

Meet the Personalities 002 Bill Handel

Podcast Transcript

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Host: Tom Smith

Production: Gil Perez



Bill: With a radio program or a radio campaign, you're talking to the world and especially when you're dealing with a station like KFI. It's 50,000 watts, it's a blow torch, it's heard all over. Not only does it work but the ratings, its a million and a half people, it's a lot of people. So the market has to be crafted, the commercials have to be crafted very carefully.

Tom: *Meet the Personalities* is brought to you by LA Radio Specialist. Learn more about working with the very personalities you hear from within these podcasts at LARadioSpecialist.com. LARadioSpecialist.com, impactful marketing programs driven by influential personalities and the power of sound.

Tom: Welcome to Meet the Personalities, the Podcast where we sit down with radio personalities for a candid talk about their take on the business of radio. I'm your host Tom Smith, LA Radio Specialist, and today I'm joined by the one and only Mr. Bill Handel. Bill has been a main stay on the radio stage both in the Los Angeles market as well as across the country. I'm absolutely flattered and honored to be speaking with him today. He can be heard...

Bill: As well you should.

Tom: Bill can be heard on his Monday through Friday on [KFI AM 640](#) here in the Los Angeles market from 6 to 10 a.m. and then on his nationally syndicated [Handel on the Law](#) on Saturdays here in the Los Angeles the Market from 6:00 to 11:00 but then at various time periods on Saturdays across the country. Bill, thank you so very much.

Bill: You're welcome even more.

Tom: Bill you started in radio by way of, I believe Handel on the Law.

Bill: Actually that was my first Job, was Handel on the Law. That came out of my legal practice, and my legal practice was third party reproductive law. That was my entire legal practice. Surrogate parenting, I started surrogate parenting in 1980.

I developed, wrote one of the very first surrogate mother contracts that existed. And I was a guest on so many shows over the course of the years that I finally was, five years later, asked to do my legal show. As a matter of fact if I remember, if memory serves, and I think this is right, program director of KBC at the time where I first started. I remember walking down the hall, and he turned to me and said, "Bill I've been listening to your interviews, you know you're better than half the people I have here." I said, "No, no, no, I'm better than all the people you have here."

And I got Handel on the Law. I've been doing that ever since. So starting at KBC and then coming here...well, actually I was fired from Handel on the Law in 1987, and then in '89, KFI brought me aboard to re-live, Handel on the Law. So I've been here at KFI since 1989. So that's how I got into radio. Everybody gets into it differently.

Tom: When you were a small boy, was radio ever part of the equation for your future?

Bill: No, I had no idea what radio was.

Tom: And where were you as a small boy? Where did you grow up?

Bill: I was born In Brazil, and I grew up, spent the first five years of my young life at that point, because zero to five is generally pretty young and came to the United States with my parents. My dad had been trying to come to the United States since 1945 when he was in Europe and had actually applied to immigrate. Took him 11 years to get in and he was in Brazil at the time and got his green card and took the entire family with him, and that's how I came here to Southern California. And I was five when I came here, and I've been here, Southern California ever since other than a stint in Canada where I went to school for a year and a half.

Tom: So then law school, was that always part of the equation for you?

Bill: No, God, no. Law school was simply a management decision. I had a pretty successful contracting business...

Tom: Contracting?

Bill: Yeah, contracting. Building.

Tom: Really?

Bill: Yeah, a building business, yeah. It was doing well, and my parents are Jewish, so the thought of not going to Law school or medical school was simply not possible. So, it literally was a management decision. It was either go to law school and suffer for three years or deal with a therapist for 40 years telling a therapist what I did to my mother by not going to law school.

I'm not kidding. So, I went to law school as it was a default just to get my parents off my back and when I graduated law school and took the bar... Well, when I graduated I literally took my diploma, gave it to them and said, "Now leave me alone. I'm done." And my parents always said, "You know, you always have to have something to bank on in case something goes bad. You always need a backup." And 1979 just as I was taking the bar, the construction business went into the toilet. So I had to start practicing law. And my mother, how many years did she call me five times a day saying, "I told you so."

Tom: That stopped?

Bill: Yeah, about 15 years later.

Tom: Wow! The law degree turned into surrogate parenting, how?

Bill: Yes, I became a lawyer in 1979 and one of my first cases was a surrogate contract. I had remodeled a very wealthy doctor's home, a reproductive endocrinologist. I totally screwed up the remodel. I mean it was hundreds of thousands of dollars over budget. You can be a bad contractor and be successful at the same time. I know that's hard to do, but I was able to pull it off.

So this doctor, remodeled his house, it was a disaster, it was hundreds of thousands of dollars over budget, and he said, "What do we do now?" And I said, "Well, you can sue me, but I have no assets. You sue me. I declare bankruptcy, we're still talking to each other across the table." So, I said, "Tell you what, I owe you a couple of hundred thousand dollars, let me work it off, I'll be your lawyer." And he said, "Okay, you can be my lawyer."

Tom: Seriously?

Bill: Seriously. At that time it was December, January of 1979 and in February of 1980 he called me and said, "I have a couple, and I couldn't do anymore in terms of surgeries, I told them to adopt, they ran an ad in the LA Times asking if anybody would carry their child via artificial insemination. The husband artificially inseminating 'the surrogate.'" And this doctor probably had the best legal mind of anybody I've ever met in my life.

He instantly realized the issues involved in paying a woman to carry a child for someone. Custody, there's paying a woman and then having her hand over a child is baby selling. She's a mother saying, "Here's a baby and I'll take some money," that's kind of illegal. And so he said, "Do you have a lawyer?" And they said, "No, I don't think we need one." He goes, "Let me call my lawyer." And he called me and said, "I want you to write the contract." And that's...

Tom: That is how you got into surrogate parenting?

Bill: That's how I got into surrogate parenting. In 1985, I mean, I was still working full time.

Tom: As a contractor?

Bill: No. The contracting business is done. I'm working full time as a lawyer. I have a full-time legal practice doing reproductive law. I had a partner who did all the other stuff, and I did only the reproductive, the surrogacy stuff. And I kept on doing that in 1986, spun off into a corporation which I still have, it's a surrogacy agency. It's no longer a legal agency, it's just one of the surrogacy agencies, and that came about in 1986, and I still have it with my partner. And 1993 I represented my last client when I started doing radio full-time Monday through Friday. Then I got out of the legal business of

representing clients.

Tom: All right, so while we're on business, the businesses of Bill Handel. We're a very busy individual, so busy that we're getting text messages in the middle of the podcast.

Bill: Let me turn off the sound here.

Tom: We have, currently running, we have the Monday through Friday show. We have Handel on the Law Saturday, we have the surrogacy business and then what we haven't even touched on yet is [Lake Industries](#), the umbrella company for [Platinum Cookware](#)?

Bill: Right.

Tom: Is there anything else I'm missing?

Bill: Yes, handelonthelaw.com which is a referral business that is an offshoot of the legal show where I have lawyers that pay into... It's a referral business, basically Yellow Pages. I have that and there is a new business I started with a group of lawyers, some friends of mine called [evolution-law.com](#) and these are very highly specialized legal business documents which, it's internet based. So imagine [LegalZoom](#) but squared, I mean, on steroids but only for business documents.

Only for small and medium businesses and we just started, I'm doing commercials, and that was about a year and a half in development. There's a Saturday show, there's a Monday through Friday show, there's a cookware business, there's a surrogacy business, there's a referral business, and there is EvolutionLaw, and that's it.

Tom: So what's a Bill Handel's day to day? You're here Monday through Fridays and Saturday. I guess you're not at the station on Sundays, what does your week look like?

Bill: All right, I wake up at 4:30, I used to wake up at 3:30 when the show started at 5:00. So I wake up at 4:30 in the morning, jump in the shower, put some clothes on, do the show, business meetings here at sales. I'm here until usually 12:00 here at the station and then I'll, in the afternoon go to my office at the surrogacy center. And I'm on the phone all day with my partners in the cookware business because that's based in Las Vegas and I try to go up there about once a month and spend a couple of days. Then three days a week I work out, and it's usually a disaster for me because I usually eat right before and right after so, I more than makeup for the workout in terms of calories, and then I hang out. Walk, go home, watch the news, go to bed.

Tom: And Bill Handel, the family man. You have two twin daughters?

Bill: Twin daughters, 21 years old. Yeah, one is a gamer who does video games, and she's actually monetizing it which is kind of neat, good for her. And the other one's in school and wants to be a sex therapist, and I'm not kidding. Okay, I'm serious about that. Truly wants to be a sex therapist when she grows up and finishes school.

Tom: The world of radio has changed a great deal and seems to be evolving constantly. We have terrestrial radio, the AM, FM. We have podcasting, we have stream, we have satellite, we have all kinds of different ways of distributing and consuming and leveraging content to make money.

What is your take on the big picture and what is your advice for, perspective, small medium sized business owner such as yourself that's considering, "Hey I want to maybe do a Bill Handel endorsement to help sell my products and services?"

Bill: You have to be pretty sophisticated I think. One of the things about radio is, it's broadcasting, it's not narrow casting. One of the things, internet is very narrow casting. You know exactly who's interested, you can know exactly who it's reaching. With a radio program or a radio campaign, you're talking to the world and especially when you're dealing with a station like KFI It's 50,000 watts, it's a blow torch, it's heard all over. Not only does it work but the ratings, it's a million and a half people, it's a lot of people. So the market has to be crafted, the commercials have to be crafted very carefully.

Tom: Any clients come to mind that have been wildly successful that have been a surprise?

Bill: Not surprised, some startups that came to me very, very early days, as in the first radio commercial they did, LegalZoom. Started with me when they had six employees I think, and I was with them for years and years and...

Tom: Was your first impression of that, This is going to be a home run?

Bill: As opposed to a home run, I thought I fit very well. Legal documents, I'm a lawyer, it was a good fit whether it was going to succeed or not. Actually, you know, I didn't even think in those days about the success or failure of a product. It was, "Do I fit in the endorsement product?" Does it make sense to have me do it? And then you guys worry about the success as far as the business is concerned.

Also, there was a company called BreathAsure years and years ago, that was wildly successful. I was their first... as a matter of fact, the people that owned it, they didn't even have any employees when I started doing commercials for them on KFI. They did it out of their garage.

Tom: And that's a very low ticket item.

Bill: They broke the mold in that they sold so many units and they instantly became a national vendor and what KFI did was actually kick start it. Whether it actually made sense on KFI after they started, I have no idea, but they stayed with me for years. I mean they ended up doing \$35, \$40 million a year and out of that, you can afford a couple of hundred thousand dollars.

So there was more of a loyalty factor I think. Instrumental in starting it, there's no question about it, but after it hit \$30, \$35, \$40 million, I don't know how much

influence I had, certainly in Southern California, but how many \$5 little BreathAsure packets can you sell?

There's a carpet cleaning company that started with me and has done well over the years. I think I was one of the first endorsers that did [Sleep Number beds](#) and that has been wildly successful, and I don't even know if they have endorsers in other cities.

There are a couple of endorsements I do, national endorsements where I'm the only one. Another one, [MasterServ](#), this is a story. George Anderson, who owned MasterServ inherited the business from his dad and liked the show and wanted to go into the copper repiping business, gambled the entire company on my endorsement. He said, "I think this is gonna work." Because it was a major campaign, serious, serious money and he stayed with it, and I had this wildly successful business with me doing the endorsement. Those are the huge success stories.

Tom: It sounded like the owner was a bit of a fanboy.

Bill: Oh yeah, absolutely. A lot of it has to do with... And this is personality radio endorsement a lot of it has to do with not only the fan. You have to be a fan of the show. And it becomes obvious when people who aren't fans of the show, how difficult it is to convince that perspective advertiser, "Hey, I've got Handel, I've Kobylt, and they're great, and if they don't know who we are, and I'm paying this much money?" Not understanding the power of endorsements.

Someone who has listened to the station and is a fan of the show instantly knows, "Okay, there's something here." Listens knows there's credibility, assuming that there is credibility and so it's a very different animal. The endorsed ads, specifically you, going to clients who know who we are, "Well, let's see, you've been doing this for years," how much easier is it to get in the door, "Hi, I'm KFI and I'm representing the Bill Handel Show or the Gary and Shannon Show." They'll talk to you.

I've had three cases in which people have died, and I'm not exaggerating, over the years. In which the person who was being buried had a radio in the casket tuned into KFI. They buried them, you could actually hear KFI coming out of the casket. I'm assuming the batteries died at some point.

Tom: Do you wanna cover anything that we haven't covered.

Bill: Yeah, sure. Where I met my wife?

Tom: Okay, where did you meet your wife?

Bill: It was a blind date.

Tom: Really?

Bill: Yeah. A gal who I had met and it lasted one month, this relationship because she

was out of her mind, she was a stalker. And about four years later, I had gone back to my girlfriend who I'd been living with for a bunch of years, and then I broke up with her and about four years after that, I call this crazy gal, the stalker and I said, "It's now time for me to finally, I want to meet someone, I'm in my mid-30s, it's time. And so, you're not the one I'm going to go out with, trust me." I literally said that to her. "Do you have any friends?" Because I knew she was a networker and she introduced me to Marjorie.

Tom: Seriously?

Bill: Yeah. She gave me Marjorie's phone number. Finding out later that she hated Marjorie, she met her through some friends, she hated Marjorie because Marjorie has never been dumped by a guy in her life. She's always been the dumper, the dumpor. Not once has she ever been dumped when she was dating.

In the meantime this other gal has never walked away. She's always been dumped every single time. So she figured it was a win-win when we broke up. Either I was going to be hurt, or Marjorie was finally going to get dumped, and when we got married, she went nuts. We couldn't invite her to the wedding. She was crazy. So that's how I met Marjorie, for real.

Tom: If it wasn't radio, what would you be spending the majority of your days and weeks on?

Bill: Probably on the businesses. But I have really good partners who really run it. My genius is to getting out of their way, and they do a terrific job. So, I'd be practicing law, probably staying in the active representing clients and surrogate parenting I would but, you know, radio's fun. It's fun. You're not grinding anything out. The hours are great. It's a four hour a day, how do you beat that?

Tom: It is fun.

Bill: Yeah and it's more money than I would ever make practicing law.

Tom: Really?

Bill: Oh yeah.

Tom: Mr. Handel, thank you so very much, it's a pleasure to work with you and thank you so much for joining me here for Meet the Personalities. That wraps up this installment of Meet the Personalities, again with Mr. Bill Handel, Handel on the Law, Saturdays across the country and The Bill Handel Show Monday through Friday from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. right here on KFI AM 640. I'm Tom Smith, this was Meet the Personalities and that was Mr. Bill Handel's take on the business of radio. Thanks so much.

Announcer: This episode of Meet the Personalities was recorded, produced and engineered by Gil Perez.

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