

INSIDE RADIO®

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“Personalities INSIDE RADIO”

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by Mike Kinoshian, Special Features Editor

Illustrated here as recently as last week's Jim Rome profile, securing your first radio job at a college station is among the most typically-traveled pathways into fulltime industry employment.

Out-of-the-ordinary however is when that particular facility emanates from a campus in which you are not enrolled.

Falling For Radio

In an odd pretzel twist chain of events, Bay Area native [Beau Phillips](#) transitioned from the University of Arizona baseball squad to becoming a California State University – Chico radio talent. “I quickly realized I was never going to be a professional ballplayer,” acknowledges Dial Global's highly talented Executive Vice President/Programming. “I loved music [but] didn't know how to play an instrument.”

Notion of attempting a radio career was proposed by his college roommate and Phillips remarks, “A light bulb went on and I thought that might be a good idea.”

While hitchhiking around Northern California Phillips stumbled onto California State University – Chico which was auditioning air personalities for its campus radio facility. “I got a job there, even though I was still registered at the University of Arizona,” he points out. “I transferred and soaked up all the communications classes I could.”

Fortunate to have turned his passion for music into a radio job, Phillips couldn't have foreseen his life would lead to the medium, although he did listen to San Francisco's progressive signals. “Like everyone else, I grew up on Top 40 and got into the great San Francisco rock music, which was flourishing when I was there in the late-1960s,” he recalls. “I like blues, folk and rock.”

Concurrent with Phillips' 1975 college graduation, Chico's KFMM was being launched from a mobile home on the outskirts of town and he was hired as an on-air talent for \$90 a week. “No one gets into radio by design – you usually fall into it,” he maintains.

Programming Progression

Non-plush surroundings notwithstanding, it was there he

fortuitously met Kirk Stirland, who these days, happens to be Dial Global's President/Programming.

Within weeks of each other, they both left Chico's bright lights for positions at KAZY/Denver. “We've always tried to work together [again] and it took [approximately] 30 years for that to happen,” Phillips remarks. “From Denver, I got a lucky break and pitched the PD job at KISW/Seattle. A zillion candidates were considered before I was taken seriously. I'd never programmed before. Luckily, [GM Bob Bingham] saw something in me and gave me the job.”

Anything but fleeting, Phillips remained in the Emerald City for 14 years. “We had a wonderfully creative and inspired team,” he stresses of the outlet then owned by silent partner Frank Sinatra, entertainer Danny Kaye and local businessman Lester Smith. “Once in a while for fun, Danny would drop by [air talent] meetings. Lester would say he didn't have a promotion budget for me but he did have 100,000 watts. That formed my thinking about being a content/product guy. We had a dynasty in Seattle for most of the 1980s. Our Rock station was highly-rewarded and respected. It's hard to beat being a 27-year-old PD [who] ran Seattle's #1 station in his first programming job. It was an amazing time for me.”

Substantial meaning is particularly attached to that last utterance since Phillips' first nine years at KISW were spent in the programming chair while the last five were as the station's GM. “When I was a PD, I really thought evolving to a GM would be a great thing to do,” he states. “Looking back [however], I probably shouldn't have done it. I was an average [air talent] and an average General Manager - but I was a good Program Director. That's really what I loved. When I became GM, I had to be responsible for budgets and the sales team. It pulled me [away] from the part of radio I really loved.”

Nationwide Insurance would later acquire KISW and Phillips declares, “It went from being a wonderfully magical and collaborative station to [one] that was owned by an insurance company and all that goes with it. I probably did an okay job but I really should have stayed in programming. We had record ratings and record revenues but I was fired and was never given a reason for it.”

National-Level Picasso

At that point in the early-1990s, he was recruited by George Sosson, who for many years ran CBS Radio's FM stations. "He's a terrific guy and brought me to Indianapolis," Phillips points out. "In my mind, I didn't want to go backwards [by being] a Program Director [so] I told George I'd stay in Indianapolis for a couple of years."

The Indianapolis situation required Phillips to oversee several stations as GM and to run a sports network but he explains WRZX's programming needed considerable help. "We went up against [WFBQ morning drivers Bob & Tom] and were getting our ass kicked. The station needed to be re-invented and it gave me a chance to orchestrate the programming. I was able to get my creative ya-yas out by being involved in programming and restructuring the stations. That's what I like and what I'm good at doing. We took WRZX to the highest debut in the history of the market. Frank Wood then bought the station. I told George I did all I could do and didn't want to stay."

Consolidation was then beginning to be the industry's big buzzword. "I could see what was happening with the strip mining of radio and didn't want to be part of it," reflects Phillips who was offered a job as head of marketing for MTV Networks. "I'd done everything I wanted at radio and moved to New York to do all the marketing and promotion for VH1, which was going through a rebuilding mode. I'd never worked in a corporate setting like that and it was a wild ride. The most amazing thing about working at MTV Networks is that, as good as you may think you are, everyone in a meeting is as good as - or better than - you. If you don't bring your 'A Game,' you very quickly find out you're not going to last."

Among the highlights during Phillips' two-year term re-launching VH1 was his production of a television campaign that involved Madonna, Sheryl Crow and Sting.

Overall the VH1 experience was enjoyable but Phillips concedes to being like a fish out of water. "I was courted away by MJJ as head of programming," he recounts. "I thought it would be intriguing to [help] rebuild its network.

I painted in local radio but never on a national palate. You have to think differently [because] you're not competing against the radio station across the street. I went on the road [frequently] and told program directors I wouldn't pitch them on products. I listened to [their concerns] and tried to figure out solutions. I wasn't interested in trying to have them take a two-hour, weekend countdown show."

Multiple Moving Parts

Knowledge garnered in the two years Phillips spent at MJJ would be an invaluable foundation for him when he joined Dial Global last June just as it acquired Jones Radio Network.

Prior to that though, national clients were shown how to use radio more effectively by Rainmaker Media, the agency he formed in 1999. "I was [at Dial Global] for four months and it was [apparent] I could help on the marketing side," explains Phillips who not only oversees all programming but heads marketing and promotion. "I'm involved in many different areas of the company. That's great because I thrive when I'm thrown into the deep end of the pool."

Constantly connected with those in the company's Los Angeles, Denver, Seattle and Omaha offices, New York-based Phillips doesn't have his own staff and opines network radio is much more complex than that of a terrestrial radio station. "There are many more moving parts," he points out. "We provide programming and services to 6,000 radio stations. We have [to deal] with affiliates, group owners and I have a hand in developing new products in the chute."

There's also an entire slate of shows and Dial Global is getting aggressive in launching day-part hosts such as Greg Kihn in Classic Rock; "Nudge" in its CHR formats; and evening talent Lia, already a major Country personality. "There's a real need at radio for quality talent," Phillips maintains. "There are literally dozens of talk shows we either own or represent. We have an entire roster of talk show hosts and a prep service that has 1,000 affiliates. My hands are full as I try to inject magic into our [15] formats [which] are on 1,700 stations. Dial Global wasn't well-known several years

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ago [but] it's exploded onto the scene [and our] sales team is the best in the business. I want to be able to help shape the company's identity and brand."

Five redundant formats existed following the company's acquisition of Jones. "In most cases, we took a little bit from this and a little bit from that to re-steer [each specific] format," Phillips explains. "We then picked a super team for each format, putting music systems in-place and getting the right imaging. We've done the heavy lifting of launching the formats. We now go into the second phase which is team-building."

Synergy Strategy

Identifying who he wanted to be his players became Phillips' initial priority. "Kirk and I have seen synergy botched so badly - we set out to do [it] right," he emphasizes. "I had no bias toward Dial Global people or Jones people and met with everyone on both sides."

Ten minutes was spent with each employee because as Phillips states, "They deserved to have the dignity of a private meeting as opposed to the 'American Idol' style which dismisses an entire group all at once. We wanted to be able to do it the right way. Some said if they were ever in that kind of position, they'd handle it [as] we did. We were putting a fair number of people out of work [but remarks like that] made us feel a little bit better."

Those who didn't survive the cut were told in September they wouldn't be with the company after December however they were invited to remain through the end of the year. "It's a lot easier to find a job when you're still employed," Phillips notes. "Those who kept it on the rails as solid employees received severance pay - and an additional 10% of their salary as a bonus. Most companies push a cardboard box across a desk; collect your key; give you 15 minutes to clear out your desk; and have security see you to the door. We wanted to be civilized and humane. That's the approach we've taken across-the-board."

Once the assessment/evaluation process was completed, Phillips made his final recommendations which coincidentally eventuated into an approximately 50/50 blend of Dial Global and Jones personnel. "It just worked out that way," he declares. "So far, I'm thrilled with what we've been able to accomplish and to see things come together. Jones offices in Seattle and Denver were islands. Kirk and I have been focusing on building bridges between the cities and opening lines of communication. It's been very rewarding to get that traction."

Respectful Partnership

Numerous notepads are scattered around Phillips'

Connecticut residence and golf has proven to be a good escape mechanism for him because, "It's a good chance to turn off the phones and to be away for a few hours. I enjoy just about any sport and like to work out. Sometimes being on a long plane ride gives me a chance to close down, relax and clear my head. Kirk and I have an office that was actually my office when I owned Rainmaker."

Both Dial Global programming executives are dragged into an assortment of meetings in New York but when they're in Connecticut they have a chance to catch up and exchange ideas. "We cherish the time we're in the same office because that's when we get much of our best thinking done," Phillips states. "Kirk and I are very close friends and work well together. He knows so much about this business that I don't. I've always thought highly of him over the years. We pull from each other and we're having a blast working together."

No longer simply interested in spots, advertisers nowadays are hungry for large-scale ideas. "At Rainmaker, we created and executed them on a national level for clients ranging from CBS Television to Nintendo," notes Phillips who credits Joint Communications CEO John Parikh as being a significant mentor. "I'm able to apply some of what I can bring on that level to our sales team. I haven't had this much fun in years - if not decades. People realize Dial Global has a fresh vision and I now get to put my stamp on a national profile. I get re-stimulated every time I walk into a different city. I'm spending a lot of time living in airports [but] the travel hasn't been a grind - yet."

Readily admitting the nine years he spent heading marketing/promotion firm Rainmaker was only as good as his latest project Phillips notes, "Regardless of the level, I've always been an employee and have never really been in an equity situation. Ultimately, I'd like to see something with my name on it and that I'm an equity player. That's my next step."



WHO: Beau Phillips
WHAT: Executive Vice President/
 Programming
WHERE: Dial Global
WHEN: Since June 2008

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