

Workplace

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MY JOB



Librado Romero/The New York Times

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Radio Personality, WOR-AM in New York

Revving Up While the City Sleeps

My day begins when the alarm goes off at 3:30 a.m. I once found myself showering with my socks on. I catch a ride at 4:15, stop for a cup of coffee and a bagel and am at my desk by 4:30 when I skim through six newspapers and log onto the Internet. I am expected to go on air fully prepared to inform people on the issues of the day. We are live from 5 until 9.

Once, I left a sheet of paper on my desk that had sports scores from the night before. When it came time to announce the results, after fumbling for my sheet, I simply said "and in the stadiums last night" and ended up making up the scores — "5-3, 7-0, 6-2" — without any reference to teams. I did not know what else to do. My audience thought it was funny. Management thought otherwise.

Since my first days on radio in college, I have always consumed a lot of coffee. A few years ago, my doctor ordered me to stop drinking it. I said, "Are you crazy? You're asking me to do morning radio and not drink caffeine?"

One of my most memorable guests was Barry White, who I am a huge fan of. We started singing "Can't Get Enough of Your Love Babe." I can't hold a tune, but I couldn't pass up the chance to sing with a legend like him. I also interviewed Tony Robbins, the motivational speaker. I got him to laugh when I gave the weather forecast in my most motivating voice.

Sometimes I get into trouble. I once interviewed the janitor cleaning the revolving stage for a Rolling Stones concert but was carried off by two bodyguards. I just wanted to know what brand of cleanser he was using. It was Spic & Span.

I finish my show just as others are stumbling into work. When I'm off the air, I need to catch my breath. I sometimes feel I've just run a marathon and need to take a shower.

Being on top of things is mentally exhausting. After a staff meeting or prerecorded segment, I try to catch a nap. I'm always looking for that extra hour's sleep. Sometimes, I plead with train conductors to wake me when it's my stop.

I'm never afraid of saying the wrong thing.

When I left my last show on another station I cried on air. You have to be true to yourself. If you have an opinion, it needs to be voiced. Chances are others are feeling the same way. I end up sharing much of what goes on in my own life. Listeners either love or hate you.

The nicest letter I ever received was from Big Mike in Brooklyn, who said I was "the coolest Jewish sister out there."

This fall I will be a mentor to a student at the La Guardia High School of Performing Arts in Manhattan. I remember when someone took me under wing when I was 17 and gave me the encouragement to follow what I enjoyed doing most.

Written with Jobert E. Abueva.