

The National Association of Broadcasters

1760 N STREET, N. W. * * * * * WASHINGTON 6, D. C.

No. 15

SPECIAL INFORMATION BULLETIN

Nov. 26, 1943

The Manager and the Medium

By WILLARD D. EGOLF

Assistant to the President, National Association of Broadcasters

**Delivered at the Annual Dinner, Association for Education by Radio,
Stephens College, Columbia, Missouri, November 20, 1943**

Contrary to the reasons advanced by the toastmaster, my conscience requires me to confess that I am on the program tonight simply because my wife is a graduate of Stephens College and our small daughter is already registered for entrance in the year 1958. President James Wood, Barry Holloway, Sherman Lawton and in fact the entire staff of Stephens College are notorious for sponsoring Stephens graduates and their families. In my case you might even call them shameless.

I come to you in the capacity which was formerly that of Colonel Ed Kirby, now with the War Department in Washington. I am trying to do Colonel Kirby's work at NAB with the assistance of nine broadcasters as a committee and seventeen more as district chairman. In other words, Colonel Kirby was replaced by twenty-seven men. Ed continues to demonstrate his prolificacy by superintending radio's vital functions as a weapon of war while maintaining his civilian contacts which were so enjoyable to him in peace time. I find him at most of our meetings wearing the uniform which identifies him among the broadcasters as one of radio's first and foremost contributions to the war.

A station manager, looking at the title of my speech, made this observation, "Hmmm! The Manager and the Medium. So it's finally come to that."

"Come to what?" I asked.

"Well," he said, "with commentator trouble, labor trouble, personnel trouble, equipment trouble, battery trouble and legislative trouble, I guess it's time I consulted a medium."

When I meet with educators I like to adopt their techniques, first, because they are democratic, second, because they provide the best method of studying radio's problems.

Consequently it is in a classroom sense that I say, let's play a game. This game you all know.

It is the formula used by psychologists and psychoanalysts to demonstrate the association of ideas. The game leader pronounces a word and the player answers with the first thing that comes in his mind. For example, the word "money" might suggest "taxes", the word "war" might suggest "soldiers" and so on. Some words suggest many things that are related.

Now I would like to pronounce a word, just one word, and call on some of you to answer with not one but several of the things that it suggests. Let your thoughts roll out, disjointed, scrambled, I don't care—expressing what the word I pronounce means to you. The greater number of different things that can be crammed into your sentence, the better. Are you with me? All right. Just one more suggestion. Please stick to the first things you think of, even if you hear someone ahead of you use them, too. We want a true first reaction. Sherman Lawton will try to keep an account of them, but there will be no competition, no prizes. This is not "Double or Nothing" or "Take It or Leave It," so don't be nervous. Ready, then, the word is simply "radio."

(Grateful acknowledgment is made to Miss Tobin, Miss Debbler, Miss Patterson and Mrs. Charters for their helpful participation.)

Very good. Now, please listen to this definition of radio.

"Radio. A system of national and international communication which, by means of news, entertainment and education, serves and influences the masses and promises to enlighten the peoples of the entire world."

How many of you agree with that definition? Then how about this definition?

"Radio. A system of local communication, which by means of local transmitters, studios and equipment, provides news, entertainment and education designed for those within specified cover-

age areas and augments this service through national and international hook-ups in a manner compatible with the local public interest."

How many of you agree with that definition? Both definitions are valid. Both are necessary to the perfect conception of radio. But failure to recognize the importance of the second definition is responsible for many ills. Let me repeat it:

"Radio. A system of local communication, which by means of local transmitters, studios and equipment, provides news, entertainment and education designed for those within specified coverage areas and augments this service through national and international hook-ups in a manner compatible with the local public interest."

Radio is primarily local, local in its facilities, local in its coverage, local in its philosophy.

The language of the law which creates radio as we know it today, the communications act of 1934, as amended, makes no reference to what two stations shall do, or three stations, or a network of stations. The law speaks in terms of single stations, single licensees, in single localities.

The license under which an applicant is granted the right to operate a radio station specifies that he shall operate the station "in the public interest, convenience and necessity." That language means operation in the *local* public interest, convenience and necessity, conceived and executed with regard to the needs of a particular community or specified coverage area. It places no burden upon the operator to weigh the problems of the nation or of the whole world except as they apply locally. In the modern development of national and international philosophy, many more such problems do have application locally, but it is the duty of the manager to study and distinguish them, for a broadcaster cannot serve the whole world and ignore his own community.

You don't have to look to the law alone to find the local responsibility and individual integrity of station management. Travel around the country and discover how numerous and different are the interests of our states and communities. Get out among the people of a certain area; see what they are doing and hear what they are talking about. I've just come from Oklahoma, which I know perhaps best of all. You don't have to go any further than Oklahoma to find interests distinguishable from those of their neighbors in other states. Their national concern now is the war and all its consequences but their local interests include flood control, irrigation, the price of beef, pork and farm products and the price of oil.

Local station broadcasts in Oklahoma must be patterned to the disposition and interests of its people. National and international programs must be sifted through the screen of local public interest.

No, you don't have to look at the law alone to define local station responsibility and individual integrity. A lot of it depends on how you were brought up in this business. I first became acquainted with radio when my boyhood pal and I made crystal sets out of cigar boxes and other

odds and ends, an outgrowth of our interest in communications developed through a tin can telephone. In 1921 I played in a college orchestra which broadcast once a week or whenever the transmitter was in working order. Our studio was the operator's living room. Our microphone was an ordinary telephone and our announcer was a law student who edited the school's comic magazine and hoped to sell a few extra copies by reading jokes out of each issue over the air. Our most responsive audience was the operator's eight months' old baby who cried like the devil in the next room every time we played. There was certainly nothing national or international in our conception of radio at that point. We could almost count the number of receiving sets that were able to pick us up and we usually heard from most of them. A few years later in Florida, I had frequent contacts with one of America's pioneer commercial stations but never thought of using it as an advertising medium in the tremendous real estate boom going on at that time. Only a few receiving sets were in operation and the whole thing was strictly a local experiment. When I joined an advertising agency in 1928, frequently writing radio continuity for local advertisers and attempting to sell ideas for sponsorship, all my dealings were with the station manager. He was the focal point of station business. His responsibility and authority were clearly recognized.

When I joined radio actively in 1932, at the lowest depth of the depression, our station and in fact the entire radio industry were going through an economic fight for survival. Management meant everything in those days, in order to keep a station on the air. We had to go to the safe every Saturday night and pay off. Anyone who could call himself a radio man had to be able to sell time, write programs, select music and talent, produce shows, perform in the shows and collect bills—but quick. I'll never forget the time I first faced a microphone as an announcer. That was something else again. Later in the evening a friend told me that I sounded as if I had run up three or four flights of stairs just before going on the air. That was impossible because our studios were in a basement. My office was where the rats always ran when the news editor chased them out of the news room. When we finally prospered to the point of moving to the top of the town's finest tall building, high up in the sunlight, we were so overcome with joy and the realization of our accomplishment that we sailed paper airplanes from the twenty-second floor balcony like a bunch of kids. Through it all there was a tremendous spirit of loyalty to our station and to the job we were trying to do for our community. For ten years at my station, during which we went from 5,000 to 50,000 watts, I never saw that spirit falter or do anything but grow. It was everybody's trust and everybody stood ready to discharge it. One of the last things I did before leaving the station was to go back on the air as a cowboy singer, under another name, when the war began to pinch us

again for station personnel and the regular singer went to work in a shipyard.

You will find the same story in most of the stations in America today. The experiences which station managers and station executives have undergone, quite as much as the radio law which governs their operations, are responsible for the feeling of local autonomy, local individuality and devotion to local public interest.

Edgar Guest says, "It takes a heap of living in a house to make it home." Well, a heap of broadcasting in a town will make it home, and it gives that town a civic asset in the men and women who have gone the route and learned the civic consciousness.

And why is it important to review these things? Because radio's responsibility in the new world rests almost solely upon the shoulders of station managers. It is immaterial if they are standard band stations, FM stations or television stations, the same responsibility applies.

I said earlier that improper recognition of the local definition of radio is responsible for many ills. The new world is already producing new ideas, there will be great social and educational readjustment, sponsored by national and even international groups. There may be a tendency among these groups, because of their national complexion, to resolve themselves onto the air, demand nation-wide broadcasts through network programs without proper regard for the obligation of station management to pass upon such programs from the standpoint of local public interest. It must be remembered that the obligation remains with local station management whether the time is given or sold. Sale of time puts no obligation on station management to accept program content. In fact, it calls for even closer scrutiny of broadcast material.

The best solution to the problem is educational. Those who wish to use radio for the furtherance of ideas or ideologies should learn the principles of radio's true American system. Radio cannot be regimented in a free democracy. Radio cannot be seized by the forelock and made to do something as a single corporate body. He who tries it will discover that he has grasped a bristling cactus

with every spear a different local viewpoint. Might as well try to grasp all the newspapers of America at once and march them around by the collective seat of their pants. Might as well try to abolish state's rights or local autonomy in city government.

But there must be a disposition to teach as well as to learn. The broadcasters, as part of their responsibility in the new world, are prepared to assist all who value radio as a means of expression and communication. Generally speaking, broadcasters are as public spirited as any group of men you will find in America. They have learned the meaning of public service as the life-blood of radio. None has ever failed in the process of amiable agreement and understanding when approached with the proper recognition of his position.

In the last analysis, radio is not a cyclops—a giant with a single eye. Radio has a thousand eyes, represented numerically by almost a thousand radio stations, eyes to see the people of our new world and read in their faces the challenge of the years. Eyes to see the returning soldiers, many of them permanent victims of battle; eyes to see the changing aspects of home life; eyes to see the new type of youth, many of whom have already said that they will not leave war plants and go back to school; and eyes to see what I saw only a few weeks ago in Washington at the Navy Day Banquet—while a WAVE choir sang the Navy Hymn—a gray-haired mother leaning back, unnoticed (she thought), as the tears ran down to her trembling lips. Eyes, hundreds of eyes, watching in every city, town and farm home in America, will be needed to shape radio's programming in the new world. To the eyes of station managers will be added those of thousands of returning radio men and women now with the armed forces. Their thoughts, their reactions will be woven into the radio programs of our post-war world.

Frequency modulation will come, television will come, but the greatest thing to come is understanding, so that the marvels of our science will be properly concentrated to the betterment of humanity. Thank you.