

R. The station's call sign: KZYX and KZYZ
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June 28, 2014
Open Letter to John Coate, KZYX GM and Executive Director

To: KZYX GM and Executive Director, John Coate
Re: On-air technical issues and lack of staff support

Dear Mr. Coate,

Firstly, I am asking that my letter here be read into the minutes of the July 2014 Board Meeting in Willits. I am unable to attend due to my work schedule.

Yesterday morning, I listened to John Sakowicz's live show. As always, it was superb and I called and told him so. That said, I noticed, yet again, technical issues were apparent at the start of John's show, as he juggled three incoming phone calls from the show's three scheduled guests. All guests were with national reputations, I might add -- most noteworthy was the former FCC Chairman, Michael Copps.

Apparently, the station's staff management, led by you, is unable to put aside the criticisms from John, and others, to assist a volunteer, like John, who needed the help of the station's engineer, Rich Culbertson. As John struggled, Rich was sitting idle during the show, playing on his computer. Rich was sitting one room away and he did nothing to help a volunteer programmer. All volunteer programmers deserve better than this-not just a chosen few.

These are the kinds of issues raised in my own letter to the FCC -- separate from the concerns raised by John -- that lend credibility to the lack of professionalism at KZYX; and, they make the case that KZYX is little more than a "mom-and-pop operation".

KZYX could be so much more!

I'll give you other examples of the vindictiveness of staff towards volunteers who have raised legitimate concerns about station management/professionalism.

Three weeks ago, Mary Aigner screamed at me in the station's parking lot

when I stopped by. She screamed that my letter to the FCC didn't reflect well on me. She screamed that my letter to the FCC identifying her lack of professionalism towards me, a potential volunteer programmer at KZYX, (who has actually worked as a salaried staff at a real public radio station, WPLN in Nashville, TN,) somehow made me look bad. I'm not sure how her lack of follow-through makes me look bad. Mary takes no responsibility for doing her job professionally. It's almost as though Mary is marking time and does little or nothing for the people who actually deliver programming - KZYX volunteers.

Another example of the staff's petty and unprofessional behavior -- Rich Culbertson spat at me when I greeted him on that same morning three weeks ago. He turned his back and walked away. Behavior of this kind from your staff reflects on you, and the station as a whole.

Mr. Coate, I reported these incidents to you in a letter when they occurred. Yet, I never heard back from you. These are your staff people. You are Mary's and Rich's boss. Perhaps a staff manual on how to behave toward volunteers or the public-at-large while on station property is in order. That manual should include no screaming or spitting.

Back to John's show yesterday -- when Rich refused to help John, a volunteer, KZYX came off as amateurish and provincial to listeners. Again, please keep in mind that John had three guests with national reputations: 1.) **Michael Copps**, the former FCC Chairman who served as commissioner from May 31, 2001 to January 22, 2009 and who now heads up the Media and Democracy Reform Initial at Common Cause, the original citizens lobby that has over 400,000 members across the country ; 2.) **Norman Solomon**, one of our country's top investigative journalists, who is also the founder of the Institute for Public Accuracy that, since mid-1997, has matched up over a thousand progressive leaders, producers, commentators, journalists, and analysts with mainstream media, and who was, most recently, a candidate for the California's 2nd Congressional district; and 3.) **Peter Van Buren**, one of our country's top whistle blowers, the 24-year veteran of the U.S. Department of State who led the State Department's Provincial Reconstruction Team in Iraq.

Rich failed them, not only John. Rich hurt the station with his drama and punitive behavior.

John continued on without missing a beat when Rich wouldn't help. It was a show that is as good as public radio gets -- three guests arguing passionately on-air for an informed electorate, the cornerstone of

democracy the week before our country's birthday, Independence Day, July 4th. The show also tied in nicely to John's show two weeks ago on the Internet and the FCC's role in pending changes.

A few people listening to the show actually posted to MSN's announcement listserv, telling Mendocino County to tune into KZYX and to "listen right now."

That's never been done before last Friday to my knowledge. Three guests. A former FCC chair and advocate for open and free media. One of our country's top investigative reporters. One of our country's top whistleblowers.

John mentioned to me his show will not be archived by staff. I asked him why not?

You, Mr. Coate, would rather write ten to twenty emails to the programmers listserv explaining why shows aren't archived by staff, and defending your staff against suggestions that they are either "too stupid" or "too lazy" to archive public affairs shows -- your words, not mine. John has a copy of your email to prove it. Where would you be without the multitude of volunteers who actually deliver on air programming?

Keep in mind, many working people can't listen to most public affairs shows on KZYX, because they broadcast during the week in the morning when most people work. For that reason, I can't take seriously any of your pledge drives or other fundraising efforts. If you limit the audience for the station's many outstanding public affairs shows to retired people, unemployed people, and shut-ins, you will never grow your membership base. The current membership has been stuck at 2,300 members for many years. Meanwhile, your competitors, KMUD and KMEC, continue to grow and prosper at KZYX's expense.

I believe there is little, if any, accountability or transparency of the station's staff. The Board has delegated all supervision to you, Mr. Coate. This model is not working. The staff you supervise are, minimally, out of bounds.

I have some questions for the Board and I would like these questions verbalized in the July Board Meeting:

Are there written job descriptions and scheduled job performance evaluations for all KZYX staff?

Who does the evaluations beside other staff, namely, you, the GM?

Are raises given on merit and expanded responsibilities, or, are raises given when the staff feels like they need more money?

How is the good use of time documented at KZYX?

More specifically, who is Mary Aigner accountable to besides you, Mr. Coate? Does she have accountability to the Board? The Community Advisory Board? The Program Advisory Committee? Does Mary prepare quarterly departmental reports for you, Mr. Coate, to pass on in Board meetings? Again, how does she document her good use of time, or does she?

This also applies to Rich. I know the station's broadcast towers, repeaters, exciters, etc., fail with some regularity, but when Rich is not in the field working on equipment, how is he spending his time? Besides playing on his computer, as John struggled to engineer a show with three guests, for example, what is Rich's responsibility besides protesting that it's not his job to archive public affairs shows? A digital radio station has the capacity to archive its shows. Gone are the days of reel-to-reel tape and PSA cartridges. It's being done by your competitors, and stations throughout California and beyond.

It boils down to these questions:

Does the Board know exactly how all staff spends a 40-hour workweek? If not, why not?

Volunteer programmers at KZYX contact and schedule their own guests; prepare their own questions and content; engineer their own shows; create and distribute their own promos; and, follow up with thanking on-air guests.

Where is Mary Aigner in that equation for a 40-hour week? The pledge drives seem to be about raising money for salaries. Let me explain.

I understand from John that **less than \$500** was actually spent on equipment repairs and maintenance for the current fiscal year. I couldn't believe it given the staff's pitches for equipment purchases and repairs

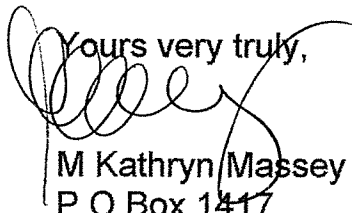
during the last on-air fund drive. The Board is looking to spend about that much again out of a total budget of \$550,000 in the coming fiscal year.

Given that the station was off the air for three days this past March 2014, shouldn't more of the money be allocated for new equipment purchases and regular/deferred maintenance? After all, listeners were left with the idea that this past fund drive was more about equipment than salaries.

One more thing. If underwriting revenues at KZYX have fallen off as steadily as they have, what is KZYX Business Development Manager, David Steffen, doing with his time? Does he regularly summarize his efforts so the Board knows who and when he has contacted potential underwriters? What systematic plan does he implement to recruit new businesses to underwrite programming at KZYX?

I'm not asking rhetorical questions, Mr. Coate. These are real questions that NPR stations throughout the region and the country deal with on a daily basis.

Yours very truly,



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c/c KZYX Board of Directors
c/c KZYX Community Advisory Board
c/c The Federal Communications Commission
c/c The Corporation for Public Broadcasting
c/c The Ukiah Daily Journal
c/c The Anderson Valley Advertiser

