

## **“The Games People Play”**

“Oh the games people play, every night and every day, never meaning what they say, never saying what they mean.”

These lyrics from Joe South’s *“The Games People Play.”* 1970 Grammy Award winner for *“Song of the Year”* and for *“Best Contemporary Song,”* are becoming more evident to each of us daily.

The several stories contained in this chapter, you may find hard to believe. You may even have similar or worse instances that you lived through in your life. Nevertheless, these events are 100% accurate, occurring exactly as they are described.

I don’t consider myself a victim, except for learning how to persevere through the foibles of mankind, that we all face in some to one degree or another. As John Fogerty sang *“I’m no fortunate son.”* I paid my dues in whatever opportunities came my way, with no automatic doors opened. The path in local TV I found, led me to work in more cities and positions than most experience. Again, it’s not a competition, except with yourself and striving to get better and not bitter.

We all face challenges and opposition, and often, the workplace opposition isn’t fair. Our obstacles may seem unusually inequitable, but routine as viewed by others, especially those who instigated them. Cheaters lie and liars cheat. Some individuals are so driven by their desire for promotions, more money and status. They want it so desperately, that they will do or say anything they can to try and get an advantage, rather than patience and hard work. More often than not, those who engage to conspire in subversive self-serving activity, are not successful, as their plots are exposed, and they are shown for what they are. As Denzel Washington is quoted, “Working hard is what successful people do.”

My career in broadcasting, was a nearly 50 year episode of *“Survivor.”* Much like our political landscape, the most obvious daily example of professional people attacking each other, even within their own party, let alone what they will do, or insinuate against those across the aisle. But this human flaw is everywhere. Wherever people are, there is some level of selfish critical undermining. People are people, and you are not going to find perfection in this fallen world. Best to recognize it for what it is and choose to try and live above it.

I’m going to share real life situations that I experienced, and all the details are accurate. As a disclaimer, “Dragnet” stated on the open for the TV show and movie, “The stories you’re about to hear, are true. The names have been changed to protect the innocent.” I too will not provide the names and locations. I chose not to fight back when these incidents happened, and I don’t want to disparage anyone now, over these past occurrences. Some of these individuals are no longer living. Many are no longer in the business. I have the luxury of being old enough, at the end of my career, and seeing value in sharing these episodes, which reflect the reality of what to expect in business and life, and hopefully my grandsons can benefit.

First, to set the stage of how I approached business and life, I do want to give a special overdue acknowledgement. Throughout High School and College I dated Cindy Ray. For those who know her, this story won’t surprise you. In high school, she once relayed that she was very disappointed that someone had lied to her at school. Most of us learned from our parents about right and wrong and honesty always being the right policy. I remember responding to Cindy, with some misguided pride, “I hardly ever lie.” The always pleasant Cindy, actually glared at me and said, “What do you mean, you hardly ever lie, you should never lie, ever.” She

challenged me, and I accepted that challenge then, and I would like to say that I have never lied from that day forward, but I'm sure that wouldn't be the truth. I can say honestly, I can't recall any incidents of dishonesty, and from that day, I've tried to live with that same mindset, regardless of my perceived best positioning, in all my personal and business dealings. So thank you, Cindy. As Billy Joel sang, *"If you look for truthfulness, you might as well be blind. Honesty is such a lonely word."*

The workplace could be absurd, especially before there were Human Relation Departments in businesses, and especially in local television stations, I'll share what may be the best example of the old boys network environment that you may ever hear.

There was a time when major advertising categories, that are common today, would never have advertised on TV. It was seen as unprofessional for certain businesses to do anything except advertise in the Yellow Pages. Remember, "Let your fingers do the walking?" The business categories included Doctors, Lawyers, Prescriptions, Non-Profits organizations and more. Now, those have become common and leading TV advertising categories.

I sold The United Way Campaign a large advertising schedule to help encourage participation in their annual fall drive for employee paycheck donation enrollments. The Station Manager was convinced that this could not be possible, and that I was doing something inappropriate with a charity for my benefit, to get such a large ad schedule from them on the station. So one morning, he summoned me to his office where he was sitting at his desk, and he asked me to come in and sit down. He had a button installed under his desk to automatically shut his door behind me. Once I was seated in front of him, he got up and walked around his desk, and then came and stood directly over me. "I want you to tell me everything about the United Way Ad buy," he said.

So I told him how it came about, as it was fairly routine. He wasn't convinced. And he then walked over towards the window, where he had an autographed baseball bat, on the window sill. He grabbed the bat and walked back over and starting hitting the bat repeatedly loudly into his hand. He stepped closer directly over me, while still hitting the bat into his hand, and said, "Tell me the truth." I remember laughing out loud. He was clearly trying to intimidate me into telling him some imagined truth he wanted to hear. Although that supposed truth that he wanted to hear, was only in his convinced imagination. I thought, and watched his hands intently, thinking, if he does draw the bat back I'm going to take him down. I am convinced he had been persuaded to believe a false narrative, by a more direct manager of mine, who had persuaded him to act out this seen from the "Sopranos." Talk about drama.

He then said, "I'm on the Board of United Way, and there is no way they would be spending money on this station, without me knowing about it. I said, "Everything is just as I have said." And I remember thinking to myself, and I may have said it aloud, "You must have missed a few meetings." He finally concluded his waterboarding session by saying, "You're up to something no good, and I don't know what it is, but I'm going to find out." "Now get out of here."

Well, there was nothing for him to find out, other than he was wrong, and everything was just as I had said. I'm sure he made a few calls and realized his mistake, before that day was over. Yet, even though we worked together for years after that, he never did apologize. I liked the guy regardless, and he is no longer living, but some people cannot admit when they are wrong. I imagine he was embarrassed, and he just couldn't say "I'm sorry." Although, after 5 years at the station, I left for a management position elsewhere, and after I was gone a few months, he did have me contacted to see if I would come back. I didn't.

When you manage a TV station, through the years, you probably have on average, about 100 employees at a time. I always liked what one of my mentors, Randy Oswald, told me; "Manage for the masses, not the asses." Another quote of Randy's I liked was, "Many days they pay you way more than you deserve in these positions, but then other days, they can't pay you enough for what you have to go through."

In my life I had 3 of my preachers, at solid Biblical churches, leave their wives and children for another woman. I've seen a Non-profit Business Manger embezzle hundreds of thousands, from the publicly donated dollars, intended to provide shelter for the homeless in Kansas. I've seen a Christian organizations who stands on Bible accuracy, at the same time, knowingly and brazenly commit tax fraud for years. A former station manager I worked for was sentenced to prison for embezzlement. Affairs, they were present, and often people were open about it. The flawed human condition is everywhere there are humans. And, there are always equally blemished humans, anxious to point out the faults of others, with the intent to say subtly, "I'm better than you." How common it is to witness judgmental criticizing of others. Remember, those who try and bring you down are beneath you.

I was surprised when the Monica Lewinsky and Bill Clinton incidents became public, there was little fallout, as that would be grounds for a Local TV executive to lose their job immediately, but not so for the President of the United States. I liked the standards I was expected to live up to, as they were consistent with my own beliefs. Does it make sense for an average business leader be held to a higher standard than the leader of the Free World? Look at our leaders today. We deserve better.

Most people have seen Anchorman with Will Ferrell, and remember his most famous line, "I'm not quite sure how to put this, but...I'm kind of a big deal." Most Local News Talent are pretty well grounded and perform their Reporter and News Anchoring jobs with pride and skill. But there are some that like to test their star status and end up fitting this stereotype portrayed by Ferrell in the movie.

The normal assigned schedule for an Evening Anchor is to arrive to the newsroom by 2pm, take over from the morning crew, and work on their stories to help the team prepare for the evening newscasts. Some become so enamored with the attention they receive from viewers and their family, that they believe they have achieved delusional, "Rock Star" status.

One such Anchor decided they didn't need to arrive until 30 minutes before they went on-air at 5pm. They would come in and put on their studio make-up, and head to the news desk to start the newscast and read whatever came up on the teleprompter. They were a "Star." They could set their own hours, and participate in the duties they chose. Can you imagine if Patrick Mahomes approached his job this way. We tried to address this several times and they refused to adhere to the assigned work schedule and team essential duties. They were above being in at 2pm for the afternoon meeting and helping to plan for the evening newscasts. The effect this attitude has on all the team members, who do show up on time and do the work of putting together the daily stories, is critical. No one, in any endeavor, whether we are talking sports, business or TV Anchors, is above the other members of the team. Well, except for Will Ferrell in Anchorman and Ted Knight as Ted Baxter, another favorite of mine, for those of you who remember the Mary Tyler Moore Show. "Lou!" "Mare!" There is typically a Ron Burgundy or Ted Baxter in every TV newsroom.

So I had this particular Anchor removed from the 5pm news and replaced them with someone else who was more than happy to get a chance to do this early newscast, and show up on time and be a team member. The change enraged the Anchor, who then hired an attorney to try and intimidate her way back to her preferred routine.

Subsequently, the News Director came to my office and said he had received a call from her attorney and they wanted both of us to come and meet. I was skeptical, but the News Director was insistent and said we're just going to hear them out. I was young, and I confess, my greatest weakness, then and now, is I am trusting and at times naive to how devious people can be. I would find out.

When we arrived at the law offices, we were shown into a conference room and the attorney and a Court Reporter came in, and they were all set to document every word in what was a blindside sneak deposition. I got up and said, I'm out. The News Director said, "No stay it's ok, they just want to talk." It was then I knew that he was in on this entrapment setup. And I walked out, and the News Director followed reluctantly. He needed the ride back to the office.

I shouldn't have been surprised that shortly thereafter, in my office one morning, the Sales Manager came in to tell me that the News Director had gone to each Department Head to ask them for their support for him to have me removed, so that he could take my position. This attempted coup failed. And this News Director never, in their career, achieved the goal they had of managing a station. A goal he was willing to do whatever he thought that would help him achieve success, aided by this Anchor. This incident confirmed for me, if you have to play games such as these to reach your career goals, you are most likely going to be disappointed, and you should be.

It's not always the people that work for you that decide they want to work against you for their benefit, sometimes it can be the company leadership that decides they want to force you out by whatever methods they choose. "All power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely," is a quote from the 1800s Lord John Acton.

Some people may decide they don't like you. Some people even don't like me. I know, can you believe it? When you manage a station, some senior leaders will decide they no longer want a particular individual in that position. It may be because they acquired the station and they want to put their own person in charge. It may be they just want a change, maybe the economy is down, or you're too old, or they don't like your tie. They don't necessarily need a valid reason, and they may go to unbelievable extent to put pressure on you without a termination, as firing can lead to potential legal concerns for them. But the ends justify their means, or so they rationalize.

One of the most adversarial relationships known in sports was between the Yankees George Steinbrenner and Coach Billy Martin. Steinbrenner hired and fired Billy Martin 5 times. That's right, 5 times. With each rehiring process the negotiation leverage surely would swing to Martin.

In my career, subversions were taken on by individuals more than once to try to force me out. I can be stubborn, especially if I feel called to my position, want to remain employed, and know I'm performing well. Why did I stay put when these situations occurred over my lifetime in the business? The answer, these positions are not easy to get, worth keeping, easily lost and difficult to replace. I leaned on my faith, and worked for him and the masses, not the asses.

In over a 5 year period, I experienced a corporate leader, visiting my station, say to me in front of my team, "Other than replacing you, what do you think the company should do." Thanks for your support. I had my office broken into at night, and my computer hard drive copied, in an effort to look for any evidence that could be used against me. There was none. However, the IT person who copied my hard drive, forgot to take with them, the empty box of the external hard drive they used, leaving me the evidence of their intrusion. The Keystone Cop of executive espionage.

I had former employees and managers contacted to see if there was anything that could be used to get me. Two corporate leaders sat in front of me with one trying to convince the other why they should replace me. "Hello, I'm here guys." I had corporate HR sent to town to host meetings to ask for employees to express any concerns and evidence that could be used against me. There was none. Bless their hearts. The actions in this paragraph were all from one employer.

For years to set all that aside, and keep your team's focus on the daily job at hand, was without a doubt, the most difficult challenge I overcame and I'm proud of how I handled these trials. *"Oh, the games people play. Every night and every day. Never meaning what they say. Never saying what they mean."*

Mine is not an isolated case, as there are similar examples played out in front of us every day, especially in the political world. People are people. Truth is relative. Or so they will tell you.

In the sports world, if you have a winning team on the field that the GM/Coach put in place, and they've provided the ongoing guidance for the team to succeed at a high level for many years, it becomes difficult to get rid of that coach with false narratives. In addition, if your response to critics and saboteurs, is kindness and love as Proverbs 25:22 says, "You will heap burning coals of shame on their heads, and the Lord will reward you."

If ever I chose to respond with a natural human reaction in defensive confrontation, it never ended well. If instead I followed the verse, *"Lean not unto your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."* Proverbs 3:5

These incidents were intentional actions taken against me, that went on for years, and I eventually found it humorous. You just have to wonder how much time, money and efforts were wasted on these fruitless attempts to undermine a fellow employee, once a corporate leader or employee decides they don't want to support you. They can become determined to find a reason to legally justify their subversions. An endless warrant in search of a crime. "Oh the games people play."