

Radio: the real show starts when the mike turns OFF.

The Cash Cage

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Chapter 14

The only thing that made me feel a little better about getting fired was that in the same month I was let go, it seems everyone in Chicago radio was being axed. Fred Winston was given his walking papers at WLS-AM after 6 years and wound up at WFYR-FM's oldies competitor, WMJK-FM where he replaced Tommy Edwards. Morning man Paul Barskey was fired at WYTZ-FM, a CHR outlet. Pete Stacker was tossed out at Adult Contemporary WTMX-FM.

I didn't apply for unemployment at first. As a matter of fact, I waited three months. I suppose I was in denial. Plus, I figured what difference did it make? I had just deposited a check at the bank for over \$80,000 dollars, minus taxes, and didn't figure to be in immediate financial jeopardy.

I knew I was in a difficult situation, though. I had been riding a wave of continual progress for five years in both market size and salary. Where exactly could I go from here, the third largest market in America, making over \$120,000-a-year? How many jobs were really at that level and above? If I wanted to maintain major market status and a paycheck to reflect that, I was severely limited in what was available. What's worse, stations in smaller markets would look at my credentials and salary history and decide I was out of their price range.

In a way, I sabotaged my career with my own success. The higher you climb, the harder you hit on the way down.

The irony is if I had been less of an achiever, I would have been more employable at this point. Now, though, I had much to lose. I had finally tasted the sweetness of being able to make enough money so as not to have to worry about making enough money. Or at least I thought I did. In reality, I had made the classic mistake thinking the more money I made, the more freedom it afforded me.

It doesn't matter how much money you earn *if* it comes at the expense of working for someone else. This is far from any path of personal freedom because in exchange for the cash, you hand over control of your life to the people paying you. You subjugate your life to the process itself. The money brings you possessions, expensive dinners, and

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even spontaneous gifts. Then, suddenly, you like it too much and think you must always live this way. You panic and desperately wonder how you will keep the big bucks coming in.

Currency becomes a drug.

You are mainlining dollars.

You are addicted.

This was the lure of the cash cage I had readily stepped into. The lyrics in “*Hotel California*” by the Eagles say it all:

You can check out any time you like

But you can never leave

I devoted part of each day of my unemployment to the job search. Other than that, I was so disappointed, so sad, so disheartened about losing the Chicago gig; I didn't care about much else. In my mind, I was a failure and I was very hard on myself.

In retrospect, what I should have done was taken a month long road trip out west. The kind of road trip where you see uplifting visuals like dead armadillos and steer horns on the side of the road. Nothing makes you want for the great outdoors like being locked up in a radio studio every day.

I should have sought out the sweet smell of a cheeseburger being served up in a diner that appears to be shaped like a flying saucer. This is the America I'm talking about! Nothing says unemployment like waking up in the morning, curled up on the front seat of your car, being eyed by a buzzard that is carefully perched on a cactus and leering at the half-eaten Clark bar on your dashboard.

Yes, unemployment is wasted on too many concerned job hunters who just can't appreciate the freedom of being broke.

About three months into my job search, I received a call from a man named Robert Hyland. He was calling from St. Louis, the country's 20th largest radio market, and wanted to talk to me about a job opening at an Oldies station called KLOU-FM. We arranged an interview and a few days later, I flew into town and we met. Robert Hyland, when he was alive, was an enigma. He died in 1992 but up until his death, he was probably the most respected man in the CBS Radio Division and the second most respected person in all of CBS, next to founder, William Paley.

People seemed just plain scared of Robert Hyland. It wasn't that he was a mean man, or unfair or even unlikable. But, he was a brooding personality who was so much larger than life; you naturally stepped back and let him pass by when he walked down the hallway. I always had the impression people who worked for him would have felt more comfortable being permitted to bow upon entering and leaving his presence. But, I'm sure there was something in the CBS employee manual that forbade such actions.

Robert Hyland started with CBS radio in 1950 at WBBM-AM in Chicago. A couple of years later, he returned to his home, St. Louis, and took over the now legendary KMOX-AM. He did well as Sales Manager and by 1955 became General Manager. He held that position until his death. KMOX was a CBS owned-and-operated property and under Hyland, it consistently had the highest grossing revenues in the CBS Radio chain, along with the highest listener ratings. How did he do this?

Beginning in 1960 (by one account), he pointed KMOX in a new direction: Talk. Hyland is actually credited with inventing the format. Under his guidance, KMOX became the first major radio station to successfully do an all-talk format. He called it "*At Your Service*". KMOX also became known for its sports programming featuring the St. Louis Cardinals and other local teams. In 1962, CBS purchased a St. Louis FM frequency that became KMOX-FM. It was later renamed KLOU-FM, the station Hyland was now restocking with talent.

The "House that Hyland Built" was an extraordinary operation. When I had occasion to be in the KMOX studios for some production purposes or other reasons, it was always a treat. The first time I was there, I was introduced to Art Fleming, best known as the original host to the television show "Jeopardy" from 1964 to 1978.

When I met him, Fleming was hosting a midday show on KMOX. Later I got to know famed sportscaster, Jack Buck, who was usually walking through the halls, preparing for a St. Louis Cardinals game, his own show, or readying himself to leave town to do a national broadcast for CBS Sports. Then there was Bob Costas. Costas began at KMOX in 1978 and joined CBS Sports in 1979. He shuttled back and forth providing services to both, maintaining his home in St. Louis. Bob Costas was spoken of with the reverence of a deity and whenever it was known he was

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returning to KMOX for whatever reason, the place was giddy with excitement. There was no doubt, he had made everyone proud.

With the kind of talent Robert Hyland had nurtured, he was easily thought of as a kingmaker. He was powerful and could make or break people. But, it wasn't so much the absolute achievements of Hyland, the tales from his employees, or even the unwavering success of KMOX that created the man's mystique. The fact is he was a notorious workaholic.

Sometimes, when I would arrive at KLOU-FM between 2 and 3 a.m., Hyland would already be there, getting on the elevator with me! His long work hours were legendary and unheard of for a manager. Based on his work ethic and successes, William Paley once offered Hyland the job as head of CBS Sports and later as head of CBS Radio Network, but Hyland declined. He liked living and working in St. Louis.

Robert Hyland was a classy man, too. On holidays, he was known to send up food platters from a caterer for any staff members who pulled the short straw for that day. He gave back respect in the same way it was shown to him.

When I arrived to first meet Robert Hyland, I did not know any of what I just told you. I only knew he had a job open at this FM oldies station and to me, St. Louis was a respectable place for me to land after Chicago.

The interview went well, at least well enough for him to offer me a job at the end of it. Somewhere in the middle, the Program Director was ushered in to join us, but it was Hyland making the decisions. Then, he asked me how much salary I needed, which is always a loaded question. I was unemployed and did not have much bargaining power. I knew I was not going to be earning my Chicago salary and he knew he probably could not afford to pay it, either. I think I countered his question with something generic like "...a reasonable salary" and threw it back in his lap.

He thought for a moment and said, "\$80,000".

"Hell," I thought to myself, "I make \$80,000 just getting fired these days."

Considering the circumstances, though, I was pleased. I just wanted to get back to work. No contract was signed and I don't recall whether we even discussed one. For some reason, it didn't seem to matter to him nor me. Robert Hyland was a man of his word and I suppose he

sensed I was, too. Things worked a little differently in St. Louis than Chicago. We agreed I would start within two weeks.

Oh, there was one more thing. My name. Hyland did not like my last name.

“Deitz,” he said. “It sounds like ditz. I don't want people thinking you're a ditz.”

I thought this was pretty fucking stupid. I had been pronouncing my name for decades, ever since I was a small child in New Jersey. Not once did I ever say “Hi, I'm Corey Ditz. Oops! I mean Deitz! Deitz! Sorry! I don't know what the fuck came over me! Deitz! Jesus! Deitz! Not Ditz! Deitz!”

Although not as prevalent today, there was a time when most deejays had fake names. I suppose one might defend the practice as being important to the total package of entertainment. For instance, the night jock on a CHR station is going to attract more 13-year-olds with a name like “Surf Dude” than by using his real name, “Marvin Elroy Dorfmeister”.

Some argue a fake name protects the person on the air from undue harassment, especially those who do controversial shows. Still, other jocks no doubt found phony names useful because it made it harder for 16-year-olds to find their home phone number after a night of jailbait sex.

There's an industry inside joke about how most deejay names usually consist of two first names. I call it the “Rule of Two”. For instance: John Barry, Jeff Morgan, and John Lawrence were three guys I worked with at Q94 in Richmond. All first names.

Even though I disagreed on the name change, Hyland's mind was made up. I wasn't really in a position to argue. So, we sat there and started throwing new ones around. Finally, he said, “Roberts”.

“Corey Roberts”

I reluctantly agreed. Is it any wonder my last name was really a derivative of his first name? Everything at the CBS operations in St. Louis revolved around Robert Hyland.

We shook hands and I departed.

As usual, I moved ahead of my wife, Chris, who hung back to sell our home in Westmont, the Chicago suburb where we had been living. Hyland put me up in a downtown hotel for 3 months while Chris and I

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waited for construction to finish on a new home we purchased, courtesy of my former employer, Summit Broadcasting. In the meantime, I ordered room service almost every night and charged it to the station: Pizza, chocolate cake and coffee.

The reason I had been offered the afternoon slot at KLOU-FM and not mornings was because John “Records” Landecker was supposed to be the new morning man. All preparations were being made to welcome Landecker to St. Louis. The story I was told was simply that it was pretty much a done deal. At least Robert Hyland thought it was. So, I arrived when I said I would and hit the air a couple of days later. Hyland seemed pleased with my initial performance.

During my first week on the air, one afternoon he strolled into the studio and we chatted briefly. No matter what anyone said, and despite General Managers and Program Directors, it was Hyland who really ran both KMOX-AM and KLOU-FM with his unique hands-on approach. Maybe it was more like a grip. I sensed he liked me a lot. He spoke positively of the opportunities ahead with the company. As he left the studio, he said to me was “Ya know, this ain't no cup of coffee.”

A funny thing to say, I thought to myself. It turned out the CBS operations in St. Louis were more like a “Tempest in a Teacup”. A tempest is a violent commotion or disturbance. Put that in a teacup and you're looking at instability on a grand scale. The big problem at these two stations was the incessant political maneuvering people spent most of their time worrying about. I think it was simply that Hyland's work ethic was so extraordinary, nobody measured up, period. The best anyone could do was cover his or her ass from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m.

Meanwhile, the countdown to Landecker was proceeding on schedule. But, then, on the Friday before the Monday of his debut, I was summoned to Hyland's office where the news was regretfully disclosed: no Landecker.

The specifics were not discussed. It was simply stated that Landecker would not be the new morning man at KLOU-FM. He had changed his mind and was staying in Chicago. I couldn't blame him. As to why, I can only speculate. My gut tells me he probably did work a deal with Hyland but delayed signing any contract in the hopes of still landing a new gig in his beloved Chicago. I imagine Hyland must have taken this

news badly, especially after what must have been lengthy negotiations and concessions. Robert Hyland liked getting his way and Landecker bailing out like this was akin to treason.

I, too, was disappointed Landecker would not be coming to St. Louis. After all, he was on my short list of Radio heroes. But, his absence just created a new opportunity and Hyland offered the morning slot to me. Of course, I agreed immediately and reassured him I could do a great job.

I mentioned a raise. He acknowledged my mention. We were supposed to talk later and I said “sure” because I was a team player.

Warning: team players often get lost in the shuffle because they are so reliable the people whose asses they're covering usually forget they are even there. My advice to you no matter what your job: be courteous, display your talent, work hard but never confuse being “a team player” with being firm about your expectations for compensation.

I never received that raise and was a little miffed only out of principle because the subject was never broached again. It wasn't so much the money as it was the issue of personal dignity. I respect commitments and if you say we'll “talk later”, I expect us to have that chat. And I also expect the person who proposed it, to take the initiative to make it happen. I don't want to have to keep pestering someone to make good on his or her own word. That's demeaning and humiliating.

I was teamed up with a new sidekick, Brian Kirchoff, a nice enough guy who had been doing some part-time work for the station. Kathe Hartley, from KMOX, was designated our newswoman and suddenly a new morning show was born. The program director wanted to know what we were going to call it and we ran through a litany of possibilities:

”Corey and Brian in the Morning”

”The Morning Show with Corey and Brian”

”Corey Roberts and Friends”

”Roberts and Friends with Corey and Brian”

”Roberts, Friends, Corey, Brian *and* a Psychotic Program Director” (Personally, my favorite choice but I'll come back to this in a moment.)

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In the end, I was staring at one of the comedy services the station was subscribed to called "Morning Circus" and I said, "How about the 'KLOU 103 Morning Circus'?"

I regretted even suggesting it. The moment the words left my lips I cringed. But, it was too late. The Program Director liked it. And so it was. We named the new morning show after a stupid comedy service.

Anyway, this was insignificant next to the series of events that began to unfold. While I was still doing afternoons, everyone loved me. It seemed I could do no wrong. I was a golden boy. But, the following Monday - after just signing on as the new KLOU morning man - everything changed.

I hadn't been on the air more than ten minutes when I executed the mechanics of a new contest exactly as earlier instructed. The hotline rang immediately and the Program Director launched into a tirade of curse words the likes I had never heard from management. Whatever set him off, he never quite explained since there wasn't enough space in between his monologue of obscenities.

Somewhere between Friday and Monday, this guy had turned into the scariest, craziest son-of-a-bitch I ever met.

I can offer you no explanation or reason for this outrageous outburst except to suggest the Program Director's behavior toward me morphed from what earlier appeared to have been a normal person (as normal as you can be in Radio) into a raving psychotic. I can't stress enough how much I believe this man needed a strait jacket.

All of the employees under him should have been issued regulation CBS dart guns, with the tips dipped in some kind of sedative. He needed a full-blown, funny Pope Hat, Vatican-endorsed exorcism. In Virginia Beach I was convinced my partner was Satan. In St. Louis, my Program Director seemed to be possessed by him.

Here it was just a few weeks into my new job and I knew I was fucked...again. I tried to blow it off and forget it but my instincts kept pounding my brain, warning me that I had stepped into Radio's mental ward.

The Program Director never regained that nice composure he demonstrated prior to my switch to mornings. Whoever *that* guy was, he left and never came back. He had officially become Radio's Dr. Jekyll and

Mr. Hyde. All of a sudden, I was working for someone whose actions toward me seemed not only unstable, but also clearly dangerous. But, I was stuck. The house my wife and I were building was just about finished and even though I didn't have a contract with the station, I did have a very large financial commitment and deposit in this new home. I figured, I would stick it out and hope things changed.

They didn't.

I attended countless post-show meetings over an endless array of stupid and minor issues which only an obsessive, micro-managing Program Director could devise. If there was a Radio Hell that deejays went to after they died, it was this guy's office.

For the next nine months, I carefully and delicately tiptoed around the station and when I was home, dreaded phone calls. My wife and I fully expected I would be fired the next time it rang. Things were that tense. CBS in St. Louis was a tie-wearing, cover-your-butt operation, of which I was doing both.

After the Program Director's behavior toward me went insane, I came to distrust him so much, I decided the only way I could protect myself was to maintain a diary of my daily interactions with him. So, I began to document our meetings and discussions, what he told me and how he said it. I wanted to make damn sure when the shit hit the fan, I had an explanation for why I did whatever it was he was insisting I do on and off the air.

The Program Director eventually did himself in. There's a thing called "contest fixing" and you don't do it because:

- 1) It's wrong and
- 2) It really pisses off the F.C.C.

When you give away a prize to the 12th caller or whoever you say is going to win it, that 12th caller gets it whether the caller is a he or a she, or is 18, 25, 45 or 70 years old -except if the contest rules specify an age limit. It's something called fairness. Well, what the Program Director really wanted to hear was the sound of somebody winning on the air that was in our demographic. So, he told me to pass over callers - even if they were the true winner - if they did not sound like our demo.

I protested.

He didn't care.

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I wrote it down in my diary.

Somewhere into my nine months in St. Louis, the General Manager apparently became concerned about the Program Director or his performance. I'm not sure which. Maybe he spotted him one night naked and dancing around an altar, praying to the great Chipmunk God. Sure, I thought he was nuts but, the G.M. may have had his own reasons. Whatever they were, I'm sure it was also political because that was the nature of CBS Radio management in St. Louis.

It was obvious some heavy ass-covering was about to happen.

The General Manager began to psychologically put his arm around me and pick my brain about the Program Director until I was lulled into a sense of safety. I began to spill the beans. He was very interested in what I had to say and before it was all said and done, he had a copy of certain pages of my diary and The Program Director and I were sitting in the General Manager's office doing a he said/she said thing.

I kept thinking I was the "she" in this thing and in the end, I was going to get fucked.

I was petrified. It became increasingly apparent to me that I was in the middle of a process that would lead to Mr. Whack Job's dismissal and I was the star witness. Sure, I wanted the guy fired but I didn't want him to know I had anything to do with it. This is probably how Kato Kaelin felt when they asked him to testify against O.J. I'm sure he was thinking to himself, "Okay, I'll talk. You just make sure you get a conviction because if you don't, I'm gonna' to be looking over my shoulder for the rest of my life watching out for that son-of-a-bitch."

The Program Director was fired shortly thereafter and I was convinced he was going to gun me down. No, really. That's how disturbed I thought this guy was. I was so intimidated by this man's psychotic possibilities, for weeks I took different routes to and from work just in case he was stalking me. While driving, I was constantly looking in my rear-view mirror to see if I was being followed. I swear. I was afraid to answer my phone because I thought the next call would be him threatening my life.

I don't scare easily but the pattern of this guy's behavior gave me reason to worry. There were rumors prior to his dismissal that he had roughed up a former girlfriend who subsequently moved out and left him.

I felt he was prone to violence and as such, might direct some my way. I know it may sound silly, but I can assure you my fears were real and a direct reaction to the disturbing behavior the former Program Director exhibited over many months.

Contrary to what I thought would happen, the general working environment at KLOU-FM continued to degenerate. Even with this one cancer surgically removed, it was still not a very happy place. KLOU was not performing as well as management wanted so all conversations were laced with that unique, stressful anxiety you can feel when personnel changes are being considered. Thankfully, I only worked in St. Louis for nine months.

Then, one day Rita Bentley from Q94 in Richmond called me. Rita was still on the “Q Morning Zoo” and was feeling me out on behalf of her boss, Steve Davis. She wanted to know if I had any interest in returning to Richmond.

“Yes,” I said. “Absolutely!”

I had my fill of CBS's tribal sacrificial mores and was still smarting from the Chicago firing. I was ready to vote myself off the island.

“Fuck this major market bullshit,” I thought to myself.

At this point, the thought of finding some refuge in a medium market where the Program Director wasn't a serial killer seemed somewhat appealing. After a few weeks of negotiations, it was a done deal. I would return to Richmond and rejoin the morning show.

I handed in my notice at KLOU and hardly anyone blinked. It's as if they expected it at any moment.

After leaving St. Louis, I never heard another word about Psycho P.D. I'm sure he was killed by his own employees. Find him and you'll probably also find Jimmy Hoffa – and of course, Bob Canada, too.

The man who had brought me there, Robert Hyland, died two years later in 1992. That year CBS announced its intention to sell KLOU-FM.

So ended that lineage of the CBS dynasty.

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