

# The Best Program Directors

By **Mike McVay** - August 17, 2020



**(By Mike McVay)** The reaction I received recently from an article in *Radio Ink* about Managing Talent, where I mentioned talent and the traits of the best talent, prompted several individuals to ask about Program Directors and the traits of the very best program directors. It's a worthy question, because so many situations exist in so many different stations and markets around the world, that the needs of a station for a Program Director is sometimes different than what that Program Director can deliver. That doesn't change the traits that the most successful PD's have, as a part of their skill set, the personality and the approach to managing what comes out of the speakers. It doesn't change how Program Directors should be managed.

When hiring a PD, it is easy for a sales-oriented Market Manager to approach the PD candidate as if they're hiring a Sale Manager, and they look for that same style of individual. The mindset of

the PD is similar in that as a GSM looks for potential clients all the time, the PD is looking for potential listeners all the time. You want your PD to collaborate with sales, but you don't want them to be of the same mindset as your Director of Sales. The PD's job is to build and maintain an audience. That's the bottom-line. You want the PD to be collaborative with sales, supportive and non-combative, but their job is to make the station sound fabulous and have the largest audience possible. Period.

The very best Program Directors know who their audience is, what their audience is looking for from a radio station, how to give it to them and can "hear" their radio station in their head. They have a *sound* in mind. They know how to lead and encourage their air talent to match that sound, how to have their imaging enhance that sound, how to collaborate with sales and promotion to entice the target audience and how to create a consistent sound across their radio station ... without creating a sameness of sound that equates to sounding boring.

They know how to hire air-talent who have special skills, are highly entertaining, creative and committed to working to delivering special content every time they turn on the microphone, and they know how to allow those same talent to do what they do best. Likewise, they know how to work with, engage and motivate the talent that are already at their radio station when they arrive as a new PD to the station. The very best PD's know how to keep their ego in check and allow those who have earned the right to be egotistical to be exactly that.

The very best PD's are driven to succeed, tireless, creative, focused, organized, motivational, know how to manage up – down – sideways, understand ratings methodology and how to maximize the ratings system to get credit for the audiences' use of their station, understand research and how to implement the results of whatever study has been conducted, and they know everything possible about their target audiences lives within their community.

They understand marketing, promotions, how to design a format clock where each quarter hour is strong enough to live on its own, how to select and "play the hits" whether "the hits" is a song or a hot topic on a spoken-word station, and they know when to break format. There are times when breaking format is the absolute right thing to do. Too many today allow rare special moments to pass without taking advantage of that opportunity to create talk among your audience by breaking format.

The very best PD's understand that they *work for* the talent. Their job is to help an air-talent perform at a high level, by providing them with the tools and guidance they need or want, and it is to positively coach and motivate them. I learned more from some of the amazing talent that I have worked with in my career than I did from any manager that I worked with as a PD.

The best PD's take responsibility for everything that comes out of the speakers 24/7/52. No excuses.

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