

The Story Behind The Larry King Answering Machine Outgoing Message

It all began long before there was the Internet, e-mail, texting, smart phones, Netflix, Google, Facebook, satellite radio...and...

...before Larry King became an international TV personality as the host/interviewer on CNN's *Larry King Live* (1985 to 2010). Larry King's first nationwide recognition was as the host of a nationally syndicated



all-night radio talk show, *The Larry King Show*. From 1978 to 1994, the show aired on approximately 200 North America AM and FM radio stations on the Mutual Broadcasting System. His show started at midnight and ran for six hours, five nights a week. During many of King's early years on Mutual, I was living in San Mateo and commuted an hour each way in my car to my 9 to 5

job in San Francisco.

I was totally addicted to the all-night *The Larry King Show*. There was no cure. (The Wikipedia web site has a nice, concise bio on Larry King.)

In order to keep a normal circadian rhythm and to listen to as much of *The Larry King Show* as I could, I purchased a special cassette tape recorder that would record in both directions. I also bought several cassette tapes that would record a



total of two hours (one hour in each direction). I hooked up a timer to the special recorder and attached it to my home stereo-tuner system to capture essential portions of King's radio show, usually the guest interview. I would then listen to the tape recordings in my car during my commute. This

was, of course, when cars were equipped with built-in cassette tape players. (If you're under 40-years-old, I suggest you Google "cassette tape" to see what I'm talking about.)

I digress. At one time during the early 1980s, one of the independent television stations in San Francisco (KTVU, Channel 2) aired a two-week-long, 24 hours-



a-day series that they called “The Golden Age of Television.” The random TV programs contained some of the very early 1950s and 1960s obscure network shows. My wife Sally and I would watch these programs live when we could.

Before the series ended, I put a six-hour VHS cassette tape into our VCR, set the TV channel to KTVU, and pressed “Record” not really knowing what programs we would capture on the tape. Many months later, we starting watching the tape and discovered a treasure cove of early TV

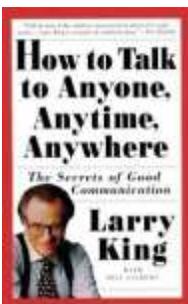


broadcasts. Among the shows we recorded was one we'd never heard of called “Miami Undercover,” a 1950s police-detective drama. The plot of this particular half-hour episode involved the murder of a Miami radio station all-night disk jockey. In the opening scene, the radio station was broken in to by thugs who tried, at gunpoint, to force the disk jockey to play certain records.

The disk jockey refused, stating very dramatically, “I never took payola and I never will!” An argument ensued and the thugs shot the disk jockey. In a very melodramatic burst of over-acting, the disk jockey collapses over his



turntable, dead. The rest of the episode involved the Miami police pursuing and capturing the killers. At the end of the show the scrolling credits showed that the part of the disk jockey was portrayed by Larry King himself. In disbelief, we rewound the tape and, sure enough, that actor was a very young Larry King--not exactly an Emmy-winning performance to be sure! We saved the VHS cassette tape with the intention of watching it again sometime in the future. (Again, if you're under 40 and terms “VHS tape” and “VCR” are unfamiliar, you can Google these terms.)



Fast forward several months. Larry King is in San Francisco for a book signing. I took off from work and headed off to buy the book and get it autographed. As Larry King was signing my new book, I told him that I had a VHS tape containing the Miami Undercover episode where he portrayed a disk jockey that got whacked. Startled and excited, Larry King stands up, looks me in the eye and exclaims, “You have that tape?! I've been trying to get that recording for years!” We made a deal:

I would mail him the VHS tape with the Miami Undercover episode, and he would send me an audio cassette tape with a personalized answering machine outgoing message.



The Larry King outgoing message served our household for many years. This was during the peak of Larry King's popularity of his CNN television interview show. Finally, after



Brian and Tyler made their own homes, I retired the Larry King message. During the years it was active, nearly everyone who heard it remarked how clever it was. Also during that period we had numerous hang-ups which I assume were strangers that had heard that we had a unique outgoing message. All of the feedback we received was positive, with one notable exception: The date was Monday, June 6, 1988, my first day on the job at Andreini and Company, an insurance brokerage located just a mile from our San Mateo home. Not only was I happy to give up my one-hour commute to San Francisco, my new job offered a greater opportunity for professional growth.

A little background: Our home telephone number at the time was (415) 573-1122. The main number at my new job was almost identical: (415) 573-1111.



On my first day at Andreini and Company I spent the morning completing the required paperwork in the Personnel Department (the term "H-R" hadn't yet come into vogue).

After lunch I reported to the Aviation Insurance Department to begin my new job.

My supervisor, Jim, assigned me my first

duty: Call several customers and remind them to mail in (remember, scanning and e-mail were not available in 1988) their insurance application forms. I had about 10 calls to make. On several I had to leave messages on their answering machines. On at least one of those calls my message went something like this: "Hello, Mr./Ms. XXXX, I'm Bob Leuten, the new rep from the Aviation Insurance Department at Andreini and Company. Jim asked me to give you a call to remind you to send in your insurance application. If you have any questions, call me back at (415) 573-1122."



Unknowingly, I gave my home telephone number instead of the Andreini number-- after all, the first eight digits were the same as I had been reciting for eight years! The next day, Jim greeted me with, "What the hell were you doing giving out your home

telephone number to our clients...AND THAT CRAZY LARRY KING MESSAGE...!"

Thereafter (fortunately) things went better for me at Andreini and Company. A few months later Jim retired and I replaced him as the department manager. I retired from Andreini and Company 20 years after that.

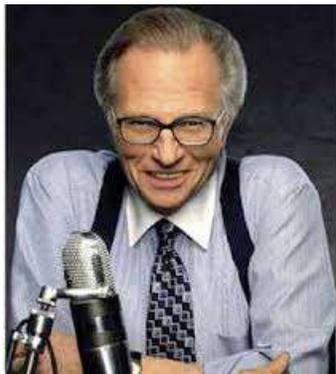
At the suggestion of my sons Brian and Tyler, I should add a digital version of the infamous Larry King outgoing message to my personal web page.

Here were the problems:

1. Find the Larry King outgoing message audio cassette tape;
2. Pray that the 30-year-old tape hadn't deteriorated;
3. Find a cassette player in working condition.

Fortunately, I had success on all three!





Larry King

[Click here](#) to see his Wikipedia page

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