



Talented Observations

Heather Cohen moved from radio programming, including a successful stint at New York's legendary WOR, to talent representation and an EVP post at the Weiss Agency. Respected for her keen sense for spotting talent, Heather is also often called upon as a judge for prestigious competitions, including the esteemed Tony Awards, as well as the Gracie Awards, presented by the Alliance for Women in Media.

Tell us about the role of an agent.

In my years as a programmer and agent, the most painful contracts I have ever done were my own. It is natural to

be an advocate for others, but often difficult to sing your own praises because it's personal. Sometimes it makes sense to take yourself out of the equation and let someone else negotiate on your behalf. They can push harder and highlight your attributes in a way that you may not feel comfortable doing.

I also find that groups and networks appreciate dealing with agents for a variety of reasons. It is understandable that a GM or PD would prefer to avoid confrontations with their talent. Going through the agent, some very honest conversations will inevitably take place. Those conversations will likely be more frank than is often possible with the talent themselves.

I sometimes have to deliver difficult messages to clients, and it does help the broadcast companies to have an intermediary. We get calls from stations, networks, and group programmers almost every day, asking who we have or who we would recommend for a specific opportunity.



Heather Cohen

In an industry that continues to consolidate and take advantage of syndicated or voicetracked programming, where are the opportunities for talent to grow their careers?

There is certainly a good deal of consolidation going on, but I am much more optimistic than I have been in a long time. Plenty of programmers seem to be pushing for local programming, and quite a few are winning that battle. I believe we will see new local openings in

2014. That said, the average personality may be hosting a morning show, voicetracking in two markets, hosting a syndicated weekend show or shift, and possibly doing PC or SiriusXM, all at the same time, not to mention TV, books, and speaking engagements. Digital provides even more platforms for programming, and that means more outlets for talent as well.

What qualities does a personality need to be successful and competitive in today's multi-platform environment?

To survive in this business, you must be prepared to juggle multiple roles. The possibilities are endless if you are willing to reinvent yourself and acclimate well to change. We certainly seek out talent who understand the importance of all things digital. As we work 18-hour days, we have an expectation that our clients will do the same. Naturally, an individual who has found a happy balance between programming and sales is very appealing.

We also choose to work with personalities with whom we would like to have dinner. I look for talent who are informative and entertaining and are not afraid of sharing their opinions. Better yet, they are not afraid of listening to an alternative viewpoint. As a listener, I am drawn to personalities who teach me something new. I want to share something interesting with my family at the dinner table. I am attracted to a host who makes me feel smarter and more in tune with the world. That is the type of broadcaster I want to represent.

What advice would you give someone just getting started or who feels their career is stalled?

We get calls from those hoping to land Monday-to-Friday shows almost every day. We often suggest that they fill in for a host who is on vacation or out sick. If they do well, the station may just have them back, and other openings will follow. This will also provide the talent with audio to send around when jobs are posted.

It pains me when I speak to talent who are ready to throw in the towel. New and exciting opportunities are coming. There will always be a need for great content and strong talent, both in front and behind the scenes. If you are on the bench, consider doing a daily or weekly podcast. It keeps your name and audio out there and allows you to submit fresh, relevant content. We all constantly need to reinvent ourselves and be willing to learn new things and explore new technologies in order to stay in the game. **INK**

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