

BULLET POINTS

Is Your Morning Show Working Too Hard?

“Those morning show guys get paid twice as much money as anyone in the Sales Dept. and they’re only working 25 hours a week!!!”

We frequently run across managers in radio who are frustrated by the apparent lack of commitment on the part of their morning shows to work a “full 8 hour day” or anything even close to that. Sales people, business managers, marketing directors, human resource directors and managers all live in a world of 8am to 5pm (if not 6am to 7pm). In their minds their jobs are done better when they put in more hours making spreadsheets balance, writing impressive proposals and attending ever more meetings planning the future.

Morning shows that stay in the office from 5am to 3pm may appear to be working harder, but are they doing what morning shows should be doing? Is spending time in meetings, surfing the web, writing parodies more productive than living a life? Or are you better off with a host that lives for the moment and experiences all that life has to offer to tell about it the next morning?



Listeners overwhelmingly find ‘good stories about life’ their favorite, most memorable and relatable parts of a morning radio show. Many of these same listeners are the managers, comptrollers, lawyers, resource directors, etc. working 10 hours a day in our crazy “we have to be the most productive country on the planet” world. For many of us, a large part of the enjoyment and awareness of life comes from the stories of others who experience things we don’t have the time to experience.

If you have a morning show host that shows up at 5:55 for a 6am show and leaves at 10:05, you may be luckier than you think. If your morning show host comes in with great stories of how she took her family out for a night on the town, or a host that saw the latest movie your target audience is talking about, or a show that spent the afternoon behind the scenes at opening day, you may have the best show you could and not realize it.

Great morning show stories rarely develop on a computer screen or in a planning meeting. Great stories develop more in the backroom of a casino, in a backyard, or backstage than in an office.

- ✓ If you have a morning show host that is in at 5:55 and out at 10:05 who leaves for home, smokes a bowl, watches porn and sleeps, get rid of them tomorrow.
- ✓ If you have morning show hosts that are in at 4am and never leave before 5pm you have a show that needs to be redirected. Try giving them this clichéd advice, “get a life” and learn how to share that life with listeners.
- ✓ If you have a morning show host that lives life to the fullest and always has a story about that life to share, consider yourself very lucky even if they aren’t really “working” as hard as you or your C.O.O.

Get Out And Have Some Fun as a Group!

The principle players on a show need to get out of the office two or three times a month and do something fun. Go play golf, tennis or anything that is fun and not radio related. There are a few reasons for



this:

1. It's a chance to stay connected on a level other than work. It's easy to forget why you like each other during the pressure of putting together a show. Getting away from work makes you see each other in a different light. This is especially good for shows where there is tension among some of the players.
2. Some of the best radio ideas come when you are not trying. When you have to create a bit, it sometimes feels like pulling teeth. When you are not in the station you think differently. It is inevitable that as radio people you are going to talk shop and that is good because it's under a different context. You will think of ideas that you would not have thought of sitting in your office.
3. There is a third added benefit of doing things together. A show outing in and of itself can be show prep. Funny or dysfunctional things happen whenever radio people get together. Living life leads to experiences that can be used on the air. If the show as a whole has a common experience there can be a good discussion about the odd or interesting things that happened, plus there will always be different versions of the story. That can lead to humor or conflict, which is always good.



The Value of the Pre and Post Show Meeting

We've discussed getting out there, living life and having experiences to relate on the air. But another important prep component is to communicate what's going on and what you're going to talk about to each other ahead of time.

The Pre Show Meeting

- The best shows always have an overflow of content that can be done on any given day. The pre-show meeting is first and foremost about finalizing the content plan by prioritizing the most relevant and topical material for the day. Sometimes even strong content has to wait another day or not at all. Once a plan is in place the show then has the confidence to deviate from the schedule and do something completely new and different that is born out of some discussion, a call, a news story, etc.
- It's much easier to be spontaneous and go with something unexpected that's hot than not to have a plan and be scrambling for something to do the next segment. Coming up with topics and other content on the fly puts a lot of pressure on everyone and usually results in half-baked and mediocre content.
- Discuss what every show player, producer, phone screener, intern did the previous day and night. Use all the brainpower on the show to come up with engaging stories and potential topic discussions.

Rather than asking each other "do you have any interesting stories about what you did last night?" (which leads to edited, filtered ideas based on what someone thinks may work on the air),

everybody connected to the show can discuss what they did after leaving the station yesterday. Some shows write bullet points outlining what they did before the meeting starts. Other shows exchange what they did the next morning with all the players.

- The pre-show meeting takes place after each individual has gone through the prep sites, sources and services, the audio has been downloaded, topics are lined up, etc.

The Post Show Meeting

- After the show get everyone connected to the show (include the producer, screeners, interns and the PD on some days) to review that day's show and start planning for the next. Start the post-show meeting by discussing what worked and what didn't work as well and why. This process is a very valuable part of the meeting because it keeps the show focused on the content that's getting the most response and helps insure that the show is continually paying attention to strengths. This simple technique will keep the show and the individuals growing and improving performance.
- Briefly go over upcoming promotions, contests, website issues, vacations and anything else that might affect show members.
- Leave the post show meeting with a shell of the next day's show with each segment filled in so that if all of your media sources go down and only one person shows up you have a plan and a show will go on.

Producers Wally from 99X in Atlanta and Arik Korman with The Bob Rivers Show helped contribute to the prep suggestions above. We also asked successful morning show host Bert Weiss for some tips on how he schedules his day with prep, meetings and life experiences:



A Day in the Life of A Morning Show Host

The biggest challenge I have every day is managing time. My assumption is that most morning show hosts have adjusted to the rigors of our schedule. I can honestly say, that in the fifteen years I've been working on morning shows my body has never totally adjusted to our schedule.

Daily questions I toil with include: How much time should realistically spend prepping for the show? Am I setting aside enough time to actually enjoy life and draw upon real life experience to share with my audience? Am I too consumed with answering listener and business e-mails that I haven't devoted enough time to being creative today? Am I allocating enough time to nurture important business relationships? Am I still married? Didn't my wife bear a son a few years ago?

The truth is that I find myself in a "defensive" mode way more than I'd like to be. For me, examples of "defense" include answering e-mails, making business calls, in office meetings, organizing the weekly schedule, managing personalities and handling logistical details. I thirst for more offensive time; the time when I'm creative and generating fun, unique, challenging, self-motivating ideas.

My day starts with the alarm going off at 3:30am. Most days when the alarm goes off my first thought is "Good God. When can I be back in this bed to take a nap?" Shower. Healthy breakfast. Show prep starts about 4:15 to 5:15am. It includes checking overnight e-mail, reading prep services and the local paper. I make notes as to which are the most well focused, street talk worthy and conversational topics.

Our show time is from 5:30 to 10am. After the show, I decompress until our daily 10:30am post show meeting. I try not to do any station related business for these thirty minutes.

My goal each morning is to put together a show that is entertaining and balanced every single break. We only play a handful of songs each morning, so show prep is time consuming. I'm lucky that The Bert Show staff (Jenn Hobby, Jeff Dauler, Melissa Carter, Tracey Peluso and Mark Owens), collectively is the most creative staff I've ever been part of. Our post show meetings are like an idea machine. The nicest, yet most frustrating problem we have is that we never get to all the material that I think is really, really strong. These post show meetings are the lifeblood of our show. We put a one hour cap on our post show meeting. If we go longer than that we usually start to get bored.



I'm usually home by noon. I lay down for a nap around 12:30. Want to hear something strange? My body wakes me up from my nap every day at almost twenty minutes to the second.

12:30 to 1:45pm is almost entirely spent answering business and listener e-mails, making phone calls, meetings and doing that defensive work. This is the part of the day I dislike the most.

2:00pm to 3:00pm I meet with a trainer to work out.

3:15 to 5:00pm is a combination of defensive and offensive work. I update the daily and weekly show schedules and send it out to some of the staff. More phone calls and e-mails need to be answered.

Then the offensive part of the day begins. After my workout my mind feels so clear and fast that I love this part of the day for generating new ideas, rework existing ideas or writing material. A lot of this time is spent searching show prep web sites. Exchange ideas with other morning shows. I miss the days when most of my day was spent on offense.

I've tried to put myself on a work curfew. Ideally, my workday should end at 5pm. If I go longer than that I really start to miss time with my son and wife. I know it's a cliché, but the best show prep really does come from real life experience. I only get about two hours of real life experience per day. So, I've told my 3 ½ year old that he better do something show worthy in the time we spend together each day. Now the pressure is on him.

I generally wind down at 8pm after we put my son to sleep. I'm mentally exhausted at the end of the day. My wife gets roughly 4 minutes of adult interaction before I'm a zombie. That might not sound like a lot. But if you add it up that's a solid twenty minutes over the course of five weeknights. She's told me she finds out what's happening in my life by listening to the show. That's good because she's in the demo and I know her TSL is high. I have to get an Arbitron book in her hands.

If anybody has figured out how to successfully balance your time between a morning show, a social life and family I'm totally eager to learn. I do the best I can. But, honestly, time management is simply my biggest challenge everyday.

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