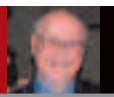


By Steven J. Steinberg

# Steinberg On Creative



## The Talent Of Directing Talent

### How To Maximize Your Station's Performance Levels

During the 25 years I spent as an ad agency creative director, I loathed going to radio stations to produce the spots I'd written. Most of my agency spots were produced at recording studios, using a talent pool of actors, none of whom, in all likelihood, would have made a good deejay. The two skills are in fact quite different: The ability to speak to listeners extemporaneously, in a stream-of-consciousness fashion, live on the air is a very special talent. Likewise, the ability to deliver an emotional read, be funny or dramatic, or create a character is not something every great disk jockey has mastered.

The business model of radio stations is also vastly different from that of a recording studio. At a radio station, most jocks are expected to pull production duties either before or after their shifts, and the primary responsibility for direction is either left to their own initiative or covered by the production director.

It's been my experience that this isn't always the optimal solution. Even the best on-air talent — whose acting ability surpasses the "norm" — and the finest production director don't always understand the performance nuances that a script calls for. That's something only the creative services director — the writer — comprehends fully. I discovered at my very first recording studio radio production that a radio commercial writer is also expected — at the very least — to contribute to the direction of the voice talents performing in the spot.

There's potential here for some head butting. I've worked with production directors who felt that their turf was being infringed upon when, as the writer, I wanted to helm the production of the spot. I've also had the dubious pleasure of working with *prima donna* on-air talent who were otherwise treated with kid gloves, and possessed a distinct "you're not the boss of me" attitude.

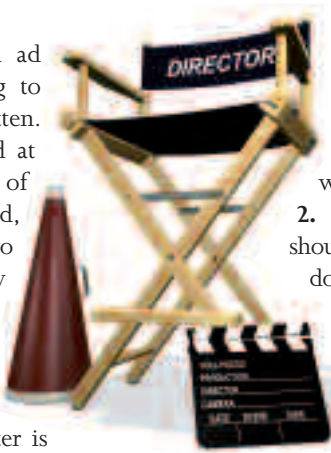
#### GET THE MOST OUT OF EVERY "SPECIAL" PRODUCTION

1. **Work with management to establish the right protocols and working environment.** It's important that both the



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- The creative services director should — at the very least — contribute to the direction of the talent voicing the spot.



production director and the jocks understand that there will be certain assignments where the creative services director — much like the head coach of a football team — is going to call the play. That policy needs to be in writing and explicitly understood by all the players.

2. **The First-Take Rule:** The creative services director should stand back and let the production director and talent do it their way before stepping in. This provides a good baseline for how well the rest of the team organically understands what you're looking for.

3. **The One Riot, One Ranger Rule:** This is especially important when the client is in attendance. Only one person gets to instruct the talent, and in this instance, it's the creative services director. Nothing confuses or frustrates a voice-over person more than fielding multiple inputs. Encourage your production director and client to offer you their opinions (if possible, out of earshot of the talent) but make sure they understand that you will be the sole director of the talent.

4. **Don't be afraid to say the line or lines exactly as you "hear" it in your head.** In my work with top Broadway and Hollywood talent, not once in hundreds of productions did I ever receive bad feedback when I let them know how I, as the writer, "heard" something in my head. Even the most high-maintenance on-air talents want to satisfy the needs of the writer, and mimicry is a great tool.
5. **Be open-minded.** Sometimes, as the writer, the way you heard it in your head can stand a little improvement. Abandon the Not Invented Here Syndrome.
6. **Don't settle.** Frustration is a two-way street. If you're not getting exactly what you want, offer positive ways to make improvements.
7. **But don't expect perfection.** There's no such thing. And in today's digital environment, it's even easier than it was when the multi-track tape recorder arrived on the scene to cobble together the best parts of different takes.

"Talent" isn't just a word to describe the person voicing the spot; it's a process that, if embraced by all members of the production team, can reap great rewards. 📺

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