

December 6, 2024

An Open Letter to KZYX Programmers from Former Program Director Alicia Bales

Dear Programmers,

I was extremely dismayed to hear the news on Monday that KZYX Operations Director Rich Culberston has been abruptly fired by Interim General Manager Dina Polkinghorn.

Rich has held the station together every day, around the clock, through thick and thin, for over 17 years. He has been a rock, supporting each and every one of us when we needed him. He has built an ingenious broadcasting infrastructure that includes three transmitters, four fully equipped studios around the county, and a sophisticated online system that weaves together live, satellite, streamed and downloaded programming 24 hours a day, every day.

But you know this, because as a programmer you have benefitted from Rich's work and steadfastness.

To make matters worse, Dina has directed Programmers and Staff to keep all discussion of 'personnel' matters off the air, and to cut off any callers who try to talk about what happened. This is blatant censorship. It's an effort to suppress discussion of a critical issue important to everyone who cares about the station: how it treats its employees. The only people who have any knowledge about the 'personnel issues' are management and the board, and they are expressly prohibited from talking about it in public. All the rest of us are free to share our concerns and opinions about the station's actions, and in fact a healthy station would encourage it.

Here's the thing. At times like this, everyone will ring their hands, wonder if there is some 'other side of the story' that no one is telling us, and generally feel powerless about what to do. There's a structure, after all. The Manager has the power to hire and fire staff, right? The Board can't do anything but support her, right?

In fact—and I have seen this with my own eyes—station management works to make sure that only one person applies for each board seat every cycle to avoid elections and 'save money.' It's likely NOT ONE of the current board members has actually been elected by KZYX Members. To top it off, Dina was the board president, and appointed herself as Interim General Manager after Marty Durlin left without any kind of open hiring process. So now, station leadership is basically unelected and self-selecting, without transparency or accountability to the community.

But the truth is, the REAL power at the station is YOU. Dina can't carry out her censorship without YOUR participation. You are the ones with your hands on the controls. You can simply refuse to cut people off when they call in, and refuse to be complicit in having your own voice silenced.

Noncooperation with immoral leadership is the most powerful thing people can do. When we join together to stand up for someone who is being wronged, we can and will make lasting change. Use the airwaves to inform the listeners, let them know what's going on. Refuse to participate at the station until management does the right thing and rehires Rich. If KZYX Programmers decided to demand Rich's immediate reinstatement, and refused to create any more content for the station until he is returned, I believe you would prevail.

When I was fired last year, it was clear they weren't going to stop with me, and it definitely won't stop with Rich. Dina is a control freak, and she is over her head in defensive panic mode, so she may actually start firing Programmers who disobey her. I am sorry to say, I doubt the KZYX Board of Directors will step in to protect you. After I was fired, Dina and the Board re-wrote the station handbook to remove the grievance procedure for staff and volunteers. The writing was on the wall then as it is now, and it will take courage to do the right thing.

If they ARE crazy enough to start firing Programmers, we at KMEC 105.1FM in downtown Ukiah will welcome any and all of you to our airwaves to continue your programs as K-Z-Y-Exiles until the station addresses its problems and rights the ship.

We are facing really dark times in the next four years. We will be forced again and again to confront our own comfort and take collective action to protect the vulnerable from harm. KZYX will be more necessary than ever, and that includes competent leadership with a commitment to fairness, community service, and especially FREE SPEECH.

Let's start now, and practice standing up for what is right. Reinstatement Rich Culbertson now.

In Solidarity,
Alicia Bales