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Aiming for Mainstream, Mediation Debuts on AM Radio

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LOS ANGELES — If you need further proof of mediation burrowing its way into mainstream culture, just turn your radio dial.

On Sunday, Los Angeles mediator Lee Jay Berman's program "Talk It Over" — one of several online conflict resolution shows — crossed over to the airwaves of the American General Media radio network.

The lively show, which has been streaming and podcasting online since August 2007, features Berman playing the straight man to jocular co-hosts, comedian Louise Palanker and journalist Diane Dimond.

"As far as I know, we're going to be the only weekly radio talk show on the air that features a mediator," Berman said in preparation for the on-air move.

Berman and Palanker broadcast the show from Los Angeles, while Dimond joins them from a studio in New York.

The trio examine news items and field listener calls to help people understand and resolve disputes.

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ROBERT LEVINS / Daily Journal

"As far as I know, we're going to be the only weekly radio talk show on the air that features a mediator," said Lee Jay Berman co-host of "Talk It Over."

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In one recent episode, Dimond recounted a news story in which model Naomi Campbell berated an airline pilot and the police over lost luggage.

"How do you talk it over with someone like that, or do you just stand back?" Dimond asked her cohosts.

"The first thing you have to do is not be a threat to them," Berman advised. "Then, the next thing you've got to do is talk to them calmly and say, 'I really want to help you, but I'm having trouble understanding exactly what you need.'"

"Our inclination is to escalate it," rather than try to calm the other person down, Palanker said with a laugh.

Later, a listener asked how to broach a sensitive subject with his wife. The man said he had heard a rumor that his ex-wife was dead,

and he wanted to find out if it was true, but his current wife didn't want him to look into it.

Berman advised the man to tell his wife, "You know you're my life ... but you have to understand, this person was married to me, and I ought to do something about it — say a prayer or do a ritual."

The process of giving such advice is similar to mediating, Berman said of the program.

"The talk show itself is very much like sitting in a caucus with one party in a mediation, having a discussion with them about how to resolve the dispute from their perspective," Berman said. "That's the mode that I'm in when I'm talking to the callers."

The hosts were put together by Berman's wife, music promotions executive Trish Bock, who is also the show's producer. She shopped it around to various radio stations

and networks.

The show will debut in a 2 a.m. Sunday time slot on KERI 1180 AM, a Central Valley affiliate of American General Media that boasts an audience of over 5 million listeners on its website. Berman said the show may spread to the network's other stations in coming months.

"What was really appealing about the 'Talk It Over' program was the fact that, in the day and age of talk radio where there's a lot of negativity ... they listen," said KERI's programming director, Chris Squires.

Berman, a mediation trainer and lecturer at Pepperdine University School of Law's Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution who has traveled internationally to teach conflict resolution skills, said the radio show is yet another project intended to spread the gospel of

dispute resolution.

"One of the slogans of the talk show is, 'We're solving the world's problems two people at a time,'" he said. "I think we're doing it stronger than that, because if we've got 100,000 people listening to us when we're on the air, that's 100,000 people who learn how to approach conflict in a way that's less threatening, and more effective, and can be more respectful."

Listeners can still podcast the show any time at talkitoverradio.com.

And if "Talk It Over" doesn't fully satisfy listeners' cravings for conflict resolution advice, there are several similar shows available online, including Clovis-based mediator and mediation trainer Douglas Noll's eponymous program at thedougnollshow.com.

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