

Tales from Tasmania – Never take “No” for an answer . . .

or . . . How I outwitted Communist China

by **Bob Young**

In the first two of these columns we tackled the subjects of “love in cooking” and “following your dreams” – and this month we complete the trio of cliches with “never take no for an answer.”

If your instinct tells you your goal and your way of getting there are both correct, don't let the doom-sayers stand in your way. Persevere and you will win.

I once worked for a radio station in Hong Kong that was staunchly anti-communist in the days before China opened the bamboo curtain. Owned jointly by a local businessman and former actor William Holden, the station was fiercely independent and strongly pro-democracy.

Petty ruling calls for ingenuity

Its stand was tested during one of the bouts of Communist rioting in Hong Kong – on one night only there were more than 45 bomb attacks throughout the then-British Colony, and many personalities on the radio station were targeted in vitriolic attacks.

In a petty gesture, China banned our radio station from broadcasting live the Macau Grand Prix, a major sporting event which took place in the neighbouring enclave of then Portuguese Macao.

That got my back up and made me determined not to take no for an answer.

A week before the event I knew there was a private function on for the drivers who were a mix of local and international racing identities. After some generous hospitality I put my case to the drivers and persuaded each of them to answer three questions on tape:

1. You've won, how do you feel?
2. You've finished in the top placings, how do you feel?
3. You didn't do too well, what went wrong?

Remember these were the pre-high tech days – no mobile phones, no internet, just ingenuity.

Armed with the tapes, the next thing was to compile lots of sound tape clips of racing cars zooming by – and the final step was to have our technicians pick up a very weak local radio signal Radio Macau was using to broadcast the event locally – a signal not heard commercially in Hong Kong.

On the day of the race, the duty announcers were briefed never to say “we cross to Macau for a report” but only to say “we cross to Bob Young for an update on the Macau Grand Prix” Even the term “cross” was a bit of an exaggeration as I would be sitting in the studio right next to them.

The scenario then was for me to sit in a recording booth which had been wired up to the Radio Macau signal, make copious notes, rush into the studio next door for a “cross,” put on the sound effects tapes and re-state what had just been described by Radio Macau.

Scooping the local broadcasters

After many such broadcasts, the Chinese technicians in Macau made a major electronic sweep of the race circuit trying to find us. They were not entirely convinced we were there – until at the end of the race when we started broadcasting our taped interviews.

Some of the drivers had been really inventive, especially those who had not done well talking about slipping gears and other technical matters. We actually put our “interviews” with the winners to air before Radio Macau.

I had kept all this planning from the bosses of the radio station so they would not be implicated in any possible follow-up action. I would carry the can. Even the bosses rang up after it was all over saying how well it had been covered – but how did we do it. I said “you don't want to know.” They agreed that was probably best.

The opposition station was spitting chips – but such was the good natured rivalry that through gritted teeth they privately congratulated us.

The amazing thing was that none of the 27 or so drivers spilled the beans.

At the end of the day there were no recriminations – the station after all had the rights for the broadcast, but couldn't do the broadcast after China withdrew necessary technical support. So we had in reality permission, had paid for the rights – so went ahead and did it.

A small achievement in the scheme of things, but one that does demonstrate if you know something is right, your instinct tells you to go for it ... then if you refuse to take no for an answer, you'll find a way.