

Episode 20:
Buddy's Unusual Path: Radio Disc Jockey
To Economic Developer
 (8/13/2018)

Segment	Who	Copy
Intro	Buddy Rizer	<p>I took six months off. I told myself I wasn't gonna do anything during that period. And I kept thinking, I'm too young not to work, but I don't wanna go backwards, you know.</p> <p>And so I started thinking, "Well, what do I wanna do?" And my brain led me to this idea that I could use my experience as a guy with Fortune 500 experience, a guy with small business experience, a guy that had been through ups and been through downs, use that experience to help other businesses.</p>
		INTRO MUSIC
Podcast Overview	Andy Levine	<p>Welcome to Second Act Stories, a podcast that looks at people who have made major career changes and are pursuing more rewarding lives in a second act.</p> <p>Today's episode focuses on Buddy Rizer. Buddy started in radio at the age of 15 and rose up through the ranks to actually owning his own radio station in his early 40s.</p> <p>But like many other industries, radio changed (and not for the better from Buddy's perspective). And it forced Buddy down a completely different path into the world of economic development – a profession that he has excelled at over the past 11 years.</p> <p>Here's Buddy Rizer's "Second Act Story."</p>

	Buddy	I'm one of those unique people that, like, I knew early on what I wanted to do. Like, when I was a kid, my parents have tapes of me pretending like I was a disc jockey on WFUN, where the fun has just begun, you know what I mean? My brother would change the records and I would, you know, talk between.
	Andy	How old is this?
	Buddy	Probably 8, 10, something like that. And then when I was in high school, I actually got my first radio job at 15. So and I did that just, kind of, hanging out with radio stations, and my first job was running in the bottom of Orioles game and plug it in commercials. And then one night, an Orioles game got rained out and they didn't have any other option, so they let me be a disc jockey, and then they just kept going from there. So when I went to college, I was already working professionally in radio.
	Andy	What was the lure, the attraction of radio to you as you were growing up, you know, at 8 or 10 years old?
	Buddy	You know, I can't even tell you. I just knew that I loved music, and at that point, you know, your gateway to music was radio. And I used to remember sneaking my little transistor radio to my bedroom and listen to the countdowns at, you know, at 10:00 on Thursday nights or whatever when I should've been sleeping. And I just always loved the idea of radio.
	Andy	So your career, once again starts at 15 and it spans 30 years, 30 plus years?
	Buddy	Thirty plus years, yeah.
	Andy	Tell me about the road that you were on there.
	Buddy	When I went away to the college in Baltimore, I was lucky enough to get a part-time job at the rock station there in Baltimore. I graduated college in about three and a half years because I wanted to get into radio full-time. Went back to my hometown station and became the program director at age 22, which was very young, ended up doing the morning show. And when I was 24 or 25, I got a weird call from somebody claiming to be the program director at DC101 in Washington who happen to be driving through Western Maryland, heard me on the radio and said, "We're looking for somebody to do Sunday nights at DC101, would you be interested in?"

	Andy	So in his early 20s, Buddy finds himself working at Washington's DC 101, one of the largest rock stations in the country.
		DCI 101: AIRCHECK
	Buddy	I started there doing Sunday nights, and eventually, transitioned into producing the morning show, and eventually became the music director. And then, you know, by the last half dozen years, was the music director or program director, station manager.
	Andy	How long were you at DC101 for?
	Buddy	Sixteen years.
	Andy	For all of us who fantasized about being on the radio – and you can count me among that group, Buddy was living the dream.
	Buddy	<p>It was pretty wild. I mean, it was... First of all, for a single guy in your 20s and early 30s, it was probably the best life you could live at that point in the '80s in the night.</p> <p>And while, you know, I fortunately never got into the drinking and drugs thing, I was around it all the time. And I saw how that really impacted people. But what I did do was probably not give myself nearly enough rest or nutrition or, you know, I mean, I was living pretty hard, had a mattress in one of the studios at the radio station. And, you know, I would end up being out most of the night with these bands, and then just sleep on the floor of the production studio for a while, and then get up and do my job. And I would do that fairly regularly during that period of my life.</p>
	Andy	But all good things must come to an end. And for Buddy, that happened when DC101 was purchased by a company called Clear Channel Communications. Rebranded as I Heart Media in 2014, the company now owns 850 radio stations in America.
	Buddy	They decided that they were going to, kind of, take over and use economies of scale to cut down expenses. So they would send out the playlist to you and they'd say, "Here, you're gonna play these songs and you're gonna do these things." And that was, kind of, when I went, "You know what, this isn't what I wanna be doing anymore."

	Andy	So how did Buddy respond? He bought his own radio station.
	Buddy	<p>When I decided that I didn't wanna be part of corporate radio anymore. I thought, "You know what, I've made some money. I have this idea of what radio still can be." So I went out and I bought a radio station. Paid \$1.6 million. Did that in 2004 right before the Great Recession hit and everybody stopped advertising on the radio.</p> <p>So, you know, I struggled with that for a few years. And, you know, during that period, it was really tough. It was the first real bump that I'd had professionally in my life.</p>
	Andy	The combination of a recession and deregulation of the radio industry was a knockout punch for Buddy and his radio station.
	Buddy	I ended up selling it at a huge loss.
	Andy	Oh boy. That must have been tough.
	Buddy	It was, it was. But, you know, it was very tough and it was one of the hardest periods of my life, but I will also say, I would not, I don't regret doing it. I wish it would've worked out better, but it was a lifelong dream. I did it. And I thought I did it well. Unfortunately, the results weren't very good.
	Andy	He took some time off to try and figure out his next step.
	Buddy	<p>I took six months off. I told myself I wasn't gonna do anything during that period.</p> <p>And I kept thinking, I'm too young not to work, but I don't wanna go backwards, you know. I think that a lot of people expected me to go back and work for a big radio station or go back to being a disc jockey. I just didn't feel at that point in my life that's what I wanted to do. I'm big on if you've done it...like, if you've done it the best you can do it, then I don't know that I wanna go back and try to do it again.</p> <p>And so I started thinking, "Well, what do I wanna do?" And my brain led me to this idea that I could use my experience as a guy with Fortune 500 experience, a guy with small business experience, a guy that had been through ups and been through downs, use that experience to help other businesses. And so I, kind of, targeted economic development and started learning what that was, and applied to a few organizations around this region, one of them being Loudoun County.</p>

	Andy	Tell me about interviewing for that job?
	Buddy	I don't know if they admit it today, but I know that at least two of them, two of the people that interviewed me because they knew who I was from the radio.
	Andy	And they wanted to meet you.
	Buddy	They thought this was interesting, you know. What is this guy going to do? I like to think that I surprise them with the preparation that I put into it, the thought that I had, kind of...the thoughts and the processes that I had laid down of what I would like to accomplish in economic development career. I think it came down to somebody that was an economic developer or me. And fortunately, for me, I think that they decided to give me a shot of this and it's worked out, you know, better than I think anybody could've expected.
	Andy	So I wanna ask you about that first year, was it challenging? So you're coming from a position where you own a radio station. You've got a bunch of different people reporting to you. Before that, you're a program director, same thing, staff reporting to you. So now you're like in a new pool trying to find your way.
	Buddy	I think it inspired me. You know, I think being a leader at a big organization leading my own company, and then I think that at that point I was ready to not be in charge of things. I think I was ready to go in and just try to figure out, you know, what's my way through this. And I had some good mentors here at the county that, kind of, helped me through those early days. I would say that the adjustment, the biggest adjustment for me was that I was used to things moving really fast all the time. And then got to the government where nothing, at that point, was barely moving at all.
	Andy	You've been involved in economic development now for about a decade.
	Buddy	Eleven years.
	Andy	You've moved up pretty rapidly in terms of now, you know, heading up a group of 24 people here in Loudoun County, executive director of economic development for the county. Any advice for others who are interested in, sort of, moving quickly up a career path, that sort of thing? I mean, what's your recipe for success, you think?

	Buddy	<p>I've been promoted five times in 11 years. So, you know, after two years, I was business development officer. And then I became assistant director, and then five years ago became director, and, you know, that's evolved into executive director. I think it's just keep trying to get better, keep pushing yourself, keep pushing the people around you.</p> <p>It all happened pretty organically, and I kept looking at more ways to contribute to the organization, and, you know, tried to have a vision for what that next step would be if it came about. And when the opportunity to become the director came along, you know, it was almost 2,000 pages of notes of what I thought a long-term plan could be, and, you know, we're about a quarter away through those plans.</p>
	Andy	What's the most rewarding part of your job right now?
	Buddy	I think seeing how we've impacted this community from...we're traditionally, one of the highest-growing, fastest-growing communities in the country from a population standpoint, and with that comes a ton of challenges. We're building two and three schools every year and roads and we have metro, DC Metro coming, all those things. What we've been able to do, taking a commercial tax base from when I started, it was about 19% of the overall tax base. Today, we're 33. So, I mean, it's been significant.
	Andy	That's a huge jump.
	Buddy	Over the last six years, we've been able to reduce the tax rate for our citizens from \$1.28 to \$1.08 significant in times like these. We've been able to diversify our economy away from being so reliant on federal government contracting and being able to, you know, introduce a lot of technology. And this has been our biggest diversity year ever as far as economic diversity. So, you know, I think those are the things that I really take a lot of pride in, the fact that we have made a measurable impact in this community and the quality of life of the people that lived here.
	Andy	So you've had two very different acts, your first act in entertainment, and radio your second act, and economic development and public service. Are they just different or have you found the second act more rewarding in terms of what you're doing in helping businesses? Any contrasts between the two, if you had to make them?

	Buddy	<p>I loved every day of my radio career. I loved every day, hard as it was, of owning a radio station, and I've really enjoyed what I'm doing here in Loudon County. I tried to approach at the same way. I tried to approach it with energy and enthusiasm and, you know, trying to make sure that I'm fully engaged in what we're doing at any given time. I think that that's the same. I think I've tried to bring some of the creativity from my old world where every day you were trying to do something new, and you had to do a new show every day, and you had to do new promotions. I tried to bring that same, kind of, creativity to this organization.</p> <p>And I think that I'm better at this job at age 50, and I was better at that job at age 25. I'm not sure I would've been any good at this job at age 25, and I certainly wouldn't be any good at that job at age 50.</p>
	Andy	<p>Let me take in a little different direction. If you were advising someone, maybe having to drink with them and they were frustrated in their job, they wanted to do something different, what, sort of, advice would you give to someone considering a second act, considering a change like the change you've made?</p>
	Buddy	<p>I think you should never feel stuck. And I know everybody has different circumstances, right? I mean, it was easy for me because being single and having money and, you know, I could walk away from a quarter of a million dollar a year job. And, you know, on some level, I found that even romantic, you know. I'm walking away from the man and deciding to do something else.</p> <p>I'm in favor of people doing something anything that makes them happier and gives them a better life. There are people that are content doing what they're doing, and they should keep doing that if that's what they wanna do. But anybody that is not happy in their role or where they're positioned in life, I think that sometimes you have to make a bold decision, and you have to take that leap. But it's a very personal decision. I'm adamant that no one should go through life miserable, that everyone should have that opportunity to do things that inspire them, and help them grow, and help them feel fulfilled. So if that's not the situation they're in, then I think that I would encourage them to look at other opportunities.</p>
	Andy	<p>So there's a song by Harry Chapin called "W.O.L.D.," are you familiar with it?</p>
	Buddy	<p>I absolutely am. Would you like me to sing it? No, just kidding.</p>

	Andy	No, no, no, I don't want you to sing it but can you see that person or have you seen that person in other radio stations that you worked in who have hung around too long and have just continued doing the same thing and not move forward?
	Buddy	I think that you see, you know, probably less of that now than you did 20 years ago as, you know, there's fewer radio jobs now. But, yeah, you know, the idea that you're the big star. I am the morning DJ at WOLD then your voice changes and your, you know, your energy changes. And then you're just hanging onto a job. You definitely see that. I never wanted to be that guy. I never wanted to be the guy that was trying to hang on to, you know, the last shred of a radio career because that's not what I wanted. It wasn't for me.

		<p style="text-align: center;">OUTGOING MUSIC</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Hello honey, it's me What did you think when you heard me back on the radio? What did the kids say when they knew it was their long lost daddy-o?</i></p>
<p>Thank you and Show Credits</p>	<p>Andy</p>	<p>Yes, those are the opening lyrics for Harry Chapin's "WORLD" – a story about an aging disc jockey who continues as a radio broadcaster but finds that life and happiness have passed him by.</p> <p>I'm so glad that Buddy Rizer found a different path and found the profession of economic development. And I thank him for telling his story which has its ups and downs but certainly finds in a happy and productive place today.</p> <p>If you're enjoying Second Act Stories, I really hope you'll consider sharing it with others by becoming a "Second Act Advocate." All you have to do is visit our website, "Second Act Stories.org," and click the "Spread the Word" button in the upper right-hand corner of the home page. It will take you less than 60 seconds to sign up as a Second Act Advocate. I'll notify you when a new episode comes out and ask you to share it with your own social media following.</p> <p>And if you are thinking of starting your own second act, we hope the interview with Buddy might help you find a new path.</p> <p>We hope you'll keep listening. A new "Second Act Story" is just around the corner.</p>