



## News/Talk/Sports

Wednesday, April 25, 2012

### The Power Of Prep



*"If I had eight hours to chop down a tree, I'd spend six hours sharpening the axe."*  
– Abraham Lincoln

Successful talk show hosts and on-air personalities recognize the value of show prep. It begins with a vision and a plan. A great chef starts with a clear idea of what will be on the menu, a general wouldn't go into battle without a strategy, and a surgeon would never go into the operating room without a preliminary work-up. But in coaching talk show hosts, I've found it surprising how many personalities just show up for work and wait to see what happens. Some days they might get lucky, but for winning over the long haul, show prep is essential. If a talent is prepared, it does not matter if he or she slides in a minute before airtime. A prepared host can still do a great show.

### Interested Is Interesting



The great personalities have a wide range of interests. It's never an accident when a show is number one. Creative talent are constantly doing show prep. Everything in their life - what they read, eat, feel, experience, and even dream - all goes into their shows. Air personality and ["Beyond Powerful Radio"](#) contributor Melissa McConnell says, "Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week - every conscious waking moment, I'm gathering information to recall later, to use on my show."

Successful hosts are in a constant process of compiling material from various sources: off air conversations with friends and family, articles from the internet, magazines or newspapers, or using Twitter, Facebook, TED talks for ideas, along with stories they've overheard or observed from life.

### The "No Fail" Formula

Prepare for each show as though your phone lines are down. What do you do when you have no calls and no guests? Do you have enough material in mind so that you could do a show that informs, entertains and engages your audience? To successfully pull it off, make sure you have enough prepared material so that if you need to, you can just talk and be interesting for your entire show.

### Social Media Makes Prep Easier

With social media, there has never been an easier time to come up with great ideas for talk. When you sift through the plethora of choices, you have the luxury to be selective about which ideas to pick and what's going to work for you.

According to a Frank Magid and Associates study, among the subjects that effectively attract an audience, health, heart and pocketbook (money) are at the top of the list. In my practice, we've added "transformative topics" to that list - how a listener's life can be made better, based on something he or she hears on your show. People also like "talkable topics" - stories and ideas they hear on your show that they can talk about with others later.

### **There Are No Boring Stories**

There are no boring stories, only boring storytellers. Your authentic curiosity, humor and real interest in a topic is key to how it sounds on air. One question: Would you talk about this "off air?" Or is this a subject simply manufactured to fill a slot on your show? If you would talk about it off air, it will likely work on air.

### **We Are In The "Story" Business**

Professional communicators are in the "story" business. As all artists do, they observe life, filter what they see through their own creative process and then put it out for others. They train themselves to be in a constant process of collecting concepts and experiences and shaping them into stories. Some find ideas by exploring their natural curiosity about things that interest them, others look for interesting guests, but they all realize the value of show prep.

### **Avoid Guest-O-Mania**

A note about guests: Invite people you want to talk to, who bring ideas, unique experiences, knowledge, humor, stories or new information. If you sat next to this person on a plane or met them at a party, would you want to spend an hour talking with them? If not, ask, "why is this person on my show?" Don't have a guest on just to fill an hour because "he or she is available," and if the guest is boring, drop them as soon as you can. It's better to be slightly rude to one person than to be rude to tens of thousands who are giving you the most precious thing they have in the world, their time and attention.

### **What If The Big Name Star Doesn't Shine?**



It's easy to get excited when you get a star or notable celebrity to appear as a guest on your show. Just because you CAN get the "big names" doesn't necessarily mean you should.

Big name celebrities are easy to get when they have something to plug or sell. That's why they're willing to do interviews and show up to promote their book, movie, upcoming project or event. But if they're also appearing on the big late night TV shows, the morning wakeup shows, all over cable news and entertainment shows, and extensively in online publications, your audience might not want to listen to one more interview with this person unless you come up with a unique angle that people haven't heard. Your number one job regardless of content or guest is to inform and entertain your audience.

If you're interested in more on show prep, there's a lot more (several chapters) on this in "[Beyond Powerful Radio – A Communicator's Guide to the Internet Age.](#)"

### **About the Writer**

Valerie Geller, president of Geller Media International Broadcast Consultants, works to help communicators become more powerful in 30 countries for news, talk, information and personality. Through consulting and individual coaching for news and talk talent, Geller finds and develops

personalities, leads “Creating Powerful Radio” and “Communicate Powerfully” workshops and seminars for radio and TV broadcasters, internet radio and podcasters. Geller is the recipient of the Conclave's 2010 Rockwell Lifetime Achievement Award and is the author of four books about radio including her latest from Focal Press [Beyond Powerful Radio – A Communicator's Guide to the Internet Age](#). To contact Valerie Geller for a one-on-one coaching or consulting appointment, or for information on the "Powerful Radio" seminars and workshops, call 212 580-3385

