had convinced him one night, no doubt over several bottles of Chablis, that we could take a unique position in our market if we’d mix our AC music with . . . light jazz.

Light rock and light jazz. A new format was born. Madonna and Yanni. Rod Stewart followed by Acoustic Alchemy.

The GM’s wife showed up at the station with a stack of her favorite CDs to dub onto carts. Who needed expensive research when she could pick and choose the cuts?

A staff meeting was called. By the time we’d assembled at the conference table, everyone already knew a format change was coming. And the consensus was, it would be a musical train wreck. (We didn’t need research to tell us that!).

“The good news is, no one will lose their jobs,” the GM

announced. "I'm comfortable knowing that you're all pros and you'll make this work."

He went around the table, handing out envelopes to the on-air staffers. We were stunned. Each of us received a check for \$1,000. Maybe this format change wouldn't be so bad, after all.

I'd tuned in just to monitor what was happening on our station, and . . .

The host of the weekend real estate show was going on about foreclosures, when he suddenly stopped and shifted topics. I could tell he had hit a cart and was playing material that he had pre-recorded. Something to do with refinancing a home loan.

I called into the control room.

"What's going on?" I asked the part-time board op who picked up the phone.

"Whadda ya mean?"

"What's going on with Sam's show? Are you playing something he taped ahead of time?"

It was easily explained. Seems the host of our real estate program suffered from incontinence. He needed to use the bathroom about every 10 minutes. Sam had pre-recorded a dozen different topics that the board op could play while the host sneaked off to the men's room.

Perhaps an enterprising sales person could convince Depends to sponsor the show.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: We just wrapped up a major research project. Some of the findings are way out, but the GM insists we

implement every suggestion. What do we do?—Nervous PD, Raleigh, North Carolina.

Dear Nervous: Any GM with a modicum of sense should know that research is simply a tool to point you in a certain direction. The best PDs combine gut instinct and knowledge of the market with the research. Try to reason with your GM. Otherwise, you'll just have to wait for the ratings to come out and work on him then.

Dear PD: I've been ordered to save money, so I have to decide between live and local versus syndication in non-prime time day-parts. Any advice?—Hatchet Man, Tallahassee, Florida.

Dear Hatchet Man: Market conditions vary, but here's the rule of thumb—if you're certain that live, local radio won't do any better in ratings and revenue than a syndicated show, go syndicated.

CHAPTER 19

Who Canned Kenny?

Our engineer looked forlorn.

“Have you seen the Instant Replay machine?” he wanted to know.

“Not lately,” I told him.

Instant Replay was a portable, \$4,000 device in the on-air studio that allowed the various jocks to store their sound effects, movie and TV clips, and music files for future playback.

The machine, which rested on a tabletop next to the console, vanished sometime between Saturday night and 4 AM Monday.

“Who would do such a thing?” I wondered. “It’s not like you’d take it home to play with.”

We did a check of the various studios, hoping the valuable piece of equipment would turn up. Perhaps someone borrowed it to do some work, then forgot to put it back.

Unfortunately, Instant Replay was nowhere to be found.

The engineer volunteered to find out who worked at the station during the time frame the machine could have been stolen.

“You know what will happen if it doesn’t turn up?” he asked. I braced myself for the answer.

“We’ll never get another piece of equipment. Ever.”

I’d asked the afternoon news person to come by my office.

“Should I be worried?” he asked, which is a natural reaction

from any personality who's summoned to the PD's office unexpectedly. They always think they're getting fired.

I wasn't going to can Kenny. I just wanted to make sure that, if a certain city in Virginia came up again during one of his newscasts, I wouldn't get any more calls from listeners threatening to report us to the FCC.

"Kenny," I said, "let's agree that you'll pronounce it Nor-FOLK from now on, okay?"

Norfolk, you.

We'd finished a station remote and a bunch of us decided to rendezvous at a local watering hole.

The Morning Guy really wanted to go along, but excused himself because he had custody of his daughter for the weekend.

We weren't at the bar more than 15 minutes before one of our Account Execs got a phone call. It was the Morning Guy calling from his apartment. He was on his way. With his young daughter.

"I've got a bad feeling about this," I told the AE. "You know Eddie, he'll be fine," the AE reassured me.

Over the years, Eddie had apparently built up a Superman-like tolerance for consuming massive amounts of alcohol. At the bar, he downed two or three bourbons for every beer we had. In a matter of hours, he was drunk, but didn't really show it.

We knew better. We asked him for his keys. He refused. I offered to get him a hotel room. He called me a name.

"Think of your daughter," the AE said. A total stranger walked over to our table and volunteered to drive him and his daughter home.

"I don't think so," Eddie laughed.

He tugged at his daughter's arm and they walked out of the bar to his car. The AE and I followed him.

"Please, let us drive you home," I begged. Eddie rolled down

his window and grinned. Three of the bar patrons who'd trailed us out to the parking lot warned Eddie not to leave.

"If you drive that car with your daughter in it, we're calling the cops. And we're not kidding."

Eddie started his car and drove off. One of the concerned citizens ran back into the bar and called 911. Within a minute, three squad cars pulled up. Of all people, the bartender pointed the police in the right direction.

Back in the bar, the AE and I were scared. We had visions of Eddie crashing his car and killing his daughter. If he were arrested, he'd lose his kid and wind up behind bars. I selfishly worried about losing my radio station's talented morning man. What if the story made the papers? The station would be ruined.

Fifteen minutes went by. It seemed like an eternity. Finally, a police car drove up. A search for the reported drunken driver had been fruitless.

Eddie had taken the back way home.

Flashback. A West Coast station in a top five market.

We know something's up because a U-Haul truck is parked on the side of our building. The engineers are unloading one big cardboard box after another, which they carry to the on-air studio.

"What's going on?" one of us asks.

Oh, nothing," one of the engineers replies, which means something serious is happening.

The next morning, a meeting is called to announce . . . a format change.

The mysterious cardboard boxes contained carts with the new music on them.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I'd like to get back on the air as a weekend or fill-in jock. I've been out of the business for about five years. Will a PD still consider me?—Sir Jockalot, Buffalo, N.Y.

Dear Sir Jockalot: If your old tapes are any good, a PD will call you. If your material is old and dated, you'll have to get studio time somewhere. Or talk a PD into giving you an on-air audition.

CHAPTER 20

Beeing and Nothingness

RIP. It happened sometime while we were inside a nightclub, a two-hour window of opportunity.

Outside, on a 10-by-10 area of the sidewalk, we'd set up our giant inflatable bumble bee. It was yellow and black with gigantic lettering for our calls and dial position. You couldn't miss it, which was the whole point. Visibility.

The beefy, brainless security guard at the door came over to our table to report bad news. "Your bee done died," he told us, relating the information with the kind of sensitivity you usually reserve for next of kin.

"What?"

He motioned for us to follow him outside, where, indeed, our vinyl bumble bee was slumped over in half, the victim of an unprovoked stabbing attack.

"Someone poked it in the ass with a sharp object," the security guard said.

Upon close inspection, he was right. There was a golf ball-sized hole in the bumble bee's posterior. We'd have to pack him up, take him home, and get him patched up.

"Probably those scum from the other station?" the security guard guessed.

He was a regular Sherlock Holmes.

You know what's wrong with most radio consultants? They have to find something wrong with your station, or they'll lose you as a client.

Our consultant had only been in town since last night, but he'd heard something that just wasn't right. "The promos and some of the imaging need more pizzazz," he told the GM and me.

"Can you be specific," I asked. We sat there in the GM's office, the three of us, while the consultant stroked his chin and shook his head. A minute went by before he spoke up.

"Can't put my finger on it, but I'll know the difference when I hear it."

That's the kind of incisive, thoughtful analysis you're looking for when you pay a guy a healthy monthly retainer to help pull up your ratings.

It's difficult finding good help these days.

A cynic will say, "Well, what do you expect when you pay your board operators \$6 an hour?"

Still, I remember wanting into radio so bad, I'd work for free. And I did. Not only that, I made damn sure what went out over the air was perfect. I took pride in running a tight, mistake-free board.

Nowadays, you get people who want into radio, but don't want to pay their dues. The worst board ops—and there are many—are the ones who think they should be on the air.

One of those board ops was working last Sunday night. All he had to do was put on a reel-to-reel tape of an old Dr Laura show, hit play, and check off commercial spots on the log as they ran. Easier said than done.

One of our engineers tuned in about halfway through the first

hour of the Dr Laura repeat. He said it sounded like she was speaking in Polish.

Turns out, the board op, careless and in a hurry, threaded the tape in such a way that it got twisted around. The show was running backwards.

What's more, the board op didn't know there was a problem until the engineer called him on the station's hotline. He'd turned down the monitor just as the show had begun.

"I get tired of listening to her ranting and raving," he said, as if that justified the embarrassing on-air mistake.

Guys like that are the reason more and more radio stations are converting to digital audio, automating whenever possible.

Robot radio.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: Regarding "Perplexed in Grand Island" and his concerns over the non-compete in your earlier column, let me add one note. "Perplexed" is in Nebraska, which is a "right to work" state. That means, in most cases, if they fire you . . . the non-compete means nothing and you can go to work wherever you want. However, if you have a guaranteed contract and they pay you out for the balance of the term, the non-compete very likely will apply. Each state has its own state laws and case precedent, so I would up your advice just one notch. If you are asked to sign any contract, drop the money on a good local attorney with a history of handling employee contract law. If you are in a market that wants a non-compete, you are probably in a big enough market to have an attorney that can help you out. It will be the best money you ever spent, even if it runs your ¼ to ½ a month's pay. Non-competes are a fact of radio life, but

make sure that it is something you can live with.—Omaha Radio Guy

Dear Omaha Radio Guy: You related to Matlock?

Dear PD: Love the column!—Katie Pruett, Young Country, Dallas, Texas

Dear Katie: Love your station. Wasn't Young Country the place where, a few years back, some wacky DJ planted money in library books, only to have the place left in shambles? Bet that was an expensive promotion.

CHAPTER 21

Banner-Mania

Our frugal General Manager—he's so tight, you can hear his shoes squeak when he walks down the hall—won't like hearing this.

The Promotions Director just informed me that we only have one banner left to hang up at station events. The other three have been ripped off. They cost about \$125 apiece.

The GM's reaction? "When the last one's gone, that's it. I'm not paying for any more."

I swear, some listeners will take anything with the station logo on it that isn't nailed down. A few years ago, we lost an E-Z Up tent that had our call letters, dial position, and mascot painted on it. The thing just vanished one night from inside a fenced-in venue.

Probably find it in someone's back yard right now.

My Gawd, what havoc I'd wreaked.

I half expected the seniors in the advanced broadcasting class to leave en masse for the Admissions Office, where I was sure they'd demand their tuition back for the last four years. And then change their majors to something other than broadcast journalism.

I looked to the back of the classroom, where their professor, an ex-radio broadcaster and old pal of mine, was sitting. He wore the grim countenance of a man about to be handed his pink slip by the chancellor.

Heck, all I'd done was answer an innocent question posed by a

fresh-faced student in the third row. He'd been pumping his arm in the air like a kindergartner asking teacher for permission to use the lavatory. "What kind of starting salary can we expect in radio when we graduate?"

I'd been asked to speak before 30 or so well-heeled kids whose affluent parents were shelling out at least \$10,000 a semester at this prestigious private university so their sons and daughters could get broadcasting jobs. As usual, my mouth started running before my brain could catch up. I unintentionally shocked the hell out of my audience.

"What do you think you'll be making?" I asked.

A preppy looking kid wearing an Abercrombie and Fitch shirt yelled back "\$50,000!" Most of his classmates either nodded or voiced approval at the figure.

"Unless you're very lucky or very talented or both, you can expect to make an entry level salary of around \$18,000 to \$20,000 a year," I told him candidly.

Jaws dropped to the floor. Eyeballs popped out of heads. I got deer-in-the-headlight looks from some of the students.

"Twenty-thousand?!" one of the kids yelled out. "I could make that at McDonalds."

"Liberal Arts majors are starting at \$60,000," offered another disappointed student.

My throat was tightening. My heart was pounding. My palms were sweating. The room was turning against me. Voices of my mentors started playing in my head. "Tell them it's not about the money, it's about the passion of doing radio," one advised me. "You have to pay your dues and work your way up," I could hear my old college professor say. "If you're looking for job security, work at a bank."

I told them how, when I started out, I'd worked day and night, weekends and holidays, because it takes sacrifice and hard work to stand out in this competitive, dog-eat-dog, what-have-you-done-for-me-lately business. I tried to get through to them that in this

era of radio consolidation, the key is to make themselves invaluable by juggling multiple tasks.

Might as well have been talking to a wall.

"I just want to be on the air," one of the students said. "Why should I have to do anything else?"

"They're gonna have to pay me if I'm doing more than one job," another kid chimed in.

Ladies and gentlemen, I give you radio broadcasting's Class of 2000.

We came THISCLOSE to having our last banner snatched.

We'd just wrapped up a promotional event hosted by several of our air personalities that involved a cruise around the harbor. There'd been dining and dancing to a live band. Passengers were making their way down a ramp from the boat to the dock when our eagle-eyed Music Director noticed something peculiar. A yard or so of red and black canvas was sticking out of a woman's purse.

"Ma'am!" he called out to her. She acted completely innocent. "Is that our banner in your purse?"

Why, yes, it was. When no one was looking, she'd pulled our giant banner off a wall, folded it up, and stuffed it into her handbag. She didn't think twice about it.

"I just thought I could have it as a souvenir," she cooed.

I'm surprised no one's stolen our broadcasting tower.

Some things behind the scenes in radio I shouldn't reveal, but I will . . . only to you, since you were kind enough to buy my book:

—You know that "face made for radio" line? Lots of average and/or homely looking guys become DJs because being on the radio helps them pick up women . . .

- Sometimes, when the ninth caller is solicited for a contest, the tenth or eleventh caller is taken as the winner—because the ninth caller sounded like such a loser over the telephone . . .
- Some jocks and talk show hosts take live calls when they aren't in delay . . .
- Contests where you hear the words “could” and “might” usually mean you don't have a snowball's chance in hell of winning . . .
- A lot of times, those are really sales people, the GM's secretary, and others from inside the radio station sounding off in promos about why they love a particular radio station. Oh, and they were told what to say . . .
- DJs don't decide what to play on their radio stations, they play songs, in order, off a log that was scheduled the day before by the Music Director . . .
- If you call in to request a song on your favorite radio station, chances are the DJ already played it or it isn't on the play-list. The jock will suggest to the caller that he or she really wants to hear the next song coming up on the play-list . . .
- The only news gathering going on at most hit music stations is when the news person walks to the computer, hits the key for Associated Press, and then prints out the headlines . . .
- If you were to sneak into a radio station and wander through the cubicles where the sales people and support staff sit, you might very well hear them listening to stations other than the one they're working for . . .

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I've been in radio 7 years—so far—and swear I've worked with half the people you mention in this column!

Keep it up!—Steve Gamlin, PD/Creative Services, WBHG/
BIG 101.5.

Dear Steve: Same stories virtually everywhere. Only the call letters change!

Dear PD: In response to your column about slacker, \$6-an-hour board operators—I started as an engineer in New York 25 years ago, and did the functions of what is now called a board op. When I started at that station, there was a staff of about a dozen engineers. Subsequently, I did a couple of tours at ABC Radio Network as an engineer, cutting tape and engineering the newscasts. There was a staff of about 40 engineers there. There is no board operating engineers at either place now. Wherever I worked as an engineer, I did have pride in what I put out over the air, and made sure it was perfect. The Mel Karmazins of the world have decided that type of engineer is superfluous, and what used to be done by engineers is now done by talent and board ops. As a result of that decision, comes the conclusion that quality doesn't count anymore. Sales departments—where all upper management comes from these days—don't care about quality, only rating and sales numbers.

It's not only the quality of the operators. You listen to some of the voices on the air these days. Can you imagine a voice like WFAN's (New York) Chris Russo getting within 100 yards of a microphone as recently as 20 years ago? I realize that the bottom line is king, and that engineers became superfluous years ago. My point is that you can't dismiss the fact that yes, management does get what it pays for.—Brian, NYC

Dear Brian: I wonder if maybe it's a training issue. I think a lot of these entry level board ops are thrown to the wolves after sitting in on a radio show or two. They don't know a legal ID from a promo or public service announcement. Also, I feel your pain about the loss of engineer/board ops, but, you must admit, the situation was

getting way out of hand. I worked at a major market station in the early '80s that had so many engineers, many of them killed time by cleaning the heads on tape decks and cart machines . . . over and over again. As for Russo, who cares about his voice? He oozes personality!

CHAPTER 22

The Frame Game

It's a pain to keep putting them up and taking them down.

Glossies, I mean. With the amount of turnover at radio stations, you don't see smiling, 8x10 color glossies of the air staff on lobby walls very often anymore. Those nail marks in the wall can hurt the re-sale value of a station, too, which is a serious matter in these continuing days of radio consolidation.

Plus, it can be downright embarrassing if someone removes one of the picture frames *before* the victim is actually fired.

That's exactly what happened at our station last Wednesday. The GM's secretary got her wires crossed and *thought* our afternoon guy was being let go that day. Naturally, at 5 PM, she turned out the lights to her office, locked the door, and carefully removed Pete's picture from the lobby wall..

Our night guy was the first to notice something was amiss. He did a double-take when he walked into the receptionist's area. He called Pete at home and asked him if he was still working at our station. They joked about the missing picture, both of them laughing nervously on the phone.

Next morning, our GM was made aware of his secretary's gaffe. He would be firing our afternoon guy before he started his shift.

And our afternoon guy would be the last person in the building to know it.

How do you tell the consultant . . . he sucks on the air?

That was our dilemma, as the big guy presented us with a batch of new positioning liners ("Less talk, more rock!") he wanted on the air, today. No, not today, like, in the next five minutes.

We try explaining to him diplomatically that our big station voice guy is on vacation and won't be back until the day after tomorrow.

"That's okay," he says, "let's go to the production room. I'll lay down the tracks." As in lay down the tracks with his grating, fingernails-on-a-chalkboard, voice.

Those who can, do radio. Those who can't, consult.

Yeah, we got the liners on. No, we're not stupid. We'll get them re-cut when our voice god returns from vacation.

This consultant is a piece of work.

We send him tapes every other week so he can hear the progress of the new morning show. Most consultants dial up the station's listen line to hear what's going on. Our guy says he prefers getting tapes. Probably because, with the time difference, he'd have to get up before 6 AM to listen in.

Anyway, he comes to town, sits down at a conference table with Morning Guy and me, and begins with small talk about the weather, the NFL season, and Hillary Clinton. We ask him about the morning show. He says he's heard the Morning Guy does a great Clinton voice and he'd like to hear him do that on the show.

The morning guy looks at me, I look at him, and we stifle our urge to break out laughing. "He's been doing the Clinton voice since he started three weeks ago," I tell the consultant flat out.

"I've got the morning show tapes right here, in my briefcase," the consultant replies, "but I just haven't had time to listen."

Not even on the three-hour flight to our city?

Radio Flashback. The '80s.

Two mysterious cardboard boxes, both looking like they could contain a new refrigerator, are propped up against a wall in the hallway next to the on-air studio. No distinguishable markings on them anywhere.

The GM solves the mystery when he pops in on the weekly programming meeting. "If you're wondering what those boxes are downstairs, they're automation equipment," he says. "Be thankful you have jobs. I'll automate the station if the ratings don't go up."

With that, he leaves the conference room.

"What an asshole," one of the jocks whispers to his colleagues seated around the table. We think the GM was kidding, but with this poker-faced guy, you never know.

My favorite line from the GM: "My door is always open." He's right about that. It always is.

He's just never there.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: What do you think about streaming audio of commercial radio stations on the Internet. Is this going to be the radio of the future?—Antonio

Dear Tony: The future is now. I applaud stations that are already promoting their web sites on the air through contesting and at work listening. The 'net is there, so why not use it to maximize ratings potential?

Dear PD: After reading the letter from the engineer/board operator in your column last week, I realized what's happened to the quality of board ops and announcers and I think you showed the perfect example. In your column, you talked about speaking in front of a bunch of college

students, hearing about their aspirations in radio, and watching their expectations come crashing down around their ears when they heard the truth. This is why we don't have quality anymore: people don't want to earn the big positions.

Currently, I'm an overnight board operator in Washington, D.C., and I earn the salary range you quoted to that college class—\$18-20,000 annually. Welcome to radio. It's one of those businesses that you can score a big job on a lucky chance. However, what people don't realize is that you have to have the qualifications to apply for the job before you can get an interview and get the job. Thank you for being honest to those college students and showing them how the real world really works. I think people would be willing to work harder if they realized what the people in the trenches really go through to make it to the big time.—Morlith, Washington, D.C.

Dear Morlith: There will always be jobs in radio for hard working, passionate people such as you. Good luck.

Dear PD: The college kids in your most recent column aren't off base with their salary expectations—corporate radio is. I've worked in several markets in the Midwest—defined as Chicago to Denver, Minneapolis to Northern Oklahoma—over four years. I've got good experience at great stations, doing everything from production, to drive-time news & sports, to FM on-air, to being a live morning show producer. I searched for six months this last year, four-to-eight hours a day, for radio work in the Midwest. All I required of such a potential position: that it was not strictly a dead-end board-op job, paid a living wage, would help me learn more about radio, and would further my development in the direction I want to go in radio. Not a lot to ask, when you think about it. Instead, I've returned to school for one last semester since I couldn't find a job that paid more than \$18,000/yr.

Radio ain't what it used to be—and that's not all bad. But there are plenty of people like me out there—quality radio people—who have nothing left to lose, and everything to gain, from the death of terrestrial radio. Many of us are Internet savvy, and market-wise. And we have no problem with the idea of “Armageddon It”—stealing enough radio ad & listener dollars away to alternative sources—to make terrestrial radio no longer worth operating, at least on a corporate level. Everyone knows the reason the big radio corporations have been making so much money is their proclivity towards consolidation, not their concern for quality, i.e.: local and live—the only REAL reason for radio in the first place. The problem with corporate “Big fish eat little fish” theory is, what happens when all the little fish worth “eating” are gone? They still have a product to create—only they're not willing to do what it takes—paying people what they're worth—to get the job done.—Shawn Peirce

Dear Shawn: With regard to starting salary, the entertainment business is rife with stories of minimum wage mailroom boys working their way to the top. It's all about paying your dues. Call me crazy, but I still believe that if you work hard, learn everything you can from good PDs, GMs, Music Directors, Promotions Directors and production geniuses, you'll move up in this business even with just a modicum of talent. In fact, I know it works—I've followed my own advice. Perseverance pays off. But don't expect to make morning personality-type salary overnight.

CHAPTER 23

Fall Guys

Our billboards go up next week in advance of the fall Arbitron ratings period.

At the weekly department head meeting, our station's General Manager, whose only programming experience involves his VCR, gives me, the promotions director, and anyone else at the meeting who's interested, his marketing expertise in a nutshell:

"Don't ever put the names of the air personalities on your outdoor advertising," he advises. "They could leave the station. Or we might wind up firing them."

That's why our billboards will read, "The Morning Guys, Weekdays, 5-9 AM."

Attention, would-be radio personalities. I know, I know. You didn't ask for my advice, but I'll give it to you anyway:

—When you're looking for on-air work at a radio station, it helps to include a cassette of your on-air work with your resume.

- You are what you send. Unless Hurricane Floyd has displaced you and your word processor has been destroyed along with the rest of your mobile home, your cover letter should be typewritten. And the label on your cassette tape should be typewritten. Be professional. Generating your resume on Motel 6 stationery in handwriting that looks like it's from a doctor generally isn't very effective.
- To those of you who've sent me cassette tapes only after slapping hand-written labels on them that say, "Start here." Causes me to wonder. If I rewind the tape to the beginning, will you suck? Were you only good for that tiny portion of your show where the tape is cued up?
- For the love of Marconi, include your telephone number on your audition tape. An E-mail address, too, if you have one. There was someone I wanted to hire a few months ago, and *you* know who *you* are. But *you* didn't leave an address or phone number on your tape or resume!
- Is it just me, or is breaking the tabs out of an audition tape—so it can't be recorded over—a sign of insecurity?
- Writing to the General Manager or owner of the station to tell them that the PD doesn't know anything because he didn't hire you is a good way to stay on unemployment.

Thanks. I feel better now.

Heaven forbid it should get out that our station doesn't deliver the goods.

It reflects poorly on a radio station when a prize-winner drops by, and his prize can't be found anywhere. The contest winner stands there at the front desk, seething. The standoff between winner and station receptionist is usually settled by the promotions director, who will try to appease the customer by giving them

CDs, T-shirts, and free passes to the gun show, anything, to get them out of the lobby.

Now and again, you can expect a screw up. But the growing number of missing prizes at our station has led to the suspicion that there's a thief among us. A commemorative jacket from an NBC-TV series is among the items that have vanished.

One of our AEs corners me. "I just thought you should know," she says in hushed tones, looking around to make sure no one else can monitor our conversation, "Martha was at Le Chez last night, and she was wearing one of those NBC jackets." Martha, our station receptionist, caught with her hand in the station's cookie jar? She's summoned to the controller's office for questioning that would make Sipowitz on "NYPD Blue" proud.

Martha can explain everything. Every Friday at 5:30 PM for the last several months, she says, she's been taking home all the unclaimed prizes that the promotions director has left on the counter behind her desk. Next day, she returns a coat, four T-shirts, concert tickets, a cooler, a snowboard, four baseball caps, 17 opened CDs, and about \$150 in restaurant trade, less the other \$150 she's already used.

"I thought no one wanted this stuff, so it would be okay to take it."

T-shirts aren't just T-shirts any more.

Whenever we do remotes and someone comes by wearing a T-shirt from the "other" station, we usually egg them on, offering one of our brand new T-shirts for the worn T-shirt off their back. Then comes the real fun. You take a black marker and draw a circle around the other station's logo. You take a red marker and draw a line across the circle. The violated T-shirt goes up in the booth for everyone—including the competition—to see.

Through this practice is how I've come to learn that of the human species, the fairer sex is the more flexible. Time and again,

women have amazed me; they're somehow able to slip our T-shirt over their existing shirt, then remove the other station's T-shirt without exposing any flesh. This is among the useless stuff you learn working the radio station's booth at county fairs and concerts.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I am an on-call board operator that gets about a shift a pay period—once every 2 weeks—and have been working for the station for about 3 months. When is a good time to mention that I don't want to be a board op for the rest of my career and would like to get on the air again? I worked with a morning show as an intern/assistant producer and on-air on local college radio.—JJ

Dear JJ: Push for it. Bug the PD. Give him your tape. Beg for weekend and fill-in work. Send tapes to other stations. The only way to get on the air is by doing it, even if it means starting out in a smaller market. Sometimes you must take two or three steps backward before you can take a big step up.

Dear PD: I am thoroughly convinced that consultants are to blame for the boring, homogenized programming that dominates American radio today . . . and this is the reason why I don't listen to anything on the radio anymore while doing my daily two-hour commute to work. I am SO sick of repetitious, mindless liners, lackluster music mixes, and those "bimbo and bozo" morning shows that I seem to hear on EVERY station, regardless of format. I worked in broadcasting for 27 years in engineering, not programming. Thanks to consolidation, the job situation is just as bad in engineering as it is in programming. I left the field and now work for an electronics plant, where I make more money than I did in radio. One parting shot: The hottest places in

Radio Hell should be reserved for consultants.—Phil, New Jersey

Dear Phil: Why limit the hottest places in Radio Hell for the consultants? You're forgetting sales people.

Dear PD: I started in radio almost 2 and a half years ago fresh out of college. I made less than minimum wage. I worked 80-hour weeks sometimes, not because I was asked, but because I just wanted in. I parlayed that drive and some miniscule, college 4-track training into a full-time promo-imaging gig. Radio is one of the few places where Horatio Alger stories remain in the employment world. If you want it, don't mind the work, and can put up with attitudes and politics, you can be PD, GM, sales geek, whatever ya want. Hell, you can even get your own weekly column on the Internet. Love your column!—J. Air

Dear J. Air: Hey, don't knock this column. It's something I can fall back on if the radio station fires me.

Dear PD: Having been in the radio business for over 20 years, I can relate to—and laugh at—many of the stories you write about . . . including the stories about the inept consultants. After being on the consulting side for the past four years, all I can tell you is “FIRE YOUR CONSULTANT!!” If those stories you write are true, I cannot believe your station is wasting money on such ineptness. Does your GM know this about your consultant?—Tom, SBR Creative Media

Dear Tom: Does my GM know this about our consultant? Tom, babe, he signs the checks. Hey, I know GMs that have two, even three consultants. For the longest time, I didn't understand it. Then it finally dawned on me one day. Can you say “scapegoat?”

CHAPTER 24

Mouth Organizations

Ever wonder why some radio personalities talk with their mouths full?

It's because media-savvy clients, like the reps for fast food chains, pizza parlors, and ice cream vendors, know that the way to free air time is through a DJ's stomach.

If the food angle doesn't work, the Herb Tarlek-type sales weasels at the station will try to guilt-trip the PD: "Pisano Pizza is spending \$100,000 a year on our station. (Good ol' Herb was the low life, scum sucking, sales weasel on TV's WKRP—W-Crap, clever, eh?—series). If they can just come by with their new goat cheese and venison pizza, we can probably get a buy for another year."

The pre-radio consolidation PD would've said: "Fuck off! If they want air time, they can buy some commercials."

The post-radio consolidation PD now responds: "Listen, your client can bring by the pizzas, but they'll have to go in the kitchen. And I can't make any promises that our morning show will talk about the new product on the air. Make sure the client knows that."

Why be so vigilant about such a thing? Because some of the worst radio happens when a client brings food into the control room—and the on-air personality loses control of the show. "Man, that's a great new breakfast burrito," Joe Jock mumbles, bits of food spraying out of his mouth and onto the microphone. "What's

in it?" For listeners, nothing. In fact, it's the audio equivalent of watching paint dry.

I tried explaining that to our local sales manager, Darryl, who makes used car salesmen look good. He nodded his head and said he understood. He assured me his client would be okay with leaving his new pizza product in our kitchen for the morning crew to sample. No strings attached. And he gave me his word that his client wouldn't go near the on-air studio.

When I arrived at the station the next morning, a little after 8, Darryl scurried over to my office. He and his client, he told me, had been thoroughly humiliated by our morning man. What's more, we'd probably lose out on a \$75,000 buy.

"My client deserves an apology!"

And now, as Paul Harvey would say, the rest of the story:

When the coast was clear, and the morning show was in a break, Darryl sneaked his client into the on-air studio with a "Meat Lovers Pizza." Pepperoni, steak, hamburger, and pork. Our morning personality, who was hurrying to edit a phone bit, took a peek under the hood of the pizza box, sniffed, and contorted his face. "I'm not eating that shit. Get it outta here."

"Darryl," I said, savoring the moment back in my office, "what did you expect?"

"Whadda ya mean?"

"The morning guy is a vegetarian."

When you're out in public, you want your station to look good. That includes the mascot, if you have one.

I nearly suffered a meltdown when I approached the entrance to the arena where the Family Expo was underway. The college kid we were paying \$10 an hour to wear a Bumble Bee costume was sitting in front of our station vehicle. She'd removed the bee head, setting it on the asphalt next to her. And she was puffing away on a cigarette.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"I'm taking a smoke break," she said, oblivious to how bad she was making the radio station look.

"You need to clean up the cigarette butts," I ordered. "And next time you light up, make sure you do it out of costume and far away from the station vehicle."

Parents with kids walked by and shook their heads. I heard one child ask her dad, "Do bees smoke?"

Only ours.

One morning they're there on the radio, coaxing you out of bed. Making you forget you're stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic. Telling a joke that gets laughs when you repeat it at the office. Agitating you because of something they said. Making you feel better about yourself because you kicked in \$20 to a Red Cross fund benefiting local flood victims.

And then one morning your clock radio goes off, and, poof, they're gone. You keep listening for an announcement about what's happened to them, but there won't be one. They've been banished to radio's Bermuda Triangle. Their replacement has been ordered not to mention the victim's name—and to keep calls about them off the air.

Whatever happened to . . . ? We'll call him James. We worked together on a morning show some years ago.

This is his story.

He had a husky laugh, punctuated by a hacking cough from a three-pack-a-day cigarette habit. He lived in constant fear of being fired, even though he'd been at the station more than 15 years. He was quick with a one liner, but just as quick to pout. A bad ratings trend might send him into such a funk that he'd go an entire morning show without saying a word to his co-workers. "Better put him under suicide watch," one of the guys would joke.

I was shocked to discover he was only 53. Smoking made his

voice sound like he gargled with gravel. He ignored pleas by management to try the patch, even after they offered to pay for it.

He was the kind of guy you wanted on the air when all hell broke loose. He kept his calm while all around him seemed to be losing theirs. He was versatile; a good writer, a good broadcaster, a good interviewer, and dependable as hell. He won virtually every award competition he ever entered. He was the Walter Cronkite of the station.

And then one day, poof, he was let go. "We're moving in another direction," the new PD told him. But the unspoken reason was that he thought James sounded too old on the air.

"Enough," James decided. He took a sizable severance check, called a mover, and headed with his wife to his hometown, where he'd sink his severance and life savings—along with about a hundred grand of his family's dough—into a small business.

He'd e-mail me to say how he and his wife had never worked harder in their lives, putting in 13-15 hours a day, seven days a week. He'd hoped to hire good help so they could at least have Sundays off, but the help kept ripping them off—or just didn't show up. Every so often, he'd confess that he missed radio. Those of us in the business envied his freedom. Little did we know the personal hell he was going through.

In six months, he lost it all. Money squabbles caused a rift between him and his family members; they stopped speaking to each other. Ultimately, he was forced into bankruptcy. His wife divorced him. His dog probably would've left him, if he'd had one.

"All I know is radio," he e-mailed. I e-mailed him back to be patient, that someone would eventually hire him.

Flat broke and all alone, he moved back to town. Weekend traffic reporting didn't pay the bills, so he landed a job at a PR agency run by someone he'd once worked for in radio. He hated it. Kissing up to people was never one of his strengths.

He asked the PD who fired him for work, but the plea fell on deaf ears. When the money ran out from his divorce settlement, he

wound up moving to a lousy apartment in an undesirable part of town. Desperate for work, he took a job as a tele-marketer. He longed for the days when he earned six figures reading the news.

After a long day, he'd go home and head straight for his answering machine, hoping to hear a job offer from a PD. He got a bite from the Northern California area, but it didn't pan out.

He didn't show up for work one day. They called him at home. No answer. He'd dropped dead.

The medical examiner's report said he'd died of heart failure. Me, I'm convinced radio broke his heart.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I'd rather be happy working in radio then having the life sucked out of me in a cubicle. I've worked four internships, got plenty of experience in promotions, and no one even seems to give me the time of day. I think my biggest problem is the lack of respect. They call me, tell me to schedule an appointment with them "in a few days . . ." I call back in a few days and leave a voice mail . . . then a second time . . . then a third time . . . and I don't even get one callback or letter saying "thanks, but no thanks" or anything. What should I do? I'm debating going to grad school and becoming a teacher.—Zen

Dear Zen: A good promotions director won't take no for an answer. Be persistent. Has it occurred to you that maybe they're testing you? Keep bugging people until someone finally says "You're hired!"

Dear PD: You should be in my place. I work for a young GM who's all ego and cannot admit when he's made obvious errors: Hiring an out of work pal to be consultant to several stations, who turns out to be the village idiot. Hiring an out of work PD who is insecure and jealous of the on air

staff. I would give anything for consolidation to end!—
Anonymous

Dear Anonymous: I've got news for you. This kind of stuff went on BEFORE consolidation. Unless new ownership is imminent, I'd start sending out those T&R's.

Dear PD: I read your column last week about missing prizes. I can go one further. About 10 years ago I was in promotions at a major market AOR station. We had just given away a guitar autographed by Def Leppard. I spoke to the winner and told him to come in the next day to pick it up. When I went to the prize closet to get it, it had vanished. Impossible, I thought. I checked with the receptionist, lord and ruler of prize closet access. She had no clue where it had gone and was furious that it could have escaped without her knowledge. As the panic grew over the missing guitar, the news began to creep up the chain of command—until finally it came to the attention of our GM. To our surprise, he took the news very calmly, and then solved our mystery for us. "It was my daughter's birthday yesterday; I thought it would make a great present."—Axeless in Toronto

Dear Axeless: Good thing your station wasn't giving away a car.

Dear PD: I quit a station in San Francisco. I haven't looked back in almost two years. Now I am getting the "radio itch" again. Should I look up my old PD to see if there are any openings or apply elsewhere? By the way, I only do weekends.—Beau

Dear Beau: Good weekend help is hard to find. I'll bet your old PD will be glad to hear from you. Unless you failed to show up for your last shift.

Dear PD: I am a freshman at Syracuse University. I work as jock, interim research director, and programming assistant at one of the three stations on campus. Anyway, the reason I write is to ask you how to assemble an audition tape. The GM of a commercial station told me my tape should

not exceed 3 minutes in length. Do you concur?—Joshua Wolff

Dear Joshua: Three minutes sounds right. Always front end your demo tape with your best stuff. If you don't hook the PD when he hits the play button, your cassette will wind up in the recycle bin. One other tip: Find a killer production person to edit your tape, even if you have to pay the guy at the local rock station to do it.

Dear PD: As an aside, your column is so specific. Don't your owners realize that you're the person who writes the column? If you wouldn't mind telling me, in which state do you work? Some of what you say leads me to believe that you could be in Pittsburgh, as we have two firms that own 5 stations.—Me, Joshua, again

Dear Joshua: You're assuming that my owners know how to read. I work in a state of confusion. And stop hogging space in my column.

CHAPTER 25

Bad Car-ma

“That’s the most whiskey I’ve seen one person drink at a sitting,” the affable, portly bartender marveled, shaking his head. “You’re not gonna let him drive home, are you?”

Well, no, of course not, but . . .

Eddie wasn’t about to give up his keys. “Hey,” he said, getting up slowly from our table, “do you know who you’re dealing with here? I’m Eddie. I’m okay, you’re okay. Okay?”

And out the door he went with the swagger of a morning radio star.

This guy was good, very good. It was as if he’d built up immunity over the years to hard liquor. He could drink shot after shot of whiskey, yet seemed to retain all his motor skills. In fact, he had all of us, with the exception of the bartender, fooled.

Until he failed to show up for his shift the next morning.

It was a little after 7:30—more than two hours into the morning show—before he called the on-air studio. He couldn’t come in, he explained to his sidekick, because his car was smashed up. He’d, uh, hit the guardrail in an effort to avoid running over a deer that had dashed onto the freeway.

When he finally arrived at the station, I mistakenly expected him to be contrite.

“What’s up?” he asked me in my office, acting like nothing was wrong.

Penetrating that skull of his was like trying to drill into a bank vault. Finally, we agreed that in the future, if he had “car problems,”

he'd call a taxi or bum a ride into work from another member of the morning crew. Just then, the GM popped in and closed the door behind him. "I'm really disappointed in you, Eddie. If you pull a no-show like that again, we'll have to fire you."

It went in one ear, out the other. Eddie quickly changed the subject.

"My car's a mess, I can't drive it home," he said, hoping for sympathy. Then he actually had the temerity to ask if he could borrow the station vehicle.

His timing as a morning man couldn't have been worse.

Here it is, more inside stuff about radio that I'll only share with you, dear reader, as long as you swear you'll keep it to yourself:

- When the GM says it's okay for you to sign a non-compete contract because "we'd never enforce it," remember—someday he probably will . . .
- Get the money you want coming in the door because when the PD says, "We'll talk about raising your salary after 90 days," chances are you'll never see another nickel . . .
- Unless you're extremely talented or lucky or both, don't ever count on getting bonus money for ratings . . .
- Live beneath your means. Put money away. If it hasn't already happened to you, someday you will be fired . . .
- Beware of the GM who brags to the prospective PD that "I never get involved in programming." He probably can't keep his nose out of it . . .
- The last guy who told me "If you come to work here, you have a job for as long as you want it," got fired five months later . . .
- You can't always count on the tickets being there for you at Will Call . . .
- Some listeners will do almost anything for a T-shirt . . .

- I'm waiting for ABC's 20/20 to do an expose on this: You're taking your life in your hands when you drive the station vehicle. When's the last time it had a maintenance check? . . .
- The potentially most dangerous radio station event of the year is the staff Christmas party . . .
- Stations that don't put a "Compliments of WXYZ" sticker on the CDs and concert tickets they give away are fools. . . .
- Budget time, usually August-September of every year, is when the GM looks at the station employee list and asks the PD, "Do we really need all these people? . . .
- You can ask for the moon if you have ratings. Keep your mouth shut if you don't . . .
- Show me an air personality who isn't high maintenance, and I'll show you a liner card reader . . .
- You wouldn't believe all the owners in radio who spend tens of thousands of dollars on research annually, and then ignore everything that comes back in the report . . .
- Radio is one of the last businesses that still doesn't care whether you have a college degree . . .
- You can learn more working at a radio station than you can take classes in broadcasting at some college. . . .
- It's not always a good thing when the GM comes from a programming background. . . .
- Great promotions directors are overworked and underpaid . . .

Some people who work the morning shift depend on a wake-up call from the station. Others simply set their clock radio. In the days when I worked morning drive, I always counted on my alcoholic next-door neighbor to get me up in time.

"Ralllllllllph!"

Poor guy, I'd think, as the sickening vomiting noise echoed out his bathroom window and penetrated my bedroom walls.

“Buiiiiiick!”

3:15 AM. Right on time. I’d jump out of bed and get ready for work.

“Ra. . . . Ralllll. . . . Ralllllph!”

One advantage of the upchucking next door neighbor versus the standard alarm clock? The neighbor always threw up, even during power outages.

Speaking of regurgitation, did I ever tell you about the time the Morning Guy on the rock station invited a projectile vomit artist on his show?

The young man showed up at the station with these canisters full of colored water, so he could spew in Technicolor. Cool, huh?

Our Morning Guy sent him out on a busy street, next to a popular restaurant. “It won’t be the first time someone’s thrown up there,” the DJ joked.

Vomit Boy slowed traffic and elicited horrified looks from passing motorists as he barfed in red, green, blue and purple. The jock’s producer provided the play-by-play and background retching via cell phone.

Not surprisingly, my voice-mailbox quickly filled up with angry calls from people who nearly tossed their breakfast witnessing the human fluids show. “You have set a new low in community standards,” complained one woman, who declined to leave her name or phone number. “I’ll be calling the FCC,” an anonymous male voice threatened.

There was also a message from the proprietor of the restaurant across the street, a major advertiser on our station. He said one of his employees thought he heard our Morning Guy make a crack about throwing up at his establishment. Could it be true, he wondered?

Well, uh, yeah. It was a joke. But the restaurant owner failed to see the humor. You see, a few weeks earlier, his place had been

shut down by the health department following an outbreak of food poisoning.

It took an apology from our silver-tongued morning man, on speaker phone from the station's conference room, to mollify the client and his advertising agency.

A lost account, and our GM surely would have thrown up.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I've got a great offer to go across the street and work for the competition. They want me to start in two days. Should I?—DJ Jim, San Diego, CA

Dear DJ Jim: Many stations want you out now if you're going to work for the other guys. Otherwise, you should always give two weeks' notice. In this era of consolidation, don't burn bridges. The way things are going in this industry, your former employer could become your new owner tomorrow.

Dear PD: We get paid \$25 for every live spot we do. That's station policy. On my last check I was short changed \$225, at least by my math. I went to accounting. They told me to go to the sales account executive, which explained that she was deducting \$225 because she didn't feel I did the live reads right. What can I do?—Gypped, Minneapolis, Minn.

Dear Gypped: If I were you, I'd head to the GM's office and get him to mediate the problem. Make sure you have an understanding of what's expected on live commercials so there aren't any problems in the future. And if a sales person is going to be the judge of what's a good spot and what isn't, I'd suggest you tell them you won't do any more.

Dear PD: I just completed the radio course at The

Academy of Radio Broadcasting in Huntington Beach, CA. I'm willing to work anywhere and have started sending out CDs with my picture. How long do you think it will be before I get my first real gig.—JF, Southern Calif.

Dear JF: The Academy of Radio Broadcasting in Huntington Beach? How'd you avoid getting sand in the equipment? As far as your employment, it all depends on that picture on your CD. If it's Pamela Lee, great. You might hear from a PD. However, if it's your picture on the CD, don't waste your time sitting by the phone.

Dear PD: Your column last week about the friend who died because radio broke his heart hit home with me. Radio hasn't killed me, yet, but it has broken my heart time and again. PDs get my hopes up for a job, then suddenly won't take my calls any more. It's been six months since I was let go from the midday shift at my last station. Is there no hope?—Desperate, Sioux City, Iowa.

Dear Desperate: Be persistent. Leave no stone, I mean, station, unturned. If you have talent, a competent PD with a good ear will eventually hear it and hire you. Keep the faith!

CHAPTER 26

Cries and Whispers

Nothing ignites conjecture and paranoia among radio station employees quite like an impromptu staff meeting called by the general manager. “Please join me in the conference room at noon tomorrow,” his memo read. “There’ll be a major announcement.”

It didn’t take long for the rumor-mongers to begin their whispering in the hallways. *Psst. Did you hear? The station’s being sold! The GM is resigning. We’re changing format. The morning team is getting fired.*

Jocks, the music director, promotion director and part-timers sat around the conference table, thinking the worst. I’d been asked to keep the bad news quiet until now. Our popular midday air personality, Chandra, was leaving the station because of the dreaded “C” word.

“The doctors found a cancerous cyst on one of my ovaries,” Chandra announced. “They don’t think it’s life threatening, but it’ll have to be removed.”

She bowed her head, took a deep breath, and then continued. “The other thing is, even if it’s benign . . .” She choked back tears and sniffed. “I may never be able to have a child.”

The women in the room lost it, digging into their purses for Kleenex. Our usually smart-alecky, self-centered morning man began sobbing like a baby, then led us in a special prayer for Chandra.

Afterward, each of us went up to her with a hug and message of hope. Chandra said she’d give us a call and let us know her

address back in Texas, where she was moving to be closer to her family. Our GM had graciously agreed to tear up her deal with the station.

"I'll really miss all of you," she said as the last of the stragglers filed out of the room.

It would be a month-and-a-half before we'd hear the smile in Chandra's voice that had endeared her to our station's listeners. She sounded energetic, upbeat, and, more important, healthy. On our direct competitor's radio station!

Chandra won't be getting a Marconi. But she's certainly worthy of an Oscar for Best Performance by a DJ Out To Break A Contract. A real three-hankie job.

The door to the news booth swung open. It was the GM's secretary. "What's the temperature right now?" she asked innocently enough. "Why?"

"You said in your newscast that it's 77. Mr. Big heard it and doesn't believe it's that warm right now."

This was not the way our news personality expected to learn that the company president was in town. Oh, the indignity. Second-guessed by an aloof radio industry big-wig who didn't even have the common courtesy to come by and introduce himself to one of the station's newest employees. What a schmuck, she thought.

Ticked, and then some, the news gal reached for her computer keyboard, punched up the local weather forecast, printed it out, and ripped it off the printer.

"Here," she said, handing it to the secretary in disgust. "If Mr. Big has a problem with the temperature, tell him to call the National Weather Service. I don't make up this crap."

Have a nice day.

Very funny. That pair of boxing gloves dangling over the microphone in the news booth when the news person showed up for work? It was a joke from the morning DJ.

During a weekend warm-up party at a local nightclub several nights earlier, a female listener walked up to the news gal and punched her right in the eye. The bouncer grabbed the attacker and subdued her until police showed up and took her away.

Our news person had a heckuva shiner. She should've seen it coming. The wacko listener had been threatening her with phone calls and letters for the last three months. We'd suggested, no, encouraged her to get a restraining order against the obviously very disturbed person.

The joke around the station is that Don King is trying to arrange a rematch.

Lunch time.

Our station receptionist, in a tight, black leather mini, is getting all dolled up. She applies red lip gloss, then digs into her purse for black mascara.

"So who's the guy this time?" one of the other women in the office wants to know.

Turns out she's made a date with some guy she picked up in a chat room on AOL.

"He's a stock broker who drives a BMW and just broke up with his girlfriend," the receptionist says of her catch.

"Probably more like a paroled ax murderer," a sales person needles.

"No, he sounded really cute on the phone," she says.

Back from lunch, a bunch of us approach the front desk to find out how the date went. Actually, we're relieved that she's still alive and not stuffed in the trunk of the guy's car.

“He had a great personality, but he just wasn’t my type,” she says.

She’ll be back at the station tonight or early tomorrow morning, trolling AOL—on our station’s free account—for Mr. Right.

Remember the station’s Instant Replay machine, the expensive sound effects box that vanished one-day from the on-air studio?

Well, the GM put out a memo asking whoever lifted it to please bring it back, no questions asked. When that plea was ignored, a subsequent memo said there was video from a hidden surveillance camera that would reveal the identity of the thief. He or she better bring back the equipment, or else.

It worked. Less than a week later, on a Sunday morning, the box re-materialized out of thin air. Whoever had taken it somehow slipped back into the station, returned the device to the on-air studio, and slipped back out. A board op made the discovery.

To this day, no one knows who the culprit was. At least, no one’s talking.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: Marvelous column. I can identify. I am 20 years old and I have either followed or been in radio since I was 10. I am currently the station manager/promotions director for the campus station at Eastern Kentucky University. This summer, I interned at three radio stations in Cincinnati. I watched all of the things you describe every week!! Currently, we’re working on a promotion where the flyer promises a live band. But guess what? Our live band pulled out!!!! At this point we are minus one band. Your suggestions?—Bernie

Dear Bernie: Round up all the musicians at your radio station. Get them to rehearse. You didn't say anything about having a great band. You just said it would be live.

Dear PD: You said in your column that it still doesn't matter in radio whether or not you have a college degree. I have found it very hard to get into a station without an internship to take me there. Plenty of people are willing to say it can be done, but they are the same people unwilling to let me do it in their station. All I'm looking for is to help around the station, and observe what's going on. You have said yourself that is a good way to learn. I'm 18, I talk to a local PD, but he seems rather uninterested in letting me take that step. There is a new night guy around; do you have any advice on how I could get in good with him? What would a kid have to say or do for you before you would let them work around you?—Amanda

Dear Amanda: I can't imagine a station turning down free help. Keep calling PDs and promotion directors and banging on doors. Someone will give you a break. Oh, and one other piece of advice: You're only 18? Stay away from that night guy. Trust me, you don't want him to show you how to get into radio!

CHAPTER 27

Woof, Woof

"This is a radio station, not a kennel, goddamn it!" the general manager, you'll excuse the pun, *barked*.

It was first thing Monday morning, the copying machine was still cold, and yet the GM was already ordering me to write and distribute the first staff memo of the week: "Company policy prohibits bringing pets into the building. Please get a sitter for Fido or Tabby. Do not bring them to work with you or disciplinary action will be taken." He didn't have me specify whether it would be taken against the owner or the animal. I could just see him with a rolled up newspaper, swatting the offending employee.

What precipitated the GM's tirade? His surprise visit to the station on a Sunday. He peered into the on-air studio and noticed that the woman doing the afternoon shift was accompanied by her black Labrador retriever, Brandy. Earlier in the week, he'd caught another jock with a pet ferret around her neck.

"Bad enough we have to clean up after the jocks," the GM said, giving me a stern look. "I'm not going to clean up after their animals. We've spent a fortune on new equipment and furniture for this place. I don't need dogs and ferrets crapping all over everything."

I wondered if there was actual damage. You know, a spot from Spot?

"No, but if you let the employees bring their pets, who knows what kind of other riff raff will follow."

Our GM has too much free time on his hands.

Unexpected excitement erupted at our news/talk station early Sunday morning—off the air.

The fire department showed up and evacuated the entire building. Some knucklehead from the cleaning crew was downstairs in the lobby, mixing chemicals in a bucket. A toxic cloud formed before he could begin polishing the floor. The noxious fumes quickly wafted upstairs. Our board op and talk show host got a whiff, then started coughing. They both high-tailed it for the emergency oxygen tank in the mailroom, where they took turns getting hits of fresh air.

Then an inhabitant of another floor apparently triggered the building's fire alarm system. It was deafening. Ring-ring-ring. Ring-ring-ring. Three fire trucks came roaring up to the scene.

At least 45 minutes went by before fire officials allowed everyone back inside the building. They ran big portable fans to air out the lobby.

I was glad no one was hospitalized. At the same time, I was angry that we'd been broadcasting dead air the entire time.

"You could have slapped on an old tape of Dr Laura or Rush Limbaugh," I told the board op afterward. "They go an hour at a time."

He just looked at me blankly, and then reminded me that the incident happened at around 2:30 Sunday morning.

"Isn't everyone sleeping?" he asked.

I joke with a jock about his request for vacation time.

"Two weeks?" I ask. "Living dangerously, aren't you?"

"Whadda ya mean," he asks.

"Better make sure you've lined up somebody bad to fill-in for you."

See, in all the years I've worked in this insecure business, no

matter the radio station, format, ownership, or ratings, I can only recall one air talent—count ‘em, one!—ever having the hubris to take two straight weeks of time off. Deep down, most jocks—while they’d probably deny this—suffer from a fear of firing. Oh yeah, they may pretend to be having fun while romping through Disney World, or sunning on a beach in Hawaii, but their mind inevitably takes them back to the radio station: Do they miss me? Is the fill-in talent better than me? Have they changed format?

It reminds me of the time when I found vacation relief work on a country station in a top five market. Hell, I wasn’t expecting anything more than two weeks’ pay at union scale and the chance to compile air checks of my work for a demo tape. Maybe because there was no pressure and I had nothing to lose, I was at the top of my game—loose as a goose, quick with ad-libs and punch lines. The host and I enjoyed instant chemistry. I got positive strokes from the GM, PD, and some of the sales staff.

But on the Friday of what was supposed to be my second and last week of fill-in duty, the PD summoned me to his office. He said I’d done so well, he’d like me to stay on with the morning show.

“What about the guy I’ve been filling in for?” I naively asked.

“We’re going to have to let him go,” the PD replied.

I started full-time the following Monday.

Call me superstitious. To this day, even though I’m now in management, I never take more than one week of vacation at a time.

Corporate has come up with another lame idea.

Apparently, the company president hooked up with some new age guru he met on a vacation in Tibet. Anyway, isn’t it like a sales person—the company president—to be sold something he doesn’t need? Guru guy cuts a deal to visit all of our stations and, for a

modest fee, will lead seminars on how we can increase revenue and ratings by reciting positive affirmations, or sayings.

As preparation for the guru's appearance in our market, the GM has asked for volunteers at our station to form a special "Affirmation Task Force." The usual brownnosers jump at the opportunity. Appropriately, the air head of the station, a sales woman with a vacant look in her eyes, is appointed chairwoman of the group.

Soon, a list of affirmations appears virtually everywhere in the station—including over the urinals in the men's room:

"Our clients enjoy increased profitability because of the affluent audience we deliver."

"It is easy to interact smoothly and successfully with one another here at the station."

"We love the pleasant smooth running operation we have created as a team."

"Each employee takes a personal interest and responsibility for the cleanliness of the facility."

We meet in the ballroom of a local hotel to go over our affirmations with the guru. The brownnosers sit in the front row, soaking in every word from the guy. Us cynical types from the programming side of the station sit in the back, rolling our eyes and passing funny notes to each other.

Just before the first break of the morning, the guru—who looks strikingly similar to the Stuart Smalley character Al Franken played on *Saturday Night Live*—wipes his chalkboard clean and asks us to think about a "definitive affirmation" for our radio station.

When no one's looking, the Morning Guy from our rock station goes up front, takes a piece of chalk and writes, "We're good enough, we're smart enough, and doggone it, listeners like us!"

We cut the rest of the day's seminar.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I'm a pretty modest guy. I always get the job done. My station is doing well. Here's what's eating me. My boss, the station's Operations Manager, always takes credit for the ideas I come up with. She's got the GM snowed. What can I do?—Unappreciated PD, Worcester, Mass.

Dear Unappreciated: It's the mark of an insecure boss who doesn't give credit where credit is due. You're in a delicate political situation. You don't want to piss off the OM. You also don't want to get overlooked within your own company. Here's what I'd suggest. CC your GM the next time you issue a staff memo detailing one of your brilliant ideas. It's a harmless way to make sure the GM knows you're on the ball. If your OM questions you about it, play dumb.

Dear PD: I'm a part-timer itching to make the jump to full-time. I've put together strong air-checks, have some worthwhile experience under my belt, and networked at stations in the market where I live. Yet, nothing. I'm always being told "You're doing everything right. You're on the right path. Now you just need to make that one connection that will lead to a job." What would YOU suggest?—Jobless, USA

Dear Jobless: Perseverance. Have a pro go over your tape and resume and get some constructive criticism. I have a feeling you're already shooting for work at a major market station, when, perhaps, you should focus on small or medium markets. You can become a star of a small market station by doing it all—jocking, music, promotions, and programming. Pay your dues for a year or two, then jump up to a station in a bigger market.

CHAPTER 28

Good Country People

Our “war” with the competing country station in town has heated up.

All because of a little promotional trick I’d read about in one of the radio industry trades a few years ago.

It’s like this: The “other” guys landed a big concert at the local venue in town. We were told that our station could have some tickets to the event, but we wouldn’t be allowed inside or outside the arena. And we absolutely, positively, couldn’t display our banners.

Yeah, but they didn’t say we couldn’t print up a few thousand flyers inviting concert-goers to listen to OUR station for a special encore performance of a certain popular country star AFTER the show, right?

And so, in the cover of darkness, a bunch of us wandered onto the poorly lit parking lot of the arena and placed the flyers under car windshields. And then, voila, our “mole” inside the arena called the station hotline just as the concert was letting out. Perfect timing. If you’d just turned on your radio, you would’ve assumed that our station had sponsored the big concert.

We got a call from the director of the arena on Monday morning. She scolded us for using such guerrilla tactics. But, in the same breath, she also commended us for the inventive promotion. “I probably would’ve done the same thing if I’d been in your shoes,” she admitted.

Of course, the “other” guys are seething. And we’re watching our backs.

You know you've had too much to drink when you wake up the next morning, only to discover you never made it to bed.

My eyes opened. I had a painful pounding sensation on the right side of my skull. It took me about a half minute to get my wits about me, such as they were. Astonishingly, I was still behind the wheel of my car, parked right in front of my house. It was 5:30 AM. I opened the car door. My necktie was on the asphalt, wet and glistening from the morning dew.

Then it occurred to me. For the first time in my life, I had passed out. One of our station's sales account execs and I had stayed late after a remote at a local tavern. Since he lived close by, I let him guide me back to my house, using his car's taillights as my freeway beacon. He made sure I got home in one piece.

Suddenly, all those public service announcements (PSAs) we'd run on our cluster of stations about drinking and driving started playing in my head. Someone had been looking out for me this morning. I thanked God and made a promise that I'd never again act so recklessly.

I could've been killed. Or worse, I could've killed someone.

Our station's kitchen looked like a pig sty.

There were scraps of food—turkey, dressing, salad, rolls, and remnants of pumpkin pie—everywhere. A rancid odor emanated from a turkey's carcass, which was still on the table; the poor bird had been stripped to the bone, as if attacked by starving piranhas. Dirty dishes, cups and silverware overflowed from the sink.

"Those damn DJs!" Eileen, the sales manager, shouted out to no one in particular. She picked up the phone in the kitchen and dialed the extension for our station's controller. "You've got to come up here," she huffed. "My god, you won't believe the mess they've made this time."

Oh boy, now they'd done it. Some of the staff from our rock station threw an early Thanksgiving feast in the conference room. They figured the janitor would clean up after them.

"This is an outrage," the controller said, shaking her head.

It was nothing new. In fact, the jocks had been put on notice—not once, twice, but three times. A messy kitchen and the door would be locked, they were warned. Someone, Eileen, I think, even posted a sign over the kitchen sink: "Your mom doesn't work here. Clean up after yourself."

This meant war. As Eileen and the controller cleaned the kitchen, one of them mopping the table with a cloth, the other stacking dishes in the dishwasher, they vowed revenge on the perpetrators. They argued their case before our GM.

The verdict? Guilty, the GM ruled. Door locked.

By afternoon, word of the lockout had spread to the morning show crew. "I can't do a show without caffeine," the morning personality protested to me over the phone. "Can't you get the key and hide it for us?"

The answer was, no I couldn't. The GM was unrelenting. "They've got to know we mean business," he said.

The following morning, my clock radio went off at 6. The Morning Guy was already soliciting on-air for free coffee. "If you care about this show, if you want top quality entertainment, then you have to come through with the caffeine," he pleaded to his listeners.

When I got to work, a local coffee establishment had already sent over pots of coffee, latte, and assorted fresh pastries. It was like room service. Control room service.

The Morning Guy had taken an incident at the station and turned it into a running bit. This lockout wasn't so bad, after all.

In fact, it might be the key to even higher ratings.

Cigarette smoke. Alcohol. Women. Temptation.

About the worst thing you can do to an air personality just back from drug rehab is invite him to an appearance at a bar. "This deal was set up a month before Ruben went to rehab," one of the sales guys argued with me, "so he has to do it. Besides, what could happen? Like he's gonna go back to cocaine again?"

"It's like making a child molester Scout Master," I told him. "Why take a chance? He doesn't have to do it. Get someone else."

I was overruled. The client had spent some decent bucks on the station. No Ruben, no more business. In fact, it was intimated that the night spot would open its doors to another radio station in town if Ruben backed out.

Then I got the call early Sunday morning. Ruben and some friends had been busted in the parking lot of the bar for possession of cocaine. He'd already been to rehab twice. This was strike three. Now we were out a great afternoon personality.

Monday morning, the sales dude went out of his way to avoid me. The GM tried to console me. "It eventually would've happened again," he said. "Ruben has no one but himself to blame."

The score has been evened by the "other" country radio station in town.

A huge banner for their station has been placed across the top of a building that faces the exhibition hall where we're sponsoring a family expo this weekend. You can't exit the hall without seeing their giant call letters.

"Want me to go up there and rip it down?" asks one of our blood-thirsty promotional assistants.

Tempting. Instead, we have our sales manager call a friend who, coincidentally, works in the building across the street. He arranges to have the banner taken down.

All it cost us was a few T-shirts and some CDs.

Radio Industry Light bulb Jokes:

Q: How many General Managers does it take to change a light bulb?

A: It's not in the budget. Work in the dark.

Q: How many PDs does it take to change a light bulb?

A: How bad IS the light bulb?

Q: How many Oldies PDs does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Three. One to change the bulb, and two to reminisce about the old one.

Q: How many Production Directors does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Just one, but first the client will want to change it, then sales.

Q: How many jocks does it take to change a light bulb?

A: We had a light bulb in here?

Q: How many jocks does it take to change a light bulb?

A: One. But, the Program Director gets to pick the bulb!

Q: How many Engineers does it take to change a light bulb?

A: “. . . . I've had it on order . . . should be in next week. . . . ”

Q: How many part-timers does it take to change a light bulb?

A: F this place, who gives a crap anyway?

Q: How many promotions people does it take to change a light bulb?

A: I don't know, but you'd better tell them to change it now, before it burns out.

Q: How many interns does it take to change a light bulb?

A: None right now . . . they can when they're ready, but they keep asking anyway.

Q: How many contest winners does it take to change a light bulb?

A: They don't want to change the bulb, they want to exchange theirs for a better one.

Q: How many clients does it take to change a light bulb?

A: All of them, but they want to see a proposal first.

Q: How many syndicators does it take to change a light bulb?

A: All of them, but they want 7 spots a week to do it.

Q: How many record label reps does it take to change a light bulb?

A: None. They want the PD to do it with as many spins as possible as he/she screws it in. And, “. . . can you add a new light bulb next Tuesday? . . . ”

Q: How many listeners does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A: As many as possible. You just hope it's YOUR light bulb!

Q: How many consultants does it take to change a light bulb?

A: They don't change the bulbs, they just test them.

Q: How many Conservative Talk hosts does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Typical Liberal blather! It is not the responsibility of government to change the light bulbs in the private sector! You can't legislate light! I'm getting sick and tired of you irresponsible “tax and spend” light bulb changers who think that everyone is entitled to free light, with no responsibilities!!!

Q: How many Talk Radio PDs does it take to change a light bulb?

A: That's a very sensitive issue. I think you need to check your facts a little more carefully. We need to wait until there are at least 3 separate news sources confirming that the light bulbs actually need changing.

Q: How many Liberal Talk hosts does it take to change a light bulb?

A: There aren't enough of them to glean a standard answer.

Q: How many Talk Radio sponsors does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Are light bulbs a problem in your home? Does it seem like the government is trying to take away your light bulbs? Are the utilities in your area causing your light bulbs to burn out faster? Don't be left in the dark! Call now, and receive free, our information kit on the amazing new light bulb alternative that doesn't depend upon the utilities providing energy! The all-new totally Millennium-compliant light source, “Candles” . . .

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: They said they wanted to pay me \$25,000 because that's what I made at my last gig. I said that I was underpaid in a market where money is much worse than this one. I suggested \$35-40,000. Was I right? Plus, I read your hints a couple of weeks back. Is it true that most people never see bonus cash?—Getting' Screwed in the South

Dear Getting' Screwed: Lesson one. Fib about what you made at your last gig. If it was \$25,000, you should have told them \$35,000 and asked for \$45,000. And yes, you have to be talented, lucky, or both, to see ratings money.

Dear PD: Last week, you wrote about pets at the station. Never a problem at the stations I've worked at, as long as it was after hours or on weekends. I used to work nights in Boston and loved to bring my Afghan to work with me. He not only provided some security for me, but it was cool having him along.—Lassie in Mass.

Dear Lassie: Obviously, your dog was radio-trained. That, or the carpeting in the on-air studio was brown.

CHAPTER 29

Scary Party

Our invitation-only Halloween party at a spooky mansion we'd rented was frightening—in more ways than one.

I'd discounted the various rumors I heard about our GM being into—shudder—astrology and the occult. But there was this bizarre picture with zigzag patterns on the wall behind his desk.

“Don't stare at it,” station insiders joked, “or he'll hypnotize you into taking a pay cut.”

Our goateed GM did have a devilish look.

A former PD was uncomfortable talking to me about what he'd allegedly seen once at the GM's house. “He and his wife keep astrological charts on every employee on the wall in his den,” he told me. “He fires at least one person a year, based on their chart showing they're in for a bad cycle.” When I begged him to tell me more, he declined. “He might have a voodoo doll of me,” he laughed nervously.

I'd put the story in the back of my mind. And then Halloween night, I was seated on the tram that we'd hired to transport guests from a parking lot to the haunted mansion. I was startled when the GM and his wife climbed on board. They were dead ringers for Mr. and Mrs. Satan, complete with capes, horns, pitchforks, and red face make-up.

I told myself their Halloween costumes were just a coincidence.

I'm always amazed at the lengths some people will go to win radio station contests. I spotted the winners of our Halloween costume contest the minute I walked into the door of the mansion.

There was a guy, dressed as a can of Raid, chasing his wife, who had sewn together a costume that made her look like a roach. Frankenstein, Count Dracula, Austin Powers, and President Clinton had no chance of winning the trip to Hawaii.

Imagine their love-life!

A friend gives me a tip on a big PD opening in a top-10 market.

"You'd be crazy not to look into it," he says. I call and leave a message for the station's GM. He returns a voice mail message with his fax number. I fax him my resume and some press clippings from stations where I've worked.

An instant later, he calls back. "When can you come see me?" We agree to meet for lunch in a couple of days. Me, I'm thinking I got the job. My pal in radio assures me that my "style" is exactly what the guy is looking for.

So I arrive at the station 30 minutes early, because that's the way my dad was. We'd always leave at least a half hour early, even if the destination were close by. He was a pain about it. "Might get a flat tire on the way," he'd say.

I wait in the lobby. After 15 minutes, the GM's assistant fetches me. She puts me in an empty conference room. "He's in his office on the phone, I don't know how long it'll be," she says. I can tell she's used this line before. So much for trying to impress him by arriving early.

Fortunately, I'd brought reading materials with me from home. I got through the latest issue of Sports Illustrated. Then I pulled the morning paper out of my bag.

“Hi,” said the GM, startling me when he walked into the room. “I have a fire to put out. Bear with me.”

I finish the paper. At least another half hour goes by before the GM reappears.

“Let’s go,” he says, rushing me out the door.

“Where are you working now?” he asks me. I thought, “He doesn’t know?”

Remember, I’d faxed him my resume and some background info. Oh, and I’d also overnighted him my station composites and still more of my personal propaganda—programming philosophy, articles I’d written for various trade publications, along with promo and liner copy.

We walk into this fancy restaurant and, first thing, the guy at the door asks the GM if he can speak to him for a minute. Meantime, I’m seated, twiddling my thumbs for 10 minutes before my prospective new employer joins me at our table.

“My interviewing style is for you to ask all the questions,” he tells me, as he focuses on the menu. I start talking, but it’s obvious he’s not hearing a word I’m saying.

“Get what you want, but if you like pasta with shrimp, this is the place to get it.”

We order. I try to get attention-deficit-disorder boy back on track. I mention some of the things I’ve done at my stations that I think would work well on his. I ask him if he’s had a chance to listen to the cassettes I Fed Ex’d him.

“No, I haven’t,” he says.

I ask him about the station’s promotional budget. “We don’t have one,” he says. “We’ve gone through three promotions directors in five years.”

“Oh.”

He mentions that his station’s morning numbers suck, but that the afternoon show is #1 in the market. I inquire if he’s thought about switching the personalities.

“Can’t do that, it would hurt the guy in mornings on the

other station we own in town,” he says. “He’s number one. He’d quit if we beat him.”

I start to describe some of the creative promotions I’ve done at my other stations. I use them as examples of how you can get all over the papers and TV for free. I ask him if he’d had a chance to go through the press clipping I’d overnighted.

“Did you send me some?”

Finally, I decide to dispense with subtlety. “What is it, exactly, you’re looking for in a PD?”

“I want someone who will listen to every second of the afternoon show and ride the dump button—so we don’t lose our license.”

He tells me that there’s lots of interest in the job opening from some top-notch candidates around the country. He’ll complete the interview process and then get back to me before Christmas.

I wish whoever gets the job lots of luck.

A sales account exec waves me down in the hallway.

She has a great promotion that will only take a minute to tell me about. There’s this eye doctor who wants to give away a LASIK eye surgery—referred to in the medical trade as a “flap and zap”—on our station.

“And what if something goes haywire and the station gets sued?” I ask.

She doesn’t have an answer for that. “Oh, um, I’ll get back to you,” she says, walking away.

You might be a DJ if:

—You can name at least 3 of the Weather Channel’s on-air personalities.

- 80% of your wardrobe has a station logo on it.
- You haven't bought Q-tips in over 3 years.
- You still refer to CDs as "records."
- You look at your paycheck and say "That's it?!"
- A day off is considered an extra hour and a half of sleep.
- The only interaction between you and someone else at dinner is "Thank you. Please pull to the next window."
- You call a weekend off a "Vacation."
- You can smoke a cigarette or take a dump in 3 minutes or less.
- You answer your home phone with station call letters.
- A salesperson has ever taken credit for your paycheck.
- You know what a "bullet" is.
- You've ever sliced your finger with a razor blade and cleaned the cut with isopropyl alcohol and an extra long cotton swab—remember carts?
- You measure your amount of production work in "shitloads."
- Dinner? Let's see what the receptionist has left in the fridge.
- You have had a nightmare of a record running out and not being able to find the control room door.
- You have muttered the words "Yeah, I'll try to get that on for you."
- You have more stereo and computer equipment than everyone else you know.
- People in your car exclaim, "How do you listen to the radio that loud!"
- When listening to music at home you only listen to the first 30 seconds of a song before switching to something else.
- Going to a club without getting paid seems like a waste.
- Cheerleading coaches call you to get that "special mix" of that jock jam they heard on the radio.
- You crank up the radio excitedly at the sound of "dead air" on the competition's station.
- You have at least 3 unopened CDs, 2 T-shirts, 5 mugs, and 25 stickers in your car.

- You have 500 unlabeled cassettes—air checks—in a cardboard box in your closet.
- Cueing, segueing, walking on, loose, back-timing, raise, lower, and dumb ass program director are part of your everyday vocabulary.
- You have 20 pictures of you with famous people that you haven't seen since.
- You know the name and artist to every song your boyfriend or girlfriend can think of.
- You know the words to every song they can think of.
- You know the re-mixes to every song they can think of.
- You've slept quite comfortably on the PD's easy chair.
- You were a half hour late for a promo appearance and blamed it on the directions you got from the sales director.
- You've had 5, #8 callers in a row.
- Your favorite pastime is conferencing three unknowing listeners on the same line.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: About six years ago I was working in suburban Boston and our night guy was pulling a weekend shift. The PD told him to stop bringing his dog in, but it was the weekend, no chance of the PD showing up, right? Wrong! PD walks in, stares at the dog, dog immediately pees all over the studio rug! Luna, we loved ya!—Steve, East Coast

Dear Steve: Some PDs have that effect on dogs . . . and disc jockeys.

Dear PD: We have three stations in the company where I work and a new PD is coming in on November 15th on one of my sister stations. When is a good time and way to approach him about work there. I'm a board op now and want more, of course.—JJ

Dear JJ: If you know where he's working now, call him and introduce yourself. Have your materials waiting for him when he arrives at the station. He'll be looking for all the help he can get.

CHAPTER 30

Plane Foolishness

I'll never fly a certain airline again. Here's why.

Monica, one of our station's sales assistants, is married to a commercial airline pilot who can't get a driver's license.

I find this out one day when Monica tells me her daughter is driving him over to the station to help set up for a client party.

"Why isn't Lou driving here himself?" I asked.

That's when Monica revealed that her husband, who gets behind the wheel of big commercial jetliners at least three times a week, can't drive a motor vehicle because he randomly blacks out.

"We're at the mall, he'll be sitting there, and he just passes out," Monica laughed. "It's unbelievable."

I don't find it funny. I fly, or, I should say, I *did* fly, on the airline he works for. I tell her I'm horrified.

"Oh, it's no biggie," she insisted. "If Lou passes out, one of the other guys in the cockpit takes over."

Now I know why they keep the door to the cockpit closed during flights.

We're down another board op.

Our eagle-eyed controller spotted \$475 of 900 calls on the phone bill for the month of October. \$410 in September. All of the calls had been made on the overnight shift, between 2 and 3 AM. There was only one suspect. Leo. This \$8 an hour board op

had been dialing up a tip line that, for \$1.95 a minute, offered advice for betting on college and pro football games.

“You getting rich?” I asked him, trying to break the ice.

“I’m already about a thousand in the hole,” he admitted.

I hated to fire him. He’d never missed a shift in his two years with the company. Plus, he ran a tight board. But he saw no harm in running up the company’s phone bill. When I suggested he might save his job if he reimbursed us for the 900 calls, he became downright belligerent.

“This company doesn’t pay me enough,” he shot back. “I can’t believe they’re so cheap they’re going over phone bills.”

Both of us knew it was a waste of time to argue ethics. He handed me his elevator pass card, shook my hand, and started for the door.

“Good luck,” I said.

“Man, I feel sorry for you having to work for these people,” he said.

I felt sorry for him.

A porn star is dropping by to plug her latest X-rated flick on our morning show. Of course, as PD, I must be there to make sure we don’t run afoul of any FCC rules or regulations.

I greet the porn star’s handler in our lobby, a big, beefy, enforcer-looking guy. He reaches out to shake my hand. I can’t help but notice the ring finger on his right hand—it’s a stub, cut off at the knuckle. Before I can ask where our guest is, he informs me that “she’s using the head.” Probably fixing herself up. After all, it’s 6:30 AM.

A few minutes go by. The porn star enters the on-air studio. She looks, well, skanky. Then again, this is the first time any of us have seen her with her clothes on. The way she’s sniffing, I assume she must have a bad cold. I introduce her to the crew—the Morning Guy, his producer, our news gal.

She does the first segment, then excuses herself to the bathroom again. When she returns, I can't help but notice she has a glazed look in her eyes. I'd swear she's on something. The sniffing continues.

"Fighting a cold, eh?" I say, wondering if she's coked-up. She just grins at me.

Finally, the interview wraps up at 7:30. In the hallway outside the control room, the porn star hands me her business card—it's her home number in Las Vegas—then goes to give me a kiss. I cock my head a little, expecting a peck on the cheek. Instead, she goes for the lips. I feel a tongue enter my mouth. Someone who could be the poster girl for Herpes or AIDS is slipping me saliva.

"Wow, you got tongue from a porn star," the awestruck morning show producer gushes.

It dawns on me—I really don't know where that mouth has been. Actually, I do. I rush to my desk, grab my toothbrush and toothpaste, head straight for the men's room, and scrub the hell out of my mouth, spitting into the sink.

I'm hopeful whatever it is she might have, I don't.

Let this be a lesson to everyone in radio: Always review your tape before you send it out.

Just got off the phone with a PD friend. He's telling me about a jock that sent his audition tape on video. So he's watching the tape, most of it shot in the on-air studio, and thinking, "this guy could be my next morning star."

But when the five-minute audition tape ended, something resembling soft gay porn popped up on the PD's TV screen. It was the jock and a male friend, both naked, frolicking on a bed.

A resume would've been sufficient.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: Last week, you wrote about the sales person who proposed giving away a LASIK eye operation on the air. At my last station, where I was the PD, the owner traded out a LASIK procedure. We talked about that SOB, non-stop, for a month. Then, the day of the surgery, we did the play-by-play live, on the air—pre and post op. Eventually, when I tell them it's time for me to move on, this is what I hear: "We can't match that offer, but if you can hang tight we can probably trade out the LASIK procedure." I moved on.—JR

Dear JR: Obviously, you didn't see eye-to-eye with the owner.

Dear PD: I'm a recent graduate of a communications program at a prominent college. I have over six years board op, production and promotions assistant experience. I've done an internship at a major market station and I've interned at a major radio network. I'd like to get on a track to eventually become a PD, but I'd like to do it without being on the air. Any possibility? Should I try a small market station?—Mike, LA

Dear Mike: That's a tough nut to crack. PDs at small market stations usually have to do it all—including an on-air shift. Your best bet is to apply for a programming assistant job somewhere, learn all you can, and work your way up. Remember, the more you can do—music scheduling, promotions, copy writing, production, and promotions—the more valuable you are.

Dear PD: I got off on reading about your job interview from hell. When I was programming a station in Tampa, I, like you, got wind of a top-10 market opening, got an interview, and flew up for the day. Not only was the GM

totally clueless about programming, he told me they just got a new morning show and asked how I'd feel about programming "the rest of the day," and letting someone else program just the morning show?—Chris

Dear Chris: Sounds like the station was in the clutches of a consultant.

Dear PD: Contrary to what's usually asked about audition tapes, I'd like to know what should an audition tape NOT contain? What kind of tape? How long? What to write on the tape? As a PD, I want you to tell me about audition tapes that made you hire the person . . . or at least helped in the decision. I'm in the 5th market and I've sent a station here two tapes . . . they lost the first one, and I've gotten no response on the second one, even after about four follow-up calls. Maybe I'm doing something wrong!—Oldies Expert

Dear Expert: Sounds like the PD didn't like your tape, but doesn't have the courtesy to tell you "it's not the sound I'm looking for." The standard audition tape is 3-5 minutes. Its purpose is to pique the interest of the PD and to get him to call you for more tape—or, better yet, a job interview. Be professional. Slap a typewritten label on your cassette tape. Always include your name and phone number. If you work for a recognizable station, include the calls on the label. An audition tape should never be boring. Front load your tape with your best stuff; I'm talking material that will knock the PD's socks off. And as I've suggested here before, find a good imaging guy or gal at a radio station and pay them \$100 to produce your audition tape.

CHAPTER 31

Nibbling the Media Food Chain

Watching someone—a jock, talk show host, music director, board op—work their way up radio’s cutthroat feeding chain is for me the best part of being a PD.

Clay walked into my office, thanked me for helping him go from starving weekend jock to full-time board op, and gave me a big bear hug. I told him he’d earned the promotion through hard work and dedication. He was bright, talented, prompt, and always willing to go the extra mile.

“I promise, I won’t let you down,” he said in a hushed tone, tears welling in his eyes.

Tears for a job that paid \$8 an hour? You had to be in Clay’s shoes to appreciate the opportunity. He was a recovering drug addict and alcoholic. Worse, he was a murderer. The story goes that some years ago, Clay was behind the wheel of a car involved in a fatal accident. His blood alcohol level supposedly registered somewhere between “Oh my God” and “Death.” Imagine having to live with something like that the rest of your life?

No wonder he took the bus to and from work.

Pressure’s on.

We talked our skeptical, frugal GM into letting us run TV commercials for one of the stations in our cluster. Our GM swears

TV won't work in our market, because it has failed at other stations where he worked.

I'm guessing the creative on his other spots was too creative and went over people's heads. If there's one thing I've learned about doing TV for radio—KISS. Keep It Simple, Stupid. You can be creative and clever, as long as you pound one message, and one message only.

Of course, if our ratings don't go up now, we'll never see another dime of TV money.

So I'm sitting in the GM's office. Ironically, we're talking about another employee with a serious drinking problem, when Clay shows up in the doorway with a friend.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt," he says apologetically. "This is Duane, my AA sponsor," he says, then excuses himself.

The GM and I just look at each other and laugh.

"At least he's getting help and going to the meetings," I tell him.

"It must be working," the GM says. "He's doing a heckuva job for us."

About a month-and-a-half into the job as full-time board op, Clay calls in sick for the first time.

He admits to his supervisor that he's fallen off the wagon. Says the people he's living with invited him to get high with them. The temptation was overwhelming. When he returns to work, we have a come to Jesus with him. He cries. Swears it won't happen again. He thanks us over and over again for not firing him. And he tells us he's moving to a new place this weekend, away from the bad influence.

Later in the week, the GM and I see Clay meet his AA sponsor in the stations parking lot. We're overcome by a sense of relief.

So much for our faith in Clay. He's disappeared. We found out when he failed to show for his board op shift on Monday.

Repeated calls to Clay's answering machine go unreturned. Finally, after a week, we send him a letter, by certified mail, informing him that he's been fired. A month later, Clay drops us a hand-written note, apologizing for his vanishing act, explaining that he's dealing with more personal problems.

"I'm trying to control the demons inside me," he writes, "but I'm having a hard time."

I don't know what got into me, but I decided it was time for me to cash in on the extensive amount of valuable vinyl I'd accumulated over the years. (*Note to guys reading this: It had nothing to do with my wife nagging me about the 10 unopened boxes of record albums in the garage. "You never play them. Get rid of them!" I countered with "If any of my vinyl turns up missing, we're through!"*)

Digging through a dozen boxes of LPs out in my garage, I separated the good stuff—you know, Ballinjack, Theme Music From Western Movies, a novelty record about Pete Rose called Charlie Hustle—from the bad.

It was an agonizing process of elimination. Sort of like trying to decide which puppy to keep from a litter. I was emotionally attached to some of the records. Various groups and songs evoked memories of key periods in my life. Yeah, I could part with Dan Hartman's disco album from the 70's, I reasoned, but what if I took a job at a sports talk station someday? I might need the "Instant Replay" cut off the LP.

I came across the Beatles' White Album. Actually, it was now the yellowed album. "Oh, wow, I forgot I had this," I excitedly said to my young daughter.

"Who are the Beatles?" she asked, making me feel ancient.

I was proud of the great condition my vinyl was in. It had weathered cold, heat, and some not-so-gentle moving men. I marveled at the colorful, creative album cover art from the '70s and early '80s.

Finally, after two hours, I'd come up with four boxes of keepers, LPs I'd eventually get around to playing again someday. I'd lug the eight boxes of my rejects to the local record store.

My daughter and I went shopping for CDs while the store manager pored over the LPs. I figured my discarded vinyl would pay for my daughter's first year at a good college. My plan was this: I'd select a few hundred dollars worth of CDs from his store and take the difference in cold, hard cash.

When I was ready to collect my fortune, I noticed the manager had stacked seven of my LPs on his counter. Must be the really valuable ones, I thought. He motioned to me to come over.

"I can give you \$50," he said.

I looked at him like he was nuts. "What?"

"\$50," he repeated. "You can have it in all cash, or cash and trade."

"But . . ."

"I don't have any use for your other stuff. You can take it back home with you."

Oh yeah? I'd show him. I abandoned the records in his store. He'd have to do the heavy lifting. If there were a vinyl god, he'd pull something.

My daughter and I left with four CDs—and a cash profit of a whopping three bucks. My precious vinyl was worth less than vinyl flooring. I didn't say a word on the drive home.

"It's okay, dad," my daughter said in a consoling voice.

My wife still won't let me hear the end of it.

"When are you gonna get rid of those OTHER records?" she nags. "They aren't worth a nickel."

To me, they're gold.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I haven't seen anything about show prep in your columns. Even in a tiny day-timer market—I prepped for hours for my morning drive show. Always made sure I had something useful or funny to say. Sure, I racked up some big expenses buying “the sheets”. But the good thing was—I was prepared. It just boggled my mind that none of my peers would spend any time doing show prep. And guess what? Their shows sounded like it too! Boring! Disjointed. Stupid. I think it would be great if you spent a column on this highly important topic.—Scott, Salem, Oregon

Dear Scott: You just said it all. No show prep, no show!

Dear PD: I'm a top-notch radio reporter for a station in a top 25-market. Unfortunately, the station switched from a News/Talk format to just talk, leaving me as a board op. How do I catch on with a decent news organization somewhere? From what I've seen, the pickings are pretty slim unless I want to end up doing lifestyle news and fluff on some music FM. Yuck.—Gordon

Dear Gordon: You'll need to spend some bucks on resumes and tapes. Hit up the top all-news and news/talk stations in as many markets as you can. Scan the trades for job openings. Someone will snap you up.

CHAPTER 32

Sweet Nothings

I couldn't help but think it was aimed at me.

It was a memo from our Group PD, the guy in charge of all the stations in our company, and it was addressed to "All PDs." It read, "Please refrain from referring to Dr. Laura in station liners and promos as a 'bitch.' "

I'd been running a liner that said, "She's a bitch. But in a good way. Dr. Laura . . ." I thought it was pretty funny. And it was accurate. Nearly everyone I talked to about the show referred to her using the "B" word.

"From now on, use terms such as moral crusader and/or moral compass when describing Dr. Laura Schlessinger," the memo urged.

My GM got a copy of the memo. He poked his head into my office. "Are we running anything that refers to Dr. Laura as a bitch?" he asked.

Not any more, sir.

A radio friend from another town was out this way to attend a wedding. Of course, I invited him to stop by my station for a quick tour.

It may be the last one I ever give. Sparks flew when I introduced Rick to Julie, the loquacious, well-endowed afternoon newsgirl on our Adult Contemporary station. It was lust at first sight. Rick couldn't stop looking Julie in her, uh, eyes. And Julie? Rick's boyish

good looks and quick wit all but made her melt onto the floor of the news booth.

Next thing I knew, Julie offered Rick a ride back to his hotel, which he gladly accepted. I didn't find out until the next day that they never made it back to the hotel. Rick spent the night at Julie's place. He'd whispered sweet nothings in her ear. Emphasis on the nothings.

"I don't want her thinking there's anything there between us," Rick explained to me over the phone after he returned home. "I think Julie thinks there is. There isn't. Could you tell her for me?"

Not only was Julie convinced she'd found Mr. Right, she was ready to quit her job and move in with him. "He's the best I've ever been with," Julie confided in me. "Okay, this seems sudden, but I know he's the one. I'll probably be quitting my job to go get married."

The next sound on the phone was a loud "pop." It was the sound of me bursting Julie's bubble. I spent the next few minutes breaking the news to her that Rick didn't want to spend another second with her, let alone the rest of his life. To Rick, Julie had simply been an easy conquest, another notch in his head-board. Okay, a one . . . night . . . stand! Understand?!

"Julie? Julie, are you there? You okay?" She started laugh-crying over the phone. "Men are scum!"

I couldn't disagree. "Yes we are." I volunteered Rick's home phone number so she could give him a verbal reaming out.

It would save me the trouble.

I shouldn't have taken that memo so personally.

Found out it was motivated by a research project on Dr. Laura that the Group PD hadn't bothered to share with the rest of us. In a nutshell, the research hinted at a lack of awareness for Dr. Laura;

it questioned whether her show was getting its fair share of promotion on our stations.

What's more, the research blamed Dr. Laura's lack of ratings growth on PDs like me, positioning her as, well, a bitch. "Focus on morals, ethics and values," the report suggested, "never advice or relationships. Never as a bitch or mean woman."

A three-ring notebook on the Dr. Laura research project included a section on liners, ready for plug and play, including "The message is morality, the messenger is Dr. Laura" and "Do you know right from wrong? Dr. Laura does . . ."

I had my production guy pull all the old liners off our station and replace them with the new, kindler, gentler, re-positioned Dr. Laura slogans.

It wasn't just a lot of work to make all the changes. It was . . . a bitch.

It's always interesting to see how different programmers react to research.

Some PDs think it's a waste of time and money. I actually worked for a PD who'd throw his research in the trash after it arrived in the mail. Others hold it as the absolute gospel. Me, I'm somewhere in between.

I believe research is best used as a tool that can point you a certain direction. But let me also say this: Any PD worth his paycheck relies on a combination of research and gut instinct. People laugh when I tell them I like to do my own research—eavesdropping on people in bars, restaurants, and other places where my station's target demo hangs out. I'm as serious as an expense check about this. I mean, how can you tell your jocks, news people, or talk show hosts what they should talk about if you don't know what the people—your listeners—are talking about?

Inside the War Room—okay, it's really just a banquet room at a local hotel—the rep from the research company is wrapping up

the latest findings from a focus group. Our Group PD is sitting at the table, taking it all in. I'm there, along with the PDs, promotion directors, and GMs from our cluster of stations in the market.

When the rep gets around to me, he makes it clear that the evening shift is the only real weak link on my station. But . . . he'd also like me to think about shaking things up: Moving my Morning Guy to afternoons; swapping Dr. Laura in mid-days for the midday guy on my sister station; putting my afternoon guy on at night; putting Dr. Laura on afternoon drive. My head exploded before I could write down any of his other suggestions.

What did I get out of the \$65,000 research project? Cold cuts, potato salad, and a diet Coke during the lunch break.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: You wrote last week about getting \$50 for all the vinyl you brought to a record store. E-bay would have been a better choice! What is it that makes ex-jocks think that the ca-jillions of CDs with holes punched in them from groups that were 'no hit wonders' will serve to see them through retirement? Can you tell I am the WIFE of someone just like that?? And we don't even have a basement. Can you tell that I, too, trucked down boxes and boxes of CDs to the local used record store, only to be told the same thing as you? The pain, the pain. By the way, I enjoy your column despite the fact that I have never been in 'real radio.' It gives me insight and my husband can say, "See? I told you . . ."—Harv's wife

Dear Harv's Wife: Those CDs also make great coasters.

Dear PD: You mentioned show prep last week, but didn't get into specifics. Inquiring jocks wanna know—what do you recommend?—C.J., Port Arthur, Texas

Dear CJ: Depends on what kind of show you're doing.

I always recommend starting with the local papers, sometimes; Dear Abby columns, letters to the editor, obits, and even the personals can be turned into bits then USA Today, magazines like People, Playboy, yes, for the articles! Then Time, Newsweek, and Ladies Home Journal for the battle of the sexes stuff. You should be all over the 'net for TV and movie sound bites. If you want to pay for a show prep service, I'd recommend Radio Online. And, of course, watch the local TV news shows, "Entertainment Tonight," and hit shows like "Ally McBeal," "Survivor" and "Who Wants to Be A Millionaire."

CHAPTER 33

Santa Doesn't Live Here Any More

We may not be getting anything for Christmas this year, except maybe a dead “D” battery in our stocking.

Our station had just wrapped up a successful afternoon remote broadcast from Santa's House. As our van pulled out of his driveway, Jolly Old St. Nick waved to us, we waved goodbye, cranked up the radio and turned our thoughts to more important things—like where we'd go for some beers.

And then we heard a most frightening sound.

“Oh shit!” our horrified intern screamed from the back of our vehicle. “Stop the van!”

He directed our attention back to Santa's House. Flames were shooting out of the right side of the roof. Santa, playing fireman, was using a garden hose to extinguish the blaze. One of Santa's helpers called 911.

We raced back to help. That's when we noticed that the mast used for our broadcast was still protruding from the top of our van. We put two and two together. When we'd pulled out of Santa's driveway, the mast had knocked down a power line, which sparked the fire.

The story in the paper reported that a blaze had caused at least \$35,000 damage to Santa's House.

Fortunately, it left out our call letters.

Good ratings. They can be both a blessing and a curse.

We had a great book. I mean, a really great book, the kind you're tempted to bronze. And yet I felt terrible. Not for me. I was getting bonus money. I felt bad for my General Manager.

"We should be celebrating," the GM told me.

He couldn't see what was coming, which was the entire staff, headed to his office with its collective hand held out. That's what happens when the ratings are good. Everyone wants to share in the success. Interestingly, no one volunteers for a pay cut when the ratings tumble.

"Brace yourself," I warned the GM.

Sure enough, even the station's traffic manager—the person who puts the daily commercial log together—was expecting a salary increase. "I'm counting on \$2,000," he confidently told me. "Hell, they—the owners—are making money."

I told him \$2,000 more a year didn't seem like an unreasonable expectation.

"A month," he corrected me.

Jocks were already talking in the hallways about how they'd be spending their big pay raises. Morale was booming. You couldn't find anything but smiling faces throughout the building.

The GM went over an employee list with me and we decided who'd get raises, and how much. As I expected, his idea of a fair pay boost was \$2,000 more a year, even for some of the jocks who were living on Kraft macaroni and cheese. Once again, I tried to warn him that the raises would backfire, but he'd have none of it.

"Nowadays most companies don't give their workers anything," he said. "These people will be grateful for any kind of a raise."

The plan backfired almost as quickly as it began. The first employee the GM met with, a six-year veteran of the station—including two previous owners—was so insulted by his offer, he ran right upstairs and told everyone how little he was getting. Word spread like wildfire. Morale sank faster than the Titanic.

Jocks grumbled about quitting. The traffic manager was livid. "This company spends more money on office furniture than they do on their own employees."

"They can effing take it or leave it," the GM told me in private. They begrudgingly took it.

1, 2, 3 . . . That's me counting to ten, so I won't scream at our promotions director.

Three of us from the station volunteered to work our booth at a local baseball game. We were standing outside the front gate, when the team's owner approached us.

"I thought our agreement was that you'd be set up and going by 11 AM," he said.

We had to do some tap dancing. Our promotions director had screwed up several other events with the team, so the owner was in no mood for excuses. We'd agreed to register fans for a trip to the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown.

"Problems with the station vehicle," one of us lied. "Jackie should be driving up any second."

Honestly, we had no idea where she was. The game was at 1 PM. It was already noon. We just stood there in our station T-shirts, but we might as well have been standing there naked. As fans poured into the ballpark, we had nothing set up. No banners with the call letters on display. And no prizes to give away.

Meantime, Jackie didn't answer her cell phone. She wasn't at home and she wasn't at the office. Where the hell was she?

"Here she comes," one of our jocks said. It was now 12:20.

She pulled up to the front gate, jumped out of the van, and actually yelled at us. "Are you just going to stand around, or are you going to help me set up?" We just looked at each other in disbelief.

"Where have you been?" I asked her.

Jackie explained that she'd driven halfway to the stadium, only

to realize that she'd forgotten her coat. She went back to the station to get it.

You could cut through the tension with a knife. When our morning jock reminded Jackie that she was more than an hour late, she turned on him.

"It's always on me," she said, which was a perceptive comment. After all, she was the promotion director! "I never get help at these events. All I hear is bitching. I've just about had it. Yeah, this is it for me. I'm quitting after the game."

She meant it.

The three of us tore down our E-Z Up and banners after the game, threw them in the back of the van, and I drove it back to the station. The Morning Guy would drive me back to the ballpark to get my car.

We'd be looking for a new promotions director on Monday.

A voice mail message from our Music Director warned me of impending trouble.

Suzie, our ex-Promotions Director, was dialing up virtually everyone she knew, asking to borrow \$20 to "help pay the rent."

"She's desperate for money to buy coke," the MD said in his message. "I know she'll be calling you. Just thought you should know."

Too late. An hour earlier, I'd told Suzie I'd loan her the money. I gave her difficult directions to my house, figuring she'd never find it.

Wrong. A tan Honda Civic crawled past my house, made a U-turn, and then parked across the street.

I told my wife to duck under the couch with me. We'd ignore the doorbell and Suzie would just go away.

Yeah, I was a coward.

The doorbell rang. And rang. And rang. Again and again. Pause.

I could hear Suzie opening the screen door. She knocked on the door, harder and harder. Then she started pounding on it.

“How badly does she need coke?” I whispered to my wife.

Now she was tramping through the flower beds, peering into our windows. I wondered what the neighbors were thinking.

Ten minutes went by before she gave up and drove off.

It was the last I'd hear or see of Suzie.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I'm curious what your thoughts are on this question: Is it OK for jocks to say on the air that they like a song that has just come out? The other day I said something to the effect of, “This is new from Eiffel 65. I'm loving this a ton. Here's . . .” I also heard my competition use a similar talk for a tune. Do jocks have to be impartial to music or not? Does speaking favorably of a single make us more “human,” or more relatable to our audience? I, of course, would never say that I DISLIKE a song. I'd appreciate your response.—Yours, in a medium market.

Dear Yours: Nice going! Not only is it okay in my book to hype a new song, it's a good way to make new music familiar to your audience. As you may know, new music is always the riskiest to play. And you're right. You should never, ever say you dislike a song. That's a sure-fire way to alienate listeners.

Dear PD: I'd like to make some extra money. Since my station isn't about to give me a raise, I was thinking about buying radio stocks. Any suggestions?—Broke, Honolulu, Hawaii.

Dear Broke: I'm in radio, which means I have no sense about money whatsoever. I do know this: Most of the people in radio who've hit the jackpot on radio stock did so through

stock options. That is, they were given “x” amount of free shares of stock by their company and they lucked out. If you’re thinking about playing the stock market, play it safe. Go talk to a pro.

CHAPTER 34

Squeeze Box

(Note to fellow program directors: Do not let your sales department see the following item!).

Our normally cheery receptionist was feeling the heat from listeners.

“Are you people electronically altering your shows?” one caller demanded to know. “You should be ashamed of yourselves,” another caller scolded. “You’re trying to put in more commercials. It’s an outrage. I’ll never listen again.”

Busted! At least a dozen, sharp-eared listeners had detected that we were trying out the new Cashbox machine on the air. It’s a device that digitally shortens gaps and pauses in shows, allowing a station to squeeze in up to five more minutes of local commercial inventory an hour. Apparently, our owner read about it in *Radio and Records* magazine, called the inventor, and arranged for us to get a loaner.

But you know how it is sometimes when engineers get a new toy to play with. Evidently, in their excitement, they set the \$12,000 Cashbox machine on “high.” The rejoin music for Dr. Laura and Rush Limbaugh played at about three times their normal speeds. With the gaps and pauses taken out of their shows, Rush and Laura sounded like they were both on uppers.

Honestly, and I hate to admit this, the average ear couldn’t tell Cashbox was in use after it was adjusted to chop just two minutes an hour from the shows.

Now the battle lines are drawn. Sales loves Cashbox. It means extra revenue. It'll pay for itself in a month.

Programming sees it as a sinister invention that will further clutter up the airwaves and quite possibly hurt ratings.

Wonder who'll win?

Amazing Voice mail from the PD who'd invited me for a job interview a few weeks ago.

"Call me at . . ." was all he said.

Three weeks had passed since the disastrous meeting, which I chronicled here. The PD had seemed distracted. He had neglected to review my materials, let alone listen to my station composites. I'd spent more time waiting for him outside his office than I actually did talking to him in person about my ideas of great radio.

So when I got his message, being the eternal optimist—I should know better—I figured I got the gig. Why else would he be calling me back?

"Loved your idea about putting the afternoon guy on the morning show," he gushed over the phone. "I made the change last week."

Gotta call for moving estimates, I think to myself. What should my start date be? Top five market. The money has to be in-friggin'-credible.

"And your other suggestions were good, too. I've hired an imaging guy from one of the rock stations in our company to spice up our on-air sound."

Visions of stock options, company car, and enough restaurant trade to feed an NFL team started dancing in my head.

He kept on talking. "I've decided . . ."

Okay, here it comes!

". . . to oversee the station myself, along with my other duties . . ."

You son of a . . .

“Just wanted you to know before you read about it in the trades . . .”

One of the DJs at the station has a degree in business and is bragging all the time about his stock market acumen.

Funny, but all his stories involve making lots of money off companies that most of us—the non-biz types—have never heard of.

If he's lost money, it never comes up in conversation.

Today, Chuck's in the coffee room, telling us about a Silicon Valley friend who's tipped him off to a company that's “about to explode on Wall Street.”

“You can get in at \$17 if you do it today,” he said softly, as if letting us in on the stock tip of the century. After some prodding, he told us the company's name, even spelling out its ticker symbol. “They've made an incredible breakthrough in the technology for laser eye surgery,” he revealed. “Their shares are sure to triple in price when they make the announcement middle of next week.”

Convinced that we could make a killing, each of us wrote out a check and handed it to our colleague to invest for us.

I got in for \$1500.

I don't mind surprise parties. As long as I'm not the one being surprised.

Some of the women in the office went ahead and decorated the news-room for reporter Zoey's birthday, even though she'd made it crystal clear all week that she wanted no part of any balloons, streamers, candles, or birthday cake.

They should have listened. A bunch of us were waiting for the birthday girl when she returned from an assignment Thursday

afternoon. Just as Zoey appeared in the doorway, we yelled "Surprise!" and sang Happy Birthday to her.

"Dammit," she cried out, "I effing told you I didn't want a party." With her right hand, she swiped at the streamers that had been taped up along a wall, knocking them down. Then she abruptly ran out of the newsroom.

Oh, to be 30 again.

DNA testing isn't an option, but our GM and consultant are wracking their brains, trying to figure out who posted a bogus staff memo from the consultant

Actually, it was signed, "Sincerely not from . . .," but the memo was so dead on, everyone who read it thought it was from the consultant—until they reached the end of the page. "From now on, you are to over-enunciate the third letter in our calls . . . incorporate the term 'the bomb' in your live liners at least once an hour . . . and use 'dot' instead of 'point' when referring to our frequency. We want to make our station friendly to computer users . . ."

"We have a cancer growing inside the station," said the consultant, who was faxed a copy of the faux memo from our GM. "You need to identify it and remove it."

I think I know who did it. When I confront him, he denies it, then starts laughing.

It will remain our little secret.

If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. There's no such thing as a sure thing. Insert any other aphorisms here.

Remember that stock tip? Those of us who bought in at \$17, on the assurance from a co-worker that it would at least triple in

value within a week, just learned that the stock has plummeted to \$5 a share.

We might as well have invested our money in some Florida swamp land.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: After your successful ratings book, are you going to keep the weak link in the chain—your night guy? I remember reading in your column on how there was a general feeling that nights were a problem. With the successful book, is it worth taking a chance to see if the jock would be willing to work with management on improving his shift? Now if the person in question is a moron with an ego the size of Texas, I can see why a change would be made. Is he worth keeping?—Student of the Game

Dear Student: In most cases, you can't expect instant ratings success. That usually takes time. In this case, the person has had more than a year in the slot, with no upward movement. Radio stations are like a football team. If, after coaching, your safety is still getting burned on long passes, you have to find a new one.

Dear PD: I've decided to start the New Year . . . looking for a new job. Should I just start sending out tapes and resumes to stations, or is there a good source for job openings?—Sir Jock O' Lot, Memphis, TN.

Dear Sir Jock 'O Lot: You're on the right track. Send out T&Rs to the stations where you'd like to work. In my opinion, the best source for new jobs is Radio and Records. But don't limit your hunt to the job opportunities section. Scour the pages for programming changes at stations—and send each PD your materials.

CHAPTER 35

The Christmas Gift Police

My favorite greeting card this holiday season reads on the front, "For Christmas, I wanted to send you a cruise to the Caribbean!" Then, when you flip the card open, it says, "But, unfortunately, I wasn't the ninth caller to the radio station . . ."

Our receptionist, who takes heat from irate listeners and clients, deals with nuts in the lobby, tells solicitors where to go, and threatens to quit at least once a week, seemed genuinely pleased with the Christmas gift all of us at the station chipped in to buy her.

Among other things, we'd given Wanda \$50 of lottery scratch-off tickets. She thanked a bunch of us at the front desk, pivoted around in her chair, dug for a coin at the bottom of her purse, spun her chair back around, and started scratching away.

Figuring it would take her a good ten to fifteen minutes to get through all the game cards, we wished her a merry Christmas and headed back to our offices. I'd just landed in my chair when I heard Wanda start screaming.

Another nut in the lobby, I figured. Probably someone with a gun this time. I raced for the front lobby, joined by other employees in the hallway on the way there.

"Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god!" Wanda shrieked.

Since I didn't hear any gunshots, I knew from our receptionist's response what had happened: It was the same emotion I'd heard countless other times from contest winners on our radio stations.

Wanda was a \$5,000 winner, baby! For now, she was in

complete ecstasy. Later in the day, however, she'd be threatening to quit again, angry that one of the sales assistants didn't show up on time to spell her at the front desk.

She'd have to hit a substantially bigger jackpot, though, before she could make good on it.

Warning: The annual company Christmas party can be hazardous to your employment.

I don't think our consultant will get fired, but he did live awfully dangerously at last Saturday night's holiday party for our little cluster of radio stations.

He'd gotten a head start on the rest of us at what he called his own "warm-up Christmas party," downing shots of tequila at a local watering hole popular with radio station types. An hour-and-a-half into our party, Mr. Consultant was pretty well hammered. Put it this way: You didn't want to light a match in his presence.

Someone tapped me on the shoulder and directed my attention to an area where a Karaoke bar had been set up. The consultant and the wife of the VP of our company were locked in a tight embrace, swapping saliva. The serious smooching went on for at least 45 seconds, as most of us watched in horror. They were passing more tongue than the guy behind the counter of a Jewish deli. Even more stunning—the VP was watching and laughing from another area of the ballroom.

The following week, the consultant swore he had no recollection of the incident.

So far as I know, he's still in the budget for next year.

Some of the sales assistants who had nothing better to do roped a bunch of other employees into doing one of those Secret Santa gift exchanges.

You know—you draw someone's name out of a hat and then buy him or her a present, not to exceed \$10, anonymously.

But this year's Secret Santa has taken on a new twist. Our controller got wind of the activity and has threatened to call it off—unless the organizers let her approve all the gifts ahead of time.

Initially, the reaction was outrage. Who did our controller think she was, the Christmas Gift Police? There was a suggestion by one of the sales gals to hold the gift exchange outside the station.

Informed of the upheaval, our by-the-book controller revealed a dirty little secret. She wasn't trying to be a control freak. No, she said, she was just trying to protect her employer, which, come to think of it, is her job. Seems six or seven years ago, an employee had been humiliated at a company Christmas party when she unwrapped, of all things, an adult toy that her Secret Santa had picked out for her. Friends and fellow employees roared with laughter. Her date blushed. She sued the radio station and the general manager. And won.

The Secret Santa with the X-rated taste in gifts remains a secret.

What we have at the station is at least one board op who thinks he should be on the other side of the glass.

When he got to work around four this morning, one of the guys on the morning crew noticed a mysterious black cord running underneath the door to the on-air studio. He followed it to the control room board, where it was attached to one of those microphones you can buy for cheap at Radio Shack.

The board op on duty looked over at him and grinned. He explained that he had brought his own equipment so he could go on the air with the talk show host from his post at the control board.

This was a first. A pirate broadcaster . . . inside our own radio station!

From the e—mail bag:

(A previous item about the Cashbox machine, a device that digitally compresses talk shows so you can squeeze in more local commercials, resulted in an avalanche of mail).

Dear PD: The fuss—from listeners and programmers—about Cashbox would go away if Rush, Dr. Laura, Phil Hendrie and other syndicated hosts would use it on their end and pump out more content in their shows, thereby reducing a station's ability to tighten up the programs for commercial maximization—Robert Taylor

Dear Robert: Huh? You miss the point. The battle isn't over content, it's over running more local inventory. Cashbox allows you to squeeze in up to five more minutes of spots an hour.

Dear PD: Get with the times. Radio is about ratings AND revenue. Without revenue, you PDs don't get paid. I'm ordering Cashbox for my station. Between Rush and Dr. Laura, we'll be able to run 18 more local commercial minutes per weekday. That's a lot of money!—R.J., Stockton, Calif.

Dear RJ: Don't tell me. You're a sales geek disguised as a GM?! At some point, the commercial clutter on your station during Rush and Dr. Laura will drive the ratings down. Just watch.

Dear PD: Your story about the Cashbox machine is a sign of the apocalypse in radio. If the suits would spend more time on creating entertaining radio, and less time on gizmos and gadgets that sneak in more commercials, maybe radio listening wouldn't be on the decline.—Jon Mills, Providence, RI.

Dear Jon: The tragedy is that commercial radio is becoming more “commercial” all the time. Companies like

XM Satellite, which will deliver commercial-free programming, must love it.

Dear PD: You wrote about commercial loads last week. I'm curious. What's an acceptable number of spots an hour on a radio station?—Board Op, Midland, Texas.

Dear Board Op: All depends. I've worked at music stations where we held the spot load to 12 minutes an hour. I've also worked at sports talk and talk stations where we ran anywhere from 16-19 commercial minutes an hour. I think once you hit 20 or more an hour, you risk losing audience.

CHAPTER 36

Swami PD's Visionary Prognostications For A Glorious Radio Future

This is where I get to whip out my crystal ball—hey, DJs, no “What, did you lose in the other one in ‘Nam?” jokes, please—and predict what will happen next in radio. Hey, you—get offa my bandwidth.

- Unable to sleep at night, the major players in radio will all reduce their hourly spot loads, thereby making commercial radio less commercial, more palatable. Ratings soar. Rates are raised. And programmers around the nation will say, “We hate to say we told you so, but . . . ”
- A sales person will actually ask a PD, with a straight face, if it would be okay to sell sponsorships for EAS—emergency alert system—tests.
- Due to a talent shortage, radio owners across the country unplug their voice tracking machines and return to live, local radio, cultivating up-and-coming performers on the overnight shows.
- Sales people agree never to sell another live remote unless there's something in it for the listening audience.
- Hair-brained events like health fairs and do-it-yourself expos, all designed to create NTR—non-traditional revenue—for sales departments, are outlawed.

- Someone slips something into the bottled water at a National Association of Broadcasters' convention. Owners and GMs suddenly get a conscience. They decide that weekends programmed with non-stop infomercials for colon cleansers, sexual stimulants, and pills that prevent prostate cancer must be abolished because they do nothing for ratings or cycling listeners over to Monday morning.
- GMs are no longer rewarded for bringing their stations in under budget by firing employees, slashing the budgets, and ordering department heads to stop spending. Instead, their bonuses are based on, of all things, ratings!
- Board ops and on-air talent, sales and programming, all live in harmony.
- Air talent and board ops magically become mature and responsible. They always show up for work on time. As a result, PDs are no longer awakened by the sound of their beepers at 1:30 in the morning.
- Promotions always come off without a hitch.
- Digital audio equipment never crashes.
- Out of date commercials never air.
- That voice on the drive-up speaker asking, "Do you want to super-size that?" belongs to your former radio station consultant.
- O.J. Simpson re-emerges as morning man on a sports talker in Florida.
- You can submit your monthly expense form without a signature from the GM.
- O.J. is teamed up with Monica Lewinsky on that sports talker in Florida.
- An owner or GM says to a PD, "We're staying out of programming," and really means it.

- Radio does something that TV did in its early days when Milton Berle, Martin and Lewis, and Burns and Allen ruled the tube—it sells a half-hour or hour to a single sponsor, thus eliminating long, intrusive spot breaks. The sponsor is mentioned between songs, going into traffic and weather, and gets a :60 at the end of the hour.
- The money that was going to be used on in-house station research is, instead, given to a PD as a raise. His GM tells him, “Use your gut.”
- A \$1.1 million government research study finds that no one listens to Radio Disney between the hours of 8 AM and 3 PM., because—HELLO?!—kids are in school.
- Just when it seems like every Tom, Dick, and Harry has his own syndicated talk show, a major syndicator announces yet another syndicated radio talk show—featuring three guys named Tom, Dick, and Harry.
- In what has to be an extreme in niche broadcasting, a prominent consultant announces a new radio format called “Time Radio,” all time checks, all the time. His first sucker, I mean, client station, announces sponsorship deals with Timex, Rolex, and Swatch.
- All radio stations are required to contribute to a general pension fund for non-union on-air talent.
- Someone completes enough years at a radio station to actually collect on a 401k plan.
- The guy who invented the Cashbox machine files bankruptcy.
- Interpol, the FBI, CIA, and Columbo are unsuccessful in their attempts to discover the identity of the person who writes *The PD Chronicles*.

CHAPTER 37

An Arresting Outfit

Our radio station's controller has appointed herself Fashion Police.

"Did you see what Regina is wearing today?" she asked me, after entering my office uninvited.

She didn't give me time to guess.

"A halter top and jeans," she huffed. "The other girls in the office think it's outrageous. Do you want to speak to her, or shall I?"

I was entertaining myself on an Internet web site and didn't appreciate the interruption. Now I'd have to log off a local plastic surgeon's web page, featuring before and after shots of his clients' boob jobs. All because our controller thought Regina had arrived at work in inappropriate attire.

I moseyed down the hallway to the promotions and marketing area of our little broadcasting complex and took a peek into Regina's office. There she was, wearing a halter-top that exposed a bare midriff. I said "Hi," turned around, and walked back to my office, where the controller was waiting impatiently.

"Well?"

"Well what?"

"Did you talk to her?"

I explained to our controller that, as a red blooded, American male, I didn't see anything wrong with what Regina was wearing. In fact, I was impressed that, at her advancing age, 28, the outfit still did her justice. I allowed as to how her appearance might be a distraction to some of my fellow employees, male and female. And

I conceded that the halter-top might be too casual, even for a radio station.

“Do you mind speaking to her?” I asked. “I really feel uncomfortable going to her about her clothing. I think it’s something you, speaking woman-to-woman, could better handle.”

Nice cop out, eh?

Several hours later, I ran into Regina in the front lobby. She was in a completely different outfit.

“She made me go home and change my clothes,” Regina laughed. “Just like we were back in high school again.”

We’d all be able to get some work done now.

Entry forms for various radio awards, avalanches of them, are arriving in the mail.

My take on it? If your GM will part with the cash, enter as many of the contests as you can. It’s good for morale. Let talent know you think they’re the best at what they do. If you’re lucky enough to win, your production guy can cut a promo that will make it sound like your station won an Oscar. Plus, the bragging rights are nice.

If you lose? Blame it on bad judges. After all, there’s no accounting for taste.

Someone sent me a really, really bad audition tape.

This is the participatory part of the book where you, the reader, respond, “How bad was it?”

Thanks for playing along.

It was so bad, I had to play it for nearly everyone at the station. In fact, I’ll even hang on to it as an example to others as something you should never, ever send to a prospective employer.

It began with the would-be talent giving a five-minute

soliloquy. All of it off mike, with a terrible hissing sound as the cassette played. And then the talent—I use the word loosely—suggested to the listener “fast forwarding to the third newscast on the cassette,” since “that’s my best take.”

You know what? It was so bad, I actually couldn’t stop listening. The poor, clueless idiot stumbled, stuttered, and bumbled his way through a story he attempted to read—word for word—from a newspaper. He sounded like the “before” example of a bad reader in a Phonics Game spot.

And then I glanced at his cover letter. It was addressed to “Dear,” with a blank line next to it. He’d copied a form letter from one of those how-to books on writing effective cover letters that get jobs.

I hope he asks for his money back.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: It’s too bad that all the people in radio forgot why they got into radio—to have a cool job and impress your friends, go to remotes to watch people do almost anything you ask for a free T-shirt, and get free food for on-air mentions. I work for an Internet broadcaster and a commercial station and wish that one would start having more fun and the other go back to having more fun. I also wish that big business would wake up and realize that radio—in any form—is a personality-run business. When was the last time you heard a PD or GM say that their digital Prophet or Scott Studio systems were winning their time slot? Yes, it can save you money today, but what about tomorrow? Thanks for your time. Great column.—M.L. in So.Cal.

Dear M.L.: I don’t think it’s a coincidence that fun-sounding radio stations usually win.

Dear PD: I don't make a habit of this—fan mail—but I wanted to say how much I look forward to *The PD Chronicles* each week. Although, I am now a suit for CBS in New York, my best friends are still in programming. I hope to someday make it to the “big office”—that's general manager, not sales manager. Then I could stay out of the day-to-day operation of my station, and just oversee programming and sales squabbles from an amused perspective.—Suit Man, N.Y.

Dear Suit Man: Be careful what you wish for!

CHAPTER 38

Food Fight

Call me paranoid, but I won't touch any food brought to the station by listeners.

Now, if you've seen our listeners, you'd know what I'm talking about. Many of them appear to be normal. But then, so did Ted Bundy.

Anyway, my fellow employees are ridiculing me the other day in the lunch-room because I won't try one of the cookies that an anonymous listener dropped off at the front desk.

Granted, I have no proof that a listener has ever poisoned anyone in radio. And, I'll admit, I've yet to discover pins, needles, razor blades, or sticks of dynamite inside the many cakes and pies fans have baked for their favorite personalities at the stations where I've worked. All I'm saying is that, given the increase in the wacko factor in this nation, that day is coming.

So, next time a listener drops off food at your radio station, do as I do.

Ask your general manager to take the first bite.

Another day, another letter of resignation.

You hate it when one of your best board ops quits. Then again, I'm happy for Paul, who's been with the station almost five years. He's moving on from his \$8 an hour radio gig for a teaching position that starts at \$30,000 annually.

Hell, we'd boosted his pay by a 25-cents an hour just the other month, the ingrate. I tease him that he won't know what to do with all his free time. Long summer vacations. Holidays off.

Paul's training at the radio station should serve him well as a fourth-grade teacher.

He's already accustomed to dealing with children.

My phone rang. It was the exasperated afternoon jock on one of our music stations. He'd been knocked on-and-off the station three times in the last 15 minutes. Would I please come to the on-air studio?

During a commercial break, the jock erupted like Bobby Knight, all but throwing things. He demanded to know why the engineers were fiddling with a new back-up generator at the transmitter site during afternoon drive.

Fair question, I thought. Back in my office, I dialed the chief engineer's cell number. I wanted an explanation.

"Abe, what the hell are you guys doing?"

"Oh, we're trying out the back-up transmitter," he explained. "I think we were off the air for maybe two, three seconds."

"Try two, three minutes," I corrected him. "We're in a ratings book. Please, keep us on the air."

Ten minutes later, still more dead air as the jock was reading a live liner hyping a major station contest. I counted to five before we were back on the air.

Time to see the general manager.

Free stuff. Radio listeners love it. In fact, if the prize is big enough, they will do almost anything for it. I mean . . . anything.

The morning jock on our rock station actually coaxed a male caller to take all his clothes off, cover his private parts with our

bumper stickers, then enter a restaurant and ask to see their breakfast menu.

An intern was sent along to provide play-by-play via cell phone.

Luckily, the cop who was summoned to the restaurant to expel the sticky listener happened to like our station. In fact, he even went on with our Morning Guy.

The uninhibited listener, who avoided arrest, won a T-shirt, some CDs, and a limo ride to see his favorite rock band in concert.

Removing our bumper stickers from his, uh, sensitive areas, was his problem.

My bitch and moan trip to the general manager's office paid dividends. He'd called the chief engineer personally and dogged him out. Now the chief was calling me.

"I'm really, really sorry about the technical problems this afternoon," Abe said. "I promise, from now on, we'll make sure we do maintenance and repair work overnight."

You don't want to make enemies with the engineers, so I gently explained to Abe that my job, as PD, was to get ratings. I told him that I was surprised someone with his experience would allow the station to go off and on the air during afternoon drive.

"You're right, I know better," he said. "I just wasn't thinking."

I felt better. But the afternoon jock didn't.

"They try to screw up my show on purpose," he protested.

"You're being paranoid," I said, even though I knew there was probably something to it.

This jock would never make it as a UN diplomat. Our engineers were fed up with his nasty notes and voice mails about burned out bulbs in the on-air studio. The testing of the back-up generator, I guessed, was retribution.

Something told me the truce was only temporary.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: Just a note to tell you how enjoyable and enlightening your weekly chronicles are. As soon as I'm fired from my station, I hope to work under a PD with your common sense and management skill—hey, it's not sucking up. Your writing proves you know what you're doing! Good lord, why are most PDs such complete jackasses?—Joe C.

Dear Joe: My guess? Insecurity. Or, they're clueless.

CHAPTER 39

Babe-Sitting

An air talent whose career I'd given a jump start in another market phones me up, tells me about a big offer he has from a heavyweight station in the country, and asks for some free advice: Should he hire an agent?

Depends. In all the years I've worked either on-air or in management, I've never, ever used an agent. But that's just cheap, ol' me. Why should I give an agent or lawyer 10% of my salary, or pay him \$90-120 an hour, to haggle over an employment contract that, chances are, would look the same if I did all the heavy lifting myself?

Could I have signed better deals early on in my career? Probably. Did I make some mistakes? Undoubtedly. I've learned as I've gone along. And I've learned not to make the same mistake twice.

As a PD, I shouldn't share the following information with anyone, particularly unsuspecting, naive air talent. But, since I abhor money-grubbing radio owners as much as the next radio guy, I'll make an exception:

—Always settle on a base salary you'll be comfortable with, even if you never make a nickel over it during the time of your employment with a station. Have cost-of-living increases built in annually (usually 3%).

- Never assume you'll make your bonuses or incentives.
Chances are, you won't. Nevertheless, you should negotiate for bonuses based on your performance. Also, if you work for a publicly traded company, ask for stock options.
- If you sign a two or three-year deal, make sure it really is a two or three-year deal. Beware of renewal clauses or "outs." The first year should be guaranteed.
- Lock into format. What if you sign for mornings on an alternative rock station—and it goes country?
- Get your job title, duties, and air-shift (days and times) in writing. I've heard of morning guys being deposed to overnights. I've also heard of air talent being handed voice-track work for other stations, with no additional pay.
- Get your vacation time and holidays in writing.
- If you're a hot-shot air talent, push for the company to foot your health plan.
- Stations are changing hands all the time. What if the new owners don't retain you? The company that signed you should be forced to pay off your contract.
- CYA—cover your ass. In the Consolidation Era, jobs are tougher to find. Make sure you get severance pay if you're let go before the end of your contract. If it's a multi-year deal, get them to pay off what's left of your contract. Otherwise, push for six month's severance. Minimum, three.
- If a move is involved, get the expenses up front. Airfare for you and your family members. A month's relocation. Some companies require that you reimburse them for moving costs if you leave before a year of employment. Think about it: Is that because the company treats its workers poorly? If you are particularly fond of the place where you're moving from, ask to be moved back if you're terminated before the first year of your contract.

- Don't believe a GM or PD who tells you, "Oh, we'd never enforce a non-compete clause." Non-competes may be the most controversial of all clauses in radio station employment contracts. If they fire you and, presumably, therefore think you are a worthless human being, why should a station care if you go across the street? They usually still do. Demand to have the non-compete stricken from your contract. Otherwise, settle on a time limit of 30 days, max, whether you're fired, your contract expires, or you quit.
- If you have a non-compete, be sure it doesn't prevent you from accepting a bigger and better job just outside your city.
- If you're doing mornings, and you've been promised such things as a new sidekick and various show-prep services, get it all in writing. If you're using a catchy show-biz moniker, own the name and the rights to T-shirts and other merchandising.

Let me also add that negotiating your own deal isn't for everyone. If you are just starting out, overwhelmed by the legalese in your first contract, shy, or just can't stomach battling with your GM or PD over contract issues before you even start your new gig, get help. Talk to a veteran air talent who has been there, done that, before. Or, find a lawyer who can match your GM's mendacity for mendacity. Set a flat fee going in so that you don't have to get a second job to pay off the legal fees.

And remember, if you don't ask, you won't get it. All a GM or PD can say is . . . no.

I take back half of everything bad I've said about my general manager. He does come up with a good idea, even a sinister one, every now and then.

Like the party we threw the other night—for our competitors. No, really, I invited every PD, full-time deejay, newsperson, traffic

reporter and talk show host from the other stations in town. It was a gathering “to celebrate great radio in our market.”

At least, that’s the spin my GM had me put on the invitations. His hidden agenda? The party was a psychological ploy, intended to make the other owners look cheap, and to give us the appearance of being the radio leader in our city. After all, we were springing for the food and liquor. (They didn’t have to know it was all on trade; we’d pay the tab by running commercials for the establishment).

More than a hundred invitations were faxed out a month before the party. I had low expectations. And, in fact, a few invitations were faxed back with sarcastic or profane messages. One PD called to ask me, bluntly, what I was up to. A few air personalities confided that they’d like to attend the event, but were afraid they’d be fired if it got back to their GMs or PDs.

In all, 12 courageous people—or were they simply job hunters?—from the other stations showed up for our first annual radio gala. They mingled with the on-air talent from our cluster of stations. It was three delightful hours of food, fun, booze, and conversation.

If the psychological ploy worked, they’d all go back to their stations on Monday morning, telling their co-workers what a fabulous time they’d had.

And how they wished they worked for us!

I don’t know about you, but my time is valuable. I have work to do.

Like dreaming up promotions that will create a buzz. Mothering insecure and volatile on-air talent. Fending off sales people who will all but give the station away if it means a buy.

So I didn’t appreciate it this morning when my general manager assigned me baby-sitting duties. A woman he’d met at an Olive Garden restaurant, who trained waiters and waitresses, was coming

by the station, he explained. He'd like me to give her a tour of our facility.

I didn't get it. We had no job openings. Her experience in radio was limited to turning one on and off!

"She's extremely bright," my GM said. "I'd like to find a place for her here."

A little later, I found out why. She was a dead-ringer for Heather Locklear. Blonde. Blue-eyed. Sparkling white teeth. She had the body of a super model, which she proudly displayed in a dress that, I swear, someone forgot to finish sewing. It stopped about six inches above her knees.

My GM deposited her in my office, where we made small—very small—talk for a few minutes. Not coincidentally, nearly every guy at the station managed to stroll by my office, looking in through the window to get a glance of this young, nubile beauty. It took great restraint on my part not to let on that she was being ogled.

When my tour guide duties were over with, I reported back to the GM's office. He asked me what I thought of his find.

"Guess it doesn't matter that she can't type, eh?" I volunteered. He just smiled.

No sign of our production director today, so I went to the controller's office to report him AWOL.

She got this goofy grin on her face, raised her eyebrows, and said, "Oh, you don't know, do you?"

"Know what?" I wondered.

"Bruce has worked here seven years. He never makes it in the morning after his birthday," she said.

They had this agreement that his birthday was an automatic personal day every year. He'd been doing it so long, he didn't bother to call in sick. He probably couldn't make it to the phone anyway.

Nothing like being the last to know.

I'm only the PD.

I spent all last weekend in Los Angeles, holed up in a hotel room with a bunch of other radio brethren from around the country, judging entries for an awards contest.

Hey, it was an expenses-paid trip to Hollyweird. I figured the work would take a few hours, then I could hop in my rental car and have some fun in the Southern California sun.

Wrong. I had to be downstairs at the hotel by 7 AM Saturday for a quick Continental breakfast. By 7:30, five of us were directed to a room, where a large box full of cassette tapes awaited our ears. Some of the entries were terrific. Great writing, creativity, and use of sound. A lot of it was bad, surprising for a market as big as LA.

We didn't get to the last entry until 5:30 PM. The long-form documentary category. Figured. By now, our eyes were glazing over. We were actually sick of listening to tapes.

"Let's just listen to one minute of each tape," a fellow judge suggested. We weren't about to argue. We voted unanimously for a well-produced documentary about a famous African American leader.

I rushed back to my hotel room, revived myself with a shower, then hopped in the rental car with a radio pal for a seafood place on the Pacific Coast Highway that another friend had recommended. While the restaurant was only 20 miles away, it took us a good hour or so to get there in the thick LA traffic.

I was starving. This would be the payoff to my trip.

There were just three or four cars in the parking lot. We wouldn't have to wait for a table. In fact, we'd probably get a booth with a window view of the Pacific Ocean.

And then my friend pointed out a big sign in the window of the restaurant.

Closed.

A friend of mine has a moral dilemma.

I could have been a wise-ass and suggested he call Dr Laura. Instead, I was a good listener.

Seems he's been offered "his dream job" at a station in a medium market. What's more, he's been led to believe that if things work out with his air shift, he might advance to program director. The timing is perfect. He's already packed up all his stuff in boxes and is ready to move.

One problem. He's accepted a similar gig in a market where he'd be a big fish in a little pond.

I'll tell you what I told him, and what I would tell anyone in a similar situation. Go with your heart—and gut. If it feels wrong, it probably is. He needs to call the guy and level with him. Sure, he'll get an earful over the phone. But if the would-be employer is any kind of human being, he'll get over his initial anger and disappointment and wish the talent well.

But I have to tell you. Many program directors are unforgiving. It's like being turned down for a prom date. You don't forget. My friend will have to go with his gut, keep the faith.

And then hope and pray the guy he spurns doesn't come back to haunt him.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: A few questions for you once again. I'm sending out resumes to radio stations for news and traffic work. How long after turning in your package should you call back? How often should you re-submit a package? Any general suggestions?—JJ

Dear JJ: Usually, the protocol is to wait at least one week before you call the program director. If the PD invites

you to check back with him from time to time, do it. Otherwise, it's the old showbiz saying: Don't call us. We'll call you. If the PD has an opening and is genuinely interested, you'll hear from him.

Dear PD: I look forward to your musings. Regarding your column last week about the \$8 an hour board op that quit to take a job as a fourth grade teacher. It's no wonder "Paul" left after only getting a two-bit raise. Come on, the board op is a jock with their mouth shut. They're still in charge of "driving the bus" and keeping the station on air. You said it best: Board ops are taken for granted when things are good and chastised when things go bad. Three cheers for board ops. You make most stations sound great.—N.R. in SC

Dear N.R.: Show your best board ops lots of love. If you can't give them a raise, lay restaurant and hotel trade on them!

CHAPTER 40

Morning Man's Electra

Our morning man's salary is all over the building.

It was quoted to me by a radio station worker bee, in the context of complaining about the host's work ethic, or lack thereof.

"I can't believe he's making \$168 grand a year," he said disgustingly.

Turns out, the morning dude was copying his pay stub one day last week. He inadvertently left it in the copier. A fellow employee happened upon it and leaked the figure to co-workers.

I was raised to keep certain things private, including salary. But I'm amazed how today's workers openly compare paychecks with one another. I found it out the hard way once. I offered someone a job, only to be told they knew the wage was several thousand dollars less than what another jock was making on the station. I was shocked.

There are very few secrets in radio.

That buddy of mine who verbally committed to a programming job in a small market, then had second thoughts when a bigger job opened up?

Well, a funny thing happened when he made the call to renege on the deal. His prospective employer talked him out of it, even though he's dreading the move.

I still contend that my friend should have backed out of the

job, for his sake and the radio station's. No damage done. However, you're doomed to unhappiness and failure if your heart isn't in the job.

I give him three months.

If you're going to give away free CDs at promotional events, make them count.

My general manager has begrudgingly okayed the expenditure of about \$120 for stickers that have our rock station's logo on them, along with "Compliments of . . . (call letters)." You slap those bad boys on the back of CD jewel cases. They remind listeners they got something cool from your station. And it reinforces your call letters.

If they have an Arbitron diary, they'll copy down your calls from their free Beck CD.

We're at a station party. I'm sitting next to the general manager's latest trophy wife.

She seems distant, if not bored. Finally, after about ten minutes go by, out of the blue she asks me what I do at the station.

"I'm the program director," I tell her.

"What's that?" she asks.

Realizing that I'm not dealing with a MENSA member, I hope to discourage any further small talk by telling her I'm the guy who handles the complaint calls to the station.

"Oh, um, that's nice," she said, sounding totally disinterested, her eyes focused on someone in another part of the room.

Mission accomplished.

More things about radio you're not supposed to know, but I'll divulge only to you, because, well, I know you can keep a secret:

- Show me a jock that keeps asking if he can borrow \$20, and I'll show you a coke addict . . .
- Most board ops think they're better jocks or talk show hosts than the one's they're working for . . .
- Some general managers still really think the Internet is just a fad . . .
- If you don't hear a winner promo for a major cash giveaway, it could mean that no one won. . . .
- Just because all your phone lines are blinking doesn't mean you'll get high ratings . . .
- Promotion Directors are among the most important, yet lowest paid people at a radio station . . .
- The worst place to keep a secret is at a radio station . . .
- Many PDs spend more time writing memos than they do on the promos and liners for their stations . . .
- The biggest, most expensive cars in a radio station's parking lot generally belong to the sales people . . .
- There is job security in radio. It's called engineering . . .
- Jocks and talk hosts don't always use the products they endorse in live commercials . . .
- Jocks will say on-air how much they love a particular song, even though they'd really like to hurl the CD against the wall and shatter it . . .
- Everyone knows how much everyone else is making at a radio station. Just ask . . .

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: After realizing that I've entered my 20th year in broadcasting (help!!), and then reading your column in Radio Digest, it really does seem the more things change the more they stay the same. No, I'm not a 21-year-old babe digging around for her first gig. There will always be the Heather Locklear look-alikes around for the short run, but who the heck hangs in there for the long run? Beauty is skin deep, and talent comes from the soul. Just give her some real work to do—blonde ambition only goes so far. Still lovin' the column!—Ann Shepherd, WARM, Tampa, Florida

Dear Ann: Good-looking people are on TV. The rest of us do radio.

Dear PD: I think my PD is "doing" our night chick. We're both up for a vacant midday gig. If she gets the job over me, should I confront my PD, or go directly to my GM?—Sandra, Louisville, KY

Dear Sandra: Big difference between thinking that your PD is romantically involved with the night jock, and knowing it for a fact. If you get passed over for the midday opening, ask him what you need to do to improve. You'll come off as a rumor-monger and sore loser if you take the dirty laundry to your GM.

Dear PD: My GM has told my PD not to let me give my own Web-site address out over the air. He says I have to direct people to our station's web page, where there'll be a link to my page. Can they do that?—Sammy, Long Island, NY

Dear Sammy: Can they do that? They're doing it! Advertisers have to pay for spots. Why shouldn't you have to pay for mentioning your web page? Don't be a stubborn jock. Tell listeners that by logging on to your station's web page, they can link to your site. That way it's a win-win situation.

CHAPTER 41

Rumor Central Station

More rumors swirl through our radio station than Hollywood. Our station quidnunc swears that it won't be long before we're gobbled up by a bigger broadcasting entity. We're about to be sold!

When the news reaches me, I look at the messenger with a sense of *deja vu*. After all, it's the second such rumor this year. And remember—it's only January.

Seems first thing this morning one of the troops saw our controller escorting a stranger in a three-piece suit from the lobby to her office. What's more, he was carrying a black briefcase. Ah ha! Probably an auditor for whatever big company is about to gobble us up.

And the plot thickens. Our controller, it's been reported, has been lugging accounting books back and forth from the GM's office!

"You think they'll switch format?" the gossip asks me.

"Who?"

"The new owner!"

Okay, so our station is state of the art. Art Linkletter. We still use carts—tape cartridges—for some of our commercials.

Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, carts are reliable. In fact,

a commercial that was supposed to play around 8 this morning would have, save for human error.

A jock and a news guy were playing Kurt Warner and Isaac Bruce in the hallway outside the on-air studio. A cart was being used as the imaginary football. The jock went long. The cart slipped through his hands, busted open after it bounced off the floor, the spool of tape unraveling in a big heap.

It was the first commercial coming up in the next break—T-minus three minutes and counting.

The panicked jock tried to do a quick repair job, but it was hopeless. The news guy felt terrible, although he had no way of knowing that the receiver-jock was Edward Scissorhands.

The commercial, worth about \$350 in revenue to the station, would be “discreped”—written on a discrepancy sheet as “cart would not play.” The traffic department, which logs all commercials, would have to give the client a make-good.

It would be the jock and news guy’s little secret.

The front desk was paging me. “Please pick up line one.”

Our night jock was calling me from a pay phone. There was a sense of urgency and embarrassment in her voice. She wouldn’t be coming in. She’d voluntarily gone to court, vowing to settle a warrant for her arrest. Something to do with an unpaid traffic ticket, she said.

All well and good, except that an unsympathetic judge was sending her to jail.

“Please don’t tell anyone,” she begged me. “I should be back in a couple of days.”

Our controller walked by my office. I called out to her. She poked her head in.

"So, who's our new owner?" I playfully asked.

"What?"

"C'mon, everyone's seen the bean counter in the three-piece suit. Who's he with? Clear Channel? CBS?"

She laughed.

The mysterious stranger was her brother from Wisconsin, who was staying with her for the week.

Another radio station rumor shot to hell.

Our latest board op is in trouble—and she just started training.

A talk show was well underway when the conversation somehow shifted to sex. The bra-less trainee lifted up her sweatshirt and flashed the host through the glass.

"You wouldn't believe what just happened to me," he said to his audience, leaving it to their imagination.

Someone—lucky me—would need to have a chat with the part-timer about our company's sexual harassment policy. Our corporate culture was no doubt very different from her full-time place of employment.

At a topless bar.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: Could you please explain something to me? A lot of publications use different designations for a station's format, and I would like to know if the nostalgia format could sometimes mean music from the big band era. When I look at the ratings listed in Radio Digest or in Billboard I never quite know if nostalgia means early rock music from the '70s, or "As Time Goes By."—Stan Hyde, Chicago

Dear Stan: Wish I could help, but I'm out of that demo.

I still have all my teeth and full control of my bladder.

Dear PD: What a great column! This is my first time reading it. I'd be interested in finding a way to get a ballpark figure for on-air talent salaries in San Diego. Obviously, the numbers will vary depending on the station and a dozen other things, but do you know of a source online—or somewhere—to at least get a median number?—Scott

Dear Scott: Your best bet is Radio and Records. They publish an annual salary survey based on formats and market size. However, I've heard that in San Diego, radio people are paid in sunshine.

Dear PD: Who picks the music at radio stations, and who plays it? Do the DJs still pick from a play-list, or do they just look at the list and pretend that they know what's going on?—Clarence Carter, Philadelphia

Dear Clarence: Hate to blow the illusion, but a Music Director on a computer generates daily play-lists. Depends on the station and the market size, but the music rotation is generally determined by callout research, auditorium testing, industry charts, and/or the consultant. Jocks who veer from the play-list risk getting fired.

Dear PD: Recently I landed a part-time air-shift at my local AC radio station . . . my dream come true! I'm a male in my mid 30s, employed full-time outside of radio but have a love and desire to work in the business on a part-time basis only. I know I'm not "morning man" material and quite frankly, my full-time salary can't be touched by radio, so I desire to work part-time and fill in as needed. I've "board op'd for almost three years prior to getting my shot so I know the technical side of radio very, very well. So I get hired to do Sunday afternoons from 3-7. After 4 months of being on time for my shift, running a tight board, filling in when asked, and always doing what I'm told, I get a call from my PD. He tells me he's not firing me, but needs to make a change.

He hired a “name” production director who had been fired at another station in town and hired him to do weekends. Not once did my PD EVER air-check me . . . yes, I offered tapes as I air-checked EVERY shift, so he got the tapes. Is this normal? I got the usual offer to “board op” a couple of shifts. I’ve done that for three years . . . not a difficult thing to do . . . I wanted the chance at an air-shift and he knew that. Should I take this as an I-got-my-chance-and-I-suck?” I still have a dream, drive and desire to work in radio, I know my limitations as an on-air talent, but how about some coaching and mentoring? Isn’t that part of a PD’s job? I mentor and coach people in my full-time job all the time. Why can’t a PD do it? Any suggestions? I love your column and read it weekly . . . great insight to the radio business.—Radio Dreamer

Dear Radio Dreamer: Remember, it’s show biz. What turns on one PD could turn off another. It’s subjective. Don’t take rejection personally. Hey, you got air time. You’re smart—you’ve got air-check tapes. Look for a weekend gig at another station. Could the PD have handled your situation differently? You bet. It’s a crime you didn’t get feedback on your performance, especially since you all but begged for air-check critiques. But don’t let one bad situation sour you on radio.

CHAPTER 42

The Importance of Being Ernest

Celebrities can be the worst radio interviews on the face of the planet.

I can't tell you how many TV, movie and rock stars have disappointed me in person. I've expected them to be "on." Instead, most have turned out to be boring, inarticulate, and guarded.

In other words, nothing like their on-screen or on-stage persona. They recite by rote what their publicists have told them to say. Throw an unusual or imaginative question at them, and they can't answer without a script or TelePrompTer in front of them.

But the late Jim Varney was the exception. I interviewed him twice during the late '80s when he came to town to promote his "Ernest" movies. He was gracious, playful, and always "on." It was amazing watching him and listening to him switch characters on and off. He'd go from Jim Varney, regular guy, with no trace of Southern accent, into the dim-witted, hayseed Ernest.

But the biggest kick of all was having him cut a custom answering machine message for me. "Would you mind?" I sheepishly asked after our first interview.

Varney's eyes lit up. He grabbed my microphone, told me to switch my Marantz tape machine back on, and, in Ernest's voice, ad-libbed a hilarious, 30-second phone message, pretending that he was house-sitting for me and screwing everything up. He was so tickled with his performance, he laughed and laughed when I played it back for him.

Tragically, Jim Varney died of lung cancer. He was only 50.

But he lives on in that phone message, which I've put back on my answering machine at home.

Speaking of celebrities, as long as they're calling in to your station or dropping by, put them to work for you.

When the scheduled interview is over, take 60 seconds and have the big star read a custom promo for your station. Even if it's something simple like, "Hi, this is (celebrity), and whenever I'm in (your town), I listen to (jock name, station calls/frequency)," the pre-recorded promos will sound huge.

If your listeners think a cool star likes your station, they'll think your station is cool.

Perception IS reality.

A young DJ takes issue with my critique of his air check. I'm on him about giving out our station's name and call letters more often. I've just singled out an example on his show where he did a two-minute break after a song, then went into a commercial stop set without once ever identifying our station.

"Listeners get tired of the repetition," he tells me. "I said the calls earlier in the hour."

I remember feeling the exact same way when I started out in radio. The PD must have had us saying the call letters 50 times an hour. Most of us on the air rebelled at first. We thought he was a nitwit. Until the boss shared with us at a meeting his findings from a visit to Arbitron headquarters (outside Baltimore, MD). He distributed to each of us a list of the various ways Arbitron diary keepers wrote down our station. There were people who got the calls letters or dial position wrong. How could they not know OUR station when they heard it?

Easy, I was to discover. My PD back then showed us a sample

blank diary form that Arbitron will gladly furnish to any subscribing station. Key word is BLANK. Nowhere on the diary is there a ballot of stations to check off. Diary keepers are expected to recall which stations they listen to, and write them down.

Which brings me back to the young DJ with the aversion to giving out call letters. I reached for the bottom drawer of my desk, pulled out my own blank copy of an Arbitron diary, and tossed it to him.

"Wow," he said, flipping through the pages. "I see what you mean. Our station isn't in here."

Precisely the problem. Therefore, I told him, if a diary keeper had tuned in to his show the other day, he might not know what station he was listening to. We'd get no credit in the ratings. Bad for our station. Bad for the DJ, who earns bonus money based on higher numbers.

"I'm gonna hammer those calls from now on," the DJ vowed. Class dismissed.

Nowhere in my job description does it say I'm required to drive one of our top rated morning personalities to a drug and alcohol treatment center. But I do.

This was a first in my career. I was mortified when the jock admitted the extent of his drinking problem to me.

"I've only been sober one day on the air in the last year," he confessed.

I dreaded the drive from his house to the rehab center; it seemed like an eternity. I didn't know what to say, so I thought back to all the TV shows and movies I'd seen about alcoholism. I tried to assure him everything would be okay—even though I had my doubts—and that his job would be waiting for him after he dried out.

I checked him in, then waited in the lobby and people-watched while he filled out all the paperwork. I came to one conclusion—

you can't tell if someone's an alcoholic. The patients, men and women, young and old, all looked, well, normal. I was expecting to see someone lying in his own pool of vomit. A nurse stopped by and made small talk. She was intrigued with my observation. "These are lawyers, ministers, school teachers, computer operators, and moms," she said. "Alcoholism doesn't discriminate."

A half-hour went by before my morning man reappeared. We took an elevator to the third floor, where he'd be escorted to his hospital room by one of the attendants.

It was as emotional a scene as I've ever experienced. The Morning Guy, usually full of bravado, confided to me that he was really scared. Tears welled up in his beet-red eyes. He thanked me for being there for him, for being a real friend, not just his boss. We hugged. I lost it and started blubbering.

"You'll be fine," I told him. "Give me a call when you're ready to go home."

That was a Friday. He called me at the station the following Monday with news that he was a free man. In his mind, he was cured. In reality, a weekend was all his insurance would cover.

"You know," he'd say on the drive back home, "I'm not sure I can be funny on the morning show anymore, sober."

He was right. His morning show was never the same.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: What does a deejay do to get on good terms with the boss? How much does a drive time New York D.J. make that is also a music coordinator?—Kelly, East Coast

Dear Kelly: How to get on good terms with the PD? Show up on time. Be reliable. Be positive. Take direction. Ask if you can do anything more to help. As for the second question, that's something you'll have to research. As I've suggested in this space before, Radio and Records magazine

runs an annual salary survey. It's an excellent source to check on salaries based on format, market size, and job title.

Dear PD: You mentioned in last week's column how some radio folks are bailing for the Internet. Actually, I got an 18-month computer engineering degree, and now I have serious job security and a good income that will get better as I continue taking courses. I love radio, and I always will. I miss it, but let's face it, it doesn't miss me. There will always be another naive youngster willing to jump in the meat grinder. After a half-dozen thousand-mile U-hauls, if he has any brains, he'll bail out, too. No more weekends, no more first-quarter health fairs, no more empty-headed morning show egomaniacs, no more "meetings" that instantly devolve into debates on the breast size of the midday chick, no more Celine Dion. And I still miss radio.—Jeff, San Francisco

Dear Jeff: Who in radio hasn't had days where you think, "Enough!?" But once it gets in your blood, it's hard to imagine getting a real job.

CHAPTER 43

Divorce, Radio Style

Who Wants to Marry Someone In Radio?

I don't have any stats or studies to back this up, but I'd venture a guess that the divorce rate in radio is among the highest of all professions, including a cop's.

What usually happens is that, by about the fifth or sixth U-Haul rental, the little woman says something like, "You don't need to load my stuff on the truck this time. You can go to—fill in the name of the city—without me."

A wise consultant—I know, it sounds like an oxymoron—told me years ago that what a woman wants most in life is security. Unfortunately, radio is all about insecurity, stress, and a sinister measuring stick called Arbitron ratings.

Employment, even with a contract, is a day-to-day proposition. You're always looking over your shoulder. What if the guy who hired you loses his job? There goes your protection. The station could be sold. You could have a bad ratings book. A consultant could talk the owner into a format change. Or, how about this one? The General Manager, told to cut costs, decides to replace you with someone who'll oversee your station and several others—for half of what you're being paid?

It happens.

What radio guy hasn't heard this?: "Don't bring your job home!"

Unless you've worked in radio, you have no idea of the insanity that goes on in the workplace. Unqualified people in the radio biz make illogical, uninformed, and often irrational decisions all the time.

I've seen major companies spend tens of thousands of dollars on research, only to have the station manager—usually someone from a sales background—disregard it because the findings didn't jibe with what he wanted to do.

I've even witnessed—and this is the honest-to-God truth—a change of format dictated by the General Manager's wife, who preferred a different musical genre than what we were playing.

Anyway, where was I?

Oh, my friend, Daniel, is divorcing his wife after six years of marriage, including four radio jobs in three cities. "She couldn't take it anymore," Daniel lamented to me over the phone. "She wants to settle down, raise a family, live in a house with a white picket fence. Plus, she was bugging me to quit smoking. This isn't the right time."

Goes back to what that wise consultant told me. What most women desire is a guy with a real job.

It was a warning sign I wasn't aware of.

The Morning Guy who I'd personally deposited, and retrieved, from a weekend at a rehab center, was, according to a reliable source, hitting grandma's cough syrup again.

"I can tell because he won't make eye contact with me anymore," the person told me. This was someone who had battled back from a severe alcoholism problem himself, and had sought out our personality, volunteering to help him at any time of the day or night. "He's avoiding me because of the guilt."

During his first two weeks back from his leave of absence, the Morning Guy went out of his way to let everyone know he was now clean and sober. He was working out. Eating right. Attending weekly AA meetings. Off the juice.

By the middle of the third week, he missed another morning show. It was particularly irksome, inasmuch as he didn't bother to call in until after 9.

Car problems. Again.

I made it clear to him that the next time his car wouldn't start, he would have to call a taxi or his partner on the morning show for a ride into work. I followed it up with a terse memo warning him that his next no-show would be his last.

Since alcoholism is considered a disability, you can't fire an employee for being a drunk.

My cell phone rang around 6 AM. It was the morning sidekick, telling me how sick and tired he was of having to cover for the morning man, who was AWOL. Again.

I tried calling the personality's house. No answer. A half-hour went by before the morning sidekick called me back. The Morning Guy had called him from a local hotel, babbling on and on about how his life was meaningless. "I tried to be nice, but I have a morning show to do," the sidekick told me apologetically. "He needs you."

Sure enough, there was a message on my voice mail at the station from the Morning Guy. He was crying. "This is the end. I really need to talk to you. Call me."

I called the hotel and asked to be put through to his room, but the phone just rang. I feared the worst. Not knowing what I'd find, I raced to the hotel, told the desk clerk I needed my employee's room number, and ran up three flights of stairs. My heart was pounding, not so much from stair climbing, but from my fear. I

envisioned busting into a room where he might be hanging from his belt.

I knocked on the door. Then banged on it. And banged on it some more. After several minutes, I started to head for the elevator, when I heard a door open. It was the florid-faced Morning Guy. His eyes were nearly swollen shut.

"Are you okay?" I asked, realizing it was a dumb question. An empty bottle of whiskey was on the floor next to his bed.

"I haven't slept since yesterday," he said. "My girlfriend is going back to her ex-husband. I have nothing to live for."

I reminded him that he had a well-paying job, high ratings, a delightful child from a previous marriage, and that there'd be other women in his life. In other words, he still had plenty to live for.

What he needed was sobering up. And someone to talk to. We walked across the street to a little restaurant, where I ordered him a cup of black coffee, some breakfast, then put on my shrink hat. He'd drive home after our chat, spend the weekend re-evaluating his life, and be back on the air the following Monday.

I hoped.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: When my college studies began to suffer due to the amount of time I was spending doing radio, my dad wisely told me that "radio was a bunch of people stabbing each other in the back for a seven thousand dollar a year job." I look back on that advice as the best I ever received. I read these horror stories about how the engineers are treated in the current state of radio and thank the Lord I got out of the field. Although I do one air shift a year at the old college station, I would not trade my cushy job with the government or my side consulting business to be climbing towers or doing proofs in the middle of the night.

My advice to people looking to be radio engineers in the current state of the profession would be this: Nice hobby, but don't quit your day job. If you think you might also be able to pull an air shift and play music, forget it. You play off a list, tight to the format. Play Susan Tedeschi? Forget it. I saw an ad for part-time weekend staff at a Boston station recently. Besides working over-nights, a requirement for previous commercial experience, and the willingness to work for next to no money, the ad said you must be willing to work closely to format. That is not what I knew radio to be. I am glad I knew it when it was good.—Engineer Man, Massachusetts

Dear Engineer: You pose an interesting question. When was radio the best? '60s, '70s, or '80s? Companies that now own all the stations in America would have you believe that deregulation and consolidation have made for better radio. I'd beg to differ. Bankers and Wall Street now run radio. Revenue is king. Sadly, programming is becoming something that simply fills time in-between interminable commercial stop sets.

Dear PD: Appreciated your kind words in last week's PD Chronicles about the late "Ernest," actor Jim Varney. I had similar experiences with him. In 25 years of interviewing "celebrities" for newspapers, TV news operations and radio, I can count on one hand the number of people who have written a thank-you note for my efforts—Kirk Douglas, Dick Clark . . . and Jim Varney. He may not have been the biggest "star," but he certainly was a supernova as a class act.—Bud Wilkinson, Sunday Showtunes, Phoenix, AZ

Dear Bud: I know what you mean!

Dear PD: I'd like to say two things. First, what you said about Jim Varney was probably the greatest thing someone could say about a celebrity after his passing. I had the opportunity to spend time with Tom Hanks some years ago, right after my wife and I were married, and he was definitely

the nicest celebrity I've ever met; actually ended up buying our wedding dishes. Second, my mom always asks me: "When are you gonna get a real job?" The only time she has ever really been impressed with my time in radio was when LA had its own all-traffic station and I was one of the first voices on it.—Mike Lynch

Dear Mike: Be nice to mom. You don't want her writing you out of the will. If you're like most radio people, it's the only fortune you'll ever get.

Dear PD: You ran a letter in last week's column from a guy who bailed from radio to get on the Internet. Well, I am one that was in computers and jumped to radio. After graduating from a large four-year college with my shiny new Computer Science degree, followed by two years of working in the computer industry, I can't think of a better job than radio. The people are friendlier and far more engaging than some stuffed-shirt, pencil-pushing, computer programmer. Never again will I be stuck in a two-hour meeting expounding upon the virtues of this software over that other one. I guess the grass is always greener.—Dave, Columbus, Ohio

Dear Dave: C'mon, you got into radio for the free T-shirts and CDs, didn't you?!

Dear PD: I love your column! Keep up the good work. What's your opinion of songs being speeded up by pitch control on the air? I'm sure you know that Denon CD players and others have a "pitch control" option, which allows the music to be played faster. The stations in the medium-sized market where I work do it, even the Hot AC.—Pitched Out Man

Dear Pitched: Big difference between our ears, and the average listener's. If the average listener can't tell that their favorite song is being speeded up, no harm done.

CHAPTER 44

Shaken But Not Stirred

It was a cloudy, dark, dismal day outside, and yet, curiously, Janine showed up for work wearing her sunglasses. Once inside the building, they still didn't come off.

We were in the kitchen, getting coffee, when I glanced over at Janine. She had a trim body, shoulder-length brown hair, and a sultry voice. Even with the shades on, I could see from the side that her right eye had been blackened.

Instantly, I knew what happened.

Unless I'd lost count, this would be at least the fourth time her new husband had given her a black eye. They'd met five months ago at a gas station after her night shift. He was the perfect gentleman, offering to help her when she had trouble at the self-service island. He boldly asked her for her phone number. They decided to marry after going out on two dates.

"You okay?" I asked, letting her know I was there for her to lean on if she needed me.

"Sure, I'm fine," she replied, really meaning it. She apologized for her husband, explaining that he really loved her, but had a bad temper. Then she quickly shifted the blame onto herself.

"I maxed out one of our credit cards and didn't tell him," she said softly, as if that gave the SOB the right to smack her around.

"Why don't you just leave him?"

"I love him," she said.

Beware of the General Manager who tells you he has an “open door” policy. It could lead you right out the door.

Case in point. Several weeks ago, a very talented and bright friend of mine, the jock and music director of another station in our cluster, decided to take up the GM on his invitation. He walked in, sat down, and proceeded to tell him all his on-the-job frustrations.

Well, a memo came out today from the GM, explaining that my friend has decided to “pursue other opportunities,” but how we all join in wishing him well “in his future endeavors.”

Translation? Don't let the door hit you in the ass on the way out.

“He—the GM—perceived me as being negative,” my friend explained to me when I contacted him at home. “I was just trying to make things better. He said if I wasn't happy, I should be working someplace else. He accused me of spreading bad vibes through the station.”

A great example of two people in the communications business failing to communicate. In hindsight, my friend should've put a positive spin on things and suggested ways to make things better at the station. As an old GM once told me, “Don't bring me problems; bring me solutions.”

By the way, the general manager's door is still open. Next?

A short, stout guy jumped out of his car and waved a pistol in the parking lot of our station last Saturday afternoon. The on-air studio faces the parking lot. And the glass isn't bullet proof.

But no need to call 911. It was just Janine's wacko husband, jealous because he'd heard her flirting with a caller over the air. In his mind, there was hanky panky going on.

Wisely, she refused to buzz him through the front door. When he called her studio hotline number on his cell phone, she told him to calm down, go home and wait for her.

He approached the on-air studio, peered through the glass, and saw that Janine was all alone.

Fortunately, he walked back to his car and drove off.

So the Morning Guy is replaying a portion of an interview he'd recorded a few years ago with the late Charles Schulz.

One of our station's sales guys stops in front of the door to my office, listens a few more seconds to the interview as it's coming out of a speaker in the hallway.

And then he asks me, in all seriousness, "Is that an old interview with the Peanuts guy?"

Duh.

Program Directors are usually buried under an avalanche of tapes and resumes. If you're a job seeker, you want your package to stand out, right?

I know a PD in LA who received a cooked turkey with tape and resume where the stuffing usually goes. Attached to the bird was a card that said, simply, "If you don't think I'm a turkey, call me . . ." The PD, impressed with the guy's creativity, called him up and offered him a job. Promotions director.

Creativity and imagination can also kill your chances of getting a job.

Another program director friend, looking to stand out from a crowd of applicants for a medium market opening, attached his resume to two live Maine lobsters, which he shipped to a prospective employer at great expense. It got the person's immediate attention, all right. She reportedly let out a scream from her office.

"We've got to get them back in water," she yelled. Turns out she was an animal rights activist and vegetarian.

The PD didn't get the job OR a thank-you note.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I loved your column last week on marriage and radio. It takes a special woman or man to be married to a radio person. I have moved across the country and will move again if I have to. I look at each move as an adventure and a chance to broaden my horizons. Women and men that are considering marrying someone in radio need to remember one thing . . . Radio is NOT a job, it's a lifestyle! Embrace the good with the bad and you'll be surprised at how much fun it can be if you let it!—Just A Radio Wife, currently in the Midwest

Dear Just A Radio Wife: Sounds like you have rich parents.

Dear PD: Love your Radio Digest column. That said, I must register my disagreement with the negative assessment of radio engineering as a career as contributed by a reader last week. I've been engineering radio since the '70s, doing part-time work in Chicago. I left the trade and for over 15 years worked for several 'reputable' and large employers such as phone and major computer companies. I want to point out that the Dilbert cartoons are done by a former phone company employee for a good reason. If you think where YOU work is screwed up and run by brain-damaged management, there's plenty of it to be had in the more traditional fields of technical employment.

If you think that there's lousy job security in radio, try working for a high-flying computer manufacturer where both hiring and layoffs make the papers for affecting thousands of individuals. It's just a crazy world out there. Granted, there are the few rotten broadcast companies to work for, but again, this is true in every field of endeavor. My advice? Leave them, go with a competitor who recognizes

technology is a crucial part of their present and future success, and do everything you can to kick the asses of those short-sighted fools across town. I give little credibility to those who blame the industry for their own failure to succeed. Radio engineering ain't a cushy job, it's damn tough, and it's not everyone's cup of tea, but it's a great profession to be in right now. Glad I'm back in.—Engineer John

Dear John: I still think radio beats working for a living.

Dear PD: I didn't get into radio till I was 40, I'm now 46. I have been a part-timer at one of the highest rated stations in my medium market and have done mornings full-time at a smaller station in the market. Our midday guy recently left and I have been filling in for over a month in his slot. I had approached the PD prior to this position being available and told him I wanted to be groomed so if and when a position came open I would be ready; he agreed. Since the opening came about I have made him aware that I want the slot. He has listened to my air-checks and has told me that I am doing great. However, he keeps posting the position online every couple weeks while not hinting one way or the other if I am a legitimate candidate. Needless to say it's driving me nuts. How should I approach him?—Wonder Boy

Dear Wonder Boy: Force the issue. You need to have a heart to heart talk with the PD. If he doesn't think you're right for the job, ask him how you can improve. It may be time to start looking for a full-time gig elsewhere if the company won't promote you from within.

CHAPTER 45

Neat Freaks of Nature

Spring cleaning, radio style.

"Please remove excess papers and tidy up your work areas. Make it look neat and clean."

It was a memo from the general manager, alerting us to an imminent visit by our elderly, curmudgeonly owner, who is always reminding us that we're using his furniture. "I paid for all this damn stuff," he'll say as he inspects offices and work cubicles when he's in town.

A sales account executive jokes that if we make it look too clean, he'll fire us. "He'll think we're not doing any work."

"He already thinks that," I laugh.

I show the AE how I do my cleaning. I grab all the stuff on top of my desk, wheel around in my chair, and deposit it into a filing cabinet. Done.

"Maybe he'll give you the Good Housekeeping seal of approval," the AE quips.

I'd settle for a simple pat on the back.

I'm still waiting to see the official rule book of commercial radio.

Something that outlines all the dos and donts. Because our general manager—the owner's son—swears there's a rule about how many songs you're supposed to play on morning radio.

First thing on a Saturday morning, the owner summons the

Morning Guy on our rock station and me to an informal breakfast meeting at a local omelet bar.

It was more like the Last Supper.

The general manager innocently asked the new jock how many songs he'd be playing an hour on his new morning show, but, when he didn't like the answer, got angry.

"Two or three an hour is not acceptable," he said. "I've been told by the top rock radio consultants that we should be playing a minimum of six per hour. I want you to promise me that's what you'll play."

The Morning Guy and I looked at each other in stunned silence. Then he spoke up.

"You hired me to do a personality-driven morning show," the jock said, his voice raising. "If you want more music in the morning, I'm the wrong guy."

I tried explaining that the music on the morning show was really just filler. It gave the jock time to pre-record phone calls and bits. We would win by doing personality-driven, in-your-face, shows.

"Let's compromise," the general manager said. "I want you both to promise me you'll play five songs an hour."

"Three," I chimed in.

"Four," the general manager shot back.

Sold.

We'd *try* to get in four songs an hour.

Once again, I'm amazed at what some people will do to win free stuff.

The talented Morning Guy on our rock station is doing an appearance at a sports bar in town. He has a pair of concert tickets to give away. It's a group everyone wants to see.

"Watch this," he says to a bunch of us from the station as he

gets up from our table, grabs a bullhorn, and heads for the front of the bar.

“You want a pair of tickets to the concert?” he teases the crowd, holding the tickets in the air with his left hand. “First woman to take off her bra and throw it to me, wins.”

The catch is, you have to remove your bra without taking off your shirt or blouse.

Not a problem for these, uh, ladies. All of fifteen seconds goes by before the first bra is flung at him. Then another, and another. Seven bras are hurled through the air.

“We’ve got a winner,” he yells.

God, I love radio.

The owner pops into my office. He has a smirk on his face.

I’m hoping to hear him congratulate me for how well our cluster of stations is doing. I should know better.

“These guys still don’t get it, do they?” he asks.

Before I can respond, he tells me he’s just come from the on-air studio of our rock station, and he’s very disturbed about the morning show.

“Your guy did a break that went on more than a minute, and he said nothing, I mean, nothing about the weather,” he barked, waving his right index finger at me.

This would be at least the fourth time since I’d joined the company that the owner would give me his speech about what makes great morning radio.

“Time and temperature,” he went on. “People want to know how they should dress when they get up.”

I wanted to crawl under my desk. I’m sure his lecture was well-intentioned, but the radio game had passed him by about 25 years ago.

“Here’s what to tell him,” he told me, waiting for me to grab a pen and piece of paper and write it down. “You tell him that the

songs are more important than he is. You tell him that if he can't express himself in one minute, we can get someone who can."

He didn't get it. We were really doing a talk show in the morning on our top rated rock station. We played, at the most, three songs an hour between 5 and 9 AM

"Tell him I'll automate the son-of-a-bitch!" he railed. "You young guys, you'll never get it."

He smirked, shook his head, and, without so much as even a goodbye, shuffled off, down the hallway.

One of the highlights, I mean, lowlights, of the owner's visit is watching him in action at our weekly department head meeting.

On this trip, he's been accompanied by the company lawyer, who keeps reminding him to be careful about what comes out of his mouth. He's Old School, from an era where it was acceptable to treat women as second class citizens by addressing them as "Baby," "Honey," and "Sweetie."

"What did I tell you?" the lawyer scolds him, after he wonders out loud in the meeting whether his son is gay because he still hasn't fathered any grandchildren for him.

Later, outside the office, when another manager brings up a personnel problem involving an African American promotions person, the owner stuns him with his solution.

"In my day, we'd take 'em out back and hang 'em," he said.

When I'm told of the comment, I ask the other manager to please keep that to himself.

I know that some day, this multi-gazillionaire will pay for sticking his foot in his mouth.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: Re: your column item about sexual harassment class at the radio station. My buddy and I got onto the elevator at the ground floor, en route to our studios on the third. Also aboard came two young ladies from the FM station, who were on their way to their offices on the second floor. As the elevator stopped at two and the door opened, my friend did his best old-time elevator operator impression: "Second floor . . . small appliances, childrens' shoes, ladies' unmentionables, and carpeting. Watch your step, thank you. Going up." Next morning, we were called on the carpet by the GM and a snaky representative of the legal department. Seems the lovely lasses took mortal offense at the mention of "ladies' unmentionables," and filed an official complaint with our owner. Scum, ain't we?!—Anonymous, Nashville, TN

Dear Anonymous: Yes, you are. You guys better take down that pinup picture by your desk of Britney Spears!

Dear PD: A bunch of us have had a debate about our favorite talk show host. My friend says that he "invents" letters that he uses on his show. I say that any popular host gets hundreds of letters and e-mails every day. Therefore, with the 10% wacko rule, he should get 10 wacko letters a day.—JLP

Dear JLP: Wacko percentages vary, depending on geographical location of radio station.

CHAPTER 46

Up In Smoke

At the time, it seemed like a brilliant idea, if I do say so myself.

My morning jock, news personality and I would be out of town for a couple of days, so I decided to get a flamboyant, outspoken city council member to read the news. I figured a guest celebrity would hold listeners and get us some media coverage. Besides, I couldn't find anyone else to fill-in.

On the first morning of his fill-in duty, I phoned in to find out how the councilman had done. The show's producer, who'd prepared the newscasts, didn't sugarcoat things.

"He sucked," she said. "It was like listening to the before part of a learn-to-read commercial."

I couldn't believe it. The councilman had always been passionate, articulate and entertaining before his fellow members of the city council. The media loved him because he spouted seemingly endless streams of great quotes.

But he was no news guy.

"He couldn't get through the copy," the producer explained, "because he can't read."

What I thought would be great radio turned out to be a dud.

We had to let Janine, the night girl, go. Chronic absenteeism.

It was one thing that her husband beat the tar out of her every so often. She wore sunglasses to work to conceal the shiners. But next,

her evil, manipulative husband had turned her onto amphetamines. Once ambitious and lively, she was a shell of her former self, missing two, sometimes even three days of work each week.

At her exit interview, the general manager encouraged Janine to seek help for the "issues" in her life. Afterwards, she gathered her belongings from a locker in the station's break room, then made a hasty exit.

I saw her unlocking her car in the parking lot, and rushed out to say goodbye. Clearly, she was in no mood to talk. "I'll be okay," she sniffed, tears running down her cheeks. "I'll call you."

A week went by when I realized Janine hadn't called me. I tried dialing up her number but only got a phone company recording, announcing that the number was no longer in service.

God only knows where, or how, she is

Black smoke billowed from underneath the hood of a parked car on the street in front of the radio station.

"Erika's car is on fire," announced one of the morning show interns to a bunch of us who'd just walked in the door.

Just then, we could hear the siren of an approaching fire truck. We hurried over to a window that faced the street. Sure enough, our receptionist's used car, which she'd purchased the day before, was ablaze.

Fortunately, Erika was okay. Her car could be replaced, I told her; she couldn't. But it was of little consolation to her.

"How will I pick up my kids after school?" she cried. "I don't have money to buy another car."

When the tow truck driver arrived, he just shook his head. "We might be able to salvage some parts," he said, "but it'll be cheaper for you to buy another car than to fix this one."

Erika had driven all the way to work, ignoring the oil can icon on her car's instrument panel that was lit up red.

She'd fried the engine.

Our talented ex-Morning Guy with the drinking problem used me as a job reference. Wish he'd warned me. Just two weeks on the beach, and already he was up for a gig at a local traffic reporting service.

The program manager called me for a background check.

Tell you what, I still think the world of the DJ. I feel sorry for him. If he ever conquers the demons in the bottle, he could be a big star. But I couldn't tell that to the would-be employer. Corporate policy at my station prohibits us from disclosing any information about ex-employees, other than start and end dates with our company.

In this instance, it was a good thing.

I love our general manager, I really do, but sometimes I have to bite the inside of my cheeks to keep from laughing.

This morning, he strolls into my office, and dead serious asks, "Do we really need the Associated Press wire service? Can't the news people on our news/talk station just get their stories out of the newspaper?"

Sure, I think to myself. The President gets shot. We won't know about it until it hits the papers tomorrow morning. No big deal.

Of course, I fought my first impulse, which was to blurt out how stupid I thought he was. Instead, I patiently explained the value of the wire service. No news is bad news. I think he got it.

But then he asked me if we still needed the morning papers.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: Your column rocks, but how much of this stuff really happens at your station?

If you ever make it to Las Vegas, please come to the Top Of The Stratosphere Tower. I do a syndicated radio show for Clear Channel in Sin City and would very much like to meet you . . . because I need a ride to rehab, too, and my boss only gave me bus fare.—The Knox That Rocks

Dear Knox: Could I make this stuff up? Yes, it's all happened at my station. Or stations. Oh, and don't tell me. You used the bus fare to buy CDs. You really do have a problem.

Dear PD: I really enjoyed last week's column. How much does a full time, drive time, New York DJ—who is also the music coordinator—make?—Raquel

Dear Raquel: Lots.

Dear PD: I was bitten by the radio bug way back in grade school and it's never let go of me. In high school, I landed a job at an AOR—album oriented rock—station just starting up, so I was able to get on the air for the first time on a commercial station at the tender young age of 17 even though the station was in a small market. While in college, I interned in the promotions department at a small alternative station in Boston to keep myself near radio while still getting experience in preparation to leave the field for the more stable profession of public relations. Now I've found my thoughts invariably turn back to radio when I think about how I'd most want to be spending my hours. How can I break back in? I'd be willing to work weekends, holidays, etc., but I lost my air-check tape when I moved two years ago and my resume is lacking. I talk the talk, know the business, but I haven't been behind a microphone in

three or four years. Any suggestions on how I can get myself noticed by someone who could grant me my wish to be back on the air, even as a part-timer?—Radio Fanatic in Boston

Dear Radio Fanatic: You must have a friend who can get you free studio time. Otherwise, beg someone for production time. Go in and cut an audition tape. Then, start sending out tapes and resumes.

Dear PD: My non-profit organization has a daily talk show and I find it very interesting to read your “inside” perspective on radio life. Last week’s column caught my attention with your description of a station employee, Janine, and her abusive husband. I’ve been working in domestic violence for several years. If her husband is coming to work and waving a gun, it’s imperative that you talk with your local domestic violence agency ASAP. Workplace violence is deadly. She seems to have handled the situation well, but most likely he will continue to show up until she is either fired or quits. Then she’ll be out of touch with an entire lifeline, including you.

You can’t make her get help or make her leave him, but you can get good information. I’m sure the community education specialist with the local domestic violence agency can give you information on workplace violence and advice on how you, as her supervisor, can best help her. Please don’t wait a day or a week to do this. This is her life on the line. I’ve discerned over the months that you are really invested in your employees as evidenced by your description of a morning jock’s struggle with alcoholism. Good luck. Please let me know if you need information or referrals.—Sue Kerr, Turtle Creek, Pennsylvania

Dear Sue: Sadly, Janine has moved on. I’ve found that sometimes, a person has to hit rock bottom before they can pull themselves back up.

CHAPTER 4/

The Naked and the Dead Air

Breaking up is hard to do . . .

There are four stages to most radio jobs. Stage One: The courtship process. Stage Two: The honeymoon. Stage Three: The honeymoon is over. Stage Four: Separation or divorce.

The last stage is a bitch. You could be well liked at your station, highly regarded within your company and the industry, even PD of the year. But God forbid you should get the upper hand on an employer by giving two weeks' notice.

What is it about saying the words, "I quit," that turns so many GMs and owners against their employees? Is it that they are selfishly worried a resignation will reflect poorly on them, the station or the company? You explain that you're leaving for a bigger and better job, and yet the GM will ask, "Why are you *really* leaving?" You hope for a handshake or an 'attaboy.' Instead, you often get the cold treatment from fellow employees (especially the vultures who circle the GM's office for your job). You're now perceived as a quitter, a traitor, a malcontent, and, possibly, a loser.

Do you know I once worked for a GM who asserted that, because I was quitting, I didn't deserve to collect on any of the bonuses I'd hit during my last book with his cluster of stations? We were talking \$10,000.

"I'm just not going to pay you," he said.

"Who do you think worked his ass off to get you those numbers, Santa Claus?" I angrily responded. "It's because of bullshit like this that I'm leaving." (I regret I lost my cool).

The GM ultimately relented, but probably only because I had the incentive agreement in writing, in my contract.

Still another embittered GM told me once that I was making a horrible mistake leaving his station. "You and that new station will go down in flames," he dourly predicted. (What ever happened to "Wish you well, good luck?"). Nine months later, I was having a blast on a station that quickly jumped from worst to near first. The GM, whose attitude was "Don't let the door hit you in the ass on the way out," was fired as his station went down in flames.

Where am I going with this? If they let you stick out your two weeks' notice, be professional, even if those around you aren't. Resist the temptation to make snide remarks about the station you're leaving—or about management. Do your best to leave on good terms. If possible, prepare a transition document to make life easier for your successor or the interim PD.

Go out with class and dignity. That'll show 'em.

Dead air on one of our syndicated shows, and all because Janice, the board op, thinks silence is golden.

"That Janice," said our engineer, who just happened to be sitting in my office when the pregnant pause captured our attention. "You know, she came here from the public radio station."

"So?" I reply.

"They think over there that the gaps in their programming get people to listen more closely," the engineer related.

Nonsense, I think. But after her shift, Janice confirms what the engineer told me. "A little dead air gets their attention," she declared.

I go into my "We're not NPR" spiel and try to impress upon her that I want "tight" board work with no dead air. "You shouldn't be able to run a credit card through the various elements," I tell her.

She nods, but anger is clearly etched upon her face. "I'll try to do better next time," she says softly before exiting my office

I'm not convinced.

I'm enjoying a laid-back Saturday afternoon away from the radio station, sipping a margarita, partaking in some fine Mexican food, when my blissful state is jarred back to radio reality.

Beep-beep-beep, beep-beep-beep.

I look at the digital display on my beeper.

"Dammit!"

"What's the matter?" one of my friends asks.

"It's work."

Seems the promotion director for one of our stations neglected to bring out a banner or T-shirts to a remote broadcast site. In fact, she forgot to show up at all. I agree to stop by the station, pick up the stuff, and take it out to the car dealership. Simply because there's no one else to do it. And I care.

"Be back later," I tell my friends. I reach for my wallet, pull out a few bucks and toss them onto the table as my share of the bill.

"Enjoy my nachos."

Big problem overnight Monday.

A note from the newsperson informs me that the board operator neglected to cover some of the commercials on the syndicated show we run from LA, 2-5 AM. As a result, that LA station's promos for the Howard Stern show played on our station.

Nice, eh?

Since a competing station in our city runs Howard, it's not something we want to call attention to, if you know what I mean.

I find out from one of our engineering crew that the overnight board op is, well, "slow." "He suffered a lawn dart injury as a kid," the engineering assistant informs me. "Lawn darts were outlawed because of his accident."

I don't know whether to laugh out loud or cry.

"I'll talk to him about covering the commercial breaks overnight," the engineering assistant promises me.

I can't believe my ears. Well, yes I can.

I've learned to expect the unexpected in radio, where anything is possible.

I'm hearing totally unrecognizable bumper music on our news/talk station's midday show.

The talk host asks the board op to name the tune. "It's Kevin Mackey, a local boy who has a band playing here in town," she responds on air.

"We like to showcase new music on our show," the talk host goes on. "If you have a tape or CD of your band, send it in."

Janice the board op strikes again. I find out that she's convinced the host that playing new music is a good thing. I summon her to my office after the show.

"What are you doing?" I inquire of her.

"We played new music on the public radio station," she explained, "and it worked real well. Plus, if Simon plays someone's music and they become a star, we can say that you heard it first on our station."

I resist my first impulse, which is to scream at her. Instead, I gently tell her that I don't want unfamiliar music on the station. I don't want to break new acts on our airwaves. I want a talk show that gets ratings! And I tell her that she is to play only the familiar, hit bumper music that's already in our computer system.

"Okay, if that's what you want," she says.

"That's what I want," I softly respond. "And no more surprises."

At least there was no dead air on today's show.

Help wanted. Emphasis on the HELP!

All stations are desperate for board ops. It's a thankless, low paying, entry-level job. Most of us are willing to take anyone, just as long as they have a pulse.

But there are exceptions.

One of our veteran sales account execs runs into me in the hallway. "Did you see that guy they're showing around the station?" he asks.

"Yeah, so what?" I respond.

"You guys aren't thinking of hiring him, are ya?"

The story goes that the prospective board op had worked at the station four or five years ago. He was infamous for sneaking onto the air and doing live commercial reads and liners during breaks, while the air talent was in the bathroom, oblivious to what was going on.

"He thought the production director would hear him and let him start voicing spots on the station," the sales guy said.

Instead, it cost him his job.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: As part of my ever continuing job search I decided, at the urging of many industry friends, to attend the Radio and Records convention in June. Having never attended before, what is my best strategy for getting the most out of the experience and making the biggest impact for me?—Rawk Dawg

Dear Dawg: Three approaches, really. If you're the shy, modest type, crank out a butt load of tapes and resumes and hand them out to every group owner, consultant and PD you see at the convention. If you crave attention, make up a

sandwich board (“Will Work For Radio Gig”), walk around, and hand out your tapes and resumes. The other strategy is to attend the seminars and go up to the PDs afterwards, introduce yourself, and slip them your T&R.

Dear PD: Is a jock in for a raise when he gets promoted to music director? How much does this Mr. Prince Charming with the strong voice make now? Does he make \$300,000 if he works in New York? If he’s charming on the radio that counts for a lot, and so the program director decides to give him a big fat 40% raise. Right?—Sour Grapes, NYC

Dear Sour Grapes: Have you sought anger management counseling? Sounds like you may have been passed over for the job. Let it go. If you’re unhappy or feel you have no hope of advancing at your station, teach them a lesson. Get a job at another station.

Dear PD: Up here in New England, we were without Twinkies for over a week due to a Teamster strike. It actually started to make national headlines. Our brand new Morning Guy—he had not yet hit the air, I was still doing the show—called a buddy in Indiana and had him overnight us 8 boxes. We hit the street Friday morning, which was Morning Guy’s debut, and gave out a bunch. Made the paper, front page, lead article, and our GM was blown away. Only one negative response—the only Teamster supporter that showed up called me an ‘effing scab’ while I was broadcasting live. Thank God he was 20+ feet away and it didn’t get over the air. I have nothing against unions, and was not trying to undermine anyone’s livelihood, but damn it, we need our Yellow Dye #5!!! A simple stunt, it paid off HUGE in publicity!! Wait ‘til they see what happens THIS week with the price of gas!!—Ethyl, Boston, Mass.

Dear Ethyl: Can I hire you as my promotions director? Some of the best promotional opportunities are tied to topical news events. You just need to think!

CHAPTER 48

Almond Killjoy

One great thing about being in radio: all the cool opportunities it affords you to be Walter Mitty.

What other line of work gets you invited to ride in a hot air balloon, take laps in an Indy-style race car, sit in the passenger seat of an Air Force fighter jet, golf with pro athletes, or take in the breathtaking sights of your city from the vantage point of the Goodyear blimp?

But Houston, we've got a problem.

Our by-the-book controller has memo'd us, saying that from now on corporate policy forbids us from engaging in "hazardous activities."

What a killjoy. When pressed, she insists it's really an issue with the station's insurance carrier. But she tells me in no uncertain terms that positively no one can soar in a hot air balloon again unless it's cleared through her. "And it ain't gonna be cleared," she admits.

Whatever. I'm determined that our Donkey Basketball game will go on, as scheduled, tonight.

I mean, how could such an event be hazardous to anyone but the jackasses?

My General Manager continues to amaze and amuse.

He strolls into my office and tells me he's close to signing a

deal with a rival of the Associated Press news wire service. For our rock station. All we have to do is run their inventory, meaning a butt load of 30-second commercials.

“What?” I ask incredulously. “Why?”

He tells me the service is willing to compensate us to the tune of \$75,000 a year, and “that’ll help with our bottom line.”

I’d like to push him out a window, but common sense gets the better of me. So I try reasoning. Have you ever tried reasoning with a sales person? That’s what most of these GMs are.

“Number one,” I argue, “we don’t need another information service. Number two, the service you’re talking about is targeted to older adults. We’re a rock station. Number three, where are you gonna put the extra commercials? We’re already full?”

He shrugs his shoulders. Asks me to think about it.

“We need to explore new ways to generate revenue,” he lectures me. “We have to stop dismissing things just because they aren’t the way we used to do things in radio.” I nod my head. He leaves my office.

I later joke to a co-worker that I picked the wrong week to stop sniffing glue.

I’ve worked for some real A-holes in radio. But tonight, I’m working with jackasses. Literally.

A bunch of us from the station have agreed to take on teachers and student body leaders at the local high school gym in a game of Donkey Basketball. Proceeds from the event will fund the purchase of new instruments for the school’s marching band.

Donkeys have a mind of their own. Thus the phrase, “stubborn jackass.” The ass I’m on is in no mood for basketball. A teammate throws me the ball. I yell at the donkey to “Go!” It stands there motionless. I dig my heels into its sides. He—I think it’s a he—finally travels all of three feet before stopping just before the half-court line. The crowd is cheering.

And then I learn another important lesson about these curious beasts. When they don't want to do something, or they're unhappy carrying you on their back, they will suddenly, without warning, simply collapse on you, spilling you over the top of their head onto the hardwood floor.

And just like that, my ass made an ass of me. I hit the floor hard, feeling fortunate that I didn't break an arm or leg. Laughter erupts from the stands. Miraculously, I'm still holding onto the ball, which I toss to a fellow player before attempting to get back on my donkey.

Later, when I come out of the game, the donkey handler smiles at me and says, "Now you know why we make all the riders wear a batting helmet."

Luckily, our controller never made it to the game.

Or it would definitely be our first and last donkey basketball game.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: Why is a "night slammer" called a "night slammer"?—M.W., St. Paul, Minn.

Dear M.W.: Just a cute little handle for the night person who is slamming the hit songs, one after another. That, or the person has a terrible drinking problem. In radio, it could be both.

Dear PD: Hang out with your friends in the record business?! Lose your inhibitions . . . your reputation . . . your wife . . . your car keys . . . all memory of having been there? Been there, done that, got the T-shirt, saw the reunion tour!—Gowa

Dear Gowa: Last week's column about radio conventions

obviously evoked old memories for you. Thanks for sharing. Surprised you remember any of it at all!

Dear PD: Since you seem to be on the prowl for board operators who can do it right, I can run one tighter than _____ (fill in the blank). I am looking to get back in a building and “play” radio from the fringes again. Since I already have a good paying full-time job, I am only looking for part time and weekend work. Any suggestions for my area?—J.F., Flower Mound, TX

Dear J.F.: What am I, an employment agency? You're just outside Dallas. There should be lots of part-time and weekend opportunities for board work. Start by calling the PDs at the news and talk stations KRLD, WBAP, KLIF, then hit the music stations.

CHAPTER 49

Getting It

Our resident station gossip insists that the female half of the morning show on our rocker “will quit if she doesn’t get more money.”

And didn’t Lanny march into the General Manager’s office with her demand—a \$12,000 pay raise, or else she’d be walking across the street and get it from a fledgling competitor.

“I need an answer by the end of tomorrow’s morning show,” she calmly told the GM.

But she badly underestimated his resolve, and overestimated her own value. Truthfully, she was the weak link on a morning show that under-performed the rest of the station.

It was high noon. Draw!

“I wish you well,” the GM told the stunned air talent. And before she had a chance to catch her breath and give notice, the stone faced GM gunned her down verbally, informing her that she’d done her last show on our station.

“Good luck,” were his icy last words to her.

“You’ll regret this,” she told him as she got up from her chair. “You’re the one who’ll have to deal with the hundreds of calls that come in when I’m gone tomorrow.”

Later, while packing her stuff, the four-year station vet would tell her friends and co-workers at the station what an insult it was that the GM hadn’t even bothered to match what the other rocker was offering her.

Let it be a lesson to all on-air talent. You’re only as good as

your last ratings book. If you don't have the numbers, keep your mouth shut. Be thankful you have a job. You have to make it so that you're indispensable to your station and ownership. And the only way to do that is to get great ratings. That's the way the game is played.

Lanny was fortunate. She had another job offer. She might succeed on the other station. Then again, radio history indicates she might not.

There is no guarantee listeners will follow you anywhere you go.

DJs and women. An often combustible mix.

There's an urgent call from the manager of a local hotel. One of our jocks has just angrily confronted his ex-girlfriend in the reception area of the hotel where she works, tossing some of her personal belongings—including bras and panties—on the front desk. He allegedly cursed up a storm in front of hotel patrons on his way out.

"I'm going to call the police on him," the hotel manager said.

I apologized for the incident, convinced her that police involvement could be bad publicity for both of us, then assured her I'd take appropriate action when the jock returned to the station.

"Okay," she said, "but if he returns to the hotel property, we'll have him arrested."

It didn't take long for Allan, the remaining half of the morning team on our rock station, to track me down.

"I can do the show by myself," he said confidently in my office. "At least give me a try."

Frankly, I felt all along he was more talented than the woman

he'd been paired with. It couldn't hurt to try him solo. I'd ask him to go on with the show without referring on-air to his partner's demise. That's just the way it's handled in radio. Here today, gone tomorrow. Without a trace.

"I think I should get a raise, too, since I'll be doing all the work now," he added. In fact, he knew exactly how much his partner had been earning. And he asked for it.

"Let's see how it goes first," I countered. "I'll give you a shot. We'll re-evaluate things in another couple of weeks. Fair enough?"

"Fine," he said.

But my gut told me it wouldn't work out.

A co-worker alerted me that Eddie was in the building. The demonstrative one.

The deejay was in his cubicle, taking down pictures of his stunning ex-girlfriend, the one he'd angrily confronted about a half-hour earlier at the hotel where she worked. He ripped the photos in half and tossed them into a waste basket.

The first thing I noticed about him was his breath. He'd been drinking. I coaxed him down the hallway to my office, where I shut the door.

"Eddie," I began, "do you realize how close you are to wrecking your career over a woman?" It hit me that I'd used this line probably three other times since I'd been at the station. .

He explained that the girlfriend had decided to move back with her ex-husband. It was purely for financial reasons, not love, she'd told him. But that was of little consolation to Eddie, who now felt suicidal.

I told him the usual things guys say to each other when they're awkwardly attempting to show their sensitive side. I told him that she'd probably come running back to him in a couple of days. Then, when it occurred to me that I might be wrong, I assured him that if she didn't get back with him, it was just as well. After

all, who needs a dingy broad in his life? There were plenty of other women out there he could hook up with on the request line or at a station remote.

What worried me was that our GM was in the building. He was the last person I wanted meddling in Eddie's life. Besides, if he smelled his breath, he'd probably have me fire Eddie on the spot.

"Go home," I counseled him. "Call me tonight and we'll talk. It's not the end of the world."

I silently prayed he'd be back the next day to resume his highly rated morning show.

Turns out there IS life after Lanny.

Her partner went on without her this morning. After the show, the front desk received a whopping three calls from listeners inquiring about the missing DJ's whereabouts. The public backlash was certainly nothing like Lanny had predicted.

However, I knew after listening to Allan fly solo for four hours that, while he was a good sidekick and competent DJ, he wasn't yet Morning Man material. I'd use him as the glue to keep the morning show together while I searched quickly for a new host. I'd ask Allan to stay on as sidekick and news person.

What I didn't realize at the time is that I was about to get a lesson in bad chemistry.

Research. It ain't cheap.

We've decided to spend tens of thousands of dollars to test the music on our rock station. At some stations, the Music Director is responsible for producing the song hook tapes—usually five-second snippets of each tune you want to test before a select group of 100 or so people in a hotel ballroom. Most MDs dread the job. It's a

time consuming effort, especially when you're testing hundreds of songs.

Fortunately, my GM has budgeted enough money so that we can commission a production company to produce the hook tapes for us. We get them back next week in time for the research project, which will take place on a Thursday night at a local hotel.

Just my luck. It's the hotel where Eddie made a scene.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: How do the morning news anchors on big AM radio stations get their news stories? What does it take to do a morning show? Perform the morning show as dictated by the morning show producer with the rest of the team?—Kelly, New York

Dear Kelly: Depends on the station, but in most cases the news is culled from a variety of sources—Associated Press, the local news papers, and a network affiliate like ABC or CBS—and is re-written by the anchors and their staffers. It takes a great producer surrounded by a great team of anchors, writers, and reporters to put on a winning morning show.

Dear PD: Read in your column you've been having problems with your Promotions Director. Is there an opening available?—Zen

Dear Zen: What, don't you have enough free T-shirts and CDs already?

Dear PD: If you could work at any station, which one would it be?—Sandy Marks, Myrtle Beach

Dear Sandy: A start-up. I think it's more fun to go from worst to first than it is worrying about trying to keep a number one station at the top.

CHAPTER 50

The Good, the Bad, the Ugly

Shhh. Not all radio consultants are bad.

There ARE good ones. Like the venerable genius who visits our broadcasting complex three times a year, and is my favorite of the three—yes, three—consultants on our payroll. He's a personal friend of our owner. Some would suggest that makes him the enemy, a person we should distrust.

In fact, he once admitted to me, he gets paid the big bucks to find out everything going on with the stations in our group—the good, the bad, the ugly—and report back the unvarnished truth.

Now, you'd think that would make a PD like me nervous. Hardly. See, I know he's on my side; he'll defend me even if I screw up, as long he knows I'm working my ass off. Maybe we hit it off so well because I didn't cop an anti-consultant, who-needs-you? attitude. Instead, I embraced him as a teacher and mentor.

At our first meeting, at a small sandwich shop near the station, he dazzled me with his common sense approach to the business. I still have the worn, wrinkled, folded-up napkin I used to jot down his programming stratagems. Fact is, he's always been gracious about sharing the "secrets" that made him a successful major market PD.

And I know that he is rooting for me to succeed. If I do well, he looks good. It's win-win.

"You make two piles on your desk," he advised me early on. "One pile is all the stuff that has to do with the station's ratings. The other pile is stuff that doesn't have to do with ratings. You put

that pile in a drawer somewhere. Or get someone else to do it for you. Only the stuff that has to do with ratings matters.”

He’s also endeared himself to me because he prefers conducting all our business at a bar over a glass or three of an expensive Merlot, which he writes off on the expense account our owner gives him.

But to the air-staff, no matter how I try to sell them on him, he is still “the consultant.”

Prior experience at other stations has taught them to believe that all consultants are Satan.

I’m just hopeful the jocks and talk show hosts I’ve arranged to meet one-on-one with “the consultant” on his visit later this week will be on their best behavior.

One of our talk show hosts told me he was doing a show about Scientology. I thanked him for not surprising me with it on the air.

“They like to sue,” he volunteered.

“Don’t give them a reason,” I cautioned.

That was yesterday. Now a group of four local Scientologists was faxing us and calling, demanding a meeting with my GM and me to discuss “the offensive, one-sided program attacking Scientology that aired on your radio station.”

“Hey, it means we have at least four listeners to the show,” I chided the GM.

This was not my definition of fun. But, at the insistence of my boss, I’d get to spend a portion of my morning with the complainers. I could have handled things with a phone call or responded with a letter, but the GM, thinking lawsuit, invited them to come by. .

The four women representing Scientology seemed pleasant enough as I squired them from our lobby to our conference room. They indicated they were regular listeners to several of the stations in our cluster, not just our news/talk signal.

And then the small talk ended abruptly.

One of the women, who wore a long-sleeved cotton shirt, had close-cropped black hair, and a little black stubble above her upper lip, did most of the speaking as her cohorts nodded their heads in agreement.

"You can't have someone like your talk show host go on the radio and say anything they want to about Scientology," the she-man barreled forth. "When Sally here called in to set her straight, she cut her off."

"That's right," said Sally, conveniently sitting right next to her. "It was rude!"

At that point the GM and I looked knowingly at each other. Time for one of us to make the old "News vs. Talk Show" speech. I waited a couple of beats, and when he didn't speak up, I did.

I concluded my oratory by telling the ladies that our talk show host, while opinionated, sprinkled in factual information about the subject to support her opposition to the Church of Scientology. What's more, I said, when the host finished interviewing his guest—a former Scientologist who'd turned against the group with a published book—he opened up the phones.

End of discussion. Or so I thought.

That's when the manly looking Scientologist (who could have used electrolysis!) argued that the host had cut off Sally because "he didn't want to hear her side of things."

Well, not coincidentally, before the meeting I'd gone back and listened to an air-check of the show. I had timed Sally's call. She was cut off, all right, when she repeatedly refused to answer the host's question about reaching a certain level of Scientology that supposedly enables the participant to walk on water.

"Can you walk on water?" the host demanded to know, repeating the question four times.

Impatient, the host finally dumped Sally after she'd gobbled up nearly seven minutes of on-air time, an eternity for someone calling in to a radio station. When I pointed that out to my inquisitors, they just looked at me in silence.

Score another one for the PD! Still, they wouldn't let it go.

“We have a tape of the show, too,” the spokes-Scientologist offered, and we have some problems with other parts of the program.”

“Like what?” I asked, animosity obvious from my tone of voice.

Well, they admitted, they weren’t quite sure. It had been a lively three-hour show covering lots of ground.

That’s when a rare, brilliant thought struck me. I invited the women to go home, type a transcript of the entire three-hour show, highlight the parts that bothered them, and we’d respond in kind.

It’s been almost a month since that meeting and we haven’t heard back from them.

I guess they must be slow typists.

Allan, the remaining half of the morning team on my rock station, comes to see me a little after 9 AM.

He has a priority list of things—okay, demands—for “my new show.” He wants to call it “The Allan Zabel Show.” He wants a board op. He must absolutely have a sidekick. Oh, and I’ll need to find him a morning show producer. How soon can I run an ad in the industry trades? he wonders.

And that’s when I break the news to him that I’ve hired a replacement for his former partner, who split for a start-up station across the street. The new guy I’m bringing in will be the lead pony. I explain to Allan that he’s done a good job carrying on in his partner’s absence, but that his strength is as a sidekick and newsperson. I try to convince him that this is the best thing for his career, that he will be on the new number one morning show in the market. It will open up all sorts of new opportunities for him. This is wonderful . . .

But I could tell from his grim countenance that a new partner wasn’t in Allan’s plans.

“You said it was my show,” he responded. “If I wasn’t doing a good job, why didn’t you tell me?”

It's never easy telling talent they aren't as good as they think they are. But I tried to put a positive spin on things, insisting that he'd learn enough from the talented and experienced new host to do mornings on his own some day. This just wasn't the right time or place.

He reluctantly agreed to go back to his second banana role on Monday.

I'd later wish he'd quit.

So we're sitting at a table in the conference room, the consultant I revere, our news director, a really dynamic, compelling talk show host, and me.

This is a talk show host who has made it clear that she wants nothing to do with "the consultant," because all consultants are "full of crap and, if they were really any good, they'd actually be working at a radio station." (Well, okay, she did have a point).

Nevertheless, the consultant, not shy with his opinions, begins critiquing the talk show host, noting that he didn't think she sounded "passionate" about her topic the other day.

Knowing that the talk show host would rather undergo a colonoscopy, I'm just hopeful she'll listen to "the consultant" and we can get through this meeting without incident.

That's when "the consultant" asks the talk show host what she's most passionate about in life.

I like to fuck," she asserted.

Now he was getting somewhere.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: In your answer to Kelly in New York, you mentioned various ways morning news anchors put together

the news on big AM stations. Many of them actually make “beat” calls to police, fire, rescue and other agencies. It’s called “doing your homework.” Some AM stations actually have reporters who put advancer packages in the can for morning use. Granted, much morning news is from the wires, the papers and the nets, but good local news comes from doing homework—and legwork. Love your column!—P.K.

Dear P.K.: Sounds like you were, or are, one of those hard-working news hounds. Thanks for the insight!

Dear PD: Please tell me how good you think the future of the adult standards format is. Thanks in advance!—

Grem

Dear Grem: Seems to me there’s not much future in that format at all. Aren’t most of the listeners dying off? I think the adult standards format of the future—for wizened baby boomers—will be classic rock.

CHAPTER 51

Morning Glory

He deserved the red-carpet treatment.

Our new morning man would be arriving in town with his wife on Friday night. I was as excited for him as I was for myself. Deep down I just knew he was the one who'd catapult my rock station to *numero uno*. I asked the GM's secretary to put Morning Man and wife up at a really nice hotel, one of those fancy joints where they place chocolate on the pillows and neatly fold the first sheet of the toilet paper on the roll in the bathroom.

Slight problem. By the time the GM's procrastinating assistant finally got around to booking a room for my prized new hire, there was none. At least, not at any of the upscale hotels I had in mind. A horse show resulted in no room at the inn. We'd have to stick him in one of those discount motels, which—I was horrified to discover later—was a haven for drifters, adulterers, victims of domestic violence, and certain unsavory characters who might be recognizable from their mug shots on "America's Most Wanted."

Fun, huh?

I'd asked the new Morning Guy to call me when he arrived in town, even though it was going to be late. My phone rang at around 10:45 p.m. I was relieved to hear his voice.

"Big problem," he said in a somber voice. My heart sank.

"They don't allow dogs."

Must be some kind of misunderstanding, I told him. We'd arranged to pay a pet deposit so he could keep the dog in his room. He left the pay phone and went back to the desk to straighten out the clerk. "He doesn't know anything about it," he said when he got back on the line.

"Be right there," I promised him, apologizing for the confusion. So much for first impressions.

It looked bad.

The new Morning Guy jumped in my car with me. His wife and dog would follow us in her car on our mission to find them another place to stay.

The bright red "No Vacancy" sign was lit up at one motel after another. Out of desperation, I pulled into the parking lot of a seedy motel that was directly across the freeway from the other place that had turned away my new morning man.

Vacancy? Yes!

I checked them in, vowing to find them a better place to stay the next day. They went off to their room. As the clerk ran my credit card, I couldn't help but notice a cop in a police car carefully scrutinizing the license plates of cars in the parking lot.

"You must have pretty good security here," I remarked.

"He's looking for people who have outstanding warrants," the disheveled clerk volunteered. He lived in the motel. His living quarters were connected to the front office. "We had to evacuate the place the other night. They busted a guy who had a bunch of pipe bombs in his room."

I hoped my new Morning Man and his wife were heavy sleepers.

Monday morning arrived, but without the new morning man on my rock station—even though promos ran all weekend ballyhooing this as his start date.

At 6 AM, Allan, who was left over from the previous morning show, cracked open the mic and abruptly burst the huge bubble of anticipation we'd created on the radio.

Yup, he announced that, uh, well, truth be told, the "new guy" hadn't made it in to work yet.

Whoever the new guy was. Allan didn't know. I didn't tell him, because I wanted to cloak the new personality's identity in mystery for as long as I could.

You tell someone in radio to keep a secret, and I guarantee it'll be in the newspaper the following day!

But it's not what you're thinking. This actually was a pre-planned tardiness. The "new guy" finally called in 15 minutes late, apologizing on-air to Allan and explaining that, being new to the area, he was lost and had no clue how to get to the station from wherever the hell he was. He said he'd call back in a little while. Click.

That's when Allan made what sounded like an impromptu offer: A reward of \$1,000 cash would be paid to the first listener to find our new Morning Guy and bring him back to the station.

The promotional stunt worked better than I ever imagined. The more the "new guy" called in, describing landmarks and giving clues to his whereabouts, the more of a buzz it created. Judging by the response, it seemed as if the entire city had turned into bounty hunters. Drivers rolled down their windows and asked total strangers on the street if they were the "new guy." Even a busy UPS driver pulled over and called in on his cell phone, certain that he'd spotted our man at a pay phone booth.

Fortunately, the bit lasted all the way into the first hour of afternoon drive. Finally, a listener spotted "new guy" at the mall as he was doing one of his call-ins to the station.

Our “new guy” was the talk of the town. And he hadn’t even completed his first air shift.

“Can you come upstairs and see me?”

It was our eagle-eyed controller on the other end of my phone. “Sure. Be right there.” She was terrific at warning me when we got perilously close to going over budget on our contests. I figured it must have something to do with the cash giveaway on the jazz station in our cluster.

“The girls are complaining about Hank,” she told me in her office, referring to the three sales assistants in our office, and Hank, my programming assistant. “He was especially rude to Anna,” the controller continued. “You need to talk to him about his people skills. The company handbook clearly states that bullying and intimidation by employees will not be tolerated.”

“How did he bully Anna?” I demanded to know, since Anna was considerably bigger than Hank.

According to Anna, Hank had walked up to her and, in an allegedly sarcastic tone of voice, said he was pulling the promos for a station giveaway because the prizes hadn’t yet been turned over from sales to the promotions department.

“He owes her an apology,” the controller told me.

An apology, my ass, I thought to myself. I was proud of Hank for being such a bulldog. We’d been hung out to dry once before by the sales department, which had shortchanged us on a giveaway involving passes to a popular amusement park. In fact, we’d wound up having to buy some of them. That’s why we’d established a rule: Promos for giveaways would not air until those giveaways were in our hands.

“I’ll talk to him about his conduct,” I told her on the way out of her office.

I’d talk to Hank, all right. I’d thank him for watching out for programming.

All caught up in the euphoria of the new guy's arrival, I neglected to notice that Allan, the holdover from the previous morning show, was in the throes of despair.

I mistakenly thought he'd be thrilled being paired with someone who could take the show to number one. Instead, he resented the new guy, who was demanding and a perfectionist. He was hurt and angry that his old partner had jilted him for another "lover"—that competing radio station.

And in his mind, reverting back to the role of sidekick/news-guy/board op was a humiliating demotion.

Clearly, this was a match made in hell. And it sounded like it on the air. Allan's board work was sloppy. He couldn't keep up with the new guy's quick wit. And he went through the motions reading the news.

"I don't think he's used to doing work," the new guy told me after their second show together. He was right. Allan and his old partner had coasted through two years of morning shows together. The new guy had come in and raised the bar. Allan kept tripping over it.

After their third show together, Allan comes to see me, threatening to quit unless the new guy "backs off."

The new guy admits to me that he's yelled at Allan during commercial breaks "because he's wrecking my friggin' show with dead air!" I plead with him to be more patient.

Wednesday of the following week, the promotions director pops into my office.

"Allan's not coming back tomorrow," she tells me. "He said he's had enough."

I find that hard to believe, but I try calling him at home. I leave three messages, all of which go unreturned.

Next morning, no Allan. I leave another message on his answering machine, this time issuing an ultimatum: He has until close of the business day to call me back, or he's terminated.

No word.

"He told me he was gonna work in a department store," the promotions director recalls. "I don't think he was bluffing."

The morning show must go on.

In a pinch, I take the night guy from our rock station and pair him with the new guy. Surprisingly, I get a call from Allan's wife. She says he doesn't know she's calling and she'd prefer for it to stay that way. She tells me her husband is stupid and stubborn. She begs me to take him back.

Pointing out that I gave him repeated chances to call me and work things out, I tell her I'm sorry, but his position has been filled. And besides, I point out, when someone walks out on a station during an important ratings period, how do I know he won't do it again?

It pains me to have to tell her that. But my job is to protect the station.

And the new morning show, which is off to a bumpy start.

From the e-mail bag

Dear P.D.: Why is it that every rock station insists on renaming at least one female jock and/or traffic reporter with the last name of "Fox?" Is that some sort of unwritten rule among program directors?—Steve from Avon Lake, Ohio

Dear Steve: It's a written rule. "Fox" creates the illusion that the jock or traffic reporter is, well, a fox. In reality, "Fox" is probably . . . not foxy at all.

Dear PD: I have been working at a major market talk station since November. I know that isn't long, but I don't just want to board op syndicated shows—which are mostly

what my station plays. What is the best way to break into an on-air position? Do I just keep sitting in a studio by myself, talk to myself, and then send out the stuff that sounds good?—John

Dear John: Bug your PD for a shot at doing just ONE overnight talk shift. If he won't throw you a bone, go into the production studio, have some buddies call you, and fake a talk show. Then start sending out those tapes.

CHAPTER 52

Eye Spy

Sometimes, I feel more like the ringmaster of a three-ring circus than a PD.

Take today, for instance. The night host on my talk station has to re-cut her spots where she personally endorsed LASIK eye surgery. “It’s wonderful . . . amazing . . . no complications” she gushed in the commercials. What listeners didn’t know is that her eyesight was worse since an account exec arranged for her to get “flapped and zapped” for free—a \$5,000 value.

“Those bastards,” she lamented. “It was just horrible. I waited for five hours before they took me in. I was the last patient of the day. The regular doctor had gone home, so his assistant did the surgery. I have to wait three months to go back.”

I was surprised she’d even think of going back there. She’d signed a waiver, which prevented her from suing the clinic or our radio station. But this was an older woman who never turned down anything free from the sales department. She’d been sucked, tucked, wrapped and now zapped.

“Where’s your dog and tin cup?” the overnight guy quipped when he saw her for the first time since her surgery. He thought she looked pretty funny wearing dark glasses at one in the morning.

He didn’t realize she was a victim of a botched procedure.

Is there a doctor in the house?

Next, my promotions director breaks the news to me that there might be a little problem with the cosmetic surgeon who's tied to a \$5,000 liposuction procedure we're giving away on the station.

"He's a convicted felon, just out of a halfway house, and he wears one of those monitoring devices around his ankle," she told me.

"Yeah, right," I laughed out loud at my desk. "Nice try."

But she wasn't joking.

The doc had actually shown her the monitoring bracelet around his right ankle. Naturally, the sales person who represented the doctor's account saw no evil.

"He was put away for cheating on his taxes," she said. "It was only \$20,000. It's not like he lost his medical license or anything."

We'd leave out those details in our "New Rear For the New Year" promo.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I've applied at my local radio station for the job of production worker and morning show jock. I had a great interview and it looks as if I will be the one to fill the position. My only previous radio work was broadcasting high school basketball games. I also wrote produced and acted in a 1992 TV commercial. Anyway, I need some helpful hints and ideas for my morning show, which I will have to produce myself. I have some ideas, but will need professional help to ensure I can get higher ratings. I can't wait to get started in this career.—Mack Miller

Dear Mack: You're scaring me. This is a commercial music or talk station? Where's your PD? You do have a PD,

don't you? Gulp. Get a blueprint for the morning show. Then get direction. You're doomed without the two.

Dear PD: The late '70s I worked at an Adult CHR—contemporary hit radio station—in Niagara Falls. I was listening to some old air-checks and I was pretty good. Anyhow, I was thinking that I might want some part time stuff in Eastern Ontario/Ottawa/Montreal. Do you think I should make new tapes, or should I send out the ones from 20 years ago?—Dan Shields, Ottawa, Canada

Dear Dan: I don't know about most PDs, but I'd think it quite odd if I received a tape from a prospective jock, and he was talking about Woodstock or the Vietnam War. After 20 years, you'll have to prove to PDs that you still have your chops.

CHAPTER 53

Party Line

“Party when you have a great Arbitron ratings book—your next book might not be so great.” That’s the best advice I’ve ever heard from a consultant.

With that in mind, we started hooting, hollering and high-fiving each other when the numbers came in for the youngest station in our cluster. After a year on the air, thanks to the hard work of the staff, great promotions, contests, and a solid product, we had vanquished the venerable rival station in our format.

“We’re number one, baby,” the afternoon guy yelled as he poured me a glass of champagne in my office. We were violating company policy, which prohibited bringing alcoholic beverages onto the premises, but we didn’t give a damn. What were they going to do, fire us? Not with these ratings! .

“Number one!” I yelled back.

We both spilled bubbly on the carpet as we high-fived each other. My eyes were moist from the raw emotion of the situation. I nearly started crying. I was so proud of everyone, particularly the afternoon jock who was my right hand man. This was sweet for him, inasmuch as he used to work for the other station.

Leave it to the party-pooper general manager to spoil the celebration.

“Remember, it’s just one book,” he said, shaking his finger at us. “I don’t want people thinking they can stop working now. I’ll believe the ratings if you can do it for another book.”

That could wait until tomorrow. We'd resume the staff party off-site.

Without him.

If you're keeping tally, I've just received my second "F" in chemistry on our rock station.

My pairing of the sensational new Morning Guy with the former co-host of the show was a disaster. I felt certain he'd accept the role of sidekick and news dude. Instead, he'd quit without notice. For a job at a department store.

In a pinch, I'd taken the night guy and put him on with the new Morning Guy. Nights to mornings? Who, working their way up in radio, wouldn't be thrilled with such an opportunity? The former night guy, that's who!

Almost immediately, he complained about having to get up early in the morning. His fatigue affected his board work. He stumbled through the news and traffic, mispronouncing important names that a "real" news guy would know. He wanted more money. And a bonus structure for ratings.

A desperate man in a desperate situation, I boosted his salary and gave him incentives. He returned the favor by announcing that Friday would be his last day on the morning show. "I want back on nights."

I explained the seriousness of the situation. We were in a ratings book with a new morning show. I needed his help now more than ever. "Okay, I'll work mornings through the end of the book," he relented. "But then I want back on nights." I told him I couldn't promise that. The jock I'd hired to replace him was, in all honesty, a major improvement. Of course, I didn't tell him that. I went on to sell the benefits of working the morning show—more money, more prestige, more chicks, and weekends off.

"Then we need to take this up with the GM," he said.

Which we did. And I let the ingrate, punk DJ have it.

"If you don't want to work on the morning show, if you don't want the raise I gave you and the incentive package, go, get out of here," I yelled. His response? He marched back upstairs, cleaned out his desk, and left the premises.

I called the new Morning Guy at home. He was relieved when I told him the news.

"You know that hot girl he's with?" the Morning Guy asked, referring to the cute blonde his chubby ex-morning sidekick was dating. "She'll dump him when she finds out he can't get her free concert tickets and CDs anymore."

The report on the new weekend fill-in jock wasn't good.

It had nothing to do with his on-air performance. He sounded great. Had fun with callers. Did some tight breaks. And ran our finicky digital audio system without locking it up. All in all, remarkable, really, for someone who hadn't pulled an air shift in more than two years.

But he was weird, man, really weird. Our music director told me the guy had called him at home no fewer than seven times on Saturday, questioning everything from the station play-list to his hourly rate of pay. You don't bug people from the station on weekends, unless there's a dire emergency.

Oh, then one of the sales assistants mentioned to me in passing that the guy gave her the creeps when he came by the office last Friday. He lurked at her desk, demanding a phone extension and business cards.

When I relate the story of the strange behavior to our beloved controller, she casually mentions how surprised she was that we'd brought him in as a part-timer in the first place.

"Why?" I ask.

"He was let go by his last station because he claimed on the air that he was working for the CIA," she laughed. "He had some issues, mentally."

Like that should disqualify him from weekend work in radio?

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I'd like to add Music Director to my title of midday jock. Any suggestions, since I don't have any experience scheduling music for a radio station?—Music Man, Las Vegas, NV

Dear Music Man: What, do you know something that your station's music director doesn't? Like, he or she is going to be fired? Otherwise, if you're just trying to make yourself indispensable which, by the way, isn't a bad idea, here's my advice: Invite the music director to lunch. Butter him up. Then, after he sees you pick up the check, ask if he'll give you a tutorial on Selector, which is the music software program many stations use. Then borrow the disks and install the program at home. Practice. Ask questions. Learn as much as you can. Ultimately, you might ask if you can fill in for the music director when he goes on vacation or is out sick. Don't let him know that you're trying to steal his job.

CHAPTER 54

Mind Awareness Day

You cringe when you hear it on the radio. Especially, when you hear it on YOUR station. It happens to the best of them. But still . . .

Kelli was wrapping up a live report for the morning news. It was flawless—until she got to the very end. “I’m Kelli Johnson for (insert wrong call letters here!).” She inadvertently blurted out the calls of our main competitor here in town, a station where she was formerly employed, before stumbling to correct herself.

“Uh, er, I mean . . .”

In the battle for top-of-mind-awareness, score one for the other guys.

Being in radio, you know what really ticks me off?

Standing in a long line at Will Call, then finally reaching the window, only to learn that—after an exhaustive search by a \$6-an-hour clerk who couldn’t spell G-E-D if you spotted them the G—there are no tickets in my name or the radio station’s.

You know what’s worse? Having that happen to a listener who won the tickets on MY station. I could tell there was trouble at the front of the Will Call line, because it came to a grinding halt.

I moseyed on over and listened in. “I won them on the radio,” the exasperated patron explained to the clerk through the donut-sized hole in the glass window. Probably bulletproof glass, I surmised, just for times like these.

Spotting my promotions director in the crowd, I summoned her over. We were in deep do-do. Not only weren't there any extra tickets floating around for tonight's comedy fest, there most certainly weren't any for the special VIP section—rows one through five—which this lucky listener had been promised.

So I did what any good, red blooded, ratings conscious program director would do under the same circumstances. I reluctantly gave up MY pair of tickets, then broke the news to my wife.

"But you're the program director," my wife protested.

I made it up to her with dinner and a movie.

Interns. You gotta love the eager-beaver types.

But the over-zealous ones can pose problems. Like Corey, an affable college junior who wants on-the-air now! So Corey did what all DJ wannabes usually do. He made an audition tape. Only, Corey exercised bad judgment. He figured it would be okay to take a DAT tape he found in the production studio and record his DJ patter on it.

We know this because our station's production director just suffered spontaneous combustion before our very eyes in the hallway. All of his commercials were archived on that DAT tape. Yes, WERE.

Corey is now prohibited from going anywhere near the equipment without permission.

By the way, his tape wasn't bad.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I've been doing a radio talk show at a public radio station for the past 3 years. I started out with a partner, but, you know how that is. I've got talent. Real talent. I get

calls after the show from listeners who ask me if I've ever done any stage comedy before. I haven't, I just have a knack for blending contemporary political issues, hip-hop, pop-culture and sarcasm into something people can understand. I've been spending the past year really trying to develop my voice and my "act." I have no doubt that my show idea and my style is something that can make money if given the opportunity. My question is, what should be my next step? Should I make a batch of demo tapes, then sit back hoping and praying. Or do I find out where the PD of one the local stations lives, and go do my act outside his bedroom window? Anyone who has heard my show has said I have the skills, so I think that a PD would like it as well. But is talent enough? Like I said I work at a public station. I don't have any commercial radio experience. What should I do?—N. Dion

Dear Dion: Standing outside of a PD's bedroom window won't get you a job, unless you're able to snap some Polaroid pictures of him with farm animals. Seriously, if you're as good as you say you are, start mailing out those tapes and resumes to PDs of stations where you'd like to work. Heck, send me your tape. I'd like to hear what it sounds like when you blend political issues, hip-hop, pop-culture and sarcasm. Hey, wait a sec. Your real name isn't Dennis Miller, is it?

Dear PD: G'day! Just wanted to say that I really love your column. It's always great to see what good ol' American radio is doing! You should come to New Zealand. I don't know if you'd be shocked or amused by our markets. Tell me, is 14 AM & FM stations for 50,000 people a lot?—Kerry Du Pont, Radio Southland 96.4 FM, Invercargill, New Zealand

Dear Kerry: That's almost more transmitters than people! Invitation accepted. Put a shrimp on the barbie for me.

CHAPTER 55

Attack of the Killer Promos

Though it would cost some big money, it would be a killer promotion resulting in higher ratings.

The idea was, we'd team up with a marketing company and have our talk show personalities record special messages inviting people to sample their shows during specific times of the day—for a chance to win big cash. The messages would be left on tens of thousands of answer machines in our city.

The promotion hadn't even started, and already there was a problem. Dr Laura, we were told by one of her assistants from Los Angeles, would have nothing to do with it because she felt the phone calls were too intrusive.

"But don't you get it?" we protested. "We're just trying to boost her ratings?"

"I'm sorry," the person from her office said. "She's not gonna do it."

We'd go take on the promotion without her.

In a moment of weakness, I said yes to an invitation to speak at a radio seminar on strategies for job seekers.

My last speaking gig had been a fiasco. A class of broadcasting students at an expensive major private university had turned on me when I burst their bubble about entry-level salaries. I told them they'd be lucky to make \$25,000 a year starting out as board

operators or promotions assistants. These were spoiled rich kids whose cars were worth more than what most people make their first two years in the radio biz.

“That’s bullshit,” one disappointed student had shouted out at me. “Liberal Arts grads are making \$60,000-a-year to start,” another one chimed in.

I thought seriously about calling in sick, but a commitment is a commitment. I’d show up at the seminar.

Could they provide a bodyguard?

No two days are the same at a radio station.

The morning personality I want for the Oldies station in our cluster brought his spouse along to the interview.

I met them at the front desk. Richard introduced me to his wife, to whom I offered a cup of coffee and invited her to make herself at home in our lobby.

“I’d like to have her in on our discussions, if it’s okay with you,” Richard said, setting me back on my heels.

“Is she your agent?” I asked. (To be honest, I was thinking Peter Pan complex).

“No, nothing like that,” Richard laughed. “See, we’ve been married 15 years. She knows me better than anyone. We’re a team. She just looks out for me.”

That was an understatement. During our meeting to go over the fine points of a contract offer, she sure acted and sounded like an agent. In fact, while Richard sat quietly in a chair in my office, Mrs. Jock did most of the talking, asking questions and jotting down notes to my answers about ratings bonuses, severance pay, medical coverage, and vacation.

When we were done, Richard excused himself to the men’s room. His wife used the opportunity to speak privately with me.

“Richard has had some very bad experiences in radio,” she said, explaining why she’d come to the station with him. “His last

job, they sent him his belongings from the radio station in a cardboard box while he was on vacation. He still has issues from that.”

He'd been kicked while he was down. Yet, he desperately wanted back on the air.

Radio does that to you.

Complaint letters are nothing new at radio stations. But the latest complaint involves, of all people, the night jock on our rock station.

The organizer of a local community fair claims our employee picked on some 11 and 12-year-old girls who had teased him during a Sunday appearance. He'd allegedly pursued the kids in his car, calling them such names as “slut,” “whore,” and “lesbian” when he caught up to them on a street corner. An apology was in order, the organizer wrote.

Or else the event might go to another station in the future.

Sign of the times: standing-room only at the seminar on strategies for job seekers in radio.

When it came my turn to speak, I covered what should be the basics for sending out tapes and resumes:

- Always type your name and phone number on the label you slap on your audition tape.
- Listen to the tape for quality control before you send it out.
- Put your best material up front. Make sure it's so compelling that the prospective PD will listen all the way through.
- Your resume should always be typewritten.
- Make sure your cover letter has the PD's name spelled correctly.
- No form letters.

I told the audience that over the course of a year, a PD's desk is buried under an avalanche of tapes and resumes. The most professional looking presentations get the most serious attention.

Surprisingly, only one question was directed at me during a brief Q&A segment with the audience. A young woman stepped up to the mic that was placed in an aisle near the front of the room. She asked me what the ideal length is for an audition tape.

I answered that most PDs are so busy, they don't listen past the first twenty or thirty seconds of a demo tape—unless it really grabs them. With that in mind, a tape shouldn't run longer than 3-5 minutes.

"The idea," I summed up, "is to sound great and leave the PD wanting more. Your tape should be the bait that results in a phone call."

All in all, it was painless. Maybe someone would get into radio because of the advice I'd given them.

Then they'd really be mad at me.

I called the night jock at home. Asked him how Sunday's appearance had gone at the community fair.

"I was great," he bragged. "I introduced a couple of bands, then got out of there."

"That's it?" I asked.

"What do you mean?" he wanted to know. "Did someone say something?"

Of course, he already knew the answer. He admitted that he'd chased in his car after some young girls who had heckled him while he was up on stage. "I just thought I could give them a good scare," he said.

And what about allegations that he shouted out at the girls, calling them "sluts" and "whores?"

"They started it," he said.

He was a young jock, oblivious to the kind of damage such a

capricious act could have on his reputation and the station's. In hindsight, I told him he should've pointed out the troublemakers to the event's organizer.

"Won't happen again," he assured me.

At least, not until the next appearance.

Another complaint call, this time from a listener who can't believe we disqualified him from possibly winning a new car, just because he'd scored a prize on our station a month earlier.

See, we have a rule that stops contest pigs in their tracks. If they win a prize valued at \$600 or more, they have to wait another year before they can play again.

"It's not fair," the caller whined on my voice mail.

I called him back, a copy of my station's contest rules in front of me so I could quickly refer to them.

His answering machine picked up after the third ring. "Hi, (station call letters), now give me my money!" The machine's greeting was for a competing station's contest.

Pig!

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: Love your column. I've been in radio since 1980, with stops in Cincinnati and San Francisco. Your column is dead on. I have seen all of this!!—Brinke Guthrie, CNET Radio 910, San Francisco, Calif.

Dear Brinke: Like I could make up this stuff?!

Dear PD: You wrote about how having champagne at a ratings celebration could have violated company policy. Have you ever questioned how your company can prohibit you from using a legal food product? I have, and two

attorneys have told me that such company “policy” would not hold up in a court of law. I have never challenged such “policy” because as a matter of course, I don’t drink on the job. But I do like to keep one step ahead of the corporate shirheads.—Dave

Dear Dave: I’ll drink to that.

Dear PD: I’d like very much to send you a tape. What is your address? Where do I send it? I’d be really interested in what you think about my show, called “The Ive (Ivy) League.” My middle name is Iverson, which I use on the air. The first 3 letters I-V-E, get it?—N. Iverson Dixon

Dear Iverson: Not a good sign if you have to explain what it means to your listeners. Have you thought about changing your name? Maybe Sandy Beach? Tad Warmer? Hugh Jorgan? Just a thought.

CHAPTER 56

Air Heads

Our promotion director was wracking her brain, trying to come up with yet another on-air giveaway, when her phone rang. It was a call from Orlando, Florida. A gift.

"Guess what?" she asked me. She looked like the cat who swallowed the canary.

"What?" I said, playing along. I waited. And waited.

"Well? Come on, tell me."

"We're goin' to Disney World!" she screamed.

Yours truly would get to accompany the morning show on a week-long broadcast from the House the Mouse Built. Free air, hotel, meals, and park passes.

"Sounds great," I said.

"And they'll give us a trip for two to give away," she gushed.

"But what's the catch?" I wanted to know.

"We just have to mention all week that we're broadcasting live from Disney World," she assured me. "That's all. It'll be great for morale."

I should have known better. But admittedly, the prospect of a week in sunny Florida, on Disney, clouded my judgment.

Of all the litany of tasks in radio-station management, firing people is arguably the most unpleasant. Remember Howard Stern's painful

stint as a PD in "Private Parts," how violently ill he became after his owner ordered him to fire a DJ?

Unlike Howard, I've never actually bolted for the bathroom and hurled before letting someone go. However, I will admit to suffering varying degrees of gastrointestinal discomfort and sleep deprivation prior to the act. It all depends on the character level of the person I'm firing. Even the Satan-like employees, the one's who are hell-bent on self-destructing, deserve a modicum of compassion. After all, you're kicking them back out onto the mean streets, often without any severance pay to cushion the blow. (If they're smart, they'll learn and grow from the distasteful experience).

You never know how a fired employee will react. Most keep their wits about them, dare they burn a bridge. Some lash out in anger, blame, and denial. Our company policy requires that a second person, a "witness"—usually the controller or GM's secretary—be in the room with the PD when an air talent or board op is let go. (Silly me, I thought it was in case of a shooting; at least one of the two management-types could crawl to a phone and dial 911).

As a PD, it hurts me the most when I have to terminate an air talent who gives 110 percent, is a really nice guy, but gets all Fs on his Arbitron report card. Such was the case with Garry, a garrulous postal worker who, my predecessor believed, had future talk show stardom written all over him. To my ears, he was nothing to write home about. But, in all fairness, since I'd inherited him on nights, I was willing to give him a shot at turning around my opinion.

In fact, Garry was receptive to my coaching. We met for about an hour twice a week after he finished his 9-to-5 government job. I picked apart his air checks. Offered ideas for talk topics. Shared tapes of other talk hosts from around the country for him to study. Cheered him on.

But you know what? As much as Garry and I both wanted him to succeed, his ratings decline continued. The harsh reality? In showbiz, either you've got it or you don't. It wasn't like Garry could stand in line with the Cowardly Lion, the Scarecrow, and

the Tin Man and ask the Wizard of Oz to give him talent. Another year behind the mic wouldn't make a difference. I had to stop the bleeding and make a change.

Garry took the news hard, but at least didn't go postal on me. I tried to soften the blow by suggesting his act might go over better on another station in a smaller market. I pointed out how lucky he'd been to get his start on a major market station, reminding him that it takes years for most talk show hosts and DJs to work their way up.

Meantime, good thing he didn't quit his day job.

Excuse me, but do you know what the problem is with most GMs?

They are, in reality, encyclopedia salesmen and women in button down suits. They didn't get the big corner office with the scenic view because of an MBA or their expertise on programming. No, they were ultimately rewarded with GM stripes for finishing at the top of their sales class, making their station and its owner lots and lots of cash.

What does the selfish GM do when it looks like his station may not hit budget for the quarter? Cancel his memberships at the gym and country club? Fire some sales people? Auction off his rich Corinthian leather couch on E-Bay? Downsize his auto lease from Lexus SUV to Jeep Wrangler? No, silly. Generally, he'll take aim at programming and promotions. The PD is called into his office and told to lose a board op here, a producer there. Scrap marketing. Cancel that T-shirt order. Stop spending. Add more commercial inventory to the hourly spot load.

"But what about the ratings?" asks the PD, who won't make a nickel above his base salary unless the numbers go up.

Here's the GM's dirty little secret:

In this age of consolidation, the ratings are secondary. Nowadays, it's all about the pressure of performing for Wall Street. Corporate exhorts its managers to "Show me the money!" Increase

first, second, third, or fourth quarter earnings, and the stock price shoots up. Maybe.

Why would a GM making a healthy six-figures-a-year have the PD fire a \$6-an-hour board op, or deny the just married night guy a buck-an-hour pay raise? Bottom line's the bottom line. Chances are, the GM has an incentive plan in his contract that has nothing to do with ratings, but everything to do with revenue. If his station can turn a profit, it's likely he'll get a nice percentage of it kicked back to him at the end of the year.

So much for the old axiom, "If you get ratings, the revenue will follow."

We'd checked into one of the Disney World resorts, the morning crew and me, where rooms usually start at \$200 a night. A public relations representative met us in the lobby of the hotel, handing each of us enough park passes and meal tickets to last the week.

It wasn't long before we spotted our first celebrity. There, in line in front of us at the hotel's all-you-can-eat seafood restaurant, was Sinbad, who'd brought his kids along on vacation. Shortly after we'd settled in at our table, one of the guys spotted Vanna White having dinner by herself.

"Why don't you go over and ask her if you can have a vowel?" one of the morning guys joked.

If we could get some of these celebs on the show, we'd have a good week of radio.

Day One of our week-long remote at Disney World.

During a lull on the morning show, I comment to the PR guy Disney World has assigned to us that I think he has a fun job. He looks at me like I'm a mental patient.

"Are you kidding?" he says to me. "I hate my effing job. This is

the UN-happiest place on earth. You've heard of Auschwitz? We call this Mousechwitz."

Of all the PR people at the park, we get the bitter, disgruntled one. He tells me that our show will be monitored each morning to make sure no one makes any disparaging remarks about Mickey Mouse, Goofy, or any of the rides or shows at the park.

He asks me to look out the control room window, where he points out an older, uniformed worker wearing some sort of communications device in his ear, like a Secret Service agent.

"That guy's a snitch," he tells me. "God help you if he catches you standing around or sitting down on the job."

So that explains why a worker with a broom and dustpan looks so enthusiastic?

"He probably swept up a \$20 bill someone dropped," he remarks. "They've swept up rings, watches, even wallets."

Too bad we can't put him on the air.

I can say I saw Ed McMahon topless.

Cooling off in the hotel's swimming pool, I heard his voice. It was deep and booming. McMahon was playing with his son in the pool when he saw me looking at him. "Hey ohhhhh," I said, invoking the phrase he became famous for on the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson.

"How ya doin?" he replied.

I mentioned that I was with a radio station and would love to have him come on the morning show with us this week.

"Just ask the Disney PR department to set something up," he said.

Translation: I'm busy.

The cost of a free week at Disney World? I've added it all up. A bad week of radio.

Mentioning where we were broadcasting from—going into and coming out of the breaks—wasn't enough. The PR rep paraded what seemed like an endless line of no-name, mediocre guests through the on-air studio—everyone from the guy who designed one of the newer rides and the director of the Disney cruise line, to the nice but equally no-name star of a musical review going on all this summer at the park. Our morning show had been turned into a daily, four-hour infomercial for Disney World.

Where were Vanna, Sinbad, and Ed when we really needed them?

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I am a former Operations Director. I recently left FM Talk. I had been in radio for over 10 years, starting my illustrious career as a mascot. Anyway, I enjoy reading your column because it rings so true. PDs are lonely folks. We can't talk to anyone at the station. Those below us wouldn't understand and those above us are usually part of the source of the problem. So that is out too. I think the column is cool because it makes other PDs feel not so lonely. I always said that when radio became work I would leave; it did, so I did. I got tired of dealing with egocentric jocks that think they are King even though their ratings suck. Years ago people like me got into radio because we loved the industry . . . it's what we wanted to do. Now it's all about money! I want to make a good living too, but I also still want to win. The new crop doesn't. I got tired of that too.

Now, for the first time in 10 years, I can listen to

whatever station I want, I can go to whatever bar or restaurant I want, I can drink whatever beer I want, etc. No calls at 3 in the morning saying we're off the air or from a host at 6 in the morning saying a board op didn't show. Very liberating. I read about your GM telling you not to celebrate the ratings; too true. My former station had a great winter book. Morale is low at that station and instead of letting people celebrate and take them to happy hour, he told everyone that if they couldn't sell with this book, then they could all start looking for new jobs. He told the air talent they weren't good enough: There's still room, you're not #1 yet! Anyway, just thought I would tell you, I still enjoy your column and to heck with GMs. I was acting GM for 8 months and that curbed any desire to ever want to do that job. I work at an agency now. Big change—radio and agency life is way different. Keep up the good work.—Name Withheld, Texas.

Dear NW: I hear from more and more vets like you who are bailing out of radio because "it's not fun anymore." Good luck in your real job.

Dear PD: Your stories indicate you have very good skills as a PD. So perhaps you can shed some light on this burning-in-my-mind topic! I have been in radio for over 30 years on air and in engineering. When I was on air my ratings were very high. My last on air gig 7 years ago had an average 25 share in morning drive on the same station. Then, one fatal day, the station was sold and the new PD pulled all of my material, teamed me up on the air with a person who could not get along with me—and vice-versa—and limited me to reading 3x5 cards with the usual promos and liners.

Needless to say after a few months of toughing it out I was history. The station has continued the same format with a huge turnover of personnel and two more owners. They have yet to come near the ratings I turned in. I was told by a sales person who worked with me that the station wanted a younger image. However, in my opinion, the numbers

don't lie and I would really like to reapply at the station for my old time slot. Do you think it would be worthwhile or should I leave well enough alone? The morning show they have is very poor; their low numbers bother me because I know I can do MUCH better. Thanks!—The Old Guy

Dear Old Guy: It's not how old you are, it's whether you "sound" old on the radio. The older jocks and talk show hosts who've survived have done so because they're still relatable and talk about what's happening today. They watch "Friends" and "Entertainment Tonight," go to new movies, read People and Rolling Stone, and live in the now. The casualties dwelled on "yesterday." A consultant told me recently that he was having problems with a 55-year-old talk host whose target audience was 25-54. "He thinks he should be talking about what was happening when he was 25." Hell, if you can still relate to the station's target demo and get numbers, go for it. The PD would be crazy not to give you a shot.

Dear PD: I'm sure your heart was in the right place, but I still have to give a big "thanks" to Dr. Laura for refusing your request to participate in a telemarketing campaign for your station. I know I get enough irritating telemarketing calls from credit cards, long distance service, security systems, etc., without having to add radio stations. Maybe your "killer" promotion would have encouraged others to listen, but it would "kill" any chance of this potential listener tuning in. Hooray for Dr. Laura for standing up for my privacy! Love your column; keep up the good work!—Tim Behrens

Dear Tim: How 'bout if you don't want the message from Dr. Laura, you zap it on your answering machine? Oh, could I interest you in buying into a time-share in Florida?

Dear PD: Never thought I'd say that, or give you a bad time, but at least Dr Laura realizes that receiving unsolicited, pre-recorded phone messages is a huge pain in the butt, and probably creates more enemies than friends. Think I'll post

your home phone number somewhere and tell everybody to call it, promoting whatever it is they have to sell. Evidently, you don't spend enough time at home to know the grinding of teeth that phone SPAM creates. On the other hand, someone who greets such nonsense might be a typical talk radio listener. Phtui!—Todd Everett, Los Angeles, Calif.

Dear Todd: Great expletions! "Someone who greets such nonsense might be a typical talk radio listener." You got it!!! By the way, of the tens of thousands of homes targeted for the telemarketing campaign, only seven people called in to the station to complain about the pre-recorded messages from the other talk show hosts.

CHAPTER 57

KAOS Broadcasting

Our station's sales manager was on the phone with some new marching orders.

We needed to come up with an NTR—non-traditional revenue—event for the station, he told me. Oh, and we had until this afternoon to come up with a brilliant idea.

“That’s insane,” I responded.

“Like I don’t know that?” he shot back.

Our GM had sneaked the NTR event into our budget, apparently at the insistence of those greedy bastards at corporate, and forgot to tell any of us about it. Until this morning. Now, we were expected to conceive of and organize a station event before the end of the year that would generate \$80,000 in revenue. 80-grand!

We had five hours to pull something out of our asses.

Seems the folks at the postal service are going postal . . . over an on-air comment by one of the personalities in our cluster of stations.

They’re threatening to pull all of their advertising. My GM tells me that the client spends about \$375,000 a year.

I went back and listened to an air-check of the show. Not good.

“No wonder postal workers take guns and shoot up the place,”

the talk show host railed. "It's because of the boobs in postal service management!"

He'd taken the side of a postal worker who'd suffered a disabling injury on the job, and was nearly starving because the government had yet to send her a check.

"Postal service, you suck!" he screamed over the radio.

My GM, who fielded the initial complaint call, would arrange for us to meet with four postal service representatives in his office later in the week.

The mail is in the air-check.

First a song by Tonic was playing on our rock station, then it wasn't.

I had just left work and was still only about a minute away from the station when I heard the dead air. *20 seconds. 30 seconds.* I cursed out loud and turned my car around.

When I finally burst in on the jock, he had a deer-in-the-headlights look. Tommy was the king of dead air on our station. One of our engineers showed up right after me. He fiddled with the computers while Tommy fumbled for a CD. It was another minute of dead air before an Aerosmith song broke the silence.

In the hallway outside the on-air studio, the engineer explained to me what had happened. The system had crashed about two minutes into the Tonic song.

"Tommy's a fuck up," the engineer lamented. "He tried to make too many changes on the computer at once. It froze up. It's not the first time it's happened. I think he needs a refresher course on how to run the equipment."

I thanked him for his trouble, then walked back into the air studio and asked Tommy for his account of what had transpired.

"The computer just froze up on me again," he said. "I guess it doesn't like me."

We'd implement "The Tommy Rule" the next day. From now on, jocks would be required to keep a CD from our back-up music

library in the CD player in case of an emergency with our digital system.

Back up against the wall.

Sales lagging? Doesn't look like you'll make budget? Having a dismal quarter? Then it's time to pull off the next best thing to a convenience store heist.

Gimme an N. Gimme a T. Gimme a R. What's it spell? NTR!!!

With few exceptions, these non-traditional revenue events have nothing to do with a station's image or ratings. They're all about whoring out the station with sales promos and, of course, generating some quick cash.

So here we were, in the eleventh hour, the sales manager, the general sales manager, the promotions director, and me, expected to come up with an idea for a sales event that would generate \$80,000 in revenue. Our GM needed the idea, like, now.

Most of the meeting consisted of whining, the participants reciting a litany of reasons why we couldn't do certain events. It was too late in the year to organize a Spicy Foods Fest. A Do-It-Yourself Expo was out. It had been tried the year before and was an attendance, revenue and ratings disaster. Someone suggested bringing in a big name speaker, but the GSM pointed out that the appearance fee, somewhere in the range of \$25-30,000, would gobble up our potential profits.

We decided it was too late in the year to pull anything off that would make money and sense. If sales were in a pinch to make a quick buck, they could sell a cruise with our morning man as the last resort.

"You can do better than that," the GSM said.

And then, just like that, he got up from his chair and excused himself from the rest of our meeting. "Gotta go," the GM-in-training said. "Good luck."

Big help. He'd make a great leader some day.

They were, truly, going postal.

"All we want is for our side to be heard," said the public information officer for the postal service. And then he whipped out a tape recorder and proceeded to play back our radio station personality's rant against postal service management.

"No wonder postal workers take guns and . . . "

Got us. My GM had a pained expression on his face. I squirmed in my chair. The four postal service managers listened intently.

"It's because of the boobs in postal service management . . . "

But what about the disabled postal service worker whose call had triggered the host's remarks, I asked. She'd received that long overdue check from the government the very next day. It was overnighted to her at home.

"Just a coincidence," the PR guy insisted.

I mentioned that the host's producer had tried at least three times to get the postal service's side of the story during the show.

"Okay, well, I think we had a communications breakdown," the PR guy admitted. "I had a message on my voice mail, so did Joe the Postmaster. I thought he was going to respond. He thought I was going to take care of it. My fault."

Just then, the host popped in. He apologized, saying he didn't mean to suggest to his listeners that postal service managers should be shot. But he also scolded them for not getting the disabled employee's claim resolved.

When all was said and done, the postal managers were still fans of the host, our radio stations would keep the postal service's business, and the PR guy gave the host's producer his beeper number so she could call him if another controversy or question popped up.

In radio, that's what you call a happy ending.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I was a PD in Atlanta, Miami, San Francisco, Washington DC—that's the background. Anyhow I got a real laugh out of your column about broadcasting for a whole week from Disney World. Without a doubt, the Disney remotes are some of the most useless remotes ever done. The funniest, to me, was from one of our competitors when I was PD in Miami. For some unknown reason their morning show ended up live from DISNEYLAND, not Disney World in Orlando. . . . so they're in Anaheim where it was 3 AM Pacific time each day when they got started. Dead silent background, no guests, you could almost hear the tumbleweeds rolling down Main Street.

And you're absolutely right about the boring guests: the trick we used to us was to interview the frigging 2nd assistant gardener they'd send out to discuss the landscaping or some other boring nonsense—right in the middle of the morning show, too. However, we'd "interview" while songs/news were on and dump it into the digital Shortcut machine where it'd be heavily edited for the next day. Or maybe there'd be technical problems with the Shortcut and we'd lose the interview completely, which happened, um, a lot. And every time it did I was shocked. SHOCKED, I say! It got to the point where I turned down Disney remotes because I could not see the listener benefit. Sorta like when the Morning Guys have Penthouse Pets in-studio—unless there's a Web Cam, who benefits from their little visit other than the morning team?—Craig

Dear Craig: The Program Director, if he gets into work early enough that morning.

Dear PD: Could not agree with you more about your comments concerning Disney broadcasts. I have done 7 in

my career, and all but one sucked. The way Disney turns into the Program Director on site is amazing. They are never happy. And all those interviews with people involved with the park. I won't do any more of these shows. I work for a radio station, not Disney. When you can't even interview the voice of Mickey Mouse, I'd say that's time to say enough is enough.—Rick, Sacramento, Calif.

Dear Rick: Sure it's not really that, after seven times, you're just tired of free trips to Orlando?

Dear PD: Enjoyed reading about your week with the Mouse. Have had the same experience times ten since I do afternoons for a Disney-owned station. My PD—who tagged along as my “producer” for the free trip—was reprimanded for drinking beer in the studios at the ESPN Cafe where we broadcast one day. Synergy my butt—it's shameless self-promotion. The afternoon guy on our sister station is doing a live broadcast this week from the DISNEY MAGIC cruise ship. If Mickey breaks wind we're sent there to smell it.—Cast member's name withheld

Dear Cast Member: A free vacation can cloud better programming judgment. Come to think of it, isn't that “Mouseola?”

Dear PD: Hello, my name is Steve and I am a 20-year-old college student fascinated with radio, and the radio business. I was wondering if there is any information that you can give me for a push in the right direction. Right now I am attending a junior college and trying to get my basic classes out of the way, but I will be finished there soon, and I want to know what my next steps should be or if you had any pointers for me. Thank you for the time, and I hope to hear back from you soon.—Steve K.

Dear Steve: What are you waiting for? Start working at a radio station as an intern or board op. You'll learn more on the job than taking expensive classes at a broadcasting school. Find out if it's what you really want to do.

Dear PD: Where do these beginning board operators making \$25,000 get the right to cry and whine about their pay? I've been doing this for 10 years or so. I just got back into radio three years ago, now I do overnights for less than \$20,000 a year. In a major market!! So perhaps the children should stop the crying and go to work for Mama and Dada.—
Mike, Phoenix, AZ

Dear Mike: Sounds like you've got a bad case of pay envy. There's something wrong if you've been in radio ten years and are earning less than \$20,000 a year. Get off your butt and do something about it.

Dear PD: Reading your column, which I find very entertaining, reminds me of why I'm glad I got out of radio nine months ago. I started my illustrious, 5-year career in the business as a board-op for a talk station. After working every shift, including overnights and weekends, picking up extra duties, including traffic director, morning show producer, assistant engineer and assistant program director all at the same time, giving myself to the station no matter what, working 60-70 hours a week while going to college full-time and doing all this on a salary, I had enough. The morning show host for the station I worked also doubled as PD. The two of us clashed philosophically on morning show ideas and other things.

He moved here about 10 years ago. This is my hometown. He would screw facts up on the air and I would correct him. This really miffed him. He wanted me, as producer, to keep up with the news for him. I saw no need to do this, because I viewed it as his responsibility as a good morning host to know more than the listener. Finally, everything came to a head. He called myself and two other board ops into a meeting to announce he had let a part-timer go and we were all going to have to pick up an extra 10 hours a week with no increase in pay. All the while I'm losing my grandmother to cancer. I tell him I can't do it due

to prior obligations on my time and the fact I'm losing my one living grandparent to a horrible disease. He tells me I'm either "With the team" or "I'm out." Needless to say, I said "I'm out."

Right then and there I knew I had made the right decision, but I didn't know why. Well, while working out my two weeks, I obtained a job as a reporter for an NBC affiliate in the same town. One month after I started at the new job, I got the chance to report my former station had just been sold. It was one of the happiest moments of my life. Let's just say I got out at the right time. I've never been happier and you couldn't pay me enough to get back into radio. I loved it when I was breaking in, but too soon realized it's all about the bottom line. At least in TV I get two days a week off and they actually pay overtime. That's something, which never happened for me in radio. By the way, my former PD still works for the group that bought my old station. When he needs news—because we are #1 in town by a 3-1 viewer margin over our closest competition in ALL demos according to the latest Nielsen ratings—guess who he has to talk to? Me. Anyway, keep up the great work . . . I'll keep on reading.—Jeremy Pate, NewsChannel 7 WJHG, Panama City, Fl.

Dear Jeremy: How do you really feel?

CHAPTER 58

Purple Reign

From a distance, it looked like a deliveryman was carrying Barney the dinosaur in his arms—a huge purple thing, all wrapped in plastic.

“Oh no, Barney’s gonna suffocate,” a wise-ass sales account exec said to a bunch of us in the front office.

Our do-as-I-say-don’t-do-as-I-do GM, who just recently asked department heads not to spend anything unless we had to, ordered some new purple furniture for his office. A second deliveryman soon appeared carrying another purple chair. Then the two of them brought in a purple couch.

“So much for getting those new T-shirts for summer,” the AE snarled.

“We could always give his furniture away on the air,” I countered.

“Ninth caller wins Barney,” the AE joked.

There are enough leftovers to throw another banquet.

Stacks of roast beef, ham, and other assorted cold cuts. Sandwich rolls. Huge bowls of potato salad, coleslaw, and fruit salad. Bottled water and soft drinks, plus a delicious assortment of desserts to die for. It made me think of what my dad used to say at dinner when he noticed we hadn’t cleaned our plates. “Think of the people in China who are starving.”

A mere 55 people showed up for our music test. I'd arranged with the catering department of a local hotel to feed a hungry mob of at least 100 human guinea pigs. They'd sit through 300 song hooks, grading each one on a scale from "like a lot" to "don't like," break for dinner, then be herded back into a ballroom for another 300 hooks.

"Sorry sir," the assistant catering manager told me, "health regulations prohibit us from re-serving the leftovers. But, if you like, you can take it all with you."

The representatives from the company we hired to conduct the music test shook their heads and shrugged their shoulders. They showed me a list of the 110 people who had confirmed they'd participate in the research.

"This has never happened before," the female rep said. "You pay them and feed them, they always show up," her male cohort added.

We'd hope for better results the next night, when another of our stations would test its music.

As for the leftovers, I got some sympathy, but no price break. I was stuck for the entire bill. But I'd get to take enough potato salad back to the station to feed the jocks for at least a year.

If we froze it.

While most people were enjoying holiday barbecues, picnics, and parades, I spent Memorial Day in the emergency room of a local hospital.

For three months, my dad had sounded like the Godfather. He had an unusually soft, raspy voice, but no sore throat. Not only that, but he kept having difficulty swallowing food. We'd sit at a table in a restaurant when he'd start coughing and choking uncontrollably. The wait staff would run over to make sure a chicken

bone hadn't lodged in his throat. "Food just went down the wrong pipe," he'd croak.

Dad's doctor kept prescribing large doses of antibiotics, but there was no change in his condition. In fact, he was getting progressively worse. His weight was dropping faster than an actress on *Ally McBeal*. Finally, in what seemed like a desperate attempt to come up with a diagnosis, the doctor determined that dad had something called a "hiatal hernia."

"Nothing you can take for that," the doc told my mom. "It'll just take more time for him to get over it."

"He's a practicing physician," Dad joked in his hoarse voice. "He'll keep practicing until he finally gets it right."

But he never did. And that's why, after still another choking spell, my wife insisted we drive dad to the ER.

After almost a two-hour wait, Dad got to see a doctor, who recommended immediate X-rays.

Our worst fears were soon realized. The patriarch of our family had lung cancer. The ER doctor made a phone call and checked dad into the hospital. He'd undergo a battery of tests the next day.

"Can you bring my radio when you come back, the one with the ear-piece?" Dad asked me.

He loved listening to talk radio.

You didn't have to be Dr. Laura to sense there was something going on between the two reps from the company doing our music research.

They were unusually flirtatious with each other as they sharpened pencils and put testing materials on the tables in the hotel banquet room we'd reserved for a second night of music testing.

"Why is he here?" I flat out asked the female research rep.

"Oh, he interprets the research for us," she explained. "He wasn't doing anything else, so he thought it would be fun to fly in and help me."

In all, only 58 people attended, which was again well below the expected sample. We'd ordered enough food to feed 100 people.

The female rep showed me the list of 100 names, assuring me they'd all been called that day. "Each and every one of them said they were coming," she insisted. "I can't explain it."

"I can assure you that in all the years we've done music testing, this has never happened," her male counterpart said. "It must be your market."

For the second night in a row, I'd have to pack my car with expensive leftover hotel food.

I couldn't wait to tell my GM. A cold roast beef sandwich, potato salad and a slice of cheesecake wouldn't pacify him.

No, he'd want all our money back.

When I told them about my dad's condition, virtually every one at the station encouraged me to take the rest of the week off.

I went to a part-time schedule, thinking that it might take my mind off my dying dad for at least half of each day.

Back at the hospital, a cancer doctor went over all the test results with my mom and me. We met in the hallway just outside my dad's room. I could tell what was coming by the serious look on the doctor's face. He adjusted his glasses, stroked his beard, then took a deep breath and sighed.

"There's really nothing we can do for him," the doctor said coldly. "He could undergo chemotherapy, but at his age, it would probably do more damage than good. You could send him to an expensive convalescent home, where they could feed him with an IV and keep him alive an extra week or two. Or, you could take him home. He has about a week."

"What would you do if he was your dad?" I asked the middle-aged doctor.

"Take him home."

The doc gave us a prescription for morphine and told us to

give it to him for pain. "You don't need to tell people about this," he cautioned. "I'm doing this as a favor. For you and your dad."

The next day, when I went to pick up my dad and take him home from the hospital, I was stunned to see him sitting up in bed. He had the color back in his face. He grabbed my hand with unusual strength. And his voice sounded normal again. He cracked a few jokes about the hospital food and his annoying roommate. This was the dad of old, full of energy and good humor. I was convinced he'd made a miraculous recovery. I went to tell his nurse the good news.

"That sometimes happens when a patient gets bad news," she told me. "They get a burst of energy for 24 hours, then their health reverts back to the way it was."

Unfortunately, she was right. And so was the doctor, who had predicted the lung cancer would vanquish dad in a week.

I left work early on Friday to have lunch with my wife. Afterwards, something compelled us to stop by my parents' house.

Just as I pulled up, my mom came rushing out onto the front porch and waved to us to come quickly.

Dad was slipping away. His eyes were closed, he was breathing heavily, and his legs were turning blue.

My wife took one of his hands and I took the other.

"If you can hear us, it's okay, we love you, you can go," she said softly. "Squeeze my hand if you can hear me."

He squeezed her hand. Tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Dad, I love you," I said.

Within two hours, he was gone. A hospice nurse arrived to help. She took the prescription bottle of Morphine and dumped it down the kitchen sink, then stashed the empty bottle in one of her bags.

I thanked the Lord I'd had a week to say goodbye to my dad.

As always, he was more concerned about me than he was for his own impending death.

He was proud of my career in radio, but found its two-to-three-year cycles of employment unfathomable. This was a man

who'd worked at the same civil service job for more than 30 years. He worried more about my future than I did.

"If you can't get into something more stable, at least make sure you save your money."

The station sent me a potted palm tree in condolence of dad's death.

I remember him, and his advice, every time I look at it.

Finally, after an angry phone call from my GM, the research company that flubbed our music tests agreed to come back in two weeks—for make-good tests.

Actually, it took him threatening a full-page ad in "Radio and Records" magazine before the company came to its senses.

We won't have to pay for the first round of tests. That only makes sense. But now they're fighting us over who'll pay the hotel catering department for all that wasted food.

The human guinea pigs that show up for the next testing won't have the luxury of eating a buffet dinner in between song hook sessions.

No, next time, it's box lunches.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I have never e-mailed so many people your column as I did this past week . . . especially on the Disney remotes. It truly is amazing how many of those little useless interviews go bye-bye into the ozone. But hey, at least at the last remote—the Millennium thingy—not only did I get the autographs of Mickey, Minnie, Donald and Goofy, they did a great job. Why, out of 75 interviews, one coming out well is possibly a new world record. Hate to make this a no-

names kind of email, but guess who has to go back later this year.—Coward

Dear Coward: Don't forget to wear your mouse ears.

Dear PD: While reading about your latest misadventures with NTR—non-traditional sales revenue—I kept hoping I would see that you or your staff had checked with the Radio Advertising Bureau and had our NTR and Co-Op department save the day. From New Co-Op & NTR E-mail Listings to the 2000 NTR Calendar, the RAB has several resources available for ideas on Non-Traditional-Revenue. Hey, I am not trying to sound like a commercial; I just wanted to let you know. I enjoy reading your column every week and I hope you find continued success at your stations.—Todd

Dear Todd: Thanks for the info. If a station has to execute a NTR event, it might as well come up with something good for both the clients and the listeners.

Dear PD: I'm working on finding a new gig. As I put together a tape, I'm wondering what I should put on it. Should I do a "best of" the morning show? Or just take a few weeks' worth of stuff and put it all on there, warts and all? I took a whole week of tapes and I'm hearing how things continue on from segment to segment, and even day to day. What do you prefer getting? Also, as a many-year veteran, I used to board-op Bruce Williams . . . and he once said instead of sending a resume, send a one-page letter explaining your job history in conversation form and what you can and want to do. What do you think?—Sick of Corporate Radio

Dear SOCR: On the first count, I think you should hit a prospective PD with your very best material. The idea, as I've explained in this space before, is to get the PD to call you back for more tape. No slight against Bruce Williams, but I suspect most PDs prefer a short cover letter with a resume. It's the tape that will get you the phone call.

CHAPTER 59

Trunk Show

I forget what station I was working for, but I do remember I came within a nervous heartbeat of doing something that I might have regretted the rest of my radio career. That's provided I ever worked in radio again.

We were doing a contest to cycle morning listeners to the afternoon show. It was quite simple, really. At 7:20 AM I was to announce to listeners what I'd put in the trunk of our station vehicle. All they had to do was call in and repeat back what I'd said when they were prompted to sometime during the 4 PM hour.

It was my last morning on the station—I'd resigned for a gig in another part of the country—and my co-workers were egging me on to go out with a bang. They thought it would be hilarious if I insulted our reviled consultant by stuffing his body in the trunk of the car.

I was a young, impressionable jock still trying to make a name for myself. This might do it.

My song was ending. I hit the contest bed. Let it establish. Clicked on the mic. Ad-libbed around the copy . . . when I approached the name of the thing our promotions director wanted me to read.

And then, I swear, a battle between good and evil ensued in my head.

"Do it," said a deep voice that sounded like, no, could it be, Satan? "Screw the consultant. Get the last laugh on the cretin. You'll become a legend at this station."

“Don’t do it,” said a sultry voice that sounded like, no, could it be, The Greaseman’s wife? “The audience doesn’t know or care about your consultant. Besides, he’ll ruin you when he finds out what you did. Be professional.”

And at the last instant, I stuck to the contest copy.

Which brings me to this old adage in the radio business: Don’t burn your bridges.

Six or seven months ago, I was dialing around on my car radio and, by pure happenstance, caught the tail end of a sports report on a competing station in my market.

The perpetually peppy sports dude gave his name, just as he always did at the end of his hourly segment on the morning show.

And then he dropped a bombshell on his listeners and the morning team.

“Starting tomorrow at 6:20, you can hear my sports reports on (competing station frequency and call letters)!” he crowed. “(Competing station call letters) rocks!”

Holy crap! He’d quit on the air. No two weeks’ notice. No chance to let his PD or GM makes a counter offer to keep him from walking across the street.

A commercial started playing, but only after the sports guy had said the competing station’s calls twice. I could only imagine what was transpiring in that on-air studio. Yelling. Screaming. Pushing. Shoving. Maybe a fistfight? The morning host had a bad temper. I could envision him punching out the sports guy, unless the news sidekick intervened.

Admittedly, the PD in me took a perverse sense of joy in the sports guy publicly defecting from the station that had given him his start four years earlier. How embarrassing and humiliating! Better it happened to them, not me.

On the other hand, I contemplated in my head the possible long-term repercussions of the sports guy’s radio mooning—which,

obviously, he hadn't bothered to do. What if, say, down the road, his former employer purchased the station he'd gone to work for? Don't think they'd blow him out? Guess again, Einstein.

Or, how about this nightmarish scenario? The morning team the sports guy betrayed gets fired, sits out a non-compete for three months, and then resurfaces.

On his station!

Vacation, vacation, vacation.

The afternoon guy walks into my office a half-hour before his show and says he'd like to talk about when he can take some time off.

"When were you thinking?" I asked innocently enough.

"Summer," he replied.

"Which week?" I quizzed him.

"No, I mean the whole summer!" he told me.

"What, do you think you're a teacher?" I joke with him.

"No, I think I'm as good as Neil Rogers!" he fires back.

And then he shows me a story he's pulled off the Internet site for a Miami newspaper, announcing that talk show host Rogers has reportedly re-upped with WQAM for a gazillion dollars—plus, every summer off.

My afternoon guy and I agree on one thing. Whatever company Rogers works for, we'd like to work for it, too.

Somebody in power at corporate who has nothing better to do calls our GM today to let him know something serious has happened on one of our stations.

"I received two E-mails complaining about the subject matter on the morning show," the VP of Brown Nosing tells our GM.

When the GM relates the call to me, I'm positively stunned

on two counts. First, I'm amazed that anyone at corporate knows how to turn on a computer. They must have called someone in engineering. Second, I can't believe such overreaction. Two E-mails complaining about the morning show? Oh . . . my . . . God! Better fire someone.

With apologies to Dennis Miller, I don't want to go on a rant here, but why is it the suits who go out of their way to tell anyone who'll listen that "I don't get involved in programming" constantly meddle in programming?

Note to Meddlesome Owners, Corporate Brown Nosers, and GMs: If you hire a program director and pay him big bucks to program your station and direct the talent, let them do it. But if the PD is only there to carry out your marching orders, don't bother. Save the moving expenses and the salary. Just let one of the sales assistants schedule the jock shifts, fill out the time sheets, and type memos.

Thanks. Now go take on the golf course.

Payback can be a bitch.

Remember the brash sports guy I was telling you about? The morning team he betrayed was let go at the station where he used to work. However, their 90-day non-compete contract expires on Monday. And yup, you guessed it. They've been hired to be the new morning show at the station where the sports guy works.

Oops. I mean, where the sports guy *worked*.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: I lost my mom to cancer four years ago. The Program Director insisted that I sit in for the "ill" morning man the week that her death loomed. The morning man,

who had about 12 weeks off a year, made 10 times what I did, and was known for his legendary “hang-nail” excuse to miss this major market gig on a regular—and frustrating—basis. The phone would ring at 3 AM and our world weary PD would say “we need ya to do the show this morning, the big guy has a tummy ache,” you know, that sort of stuff. The tummy aches were usually fired by gallons of alcohol. Mom had been diagnosed with colon cancer. She was slipping from the terror and destruction and pain of chemo and a grueling post op, to the final dementia, as the cancer spread to her brain. Instead of being there for my mom and dad, I was stuck in another guy’s chair, increasing his almighty “ratings”.

My mom died with courage that would make a drill sergeant weep. I was an idiot, and opted for the company and the ratings. Last week, I was fired from that same station. New PD, new GM, no memories of some of those mornings, killer ratings; and when I answered the call of the Program Director, instead of my family. The next time the phone rings from the idiot GM of yours, and he wants you to polish his purple desk, or work extra hours, opt for your family. You will sleep better at night.—A Fan

Dear PD: Even though we have never spoken let me offer my heartfelt condolences on the passing of your father. I’m still fighting back the tears from your article. My dad has been ill for a couple weeks. He was on vacation when my mom took him to the ER. The x-ray showed spots on his lungs. He is home now and will go in for more tests tomorrow. All I can do is pray and hope for the best. I’m in the middle of a format change for a major market station. Last week my only concern was the station. Now things are in perspective. I keep telling myself it’s only radio. It’s a shame it takes a jolt of tragedy to see what is really important. I love my job but starting now it’s just my job not my life. I wish you all the best and hope you are surrounded by family & friends

during this time of grieving. Remember, it's only radio.—
Shaun Pierce, WZPT, Pittsburgh, PA

Dear PD: Just wanted to be one of the many, I'm sure, to send condolences on the death of your father. I recently moved home to be with my mom, who has emphysema. Your moving story made me realize . . . again . . . that I did the right thing. You're in my thoughts and prayers.—Katie Pruett, KRLD 1080/Dallas-Fort Worth

Dear PD: From one PD to another, of course I enjoy reading your column every week. After reading about your dad's death intermixed with the music survey debacle, I want to let you know that your story telling is where your real talent lies. Like a book you can't put down, your columns are full of enough passion to bring a tear and a laugh every week. My condolences to you for your dad AND station management.—Jim Stallings, WAJR, Morgantown, WV

Dear PD: Sorry to hear about your dad. Condolences to you. Just wanted to say I love your column. Being an on air guy for 10 years and witnessing some of the most brilliant moves to the most buffoon-like from GMs to the all-night guys, your chronicles never fail to amaze and entertain. That is all.—Bottom-feeder in Canada

Dear PD: I know what you went through with your father. Dad died at about 2 AM Friday morning. I had missed Tuesday-Friday of my air-shift, yet hadn't had a sick day off in over 10 years and very few vacations. I hit the road a few hours later and was back home by early afternoon. I soon found out they had me doing a remote the next day, Saturday, at a major convention center in town. I put on my best smile and did the remote. I only got a plant from the station three or so days after I got back and that was because somebody wondered why none had been sent. I was pulling in huge afternoon numbers and did morning fill-in.

I look back at the whole thing and in some ways figure getting back to work right away may have been a good

thing to do, but I also think the station lacked any real feeling for the whole matter, too. The Morning Guy's wife got flowers sent to her if she even got a cold. Almost eight years later the station is another format, the whole staff I worked with is gone, the fantastic morning guy is now at some little hole-in-the-wall station, and I am the only person still in the market doing radio from the old group. 15 years this month, in the same town and now I own my own morning show, broadcast on the Internet and have my own company doing what I love. Dad, who was in TV and Radio, is in my thoughts daily and I try to do the kind of show I think he'd approve of, something for the whole family and not the same 200 oldies over and over. My collection in the studio is almost 5000 songs and they all get played—just not at the same time. I read your adventures every week and wish you the best of luck. Who knows, maybe they have a special place in heaven for radio dads? Maybe yours and mine will have a cold one and help keep us safe in this dog eat dog business we love so much.—Mike Shannon, "Shannon In The Morning," Good Time Oldies Radio Network, South Bend, Indiana

Dear PD: Condolences on your dad. I'm glad you had some extra time with him. I was really close to my father-in-law, who died six years ago—he had a series of strokes while I was in the middle of a job-related move from one market to another. Best wishes.—Chris Miller

Dear PD: It's interesting that you brought up the low radio salary issue again in a recent column. I think the industry as a whole is in for a rude awakening unless they decide to cut loose with a little more cash. I've worked in the business for 18 years with stops at the network level at NPR and NBC. Salaries remained low and benefits were mediocre. Frankly, I didn't know any better. Now I have an entry-level job as a content writer for a tech company. The salary is the highest I've ever made and the benefits are excellent.

When I took my last job as a mid-level news writer two years ago, I had stiff competition for the job. When I left a year later my boss couldn't find a replacement for over six weeks and eventually settled on someone with far less experience. While the tech bubble may well burst in the next few years, a whole generation of young people—and us old timers—are not going to settle for low wages and lousy benefits. I look forward with great joy to the day when a GM making hundreds of thousands a year can't understand why no one will take their top 10 market news director job for \$25,000 a year.—Mel, San Francisco, CA

Dear Mel: Obviously, your last name isn't Karmazin!

CHAPTER 60

Breaking and Entering

In a rare moment of weakness—okay, maybe I just wore him down—my stubborn, tightwad G M relented.

“All right, go ahead. You can get two new tires for the station vehicle,” he said in a disconsolate voice. “But that’s all.”

It was a start. All four tires on the vehicle were as bald as Samuel L. Jackson in “Shaft.”

“What about the brakes?” I reminded him.

“What about them?” he growled impatiently.

I told him the station mascot, who also drove the vehicle, had returned from an appearance looking as white as a ghost. The brake pedal on the vehicle had nearly touched the floorboard. He wasn’t sure he’d be able to stop when he pulled into our parking lot.

“He says the vehicle’s unsafe to drive,” I offered.

“The kid’s overreacting,” was my GM’s response.

Okay, I knew, and my GM knew, that the station vehicle was a rolling death trap. But my GM wasn’t about to spend \$1300 on a brake job when he was this close to making budget this month.

“You’ll just have to put it off a few weeks,” he said, the temperature in his office plunging from his cold heartedness.

So what if the brakes failed and the 19-year-old college student behind the wheel of our station vehicle wound up in the hospital? The bottom line was . . . the bottom line.

For my GM, there would always be another \$6-an-hour kid to take his place.

Ah, the joy of ratings victory—the ear-to-ear grins, the high-five slaps, the flowing champagne, the shrieks of joy in the hallways. And the “no numbers are ever good enough” GM who cautions, “I’ll believe it if we do it again next book.”

Well, it’s only fair to share the flip side. A bad trend.

No matter how many times you’ve done this, it’s always the same. You can feel the butterflies fluttering around in your stomach and you can hear your heart thumping as you download the numbers from Arbitron’s web site. You hope your station trended up, but, if it didn’t, you pray to the Arbitron gods that you at least stayed flat.

And then, in a matter of minutes, which seem more like an eternity, you get your first glimpse of the 25-54 numbers. Your heart sinks. Down almost a half a point. 12+? The same. Then you look at the individual day-parts to find out who, specifically, took the hit.

Mornings, off. Middays, off. Nights, off.

A bad trend or book, and the PD who was once king suddenly becomes the loneliest person at the radio station. People make it a point to steer clear of your office, as if the low numbers might somehow be contagious.

“I’m really concerned about the morning show, it hasn’t been sounding right lately,” the GM will say, even though it occurs to you that it took a bad trend for him to jump to that conclusion.

“You got Arbi-fucked,” the consultant with the chin up attitude tells me over the phone. “Station had a bad month. What, did you suddenly start doing bad radio?”

“It’s only a trend,” a colleague from another market reminds me, although it’s easy for him to say. His station’s trend was up almost a full share.

But what you dread most as a PD on ratings day is conveying the bad news to your air talent, especially the ones whose day-parts took a dump. That’s when you have to put aside your own

suicidal feelings, suck it up, and get back to being a coach and cheerleader.

After all, a bad trend or book isn't the end of the world. It just seems that way.

It goes like this: A desperate man in desperate times decides to do something that defies all logic.

“Nothing kills a bad product faster than good advertising.” The struggling AM station in our cluster could be a case study.

My GM, under pressure to show some kind of upwards ratings growth—a tenth of a point would do, inasmuch as the station's sitting at a .8—for the AM'er, decides to shoot the rest of the year's budget in one month.

Thus, the promotion, “A Car A Day In the Month of May.”

Some of us in programming tried to warn him that it was a waste of airtime and money, because, all together now, “Nothing kills a bad product faster than good advertising.” The AM station is still a work in progress, a hodge-podge of programming intended, truth be told, to keep a rival broadcaster from coming into the market and attacking our other AM, the cash cow of our cluster.

But you know how most GMs are. Stubborn. Headstrong. Programming geniuses. And if they're proven wrong, which they often are, they can deflect all blame onto their PD.

So anyway, the station, with a determined single-mindedness, devotes all of its on-air promotional time in May to the car giveaway. Then comes the big car start party in the parking lot of the station. 31 cars lined up. When the time comes, the 31 winners each grab a key. They scramble from car to car until their key turns over the engine of a brand new vehicle.

Reads like a textbook CHAPTER on how to do a great promotion, right? Except a bunch of us from the station hear rival stations playing in the cars as the winners are driving off our parking

lot. This, after we'd carefully set every car radio in the parking lot to OUR AM station.

Oh, the humanity.

Now, you may be wondering what effect the "Car A Day In the Month of May" promotion had on the station's ratings? According to the trends, the AM'er dipped a tenth of a point 12+ and slipped two-tenths of a point 25-54.

Note to self: *Get with morning man on Oldies station after his shift. Seems to be going off the deep end.*

This morning, for what seemed like every break during the 7 o'clock hour, he went on *ad nauseum* about how he likes to watch old western movies starring Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, and John Wayne. Yessiree, pardner, he was even giving plot lines.

You could almost hear the listeners tuning out.

Urgent message, call the consultant's office.

One of the music experts there had a chance to analyze the latest Selector disk we'd sent him. Selector is the music scheduling system many music stations use. Seems Leslie, who we'd promoted from jock to Music Director for our country station, had been asleep at the keyboard.

"You have serious and severe overplay on your tempo records," the expert told me over the phone, "and underplay on the ballads."

This was about the third or fourth time he'd run an analysis and found rotation problems with the music. I suggested either he come to us, or I send Leslie to him for a day or two of intensive Selector re-training.

It was settled. She'd go to him.

And with any luck, the problem would soon go away.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: Your column last week appealing to GMs to butt out of programming was great! My GM constantly questions the music we're playing, the money we're giving away, and my decisions about the talent line-up, yet we're top five in the ratings. Why are they such pains in the butt?—Anon., Jacksonville, FL

Dear Anon: It appears they don't have much else to do. I wonder if the owners have noticed?

Dear PD: I'd like to go from jock to PD some day. I'm working in a small market right now but would like to make a jump up. Any career advice?—Donny Samuels, Lafayette, LA

Dear Donny: Learn everything you can—programming, promotions, marketing, sales, and music. Learn it from a good mentor. Then, apply that knowledge to your first PD job.

Dear PD: I'm having second thoughts about getting into radio after graduating from college. If you had it to do all over again, would you get into radio, especially in today's world of radio consolidation?—Curious, Tampa, FL

Dear Curious: Honestly, I'm not sure. I think there are other careers in the media and Internet where you can make as much or more money than radio, plus the benefits are better. I think if I had to do it all over again, I might head right out of college into PR, corporate communications, advertising, or new media.

CHAPTER 61

Star Wars

This would be a cinch.

It was our radio station staff against star players from the major indoor soccer league team in town. We'd be taking them on in volleyball at a pediatric AIDS fund-raiser. They would only be allowed to use their feet for the first game of our match.

Most of the jocks from our rock station spent the week leading up to the event ridiculing the other team on air, saying how a bunch of soccer players couldn't play volleyball, how we'd shut them out the first game, and how it would be noooooo contest.

Come Saturday, it was no contest, all right. We lost the first game of the match, 15-3. The soccer players used their feet to dazzlingly dig out balls we spiked over the net with all our might. Remarkably, they returned pinpoint shots that always seemed to land just out of the reach of our players.

In the second game, they used their hands and feet, plus pure athleticism, to destroy us, a bunch of mostly sedentary, beer bellied guys, 15-zip. As if to punctuate things with an exclamation point, they toyed with us—cat and mouse—in the third and final game of the match before humbling us, 15-10.

If there were a rematch, we'd ask them to wear blindfolds.

Ah, summertime at the radio station and the living is easy. On the eyes.

It doesn't take long for word to spread that there's a "hottie" in the building. I'm no more than a minute into interviewing a candidate for traffic reporter when a two-way traffic jam ensues in the hallway outside my office window.

If the college coed could only see them—a pathetic parade of horny guys, ogling at the pretty young thing with the flowing blonde hair in the sundress. One of them, a rebellious and mischievous sales account exec in his early 50s, sticks his tongue out and wags it like Gene Simmons of Kiss as he saunters by.

Yes, it's true what they say about men.

Fortunately, her back was turned to them. Me, I had to muster every ounce of my composure to ignore the disruption her presence was causing among our male work force. In addition, I had to fight off the impulse to stare at her perfectly tanned legs, which she'd crossed while sitting in a chair directly in front of me. A gold chain dangled from around her left ankle. I remember thinking that her dress was inappropriately short for our meeting, but I went on with the interview anyway.

Tough job. But somebody had to do it.

You never know what will happen next on the radio.

The Morning Guy on our rock station called out a name in the 7 AM hour for a contest we're running. Minutes later, a listener responds: "I think the name you called out is . . . my dad."

So? So, the caller said, he hadn't seen his old man since he'd divorced his mom and moved across the country 18 years ago.

This is what's called a "gift" in radio. If you're a sharp, enterprising morning man, you don't question why or how it happens, you just thank the Arbitron gods and run with it.

Which is what this morning man did. He put out, in effect, an all points bulletin over the air for the kid's dad.

45 minutes later, dad called in. Co-workers had alerted him

that he was being talked about on the local rock station. The Morning Guy reunited father and son on the air.

Ironically, dear ol' dad missed the deadline to win the cash in the station contest.

"That's okay," he told the morning man. "I lost the money, but I found my son."

The Arbitron gods were smiling on us.

This is when you find out how bad you really want to be in radio. And how paltry the pay is for entry-level jobs.

Marty, who'd been bugging me for months to join the morning show in some capacity, now had that opportunity. I needed someone to produce the new morning show, assemble a weekly best-of show, drive the station van to appearances, and do the heavy lifting. Marty's eyes lit up when I told him about the opportunity. And then his face quickly contorted to a look of stunning disbelief when I informed him what the job paid

"\$21,000 a year? I make more than that working security at the department store," he said. "And I get full benefits."

I told him to talk it over with his wife and get back to me. Ultimately, he accepted the job, which meant getting up at about 3:30 every weekday morning. He'd also keep working 30-hours a week at the department store. With a wife and a kid, he couldn't very well do without benefits.

Give him a week before he'd come back asking me for more money and full-time hours.

"You know, she's a blonde, so she's as sharp as a marble."

So joked the codger host on our news/talk station as he introduced a live piece by one of our reporters.

After the morning show, the reporter stopped by my office to

see me. I expected her to demand that I fire the geezer. Instead, she began by apologizing for him. "You know, some of these old guys still think that a woman's place is in the home, scrubbing toilets and ironing clothes."

I told her that I didn't think the host meant any harm, either, but that I worried his gender put downs and tasteless blonde jokes could diminish her news credibility. What I didn't tell her is that the host's comments raised the sexual harassment red flag.

"My neighbors are asking me how I can stand working with the guy," she admitted to me. "I try to tell them that he's just having some fun, but they think he's mean and nasty. I'm not going to blast him back on air."

I volunteered to have a talk with him, but the reporter, concerned that the host might overreact and stop talking to her if I reprimanded him, said she'd try to handle the situation herself. She'd use the angle that someone called to complain about the blonde jokes. Maybe then he'd become Mr. Sensitive and knock them off.

If not, I'd have to step in.

There's just something about radio station employees and transportation problems.

The morning sidekick/news personality on our Oldies station has a serious car problem. Michelle doesn't own one. And, because she's between boyfriends right now, she has to find a ride to and from work every day.

For now, the Morning Guy is picking her up on his way to the station every weekday at 4 AM. It's the ride back home that's the rub.

Most of us have learned to be on guard around 4:30 in the afternoon, when Michelle starts her search for free transportation. If we hear her voice in the hallway, we quickly pick up our phones and pretend to be in a pressing conversation with someone.

But always, she surprises at least one unsuspecting person who hasn't thought up an excuse, usually pouncing on her prey just as they're cleaning off their desk and closing their bag or briefcase.

"Are you going home soon?" she'll ask a startled sales AE.

"Well, uh, I, um . . . "

"Would you mind dropping me off at my house?"

"Where do you live?"

"Over by the Farmer's Market."

"I live the other direction."

"The bus doesn't come for another hour, and I've already been working 12 hours . . . "

"Well, I guess I could give you a ride . . . "

Got 'em!

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: Long time reader, first time writer. I love how each week, you come up with something new and interesting, I mean hey, that is what radio is all about, keeping it fresh! I wish the "big-wigs" in San Francisco radio market would get a clue. Heck, some of them aren't even Web-casting yet??? Hello, extra revenue—ever heard of it??? Why is it that radio and, for that matter, TV, have some of the most talented people in the biz, yet, in most cases, those people are treated like the scum of the earth. All the while, the PDs who often make dumb programming moves get treated like they are gods.

Shouldn't they suffer the same fate as the air talent? If the ratings aren't good, don't let the door hit you on the way out! Also, what's up with this new technology with automation and voice tracking that sounds so fake? A monkey can tell it's on tape, especially when the computer messes up and advances to the next song, when the "jock" talks up the

last song!!!! You know, back in college, they said radio was the place to be. Yeah, maybe, if you want to still be doing overnights for the same pay for more than five years at the same station! That's why I've left the business. Sorry if I'm ranting and raving, but something has gone seriously wrong with the radio business. I don't know if it will ever get back to the way it used to be.—Deejay, San Francisco, Calif.

Dear Deejay: How do you really feel? Let me address your issues in order. First, as a PD, I've never treated my talent as "scum." Those who do shouldn't be PDs. You win in music and talk with the best personalities. Second, PDs are like baseball managers. Most are hired to be fired. Those who enjoy longevity at one station are usually very smart and very, very lucky. PDs are treated like "gods" during the courting process with stations. Believe me, the honeymoon doesn't last long. Third, like you, I'm not a big fan of voice tracking, however, I do know that when it's done right, the average listener can't tell whether it's live or Memorex. Finally, don't think that all radio is bad because you had a bad experience at one station. It's up to you to make things happen. If, after five years on the overnight shift, the station you were working for didn't see fit to give you a raise or a better day-part, it was time for you to start looking.

Dear PD: A "Cheap Channel" station docked me a day's pay when my handicapped son was hospitalized with massive seizures, and I needed a day off to be with him. They claimed they had some obscure corporate policy that you cannot take a day off after a Monday holiday. My son had the nerve to get sick the day after Labor Day. This from a company that probably beats its corporate chest when it supports kids' charities. What a bunch of hypocrites!—Please don't use my name.

Dear Please: Stories like that give radio a bad reputation.

Dear PD: As a former radio newsman of 10 years now working outside the industry, I love to read your weekly

column! But I can't help wondering: Doesn't your own GM clue in on the fact that your column is about his stations most of the time? I mean, you aren't always the kindest about his actions.—Kevin Marks, Oxford, OH

Dear Kevin: My GM can't even figure out how to access his e-mail.

Dear PD: If I were in your shoes, I'd find a nice small market station and automate it. Sounds like the headaches you put up with are far too many for the money you're earning. Last week, you wrote about your GM refusing to pay for a badly needed brake job for the station vehicle. You might want to point out to him that a \$1300 repair bill is a lot less than \$13 million in a wrongful death lawsuit. Your station is breaking the law, knowingly operating a vehicle that is unsafe to operate. Tell your GM to go (bleep) himself and his budget. He'll get fired if your intern sails through a red light because the brakes don't work and some innocent person is killed. Surely you can trade out the brake job. Heck, even the GM in little old Albany, Oregon, sprung for a new Volkswagen Beetle, along with new tires and brakes for the station van! Your columns continually remind me that I am so glad I got out of radio when I did.—Bruce, Salem, OR

Dear Bruce: Remember, I'm dealing with a GM who wanted to save money by having the stations in our cluster share one morning paper.

Dear PD: By sharing your experiences, opinions and beliefs, I feel you have provided an outlet for various people in the industry to feel justified about some of their interpretations of what happens in and around a station. I was hoping to find out, when it comes to syndicated programming, how much say does an individual PD have over what gets cleared and what doesn't on their station? I got the impression from one music director here in Toronto that even against the wishes of both him and his PD, certain

programs were being cleared that they thought were bad for their station. Are there people at the network level that can "dictate" regional and national clearances?—Clayton Walters

Dear Clayton: Misery loves company, eh? As for forcing syndicated programming on PDs, well, it happens all the time. Remember, it's not always about "good programming" and "quality programs." Truth be told, some GMs will add syndicated product because the station gets compensated.

Dear PD: When we're all on the same team, and the money "all goes to the same place," why should one PD be on a mission to destroy the station "down the hall?" This is my life. In the 17 months I've been with this company, I've been part of a team that has taken our Classic Rocker off satellite from 6AM-8 PM Monday through Friday and really put it on the map. Ad revenues are currently 60% above a year ago, we've got a 3100-song play-list, listener and client response has been overwhelming, yet the PD down the hall is bent on destroying us. He's been with his station for over two decades. We do not share format or target demo. We've done nothing to cost him a single listener or advertiser. Our GM, who started at the same time I did, has been nothing but supportive to all three of our stations. Ever dealt with this?—The Big Guy

Dear Big Guy: Been there. I don't quite get how the guy down the hall is trying to destroy you. But, if there's something sinister going on, let your GM know. He needs to give the other PD an attitude adjustment. You and the other two PDs in your cluster should sit down and pass the peace pipe. Work with one another, not against each other. If your GM won't address the problem, you'll need to get with your adversary and try to turn him around.

CHAPTER 62

Brainiacs and Maniacs

Let us in!!

We were shut out of the big fireworks extravaganza the city's parks and recreation department throws every Fourth of July. As usual, the adult contemporary (AC) station in town would be hosting the event, which meant its highly rated and banal morning personality would be emceeing the proceedings over the public address system.

But, a staffer suggested, perhaps there would still be a way for us to have a presence, even if it was across the street from the high school stadium.

Hmm . . .

I didn't think it was possible, but the research company that screwed up the music tests for two of our stations also got an "F" on the make-good tests.

The first time around, we settled on a minimum of 100 people for the auditorium testing. We'd pay them and feed them to sit through 600, five-six second song hooks, which they'd grade on a sliding scale from "like a lot" to "don't like." Yet, only 55 people showed up. I got stuck paying for enough leftover coleslaw and potato salad to feed a hungry NFL team. "That's never happened before," the flabbergasted rep from the research company told me. "It must be your market," the rep's helper reasoned.

The make-good tests didn't fare much better. On a Friday evening, 76 people showed up. Saturday morning, the turnout was 67, including a blind guy who somehow slipped through the phone screening process. You should've seen the research company rep deal with him. It would have been laughable had it not caused such an embarrassing scene.

"You're throwing me out 'cause I'm blind, aren't you?" the guy with the red tipped cane protested. "No, no, let's go outside and talk about this, okay?" the rep said, ushering him out.

At least this time, I'd been smart enough to order inexpensive box lunches instead of a buffet. Still, I was again stuck with a bunch of leftover food, which I took back to the station and stuck in the fridge for the weekend board operators. Hell, they'd eat anything. Even the stuff in the back of the refrigerator that resembled petri dishes.

Anyway, the brainiac hired by the research company to numbers crunch the test results has to twice overnight us the data on computer discs because the first ones he sent were blank. Then the company has the nerve to send us a bill for \$26,760, not including the tab for renting the hotel ballrooms or the food that the hotel gouges you for.

The head honcho from the research company tried to mollify my GM, saying that the test results were still a "viable and valuable research tool," even though they'd failed four times to bring in the right sample number. He finally relented on the hotel costs, but insisted that our stations pay for the "normal costs associated" with music tests. The adjusted bill was now \$22,760.

My GM and I argued that the tests and make-goods were worthless because of the under-represented sampling. In our minds, we owed nothing because the research was flawed. "Hold on," said the head honcho. A minute went by before he came back on the line and said, "We're simply not going to eat that."

I got ticked, and when I started to question whether our tests were botched because the two people who'd shown up to conduct them seemed to be more interested in each other than in our

stations' musical welfare, well, my GM said, "Hold on a minute," pressed the mute button on his phone, and cautioned me to back off.

"You can't make an allegation like that without proof," he said sternly. "Let me finish up this call."

Finally, we agreed that we disagreed. The research guy would talk to his boss about our dispute. My GM promised to follow up with a letter to the company president.

"I'm telling you," I told my GM after the call, "there was something going on between those two."

He told me to "let it go."

Score one for the promotions director of our rock station.

We were all wracking our brains, trying to come up with a way we could infiltrate the annual Fourth of July fireworks show, even though the AC station in town owned it.

Out of nowhere, the promotions guy came up with a great idea. We'd distribute 3-D glasses before the show. Glasses with our logo on them. Some people might think our station was sponsoring the show. We'd promote the heck out of it.

Of course, leave it to one of the jocks to try and burst our balloon. "We don't have any 3-D glasses," he reminded us. He had a good point.

That's when our cagey promotions guy earned his money. All it took was a phone call to one of the record companies and, voila, we got our 3-D glasses.

Free.

This would be great. We'd park our station van across the street from the fireworks venue, then a bunch of us would pass out the 3-D glasses to people—on public property—as they arrived in the hour or so before the fireworks went off.

We'd deal with the other fireworks—an angry call from the city parks and rec department, no doubt—the following morning.

Over the years I've moved enough radio people from there to here—myself included—that, I joke to friends and family, I could start my own moving company if the radio career suddenly ended.

In the interest of public service—and anyone relocating to a new radio station over the summer months—here's what I've learned.

YOU DON'T WANT TO GO WITH A MOVING COMPANY IF:

- The guy giving you the estimate spends an inordinate amount of time going through your wife or girlfriend's underwear drawer.
- The name of the moving company starts with "Mom's," "Starving," or "Budget."
- The guys who do your packing talk about how they "just got out of the slammer a couple of days ago."
- The moving guy is missing more than three teeth.
- The moving guy's helper or helpers have tattoos on their arms that read "Crips" or "Bloods."
- The truck that pulls up to the front of your home or apartment reads "Two Ex-Cons Moving and Storage."

Seriously, always shop around. Get three estimates. When you declare a "winner," lie to the runner-up about how much lower the other company's estimate is, even if it isn't. Chances are they'll match or better the faux number.

Oh, and when the moving truck pulls up with all your stuff, make sure your wife or girlfriend's underwear is all accounted for.

From the e-mail bag:

Dear PD: You had a piece from someone who lost his holiday pay because he was out the next day taking care of a sick child. Well, it is not only in radio. I work for an oilfield services company that has the same policy. If an hourly employee—non-exempt to be technical—misses the next business day after a holiday, they don't get paid for the holiday. It must be legal, but it sure sucks. I enjoy reading your stuff. I had a short career in the radio business working as an automation jockey in the early 70's. We were known on the air as "all oldies, all the time." In the shop we joked, "All Bill Drake, all the effing time." Keep up the good work.—Harold

Dear Harold: Your transition from radio to the oil business reminds me of an apocryphal story about a morning jock in a small market who begged his GM to give him more money. "My wife is having a baby," he said. The GM responded by inviting the jock to come by his office at 2 that same afternoon. When he did, the GM said he'd found a way to get him more money. The catch? He'd have to pull a midday shift starting the next day. At the service station the GM owned.

Dear PD: I don't work in radio at all, I'm just an interested person in the business and I love reading your stories; they make laugh. Especially the ones about your GM. In my opinion, he's as dumb as a brick. You rule!—Yves

Dear Yves: Thanks. And wherever you work, keep all us radio people in mind when satellite radio renders radio station transmitters useless.

Dear PD: I look forward to your column every week. Your passion for radio still manages to shine through no matter what dilemma you write about. I am an 18-year pro

looking to land my first programming position. I was hoping to send you my programming philosophy to solicit your opinion, and hopefully network to a possible job opening. I have worked very hard over the past year securing RCS (Selector) software to learn music scheduling and improve as many of my skills as possible. I work for a small company that unfortunately does not have a program to develop from within. From your writing, I think you are both talented and secure enough to offer some very valuable advice. I also understand that your column is not your primary job. I am sure you are swamped. But can you help?—Joe

Dear Joe: I'd be glad to help. Just e-mail me your programming philosophy and resume. But just be careful what you wish for. After reading this column, do you really want to become a PD?

Dear PD: I am now a GM and my previous life as a major market PD has given me an advantage over some of my fellow GMs. However, I still get comments like "You still think like a programmer" from other GMs, or "You always take programming's side" from my general sales manager. I often contemplate how radio stations got divided up into "sides." I guess now I am on the side of good business, and good business means that there is a balance in the building. Remind your boss of the old rule: "Every PD gets 2 books, every GM gets 2 PDs." Also, remind him that it's pretty easy to plan for a new set of tires when he does his budgets. Vehicle maintenance is a no-brainer!—RJC

Dear Initials: Always nice when a programmer becomes a GM. I think it's up to the PDs-turned-GMs to educate sales people, especially the green ones, on ways to sell that benefit both listeners and the station's bottom line.

EPILOGUE

I've worked in radio during the best of times, and the worst of times. When it's good, there's nothing like it. It really is like getting paid to have fun. When it's bad, when you work for an owner, a GM, PD or Operations Manager who learned their management style from Saddam Hussein, well, let's just say the aluminum siding department of Sears begins to look appealing.

If this book doesn't discourage you from getting into radio, nothing will.

Granted, radio can take you on euphoric highs, reward you handsomely for ratings successes, gain you backstage passes to major concerts, and get you girls. But this under-appreciated, over-mythologized medium can also sucker punch you to the ground, leaving you dazed and confused.

Be advised: Radio is not for the thin-skinned. You live and die by the Arbitron ratings. There's no job security. You move from job to job, city to city. Talent is in the ears of the beholder; one program director may love you, his successor may loathe you. Unless you are very talented, lucky, or both, you live paycheck to paycheck. And very few in this business survive with one station or one company long enough to see a pension. Even when things seem to be going relatively well, all it takes is for some capricious jerk at corporate to change your format to the hottest new musical genre. Or talk the owner into selling the station.

Does radio beat working at an insurance agency? If you thrive in an environment that's different every day. Is it glamorous? Not very. Ask the sweaty promotions director who works 12-hour days, gives up most of his weekends, and does the heavy lifting to make his station look great at remote broadcasts and community events.

Is it fun? When the ratings are up. Can you get rich? If you're a Howard Stern, Rick Dees, or a smooth-talking sales account exec. Would I trade my job for any other in the world? In fact, I'm not sure I could get a job in the real world. There's nothing else I'm qualified to do. Besides, radio is in my blood, dammit!

You should know the human toll this business can exact on an individual and family. The heartbreak that comes when you leave good friends behind in a town that you started thinking of as "home." The sea of tears your kids shed as the moving van pulls away from the house that was their favorite of all the places you've ever lived. You begin to second-guess what kind of parent you are. On the one hand, I think moving my kids around like army brats—six times in 16 years, my wife reminds me—has made them stronger, more world-wise persons. On the other hand, my teenage daughter is now reluctant to make close friends or join school organizations because, I'm certain, she doesn't want to chance putting herself through the agonizing, emotional wringer of saying yet another round of good-byes.

Broken relationships are commonplace in radio. Fortunately, I'm blessed with a loving, doting wife who not once has even suggested divorcing me over my mistress, radio. Our marriage faced the ultimate test a few years ago, when one job ended and another one forced us to be apart for six months. For financial reasons, I rented a room in a house full of complete strangers in an unfamiliar new city while my wife and kids tended to things back home—including leaky plumbing, yard work, and a surly real estate agent. My heart ached for them during a separation that seemed to last an eternity. It was the loneliest period of my life.

The running joke among radio industry professionals used to be "Don't buy a house." It was such an insecure business, most gigs lasted 2-3 years. Nowadays, aside from teaching, undertaking, or working as a tax collector for the IRS, what profession IS secure? My dad worked the same civil service job for 30 years. My longest stretch at one job in radio is six years.

Radio is currently going through some painful growing pains

in what's best described as the Consolidation Era. The Telecommunications Act, signed into law by President Clinton in 1996, relaxed ownership restrictions and launched a consolidation revolution. Time was when you built a great on-air product and the revenue followed. Now, since giant companies own four, six, or even eight AM or FM stations in a single market (a cluster, they're called), the competitive spirit has been blunted. The cash cow or cows in the group get all the best programming and resources. The "other" stations in the cluster—the redheaded bastard stepchildren—serve to protect the cash cows from being attacked by another company's upstart wolf.

In fact, the big radio groups who've gone public now are under intense pressure and scrutiny to perform for Wall Street. Company stock prices take precedence over rating shares. The usual "rules" of good radio are ignored. If generating more revenue takes running what sounds like endless commercial breaks, so be it, radio listeners be damned. Even the also-ran stations are whored out. Somnolent infomercials for colon cleansers, water purifiers, healing magnets, and pills to stimulate sex drive may drive away most listeners, but they drive up the owners' profits.

Certainly, given all the recent technological advances, the medium looks vulnerable right now. The Internet offers competition with streaming audio that will soon be accessible through portable devices other than a desktop or laptop computer. Thanks to Napster, anyone with a computer or MP3 device can capture hit music for free on demand. Then there's satellite radio, which promises commercial-free programming on your car radio in return for a small monthly subscription fee.

But if you're expecting me to predict the end of the radio world, forget it. In fact, my hunch is that, as the battlefield widens, once-greedy radio owners will be forced to hunker down and fight for listeners by whatever means necessary—reducing spot loads, upgrading programming, and investing heavily in the on-air product.

If I'm wrong, if, sadly, it turns out that the owners in the

Consolidated Era really don't give a damn about good radio, you'll see broadcasting towers bulldozed, the valuable land turned into parking lots or expensive homes.

RESOURCES

ALLACCESS.COM: News, views, ratings information about music and talk stations. Also offers job listings. It's free to all who register.

RRONLINE.COM: Radio and Records magazine. Best weekly source for news about the radio industry, ratings, and job openings. Limited information online. Anyone serious about radio broadcasting is a subscriber.

RADIO-ONLINE.COM: Some free information, but some services cost.

OLDRADIO.COM: Broadcast archive. Radio history on the web. Great perspective for radio history buffs.

DMOZ.ORG/ARTS/RADIO/INDUSTRY/ Monster Radio Industry Directories, from the people who bring you the Internet Open Directory Project, with scores of links and listings

DMOZ.ORG/ARTS/RADIO/RADIO_GUIDES/ More Monster Radio Industry Directories, from the people who bring you the Internet Open Directory Project, with scores of links and listings

FMJOCK.COM: Informational hub featuring free show prep, radio news, radio jobs and loads more.

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Lies, intrigue, illicit affairs, kidnapping, snitches, and drug abuse. Sound like the stuff of a daytime TV soap opera? No, just a typical day at one of the radio stations where Jack James has worked. This major market program director's matter-of-fact, often cynical and mostly hilarious deadpan diary entries give readers a glimpse of what really goes on behind the scenes of an everyday radio station. There's the promotions director who uses her station's Web page to conduct an anonymous hate campaign against the new morning guy. The night DJ who can't pull his shift because some of his teeth have been knocked out in a drug deal. The popular host who confesses he's only been sober one day during the last year. The board operator who decides to hijack the airwaves and do his own talk show. And the woman with Tourette's Syndrome, who disrupts a remote broadcast from a bank. As the author notes, "Could I make this stuff up?" *The PD Chronicles* is must reading for anyone who has ever listened to the radio, works in radio, or is thinking about getting into radio.

Jack James, who started as a lowly gopher at an all-news station on the West Coast (as in, go for coffee, go for burgers), is now Program Director of a major market radio station in the United States. He has been an on-air talent or PD in Top 40, AOR (album oriented rock), country, urban, oldies, news, and talk. His radio odyssey has taken him to six cities in 16 years, working with some of the most talented personalities and professionals in the industry. James has survived format and ownership changes, good and bad ratings, substance-abusing employees, capriciously malevolent employers, and at least one death threat.

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