

# How To Be No. 1 For 40 Years

## Lessons from New York radio star Dan Daniel

**D**an Daniel has thrived as an entertainer on New York City radio since August 1961 on CHR WMCA, Country WHN and WYNY, WYNY as an AC and Oldies WCBS-FM. He's been No. 1 in four formats in the No. 1 city, and if you got a tape of him in the mail cold, you would hire him. His sound and content are always 100% current and natural.

Arbitron gives him winning shares, and his professionalism earns him accolades from radio's leading executives. His strategies for staying at the top of the game are useful for all air personalities and programmers, and understanding his off-air work ethic will help anyone.

"Dan Daniel is one of the most talented people I've ever known," says Ruth Meyer, the PD who brought Daniel to afternoon drive on WMCA. "He puts a unique spin on every word, every idea."

### No Novelty

Station owner and programming genius Todd Storz invented the Top 40 format with pros like Meyer and stars like Daniel. In 1960 the format was brand-new.

"Thank you, Todd Storz," says Daniel.

"My tax return lists my occupation as 'entertainer,' not 'announcer' or 'disc jockey.' My accountant is responsible, but Todd would have demanded it. He certainly did when he hired me in the '50s."

One kid listening to Daniel on WMCA was Joe McCoy, now VP/Programming of WCBS-FM. "One of the things I really enjoyed about Dan was the 'hip-hop' sound he had on WMCA, and he brought it with him to WCBS-FM," says McCoy. "He never gets in the way of the music, yet he has the personality and the one-to-one focus that endear him to listeners. He is the consummate pro on and off the air."

No lazy breaks. Every time Daniel speaks, his comments are based on current events or popular

culture, not references to the past. His delivery is also current — no novelty or shtick.



Dan Daniel

Steve Blatter was MD of WYNY when it was a Country station. "Dan arrives for an afternoon drive show at least an hour before his scheduled airtime," he says. "This time is not used to grub restaurant trade off an account executive. Dan begins his daily show-preparation ritual by meticulously reviewing each hour's music."

Daniel believes show prep is critical to embracing the listener's perspective. "It's about the listener," he says. "Most of my intros and outros over the years have had to do with shared experience, the stuff of life. Stuff you can't make up. Stuff that will happen again. What could be more current than that?"

"And, by the way, even though I hear Marvin Gaye every day, the next time I play one of his tunes, I'll treat it just like the first time it was ever my honor to introduce him."

### All About The Energy

Paying attention to daily life keeps Daniel's act fresh and current. Besides, he has little interest in the past, according to Blatter, who says, "Dan would much prefer to talk to you about Britney Spears than about having his picture on the sleeve of a Beatles single over 35 years ago."

"I was semi-famous in my 20s," says Daniel. "It felt so good, I knew I never wanted to be a has-been. I was willing to work hard at that. But that was jive. A 32-year-old woman called me in the late '70s to say, 'Dan, I first heard you on the radio when I was 12. I am now 32, and I have a daughter who is 12, and it's great to

have you back in my life.' Wow! That's validation of who you are, not who you were."

Energy is the wrap around all of Daniel's airwork. "He is never, ever down," says Dan Griffin, the GM who created WYNY-FM as one of the first AC stations in the country. "Off the air or on, he is never down,"

When Daniel started at WYNY in 1978, he took a risk. Big AM radio stars were hesitant to join FM stations. At the time, less than half of the radio audience listened to FM.

Walter Sabo was Exec. VP in charge of the NBC O&Os when Daniel was slotted in pm drive at WYNY. Sabo says, "The station was struggling to find the right formula for an 'adult currents' station. The format was just a theory. Dan Daniel's skill made it a reality.

"His experience and team-building skills were key contributions to the ultimate success of the genre of AC. Just three years after Dan joined WYNY, the station became the highest-billing FM in America."

### Shaking Hands And Kissing Babies

Daniel's work off the air complements his on-air persona. Top Country consultant Mike O'Malley was PD of WYNY when it switched to Country. He says, "I was with Dan at a concert event at Madison Square Garden, and he worked the entire place. It took nearly two hours. And every smile Dan gave was genuine, every handshake he offered was a heartfelt 'thanks for listening.'

"Listeners would wait on line to pump his hand and ask him if he remembered saying something months earlier. Then they'd immediately remark how, at that moment, when Dan said it, they were feeling just the same way.

"These weren't soapboxes or rants; they were just Dan's observations and brief asides on life that cut through the noise of New York and found a home in listeners' hearts and minds."

The importance of personal appearances was impressed upon Daniel before he came to New York. "My first personal appearance for a station was at a dance hall in Menomonie, WI called the Blue Goose Pavilion," he says.

"The place was packed. There was a 13-piece big band, a regional favorite it had been my pleasure to see. I was the one they wanted to host the show. I was also the one they wanted to do the show. They wanted me to sing a few tunes with the band. I guess they assumed that

## Majic's Nonstop Rock

What do Bill Hailey And His Comets and a new Toyota have in common? Not much, but WMXJ (Majic 102.7)/Miami this week came up with a clever way to award two new cars to a couple of lucky listeners by holding a Rock Around the Clock contest at a South Florida Toyota dealership.

The contest included two phases: First, 25 lucky listeners were asked to toss around the "Majic Rock" without being disqualified, just like a game of hot potato. The catch? The contest continued around the clock. After the contestant pool had been whittled down, those who remained were asked to sit in rocking chairs and rock for as long as possible. After 17 hours 10 Majic fans remained.

Serving as official judges for the event were WMXJ Asst. Promotions Director Connie Estopinan, Promotions Director Joe Nicholas and Asst. PD/MD/late-morning host Mindy Lang. Visit [www.majic1027.com](http://www.majic1027.com) to find out who the lucky winner was.



**ROCK AROUND THE CLOCK** Seen here (l-r) are WMXJ/Miami Asst. Promotions Director Connie Estopinan, Promotions Director Joe Nicholas and Asst. PD/MD/late-morning host Mindy Lang with the station's "Majic Rock."

everybody on the station, not just Bill Bennett, sang professionally.

"I guess it went well, but the only thing I can distinctly remember about that evening is the following: I was introduced to a big ovation, and as I clenched the mike stand, above the din I heard two teenage girls, elbows on the stage, looking up and screaming, 'Look, his knees are knocking!'"

### Be Grateful

According to O'Malley, "PD or part-timer, everyone was the same to Dan: special. He was never above or below you. He never ran hot and cold. Dan never mailed it in, never sounded like he wanted to be anyplace other than on the air and never took shortcuts."

When WMCA went Talk, Daniel was hosting mornings and Alex Bennett was hired for late-nights. Bennett has been a star in San Francisco for over 20 years, but he was a nervous kid when he started in New York City.

"When I came to WMCA, I was a young punk, and I was thrown in with the heavyweights," he says. "Imagine suddenly finding yourself in the same room with the likes of Murray The K, Frankie Crocker, Jack Spector and Dan Daniel.

"The big lesson I learned from Dan was how to put on a 'Good Guys' sweatshirt at a public appearance without messing your hair. You had someone install a zipper in the back. When anyone mentions Dan to me, I remember him with nothing but fondness as a classy guy."

Despite Daniel's legendary status, everyone who has worked with him comments on his humility. He says, "First of all, be grateful you have a job. And the best way to show gratitude is to do the best

show you can do every day.

"There are a lot of talented people in our business who are out of work. And there are a lot of people listening while working at jobs they absolutely hate who would kill to have the talent to do your job. You are special."

### Call An Audible

"Now, under 'Behavior,' there are performers who have great ratings and make megabucks by displaying bad behavior," Daniel continues. "But I'm guessing that most people reading this article work at music-intensive stations. Never underestimate what impact you can have when the mike is open for only seven seconds.

"Show-prep time consists of all the hours you aren't on the radio. Bring all of that next time. Have a game plan. But be prepared, in an inspired moment, to call an audible. That will set you apart. Honestly, on those occasions I would rather say, 'I'm sorry,' than ask, 'May I?' But be prepared to receive a memo that says 'Shut up and play the hits.'

"Time is a concept. Time is light. A hit is a hit is a hit. To know that in our business is to be enlightened. I always played the hits. For me, it was never about the music anyway; it was about the listener and the human condition."

Al Brady Law was VP/GM of AC WYNY when it was No. 1. According to him, there's a simple reason Daniel is a singular success. He says, "It's because he never tried to be something he wasn't."

To hear Dan Daniel on WCBS-FM and WYNY-FM as an AC, go to [www.sabomedia.com](http://www.sabomedia.com). To hear him on WMCA, go to <http://musicradio.computer.net/wmca/wmcaairchecs.html>.

## Karmazin On Daniel

Here are a few words from Mel Karmazin on Dan Daniels.

"There are very few radio personalities I can say I grew up listening to. Dan is someone they build Hall of Fames for. He is and always has been a great broadcaster. I have enjoyed listening to him for over 40 years on various New York radio stations. I am very proud of what Dan has accomplished for WCBS-FM, and I continue to be impressed when I see him in the lobby of the Viacom building."