The Traits Of Winning Programmers

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"Attention is the new currency. Everyone craves attention, and those that do things to create attention will win."

Those were the words of Gary Vaynerchuk last year at the NAB Radio Show. And the masterminds of attention are program directors. PDs create attention so they get the largest share of voice, and in turn help their companies get the largest piece of revenue.

As this issue of *Radio Ink* celebrates our industry's finest, let's break down the winning traits of programmers.

Passion

Passion for their craft is a vital trait for a programmer!

Throughout my career, I've been fortunate to witness this firsthand, whether it was Geoff Vargo (my first PD, at WVUD-Dayton) or Mark Chernoff (the last PD I worked for at WNEW-FM). Charlie Kendall was WNEW's PD before Mark, and he says, "A passionate love of what you do is essential. Captivate the listener, make them stay longer. Make them come back."

An obsession with excellence is critical; as former PD and media consultant Armando Rivera says, "A PD works the hours of a doctor, always on call, 24/7."

Leadership

The programmers who rise to the top in today's competitive landscape understand how to lead their teams into battle.

The late great UCLA basketball coach John Wooden said about leadership, "In the workplace you'll get better cooperation if you are sincerely interested in people's families and interests, not simply how they do their job."

Rob Cressman, PD of WDRV/Chicago, applies the same thinking in his "Quest for Common Loyalty"; he says, "We learn most from the leaders in our lives who have made the effort and taken the time to learn about us."

Leadership takes other forms as well, and keeping an eye on the details of a strategic blueprint is critical. According to Entercom SVP/Programming & Operations Dave Richards, "If you don't have the vision, and the ability to create a strategy with clear goals and focus and motivate people to reach those goals, then you're missing the key components to win."

Knowing what it takes to motivate your team is an important leadership trait, and Mike Thomas from WMVP-AM boils it down to a vital programmer action: "Listen to your shows. They all want specific feedback, and they want to know you have their back."

iHeartMedia VP/National NTS Brand Coordinator Grace Blazer says regarding leadership, "Great programmers care about their teams. They always move forward and know when to be 5-star chefs and short order cooks."

Leadership is also about knowing how to be calm in the face of any battle, whether it's internal or external.

Bill Weston, PD of WMMR & WMGK/Boston, has a great term: "emotionally compartmentalize." He suggests, when encountering a problem, "Let the pressure valve release before going to fix it."

Collaboration is an important leadership trait according to Keith Dakin, VP of programming at Connoisseur Media, who says, "A true collaborator with all departments, on all levels, is what makes a winning PD in 2020."

Focus

Focus is a vital attribute for programmers. According to Entercom SVP Jim Ryan, who serves as PD of WCBS-FM & WNEW-FM/New York, "There are many paths to success. Every station and every situation is different. In each of my past situations, hard work, focus, and common sense made the difference, and they all go together as a winning strategy."

A final coaching word from Boston Celtics legend Red Auerbach: "Just do what you do best."

Bravo, programmers!