

A Radio-TV network embraces a cause larger than itself

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President and CEO

When I took over as President and CEO, Radio Philippines Network-TV Channel 9 was a gaunt shadow of its former self. In the seventies, it proudly proclaimed itself “The Leader,” because it was. Not anymore. More than two decades of government sequestration and some bad management decisions in the past, have contributed to its image as a troubled network. It had a dispirited work force that has filed labor cases against almost all managers who came through its revolving door of leadership. Morale was low and even lower was its cash position. Although many in its ranks were some of the best and most experienced in the business, most were just waiting to get out, if only management could pay them their retirement benefits.

I like to describe myself as a happy warrior. I have taken on not a few challenges in my life, and did not consider the task of managing a “troubled” network particularly daunting. I have spent most of my professional life as a broadcaster. I knew, I owe the industry some, and intended to pay it back.

For starters, I had an opportunity to articulate my policies and give the managers and the employees a glimpse of things to come on my first working day. It was also the day for the Christmas party for the year 2007. When I spoke, I knew it was to an audience that has heard promises before. Through the years, they had come to look at privatization as the panacea for all that ails the network.

I had to explain that while the ultimate goal is privatization, it does not happen in a vacuum. Privatization is driven by market forces. Everyone has to do their part to make it happen. There is a need to increase the value of the network and make it enticing to investors.

There have been some positive developments. Solar Entertainment Corporation, a long time partner of RPN-9, had just concluded an agreement to buy most of its airtime and go on the air on a 24/7 basis. The deal, contained in an amendment to a 2006 Memorandum of Agreement, was deftly negotiated by Sec. Dodi Limcaoco. It infused some funds, to allow it to survive, but just barely.

I had to mobilize an uninspired workforce. I committed management to adhere to a policy of transparency. The other mantra was: shared pain, shared gain. There was no sacrifice to be demanded of the rank and file that was not expected of the management as well. It was vital to instill a “can-do” attitude. I warned anyone who cared to listen that I did not want to hear two common excuses: “It cannot be done” and “There is no budget for it.”

I had to find strength in the proud history of the network. One of its intangible, yet valuable assets is its public image. But how do you enhance that image and dovetail it with Solar Entertainment’s programming of crime and suspense programs?

In years that I have worked with the disabled, one of the important lessons I have learned from them is embodied in their motto: "It is not what you lose, but what is left, that matters." Our partnership with Solar Entertainment had left us with only three and a half hours of airtime for news and public affairs. However, we still had two minutes every hour as breakspots, and some non-prime participating spots. It was more than enough to give its corporate image a make-over. To do this we had to embrace a cause larger than ourselves.

While in the public sector, both as a lawmaker or a cabinet member, there have been two causes that I have embraced as my own. The first is protection of the environment, and the other; disaster risk reduction. In recent years, my work with international agencies was also in these fields. I embarked in an effort to "green" RPN-9. The twin concerns of addressing the survival issues of climate change and reducing risks of disasters is a daunting task. But there is more awareness about these issues now. The challenge is to create a culture of strategic thinking. Television can help create such a culture. Solar Entertainment's programming is well known by its initials: C/S which stands for Crime and Suspense. Now on RPN-9 C/S also means Conservation and Survival.

To be an advocate, we have to practice what we preach. In partnership with our sister station, IBC-13, we have embarked on a program to clean and green our home, Broadcast City. On the air, we continue to be an advocate for conservation. We want to help change common perceptions about disasters. That while response and prevention may be important, mitigating disaster risks is what really matters. On TV it may seem out of synch. We may be the only network talking about floods and typhoons during sunny days, but we have embraced a larger cause, a strategic vision. It helps us marginalize what has been troubling us. It gives us a reason to stay on the air and find meaning in our existence.