

S6 E32: Adapting To The New Normal

(AJ II & Leah A. Henry)

Previously recorded on Monday, April 6th, 2020

0:00 AJ: This week on *Max Out Time*, 93.9 executive producer and radio personality, Leah A. Henry. A P-S-A to stay home but stay tuned.

0:13 Intro Song: 'For The City'

0:51 AJ: Leah, how are you today?

0:53 Leah: I'm doing well, how are you?

0:56 AJ: I'm doing fine, you know just trying to get adjusted to everything. I wanted to talk with you because I am an avid listener, I've told you this already of your segments on WKYS, sound of the city, you are the sound of the DMV [Leah: Thank you.] and I wanted to speak with you for a very long time now. Under the circumstances we couldn't get together and do this in person but I got you on the phone right now.

1:20 Leah: Absolutely, we got to make it work with what we can do right now.

1:23 AJ: I really appreciate you coming on. Honestly, I just want to talk you about how your influence in DC and the DMV and the air waves, how that's been impacted by this virus. When did you realize that this was so serious and important?

1:39 Leah: It got to a point where we realized that we as media, we had to shift the way we do things. I haven't been in the media that long, going on four years in the Fall. But one thing that I think that anyone who is a veteran in the media will tell you, media really don't stop for much. The way that we operate, pretty much operate no matter what happens. I knew that this started to become serious when I started to see TV stations and I started to see radio station preparing to adjust to this.

2:19 AJ: What is the adjustment?

2:20 Leah: Well I mean literally, snow, rain, hell freezes over, it doesn't matter. Most media outlets are operating in normal capacity, regardless. If you watch the local news, most of the talent aren't even in studio, they are at home [AJ: Exactly.]. That's the case for radio right now as well, most of our talent are home, working. Nobody in radio could have ever imagined this being the type of condition we would be under. I think that when I started seeing media companies really taking the steps to do something they've never done before, I think that's when I realized, plus schools closing, you know what I mean.

3:03 AJ: You've brought up a great point. Rain, sleet or snow, they'll put you out in a hurricane. But, the Coronavirus comes and you got to go home and do your thing from the house.

3:13 Leah: Right, right, and that was the indicator for me because I always looked at my job as one of those that is like yep even though everyone else is here, there's always an exception. Including in media, you know what I mean everyone has to adjust so it's been interesting to watch because nobody could foresee what we are currently living through right now.

3:43 AJ: It's interesting because you are not a news anchor, you don't work at PBS news hour or one of the local stations. WKYS is more entertainment and hip hop, and you're an entertainment journalist with your own segments on entertainment and celebrity gossip. How have your segments transitioned?

4:01 Leah: I worked in TV, I was a producer in local news for three years while simultaneously doing radio. Entertainment certainly has my heart but I have a degree in journalism. So I always have a journalistic instinct no matter what and I try to use that even when I – that sets my entertainment apart from most people, because I am very serious about detail, and using my experience as a journalist to really give people the story. I think the difference in radio is you have to find a way to be entertaining but ultimately, I have always used my journalistic skills to report anything entertainment wise.

4:47 AJ: Come with the degrees and the experience, tell us what your motto is again?

4:53 Leah: Howard University the real HU, I won't tell you anything different, okay? Period!

4:59 AJ: I got you, I understand it, you know we got Howard through the blood up in here.

5:05 Leah: Okay, now what happened to you, we don't know, we won't talk about that.

5:08 AJ: I was the rebel child.

5:12 Leah: Black sheep.

5:13 AJ: [laughs] As long as I'm black, I'm cool.

5:17 Leah: Alright, alright. I'll let you have it. I went to Howard, graduated in 2016 and have been working like a slave since then.

5:27 AJ: That's what you got to do, two, three jobs, all in the media, behind the scenes, writing the rundowns, I see you.

5:34 Leah: Yeah, I mean there were some days I hated it, but I think in 20 years I'll look back and appreciate my versatility in media and the fact that I can do a lot of things that a lot of people can't at the same time, so I'm grateful for that.

5:49 AJ: How has some of your experience and your background, your education helped you with your segments and what you're doing now in your career?

5:56 Leah: I mean if you start in the beginning, I think that Howard taught me how to not take no for an answer. I've got a lot of no's. I'm not your cookie cutter on air, in any means, whether that be TV. I'm a plus sized black woman and in radio, I'm a plus size black woman. And even with social media and the way that we're connecting with people. 20 years ago most people didn't even know what Donny Simpson was like, unless they watched BET. But now you can look up anybody and see what they look like. It then becomes a certain fascination with the way you look. Maybe if I was thinner or I looked a certain way, maybe I would have more followers. But that also challenges me to attract an audience that purely based off of what I say or how I perform. So, I can appreciate an organic followership. With that being said, all that being said, I just think that different stances of my career have created different things for me. When I started working for the news station in DC, I really didn't want to do TV, when I graduated from college, I really wanted to be a radio personality because news is very very tight. The personalities were a challenge per se, they don't necessarily get to be themselves. I'm sure you see this every day in your work environment.

Most news talent have more personality off camera than they do on camera. But, their job is to deliver the news and people don't go to the news for your personality, they go to get the facts.

7:31 AJ: Like you were saying, you had to be more straight laced, it's got to be a little more serious. You can't be as free flowing or have as much fun per se.

7:38 Leah: Also I think the thing that TV robs you of depending on the format, is your opinion. I have a lot of those and I never wanted to give mine up to be anywhere. I will say this, the news realm is changing as well because they realize they have to start – right now most news programming is geared towards housewives sitting at home, you know what I mean older women sitting in their home. Especially local morning TV, that's my experience, I don't mean network. Most of that are geared towards the stay at home moms or the older retired couple watching TV –

8:21 AJ: Yeah, because who else is going to be home at 4 or 5pm or in the morning like that, you know?

8:27 Leah: Right, 4 am or 8 or when people are leaving to take their kids to school so you have to keep that in mind. I also think that TV and news in general is going to be stifled when it comes to millennials because a lot of us don't turn on the TV to watch the news, it comes to our phone quicker. So, now TV is going to have to come to a slow transition of how they're going to keep viewership with millennials. So with that being said, you know, I think you are starting to see where TV stations are starting to embrace a little bit more character and a little bit more personality from their talent. But that's a lot at a lot more slow of a pace that I prefer as a talent, I prefer to be myself a hundred percent. I knew that when I did radio, I could do that. I knew that what I said would be my opinion, that people will follow me based off my thoughts and views and that was something that was important to me. When it came to choosing a career, even though I was in school for journalism, that was the closest thing in my mind to doing what I wanted to do. That's why I kind of chose the path I did, when I graduated from school and I couldn't get a job at radio at first, I had to rely on my degree, which was journalism. I was an entertainment journalist, I was a producer of an entertainment show but as you know when you work in a newsroom, you can get dragged anywhere. So I started to do regular news as well while I was at the local station ABC.

10:03 AJ: Credit to you and a credit to Howard University. I am sure that you are well versed, I am sure that you are very prepared.

10:08 Leah: Well not necessarily because when I was in school, I didn't care for journalism, it was a learning curve for sure. Especially because I was a producer, I never want to be a producer anyway, I still don't. I am one but that's the reality of where I sit, I had to learn how to produce because when we were in school, most journalism courses or schools teach you how to be on air, they rarely teach you to be producers, directors. I'm sure other schools with more vast programmes do, but I went to Howard which had limited resources which I appreciate because Howard makes bred journalists with minimal resources. Imagine that we had some of the opportunities that some of the other schools have when they have these big production studios and everyday they're making newscasts and that wasn't the reality at Howard. So when I did get out there, I had to learn, because I didn't have formal news internships, I did radio internships because I wanted to be a radio personality. It was a learning curve for sure but I had my degree to give me the base for that, but I wasn't

prepared to be a producer. A lot of my career got to do with God, not just with what Howard did.

11:26 AJ: For someone like you, how do you communicate effectively? And when I say that, I mean on TV we wake up, we see the bright lights, we see your face, you can look straight into camera and talk to the viewer. How different is that in radio? Especially right now, think about it, you're trying to communicate some very important details that are surfacing that could be make or break.

11:51 Leah: I try to do my best, I try to make sure I have all the details and I try and reiterate it in a way that I feel like my listeners are going to perceive it. It's not something that I think too hard on. My biggest thing is being factual when I present things to people, and that goes back to me being a trained journalist, I don't like –

12:19 AJ: It goes back to day one.

12:21 Leah: Yeah, I don't like to be wrong. I'd rather be correct than fast. But sometimes in journalism, it's hard to do both, but--

12:28 AJ: Accuracy is key.

12:30 Leah: Right, due to the laid back nature of radio, it's a little bit easier because I've been in a newsroom where breaking news is happening and you're trying to get as much information as things are rapidly changing. I haven't been in a situation like that per se in radio because a lot of the time, in radio we're often waiting for news outlets to regurgitate the information. Being in TV, you're giving that information out, because it's a totally different ballgame, radio and news, especially because I work at a hip hop station.

13:03 AJ: How are you able to do this job? Now I watch Breakfast Club and they've been at home for weeks. Tell us about how social distancing and how the virus has impacted just the way you do things?

13:17 Leah: Well, it hasn't changed much for me because I still got to go in today because I'm still the producer –

13:24 AJ: Be careful!

13:25 Leah: Right, everybody can send prayers for me.

13:29 AJ: We need the prayer warriors right now.

13:32 Leah: Okay, and shout out to all the essential workers who are genuinely essential and have to put their lives at risk because this is real.

13:40 AJ: And should be getting a stimulus on top of a stimulus, on top of a stimulus, but that's for a different day--

13:44 Leah: And a bonus! And all that okay! Period! Don't get my started because I'll fool around and I have a job tomorrow. Most of our talent are at home, the main talent are at home. As a producer, I take that L, I don't have to come in.

14:02 AJ: As do I [laughs] I feel you, I'm there with you.

14:07 Leah: It's not an easy situation to be in, it's not luxurious, this is the not so fun part of what we do. Especially when you put into perspective, your life is at risk. We don't know

what the virus is, everyone is susceptible because we don't have a vaccine. This is really the ugly part of our job where we are forced to go in spite of probably what's best for us, which is for us all to stay home. I was reading an article that said the corona task force is suggesting that for the next two weeks people don't go to grocery stores. Which is the only essential place that most people, if you're not an essential personnel, would be allowed to go and they're telling you to not go there. It's still not safe.

14:53 AJ: It's not safe at all, believe me, they ain't washing their hands, they ain't got gloves on. Some of these places, people walking up behind you and getting their eggs while you trying to get your eggs. It's it's a mess.

15:03 Leah: There's no guarantee and this part of the job sucks because you know sometimes you are forced to pick your job over you, you know what I mean? But, that's the reality of being a quote on quote essential worker. I don't have the luxury of staying at home, some of my co-workers do and so it it it has been interesting. Again, my time in media, I would have never thought that I would have turned on the TV and seen anybody in the workplace literally in their homes doing their jobs for a TV station or a radio station the on airs being at home.

15:50 AJ: Like literally in their living rooms, in their kitchen.

15:53 Leah: Chilling! Chilling on their couch doing their job. Yeah for sure.

15:59 AJ: Some of them rolling out of bed.

16:00 Leah: Yeah literally, so it has been an interesting experience for sure.

16:08 AJ: For people who are staying at home and are sheltering in place and who are kind of going crazy and are going through it right now. If you are on the airwaves, and you are telling them your advice, your Leah's lemonade, what are you saying to those people once you get on the air?

16:24 Leah: Stay at home because I want to have a summer.

16:25 AJ: And a fall, and a winter.

16:28 Leah: Right because the reality is that it can be a long time. That's the only advice I can say, is stay at home. I know you want to get out, I know it's annoying to stay inside your home but being inside the four walls of your house is better than being inside the four walls of a hospital.

16:49 AJ: Say that again?

16:50 Leah: Being inside the 4 walls of your home is better than being inside the 4 walls of a hospital.

17:05 AJ: I never even looked at it like that.

17:07 Leah: Because I promise you that people in there would prefer to be at home right now, you have to think about those things. I think being someone that has to go out to work just put things into perspective. I want to be at home, that's the honest to God truth, I don't want to go to work. I don't feel safe going to work, it's not something that I prefer to do, it's something that I I don't really have a choice to do. I would give a lot to work from home but that's not an option for me. I hear people, I get it, I'm sure it's also easier said than done

when you're home and you're just staring at the wall. I've been sick before and been in the house for a long time and you just like, I want to get out. It's different when you don't have a choice but I encourage people to stay home, it's not worth it. Frankly, the more we keep going out, the more you're going to be in your house anyway.

17:45 AJ: That's the lemonade for today y'all. I mean Leah, you're a voice for the people, you're on the frontlines, you're communicating over the airwaves what people need to hear. I really appreciate your insight and I really appreciate your perspective on all these things, and how you have dealt with these trying and uncertain times and it's really scary but you're doing a really great job. As always my special guest, Leah. A Henry, you're going to leave us with one last thing?

18:12 Leah: Yeah, just make sure you follow me on social media, that is Leah A. Henry @leahahenry. Y'all just stay at home because I want to hurry up and get back to regular life because after this I'm taking a whole week off work because y'all don't deserve me.

18:38 AJ: [laughs] Where we going on vacation, where we going?

18:40 Leah: So I have a vacation planned for June, right now. Uh no, no, no.

19:00 AJ: Aw you might want to go ahead and yeah. Rona might have something to say about that.

19:06 Leah: Uh well right now we're going to keep that vacation in tact until the very last minute. When it gets cancelled or whatever then we will think of something else, but in the meantime, that's what we're going to do, okay.

19:13 AJ: Well keep doing your thing, we hope and we're praying for you and everyone at your station that you can really make it to that vacation wherever it might be. I don't know if it's Turks and Caicos?

19:20 Leah: Turks and Caicos.

19:22 AJ: Turks and Caicos or an exotic island. I hope you're not getting on a cruise ship.

19:23 Leah: Yeah, that's actually what the plan was so we'll see.

19:26 AJ: We're going to pray for you.

19:27 Leah: Sure, go ahead, send up a prayer, I need as many as I can get honey.

19:31 AJ: We're going to do it. Thank you so much for being with me.

19:34 Leah: Thank you for having me, appreciate it, stay safe.

19:37 AJ: Please continue subscribing at *Max Out Time With AJ II* on iTunes. Add @leahahenry on social media. Like me on Facebook, follow on IG and Twitter, and rate and review this podcast on all podcast streaming services today, AJ out!

19:53 Outro Song: 'For The City'

20:20 –End–

[Max Out Time W/ AJ II](#)

