

RADIO'S PREMIER MANAGEMENT & MARKETING MAGAZINESM

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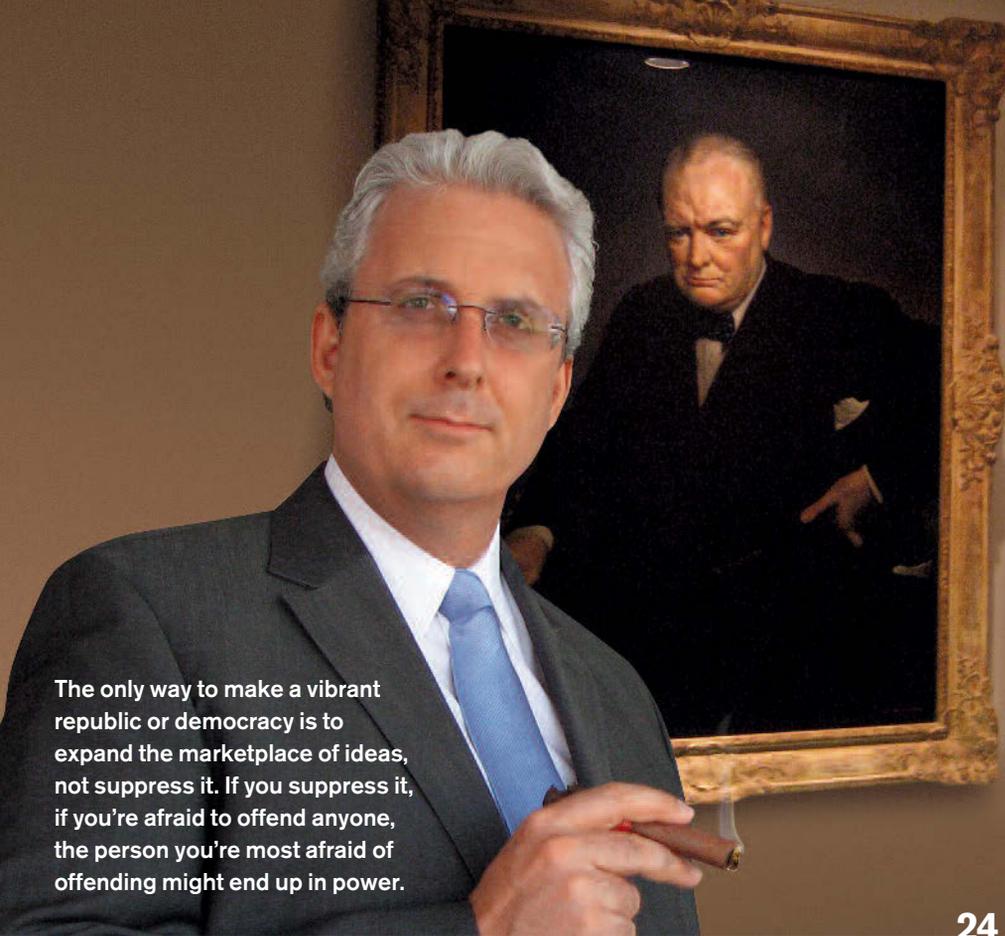
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Can Talk Radio Change History?

TRN CEO Mark Masters
Inspired by Churchill



The only way to make a vibrant republic or democracy is to expand the marketplace of ideas, not suppress it. If you suppress it, if you're afraid to offend anyone, the person you're most afraid of offending might end up in power.

24

IN THE ISSUE

06 PUBLISHER'S LETTER

My 15-Second Sales Course

08 ON AIR

10 THE WIZARD OF ADS

By Roy Williams
How To Spot A Wiener Dog

11 DIALOGUE

By VP/GM Deborah Parenti
Evaluating The Buzz

12 SPAM FILTER

By Gordon Borrell
The Digital Guru's Confession:
I Listen to Radio, And So Do My Kids

13 CONTESTING

By Ivan Braiker
Boost Ad Revenue,
Stay Connected To Listeners

14 DIGITAL SALES

By Shannon Deuel
Selling Interactive In A Local Direct Market

16 10TH ANNIVERSARY IN TALK

By Editor-In-Chief Brida Connolly
St. Louis Loves Glover

19 CLIFF EFFECT

By Skip Pizzi
Doctor's Orders: Keeping Radio
In Good Health Takes Work

20 CLIENT PROFILE

Autobody Idol

24 COVER INTERVIEW

By Editor-In-Chief Brida Connolly
Visionary Master



10



13



16



20

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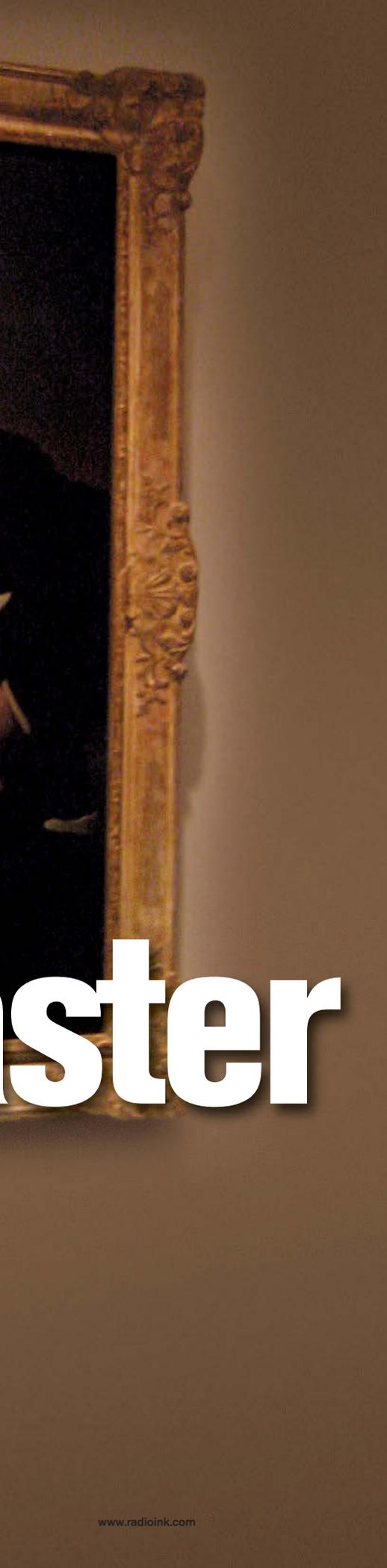
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**WINSTON CHURCHILL
WAS VIRTUALLY
BANNED FROM
THE BBC FROM
1928 TO 1938.
HAD HIS VOICE
BEEN ALLOWED
SOONER, WHAT
MIGHT HAVE BEEN?**

Visionary Ma

{ By Editor-In-Chief Brida Connolly }



ster

Mark Masters has visions, and he spins them out as he speaks. The Talk Radio Network president and CEO sees talk radio as a “pressure relief valve” for underserved citizens. His hosts perform “intellectual and emotional acupuncture” that lets them become part of the listener’s inner life.

Masters is a visionary, but he’s no mere romantic. He’s a sharp and savvy businessman who’s launched one successful show after another in a wildly competitive part of the business. And, as you’ll see, he thinks about sales, and loves a good seller, as much as anybody in radio. Perhaps his most fundamental vision of what talk radio can be? “The bait on the hook to recruit the best salespeople in the industry.”

>>What role do you see talk radio playing leading up to the November elections?

I think talk radio is an important pressure relief valve for the psyche of Americans. It’s a place where the marketplace of ideas can be fully explored. Half of America is underserved by television, and that part is properly served by talk radio.

I was approached at a seminar recently, and someone said, “Talk radio should be shut down.” And I said, “Who decides who’s allowed to speak?”

Let’s say you have a really benevolent person, and they make all the right choices. We could probably agree on that person. But what happens when the power is given to someone who is totally unfair? Now you have a real problem, because half of society is no longer represented. When you don’t have a robust, dynamic marketplace of ideas, tension and frustration build.

Talk radio’s role is not only to explore and flesh out all the ideas and all the sides, it also allows a catharsis, where that tension doesn’t build up. It’s almost like when family members finally get things off their chest. Things get better.

Talk radio creates a venting. If you didn’t have talk radio, you’d have a lot of angry people. Hosts — whether conservative, liberal, libertarian — emote on your behalf. And it’s a cathartic effect that allows perspective to come back.

>>There’s a term being tossed around now, probably more than any time since the late 1980s: “Hate radio.”

Hate radio is a term that is used to suppress the side you disagree with. So if a conservative disagrees with a liberal, the conservative can say that all liberal radio is hate radio. It just ends debate.

But let me give you a better perspective on hate radio. The BBC banned Winston Churchill from the airwaves, I believe between 1928 and 1938. They accused him — I’m paraphrasing — of creating angst and anger toward the sensibilities of the German people, because he was railing against Hitler. In England, the Labour movement at the time was very concerned about appeasing the Nazi movement in Germany, and they saw Churchill as a rabble-rouser — a guy who was spewing hate toward the Germans and the Nazis.

During the same period, a lot of people in England wanted to disband the military, saying the English military was actually a big cause of the friction between Germany and England. When Churchill went to France to talk the French into building up their military, the French ambassador told Churchill that the English had not only expressed desires to reduce the size of their military in the early ’30s, but had tried to convince the French to reduce their military from 700,000 to 400,000 troops.

Churchill was shocked by this, but he couldn’t find a venue to speak about it. Churchill called World War II the “unnecessary war” because Hitler got in as a result of low voter turnout. There were simply not enough voices exploring the ramifications of Germany’s ascension to power. There was only a desire to have peace, comfort, and security, and not tackle the topics.

I would argue that, had Churchill been allowed to go on the air and explore these issues in full, open, and sincere debate with pro-Germans, maybe, just maybe, there would have been enough consternation brought against the evils of the rising German party that a

higher voter turnout would've resulted in Hitler never getting in. Hundreds of millions of people wouldn't have had to die, all because Winston Churchill was allowed to speak for ten years on the BBC. But he wasn't.

He was banned because he was a troublemaker. He was *hate radio*.

The only way to make a vibrant republic or democracy is to expand the marketplace of ideas, not suppress it. If you suppress it, if you're afraid to offend anyone, the person you're most afraid of offending might end up in power. He might be the bad guy, as was the case in World War II, where everyone tried to appease the bad guy and things just got worse.

The worst thing that happens when people are debating is when you have a real nutcase who's full of hate. They normally implode and go away, right? Advertisers will not want to stick with them. The people with the best ideas will make their point in the strongest way, and the combination of the best conservative and the best classical liberal ideas makes for a stronger and better country, a stronger and better economy.

But when one side shuts down the other side, you have suppression and anger on either side. Not good. When you have a combination of conservatives and liberals, something good and magical comes out of that.



I'VE SYNDICATED MORE TOP 10 SHOWS THAN ABC, PREMIERE, AND WESTWOOD ONE COMBINED.

>>Has there been a major, driving issue for talk this year?

The national debt is a huge issue. Unemployment is a huge issue. The BP oil spill. Those three things seem to have even eclipsed the problems in the Middle East. There's a growing awareness, when you have millions of people about to lose their homes, an unemployment rate above 9.5 percent, when people don't see any tangible results of the TARP program in the small markets and in small business. That is a concern to people. A poll recently came out, I believe, that showed the overwhelming majority of people didn't think TARP helped; in fact, they thought TARP hurt. They wouldn't hold that opinion if they saw some tangible result in their own towns.

Jobs seem to be the overarching issue right now. A lot of the politicians have never met a payroll or run a business, and yet they're making decisions that affect 75 percent of the job creators in the United States. That's a big deal for folks. That's not a conservative or a liberal issue, that's just a "Can I pay my mortgage?" issue.

The environment, also. The oil spill is just a horrible tragedy, and our hearts go out to all the folks on the Gulf Coast.

>>When you're looking for talent, do you consider what's going on and try to fill a niche, or do you find people and develop a place for them?

I look for someone who has enough range of personal life experience that they can originate ideas, and do it in a highly entertaining way. Because in the end, talk radio is primarily an entertainment medium. It is show business. Yes, on one hand, it's analysis of information, but at its core, it's storytelling, it's taking data and turning it into meaning in a unique way.

When a host can take the listener through a process that turns data into meaning, and along the way, help emote on behalf of the listener, express ridicule and humor and satire, it's almost like emotional acupuncture.

When that happens, that host becomes an emotional part of the life of the listener, a friend. The speaker disappears. That host starts to validate the inward thinking of the listener and makes the listener tell friends to listen — that's what I call a viral host. When the host can turn one listener into four or five referral-based listeners in a year, that's viral audience growth.

Only about one out of 200 hosts can do that on a national basis. Most hosts are good for fill-ins, but very rarely do you have a Dr. Laura, a Rush Limbaugh, a Michael Savage, who get people to talk about what they said. To say something that made listeners laugh, that crystallized a thought in such a way that it brought jaw-dropping clarity to an issue, that made them want to talk about it at lunch or dinner.

I don't care if they're liberal, conservative, libertarian. I care that they're riveting. The number one rule: referral-based audience.

>>How do you know that before you've got someone on board?

If you're dealing with someone who's already in the business, you can look across a daypart. Let's say you have a station with a 2 share, and suddenly there's a daypart that has a 5 share. You say, "My gosh, where did that come from?"

Personality radio, spoken-word radio, has a power to create referral-based audience that music will never have. Music is available in so many different places in every market, but spoken-word is fresh, original; it deals with a 15-minute news cycle.

I want somebody who can perform emotional and intellectual acupuncture on a listener, in such a way that they become addictive. That's when that listener will go viral. If a host is dealing with subjects of interest to the national audience, that show can be done nationally.

I've seen ratings spikes where a host is a very ferocious guy on local issues. He's dealing with potholes and local senators or school issues. And that guy can't be syndicated nationally.

A syndicated show has to be two, three, four times better than the best local shows because they have to create ratings spikes that make a profit for the station, that make it worthwhile for the station not to have a local host in that slot.

>> Have you ever gone out on a limb with somebody you weren't sure about?

Absolutely. Jerry Doyle worked in investment banking on Wall Street for 11 years under Michael Milken. He was a multi-millionaire when he left Wall Street in his early 30s. Then he went to Hollywood for 12 years and became a huge success opposite Bruce Boxleitner on the Emmy Award-winning TV show *Babylon 5*.

Because he had this broad life experience, he also had a lot of strong opinions. He was a news addict. The first time I had him on the radio, I had him fill in for a weekend show. After 20 minutes I pulled the crew in and said, "How long do you think this guy's been on the radio?" They said, "Ten years?" I said, "How big a market?" They said, "A top 10 market." And I said, "This guy's never done radio before."

Everyone was in shock. To this day, Jerry is pulling double-digit shares on legendary stations — 210 stations nationwide. It's one of the fastest-growing shows we've ever had. That first year, I felt like I'd really stuck my neck out, but I heard something there — a level of confidence, the life experience he brought to the radio that was just magnificent. And a sense of humor.

A lot of music jocks call me and want to be in talk radio, and I have them fill in. The problem is, their only experience is in radio, so what they're saying into the microphone is not necessarily their organic opinion. When you hear organic opinion expressed in a brilliant way, it's almost like voyeurism, like listening through a keyhole.

The truth is, what gets ratings is not caring about getting ratings. It's being totally yourself, because it's so rare in a politically correct world to see people be totally original, organic.

>> What can you tell me about your sales team?

An issue close to my heart is the recruiting and hiring of salespeople at all stations. Talk radio stations have the highest revenue yield of any format, but 10 to 20 percent of the salespeople are generating about 80 to 90 percent of the revenue. Management is spending its time in programming trying to fix the lack in sales. You can't fix in programming what you lack in sales.

You can have the best-programmed station in the world and a



weak sales department, and you'll bill less money than the most poorly programmed station with an incredible sales department.

What I've always told stations is, use the best syndicated programming as the bait on the hook to recruit the best salespeople in the industry. Because the real superstars in radio are the salespeople. Right? They're the most underappreciated, under-cared-for group, and yet they're the ones who pay all our bills. We have a program where we try to help our clients, our stations understand how to recruit the best salespeople.

>> You have your own sales department, right?

We work with a national rep firm for institutional business, and an in-house sales department of about 28 salespeople for new business development. And we're expanding that effort to go into the local markets and help stations utilize this strategy of recruiting good salespeople and eliminating the motivationally impaired.

A weak salesperson is better off trying something else than continuing to feel bad about what he can't do. Either you believe, or you don't. I'll give you an example: I'm a big Ford fan. I'm also a big fan of some of the new Chrysler products, and Cadillac. I'm a motorhead. I can go on a car lot, and see a guy standing there looking at that car, and a salesperson is tracking him around doing curbside qualifying: "Well, where are you presently working? How much do you make?" I could sell that car to the guy, not because I'm trying to sell a car, but because I believe in that car. Why would you buy something from someone who doesn't believe in what they're trying to sell you?

In talk radio, the best salespeople are the biggest talk radio fans. The best salespeople also come out of the ranks of law enforcement,

I LIKE TO SAY THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WEEKEND RADIO AND WEEKDAY RADIO IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HAM AND EGGS. WITH EGGS, THE CHICKEN IS INVOLVED. WITH HAM, THE PIG IS COMMITTED.

nursing, and education. What do they have in common? They have integrity, they have a command voice, but they can also tell a narrative.

The best salespeople want to know first, "Is the product good? Will you stand behind the product? Will you have my back? Can I underpromise and overdeliver to my customer?" The number one thing weak salespeople care about is compensation, and everything else doesn't matter.

The reason we have 28 new business development salespeople in our company is because we want to create partnerships with our advertisers. We define success by renewals, not by getting the first ad. The advertiser renewed because they made a profit. And that's not just airspace. That's a question of messaging, a question of "Is their 800 number easy to remember?" and was your copy right?

We're partners with our advertisers. We're not selling airtime, we're helping them make a profit. The advertiser made a profit because that salesperson took off their spot-seller hat and put on the "How can I get through to this advertiser's customer?" hat. It's a thing of beauty, because that person is unstoppable.

I kid you not, GMs have come up to me and said, "This whole station is being kept afloat" — successful stations — "by that one guy over there in the corner." You walk over and talk to them, and they have this beautiful attitude. They believe in what they're doing, and they want their advertiser to make a profit. You can't train that kind of grace, humility, innovation, and joy into someone. It is as rare as a great host.

>>What kind of training do you use?

You train, but you don't overtrain. You explain what the whole principle of entrepreneurialism is. We are not selling time, we are trying to make a profit on this person's investment. You have to figure out why someone would buy their product, then create the message and work with the marketing. A lot of companies don't have a creative

ad department, so the salesperson has to come up with the idea.

And you have to find the right advertiser. We have a health food show — but why are you trying to sell chocolate cakes during a health food show? That doesn't match. Why don't you sell fat-free, gluten-free, sugar-free chocolate cakes? Now you've got something.

I've been in stores where I've seen customers about to buy something and the salesperson actually kills the sale. The customer loses the relationship with the product or service they're about to buy because the salesperson is trying to sell them something they've already been sold on. All the salesperson has to do is get out of the way. But the salesperson feels they have to be there.

Training is not a substitute for recruiting. If you take people who don't love what they're doing and try to train them to have that grace, you can't. But you can train knowledge into someone who has an effortless grace.

>>What's the right relationship between syndicated and local programming?

Here's the dilemma. Let's say you have no money because you're busy paying your electrical bill, and the economy is the worst in 80 years. The solution, since you have a lot of unsold inventory, is to trade your unsold inventory for best-in-breed syndicated talent, right?

Now you have talent you couldn't have afforded. You have a guy or a gal who might make \$5 million or \$10 million a year. You get them basically for five minutes of inventory you couldn't have sold anyway. Now you have the ability to recruit a salesperson. But you still have no money. So you give the salesperson a commission. And the salesperson brings in money.

What do you do with that money? Do you hire more on-air talent? No. You hire more salespeople. Syndication exists for one purpose: so you can repurpose money into the engine that drives your ability to pay your bills. Hire salespeople.

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THE TRUTH IS, WHAT GETS RATINGS IS NOT CARING ABOUT GETTING RATINGS. IT'S BEING TOTALLY YOURSELF, BECAUSE IT'S SO RARE IN A POLITICALLY CORRECT WORLD TO SEE PEOPLE BE TOTALLY ORIGINAL, ORGANIC.

So now you have two or three good salespeople, and you're making a little profit. What do you do? You take a little bit of that profit and do promotion, so you can create more audience. Your station is growing, growing, growing. Now you take your weakest syndicated show, and you cancel it. And you hire a local on-air host.

If that guy makes a profit, and he meets with clients with the salespeople, then you take your second-weakest syndicated show and replace it with a local host. And that's how localism develops organically.

Another way you can do localism organically is take the other unsold inventory and offer it to people of differing opinions, or to local TV stations, and do local reports in those spot breaks where the inventory's not sold. Now you're getting local voices on the air in the middle of a show that has audience. What would you rather have? Thirty minutes in a show with five listeners, or one or two minutes in a show with 50,000 listeners?

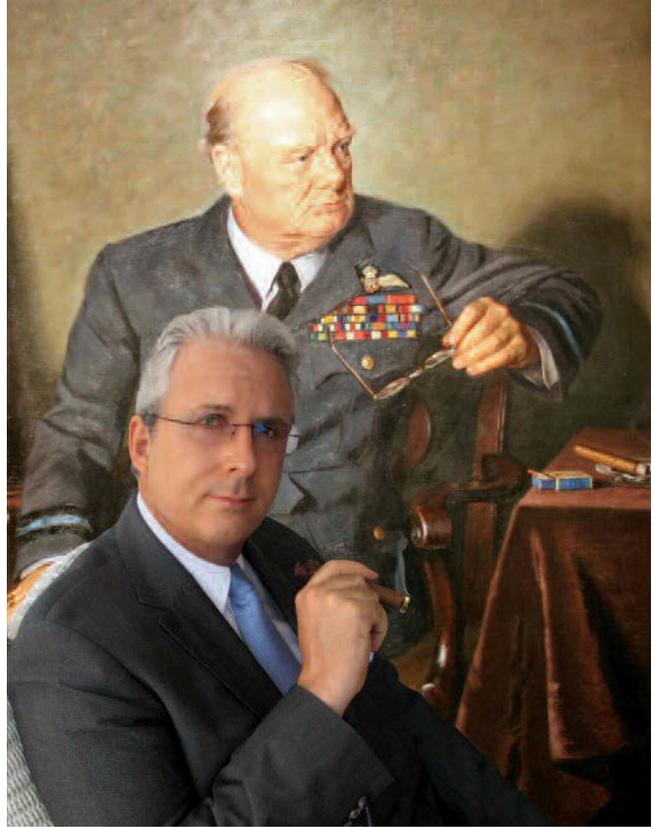
You can give a local host a voice, using the unsold commercial spots as local public service announcements. And one of those people might be so popular that you might say, "My weekends are not making any money there. I'll give you two hours on Saturday morning for free." And you incubate your future local shows on the weekends, at a very low risk.

Monday-through-Friday radio is a career. Weekend is a hobby. I like to say the difference between weekend radio and weekday radio is the difference between ham and eggs. With eggs, the chicken is involved. With ham, the pig is committed.

>> You talked in an earlier interview with another magazine about constant improvements you make to every show every year. What kinds of improvements?

We listen to our shows and see when the boring light goes on in the middle of your head. It's not so much analyzing ratings, though ratings play a role in it. We talk about pacing, getting people to listen longer through breaks, better production, making sure there's more comprehensive prep, guest selection. Even getting the producers to be able to debate with the host before the show, so that you have better performances, more range in every show.

Most shows have warmth and range. A show with strong intellectual range and no emotional range will fail. A show with strong emotional range and limited intellectual range will succeed locally but fail nationally. We're always trying to push that range on the emotional side.



Can a host go from drama to humor to satire to ridicule — a full range of emotions? Can they build tension and release the tension with humor? Can they express outrage without being angry? Anger turns away audiences. Outrage engages audiences. This is a very misunderstood thing about radio. Outrage is an expression of passion without anger. Anger is dark and malevolent.

We look at all these factors. We want to go through a full range of human emotion and intellect, take data points, do deep analysis, prep the show, and backlight one analogy using another to help the audience see clearly. And then reset. Humor is a wonderful reset.

A lot of hosts go along in first gear. They only have one emotional range. A great host goes through first gear, second gear, third gear, fourth gear, fifth gear, downshifts to third gear, puts on the brakes, goes around the corner — it's exciting!

The death knell of radio is predictability. If you can predict what a host is going to say, you will not tune in. It all comes down to that person's ability to take an unpredictable path that challenges you and makes you stretch, even if you're opposed to them. Another thing people don't realize about great hosts is that half their audience does not necessarily subscribe to their beliefs. They're listening because they're entertained. They want to be challenged.

I consider myself a middle-of-the-road, moderate conservative. But I like to listen to smart liberals. I love listening to Jon Stewart. I like to be challenged. I don't want to put myself in a group and wall myself up from other opinions. Honest liberals, classic liberals, listen to Rush and Savage, and they get a chuckle. Most conservative talk show hosts who are not entertaining don't have the opposing side listening.

So this is the untold story of conservative radio: Most conservative shows are dead on arrival. You have to share yourself with the audience. You sort of get emotionally naked in front of the microphone. That's a very difficult thing to do; these people walk a tightrope.

Churchill would've been considered a troublemaker today. Please, God, please, God, we have as many Churchills on the air as we can. Regardless if their thing is the economy, the environment, defense — please, God, we have them, because we're better off having them than not having them. **INK**

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