

INSIDE RADIO

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Brilliant Bridge Builder

by Mike Kinosian, Personality Editor

Whether the example is on-air talent to programmer; programmer to GM; or GM to entrepreneur, it's clear **Dave Van Dyke** is master of the transition game.

Each graduation has been made seamlessly and new duties have been handled with aplomb.

The current chapter in his colorful career finds the native New Yorker, who left as VP/GM of Infinity's then-Classic Rock KCBS-FM "Arrow 93"/Los Angeles at the end of Summer 2001, now presiding over Southern California-based Bridge Ratings and Radio Mentor.

Defining The Concept

Especially at first, the Bridge Ratings model Van Dyke had in mind was to provide meaningful service to small and medium market stations. "If you can believe it, many of them were more frustrated with Arbitron than major market operators," he remarks. "Part of the problem in smaller and medium markets is sample size and frequency of reports. Some markets below No. 75 get one or two books a year. They weren't getting enough information fast enough."

If a station in a market Arbitron surveys Spring and Fall were to make a format adjustment or had a new competitor debut at the end of a book, they wouldn't see those results for six months. "The initial point of our company was to provide a service that would allow companies to have ratings information between those Arbitron books," Van Dyke explains. "Thus the name Bridge."

Sirius – Yet Sensitive Side

Immediately following his departure from "Arrow 93", Van Dyke launched Radio Mentor, and is still very much involved with that consulting firm directed toward senior level general management.

In his last two years as a Los Angeles GM, Van Dyke was among those becoming increasingly more frustrated with the state of the industry. "At the outset, I was able to [deal with] GMs much like a career consultant, but [also] as someone who's been in the trenches," he notes. "Many times our conversations will be about strategies and the best way to accomplish certain [goals]."

Since most GMs don't have anyone else to confide in, this has proven to be a unique niche. "They have fears just like

the rest of us and concerns about their operation," Van Dyke correctly states. "But they can't admit those things to senior level executives and certainly can't talk about it to anyone else at the station. That's not proper. If they have to, they vent to their spouses, and may feel better about it."

This is a concept Van Dyke would like to have taken advantage of during his own GM tenure. "You don't want to share deep-down fears or concerns with people who are judging you," he comments. "As busy as he was, [former Infinity boss/current Sirius Satellite Radio CEO] Mel Karmazin was surprisingly able to find time to talk with me about certain situations. I found him to have a very sensitive side."

Ratings Void

When gradually getting into programming, Van Dyke was curious about the ratings game and how it worked and essentially learned, "There are games you can play to [influence] ratings, whether it's through diary [manipulation] or on-air marketing. There are ways to make some difference, other than performing regular programming duties. Through natural understanding and education, I learned what makes Arbitron tick."

Over time, however, he felt there had to be a more accurate way of measurement, and supported Kurt Hanson's Strategic Radio Research. "I found that to be much more immediate and capable of reflecting the true nature of radio listening. I was crushed when they went away, because it created a vacuum in the industry."

Part of the inspiration of forming Bridge Ratings was to bring something similar, while adding an element that would analyze behavior behind the ratings.

Quicker Response

Especially considering that Hanson, Tom Birch and others made previous attempts, Van Dyke's friends advised him it probably wasn't a good business to pursue. "There's this behemoth and this little guy," he states. "The lesson to be learned from the Birch situation is that it was trying to be very much like Arbitron. Even though it was telephone methodology, it was still a cume and AQH-type product."

It's Van Dyke's view that Average Quarter Hour is an antiquated method of measuring listening because, "It goes back to when radio had talk and entertainment block programming, but doesn't have any relevancy to today's programming. The proper way to measure loyalty or time spent with a station isn't just cume – which is the most accurate number in a book – but also what we call 'favoriteness.' We've determined that a person who says

'Station X' is their favorite tends to give 67% - 80% of their radio listening time each week to that station. When you see stations ranked by favoriteness, you have a comparable association to stations able to deliver long quarter hours."

Not necessarily considering Arbitron to be a competitor, Van Dyke believes it's better to focus on the product nature of a ratings system. "We're not trying to be a sales tool," he stresses. "Arbitron is a sales tool and too blunt of an instrument to correctly measure the nature of listening, which is a fluid act. Because of our random-dialing telephone methodology and 24-hour - not seven-day - recall, we're able to provide a much more immediate response and action from those we interview."

Christmas Wish List

Growing up in metro New York, Van Dyke heard great radio on stations like WABC, WMCA and Bill Drake's format on WOR-FM. "At a very young age, I was curious about what made WABC sound so interesting and bigger than life," he recalls. "The magic and mystery of radio - especially the way WABC did it - intrigued me. It just seemed like fun. I was able to convince my folks one year that, instead of underwear and socks for Christmas, I wanted some equipment."

Like many others in the industry, he built his own small station. This one was in the attic and had a tenth of a watt transmitter he got from an electronics store. "A friend of my father's hooked up a dipole antenna across the roof of our house and connected it to the transmitter," Van Dyke points out.

The homemade station with turntables and tape recorders could be heard within three blocks of his house. "Friends came in to present the news - it was a lot of fun," pleasantly remembers Van Dyke, who later majored in broadcasting at the University of Miami and got a four-year college internship at WOR-FM. "I learned a lot about [the Drake] format from people like [former WCBS-FM/New York PD] Joe McCoy. [The University of Miami] was just starting a campus station when I got there. I became PD my junior year and GM the following year."

Programming Road

His first commercial job came when WMYQ/Miami PD Al Casey hired him. "Being involved with that station was a very special time," Van Dyke comments. "[XM Satellite Radio Chief Programming Officer] Lee Abrams and I became fast friends and have been friends ever since. What a smart kid he was."

An early on-air love led to a four-year stint at ABC's WDAI/Chicago, where Van Dyke did afternoons and eventually morning drive.

Rock KFWD/Dallas, which later became KTXQ, gave him his first PD assignment.

Other programming positions followed at KAZY/Denver; KGON/Portland; and KLUV/Dallas.

Boston Manager

It was at Oldies KLUV where then-WODS/Boston VP/GM John Gehron recruited Van Dyke to be his PD.

One question Gehron posed during the interview process was what Van Dyke aspired to do in his career. "It seemed like the right thing to say that I wanted to be a GM," Van Dyke notes.

That remark stayed with Gehron, so when he decided to return to Chicago in 1989 and needed to find his replacement, the programmer-turned-GM suggested Van Dyke apply for the job.

Once a sales assistant herself, CBS Radio's then-President Nancy Widmann was unbiased to where her GMs came from. "John said I should let Nancy and George Sosson [who was in charge of CBS Radio FMs] know I was interested in the job," Van Dyke recalls. "I flew [to New York] and spent time with them. When it was time to go back to Boston, they said the job was mine, but needed my decision the next day."

A Lesson Of Delegation

The PD-to-GM adjustment was actually easier than he thought. "Many PDs have issues with sales and it's something I had to overcome," acknowledges Van Dyke, who became



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actively involved with the sales process. "I went on more calls, learned what salespeople did and grew a sensitivity and love for that job. I was comfortable enough to oversee parts of the company I hadn't truly been involved in as a PD."

A hands-on person like Van Dyke, however, can find the GM's job to be somewhat tricky. "I love getting my fingers dirty as I look under the hood," he states. "A GM has to delegate, which is one of the most difficult things a person can do. There's a definite art to it and most people in this business don't do it very well. I'm not a control freak, but I like to have impact on a station."

Legendary Chicago on-air personality Tommy Edwards (now OM/PD at Clear Channel Oldies WRLD/Chicago) was brought in to program WODS under Van Dyke. The duo later went to Los Angeles to help create the Arrow format.

One of the most lasting lessons Van Dyke learned from Gehron was to use the GM as a resource. "John didn't force himself on me," he explains. "But whenever I had issues I wanted to talk about, I went to him. That's how Tommy worked with me."

Completely Responsible

Everything Van Dyke learned in one situation contributed greatly to his next career opportunity. Starting his own companies was daunting because he no longer had a major corporation's resources behind him. "It's a series of steps down a road that leads to a specific destination," he maintains. "You realize when you're running a station like KCBS-FM that, while you have millions of dollars to work with, you have to make money in order to spend it. Fortunately, I had the ability to start [my two companies] from an investment perspective. The positive thing is, you're totally responsible for everything the company does. The scary thing is you're totally responsible for everything the company does. I have wonderful and exhilarating freedoms with entrepreneurship."

Earlier days Van Dyke spent at Infinity's KCBS-FM were considerably more autonomous than those at the end. "That was the situation for all GMs [there]," he comments. "It was a wonderful environment. You were called on the carpet when you did something wrong, but they let you make mistakes. In the most recent world of ownership, it's not quite that way. One frustration I hear from many managers I consult is that they have much to offer yet aren't being given the opportunity. They have all this great knowledge and capability and [have become] shells of their former selves. It's all locked up inside them - they have no outlet."

KCBS-FM was a moneymaker (doing oldies) in 1992, although Van Dyke points out it perhaps wasn't quite as profitable as CBS would've wanted. "It was up to me to convince corporate we needed to blow it up and put on a brand new [Arrow] format," he notes. "It made sense to Tommy and me. He and I sat together the night before [9-10-1993] in anticipation of

launching ['Arrow 93'] the next day [but] weren't nervous about it [because] we knew we did everything possible to ensure its success. That was part of the enjoyment. We were well prepared - much like a great sports team that has confidence in what it's doing."

That optimism proved to be well founded: In Arrow 93's first book, KCBS-FM rocketed from 23rd to fourth (Adults 25-54). "It was just a wonderful experience," confirms Van Dyke, who like fellow Angelinos witnessed Arrow segue to JACK-FM in March (2005). "It was like what happened with JACK, in that it was a different Classic Hits approach. It's definitely a part of me and I'm glad for [the people at KCBS-FM] that [JACK is] doing well. The energy you get every day from walking into a great-running radio station is something I miss greatly. I can go into a station for either of these two companies and feel that energy, but [can't] live it day-to-day."

Advanced Radio Degree

Regardless of the particular capacity, Van Dyke has discovered that all the roles he's held have been perfect stops in an illustrious career of a person who loves the industry. "I consider each a degree I earned from the college of radio broadcasting," he contends. "With each successive degree, I learned, grew and became a different person. Each opportunity provided a chance to learn; it's important you never stop learning. Each individual step along the way had its wonderful moments. I'm [especially] proud Bridge Ratings is gaining solid traction."

Overseeing his two companies is a handful, but also very fulfilling. "There's satisfaction in seeing something like this grow," Van Dyke comments. "It's an exciting time to be involved in this business. People are finally beginning to understand that the ways the last five years [have been] were perhaps not the best way to have the business run. Radio broadcasting is entering a new phase as a mature business and I want to continue to enjoy being part of it."



WHO: Dave Van Dyke
WHAT: President
WHERE: Bridge Ratings and Radio Mentor
WHEN: Since early-fall 2001

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