



Are You Your Own Brand?

QUICKREAD

- To be in control of your own career, you need to make yourself indispensable.
- Form relationships with your listeners every way you can, on the air, through local involvement, and on social media.
- Managers will hesitate to release talent who are ready and willing to help the sales team.

Coaching radio talent in large and small markets across the country, I've found there are some universal things the most successful talents do to make themselves stand out, sustain their success, and become indispensable (at least, as much as possible given the current state of our industry). As the world around us has evolved and as choice for consumers — a.k.a. listeners — has grown, the things talent must do to make themselves indispensable are changing too.

Here are six growth areas that can help insulate you and help you accomplish one of the hardest things to do in radio: developing choices so you're in control of your professional future.

Within your station's programming guidelines, develop a relationship with listeners through the content you choose for your show. Listeners won't give you their valuable time if you're not relevant, fun, real, honest, and vulnerable. Share your life, connect with your demo, and keep on the topics of the greatest interest. If you do it all in a way that captures the imagination of the audience, your ratings should be healthy. If you can genuinely say there would be a march on the station if you left, you're in a good spot. But you won't get there through luck.

Extend relationship-building to social media — even more than you're doing now. We fight for the consumer's time. If you're on social media all the time, in a substantive way, that will be compelling to listeners and help them feel like they know you. Look at all those celebrities who are always on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, letting people into their lives. They're staying top-of-mind. You should do it, too.

At every level, seek feedback from mentors who will tell you what you may not want to hear. I referee basketball. My greatest growth has come not from those who tell me how good I might be, but from those who've committed to being honest when the opposite is true. An insatiable desire to get better (actions, not words!) and a positive attitude are two critical attributes that make you an employee anyone will want on their team. Invest in your own growth.

Get close to the money. It's no news flash that radio is a for-profit business. You don't like the sales folks? Get over it, because they have a harder job than you. Walk into the

sales department tomorrow and tell each seller you want to meet the station's biggest local clients, to say thanks for believing in the radio station and to help get that next order. And don't ask only once. You are a star to those clients, and you have the power to close deals.

It's a lot of work, but managers are hesitant to release talent who are willing and able to help sales. There's a morning guy I know who has a list of the station's biggest local clients. He stops by each one, unannounced, twice a year to say hello and thanks. You think his manager will ever consider letting him go? Developing advocates in sales as you help them reach their goals is a very smart move. And when you visit clients, dress nicely — it'll help!

Join every organization you can. Don't wait for them to offer. Getting involved helps you be visible locally and opens doors to new opportunities. And it can help you develop new passions that are rewarding for you personally and can create new avenues professionally. I work with the Children's Miracle Network Radiothon team. As I've done training over the years, the number of radio people who've transitioned to working more directly on behalf of these kids has inspired me. There's more out there for all of us, but you need to be involved.

Look at the classes offered at a local community college. Take a class that teaches you more deeply about something connected to radio (marketing, business management, etc.), or just take a course in an unrelated subject that fascinates you. Most community colleges are affordable, and in many ways, we all need to go back to school. Doing this can make you more a better resource for your current employer and more marketable to the next.

The rules are different today than they've ever been. If you work hard on broadening yourself — whether it's what you do on the air, in the building, online, or in your community — new opportunities and horizons will always appear. You can create an environment where you're always employed, always fulfilled, and always in control. *******



Steve Reynolds can be reached at steve88@nc.rr.com or 919.821.4700.