

Contemporary Hit Radio



JOEL DENVER

Paul Drew — The “Ultimate Trained Observer”

Paul Drew is a unique individual. There are few people with his accomplishments after 30 years in radio, sales, and the record industry who still hold an active role within the business. For those reasons alone, Paul takes his place as the “ultimate trained observer.”

Besides programming such legendary stations within the RKO chain as KHJ/Los Angeles, WRKO/Boston, KFRC/San Francisco, WAXY/Ft. Lauderdale, WFYR/Chicago, and WHBQ/Memphis, he has programmed or consulted WIBG/Philadelphia, CKLW/Detroit, KAKC/Tulsa, and WQXI/Atlanta. Paul also has run a record company (Real World) and most recently has completed a 22-city seminar series entitled “Professional Programming Management.” In an open and frank manner, Paul shares some observations from his recent tour, as he prepares for another seminar series which begins July 8 in San Diego.



Paul Drew

A Long Range Plan

R&R: Why have you chosen to do such an exhausting lecture series for so few recoupable dollars?

PD: I've thought about doing something like this as far back as five years ago. It was a year ago that I decided when the series would begin. I find that this is more profitable from a knowledge standpoint than dollarwise for me. If the series was priced too high, it would be out of the reach of those that most need to hear what I have to say.

We start at 8:30am and end at 4:30pm each day of the series. There have been times where I've spent hours on end talking far beyond the times to those interested enough to continue on a one-on-one basis. You've heard of all-nighters? These I call all-dayers.

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R&R: What kinds of topics come up most often?

PD: It seems the most perplexing area for young programmers continues to be dealing with management and the sales department. Most PD's don't enjoy a good relationship with their upper management. The biggest reason is that they lack a true knowledge of that side of the radio station. Their thoughts and expectations are somewhat unrealistic.

Exploding The Myth Of “Total Control”

R&R: All too often a PD is fired for “philosophical differences” with the GM. What causes these problems?

PD: I find that most programming people, or those that want to get involved in this area, all say at one time or another, “I want total control in programming... the money isn't important, it's just that I want to do a good job.” If you look at Poland, the government wants total control, and they don't even get it.

For a PD to expect total control is totally unrealistic. Even in Russia there isn't total control. If you owned the station you still wouldn't have total control because there are too many outside influences and situations that must be taken into account to operate as a business. When you delegate more responsibility to competent people around you, then you are actually more in control.

R&R: Speaking of control, what about dealing with a staff? There are two schools of thought as to being a nice guy vs. a dictator.

PD: We no longer live in a society where the working situations are like they were even five years ago. People now work for different reasons and look for something different out of the working environment. The old “superior/subordinate” relationship is ineffective. In this kind of situation you will not attract the quality people necessary to win. People want to work in an environment where they can feel good. You accomplish nothing by discipline. People don't come to work to be scolded. Motivating your staff is a personal one-on-one experience, and can't be fully accomplished as a group, although that's a start.

If you are a programmer and hire good people, you are taking the right steps. The same holds true for management. If you believe in your PD, you have got to give him the chance... he might fail! Chances are he won't. If he does then you've got to help him by showing the way. This is the hope for tomorrow in today's young people who need to learn and grow.

Looking At Radio's Future

R&R: There is no doubt that radio and the way it's programmed have changed considerably. Detractors predict that it will be swallowed whole by new technologies.

PD: I think that's wrong. The new technologies will not hurt the levels of listenership that radio currently enjoys. I still believe radio can do things that other media can't achieve. The immediacy of news and entertainment is unsurpassed, plus the cost of running a radio station is a bargain in comparison to other media.

R&R: Since you've recently traveled to so many cities, what do you think of the quality of radio across the country?

PD: I know that some people malign radio in certain markets. What these people fail to realize is that if a homey sound works in a market, it's because the radio is localized. The tastes of the market come first. Part of the reasons for doing these seminars was to expand my knowledge of what's happening too.

R&R: Are there some problems ahead for radio?

PD: I think that radio isn't attracting the right types of people in as large a quantity as necessary to keep the business viable and entertaining. Where are the new Don Imuses, Larry Lujacks, Dr. Dons, and Dick Purtans, to name a few? Most people start in smaller markets, and in those markets today, radio personalities make less money than the average secretary. In my seminar

A Programmer's Top Five Problems

According to Paul Drew, programmers in general need help in the following areas:

- Coping with not having true responsibility for programming with the ability to hire/fire as needed.
- Lack of working knowledge of budgets, their preparation, and efficient means of spending.
- Communication problems with sales.
- Hassles with engineering over equipment problems.
- Management of on-air talent.

Extra concentration on these areas alone, according to Drew, “will make the programmer's job easier and make for improved efficiency at the entire radio station.”

I can't change station owners' minds about this subject, but I hope the people that will one day own stations will remember this.

R&R: In recent years it seems as if radio management has been playing the game of follow the leader, or as you put it, “the lemming factor.” Why?

PD: It's safer to follow than be a leader. Often I've seen stations change successful formats just to follow the current trends, or to try to increase already high ratings and billing. If the format fails, the PD is blamed and usually fired. What it comes down to is that it's easier to change PD's than an entire sales department. I don't agree with this line of thinking at all.

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Showmanship

R&R: You mentioned the lack of air talent created by poor conditions at the smaller market level. What about the creativity levels of today's PD's. There's considerable controversy about this.

PD: In the past there were some greats like Todd Storz, Gordon McLendon, and Bill Drake. Some more modern-day mavericks include Cecil Heftel and Ted Turner. One thing binds all of these people... they didn't have boards of directors to appease. They were entrepreneurs in an era of expansion. As young as this business is, that era has passed. In big markets all the way down to small markets, things are now run by corporations. Does that mean that someone can't become a leader? No. It just takes a lot more work. There are people out there today that are achieving this kind of status, but it would be very subjective on my part to name them.

R&R: How does one go about setting his or her goals to be a creative leader in radio?

PD: Keep in mind that every radio station is a direct extension of a programmer's personality. No company is blessed with every station being a winner. Generally at least one is in trouble, and all it takes is a young talented programmer who has the energy, drive, and commitment to turn the loser around. You cannot become a star by taking over a winning situation. The other important aspect of a winning PD is “showmanship.”

R&R: Can you give me an example of showmanship and how it works?

PD: Over the years, the one person who showed me the most showmanship was

Gerry Cagle. You just wrote about him and what showmanship he's putting into AM stereo. It was this showmanship that caused him to do such a marvelous job for me at WRKO. As I mentioned, a station is a direct reflection of the PD. Well, Gerry's type of showmanship didn't work as well at KHJ, but he did fine with it at KCBQ.

When Les Garland announced he was leaving KFRC, I called (GM) Pat Norman, who is also a great showman, and hooked the two of them up. It has obviously become a good marriage for both. Call it a second instinct if you like, but I knew that Gerry needed to put on a good show, KFRC needed to put on a good show, and the market was ready for a good show. The greatest PD's are the ones that can put on a good show. Even if it's information radio, it's still a form of entertainment.

All too often, a PD hides his creativity because he is afraid to express what he doesn't know. If he doesn't know something that people think he should, he feels he has to hide it. The ignorance of the subject prevents him from being creative in that particular sphere of influence or situation.

Those people that have attended my seminars already are the ones I feel are tomorrow's superstars. I say that not out of false pride, but because they are learning what I already know. They aren't afraid to say “I don't know.” They don't have the tunnel vision so many others have developed. To me this is improving the business the best way I know how.

R&R: Any predictions for the future?

PD: In the next two or three years you will see some new and fresh ideas coming up. Not all of them will work, but the ideas will be good. There will be new formats aired that haven't even been discussed yet. In situations like our present economy, people are up against the wall and the big winners are those that are going to gamble big.

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I also think that as the FM band becomes more crowded, you'll see people returning to AM, especially with the new fascination of AM stereo. The full effects and benefits of this new technology are some time off. Today's PD's are brighter than ever. With the proper tools they will be great. I'm very encouraged by what I've seen so far in my seminar series.