

# Training for Radio Hawaii's Broadcast Workshop

by Ruth Gurnani-Smith

Photo by Tommy Goodwin.

With his Honolulu-based Broadcast Workshop, veteran broadcast educator Phillip Trout has set out to revolutionize the field of education and training in the industry. Both his method and his results are impressive.

Trout describes his operation as the "boondocks" approach to broadcast education. By this he means that the greatest opportunities for employment and experience lie in the less glamorous small and medium market stations where a trainee can move quickly into productive work and up the ladder -- and usually out of town to a bigger market, leaving space for a new trainee. In this regard, Trout states that Hawaii is the best market in the U.S. for entry-level broadcasting jobs due to the low local wages and high turnover of personnel. Those with any measure of local success soon move, sensibly, onto the mainland where their possibilities for career growth are far greater.

The Broadcast Workshop concept is so sensible that, like so many revolutionary ideas, it is amazing no one has done it before. Trout contacts local radio stations across the country, explaining his training program and enlisting the support of station managers and program directors. In exchange for their assistance in training the students enrolled in Trout's program, he buys \$1000 worth of advertising time per student. His ads go out on the air and interested young people contact the local radio station.

The first and perhaps most important element in the selection of students is the screening process. The initial screening is by the program director at the station to which an aspiring student first inquires. These people have long experience in assessing the talent of hopefuls and the names of those who seem to show some promise are passed on to Trout. These applicants are contacted by telephone from the Honolulu office of The Broadcast Workshop where an interview by experienced staff evaluates voice quality and assesses background, education, and, importantly, level of interest.



Phillip Trout and his "boss" May

Those who pass the second interview are then contacted by Trout himself. In addition to further evaluation of voice quality and other relevant potential, he deliberately stresses the competitiveness of the profession, weeding out those with only a cursory interest. A near-obsessive drive to succeed is almost a necessity for survival in the business, according to Trout.

For those fortunate few who have not yet been dissuaded from their passion for the airwaves, auditions are arranged at the local stations. Each student is asked to submit a written biographical sketch, and is required to read several types of material "cold". A voice tape is made of this reading and is assessed by staff at the local stations before being sent, along with the biography to The Broadcast Workshop, along with the program director's recommendations concerning the student in question.

In Honolulu, where so many of our radio stations are affiliated with The Broadcast Workshop network, three auditions and recommendations from program directors, plus Trout's own personal evaluation of the applicant, are required for acceptance. In mainland

locations, only one audition is required.

There is no age limitations for Workshop participants. Most are in their mid to late twenties. The youngest is seventeen, a recent high school graduate; the oldest is in his fifties retired from the military. Most interns maintain their outside employment while they are in training, and often well into their first broadcasting job as late nights and weekends are the shifts usually given to the lowest man on the totem pole.

The actual training is tailored for each student, taking into account his or her interests and talents as well as the programming and marketing needs of the local stations to which the student is attached. Opportunity and circumstance on the local scene also play a major role in the direction the student takes.

The program director acts as tutor to the student for about six months -- for which service he is remunerated by Trout -- and provides occasional reports to The Broadcast Workshop on the student's progress. Trout also touches base with each student from time to time both to evaluate the individual and

to determine the quality of the relationship between the student and those with whom he or she is working. Where conflict occurs, it is Trout's responsibility to either smooth out the wrinkles or find another location for the student.

In addition to the hands-on training outlined with the local program director, Trout administers academic training which provides each individual with an overview of the radio broadcasting industry, whatever his or her specialty turns out to be -- and many eventually choose a broadcasting career "off the air". The principal text used in the academic training is Making It In Radio by Dan Blume, a Hartford, Connecticut lawyer with a very strong background in radio broadcasting. He covers every aspect of the industry clearly and concisely, and in a highly readable style for beginners and interesting for professionals.

The Broadcast Workshop's record of quality, competence, cooperation and dependability with the local radio stations in Hawaii gave Trout the success story he needed to sell the idea to station managers in non-metropolitan areas on the mainland, thus expanding his training network to its current 30 stations.

The background to this story is a very interesting one. Trout's career started in radio in Kokomo, Indiana in 1955-56 when at the age of 17 he talked his way into a job at radio station WIOU. In that era immediately preceding the accession to national prominence of such performers as Elvis Presley and Bill Haley and the Comets, Trout was an aficionado of jazz and of that then new style of music called rhythm and blues. These formed the bases of his two regular radio shows. These shows were not among the most popular in Kokomo in 1955, and Trout moved on to other stations around the country, never making it big and learning a great deal about the industry.

Some years later Trout was brought into the then San Francisco- (later Los Angeles-) based Columbia School of Broadcasting, founded a year previously by Bill Anderson who had been unable to sell his correspondence course to the public. Trout developed a new marketing program, including the auditioning of applicants in a studio environment. These simulation studios were subsequently used for some training. So successful was the new sales

approach that Franchises were sold to local promoters around the country and the school appeared to be doing well until a serious auto collision incapacitated Anderson for more than a year, resulting in the bankruptcy of the company.

After ten years with Columbia, Trout thus lost both his job and his stock holdings, though the students were hardly disrupted because the franchisees banded together and bought the school.

Trout was engaged by KIIS in Los Angeles where for five years he ran the in-house broadcast training program. In 1982, he chose to go into semi-retirement in Hawaii, for decades his favored vacation spot. His former association with Columbia and his long years of experience in the field of broadcast education recommended him for the post of director of that company's Honolulu office where he worked under the direct supervision of the President Bill Brock.

Within a year of his appointment, changes on the Board of Directors resulted in Brock's removal and replacement by Art Mandelbaum. Columbia had been sharing offices with local station K108. A change in ownership at that station brought this informal arrangement to an abrupt end and Trout was left with thirty students and no teaching space for three months, until suitable premises could be found.

As a temporary measure, Trout made arrangements with local stations to assist in the training of current Columbia students, in lieu of the simulated training environment they had been using to that point. This on-the-job training worked so well that Trout sought to convince his board of directors of the value of adopting it as a regular part of Columbia's curriculum.

Trout disagrees with the direction he sees Columbia is taking. He feels very strongly about the ethics of his approach, and dismissed from his employment due to irreconcilable differences with the new President. He formed what he considers the optimally productive training ground for new talent coming into the industry.

Trout feels strongly about being there for advice and assistance whenever his trainees need it, even after they are settled into their first full-time job in a radio station -- and perhaps even their second or third or more. There has already been measurable success among the interns in The Broadcast Workshop

program. All of the early students have gone onto the payrolls of the stations where they trained, being high achievers and carrying a fair share of the workload. This is doubtless due to the fine screening process. The ratio of applications to acceptances varies from around 1 in 25 in some localities to as low as 1 in 50 in others.

Trout's goal is for each affiliated station to train four or five students per year. He also seeks to expand his network right across the continent, providing on-the-job training environments in every non-metropolitan area of the country. Of the 10,000 or so radio and television stations operating in the U.S., some 6,000 serve small to medium markets where entry level jobs are plentiful. He is currently seeking association and capital investment to expedite this expansion.

He sees the coordination of all this activity -- 5 x 6000 stations = 30,000 students per year nationwide -- as the ideal occupation for retired broadcast personnel, being coordinated almost entirely by telephone (and potentially by computer link), thus sharing the profit in training new broadcasters among those who have done most to earn it.

The comments of the students themselves are overwhelmingly positive and anyone tuning in to Honolulu radio can judge for himself the quality of the presentation of the advanced students who regularly read local news, weather and public service announcements on the air.

The idea of "hands-on" apprenticeship is far from new. It is the original school. It has merit that could well be considered in many other areas of industry and arts. Trout is to be highly commended for his "backward" ideas. ■

If you would like further information concerning the Broadcast Workshop, contact:  
Phillip Trout

(808)926-3700