

A Guy's View Of The Radio World

Notes on surviving 27 years in the industry

By Guy Zapoleon

What does it take to be a survivor in the ever-changing and often fickle world of radio? Is it talent? Flexibility? Luck? Timing? While those, to some degree, are necessary, they don't always represent the magic mix. Guy Zapoleon knows what it takes. He has enjoyed the good experiences, survived the bad ones and taken to heart the lessons he was meant to learn.

We could all learn something from Zapoleon, a 27-year veteran who wears that distinction with dignity and pride. This radio guy-turned-top consultant could easily write a book on what it takes to succeed, and he's graciously taken the time to address the most important elements that have held him in good stead throughout his journey in radio. Feel free to take notes.

MUSICAL BASICS

I have thrived and survived by understanding what I do well, focusing on that and surrounding myself with incredibly talented people. I consider myself truly blessed to be in this business. Whether you believe it is by the grace of God, as I do, good luck or some other factor, I definitely think everything happens for a reason, and there's a reason I've been in this business for 27 years.

I think back to how lucky I was to have grown up outside New York City and then Los Angeles, listening to two of the greatest radio stations ever: WABC and KHJ. Those stations were my initial instructors in music and radio.

My passion for music and radio fueled me, and my career was chosen for me at a young age. A number of people helped and inspired me along the way to learn the basics of radio and reach my goals. My mom and dad both loved music, and it was their influence that made my sister, Anne, and me big music fans at an early age. Mom was listening to The Dominos' "60 Minute Man" in the '50s when all her friends were listening to Perry Como.

The father of my best friend, Jeff Prescott, was legendary Boston DJ Norm Prescott. He gave me his weekly *Billboard*, *Gavin* and *Record World* publications when I was a teenager. Later on my friend and early mentor Sherman Cohen helped me complete my L.A. radio chart collection. My father thought I was wasting time focusing on music and radio until I won a car from KHJ at age 17. That convinced him that my passion for radio could pay off.

My mother's friend Stan Kreshower got me an interview with legendary A&R man Russ Shaw at Warner Bros. Records when I was 20 and looking for a summer job. I

brought my top 1,000 songs of Los Angeles. Instead of giving me a job, they published my chart in WB's monthly *Circular* magazine.

That piece led to a *Rolling Stone* article the following spring, which led to an interview with RKO National Music Coordinator Betty Breneman and a part-time job doing music and continuity at KRTH/Los Angeles. Alan Chlowitz and John Squyres at KRTH were instrumental in bringing me back to radio after I left for six months to train as a manager at Bullock's department store.

MANY MENTORS

Art Laboe hired me at KRLA/Los Angeles to replace Sherman Cohen for my first MD position, where I learned my musical basics. Then PD Bob Hamilton hired me back to KRTH, which was an Oldies/CHR hybrid at the time, and I learned his magical radio tricks, which were brilliant in their simplicity. Paul Drew mentored me along the way and told me early on that I would have to go to a smaller market to learn my all-around programming skills.

Mike Cutchall, Rick Phalen, Dave Van Stone and Dave Anthony took a chance on me by giving me my first PD job at KRQQ/Tucson. Cutchall and Phalen had the patience to let me make mistakes, one of which was a bout of "PD-itis," when I tried to turn Adult Top 40 KRQQ into something I knew — an Oldies/CHR hybrid like KRTH.

Charlie Minor helped me get Dan Vallie's ear at EZ Communications and convinced him to hire me at WBZZ/Pittsburgh, where I worked with Tex Meyer. It was Dave Van Stone and Bill Phalen again who hired me at KZZP/Phoenix. Incredible Nationwide VP Mickey Franko developed me as a programmer and a manager of people.

We put together a highly successful team of people for KZZP. The incredible collection of future programmers and talent I worked with included Bruce Kelly, Kevin Weatherly, Todd Fisher, Clarke Ingram, Michelle Santasouso, *Kevin and Bean* and Darcy Sanders. They taught me the joy of mentoring young radio minds.

Jon Coleman was a huge part of KZZP's success and a great teacher of marketing and research fundamentals. It was Mickey Franko (again) and Steve Berger who took me through the Nationwide graduate school of radio and management. They taught me the ethics of broadcasting when I was National PD.

I worked with Clancy Woods and the incredible team of people at Nationwide to build the first Hot AC "Mix" station. That station succeeded largely because Woods never settled for the first idea (as John Parikh always told us) and because of his ability to get

KHMX/Houston the kind of budget we needed to always think big.

CRASH COURSE IN CONSULTING

It was Jerry Clifton, my consultant during my latter years at KZZP, who showed me that radio consulting could be a fun and rewarding career. John Parikh and Dave Charles at Joint Communications gave me a crash course in consulting fundamentals. Steve Rivers gave me my first radio project, working with Pyramid and Atlantic to create strategies for both Hot AC WBMX/Boston and crosstown CHR Pop WXKS to coexist and succeed.

Mark Schwartz hired me for my first consulting job to help Jeff McCartney rebuild legendary CHR WAPE/Jacksonville. Scott Ginsburg believed in me and made me part of the Evergreen brain trust, enabling me to work with Jimmy de Castro and Steve Rivers to build a worst-to-first success story: WKTU/New York.

I've had some brilliant partners — Steve Perun, Bill Richards, Jeff Scott, Pat Paxton, Taylor and David Gordon — who helped me build our company. Today I believe we have the best minds anywhere working as consultants at Zapoleon Media Strategies, including Mark St. John, Steve Davis, Steve Wyrostok, John Clay and Lorrin Palagi. There's also our consulting team and our amazing business management team, which includes Chrystine Staiger, Vicky Mouch and Srini Iyengar.

What's the point of mentioning all these people? Each one in their own way provided a step or helping hand to move my career forward. Without each one of these people, and many more, my career would have taken a different path.

Continued on Page 93



Guy Zapoleon

Survival Island

Tony Bristol

PD, WPRO/Providence

If you were about to be stranded on a desert island and had to choose one record company exec and one local record promoter to be stranded with, who would they be?

John Boulos. John is streetwise, wouldn't take anyone's crap and is a real stand-up guy. Plus, who better to be stranded with a Red Sox fan than a Yankee fan? My local rep would be Paul Barrette from Arista. We'd dig some holes, make some clubs and try not to let Boulos' big mouth disturb our backswings. If you could only take five CDs with you, what would they be?

My five CDs would be Jimmy Buffett's greatest hits, Stevie Wonder's boxed set and anything Zeppelin. The other two would have to be WB and Arista product to keep Boulos and Barrette from stabbing me in my sleep.