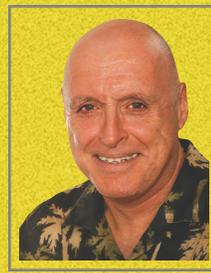


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1231 Spending Time in the Neutral Zone

Have you ever rushed a decision and came away regretting it? I have. Did you ever leave a job without having a job to go to? I did. Have you ever heard the term “neutral zone,” and what it might mean for folks who have to make changes? I’m Jerry Roberts, and I’ve got details on a potentially valuable tool, next, on The Extra Point.

I’m going to tell you a personal story, and then I’ll explain the “neutral zone” I referred to. In the mid-1980s, I left KUAM, then mired in bankruptcy, and moved to San Francisco. I had been on an eight-year run as J.Q. Fanihi without any real break, and frankly, I needed to get away from the life of a morning radio guy.

I didn’t want to leave Guam, but when KUAM rejected the idea of me moving to afternoon radio, and I didn’t want to change professions, I had no choice but to go. I gave two month’s notice, shipped my stuff, and was off on a new adventure.

I knew a few people in the Bay Area, and I liked the area. I sent out tapes of my radio work in Guam to a dozen stations, fully realizing that there were almost certainly no openings. That was fine with me, I had some money saved and I intended to relax for at least a couple of months before seriously seeking work.

I followed up with phone calls and, just as I suspected, no jobs were available and I was told to call back in a couple of months, three months, six months, etc. That was fine, as I had other immediate plans.

I was going to drive up and down the coast, over to Vegas, see friends, sleep late and have fun. For a month, that’s what I did. Then, I knew I had to focus on a job.

This was a few years before email came about, so I sent another round of letters and again made calls. I got the same answers. Then, the phone rang and it was the program director of a big station. My heart jumped. This was my

break. No, it wasn’t.

The guy said he liked my style, but it would likely be a long time before I got a full-time job. He said the economy was down, businesses were already leaving the state, and people loved the Bay Area. So, every radio station had a list of talented people who wanted to work. They’d do nearly any job to be able to live there, while they wait on a call from a radio station.

He said he knew I’d come a long way to hear that news, and he was sorry. I sure wasn’t happy, but I knew he’d done me a favor. When a second program director more or less confirmed what the first man had said, it was Plan B time.

Eventually, I left the Bay Area for L.A., where I joined a radio network and things worked out much better.

Now, the neutral zone. A philosopher named William Bridges studied leaders who handled big crises in the 1960s. Bridges discovered that the best leaders responded to major changes by observing, gathering data, and just thinking — and he labeled this the neutral zone.

Often, the leader has to get away in order to come to the best conclusions. Bridges said that this zone was critical in order to avoid major mistakes and negative consequences.

My neutral zone would have been taking a few weeks off from KUAM, using that time to visit San Francisco, San Diego, Seattle, and Phoenix, then decide where to live. I would have figured out that San Francisco was out of the picture, and moved on.

Today, we hear of people quitting jobs for any number of reasons, without having something else lined up. Many of them have acted on an impulse. As the economy tightens up and jobs become more difficult to find, maybe they’ll wish they would have had some neutral time to think things through before deciding. (Con’t.)

Skipping the neutral zone means we amplify the risks associated with our decision, and possibly regretting how things end up.

Experts advise that the right neutral zone is where we don't spend time grieving over our current situation, or fantasize over the one we might be headed to. We just give ourselves a break from all of it, and take some "me time".

Then, when we're relaxed and know our head is screwed on straight, we can gather data, go over our options, and decide what to do.

If you're thinking of making a major life change, consider carving out a neutral zone for yourself. I believe you'll always be glad you did.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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