

# A Guy's View Of The Radio World

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Every creative young person in broadcasting today needs lots of helping hands and patience in their learning process.

I wonder, with the changes going on in radio, how I would have fared if I were beginning my career today. I fear that we may lose a lot of talented individuals to other industries and thus threaten our future — all because we are becoming a bottom-line, black-and-white business intolerant of even the smallest mistakes necessary for personal growth and the creative process.

## WHAT MAKES WINNERS AND LOSERS

Here is some of what I've learned over the years:

- *Winners understand what it takes to make a great team.* Winners in our business understand the process, which is often so simple in concept, but so difficult in detail and execution. They must understand that it takes more than a great CEO, and it takes more than a few great players to build a successful radio station: It takes a great team of many people.

Winners understand that they have to surround themselves with incredible people who possess skills they may not. A study of Los Angeles Lakers (and former Chicago Bulls) head coach Phil Jackson is a simple case in point. Jackson is one of the great coaches in basketball history, but without Michael Jordan on the Bulls, there was a two-year gap between championships.

Last year's Lakers squad had the same great players as it did this year, but without Phil Jackson, Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant played many years without winning a championship. Great managers know what the best coaches know: They make sure their teams understand the fundamentals of the game and know the play, then empower them to run the play and improvise if they need to.

Jimmy de Castro said that success has a thousand fathers when he gave credit for WKTU's worst-to-first run upon its rebirth in the late '90s. Though it took a few generals to lead, literally hundreds of people were responsible for WKTU's success. Most importantly, once the plan was signed off, these people were allowed to do their jobs and be creative.

- *Winners understand the power of brainstorming to turn the raw coal of an idea into a diamond of a concept.* Successful ideas require time for brainstorming, which also requires as many ideas as possible upfront. WKTU serves as

an example of another important key to success: Get as many ideas as possible upfront and then boil them down to a workable plan. Steve Rivers and I both spent months listening, analyzing and talking to people in New York and formulating a game plan for WKTU.

I combed Internet chat rooms to come up with ideas for the radio station. We had brainstorming meetings with a ton of New York radio experts in the penthouse of the Four Seasons Hotel. We did several perceptual projects to verify the opportunity, and we roughed out the entire action plan on America Online.

The point is that there were a ton of ideas fed into the pipeline for us to make the final decisions about what the final product would sound and look like. There is no short-cut or cookie-cutter formula to this process. It must start out raw, with no preconceived idea dominating the strategy.

- *Hard work pays off.* I watched Dick Clark make his speech at R&R Convention 2000, and he is truly one of the most incredible — as well as successful — survivors in our business. His motto is simple: "Hard work pays off even more than talent." If you work really, really hard, let people know you're good at what you do and take responsibility for your work, you'll survive and be successful.

Dick never gave up, even when he was pigeonholed as an outside vendor. He maintained a company persistence to pitch, pitch, pitch his talent and his ideas. Dick knew that radio is the greatest personal companion next to a live hu-

man being, and he was inspired to be in radio when radio had the most exciting people as its stars.

Dick has humility: He always asks permission. He understands that he is a host, and his prime directive is to let the guest or audience be the star. It is always crucial to work hard, care about the clients you have and take success and failure personally.

- *Radio must continue to look for people who are truly passionate.* I still laugh with Dave Robbins who, when we worked together at Nationwide, once told me we should look for our managers at McDonald's. He said that we should find the managers who were passionate about their jobs and hire them as our next PDs.

Dave was right about the managerial and marketing aspects necessary for a great PD. McDonald's managers had to go to Hamburger University to learn these fundamentals. However, these managers still need to have a clear understanding of the entertainment side of radio: music, air talent and production values. We need people who are passionate about their specialties in all aspects of radio: music, on-air, production, sales, marketing and promotion and management.

- *Invest in your people.* Nationwide President Steve Berger's motto was "Only the best people." When it comes to winning and losing, things generally boil down to whether you have the best people on your team. It takes time to teach the basics in order to develop broadcasters with knowledge.

- *Winners need mentors.* Remember the long list of people that I mentioned to start this piece? Radio must continue to

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## Food For Thought

A book that I feel reflects the state of our industry at this time as well as giving food for thought on how to adapt and adjust is *Who Moved My Cheese* by Spencer Johnson. The primary rules that Johnson writes of have a strong relationship to radio today:

1. Change Happens — They keep moving the cheese.
2. Anticipate Change — Get ready for the cheese to move.
3. Monitor Change — Smell the cheese often so you know when it is getting old.
4. Adapt to Change Quickly — The quicker you let go of old cheese, the sooner you enjoy new cheese.
5. Change — Move with the new cheese.
6. Enjoy Change — Savor the adventure, and taste the new cheese.
7. Be Ready to Quickly Change Again and Again — They keep moving the cheese.

What do these rules mean to people in the radio and record industries? Consolidation has created additional responsibilities for most GMs, PDs, MDs and staffs. One team of people has become accustomed to operating one station, but the radio industry is now company- and cluster-focused. Getting ahead these days doesn't happen as much from networking with PDs outside your company as it does by impressing your cluster GM or PD and group GM or PD by volunteering for anything and everything — in most cases for the same amount of pay.

As rising managers and talent look for ways to adapt to the changing face of radio, the future is on the horizon in the form of the Internet or satellite radio giving the public music and entertainment with limited commercials for a small fee. Even better to most music consumers is a totally free service, such as Napster, where people can download their favorite music for free and play it on equally innovative programs, such as Music Match.

The question becomes this: How will radio, with its programmers spread way too thin and huge spotloads raising the eyebrows of critics far and wide, adapt to this new, more competitive environment? Can radio adapt with the huge debt service owners have these days?

For the record business, the problems are significantly multiplied. How can the record community develop hit songs when radio's decisionmakers are impossible to reach? An even grimmer scenario exists when one learns that the local PD/MD team isn't even the final decisionmaker and that an even bigger team of people (such as the group PD or a consultant) are making the final decisions. The biggest issues for the record industry are dealing with free services such as Napster and finding ways to make money with music downloads.

There are few answers to these questions. A lot hinges on the reaction of the radio and music consumer. The lesson learned is this: One should be always aware of the changing face of their business and how one's role changes as their business changes. Does this present new opportunities? Are you learning new skills by growing and adapting in this new environment? How do satellite and the Internet affect your business, and are you sniffing out new opportunities there? Don't hem and haw and find out that your cheese has moved without adapting and moving along with it.

— Guy Zapoleon

## Power Profile: Guy Zapoleon

**Current Position:** President of Zapoleon Media Strategies.

**Previous Post:** National PD for Nationwide Communications.

**Claim to Fame:** Launched "Mix 96.5" at KHMV/Houston; programmed CHR/Pop KZZP/Phoenix, taking the station to double-digit ratings; programmed CHRs WBZZ/Pittsburgh and KRQQ/Tucson; MD at KRTH/Los Angeles; MD at then-Top 40 KRLA/L.A.

**Civic Honors:** The thing I need to work on next in my life.

**Business Accolades:** Numerous R&R and Billboard awards, including CHR and AC Consultancy of the Year.

**Proudest Accomplishment:** The people I've mentored and helped in the business, an opportunity for which I thank God every day.

**Hobbies:** Music, radio and basketball.