

PROGRAMMING TO WIN

by John Silliman Dodge



Managing Creativity

By definition, a classic stands the test of time year in and year out. For music to qualify as classic, it must never lose its power to move us. I'm not a huge fan of Classic Rock but every time I hear "All Along The Watchtower" by **Jimi Hendrix**, all the hairs I have stand at attention. That's power.

For an idea to be a classic, it has to have both power and universal application. I've given one particular workshop at The Conclave, at the Triple-A Summit, and again on March 5 at Canadian Music Week in Toronto, and each time people listen like I was a rocket scientist. But this isn't rocket science. It isn't even brain surgery. It's actually tougher than both. It's the art of motivating and getting the maximum performance from creative personalities. I hope this article helps you do just that.

Some days it really does seem like announcers are from Venus and PD's are from Mars. And admit it, some days you wouldn't mind taking them out of the picture altogether. But radio sits on a three-legged stool: entertainment, information and companionship. Take away one leg and what happens? You fall right over.

Turns out we need these communicators now more than ever before. It may seem like we're in the music business but we're not. We're in the relationship business. Relationships between listeners and air personalities, between leaders and staff, between sales people and their clients, between labels, PD's and music directors - this is the glue that holds the whole show together. And who are our relationship managers, our most valuable customer service reps? Who reaches out and touches the listener every single day? Our announcers. Their presentation, the way they deliver our package is more important today than ever before. Because the songs we play are no longer exclusive to us. By itself, our music isn't a defensible position. We should post a sign above the station door that says: It's the PEOPLE, stupid.

Now on top of everything else you do today, you're required to be a coach, a mentor, a teacher, a guide, an artist manager, and a cheerleader. Depending on your experience and personality type, these roles may or may not come naturally to you. Managing people is one thing. But the quantum leap is *motivating* people. And motivation is at the core of leadership. True leadership isn't about power - it's about motivation, service, support, and the continual communication of vision.

By contrast, management is a control function. Managers dink around with process and procedure. They make excellent format clocks. They tell people what to do and some of it actually gets done sometimes. But leaders weave dreams and inspire people from the inside out. Leaders understand that most people want to be led and only require a vision greater than themselves to follow. Leaders understand human nature and the reasons people work.

Speaking of work, the top-down command and control military

model doesn't work anymore, except maybe in the military. People won't do anything that isn't in their own self-interest. I can hear you say, "They will if I tell 'em to!" Trust me, they won't. They'll thwart you. You can threaten them with firing but your best and brightest don't even need the job. You need them more than they need you.

Remember that announcers are performance artists and what motivates artists is not the same thing that motivates engineers or salespeople. Your performers are people pleasers. They need your approval. They live to make you happy. If you're not happy, they're not happy. So what kind of skills do you need to have to deal effectively with artists? Empathy. Understanding. Compassion. Detached attachment. Sensitivity. Listening skills. Nurturing. Female energy. If you're a man you're saying "What?" If you're a woman you're saying "Duh."

Speaking of women, it's time to give props to my most important management guru. Every important lesson I ever learned about motivating people, I learned from my daughter. Adapted for radio, here are a few things being a dad has taught me:

- Heap on the sincere praise. Approval is the performer's emotional paycheck.
- Motivation comes from the inside out, not from the outside in. Learn a person's self interest and then find ways to link their interest to yours.
- Understand why people work. Money is a byproduct, rarely the end goal.
- Have frequent, informal chats with all your people, not just your favorites. No ulterior motives, no agenda, just take their temperature *as though you were really interested*.
- Listen more than you talk. (Always a challenge for radio folk.)
- Be open to ideas from anywhere, everywhere, and everyone. When you use someone else's idea, trumpet it publicly and you will gain more loyalty than you can imagine.
- Check your assumptions and assess each person as an individual so you can respond in a custom fashion. One size does not fit all.
- Workers' biggest complaint is lack of feedback from management. So always look for opportunities to give focused feedback, actionable information, and sincere praise.
- Never criticize someone in front of his or her peers. It always creates bitterness, resentment, and passive aggression. Even resist the urge to criticize in private unless it's absolutely necessary.
- There can be a difference between what I think I'm saying and what you hear me say. Always think before you speak and consider your words carefully.

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Getting Your House In Order For The Spring Book

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- If your competitors take part in the same type of local or national promotion in these months every year, take advantage of that situation by planning ahead and combating it accordingly.
- Do you put out a station CD (either live performances or studio tracks)? Fall or spring may be a good time to release it if a limited amount of major marketing or promotional events aren't taking up your time.
- New t-shirts, stickers, and other station-branded promotional items are also good tools to have on the streets during the spring and summer months.
- Is your Web site stale? Freshen it up with more music news, artist and

lifestyle-related features, Internet promotions and listener e-mail club benefits. Have your jocks become more interactive with the audience and point them to the Web site to take part in and experience a different aspect of their "show."

- If your station puts on a big concert festival, obviously this is going to take up a huge amount of your time. In fact, most programmers complain that festivals, while usually a healthy NTR stream in a good concert season, are big-time ratings killers. Too much time is spent on the air hawking tickets and promoting giveaways that only appeal to a small percentage of your audience. If you have a strong enough database utilize your e-mail club for ticket giveaways and meet-and-greets. Some effective ways of avoiding the festival ratings trap – put on a series of concerts at smaller venues using one bankable

headliner and some promising up and comers, and make that part of your promotion and marketing fabric without exhausting too much of your precious resources the way you would trying to make that big shed show a raging success. Barring that, you could just string together a monolithic amphitheater concert and hope it sells out early. Local band contests for opening slots on the bill can also help enhance the station's promotional strategy leading up to the show.

Above and beyond all else, the advice from the programmers we spoke to is: stay with the message and maintain focus. Keep your finger on the pulse of the market, think like your listeners and execute tactically. And of course, hope for great diary placement... Good luck!

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- Your body language talks louder than your mouth. So check yourself. Crossed legs, folded arms, set jaw, knit brow? Or open stance, welcoming eyes?
- Be consistent in your words and deeds. If you don't do what you say you will do, nobody will follow you. The motto is, "Never mind the mouth, watch the feet."
- Most people will solve their own problems if you express confidence, wind them up, point them in the right direction and then get the heck out of the way.
- A corollary: You can tell people what to do but don't tell them how to do it. That's their business. Instead, tell people *why* something needs to be done and let them know you have confidence in them to do the job.
- Enthusiasm is a force multiplier. Develop yours and juice everybody with it.

I once had a PD who joked, "This management thing would be a cinch if it weren't for the people." And even though he was kidding, he was right. Getting the music right is simple compared to motivating the talent. But back to our three-legged stool analogy—

if radio is based on entertainment, information and companionship, then our announcers need to deliver on all three promises. They need to wrap the package up in magic. If not, as we said, we'll just fall over. It's the biggest challenge we face in the 21st century—the care and feeding of creative personalities. If we can get this right, a lot of our other issues are just going to evaporate.



John Silliman Dodge is a radio Swiss Army Knife. He's announced, produced and programmed formats from metal to kids to classical. John pioneered the modern classical approach at WCRB/Boston. Today he gives interactive training workshops and consults radio stations on announcer performance and staff motivation. John also announces for Sirius Satellite Radio. Email john@sillimandodge.com or visit www.sillimandodge.com.