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## Faster Better Than Sooner

If you have ever wanted to know how it happens to you, here comes your chance. This is how you get news that changes your life.

August 16th has always been the day Elvis Presley died to me. That's because I am one of those people who grew up in the south and was raised on the King. I loved his music and even some of the movies. But all that ended this last year for me. Now I will never forget August 16th for an entirely different reason. That was the day my youngest son was diagnosed with Leukemia.

His mom found a lump on the top of his head. We took him to our doctor and he scheduled an appointment with Ultrasound Specialist at Carolinas Medical Center in Charlotte. At the same time, our doctor told us he was scheduling an appointment for John-John with a surgeon. That was the first time (but not the last) that we shuttered at the thought of something so serious. My boy was three years old.

We went to the Ultrasound Specialist. They said, "This is no problem. It is not cancer, but you will want to have the bump removed. Keep your appointment with the surgeon." I could feel my heart beating faster and faster.

After the surgery, we were asked to call for results on Monday morning. Unfortunately, they don't tell you if you kid has cancer. They said there were no results yet. Then, they called our pediatrician. He called us right back and said, Get here with John faster better than sooner. We knew that was not good.

You feel like everything except fear ends with a thud at moments like this. Forget work. Forget everything you ever thought was important. The fight of the century had just started and our little boy was in the center ring. We met doctors and medical professionals who are truly gifted. We found out that you cannot catch Leukemia early. There are no phases. You either have it or you don't, and John had it.

Many folks that work in radio recognize that having a child with Leukemia is something that could happen to any of us. Some of you are out there raising serious money for St. Jude. Great call letters, great PDs, great market managers. It is unlikely even if you've gone to St. Jude that you can recognize how it feels to have a child with Leukemia or how thankful we are to the many people who work hard to cure it as doctors, nurses and scientists or program directors, morning talents or market managers raising money for their fight. On August 16, 2004 we became the hopeless that realize that we are powerless in the outcome of John's cancer. We have had to learn that there is hope and pray that John recovers and has a normal life. We have watched John be more of a man that I will ever be."

One of the first things that the childhood cancer specialist told me is that they didn't put any cancer-fighting drugs in the children's spines years ago. Kids were just dropping dead when the experts thought they were cured. It was the research that led them to start shooting their spines with cancer-fighting drugs immediately. That one action has saved the lives of so many children. Hope. That is what the research gives families like ours. Faith that tomorrow is another day closer to cleaning out this unfair and unjust deadly problem for children like my son John.

So, as St. Jude Children's Hospital gets together with Country Radio this January, don't start thinking it is too late for your station to do something to help. Call St. Jude and see how your station can get involved!

I am writing this from a hospital room in something they call Seven Tower at Carolina Medical Center. This is the childhood cancer wing. John is sleeping beside me. We are in phase 2 of treatment that will last 130 weeks. This is week 20 for us. We come every three weeks for a four-day hospital stay. He takes continuous drugs to fight cancer. Without the giving hearts of program directors, marketing directors, general managers, sales managers and more, my son might not live. Thanks to those who are involved many more sons like John will get hope and a fighting chance to beat Leukemia and other childhood cancers. It makes that big a difference.

Even though we are not at St. Jude, I know the work they are doing is helping my son and can help insure that every child has opportunity to live. St. Jude shares their research with hospitals like ours (and yours) to give our children hope and a better tomorrow.

I have had some great ratings parties in my programming career. I have enjoyed the ups and downs of Arbitron (haven't we all). I know what it is like to work for a company that is focused on increasing revenue and bottom-line performance for shareholders. There is nothing wrong with any of that. However, think about adding a St. Jude radiothon to what your station does in 2005. You will come away from it amazed. Your staff will come away from it feeling like they did something important. It will be a great team-building exercise for your staff. Everyone in your market will be stunned with how important and caring your station is for children and families. It will have a strong impact on listeners and advertisers. And families.

While your ratings trends and monthly cash-flow statements are important and essential to keeping the j-o-b, doing something like St. Jude can lift your station and make it unforgettable to your listeners and to the market you are in today. That is how you become a legend. You build something that lasts.

The St. Jude Radiothons done by Country Radio are just part of what makes Country Music, Country stations and Country listeners amazing. I never underestimate the power of this audience. I hope you won't either.

One last word from what John calls the "hostible" (hospital): Thank you from our family for supporting great causes like St. Jude. Happy New Year!