

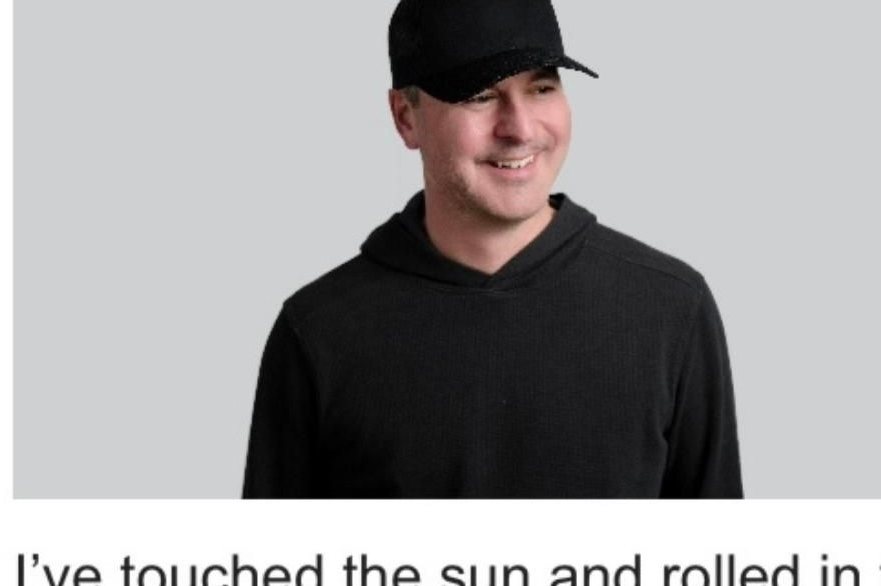


Rich Shertenlieb is one of the most creative and talented personalities I've ever coached. We worked together on the 99X Atlanta Morning Show and with Kidd Kraddick.

Rich won the Marconi Award for Major Market Personality of the Year, The Toucher & Rich Show set the record for the highest ratings share in Boston radio history, and he has been on the #1-rated morning show in three different formats (Rock, Top 40, and Sports).

His guest blog How to Launch a New Show: from a Guy Who's Won & Lost at the Highest Levels is full of wisdom and insight for both talent and management.

~ Randy Lane



HOW TO LAUNCH A NEW SHOW (From a Guy Who's Won & Lost at the Highest Levels)

By Rich Shertenlieb

I've touched the sun and rolled in the mud at the highest levels. I've been with Bill Belichick *with* and *without* his 24-year-old girlfriend.

I've won a Marconi Award and set the record for the highest ratings ever in a major market.

And I've also had a show canceled after just five months. Radio, huh?

That combination of both success and failure has given me a rare perspective on what it truly takes to launch a new show. I've seen firsthand what makes a show connect—and what makes it fall flat.

Over the years, I've also talked with countless others who've shared the same highs and lows. Through it all, I've been lucky to learn from some of the best in the business—managers and programmers like Mike Thomas, Mark Hannon, Leslie Fram, Patrick Davis, and Chris Oliviero.

If every broadcaster could learn from mentors like these, they'd be lucky, too.

Here are a few of the lessons I've learned about launching a new show along the way.

IGNORE THE NOISE

Face it—for the first six months of its existence, your new program is the worst show in the history of the world. Everybody hates you. The newspapers, the bloggers, social media... "Why aren't you the old show?" "You're not from here!" "I'm never listening to (insert station name) again!"

An inexperienced program director might be tempted to react to the noise and frantically try to change course. I've seen this happen numerous times before, and it rarely works out in the end for that show.

The best program directors help their talent ignore the noise and focus on getting better every day. I'll never forget the early days of The Sports Hub, when every article was about when I was going to get fired and when the station was finally going to hire a "real" sports guy for the slot.

My PD, Mike Thomas, and GM Mark Hannon sat me down and said, "Never mind the noise. You're our guy, and we're invested in this working for the long run." From that moment on, I truly felt free to focus 100% on the show's quality—not the outside nonsense.

WORK OUT AS MANY OF THE FORMATICS AS YOU CAN BEFORE LAUNCH

- First, consider the spot load. When a new show launches, competing shows will sometimes lessen their commercial load for the first month or two to gain an advantage. It's a smart move.

So if you're playing 24 minutes of commercials an hour while the competitor is only playing 13, you're putting your new show in a no-win situation. Help your team out by staying competitive in the early days of the launch and limiting commercial loads if you can.

- Second, make sure the entire show is available as a podcast, and the podcast is properly encoded for PPM.
- Third, ensure that the stream is ready, PPM-encoded, and glitch-free, since we know many people are listening away from their traditional AM/FM radios.

BE THE SALES DEPARTMENT'S BEST FRIEND

Remember: the launch of a new show is tough for the sales team too because it means uncertainty for advertisers and, in most cases, low ratings at the start.

Let the sales department know right away that you're willing to do almost anything to help build relationships with their current and future accounts.

Join them on client visits. Provide a list of companies you've worked with in the past or would like to partner with. Make short videos talking about how much you love a product for the salespeople to send to their clients. Anything you can do to make the sales staff's jobs easier will build goodwill—and that goodwill will matter as your ratings begin to rise.



PATIENCE

A wise man named Randy Lane once said, "Developing new shows takes patience. You can be looking at one to two years for a show to achieve ratings and revenue success."

A new show on Day One sounds almost nothing like that same show six months later. Chemistry must be built. The host must learn more about their co-workers to bring out their best. Speech patterns must be established so no one talks over anyone else. Emotional hot buttons must be discovered, and the rhythm of jokes, setups, and strengths and weaknesses all need to fall into place.

When I first launched The Sports Hub, for six months, it seemed like everyone hated us. Even worse, it felt like no one was listening. But then something happened. The "you'll never last" calls stopped, and people began to accept that we were, in fact, the morning show that was here to stay. Listeners became familiar with us, learned our personalities and quirks, then came the calls and emails, then the ratings.

It was like watching popcorn pop. You wait forever, thinking nothing's happening, and then suddenly—boom—it all happens at once. Zero to sixty.

On my most recent show, the first few months felt the same. It seemed like we were talking to ourselves. And then, four months later, the calls came, the emails came, the social media came, and people started stopping us on the street. And in our fifth month, we skyrocketed from 14th to 5th place. We jumped nine spots in one month. Zero to sixty. Popcorn. Popped.

STAY HUMBLE BUT STAY FOCUSED

People love underdogs. I remember when *The Boston Herald* reached out to me for a quote about the competing show across the street when we first launched. I told them I was just going to focus on my show, and may the best show win. After all, who the hell was I? I hadn't won anything yet.

Across the street, our competitors mockingly told the newspaper that they were "hiding under their desks," they were so scared. We surpassed them in the ratings a year later—and unfortunately for them, that quote came back to haunt them.

Stay humble, but stay focused.

The bottom line is every show starts rough. But with talent that's willing to grow and leaders who stand by them, it's amazing how quickly "the worst show ever" becomes "I knew them first."