

REINVENTING PUBLIC RADIO

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I've been looking forward to talking with you this morning about reinventing public radio. And - since we're in Hollywood, let's turn to the movies for a little inspiration.

A few years back, Jack Palance played one of those larger-than-life cowboy characters in "City Slickers," delivering wisdom from the back of a horse..... Let's take a look.....

(video clip from city slickers)

Curly: You know what the secret of life is?

Mitch: No, what?

Curly: This.

Mitch: Your finger?

Curly: One thing. Just one thing. You stick to that and everything else don't mean shit.

Mitch: That's great, but what's the one thing?

Curly: That's what you've gotta figure out.

That's sort of where we are in public radio these days. We've got to figure out what's that one thing that will take us into a new era. And perhaps Curly's notion that it's just one thing is right on the money.

Some would argue that the *one thing* is making **great** radio happen at every station, every hour of every day. If we just followed all the best practices, like smarter forward promotion; if we had stronger on-air talent, if stations embraced Morning Edition Grad School and LNI; if we blended our local and national programming perfectly to create a high quality, unique service in every community – then that would carry us into a bright and shining future.

Now, all of those things are very important, and need to be done; but I want to suggest that the *one thing* that will take public radio into a new era is more than

best practices. Here's why: because the world around us has changed so much that our best practices are no longer enough.

Instead, I want to suggest that the one thing that will take public radio into a new era is this: **throw open the doors.**

Throw open the doors to the increasingly diverse communities in which we live.

And **throw open the doors** to young people who understand more than anyone that the nature of media has fundamentally changed.

Why do I think it's essential to **throw open the doors**?

Because the real reinvention of public radio is not going to be accomplished by us alone. The real reinvention of public radio is going to happen – indeed, *is* happening – as new people with new ideas change the very nature of what public radio, or should I say, public media, **is** and **can be**.

I believe that the more we can open our doors to the ideas and participation of diverse communities and young people, the more public radio will thrive and grow and, yes, change.

Let's start with opening our doors to diverse communities.

I could show you all kinds of statistics that tell us the country is rapidly becoming more diverse. But, frankly, I don't need to. We all see diversity everyday– in big cities and small towns. It's safe to say that diversity is a fact of life in almost every American community.

But it's not a fact of life in public radio. Our audience is 82% white. By and large, they look like most of us.

Now, there are many reasons, often cited, why organizations *should* focus on diversity. Usually, the reasons that are given fall into two broad categories: one is the values case, which says - "it's the **right** thing to do, and will make our people happier;" and the other is the business case, which says – "it's the **smart** thing to do, and will improve our bottom line." In fact, it's both. It's the right thing and the smart thing.

The Society for Human Resource Management, which makes a business of thinking about these things, says: **finding talent** is seen as the most important management challenge facing business executives in the next five years. I think that is especially relevant for public radio's aging workforce.

Our industry is not attracting or recruiting a diverse workforce in sufficient numbers. But it's not because the talent isn't out there. It's that we are not

opening our doors to the full range of talent that could be available to us – from on-air to senior management.

I believe this limits our ability to serve our communities. It also puts us at risk of becoming less and less relevant to more and more people.

When it comes to **opening our doors to diverse communities**, we have to ask ourselves some tough questions:

- Is the lack of a diverse staff a liability?
- Is the diversity of our communities and our nation represented in our news rooms? In our production studios? In our programming? In our management?
- And if not, why not?

You can answer those questions for yourself but let me share a few examples of initiatives that are trying to reinvent public radio by **throwing open the doors**.

First, Chicago Public Radio's **Vocalo** -- an on-air and online station – that's completely driven by the audience. It's all about inviting new people in – to create and share content.

Users share their stories, poems, documentaries, photos, and videos at vocalo.org. Some of that user generated content goes on-air, along with content from the Vocalo staff - which includes a few radio professionals, as well as artists, producers, journalists, filmmakers, actors, and comedians – like Ladytwist – an up and coming hip hop artist and comedian.

Vocalo came about when the general manager at WBEZ, Torey Malatia, and his staff asked – “is what we do necessary?” For a large part of Chicago, the answer was “no.” WBEZ wanted to change that answer. And they are doing it by **throwing open the doors**.

Vocalo is a bold concept, which is one reason why CPB helped fund it. Whether it succeeds or fails, it will teach all of us lessons about re-inventing public radio.

In a different way, WNYC and PRI's new program, **The Takeaway**, is working to open the doors.

The Takeaway sounds different from other public radio morning shows. That's because it's trying to attract and serve a group of listeners who don't tune to public radio in big numbers: college-educated African Americans and Hispanics. PRI is working with a different metric to evaluate progress: the “college share”.

It's using Arbitron data to calculate the percentage of listening by people with college degrees. Their goal is to attract college shares for African Americans and Hispanics that are closer to the college share for whites.

If WNYC could achieve that goal, they estimate their weekly cume could climb by 19%. Just imagine the kind of national impact if public radio expanded its audience among college-educated listeners of **all** ethnicities. It could bring hundreds of thousands of new listeners into the fold.

The Takeaway has a new sound, **yes**. But more importantly it has an **incredibly diverse staff**. The result is a wide range of perspectives and experiences that influence editorial choices and better reflect the entire community. This is what can happen when you **throw open the doors** – and that's why CPB is supporting it.

Oh, I know some people will say this won't work – that at best you'll trade one new listener for one current listener, or worse, that you're messing with the fundamental appeal of the programming. Well, I say we gotta seriously try -- The Takeaway is only one strategy – we need many more stations to develop other strategies appropriate to their communities -- because, in all likelihood, there will not be a neat, one-size-fits-all national strategy, but many market-by-market, station-by-station strategies for serving our increasingly diverse communities.

Another example is right here in Los Angeles where we're working to create an entirely new format – **a 24/7 English-language service targeting Latinos**.

In the Los Angeles area, Latinos make up 45% of the population. Research funded by CPB shows that many Latinos don't feel well served by radio, including public radio. We have a tremendous opportunity to create programming that appeals to this group.

Now, creating an entirely new format is a huge challenge, but if we're successful, we'll open the doors to a new audience, and we can use the experience to inform the creation of Latino focused programming in other places.

So, as a program director, you might be thinking – that's all well and good, but I don't have a second station or the resources to pull this kind of thing off. And many of you are right. But some stations are finding ways to open their doors to their communities, without spending a ton of money or producing hours and hours of new programming.

For example, WILL in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. The station is part of CPB's community engagement initiative. Through that initiative, WILL has brought together a group of nonprofits that work with at-risk, African-American youth.

The group is creating a “community asset map” so it can better serve young African-Americans. And the station has decided to focus its high-school radio-and-TV-training program on these young people.

General Manager Mark Leonard says that the station is re-orienting itself towards the community. He says that now, quote -- “our projects **start in the community**, not in our conference room.”

And their efforts are paying off in even more ways: the station has seen a 28% increase in funding from local contributors.

Throw open the doors.

So, where do you start? It may be as simple as asking.

I have to admit that I was surprised by the response that PRX received when it opened the doors on-line to the Public Radio Talent Quest. They invited people to enter the talent quest by submitting a two minute audition piece. Nearly 1400 people entered. Talented people were out there looking for a way to engage with us -- all it took was an invitation. The best part is, we found Majora Carter, Al Letson and Glynn Washington in the process – the 3 Talent Quest winners. I hope you met them last night at our reception. Al and Glynn are here with us this morning.....please stand...

This is what can happen when you open the doors. New talent, new ideas, new audiences, a new public radio.

Secondly, I believe public radio needs to **throw open the doors** to young people. Not just because we want them to become listeners, but because young people are the ones who are most involved in reinventing media.

For years, we’ve been hearing about how media is “converging,” – but if you really want to see what “converged media” means, visit Youth Radio – I did earlier this year – it’s an amazing multi-media center in Oakland, CA – the young people there don’t think in terms of radio, television or internet. They think in sound, video, text, games, widgets, podcasts, social networks – and all of it together at once. This is not “**new** media” to them - it’s just media.

Youth Radio teaches young people how to tell their stories in digital form. And then the adults get out of the way. The result is incredibly creative media. These young people – and millions like them all over the country – not only embrace converged media, they expect it, their content goes everywhere. The young people at Youth Radio embody the future of public media.

It’s so different from the early days of public radio. I remember when every station had a program schedule that looked like a patchwork quilt – a

documentary program here, an hour of jazz there, a symphony program someplace else. We wanted to deliver all kinds of programming to lots of different people, but we only had **one** channel. Then we learned to focus our formats -- to maximize the reach and impact of our **one** channel.

Today, **technology has finally caught up with our aspirations** – to better serve audiences by providing diverse content when, where, and how they want it. The entire delivery system for information is changing. But that’s only one part of the equation. Thanks to social media and interactivity, we are now in a **two way** – no, a multi-way -- conversation.

Converged media makes all of this possible, **but we have to embrace it**. And young people can lead the way. We just have to **throw open the doors**.

To borrow a phrase from Pat Harrison, CEO of CPB – ‘the people formerly known as our audience’ are now our collaborators and co-producers, shaping their own stories, creating their own playlists. This is a fundamental shift in the us-to-them, broadcast model we grew up with.

As program directors, it’s no longer good enough to think that your job is just to fine-tune the broadcast sound and put the right program at the right time. The broadcast-only world is gone.

At CPB, we want to help stations make the transition from broadcasting to converged media. One way we’re doing this is through a grant to the Association of Independents in Radio – AIR – for the “Public Radio Makers Quest 2.0.”

It’s our follow up to the Public Radio Talent Quest, -- but this time, we’ll focus on producers.

AIR will find a dozen producers who will create small projects that will show us the potential of converged media.

They will be experimental, and some might fail, but the lessons learned will guide us all into the era of converged media. AIR will be looking for collaborators for the project, so contact Sue Schardt if you’re interested.

Now, our emphasis on converged media doesn’t mean that we are abandoning traditional broadcast radio. Far from it! We know that, right now, and for probably the next decade, radio broadcasts reach many, many more people than any other platforms for our content. We want to take this incredibly successful service to the next level. That’s why CPB initiated the “Grow the Audience” project to examine how we can continue to grow our **radio** audiences. This afternoon, Tom Thomas and Terry Clifford at SRG, along with researcher, George Bailey and your very own, Arthur Cohen, want you to be part of a conversation on “Grow the Audience.” And on how opening the doors will advance that goal.

So, if we **throw open the doors** to diverse communities and to young people. - what are the end results? What does public radio gain?

I believe we will remain relevant. We won't become marginalized, but instead will be a vital service to a wider range of listeners and give voice to a changing America. We will continue to help shape the discourse of our democracy. In fact, we will become an even more important voice in the American conversation.

When President Lyndon Johnson signed the public broadcasting act of 1967, he said:

“I think we must consider new ways to build **a great network** for knowledge--**not just a broadcast system**, but one that employs every means of sending and storing information that the individual can use.....”

Johnson's words should inspire us today. We can build on our success to be that great network – on-air, on-line, and anywhere else the technology takes us. America needs us to provide that space.

But what happens if we don't open the doors, if we don't embrace the new media? I believe that we will not find the support we need to continue to exist – from Congress, from foundations, or most importantly from our communities.

And we will be replaced -- by others who actively include the voices and ideas of diverse communities, by others who understand the potential of converged media. It may not happen tomorrow, but it will happen.

So during this conference, as you discuss and debate the changing role of the program director, I challenge you:

- To bring more young people into your stations and see what they can teach you.
- To open the doors to diverse communities and let them bring in new and diverse ideas.
- To experiment. Take a risk. Play.
- And finally, to remember that sometimes the most courageous thing is to just get out of the way.

If we do these things, we can become the great network President Johnson envisioned. But in order to do that, we must risk change. We cannot satisfy ourselves with past successes. We must - **throw open the doors**.

Thank you.