

A portrait of Bruce Reese, a middle-aged man with light hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and red tie. He is smiling slightly and has his arms crossed. A silver watch is visible on his left wrist. The background is a blurred indoor setting with warm lighting.

"I still believe what worked for us at Hubbard and Bonneville was investing in people and treating them well, creating and selling great products to advertisers. I think I can say with a high level of confidence that we never tried to save ourselves to prosperity."

Bruce Reese

2017
**LIFETIME
LEADERSHIP
AWARD**

Radio Ink's Lifetime Leadership Award is presented each year, in conjunction with our 40 Most Powerful People in Radio list, to a radio executive who has demonstrated over the course of his or her career a commitment to excellence and has set a standard in leadership for others to emulate. Previous recipients include Lowry Mays, Ralph Guild, Gary Fries, Eddie Fritts, Bill Burton, Gordon Hastings, Ed McLaughlin, Jerry Lee, Charles Warfield, Dan Mason, and Cathy Hughes.

The 2017 Lifetime Leadership Award winner is Bruce Reese.

Reese started his professional life as an attorney, practicing law in Washington, DC and Denver. He also worked in the anti-trust division of the Department of Justice. It was in DC that Reese met Bob Barker, who was general counsel and vice chairman of Bonneville. Reese worked at Barker's law firm doing some of Bonneville's legal work back in the late '70s early '80s, until, he says, he was "unwittingly" hired as Bonneville's general counsel.

"There were a number of happy accidents that got me working for Bonneville," says Reese. "It was not something I had planned on doing, being in the radio business, but it was something that, as I look back, was wonderful and perfect. I still remember an old tube radio that I had in the headboard of my bed as a kid, thumbing around at night trying to find rock 'n' roll to listen to from Chicago, New York, and Boston, the big clear channel stations. I loved music and listening to the radio. Maybe it was something that was meant to be."

The legendary Arch Madsen was president of Bonneville at the time, and he was getting ready to retire. His successor was Rod Brady, who initially didn't know anything about the radio business but was a great executive. Madsen and Reese were the

two new people in the company, and Madsen took Reese under his wing.

"I taught him the regulatory side and how this business was different than other ones he had been involved in," Reese says. "He had almost no interest in anything pop culture-related and now he was running a business that is almost all pop culture-related. I explained to him why you didn't play the Rolling Stones next to Rostropovich, and he explained to me what a balance sheet looked like and how to build consensus dealing with people."

Madsen started giving Reese non-legal assignments almost immediately, including asking him to work with divisions of the company that were having problems so Reese could help them succeed. Reese

officially stopped being a lawyer for the company seven years later, in 1991, and became executive vice president in charge of the entire Salt Lake City operation. His responsibilities continued to grow, and he advanced to COO. After three years in that position, Reese was promoted to president of Bonneville in 1996.

Reese and his team would go on to win more than 40 Crystal and Marconi awards from the NAB, through a philosophy of strong local talent and service to community. Bonneville was strong and ripe to be purchased by a company with similar values, and in 2011, it happened: Hubbard purchased 17 of Bonneville's stations, in Washington, DC; Chicago; St. Louis; and Cincinnati, for \$505 million. Reese stayed on with Hubbard from 2011 through 2014 as president and CEO. Through decades of strong leadership Bruce Reese made a lasting impact on the company he ran and the industry he was so heavily involved in.

Here is our interview with Bruce Reese, the recipient of *Radio Ink's* 2017 Lifetime Leadership Award.



Radio Ink: You really took control of Bonneville in 1996. Talk a little about that time.

Reese: It was a big year in broadcast ownership that I remember almost precisely. When consolidation started, we owned 20 stations in 10 cities. I had the opportunity to figure out what to do in the face of consolidation. Twenty radio stations used to be a lot; we were a top 10 owner with 20 stations back in those days. But with the floodgates opened on radio ownership, things were moving rapidly, and we didn't have access to public funds.

We were privately held, and any money we spent was the church's money. [Bonneville is owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.] We tried to figure out how to compete in the new world, where other people in a particular city owned a lot of stations. We concluded that our best bet was to try to be big enough in fewer cities, and we set out on a course that was a little like draft night in the NBA, taking the assets we had and trading around to the point we would be big enough to compete in four or five markets rather than being spread out over 10.

We started with 20 stations in 10 markets, and ended up with 20 stations in four markets — excluding Salt Lake, which was a forgone conclusion. We had these cross-ownership rules, and interestingly, 20 years later, we still have these stupid cross-ownership rules. We had a radio station, a TV station, and a newspaper in Salt Lake, so we couldn't do anything here. We bought and swapped and sold things for cash, and at the end of 18 months, we had reconfigured the company. We had pocketed a few million dollars at the end and spent no new money in the course of building the company.

Radio Ink: What was it like negotiating for stations as a church-owned company when most others were spending big, trying to get as big as they could as fast as they could?

Reese: It depended on who you talked to. We were not in a position to buy a lot of stuff, so we had to find people who had similar goals. They may want to build in particular markets. Bonneville's strength was, we owned a couple of stations in pretty good markets. Salt Lake was our smallest market. We owned stations in large markets and had good assets that we had to give up in order to make these deals.

We needed to find people to do a win-win deal with and understand that yes, I'm giving up something. There were people like that out there. The one I dealt



“NAB congratulates Bruce Reese on his Radio Ink Lifetime Leadership Award. Under his steadfast guidance, Bonneville and Hubbard cultivated a well-deserved reputation as first-class radio operators that prioritize service to their local community. Bruce is also a longtime champion of broadcast radio, and our entire industry has benefited from his previous role as chairman of both the NAB Radio Board and the NAB Joint Board of Directors. I cannot imagine a more deserving recipient for this award.”

Gordon Smith
President & CEO
National Association of Broadcasters

with several times in those first few years was Scott Ginsburg. He was buying a lot of radio stations, but he was also someone you could talk to. I could say to him, “I’m willing to do this if you’re willing to do that.” You could see that it did not have to be, “I win and you are humiliated.” It was seeing what was in it for both of us.

Obviously, Jeff Smulyan is the guy we dealt with on a number of transactions. He was the same way: How can we make both of our companies better by doing a deal? That worked for us. There are always mixed results. I hope Jeff feels, at this point, he got at least as much as he gave up in some of those transactions.

We had to find people like that. We were not going to outbid anybody in a cash deal, but we did have some assets we gave up in order to put our company in a situation where we could sustain it.

Radio Ink: Is there one deal that stands out?

Reese: The one deal I remember best was the one people look back on and say, “Why did you do that?” But it turned out well for us. I had no particular insight, but feeling that strong local content was important, and that there was a benefit to being in the news business, the idea of getting WTOP in Washington was something I was interested in. WTOP was not particularly strong in the mid-’90s.

To his credit, Scott had brought in some great talent like Steve Swenson, who had brought in Jim Farley, but they were early days and TOP was mid-teens in ratings. We worked a deal where we gave up our New York station and a Houston station we acquired only for future trade purposes, and we swapped our Los Angeles signal for one of Evergreen’s, for WTOP and WGMS, the Classical station.

People shook their heads. My friend Bob Johnson, who was our COO, asked, “Are you sure you want WTOP? Can’t we talk them into giving us one of the music stations instead of that AM signal which is not doing well?” I said, “I think it’ll be OK,” and our board supported it.

One of the core ideas, and I think it came from Jim Farley, was to extend WTOP’s signal into Virginia when the sun goes down. It was great north and south, but hard to hear after you got to the Beltway after sunset. They had acquired an option to purchase an FM translator somewhere in the eastern Appalachians that would cover Dulles and that area after dark. That was the beginnings of putting WTOP on FM. We took that idea and grew it. We were one of the first to make that move.

Radio Ink: Did you have mentors help you during your career?

Reese: Absolutely. I was a lawyer who loved rock 'n' roll. I did not know anything about accounting or selling. Arch Madsen was the one who thought broadcasting was all about the content and the importance of putting great products out there and being of community service. It's something that is still important to me.

Rod Brady is a great business executive who knew how to build teams and consensus and how to delegate authority. I have the greatest respect for him. Why he gave me the opportunities he did, I will never know, but I'm glad he did.

I worked with Ken Hatch and Jack Adamson, who were at Bonneville when I got there. Bob Johnson, who was my general counsel and COO, Drew Horowitz, Chuck Tweedle, Joel Oxley, and many others. I learned from the people who worked for me as well. They made me look real good. Also, my counterparts in the industry I have a great deal of respect for — Jeff Smulyan being one of them, but there were many others. The years I spent on the NAB Board, where I got to rub shoulders with great people with different perspectives on business.

Radio Ink: What is your philosophy on how to treat people?

Reese: It's all about the people. They are putting out the products, and selling the product. I believe you have to treat people the way you would like to be treated. The people who brought me to Bonneville always treated me that way, and we continued that while I was at Bonneville and Hubbard.

I know that is the way Ginny and Drew are running the company these days. You need to have good people working for you who understand and buy into the mission. You ought to treat them with respect and give them opportunities to grow and make it worth their while to be with you.

Radio Ink: Other than the WTOP deal, is there something else you consider a big success in your career?

Reese: I wouldn't measure it in terms of a particular acquisition, but taking what Arch Madsen and Rod Brady had started and turning Bonneville into a company that achieved our goals. We tried to do three things. We tried to be terrific, and taken seriously as broadcasters. When Rod got there, and to some extent this lingered for a few years, it was,



“Bruce Reese has long been an industry leader representing the highest level of professionalism and integrity. When he saw the need for the industry to diversify its offerings across multiple platforms to remain relevant and competitive, he became the outspoken voice for change. I had the good fortune to be Bruce's first hire when he was made the CEO of Bonneville. He gave me the opportunity to be the GM of WTMX. That was a life-changing event for me, one I will always be grateful for, and thus began our long and fruitful partnership. He became my mentor over our years working together, but more importantly, he is a cherished friend. Bruce made the radio industry better, and he was the poster CEO for doing things the right way and with full transparency. I can't think of a more deserving broadcast professional to be the recipient of the Radio Ink 2017 Lifetime Leadership Award.”

Drew M. Horowitz
President & COO
Hubbard Radio



The Hubbard team, in summer 2014: Dave Bestler, Ginny Morris, Drew Horowitz, and Bruce Reese.



“Bruce is incredibly smart and innovative, and has the courage to take chances. Not many CEOs would’ve taken the chance to move WTOP to a full-market FM, but Bruce did, and it paid off in a big way. He’s a fascinating person. There doesn’t seem to be a subject in which he isn’t conversant. I learned so much from Bruce and count myself extremely fortunate to have worked with him for such a long time.”

Joel Oxley
Market Manager
Hubbard Washington, DC

“Bonneville is a little old church company out in Utah, and yes, they own some good stations, but they aren’t serious about the business.”

He started it, and I hope our team continued it — building a company where being financially successful was critical. I think we did that. We ran at margins that were as good as anybody’s in the business. By the time I left and Hubbard made this acquisition, I hope that was one of the reasons they made it — because it was a growing concern to be successful. We continued to provide great service to the communities we worked in, and provide an example



The Bonneville board of directors, circa 1998. Bob Johnson, then COO, is at far left, and in front is then-Bonneville chair Jim Jacobson.



Bruce Reese: “This is of one of my mentors and a great broadcaster himself, Dr. Rodney H. Brady.” Brady passed away in January of this year.

to other broadcasters of how you could do well in the business and do good in the communities, be an exemplary servant.

The Crystal awards that Bonneville stations won for years and years, I think showed how much we cared about the community. Thirdly, we tried to build a company that was an employer of choice, a place broadcasters wanted to work. I think we succeeded in that by giving them the opportunities to grow professionally, give back to the community, and be fairly compensated.

Radio Ink: Does it worry you, the way people in the industry are being treated?

Reese: I read the trades every morning and watch what’s going on. It’s difficult times. Every business has those problems — it’s not just radio that has this challenge of hyper-competitiveness. We used to say “American industry.” Now we say “world competition.”

You have to treat people well. We never found that skimping on the people side ever helped us. We never cut sales forces drastically when times were tough. We would try to stay where we were, if not double down a little and grow to put more feet on the street rather than fewer. We tried to invest in product, local product, because we think that’s our strength.

I will say we didn’t face billions of dollars in debt the way some companies do. I was extraordinarily fortunate to work for two owners in this business, Bonneville and Hubbard, who have a long-term view. They both got into the broadcasting business within a year of each other, 1922, 1923. They have been at it a long time. They have kept a long-term view of what success is and have not gotten into silly kinds of debt.

I feel for people. It’s a very intensely competitive business. We don’t have days where revenue grows 2 percent, 4 percent, 6 percent a year. We are lucky if we go up 1 or only down 1 or 2. It’s not a high-growth business. You have to figure out where to deploy resources.

I was fortunate to never have to deal with those pressures, but I still believe what worked for us at Hubbard and Bonneville was investing in people and

treating them well, creating and selling great products to advertisers. I think I can say with a high level of confidence that we never tried to save ourselves to prosperity.

Radio Ink: Do you think the radio industry is in good hands?

Reese: I think there are some great leaders in the industry. They are dealing with extraordinary difficulties; there were difficulties when I left two years ago, and it's only gotten harder. I am excited to see some of the changes that are coming. It is tough to see some of the other changes that happen as well.

I like the leadership at the largest companies. They are making hard decisions and trying to figure out what to do with these assets in difficult times. I don't always agree with the decisions they make, but I know they are sincere in their efforts. I think we have terrific leadership at the trade associations as well.

Radio Ink: Will we see the big radio companies break into smaller companies?

Reese: We've been speculating about this for a long time, and it has not hap-



Ginny Morris and Bruce Reese



CONGRATULATIONS TO
BRUCE REESE FOR BEING
HONORED BY RADIO INK
FOR YOUR MANY
CONTRIBUTIONS TO
THE RADIO INDUSTRY.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR
LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP
AND SERVICE.

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pened. I don't know what will happen there. Five or six years ago, I was absolutely certain that those things would have to happen. I think the critical thing is the recognition that these are largely local assets in the radio business, and we have to be successful locally.

I think my belief 10 years ago was that meant you have to have local talent to do that, and that has been proven to be untrue. I think if you can get great local talent, it will trump national talent anytime, but finding great local talent is hard. Sometimes nationally syndicated products are better than what you can do locally.

It is a difficult assignment, and I am not going to second-guess people on that. I have to respect their decisions and trust they will do their best.

Radio Ink: What advice do you have for young people getting into the business?

Reese: First, it's a great business, it's a fun business. You have to remember the fun. My daughter is in promotions/events. Last Saturday she had an unfortunate run-in with high south winds and a bounce house. Thinking it was full of children as it went to turn over, she tried to stop it and it rolled on her and she sprained her wrist and got a black eye. She'll laugh about that someday.

You have to know where you want to go, be bold in your aspirations, understand social media and its impact on the business. You have to appreciate the importance of sales. It is not just about the product and a great-sounding station — you have to sell it.

You have to be willing to try a little bit of everything and see what works for you. I have a neighbor who is trying to find his gig in sports broadcasting, and those are tough assignments to find. They are dream things to do, and somebody will do it — and that could be you.

Radio Ink: What do you miss?

Reese: I miss it every day. I miss the people and the interaction with those at Hubbard and Bonneville. I miss talking to people on the phone. I look forward to it ringing these days. I'm doing some consulting, none of which is broadcasting. I had a great gig for about 18 months at a senior housing project, and it was fun talking to people, but it's nothing like the 30 years I put into the broadcasting business. I miss people the most.

Radio Ink: Could you see yourself doing something again in radio?

Reese: I don't know why anyone would hire a tired old guy like me. I think it's highly unlikely, but it's something I would welcome. I love the business. It was extraordinarily good to me. It made life fun almost every day I got up to go to work.



“Bruce fostered a culture at Bonneville, and then Hubbard, of winning as the norm. His stations excelled in ratings, revenue, and recognition. Bonneville and Hubbard stations routinely outperformed the industry in winning Crystal, Marconi, and National

Edward R. Murrow awards. Bruce had an intelligent, low-key, no-drama management style. He regularly challenged us.

“Like all really good broadcast executives, Bruce celebrated each of our wins. But here's what set him on a higher plane: The biggest failure on my watch was our experiment in journalism, Washington Post Radio. After we put it out of its misery and stopped the gusher of red ink, Bruce called Joel and me and told us that even though we failed, he was glad we tried it. ‘If you don't try new things, you stultify.’ When was the last time you saw a traditional broadcast executive say that? (Now I can reveal the rest of the story: I thought he was calling to rip us a new one!)

“Bruce hired good people, let them run their local markets, treated employees very, very well, and made sure we had the tools we need to succeed. He pushed us to innovate, embrace digital, and set our own goals even higher.”

Jim Farley
Former VP/News & Programming
WTOP/Washington, DC

Here Are Our Previous Lifetime Leadership Recipients:

Cathy Hughes
Dan Mason
Charles Warfield
Jim Thompson
Dick Clark, Frances Preston
Jerry Lee
Ed McLaughlin
Bill Burton
Gordon Hastings
Gary Fries and Eddie Fritts
Lowry Mays
Ralph Guild