

## THREE STAGES OF TALENT DEVELOPMENT

PATH-  
FINDER  
RadioReport

April 2000

1145 Kensington Road  
Kensington, CT 06037

voice 860.828.8815  
fax 860.828.3088  
pathfinder@danhayden.com



danhayden@danhayden.com

"You can't get there from here," is the thought that passed through my mind during an aircheck session with a rookie disc jockey. The twenty-something weekender was frustrated because she had been passed over for a full time position. She was convinced that she had the right stuff and only needed a shot. As I listened to her tape, I thought she just might be a diamond in the rough, but much work had to be done.

I suggested that she think about talent development as having three stages: style, content, and personality. Each stage was rooted in the previous one, so it was necessary to master each before moving on to the next. At this point, she needed to focus on stage one: style development.

### Style

Style development is about gaining enough control of your on-mic presentation to consistently execute the format without embarrassing the program director when the consultant is in town. Style skills include: voice control, transitioning between elements, liner presentation and talk-overs. The ability to sound natural, to handle on-air phone calls - to reflect the mood, energy and attitude of the material at hand - whether music or subject matter. And, ultimately, to disguise the format so it sounds like you're making it up as you go. Think of mastering the *style stage* as the price of the admission.

### Content

Next is learning to integrate relevant content into the execution of the format in a natural sounding way. Everyday stuff, not deep thoughts. Local mentions, news items, TV references, listener comments - a remark about another station personality. It is the ability to draw on "real-life" to add interest and unpredictability to the presentation of the format.

### Personality

The third stage of development is the *personality stage*; it is the dj's Holy Grail, and the reason why most were drawn to the business. Here, technique is automatic, and personalities are confident and comfortable being on the air. The way is clear for self-expression - but first, the big question must be answered: When the mic is open - WHO AM I? Like a writer searching for his voice, the kind of support needed at this point has less to do with teaching technique and more to do with guidance and inspiration.

How do you spot the jocks with the right stuff? Look at the kind of people they are in real life. Are they funny, interesting - are they well liked? Do they think differently? Are they genuine? Can they tell a story? Do they have desire and self-discipline? Those are the raw materials.

What role can you play in a personality's development? Identify the characteristics or human qualities that drive his/her appeal. Narrow the list to one or two attributes, and grow the on-air persona around those. Often personalities focus on the wrong attribute. They may think it's their sense of humor that drives their popularity, when in fact it is something else. We have had excellent results using focus groups to sort through the various aspects of a personality's *personality* to help them understand what it is about them that's connecting with the audience.

## **CONDUCTING AIRCHECK SESSIONS**

Consider style, content and personality when reviewing airchecks. Focus the discussion on the area that is most appropriate to the individual's stage of development. Keep them on track by helping them to understand where they are along the developmental path, and where their focus should be in order to improve. It is the creative application of basic skills that bring about desired results.

### **Style**

- Evaluate the individual's ability to present the format. Listen for the quality and consistency of the presentation. Are you “hearing the format” or is it natural sounding.
- Focus on basic skills. How to deliver liners, handle on-air phone calls, frontselling/backselling and billboarding. How to smoothly transition from element-to-element without crutch phrases. Brevity is always important – as is attitude and energy.

### **Content**

- What's happening above and beyond the basics? Listen for topical references, and tie-ins to song titles and station activities. Listen for clever integration of real-life observations and funny lines into the natural flow of the format.
- Is the jock working at finding fresh ways to say things or saying it the same way every time? Is he/she doing a show or doing a job?

### **Personality Development**

- When personality development is an appropriate topic - and many times it is not - shift the discussion from do's and don'ts to goals. Find out what they see as their future. Get a self-assessment. Ask what they believe their special appeal and strengths are. Conversations along those lines lead to aircheck sessions that are motivational and fun.

### **Housekeeping**

- This is the part of the meeting where recurring crutches and bad habits are pointed out. These are issues that have been fully discussed in the past, but require matter-of-fact reminders to prevent backsliding.

### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

- There are so many ways to disappoint listeners who call in for requests. From jocks saying that they're not allowed to play requests, to blaming it on computer-generated playlists, to lying and saying they will play it when they know they won't. Better to say that we plan out the music in advance to prevent repetition and get the best mix. Thank them for the request and let them know that all suggestions are noted and taken into consideration when planning upcoming programming.
- High gasoline prices have opened the door for gas-oriented promotions. The Pump Patrol is one of my favorites. Enlist listeners as spotters and invite them to call in whenever they spot a station selling gas at an attractive price. One call leads to another, and very quickly your station has uncovered the lowest prices in town.
- In the 1980s when the telephone answering machine was leading edge technology, we conducted opinion polls to recycle morning listeners to afternoons. A question was asked on the morning show, reinforced during middays, and the results were given during afternoon drive. Respondents would voice their votes on an answering machine. Today, station websites are ideal polling places. And a feature such as this is another way of driving traffic to your site
- We are putting together a fresh list of Internet sites for show prep. If you know of sites that should be included, please pass them along.