

# MENTORING INSPIRING Women IN RADIO

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## **WHY AREN'T THERE MORE WOMEN PD'S?**

*These very successful female programmers focus more on doing the job done than worrying about impediments or a glass ceiling on their careers*

By Jaye Albright, Consulting Partner, Albright & O'Malley

Ask any woman who has been on the air or worked in radio programming for more than a decade and she'll likely admit to having been told at least once during the formative years of her radio career by a boss or employer that "women don't like to listen to other women on the radio," that "a female host for midday and afternoon drive is bad programming," or perhaps even "if you want to be a Program Director, who might as well start looking for another job right now, because that will never happen here."

Are those stereotypes or out-dated attitudes still holding potential women Program Directors back? According to the annual gender analysis among the ranks of radio managers of the 10,517 U.S. radio stations listed in M Street Journal's database conducted by the group Mentoring and Inspiring Women, the number of women SM's and GM's has been increasing, albeit slowly, but the percentage of women who are programmers has remained the same. Nine out of ten PD's are male, a number which has remained consistent each year that the study has been released.

*As of late 2004, women were managing 15% of all radio stations in the United States, up from 14% in the previous year. Women manage sales departments for 30.2% of all U.S. radio stations (3161 of 10,451 stations), up from 29.5% in 2003. In the top 100 markets, women were managing sales departments for 33.7% of stations, a percentage that has increased steadily from 26% in 1995. As for Program Directors, in late 2004, it's a case of "same old, same old." Women were only programming 10.7% of the 10,634 stations listed in the MStreet database, a percentage that has fluctuated very little since 1995. The ratio is lower among the 120 groups which own 12 or more stations: women programmed 8.8% of 4814 stations. In the top 100 markets, women programmed 8.9% of 2372 stations. In groups owning 12 or more stations, there were 300 women PDs or 9.7% of 3091 PDs, compared to 291 (9.6%) of 3030 PDs in 2003. In the five largest groups of 100 or more stations, only 9% of the PDs are women.*

To investigate why GM and SM ranks have increasingly been populated by women while PD percentages didn't grow, R&R talked to eight women whose successes prove that it is not a lack of ability, passion, desire or talent which may be holding women back.

Becky Brenner programs Infinity-owned KMPS, Seattle. Beverlee Brannigan is Operations Manager for Journal Broadcast Group of Wichita, overseeing formats from country to Hispanic. International broadcast consultant and author Valerie Geller is President of Geller Media, having spent much of her career as a news director, on air talent and ultimately as PD of WABC, New York. She is currently working on her next book, a follow up to *Creating Powerful Radio: A Communicator's Handbook* and *The Powerful Radio Workbook: The Prep, Performance & Post Production Planning*. Helen Little is Operations Manager for Radio One Philadelphia's WPHI/WRNB/WPPZ cluster. Lisa McKay is PD for Curtis Broadcasting's WQDR, Raleigh. Turi Ryder is a talk radio host who works almost exclusively from her San Francisco home studio and is heard regularly on KIRO AM, Seattle, WMAL in Washington DC and FM 107 in Minneapolis. Julie Stevens is PD and morning personality at Empire's KRTY, San Jose. Melissa McConnell Wilson, is General Manager for 90.5 The Edge, (KVHS) Concord, California, one of the most successful student-run stations in the world.

Little says, "Part of it, of course, is that there are less jobs for both men and women today in programming. The radio business is operating with a totally different structure now. There is no doubt that there were fewer women PD's several decades ago because there definitely was a ceiling on the average woman's career track.

"It was hard for more than one woman at a station to find a job on the programming side and usually that job was evenings or midday on the air. So, it's not surprising to me that there are fewer women left with a desire to program now with the decade or more experience that it often takes to get to the level where you're perceived as equal to the best-qualified men who are considered for these positions too. Today, more women have the opportunity to do those jobs, but the fact is that there are fewer jobs. For example, here at Radio One in Philadelphia, we have three radio stations, which once upon a time would have had three program directors. Now in many cases, that is just one job, held by one person who is a cluster-programming manager. My experience is that more of our programming people on the way up to management are now women, compared to ten or fifteen years ago, so the jobs are bigger and the opportunities are greater but there are just fewer of them available to men or women."

Brannigan says that she runs into "a lot of women air personalities to whom it has never occurred that THEY could be the PD someday. I can't explain why. I'm generalizing, of course, but women bring great organizational and creative skills to the party. Especially for women-targeted formats, it's puzzling to me why more women aren't in programming management positions."

Ryder adds: "At the time in one's career when advancing to the position of PD would be most natural, many of us are also at the moment in our lives when we must choose whether or not to have families. Since radio is a demanding occupation, often requiring

frequent relocation, long hours, and providing little job security, and considering that the openings available to women will likely be fewer, many talented women opt for lower profile jobs in radio, or leave the industry altogether. I could, if pressed, name several talented women who were fabulous on and off the air, and would have made great PDs. One started her own business as a franchisee, another got her pilot's license (she started an air traffic service). Secondly, a GM may hire a string of PD's who turn out to be only marginally successful. Still, the GM (statistically likely to be male) can continue to recruit prospective PD's for years and attract little attention to himself. However, the moment the GM hires someone unusual---a woman or perhaps a minority for a non minority formatted station---the eyes of the industry swivel and focus on him faster than Linda Blair's head spun round in "The Exorcist." Most of us, women included, are not too comfortable with that level of scrutiny. Since one can find talented managers of both sexes, it's simply less "dangerous" to go with someone who won't force her boss to live in a spotlight. By the way, I solved the family problem by building a studio in my house."

For a time, it seemed that path to programming for women was as attainable as the one to major dayparts for on-air talent years before, according to McConnell. "I've actually had PDs tell me that I couldn't be hired in the midday slot because there was a female doing the adjacent drive slot -- actually used the "wall to wall female" phrase! And both instances were in San Francisco! Having worked very hard to advance from Music Director to APD and PD at several stations, I believe the hesitation to put women in programming comes from upper management.

"It's almost like they don't seriously consider it a possibility (still!), when hiring a male for the same job is a given. I had to "prove myself" when my male counterparts did not. Perhaps it's the issue of accommodating family issues (sick kids, pregnancy and maternity leave, etc.), which are handled very differently by male PDs. That may be viewed as a liability. It's ironic, that women may more easily move into General Management than Programming -- it's all about money! The numbers don't lie (the bottom line, that is!), and it's hard to argue the competency of a woman who makes the station money. Of the other women GMs I have known, they all see the big picture, can manage the entire station AND a family at home, in many cases.

"So how is it different than Programming? It may be that the "business" world is more conventional (9 to 5) and the interface with the music business is more unconventional (in time commitment, outside of office hours for time and travel, etc.) How ironic!

"Other than my distain for the amount of paperwork involved in being a GM, I found it comes naturally for me, and my Programming experience gives me great insight. (But I'll be honest, I miss the "creative" aspects of Radio -- the rush of being on the air every day and the intensity of crafting the music programming and on-air elements to create a masterpiece of the format! This is, even though I still do a little bit of that now. I think about it every day)."

Brenner thinks "it is because women make life choices based on what will allow them to balance personal and professional goals most successfully. It is much more difficult to

have a family if you have a 7 day a week, 24 hour a day job. If you are going to be a good Program Director, you need to sacrifice a lot of evenings and weekends and you may never make the kind of \$\$ you can in sales or management.

“It is certainly getting better as more women become more experienced in programming,” she adds. “I think you have to consider the fact that until the late 70's, women were relegated to nights and overnights and not exposed to music programming, research and strategic planning. It took several years for GM's to evolve out of the "old school" and actually seek women out for programming positions. Now with consolidation, there are fewer programming jobs out there. If you combine that with the fact that most women can't see balancing family and Programming, I think that explains the slow growth.”

Geller “completely” agrees, “however what I do know is that each year that goes by, the situation seems to improve. When I first got into radio in the seventies, there were so few women around. I recall being on the air looking for gigs and once told: "We have our woman...if she leaves to get pregnant, and if we need another one, we'll give you a call..." That being said, much of my career as a news director, on air talent and finally as PD of WABC in NYC, I was told I was the "first woman" they'd had in the job... I'm delighted now to see more and more talented, capable and accomplished women not only in promotion and sales but as excellent GMs, PDs and there is opportunity now for stronger women on air. But at the end of the day, because of the nature of the business, to quote Cameron Crowe in 'Jerry McGuire', it's "Show me the money." If talented women program directors can find and develop talent, work to compete in the format and know their market, the opportunity to cover the bottom line and grow the station, will follow and more women will move ahead. That being said, the stakes are higher for talented women so often a woman will take risks, try new things, and at core, understand that in the creative process, not everything always works, but if enough of what you try DOES work, then it will get an audience.”

Stevens is not sure she got her job like other female PD's got theirs: “It was pretty much thrust upon me. In fact, during the 80's I felt pushed along faster than I probably should have been because I was a woman. Owners and operators were trying to fill quotas in those days and if you were female and had a modicum of sense, they put you on the fast track to management.

“Seeing the situation at KRTY from the outside, one might think discrimination in that I hired Nate Deaton, and he was just promoted over me to be the GM. Truth is, I went to the owner and told him he should make Nate the GM because we had a hole in our leadership and home and family are way to important to me to spend the kind of time required of a GM. I can't help but think there are lots of other women broadcasters out there like me. If you're on the air, it's a perfect situation for having kids. Especially if you're on the morning show. 5-9a.m. and you're done for the day. Dad gets the kids off to school and you pick them up from school. The situation is perfect for families. But it also means you're not terribly interested in management. That's my experience.”

What would be an interesting question, according to McKay, is "How do the stations with female PD's do in comparison to the national average of that format?"

"I could spend most of the day griping about the good ole boy network, it exists and it always will. I'd rather ignore it and help my team and my station move forward. I had a manager explain why he was meeting with one of my programming staff without me the other day as "having a man to man chat with him." When I asked what the topic was I found out it was one that I had covered months ago with this team member.

"Radio has a self perpetuating outdated mentality of taking the road that has always worked pretty well in the past instead of actively searching out new ways to get the job of building loyalty with our listeners and training tomorrow's legends done better and differently."

Little advises women who have a desire to learn programming skills to "let it be known to the people who hold the positions you aspire to. Equip yourself with the knowledge and abilities it takes to do the job successfully. Then, aggressively network with others while expanding your education in all areas of management from music, technology, formatics, programming law and motivation of talented creative individuals.

"There's no doubt that there is another factor as well of course, which is the need for balance in their business and personal lives that women often seem to see a need for in order to feel fully successful. Is her husband willing to relocate to a new city where opportunity might open up? Her children? Women do have to balance a lot more on their plate if they want to excel in both the personal and career side of their life."

Brenner is confident that things are "getting better as more women become more experienced in Programming. I think you have to consider the fact that until the late 70's, women were relegated to nights and overnights and not exposed to music programming, research and strategic planning. It took several years for GM's to evolve out of the "old school" and actually seek women out for programming positions. Now with consolidation, there are fewer programming jobs out there. If you combine that with the fact that most women can't see balancing family and Programming, I think that explains the slow growth."

But, McConnell tells this story: "During an interview, a GM asked me how many children I had at home (clearly taboo, but he did it anyway!), and then hired a less experienced, less qualified twenty-something single male for the PD gig instead. (The station flipped format a year later, due to lack of ratings). It's maddening and unfair, but that can be enough to make even the most determined among us want to quit pounding our heads against a brick wall."

"I have not experienced a glass ceiling in my career, Brannigan adds, "and I don't think it's coincidence that my personal situation (married, no kids, husband willing to move) has allowed me the flexibility to grow my career. I'm in awe of women who have demanding jobs AND families. I'm not sure when they sleep. Not every woman has a

flexible family situation that lets her be at station events 4 nights a week or run to the station at midnight when the hard drive system is running 90 minutes early.

“Mentoring and networking are really helpful. We all need to do a better job at identifying women who have management potential...nurture their strengths...and talk to them about programming management opportunities. I’ve worked with women who don’t see how their skills would make them a good manager. Encouragement and empowerment go a long way.”

Her advice to women who aspire to become programmers: “Self educate. Learn everything you can about your craft. Never be afraid to ask about what you don’t know. If you’re not getting the coaching and mentoring in your current position, find someone who will give it to you. Hang around people who make you stretch. And...get used to the idea that the uncomfortable-ness of change is a GOOD thing!”

Brenner advice: “Include female programming staff members in music meetings, research meetings and planning sessions. Delegate projects that don't necessarily have to be done by the PD, APD or MD so they get a taste for what is actually involved in the job. Have open discussions about the possibility of balancing family and programming.”

She encourages women to “ask to be included in music meetings, research meetings and consultant visits. Ask for "assignments" beyond your air shift or other responsibilities. Let your PD and GM know that you are on a track to become a Program Director. Develop a thick skin. Learn how to work with the system rather than fight against it.”

Judging from the ratings successes these women programmers are having in very competitive markets from Philadelphia to Raleigh to San Francisco to Seattle, the answer to McKay’s rhetorical question about how well stations with female PD’s do in comparison to national averages appears to be “VERY WELL INDEED.” Thanks to these eight female pioneers in the programming ranks for sharing their insights with us.

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*The MIW group of top-level radio women across the country has dedicated themselves to using their influence and resources to help put more women in positions of leadership in radio. For contact information for each MIW, success and mentoring tips, articles, for the complete 2004 Gender Analysis data, or to join the MIW Network, go to [www.RadioMIW.com](http://www.RadioMIW.com). Jaye Albright serves on the group’s PR and Publicity Committee.*