



THE SECRET CODE TO HIGHER T.S.L.

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Pop Quiz! When is the last time you went through your *entire* music library and reevaluated your tempo Sound Codes for all the songs? Hmmm?

Recently, while on the road conducting a music test for one of our clients, the Program Director and I were discussing issues he wanted to address with the respondents sitting in the hotel ballroom. The subject of tempo came up. The PD was concerned that his audience might feel the station was “too hard”, since he had recently added some more up-tempo songs to the station library. He also told me that their Time Spent Listening was dropping. Wait’ll you hear what happened when we posed some direct questions about the stations tempo to the respondents!

Toward the end of the night I asked the audience “*is the tempo of the station’s music overall too hard?*” Only two people raised their hands! The PD, GM, and MD were standing in the back of the room watching. All were *stunned* at the reaction. As a researcher, my *next* question was to ask the obvious... “*Who feels the station is too soft?*” About 75% of the room raised their hands. Wow! I looked to the back of the room and the PD, GM, and MD had turned ghost-white and looked ready to faint. The PD later asked me “*How could we be too soft? We play a ton of Classic Rock music.*”

You’ve heard the term a hundred times that “perception is reality.” Case in point. Another adage I could throw at this situation is “you can’t see the picture from inside the frame”. Think about it. The room is filled with 112 of the stations audience. Over *half* of them are P-1 to the radio station. Many of them have been listening to the station for years.

Fast-forward to the results of their music test. We tested 700 songs that night. The #1 song was certainly up-tempo - “*Pour Some Sugar On Me*” by Def Leppard. That was also the top testing song for Women and P-1s to the station. For the record, the station is positioned as *Classic Hits* not *Classic Rock*. Here’s the top 10 testing songs from that music test.

| RANK | ARTIST | TITLE |
|------|--------------|------------------------|
| 1 | Def Leppard | Pour Some Sugar On Me |
| 2 | Queen | Bohemian Rhapsody |
| 3 | Aerosmith | Sweet Emotion |
| 4 | Queen | We Will Rock You |
| 5 | Van Halen | You Really Got Me |
| 6 | Supertramp | Take The Long Way Home |
| 7 | Boston | Long Time |
| 8 | Kansas | Dust In The Wind |
| 9 | Phil Collins | In The Air Tonight |
| 10 | Beatles | Come Together |

As I probed the audience further that night in an open-forum style discussion, here are some verbatim quotes:

“They’re choking me to death with my favorite songs”

“The station just seems to drag at times”

“They need to kick it up a notch”

“Some of the songs we’re listening to used to seem harder years ago”

Here’s my point. As songs become more familiar, and with the effects of time, the perception of tempo seems to soften. Some songs by groups like Journey, John Mellencamp, Van Halen, and Steve Miller used to be considered Rock songs only. Now you hear them in grocery stores while you shop in the Produce section. Times have changed.

Songs that you may have added to your library 5 to 10 years ago were likely perceived as ‘harder’ at the time you gave them their initial tempo Sound Codes. Today, songs like Boston’s “More Than a Feeling” are almost ballads. It’s not the Hard Rock song it was back in 1978 when it first hit the radio airwaves. Using a 1-to-5 scale for ‘hardness’, what would you say that song is today? I’d say it’s about a “2”. The PD had it as a “4” in Selector®.

Many songs by artists like America, Doobie Brothers, The Eagles, Supertramp, and REO Speedwagon are now perceived as near-ballads. They are not mid-tempo songs that they once may have been coded. Peter Frampton’s “Show Me The Way” may have been a “4” or “5” in tempo 20 years ago. Today, the song is probably a “3” in this station’s case.

Researcher’s Observation: After careful thought about this situation it seems that the audience may become “bored” with some of the slower/mid-tempo songs if they hear too many of them, forcing them to tune to other stations for a “pick-me-up”. Having your core audience leave your station in search of something you aren’t giving them will certainly lower your TSL. I’m not suggesting you drop those high-testing slower songs since clearly the listeners still love them. However, it’s your job as the PD to know the limit as to how many of these songs to play each hour without pushing away your core audience.

Here’s an exercise you can do with another one of your Programming staff. Get your last hook tape from your latest music test. Roll the tape, and at the same time both of you listen to each song hook and write down your choice for a tempo Sound Code for each song. Then, compare notes AND see which number you have assigned to the song in your scheduling software. Revise as needed.

Revisit your tempo Sound Codes and maybe you’ll find that the changes you make may freshen up your radio station...Hopefully this exercise will be helpful to you. Kick it up a notch...Bam!

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