

The play is the thing

COMMONNESS By Bong R. Osorio

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Drive time is radio time.

You tune in to our favorite morning radio shows, and either agree or disagree with the opinion of our favorite personalities as you move to your respective destinations. Radio is fast evolving, but among the many things that have changed in the new radio landscape, one thing remains invariable — an arresting morning show anchored by forceful broadcasters, whose vigorous impact sets the tone for a great radio day.

Geller Media International president Valerie Geller, who has spent the past decade working with more than 500 radio and TV stations in 27 countries, says, “The bulk of the listeners are still in the morning, so the morning show is always going to be the lead car, driving the train, and a strong morning show can only help your radio station. It’s a pivotal time.”

Geller is in town to deliver a series of radio lectures courtesy of the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas (KBP) in partnership with Coca-Cola Exports. In her essential book, *Creating Powerful Radio*, Geller writes there’s a way to tell if a radio station has the right morning tandem in place. She avers if you put two “generators” together, they fight for the microphone and it can be barely listenable. If you put two “reactors” together, it’s just boring. But if you find a generator and a reactor and synergize them, it’s magical.

Geller defines a true generator as “someone who has a million ideas, but they may not all be good ones, while a true reactor is someone who doesn’t have the ideas, but the minute you give them an idea, they come back and say funny, wonderful things. The reactors are some of the most powerful talent in America. They just need someone who can generate for them. If you get the magical combination of generator and reactor, it works every time.”

She underscores that some of the most basic morning-show elements can be the most important to listeners. They have a master list of information they need to know when they get up in the morning: news headlines, stories that will affect their safety or bring them out of harm’s way, tales that entertain informatively or that inform entertainingly, the traffic situation, the weather and the time (even if they have watches and wall clocks). Worldwide, the weather, which is the number one topic on planet earth, ranks first in importance.

Every radio programming person has a formula for running a successful morning show, but Geller believes it all comes down to three basic principles: “Tell me the truth, make it matter and never be boring.” Geller further dissected these tenets and came up with the following codes that can help create great radio fare any time of the day:

- Speak visually, in terms a listener can “picture.” Take the listeners on a journey that will allow them to stay with you. Create your theater of the mind and talk as if you are talking to a blind man. Remember, there are no boring stories, only boring radiomen.
- Start with your best material. Start strong. Open with fire and passion. Provide answers to the listeners’ question — “Why should we listen?” In other words, give them a reason to stand by.
- Listen to your own station. Monitor the body of work, sustain what works and alter what doesn’t. It’s just like listening to yourself, and hearing what you are saying.
- Talk to one listener at a time. Broadcast as if you are talking to one, and only one, person. It makes for better tone and continuity.
- Do engaging transitions. Never say the phrase, “We’ll take a break.” Use “up next” instead when you have to bring in a commercial.
- Promote, brag about your stuff. Apply the principles of basic marketing. Produce a good product to grab audience interest, develop permanence or sustenance strategy and promote and let the people know about the good things you are doing. To do this you have to find focus, engage the listener (what’s in it for them?); seek their opinion (what do you think about this?), and do superb storytelling.
- Be who you are on radio. You will come out sounding more natural and interesting, which can bring glued-in and loyal listeners.

- Take risks and dare to be great. Experiment, experiment, experiment — on topics, formats, presentations. Find something new and fascinating every day.
- Humor is key. Natural, organic humor, not the toilet kind of humor, can work. Life is already hard as it is, and your listeners need to have some guffaws. Self-deprecating humor may work. When you poke fun at yourself, you generate empathy; it provides added value.
- Discuss “talkable topics.” Give your listeners things they can discuss when they get to work or share in lunch discussions. Geller enthuses, “When something is in power, five minutes feels like one minute, and when something is out of power, one minute feels like five. It’s not how long a bit or song goes. The question is, ‘Is it engaging, affecting the listener, connecting and is it good?’”
- Give listeners what they want. Geller cites a Frank Magid and Associates study that found there are four things that listeners always care about: first is health and personal safety; second is any story that touches the heart; third is money (anything that’s about spending money, saving money or corruption around money is interesting); fourth is transformation, or how life can be better tomorrow than it is today.

In radio, the play is the thing. Stories must be told — from your own life or from the lives of other people. How you play the elements of life out will direct the future of your radio broadcast.

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Congratulations to one of our friends in advertising, Igue Alcazaren (brother of fellow STAR Lifestyle columnist Paulo Alcazaren) for winning first prize in the Palanca Awards (screenplay category) for his work “Prisoner Alpha,” a Ninoy Aquino tale. Igue is an award-winning TV commercial director.

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