

San Francisco Chronicle

Julie N. Lynem, Chronicle Staff Writer
 A Profile of Greg Ketchum
 November 10, 2002

THE 'FRASIER' OF THE CUBICLES



Dr. Ruth talks candidly about sex. Dr. Phil mends relationships. Dr. Greg's specialty is work, or lately, helping people deal with not having work. Greg Ketchum isn't a medical doctor but a former psychologist and current executive recruiter and coach who hosts the Bay Area's latest workplace radio program, "TalentPlanet." The

weekly show, which premiered in August on Cnet radio 910 AM, offers no-nonsense career advice.

With layoffs mounting, especially in the tech sector, Ketchum, 52, hopes the program will be a lifeline for working folks who want to get a better job or simply keep the job they have. "It's pretty grim out there for a lot of people," Ketchum said. "Even people who have a job, many of them feel stuck. We're trying to be a voice that says, 'Stay calm. Here are some things that you can do. It's not the end of the world.'"

"San Francisco radio host Greg Ketchum is part coach and part psychologist."

He touches on timely topics such as how to come off best in job interviews, how to avoid getting laid off and how to maintain ethical behavior at work. He has interviewed public-speaking coaches, human resource professionals and high-tech executives. Admittedly, they're not guests with star quality, but then again, Cnet is not National Public Radio, and Ketchum isn't Terry Gross, host of "Fresh Air." Even so, Ketchum believes his program has the potential to be nationally syndicated.

Workplace radio "is a niche only because people haven't thought about it differently," Ketchum says. "My God, Dr. Ruth talks about sex, but people thought, 'How in the world could you have a national radio or TV show based on that?' Now sex is a legitimate topic." Every Saturday, Ketchum arrives at the Cnet studios, ready to tackle the day's topic. Just before 3 p.m., he reviews his notes, puts on his headphones and approaches the microphone.

For the next two hours, he's no longer Gregory A. Ketchum, but Dr. Greg, attempting to cure what ails Bay Area workers. "Well, good Saturday afternoon to you, I'm Dr. Greg Ketchum, your host of 'TalentPlanet.' We like to call ourselves your on-air career home," Ketchum says in a clear, upbeat voice.

talentplanet.com

tel 415.387.5942

fax 415.752.1037

619 15th Avenue
 San Francisco, CA 94118

P R E S S T I M E

By all accounts, the show comes across as a serious look at career matters. But “TalentPlanet” is not without its funny surprises or embarrassing mishaps for Ketchum and his producer wife, Kathy Taylor. During the first few weeks of the show, the couple accidentally hung up on a caller three times. They also wondered how they would wing it when a guest was late calling in.

Then there was the day Ketchum started joking around a bit with a studio guest after he thought the station had been knocked off the air. Ketchum pretended to be miffed by the ordeal, just like a Hollywood diva. “I finally said, ‘I can’t work under these conditions,’” Ketchum says. “Then, the engineer says we’re on the air and have been the whole time.” Then there are the callers, most of whom ask pretty straight-forward questions. One man, however, phoned in with a question that made Ketchum bite his tongue. The man wanted to know if he could ask a potential hire if she had any plans to get pregnant. When Ketchum told him he couldn’t ask that question, the man said he would hire the male applicant instead.



xxx & Dr. Greg in the Studio

“That rocked me back,” Ketchum says. “All the guests in the studio looked at each other and didn’t know what to say. I wanted to say, ‘You’re a bonehead.’”

But he didn’t. “You can’t do that kind of thing because it’s gender discrimination,” Ketchum explains. Shocking questions aside, Ketchum says he tries to help listeners to reach their potential. Most people, he said, would rather do what’s comfortable than take a risk. “Either you step up and face your fear or you make a U-turn away from it,” he said. “We want people to know that it’s not so hard to take that next step.”

Ketchum isn’t the first Bay Area radio personality to take on the issue of work. Marty Nemko, a freelance columnist, has hosted “Work With Marty Nemko” on KALW-FM for more than a decade. There are about a dozen local and national career-related shows, according to the National Association of Broadcasters. But it’s Ketchum’s mix of psychology and coaching expertise that makes his brand of workplace show stand out, said Steve Kovsky, former news director for Cnet radio.

“He’s as interested in an individual’s personal development as their career development,” Kovsky said. Cnet radio director Brian Cooley, who recruited Ketchum for the show, said he has a way of luring guests and audiences in with what’s new and now. “He tends to break down the usual jargon and routine information we’ve all heard a hundred times,” he said.

His soothing, even-toned voice doesn’t hurt either, said Taylor, who met Ketchum on a blind date. “That’s why I went out with him,” she said. Ketchum showed an early interest in broadcasting. As a child growing up in Memphis, he had an affinity for theater, television and radio. He recalls listening to Wink Martindale, then a Memphis disc jockey who later hosted such television game shows as “What’s This Song” and “Tic-Tac-Dough.”

Ketchum majored in broadcasting his first few years of college. He switched to psychology when he realized he had a gift for listening to other people’s problems. In 1980, he earned a doctorate in psychology from the California School of Professional Psychology, now part of Alliant International University in Alameda.

Like many psychologists at the time, Ketchum set up shop in downtown San Francisco. But as much as he enjoyed digging into the psyches of troubled people, he felt constrained. He made a scary transition in 1996 when he set up his own management consulting practice. He and Taylor, a former television sales representative and executive recruiter, formed the TalentPlanet executive coaching business in 1999.

Itching for something more, Ketchum did some five-minute spots on ZDTV’s Internet radio station. When ZDTV closed its radio operation in 2001, he joined his buddy Kovsky at Cnet, where he did about a half-dozen Cnet segments on job issues. That break led to a pitch last year for a permanent Cnet radio program. A year later, the show was born. “I feel incredibly grateful,” he said. “I’m just having a ball.”

DR. GREG’S TOP FIVE TIPS FOR WEATHERING THE STORM

- **Keep your current job:** If you’re currently employed, do everything you can to make yourself indispensable.
- **Network like there’s no tomorrow:** The time to build your network is when you have a job, not when you’re out of a job.
- **Conserve resources and have a back-up plan:** Save money, put off expenditures that can wait. Having a contingency plan can help immensely in managing the uncertainty and anxiety of these times.
- **Keep your resume fresh and get to know a recruiter.**
- **Have faith and don’t panic:** Setting at least one goal a day toward creating security for yourself can help alleviate feelings of helplessness.