

## USA Survey Results from September 2007

### Over 65% of the Public Radio GM's Leaving in the Next Four to Six Years

The next time you attend a regional or national meeting, take a look around you. Six out of every ten managers in the room may be leaving public radio in the next six years due to retirement or career changes. These are the results from the University Station Alliance (USA) survey sent the first week in September to the USA listserv.

There were forty-two respondents to the three questions sent to 90 members of the USA listserv. For question number one, "I plan to retire and/or change jobs in the next \_\_\_\_ years," 24.4% (10 managers) said they would be retiring or changing jobs in the next one to three years. 41.5% (17 managers) said their timeline would be four to six years, 12.2% (5 managers) said seven to ten years, and 22% (9 managers) said eleven-plus years. One factor this survey does not address, nor can it, is how this will affect the other managers planning to stay in the system. With all the job openings, some additional managers that are not at this point planning to change, will change jobs.

Just as interesting is question number two: "I am training my successor". 26.8% (11 managers) said "Yes, I am training my successor." 73.2% (30 managers) said "No", and 14.6% (6 managers) said "The university resources department will not allow this."

"Hallway discussions about this topic have been occurring for the past several years," says USA Executive Director Craig Beeby the author of the survey results. "This is the first attempt to address what is really on the horizon and to determine what our fellow manager's plans for the future may be." What do we do with this startling information? Here is how the USA affiliates responded to the question, "I think the USA should handle the subject of station administrative turnover by..." 53.7% (22 managers) said creating a training program for station managers was a good idea. 75.6% (31 station managers) said creating a mentor program for new university station managers was a good idea.

The axiom a university-licensed public radio station is one heart-beat away from a good relationship with the university has in the past made reference to the station's relationship with the top administrator at a university and the value that administrator places upon the station. Beeby proposes a change to that axiom. "Better stated, the university/public radio station is two heart-beats away from a good relationship with top university administration because many universities are reliant upon long-time GM's and director's to keep the station on-course." For many universities, the upper administration has not "had to worry about the station" because the top station management has developed a "trusted integrity". However, the changing of top guard at the station level may trigger questions about the station that have not been asked by university administrators for a considerable period of time.

The USA is addressing these issues over the next year with a couple of possible strategies. "The first, the idea of "accreditation", was first brought to our attention two-decades ago by the system visionary, Don Mullally, Ph.D., retired station manager at WILL-AM-FM-TV" says Beeby. "Since some may respond negatively to the concept of "accreditation," we are using the concept of "Peer Review" since this is a process familiar to university administrators."

Beeby says, "Peer reviews that involve the staff and all the important players at each respective university would be conducted at the stations that request them. Peer reviews would be VOLUNTARY requiring the work to be conducted by the station staff and the respective stakeholders. In fact, the more work accomplished by the local stake-holders, the more successful the peer review would be. Then a USA peer review team of station managers could work with the

station and their university to provide feedback, consultation, and a written report. The USA is working on a “pilot peer review” with a USA-affiliated station, and we will develop this process as a foundation to present to the USA affiliates later in the year.”

Beeby says “Generic training programs for managers at neutral locations have limitations. Peer review is a process that requires all vested-interest parties to work locally to learn at the local level and to buy-in to the peer review process and results.”

The second USA strategy is to create a “mentor contact resource”. Station managers with the interest in mentoring can contact the USA E.D. and the E.D. can pair them with the station manager needing a mentor.

The University Station Alliance is a grassroots organization founded in 2001 to assist university licensed stations with the challenges and opportunities associated with their licensees. University licensed stations make-up 63-percent of the public radio system.

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