

Pass The Mic- Women Finding Space on Air: Transcribed Interview Val Meyer

Interviewer: Uh, so please tell me your name and how you've been working in radio.

Val Meyer: Okay, Val Meyer and I've been working in radio since 2010.

Interviewer: Did you ever feel you were at a disadvantage as a woman? Please explain.

Val Meyer: In radio?

Interviewer: Yes

Val Meyer: Um, I never felt that I was at a disadvantage in radio. I got into radio because I was moved from a position with a company and they wanted me in radio because they wanted certain things changed. So it was actually an opportunity, an advantage to me that they moved me into radio. But I hadn't worked in radio before, had worked in TV and at home, Um, all of my career, mostly TV. So radio was a completely different, um.. medium than those two-- on every level team leadership content um... structure, all of it. And the products entirely different, cause it's live.

Interviewer: And no-- no feeling of having been at a disadvantage as a woman in that environment?

Val Meyer: Getting into it... Um, no, you know, not really as a disadvantage. It's just it's just been a different process, working in radio because it's very male dominated. The women in senior positions are rare and it's improving, but it's quite different. So if you don't have a radio background and your woman going into radio seven years ago, um, you know you have to prove yourself in a different way.

Interviewer: Do you do-- Do you want to expand on that? Like what did you have to do differently?

Val Meyer: Radio is and has been a 'boys club' more so than any other medium I've worked in, and it's, it's hard to bust through. I've never had a hard time working with men, I've always worked with men. Um, and generally my bosses have been men, Um, almost in fact, I think all my bosses have been men. Um, which is great, but I don't really look at the male female kind of thing. I look at it sort of like world just doing a job here, and you're good and you're smart and you're you know, intelligent-- You're trying hard, You're intelligent, you know, you're a team

player, your leader. Those are the things that I think really make a strong employee. So I've never really been the male versus female kind of person. And, you know, I'm a pretty strong woman, and I could be one of the boys, or I could be one of the girls, but being one of the boys and radio was a little bit different because they're different kind of boys. I grew up in the country, so I'm used to those kind of boys. You know, where I would just, um 'That's not appropriate, or you should go, you know, get an education on women.' or that kind of thing, I just put up with it. I felt like I was regressing a little bit in some areas, with some people going into radio because it they are very tight and they've all done it for a very long time. Radio people are career radio people I have found especially management. I'm not talking about the talent so much, talent--talents more fun, actually in radio if you ask me. But, um, because it's so live and variable. But, uh, you have to really prove yourself in a different way. It doesn't matter about your background so much. It matters about what do you know about radio?

Interviewer: Fair enough, so this is probably a very similar question, but I'll ask it anyway. Did you ever experience sexism in your job?

Val Meyer: Uh I have seen it, but I just don't accept it. So--and I've had people who have worked for me who have experienced it. And-- so it's a matter of working with them and supporting them and kind of not protecting them, It's making them know how to deal with it. For example, getting really emotional with radio men doesn't fly. It doesn't fly getting emotional with anybody at work. But it it really sticks with you, with the men. It just seems to be your painted with that brush, and you can't break out of it. So it would take some work, to work with people to break them out of it. Um, so I have absolutely seen it, but I haven't experienced it, and my experience with it is working with people to get out of it. If that makes sense.

Interviewer: Yeah yeah.

Val Meyer: And it's not that I'm superwoman or anything, it's just that I just don't put up with it. And it's like you can be a strong woman or a strong man or weak or not in the groove or out of date, and it doesn't matter if you're a man or a woman, you can you can be that way.

Interviewer: Do you want to give an example of the type of sexism that you have seen ?

Val Meyer: Bullying I would say it's probably the best example of that. Um, breaking down confidence, Um, would--and and making people afraid to speak up. And I've seen, I've seen actually a number of examples of that, Um not opening the door and making people free to make mistakes and lead and learn, and it's..it's kind of putting a 'baby in the corner' and some examples and in other examples, it's, um, just breaking down confidence.

Interviewer: Yeah, well, I guess it's good to know all workplaces are the same over are the same, I guess! (laughs)

Val Meyer: (laughs) Well I think that's true. I don't think it's, uh that different.

Interviewer: Yeah absolutely, do you feel women have a harder time getting on air jobs in radio?

Val Meyer: Um, I don't think it's a matter of, a, hard time. It's finding women, we want more women. We've We've got a lot of women on her FM's. Um, we even have like our noon hour host on TSN is a woman. Um, and you know, obviously TSN is not gonna be the the growing, uh, room for a lot of female broadcasters. Unless they've got a real understanding of sports or a particular sport, they have to know. But talk radio, we have a lot of, uh, women on news talk, and we're always looking for women on news talk. But... there's--- and end men, and it can apply to either, but women can have a tone of voice that can like great-- women or men, you know? So voice and delivery is one, content is another. Like we've got Barb Digiulio doing evenings and everyone loves her! I lover, the PD loves her that listeners lover, the team loves her, everybody loves her, she's fantastic. But she's, she doesn't sort of hide in female, male kind of controversy or feminists she's-- everybody loves her. All the guys love her, she knows all about sports, she's, but she's a you know, a pretty woman and and likes to have her hair done, like she's a normal person. So she, she doesn't really-- and she's had to fight off a hard fight coming from a sports station for so many years. Um, but it's tone And it's, um, delivery and it's content. So it has to be a broad appeal... And if, I think if men or women get to 'activists' or too 'shrill' or too 'whiny' and it can be any men or women, um, they're not gonna get a job. So... our goal has always been, uh, in the seven years I've been with News Talk is to get more women on air. And we are getting more women on the air on round around tables. We've got a lot of brilliant women on the air, but... I, I don't like to say it's because you're a woman, on anything. So I'm maybe not the perfect interviewer, interviewee here. (laughs) Because I uh, I really that's the last road. I usually go down.

Interviewer: Yeah right, and to be clear, we're not looking for any particular kind of answer.

Val Meyer: Yeah, it's just the experience right?

Interviewer: Women come in here and say ' No I've never experienced sexism, and that's great! That's what-- we just want to get the data

Val Meyer: It exists, it exists for sure. But I haven't had to deal with it so personally other than with my team.

Interviewer: Right. Okay so do you feel women have a harder time getting management jobs?

Val Meyer: I would say, looking at our company, yeah. Um, now that we've been bought by Bell. Um, TV has always had a lot of women in management, and so has out of home. Um, at a out of home was sort of later... sill is often ah, sort of male oriented. But radio specifically was male dominated, and people aren't moving. You know, I think the whole world's gonna look different now because everybody is getting, you know, to my age and older, and people are leaving the business. First of all, we're all downsizing. So, you know, I used to have three stations, I've got seven. So that comes with consolidation and ever been a lot of cutbacks. Media struggling, across every platform. Um, so... a lot of people are either choosing to retire or being forced into retirement. And that is really predominantly, predominantly men because they had the jobs. So a lot of these new jobs coming in are being taken by women that goes with PDs that goes with GMs. You know, our new um President of TV and Radio was a woman, Um, from Bell previously CTV. So it's changing... because the old guard is leaving. And that's where the opportunities are coming. Because women have been just like working away, Um, getting it done. And, uh, it's really changing now, big opportunities for women I think. Now, Yeah.

Interviewer: Great, um, do you feel women in general are treated differently than men in the radio industry?

Val Meyer: Um, less so. I think ,I think that ship is sailing, It's leaving the port. Um, and it's because a lot of the people from that 'boys club', as they said are, are leaving the business, and women are getting more opportunity, I think than in the past. I mean, I've been super fortunate in my career, Um, and to move into a new medium, you know? seven years ago, it's--it's I've been completely fortunate in that. Um, there's more opportunities for women all the time. So we've got-- I've got, you know in Toronto four radio stations two of the PDs are women and two of the PDs are men. So, um, it's pretty balanced. It's getting more balanced.

Interviewer: It's good to hear that.

Val Meyer: Uh huh.

Interviewer: Have you or other women you know of, uh, ever been paid less than a man doing the same or similar work?

Val Meyer: I would say... yes. Um... it's hard to say if it was sort of a sexual bias on that. Uh, I think it's been more of an experience issue than, ah, sexual bias in my experience. I think I guarantee that happened in the past. But, you know, we've got we've had pay equity in place for, you know, years decades, uh, with the companies I've been with. Well, I've been for the past 13 with Astral/ Bell, and that program was put into place years ago. So that doesn't really fly anymore. It's more experience based and and budget based, right? If we're cutting, if we're cutting the cost of something, it doesn't matter if you're a man or a woman that's gonna get the job. This is what's in our budget now. So It's, it's not really the case anymore.

Interviewer: Do you feel the radio industry is a fair and equitable place for women today?

Val Meyer: More than ever, absolutely. There's great careers-- radio is really is a tough business. You know? you don't make a lot of money in radio. Um, people come to radio because they love the medium. They move all over the country, they you know, they'll do whatever they have to do to be in radio because they love the medium. Um, and that's if you're a guy or a girl and if you want a great opportunity in Toronto and you don't have the experience, you're not gonna get it in Toronto. You know, you're going to go to a smaller market and sort of earn your stripes there and then be put back-- if you're gonna be on air or, um or working with the show. Um, but I think there's more opportunity then, there's ever been in radio for diversity, different voices, different content. Uh, you know, we've got a whole digital line attached to our radio now. Um, it's a, It's a great business to be in. I think it's a young person's business more than it's ever been, because the world's changing so much. Um... so I think it's a great opportunity, It's just, you know, you're not gonna make a fortune in radio, that's the bottom line, so it depends what you want to do. But if you're the, other thing about radio is it allows you to do other things. I mean, you can have a show and then you can do something else on your own. So I think there's more opportunity than there's ever been in radio. I think it's a great business, It's fun, too! It's It's a fun-- you never know what's gonna come out of those speakers and you go 'Like hmm I can't edit or rewind that one.'

Interviewer: (laughs) No re-do button yeah

Val Meyer: Yeah!

Interviewer: I love radio for that very reason. Do you have any advice for radio owners and managers with respect to women working in radio?

Val Meyer: Um... say it's It's not specifically about women, I think it's, the old days are gone. The business has changed, It's there's so many options to get information and music. You know you have to-- whether a man or a woman, go into it with a fresh face, fresh ears, fresh ideas. If you think it's gonna be the same as the good old days.. it's not. Like my job half the time is looking for efficiencies, you know, gonna love that word, but, um-- or synergies. But in a lot of cases, it makes a lot of sense, you know? But don't for, don't just 'follow the dollar' and lose the creativity in the process. Which is a very fine line and a scary one because, you know, tough times call for drastic measures sometimes. And you have to be so careful not to hurt the product, and that's whether you're a man or a woman. You have to be fresh and think differently... and that's, that's the management story. If you don't you think it's, 'We've always done it this way.' Well its, oh, my God, If you utter those words...

Interviewer: (Laughs)

Val Meyer: There's the door!

Interviewer: Yeah, exactly. Good advice. I have two more good questions. Um, do you have any advice for women seeking to build a career in the radio industry?

Val Meyer: Yeah, I would think, Um.. know all of it. Um, if you're going into-- you know, if you're going into the music business, if you're gonna go into the radio business on-air, in the music business, it's, it's very limited. Your, your, um your goal is pretty challenging because because it's so limited. We can voice track everything, you know? So live radio is morning shows, and you know, it depends on the market things, but with the world we live in, you can voice track everything and you can voice track across the country. So FMs are very different, AMs are pretty exciting. Um, I think the opportunities personally in my mind, the real opportunities air on AMs especially talk radio is really growing. It's really growing in the U. S. Um, and syndicated programming doesn't work that well, in local markets because radios a local medium. Music you can get in various places, morning shows or local. But I would know every part of the business. I would-- you have to be on your game, you have to have a great digital background, really understand social media. And I'm the worst one to be talking about that, if my team heard that they would laugh because I'm terrible. I don't want to. (laughs) I just don't want to! Tell me about it, tell me how it works, what people are saying and then go! But, um, you know, really, you need to understand-- be on the cutting edge of everything! Um, so you've got to really know what you're talking about in every, every area, how to talk interesting content, how to write it, had a present, it digitally on air, on screen, whatever. I think you better really know your stuff, and don't think you know it all and I don't think you deserve it all. Even if you're the head of your class, It doesn't matter. The world is a different place to work in than taking what you had to school and I have which had a school to work, and that applies to men

and women. You know, you still have to learn on the job. And, uh, then, as I had a boss tell me, 'The sky's the limit.' you know?

Interviewer: Are there any other stories or examples that you would like to share on this topic in general?

Val Meyer: I think, generally my opinion on this is... don't think about yourself as a woman and don't think about yourself as a man. Think about yourself as a creator or, um, an employee or a sponge. You know? um, being a man, being woman being gay, being whatever will add a perspective to your content and your delivery and your experience and your stories, it will apply to all that. But if you get too in the you know, inside baseball there... you're gonna lose the audience. So it really-- a man could talk about his wife and a wife can talk about her husband or partner or this or that and and tell interesting stories. If you get too 'preachy' you're you're narrowing yourself into a smaller box. So I would just... really keep your mind open, be flexible, be a team player, fight back when you need to fight back. But don't don't try and win the war on every issue. You know? sometimes there's little battles that really win the war at the end, and, uh, I would just say, chill a bit on that. And, you know, I have women that just, like, want to crack me in the head, I get that sometimes. But I just think you're gonna have a better career if you, uh if you're just open minded and our good worker on an intelligent worker. That's what we're all looking for. You know?

Interviewer: Okay, thank you Val! Thank you so much, it is so generous of you to spend time with us to do it

Val Meyer: Oh! no problem. Happy to!

Interviewer: Thanks

Val Meyer: Happy to

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END Transcription.