

“Making your way in the world today, takes everything you’ve got.” Theme from Cheers

## The Climb, Betrayals and Lessons Learned

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

The refrain of these lyrics from Joe South’s *The Games People Play*, the 1970 Grammy Award winner for “*Song of the Year*” and “*Best Contemporary Song*,” are even more evident daily.

The stories contained in this chapter you may find hard to believe. You may have similar or worse incidents you could share. These events are totally accurate, and occurred 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 fashion. As John Fogerty sang, “I’m no fortunate son.” I paid my dues. I chose a path in local TV, that led to work in more cities and more positions than most. Again, it’s not a competition, but looking back, I endured and was subject to more antagonism than many, and hopefully more than you faced in your own story. No complaints, but rather a testimony to the value of perseverance and finding humor in the lengths your adversaries will go.

We all face challenges and opposition. Often, it isn’t fair. Our obstacles may seem unusually inequitable to us, while insignificant to others, especially by those who instigated them. Cheaters lie and liars cheat. Some individuals are motivated by their desire for promotion, money and status. They want it so desperately that they will do or say anything they can to get it, other than demonstrate patience and hard work. As Denzel Washington said, “Working hard is what successful people do.” More often than not, however, those few who engage to conspire in subversive self-serving activities, are not successful and, as their plots are ultimately exposed, they are shown for what they are, malicious and futile.

*“If one advances confidently in the direction of their dreams, and endeavors to live the life which they have imagined, they will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.”* Henry David Thoreau

My career in broadcasting has been a nearly 50-year episode of *Survivor*. I don’t claim victimhood. Face it, people in general, but especially in this business, are not going to always be honest, supportive and polite. You will be disappointed if you expect perfection from this fallen world. Much like our political landscape, an obvious daily example of individuals attacking each other, even within their own party, as well as their actions, insinuations and indictments against those from across the aisle. This is a human flaw continually on display.

Many see kindness as weakness, be kind anyway. Wherever people are, there is always some level of self-serving critical undermining individuals. Critical, judgmental jealous and insecure spectators. It sounds cynical, but we all know this to be true — It is best to recognize it for what it is and choose (or try) to live above it. One of my favorite books in The Bible, is Ecclesiastes. I try and read this short book every year. “Vanity of vanity, all is vanity.”

You will witness that employees, friends, neighbors or even family can be the culprits. CEOs and coworkers can surprise you. “Smiling faces, sometimes, pretend to be your friend,” sang The Undisputed Truth. Some employees want to do as little work as possible. Some managers have power, and they like to use it. They manipulate to further the career of those who think like them, vote like them, party like they do, and promote those who will bow and kiss their ring, perpetuating their sense of entitlement.

There are those who like to hide in the weeds and play, “Gotcha.” The one thing all of these souls have in common, is that they are insecure and their insecurities are acted out and revealed in self-serving, and at times malicious behavior. I was once asked in an interview, for a job I didn’t get, “Do you drink?” and “How much?” as they added, “We like to party here.” The concern was that the Sales Team at this station was known to be big partiers in the 80s. If I didn’t drink enough, I wouldn’t fit in. I told the interviewer, “I do drink, but I don’t get drunk.” That was not the right answer for that job, I’m glad I didn’t get.

I’m going to share real-life situations that I experienced, and all the details are accurately described; and very much like, *Dragnet*, which opened with a disclaimer, both on the TV show and the movie: “The stories you’re about to hear, are true. The names have been changed to protect the innocent.” I too will omit the names and locations. I chose to observe and endure, but not to fight back, when these incidents happened. 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 back end of my career, and seeing value in sharing with others these trials, and someday hopefully my grandsons can benefit. These episodes are a reflection of the reality I faced in both business and life. I attempted to exhibit grace under fire.

I want to share first an early memory that set the stage on how I learned to approach life, and I want to give an 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 or Sunday school about right and wrong, as did I. However, I remember responding to her, with some misguided pride, “I hardly ever lie.” The always pleasant Cindy actually glared at me in shock, and said, “What do you mean, you hardly ever lie? You should never lie, ever.” That was a formative character development moment challenging me. 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 however, I can’t recall any incidents of dishonesty, and from that

day, I tried to live with that same mindset, regardless of my perceived best positioning, in all my personal and business dealings. So thank you, Cindy. In the search for pure truth in this world, as Billy Joel sang, "Honesty, is such a lonely word."

As an illustration of how absurd the workplace can be, especially before there were Human Relation Departments in businesses, is possibly the best example of the old-boy network environment that you may ever hear.

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

I sold The United Way Campaign a large advertising schedule to help encourage participation in their annual Autumn 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 charity dollars for my own benefit, by getting such a large ad schedule from a non-profit on the station. So one morning, he summoned me to his office and from behind his desk, and asked me to come in and sit down. He had a button installed under his desk to shut his door automatically 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 his 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 and kept hitting the bat into his hand. "Tell me the truth." He then paced back and forth, all the while hitting the bat in his hand. At one point, I remember laughing out loud. I don't think you're deranged to the point of hitting me with a bat in the office. I did intently watch and thought, if he draws the bat back, I'm taking him down. He was clearly trying to intimidate me into telling him some imagined truth he wanted to hear, although that supposed truth was only in his imagination. I am convinced he had been persuaded to believe this false narrative, by a more direct manager of mine who had persuaded him to act out a scene from *The Sopranos*.

He said, "I'm on the Board of United Way, and there is no way they would be spending that kind of money on this station, without me knowing about it." I said, "Everything is just as I have said." And I remember thinking to myself (or I may have said it aloud), "You must have missed a few meetings." He finally concluded this third-degree session by saying, "You're up to something, 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 apologized. I liked the guy regardless, and he is no longer living, but some people cannot admit when they are wrong, and are determined to prove you guilty, when you're not. I like to imagine he was embarrassed, and he just couldn't say, "I'm sorry." After five years at the station, I left for a management position elsewhere, and after I was gone a few months, he made contact to get me to come back to my old position. I didn't.

When you manage a TV station, you probably have on average about 100 employees. I always liked what one of my mentors, Randy Oswald, told me: "Manage for the masses, not the asses;" and he also said, "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."

Throughout my life, I witnessed three of my preachers at solid Biblical churches, leave their wives and children for other women. I've seen a Non-profit Business Manager embezzle hundreds of thousands from public-donated dollars intended to provide shelter for the homeless in Kansas. I've seen a Christian organization who stands on Bible accuracy, simultaneously, knowingly and brazenly commit tax fraud for years. A former station manager I worked for was sentenced to prison for embezzlement. Affairs were ubiquitous and often, people were open about it. That is the flawed human condition; and there are always equally offensive humans, anxious to point out the faults of others, with the intent to say subtly, "I'm better than you." It is rather common to observe those who seek to elevate themselves by criticizing others. However, those who try to bring you down, are beneath you.

I was surprised when the Monica Lewinsky – Bill Clinton incident became public, as those actions would be grounds for any Local TV executive to lose their job, but not so for the President of the United States. I like the standards I was expected to live up to, as they were consistent with my own values, but should an average business leader be held to a higher standard than the leader of the Free World? Look at our leaders today. We all 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 as portrayed by Ron Burgundy character 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 families that they become delusional and believe they have achieved "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 saw themselves as a public celebrity, deserving preferential treatment and able to set their own schedule. Can you imagine if Patrick Mahomes approached his job this way? We tried to address this several times with the News Anchor, and they refused to adhere to the assigned work schedule. They were above being in at 2pm for the afternoon meeting and joining the team to plan for the evening newscasts. The effect this attitude had on all the team members, who did show up on time and did the work of putting together the daily stories was critical. No one, in any endeavor, whether we are talking sports, business or TV Anchoring, 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 are a few real people like Ron Burgundy and Ted Baxters in local tv newsrooms.

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, show up on time and be a team member. The change enraged the difficult Anchor, who then hired an attorney to try to intimidate their way back to their position and preferred routine.

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

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. I walked out, and the News Director followed reluctantly. He needed the ride back to the office.

I shouldn't have been surprised when, shortly thereafter, my Sales Manager came into my office to tell me that the News Director had gone to each Department Head to ask them for their support 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, I may add, he was willing to do whatever he thought would help him achieve it, aided by a delusional Anchor and also our News Consultant, who contributed to his mutiny attempt. 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,”* (Lord John Acton, 1857).

Some people may decide they don't like you, especially if you are their boss, in a position they want. Some people don't like any boss. Some people don't like me. I know, I can't believe it either. When you manage a station, some corporate leaders will decide they no longer want a specific individual in that leadership position. It may be because they acquired the station and the employees, 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 lengths to put pressure on you to exit, without a termination, as firing can lead to potential legal concerns for them —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 five times. That's right, five (5) times. With each rehiring process, the leverage surely would swing to Martin on whether he would choose to return or not.

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? 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 five-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 for your station?” They weren't kidding. 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 exposed. 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 with their preferred choice—which was one of my employees they had already contacted. 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 heart anyway. The actions in this paragraph were all from one employer. There are many more details to these incidents that are deserving of a separate chapter.

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 in my career, and I'm proud of how I handled these trials. The company's official response, clearly stated from their

attorneys, “We see no evidence of any wrongdoing.” If you accept that, then that would mean, all managers and employees are free to conduct similar actions against any employee they choose. *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 and Coach put in place, and they provided the ongoing guidance for the team to succeed consistently 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 the guidance of Proverbs 25:22 says, “You will heap burning coals of shame on their heads, and the Lord will reward you.” The times I responded with a natural human reaction in anger or tried to match the intimidation, it never, no never, ended well. The times I chose to lean not unto my own understanding but trusted the Lord, things always worked for good. Always. Proverbs 3:5 and Romans 8:28, are two powerful truths revealing the active living presence within the Word. Hebrews 4:12.

Another great truth is revealed when you chase after the Fruit of the Spirit, as described in Galatians 5, is you will find within yourself Love, Joy, Peace, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-Control. People don’t fail to reach their dreams in life, they just stop trying.

These incidents described in this chapter were intentional actions taken against me that went on for years, and I eventually was able to find the humorous view as they all failed. You just have to wonder how much time, money and efforts were wasted on these fruitless attempts to undermine and supplant a fellow employee, once a corporate leader decides they want to eliminate them. They can become determined to find a reason to justify their subversion legally. An endless warrant in search of a crime. There are other incidents I don’t share, as some are too painful to have gone through, revisit or relay. *Oh, the games people play . . .*