

PACIFICA FOUNDATION RADIO
KPFA 94.1FM
MANAGER'S REPORT TO THE LOCAL STATION BOARD
Saturday, June 14, 2014

Richard Pirodsky, Interim General Manager
Summer Fund Drive

KPFA will begin its Summer Fund Drive on Monday, July 28. It is scheduled to run until August 8. The dollar goal for the twelve day drive is \$363,830, with a daily average of \$30,320.00. The feasibility of using a full service phone operation is still being explored. At the very least, the drive will use a roll-over service in the same way the successful Spring drive did.

Some concern had been expressed that the roll-over service simply took donations from callers who could not get through to the station's telephone room, that otherwise would have gone to the website. But the numbers tell a different story. In the three drives prior to the first use of a roll-over service, web donations accounted for approx. 11.3 percent of the drives total.

In the 2014 Winter drive, the web percentage dropped to 11.06 with the roll-over service bringing in 3.08, for a combined total of 14.14% and approx. \$91,000. The Spring drive totals were 7.78% for web donations, 20.83% from the roll-over service, for a combined 28.61 percent and approx. \$218,000. Clearly in the pre-roll-over service drives, KPFA was "leaving money on the table." With the roll-over service, many more calls are answered, and much more money is raised. Going from a roll-over service to a full phone service for the Summer drive offers the potential for everything from full PCI compliance and instantaneous processing of credit cards to streamlined data entry and transmission, while freeing up phone volunteers to assist in other areas of pledge drive and station operations. Thus it is easy to understand why roll-over and full phone services are much like single-payer, national health care; while there are and always will be some whom offer complaints, no entity which moves forward to make the switch every goes back to the way things were.

Development

The consulting firm Goal Busters is putting together a report which I will email to this board as soon as I receive it. It will cover the firm's work to-date at and for KPFA, what it is pursuing now, and what it envisions for the short term future. The report will cover changes to the comprehensive campaign as well as enhanced focus on grant writing, donor list outreach, major gift cultivation, and other off-air revenue streams.

But there is one aspect of the report which everyone in this room must now start to address. It is what Alice Ferris and Jim Anderson of Goal Busters refer to as "the trust issue." It seems that while many of KPFA's donors have been with Pacifica and the station for "the long haul," while they have witnessed many ups and downs, the past few years are somehow different. They are becoming increasingly hesitant about giving. They express openly their fear that they don't know where the money they donate is going? Will it really improve programming and services, or is it headed to New York? Or Washington, DC? Or to an attorney defending Pacifica and/or the station in yet another lawsuit. And once again Pacifica finds itself suing itself.

The donors are very open about their concern regarding what they see as a blatant battle for political control of programming and the station by the two major caucuses; caucuses which they perceive as intent on serving themselves and not the listeners.

As Alice and Jim were relating all this to me, I couldn't help but think of a scene from an old movie. In the film "Meet John Doe," the hero barges into a plush dinner party to find out if the rumors he has heard are true. As the leader of a movement that espouses brotherhood and do unto others, the Pacifica of its day, he is shocked to find that the patrons of his movement are scheming to take it over and use the movement for their own personal and political gain. He glares at the assembled fat cats and tells them: "Your type is as old as history - if you can't lay your dirty fingers on a decent idea and twist it and squeeze it and stuff it into your own pockets, you slap it down. Like dogs, if you can't eat something, you bury it! Why, this is the one

worthwhile thing that's come along. It may be the one thing capable of saving this cock-eyed world. Yet you sit back there on your fat hulks and tell me you'll kill it if you can't use it. Well, you go ahead and try. You couldn't do it in a million years."

Of course, John Doe, along with being an activist, was also an idealist. A decent idea, a service organization, a radio station, can all be killed. And right now, each one of us is bearing witness as to how that can be done. There are far too many people in this room looking at KPFA as if it were a mirror. If they don't see enough of themselves in the reflection, they are more than willing to throw stones at it until it shatters.

As far as many of our donors and listeners are concerned, it is just about to break. They're not in this room and they don't belong to either caucus. They have seen and read all the negative press, the constant fighting, the all-too-public internet exchanges, the ever-narrowing focus on pleasing those at the station and in the caucuses at the expense of the broader public we are all pledged to serve. They can't help but question whether KPFA can be saved, or even if it should be saved. Can they find a more stable organization, more deserving of their charitable giving? They can, they have, and in ever increasing numbers, they will continue to do so.

Those numbers are growing increasingly frightening. Back in 2009, when KPFA was still subscribing to the Radio Research Consortium for Arbitron rating numbers, KPFA had 150,000 listeners or cume persons; that is the total number of different persons who tune in to a radio station during the course of a daypart for at least five minutes. Of those 150,000 listeners, we had 19,063 donor-members. By February of 2012, just three years later and no longer receiving Arbitron numbers, an article in the San Francisco Chronicle cited the number of listeners for KPFA at 90,000, while the station's members had slipped to 17,653. Now in 2014, in the fourth largest radio market in the country, with well over 6 million potential listeners within reach of our over-the-air signal, KPFA is now down to a total membership of 15,809. One can

only guess as to how low the listenership numbers have sunk, at least until KPFA can purchase Nielsen Audio numbers.

I have no simple, easy solutions to the "trust issue," and I don't think there are any. This board will have to develop a plan of action for what will probably be a slow, long, and difficult process. But I will offer one bit of advice. It is a way to frame the thoughts which motivate your actions. I would ask you to think like a manager but we all know that isn't going to happen. So instead, think like a programmer. As an individual, you have the same right to free speech as everyone else. But interestingly, as a programmer, you don't. The FCC says you can't say certain words or even suggest certain actions. Pacifica and KPFA say you can't "air dirty laundry." And if as a programmer, you are unwilling to live up to what is demanded of you and your position, if you insist that you have every right to say whatever you want whenever you want to, you will be suspended, fined, and taken off the air.

As an individual, you have every right to protest, criticize, and legally bring down any entity you deem worthy of such action. But as a KPFA LSB member, there is one such entity protected from your righteous indignation: KPFA. As a board member, you have fiduciary responsibilities to the station. The most basic definition of which means that KPFA has been entrusted to you. You must hold it, support it, protect it, and at the end of your tenure, turn it over to others, hopefully in better shape than when you started. If you as a board member you are unwilling to live up to what is demanded of you and your position, if you feel you have the right to tear down KPFA for any reason, if you feel you must "burn the village in order to save it," then you are in violation of all you have sworn to uphold and have no choice but to resign. You can destroy the station or you can serve as a board member. But you can't do both.

Programming "101"

The coverage maps I distributed are, even by Radio Locator's admission, "generous." They offer the high ground of "what should be" whereas those listeners living all across the maps will tell you "what actually is." Still, they do present a good picture of the size of our over-the-air listening community; the ones we are obliged to serve with our signal. Page 1 shows KPFA's signal coverage. Page 3 shows KFCF in the Fresno region.

On weekdays at 8am, those two regions offer us the largest, most diverse audience available to us. KPFA can, if it so chooses, and in the past it has, use this time to narrowly focus on a very small segment of that very large available audience. And by doing so, it will never recoup at any other time of the day, at any other place in the weekly schedule, the numbers it loses with regard to listenership and revenue.

In study after study, in decade after decade, stations in large, competitive markets, succeed or fail, live or die, depending on whether they try to reach as many listeners as possible during peak times with the most consistent programming of the broadest appeal, or whether they offer a patchwork quilt of inconsistent, narrowly focused shows with decidedly limited appeal.

But what if a station decides that what IT deems important should be aired at peak drive time, no matter how few listeners it attracts and how little revenue it generates? Now I know all of you just LOVE it when I use baseball analogies, so here's an apt one. The most important player on a baseball diamond is the pitcher. I don't say this as an old pitcher. Everyone on the team agrees. No one is more vital to the team's success on a consistent basis than the person on the mound. If the pitcher is throwing well, the team has the best chance of winning. If the pitcher is throwing poorly, the team is most likely to lose.

So clearly, when making out the batting order, the manager puts the pitcher in the most important slot. Well, no; that doesn't happen. The pitcher invariably bats last so that those who can't pitch, those who are less important, can deliver what is needed from the batting lineup in order to win. Baseball and radio are team "sports." In order to be successful, it takes various

types of people with differing skill sets, put in positions where the team or the station can most benefit from what each individual has to offer.

If anyone or everyone in this room feels that locally produced, narrowly focused, unpaid, radical programming is the most important offering KPFA and Pacifica can make to the listening community, I will not and have no need to argue the point. But if you don't have some other kinds of programming which can deliver the listeners to justify our signal strength and the revenues to pay the station's bills, there will be no station to offer ANY kind of programming. You don't need studies to confirm this. You need only look to New York. For over ten years WBAI has embodied it. And if not for KPFA and KPFK bailing it out, it would have gone under long ago.

If you choose to follow WBAI down that path, and believe me when I say that it will take other changes to the schedule and way more promotion to avoid it, please remember that there is no station in Pacifica to bail out KPFA. And that is why this interim General Manager did what he did with regard to the recent change in the schedule.

"But you did not follow proper process!" I don't know about that. I checked in with the iED in advance to tell him what I was planning to do. He gave his enthusiastic approval. As for the history of process at KPFA, let's stroll down memory lane to to the last time a show was added to drive time. After two Fosters and three choruses of "Waltzing Matilda" (or maybe the other way around), former iGM Andrew Philips told me that 7am was "bloody cratering." And so even though he had told a group of programmers he was not going to make any moves, he placed the locally-generated program Up Front on the schedule at 7am. At the time, one KPFA caucus favored this action and supported it, while the other cried for "process."

The last time a drive time program was not just rescheduled but canceled, again, it came with no warning, no consultation. Termination letters were handed out and suddenly The Morning

Show was gone. At the time, one KPFA caucus favored this action and supported it, while the other cried for "process."

Now I'm sure everyone in this room is a committed, principled idealist. But when it comes to calls for process, I'm afraid your partisan political slip is showing. Process seems to be something one caucus calls for when it wants to slow down change or bury it under a mudslide of procedures. Nothing in Pacifica is determined by consensus because no one is ever able to create it.

Still, if you wish to actually develop a non-partisan process for programming and scheduling, I heartily encourage you to do so. Set up a committee, a programming counsel, take the "process" out of management's domain and give it to the LSB. But when you do, make sure you hand over all responsibility for the success of programming and all that it must do for the station, to the entity with all the authority over programming. Because if you don't, whoops, we're back in WBAI-land again.

"Didn't you tell programmers you weren't going to make any changes shortly before you did?"

Yes, that's true. When they asked me, all I knew was that Uprising was scheduled as the all-too-necessary preemption at 8am during the last week of fund drive because the Morning Mix as a whole does not deliver the necessary revenue for that slot and has not for three years.

But if Uprising had failed for any reason (and there were many) to generate the necessary monies, if it drew fewer listeners and dollars than the Morning Mix, then not only would it NOT have become a part of the schedule, it too would have been preempted later in the week. As a manager, I am not and cannot be politically invested in any program. I cannot promulgate or subsidize failure. In this case, I did not have to. The numbers, both in terms of streaming listeners and revenue, more than justified the decision.

"Weren't you intimidated by a certain caucus to make the change just before you left?" Yes, this is also true. During the fund drive, Margy Wilkinson came to the GM's office, kicked down the

door, reached across the desk, grabbed me by the collar, lifted me up off my feet, slammed me into the wall and said, "Listen, punk! You put Uprising on at 8am or else!!"

Come on, folks. Going back to last year, in the first iteration of the schedule changes and all that followed, I had Uprising listed at 8am, and for all the reasons I have stated earlier. If I could make just one move, and it appeared that was all I could do at best, then I would take the most important hour for listenership and revenue and do what I could to help the station.

"Didn't you do this to get back at Summer Reese for blocking your changes?" I have absolutely no animus toward Summer Reese and she has little if any toward me. In fact, if she were to make a list of all the people in this room and rank them in terms whom she likes and respects, I'm pretty sure I'd rank a lot higher in that batting order than most of the folks in this room, including some of the folks who say they are on "her side."

She is not the first supervisor to overrule me and she won't be the last. And if you happen to re-read the email she sent to me and that I forwarded to the staff, please note that she commended me for starting a data-driven "process" to achieve necessary change. If she were still ED, I am certain there would be changes to the schedule, and some of them would be ones I suggested. For me, that's fine because I NEVER expect to get all I want, and am usually grateful for whatever good I can achieve.

"Have you gone over to 'the dark side?'" Well duh, I'm the money-grubbing GM. At any community media outlet, I am always "the dark side," dealing with money and other things that governance would rather avoid.

"Are you trying to curry favor with the majority caucus?" You mean so I can be manager-for-life at KPFA? No there is nothing either caucus can do to help me for what little time remains for me up here in Berkeley or down in Los Angeles.

I am not eligible to be a part of any caucus. As a manager, making politically-motivated decisions will not serve the listeners, the station, or even my employment prospects. I've

managed media outlets for over 30 years. Pacifica was not my first employer and it is certainly not going to be my last. I have never made politically-motivated decisions and I never will. Oddly enough, that is one of the reasons Pacifica hired me.

"If not politically-motivated, how do you explain that one caucus is in favor of the change and one isn't?" I will cite the law of averages. Unlike proposed schedule changes, which BOTH caucuses opposed, every blue moon I do something which will appeal to a given side. My motivations are dictated by my responsibilities. The caucuses do not have my responsibilities and have their own criteria. Sometimes the stars align; most of the time they don't.

"Well, we will have more protests, have more people sign petitions, and more emails sent out to have the change rescinded!" Since this was a data-driven decision, the data created by those actions need to be held up against the date which was employed. If people show up for a protest, sign petitions, or write emails, there is no way of knowing how many listen to or support a given show. As an example, the online petition now contains over 200 names. When it reached 175, I asked our data guru Chris Stehlik to cross reference the list of names with our list of members to determine how many had made any kind of donation to KPFA in the last two years. The number was 78, considerably less than half.

But if people are willing to hold up a sign against Uprising being on the schedule, they may be willing to put up a poster promoting The Morning Mix or another show that needs and deserves more listeners. If people send emails to the station, maybe they could be encouraged to send emails to their friends and colleagues urging them to listen to the show of their choice. If some folks will sign an online petition, perhaps more of them also sign checks to support KPFA.

Taking those positive steps to generate more listeners and more revenue will generate the very type of data that can and should impact programming and scheduling if the station is to survive. Protest can be a very effective hammer, but not every situation is a nail. What kind of protest is going to save the network? What kind of petition is going to turn things around at WBAI, WPFW,

and KPFT? If these problems are not addressed, no matter what is done to KPFA's schedule, the network will die. To save the network, this LSB and the PNB will need to make difficult decisions which none of you will like. Management has to do that every day. Governance must learn to do the same in order to ensure that this service organization continues to serve.

Richard Pirodsky, iGM

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June 14, 2014