

# INSIDE RADIO.

## Life After Air America

by Norman Goldman

January 29, 2010



Connection. Information. Inclusion. These are three key elements to any successful talk radio show. I learned this early on in my broadcasting career, and it applied as well in my legal career, with clients, judges and juries. Indeed, I believe this applies to any medium requiring acceptance from consumers. No matter the format, topic, or political bent, being able to connect with the listener (one at a time) and provide intriguing, topical, entertaining and engaging talk is crucial to success.

There is much talk about Air America and the state of talk radio after its demise. History has shown a landscape littered with failed shows as well as networks. Nothing has changed – radio is about entertainment – but that word “entertainment” can be broadly defined. Cooking shows, car repair shows, sports talk shows, all must meet these requirements of informing, connecting, entertaining. What makes radio so much fun for the listener, and so frustrating for programmers, is that the uniqueness of the host determines pretty much everything for any show. That is why there is one Rush Limbaugh and one hundred wannabes.

Yet in progressive talk, as in conservative talk, some hosts connect with the audience and others do not. Air America could have succeeded, even with its blatantly ideological bent and messianic message, if it had found, nurtured and grown great talents. The successful programmer is part talent scout – knowing a hit when you hear it. Finding a good potential host, being patient (not easy these days) and coaching a coachable talent maximize the chances of a hit show. Air America never knew this and we see the consequences.

Air America never understood the fundamentals of radio. People tune in to hear a particular host, not to hear “conservative talk” or “liberal talk.” Compelling radio hosts will always find an audience, and smart programmers know that fundamentals matter – connect, inform, include, entertain, be a friend and a companion, over a sustained period of time, and watch the ratings grow. It seems to me this is as true for cooking shows and car repair shows as it is for relationship shows and political talk.

*Former attorney Norman Goldman is a talk show host based in Los Angeles and is represented by Compass Media Networks. Opinions expressed are his own. He can be reached via [www.normangoldman.com](http://www.normangoldman.com).*