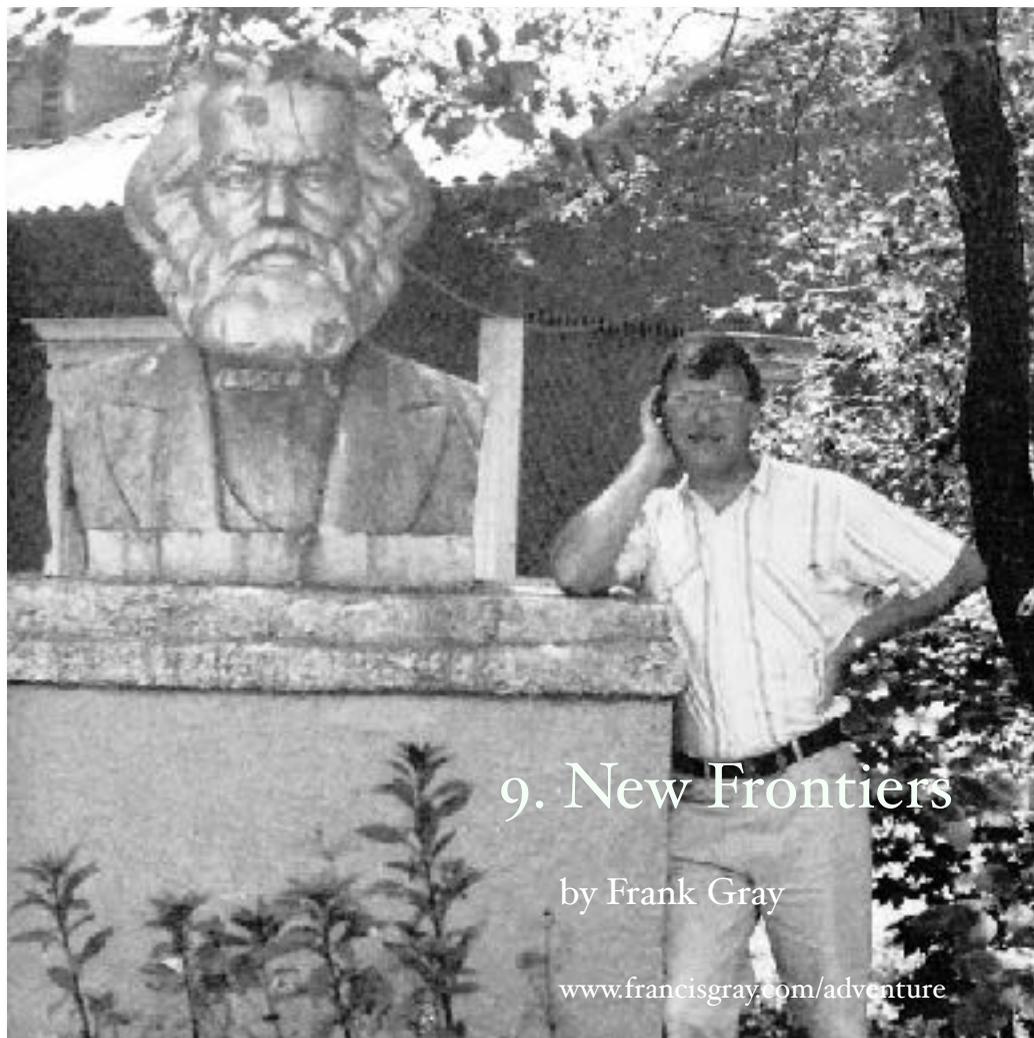


The Adventure

New Frontiers

# THE ADVENTURE



## 9. New Frontiers

by Frank Gray

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**The last quarter of the twentieth century was brimming with change, new opportunities and endless challenges. It was an exciting time to be around.**

Understanding this, we can better appreciate the opportunities that lay before us in FEBC and the kinds of decisions we needed to make. Some of these proved to be difficult as old services were terminated and new priorities established. With the turn of the millennium we also saw a tightening of funds which further added to the mix. The impact of these changes was being felt.

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I found myself at the leading edge of discussions on how we as an international broadcast network might address these many changes that were overtaking us. They would have a profound impact on how we prioritised our ministries and how we would need to embrace changes over which we had little control.

In 1996, at the Field Directors Conference in Tagaytay, Philippines, in my new role as V-P International Operations and Programming, I presented what became known as the 'Big Picture' document, to help define what FEBC of the future might look like. Some of these changes were already underway, but others were just around the corner. It was important to open up the various conversations needed to bring field directors on board. We would need their help to

facilitate the processes of change and participate with greater understanding in the international discussions.

It began by pointing out that we had inevitably inherited a system that had 'evolved but which now needs to be designed in line with today's realities and with an eye to the future.'

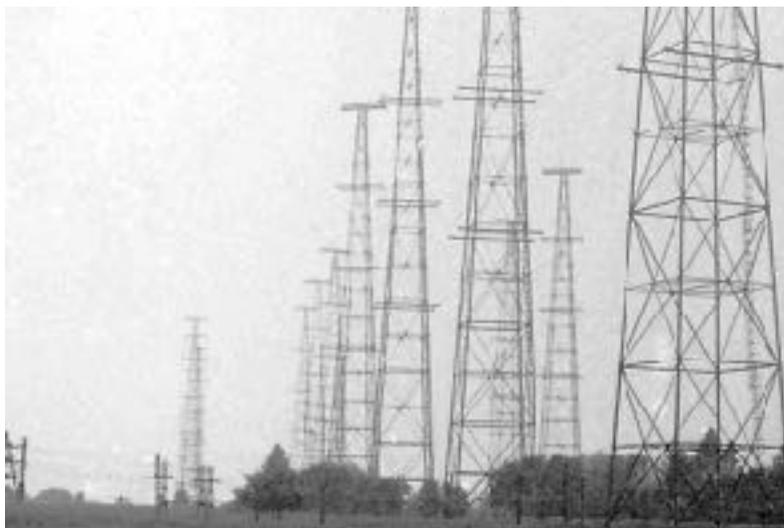
Here is a brief overview of some of the most significant changes.

#### Political Landscape:

1975 had marked the fall of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos to communist-driven regimes. This had a massive impact on the lives of hundreds of thousands of people as they fled to refugee camps and found a new life in countries around the world. It appeared that communism was tightening its grip. But within a few years we would be hearing of rumblings from the USSR that suggested that communism was losing that grip and people had lost faith in it. Could this really be true?

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Meanwhile China was opening up and allowing greater freedom, travel and trade. A few more years and we saw the impact of Glasnost and Perestroika encouraged by then president Mikhail Gorbachev and the ultimate collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The whole propaganda machine ground to a halt and the militant sounds of Radio Moscow were silenced.



Giant antenna arrays in Siberia

The conclusion of the Cold War that resulted had a huge impact on shortwave networks around the world and the sudden availability of airtime on powerful transmitters at knock-down prices.

Russian Director Rudi Wiens and I travelled to the former USSR on several occasions, but on one memorable visit we visited the transmitter sites, near Novosibirsk, used to broadcast Radio Moscow programs to the world. They used massive antenna arrays to direct their signals, but the transmitters themselves were ageing and had fallen silent. The station managers appeared anxious to do business and make

their transmitters available for our use. In another location a whole transmitter site – possibly used for jamming - was being offered for sale for as little as \$10,000. But the question that plagued us was “Who is it who is selling?”

### Decline in Shortwave

Political upheaval also gave way to significant changes in government regulations in many countries. Even India, where broadcasting had been a state monopoly, was now in the Spring of de-regulation and encouraging private radio and TV stations to flourish on a commercial basis.

De-regulation of the media in countries across the world made in-country local broadcasting on FM stations a very attractive alternative. It was all part of the worldwide trend to yield more power to the people rather than in central government – a welcome change.

The shift towards local radio throughout the region also meant that interest in shortwave listening would decline. BBC’s Dr Graham Mytton had theorised that the number of shortwave listeners in a country was inversely proportional to the number of local in-country options. In other words as listeners had more choice locally their need for listening to overseas broadcasts would decrease. It also meant that new opportunities were presenting themselves for ownership of local FM radio stations. Often these were in countries that had previously been ‘closed’ but where changes were now taking place at an unprecedented rate.

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One of the casualties of the shift toward local radio was the decline in listeners to the Overseas English service via shortwave from Manila. The numbers of letters received from listeners had fallen back considerably and questions were being asked. Interestingly the number of letters received had peaked to over 2000 in a month during February 1991, at the height of the first Iraq war. But by the mid 90s this had fallen back to 200-300 only. The decision made was to axe the Overseas English Service from Manila. It had been on air for close to fifty years and had a memorable past. It had also become a popular service in India in particular. Interestingly, even after it was terminated, the OED still continued to receive the same number of letters from listeners requesting literature, Bibles and people needing help.

This new trend away from shortwave listening also impacted FEBC's engineering planning. We needed to be in a position of knowing how to allocate transmission services, looking ahead as far as ten years to see what our needs might be by then. This was not easy but the basic conclusion was that while major language services would decline there would still be a need for shortwave services for minority people of which there were many scattered throughout Southeast Asia. We did not want them to be overlooked or forgotten, because they



Hmong believers in northwest Laos

depended on our broadcasts. Ours were likely to be the only broadcasts in their own mother tongue.

### Technological Innovation

'Digital' was the buzz word in the late 90s as we scrambled to understand it in its many dimensions. We convened the Broadcast Systems Conferences, a forum for engineers to review the wide-ranging impact of digital and how we might prepare for it.

Our initial emphasis was on digital production: Put simply the digital shift for studios meant that tape recorders would be phased out and replaced with computers and monitors. We spent a lot of time trying to provide direction on what software to use so that we had common standards. However, we soon discovered that the critical standards revolved instead around file types, file-naming convention and play-out automation. This was especially important as we now looked at ways of sending 'files' rather than tapes to the points of transmission. In some fields there was considerable reaction to making the shift away from traditional analogue recording and established broadcasters in particular felt uncomfortable about letting go of their trusted tape recorder and operator and instead editing on a computer.

Transmission was not affected too much except that we had to ensure that shortwave transmitters would be 'digital ready'. Satellite broadcasting was also something we tracked. It

looked for a time as though Worldspace might make a breakthrough with broadcasts from satellites but it was a technology that came too late and also had political overtones. We got as far as trying a few test broadcasts but never went any further.

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On one occasion we had some serious discussion with a few satellite engineers in Indonesia, who were also Christians and very supportive. We raised the question of whether with an Islamic government it would be difficult to use their satellite channels for

distributing Christian broadcasts. Their response was disarmingly simple 'It is simply data. No problem.'

The Internet was growing by leaps and bounds and this was the direction that media development was growing most rapidly. Its greatest strength was that it now made publishing, in a wide variety of forms, available to all. It would no longer be controlled by governments or the wealthy and powerful. This was the next greatest frontier since the development of the first printing press in Gutenberg around 1440. Moreover any 'publishing' on the Internet was global. Fully grasping the implications of this was mind-boggling.

The Internet posed a threat to traditional concepts of broadcasting, too, especially as Web 2.0 was rolled out with broadband and more recently the vastly improved transmission capacity of fibre-optic cables.

Mobile phone technology brought the phone and connectivity to remote communities that had never seen a phone before. Smartphones with full internet capability have taken this connectivity to a new level, bypassing the need for computers as we traditionally know them.

As radio broadcasters it has been difficult to assess the full impact of digital media and its implications. Uppermost was the need to understand the various digital media and how they might be used to augment the effectiveness of traditional radio broadcasts. The range of technologies and channels had suddenly increased dramatically and it was important for us to

understand this and the new dynamic. I became a dabbler to help understand these things experientially for myself.

Facebook and social networking have perhaps had the greatest impact. Their success has dictated changes in the way in which people interact. Their messages have become more personal, shorter and more visual. Their content has tended toward trivia, graphics and photographic images as well as video clips. Sadly, reliable factual information has been more difficult to discern amidst the plethora of comment and opinion, as well as mis-information, currently dubbed "fake news".

This is worrying for Christians who work in the media, especially, as they struggle to find an audience and look for meaningful things to say - briefly. Straight radio broadcasting used to be a lot easier and tended to encourage a faithful following. But it may not have had the potential reach and penetration that we now have through digital media and new technologies, where brand loyalty and in-depth contact with followers are more difficult to cultivate. Having said that, we can now 'broadcast' via the Internet, either in real time or on demand.

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## Missiological Challenges

I was conscious that we needed to be constantly assessing our contribution as radio people – mostly – in the worldwide mission of the church. Opportunities seemed to be popping up in many places at once while others seemed to be over-served and not needing FEBC as much as they once had. A classic example of this was to weigh the strategic importance of station KGEI's ministry to Latin America against the amazing opportunities that were opening up in countries that had previously been off-limits. These included Mongolia, Cambodia and the former USSR. Should we be re-focusing our priorities and allocation of limited resources?

The strength of the *Wb2* initiative was that it helped us focus on those language groups that had been by-passed or overlooked. Many of these were hard-to-reach people or forgotten people. Radio could be used for sharing the Gospel with them.

Through networking we were able to interact with mission agencies and nationals who represented other kinds of ministry. The AD2000 movement helped provide one of these forums. Research conferences were also included and we happily shared what we were doing through *Wb2* and other ventures. In fact, because of my attendance at many of these, I was often thought of as 'a researcher'. The Forum of Bible Agencies also were interested in radio and what they could learn from the *Wb2* partnership.

Bible societies were faced with many of the same challenges we had faced as broadcasters and wanted badly to exchange a competitive spirit with one of partnership and cooperation.

The 90s were the time of the 10-40 window. Developed by Luis Bush of Partners International it made a good effort to visually draw attention to the fact that the majority of unreached people groups largely inhabited that geographical area located between 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator, territory that was largely Hindu or Islamic in orientation. It provided a window of opportunity for less conventional forms of mission activity, encouraging new ventures such as tent-making, or Business-As-Mission as it became known.

As local radio opportunities emerged we made a conscious effort to think in terms of community. A background of shortwave had sub-consciously encouraged us to think of distance-based 'us' and 'them', something that was hard to

shake off. With a few exceptions, like the Philippines and S. Korea, listeners had historically been at a distance, geographically separate. Now we had the opportunity to live among those to whom we broadcast as members of their community.

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Other memorable events included the Wheaton '83 conference and Lausanne II in Manila in 1989. Wheaton '83 was described as an 'International Evangelical

Conference on the Nature of the Church'. It brought together a broad spectrum of evangelical theologians and missiologists with the central purpose of bringing Christians to a clearer

understanding of, and a fuller obedience to, our Lord's intention for His Church. Ed Dayton, the Vice-Chairman of Consultation II that addressed 'The Church in New Frontiers for Missions' had asked me to attend, and also to present my first ever paper on RICE, *Radio In Church-planting Evangelism*.

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It set out a strategy for using radio in missions purposefully. It was a great privilege. Dayton was also instrumental in providing funds for our first RICE consultation in Cambridge, UK and the publication of *Radio in Mission*, Lausanne Occasional Paper (LOP) #24, that led up to Lausanne II.

Lausanne II in Manila provided a good opportunity for both FEBC and *Wb2* to put on a good showing. FEBC-Philippines set up a temporary radio studio in the PICC (Philippine International Convention Center) where the conference was staged. It provided opportunity for taking the conference to the Filipino community through live interviews and recordings. The *Wb2* group also engaged in workshops at the conference. In one of mine I shared a platform with Dr Ralph Winter from the US Center for World Mission in Pasadena. It was also a wonderful opportunity to meet with a small delegation of pastors from Laos and a long-term correspondent from Mongolia, Caleb as we knew him, who had been in touch with us for several years.

## Training

With so much change underway it was critically important that we provided training events throughout FEBC as needed. As General Program Director programming-related training was my responsibility.

A year after we arrived in Manila I ran the first Programming Conference at CRCM in 1983. The focus was on Creativity. Guest speakers were Chris and Christina Rees, recommended to us by Rupert Neve of the Cambridge Radio Course in UK. Chris was a producer with the BBC. We had about thirty-five attending, many from the Philippines but a lot came from Asia and La Mirada. It proved to be a very profitable time (I can still remember those 'mountains of cream' we had to imagine in building pictures for the mind) and it was not long before we planned another, in February 1986. This would put an emphasis on research and the need to know and understand our audiences.

The timing for this was most interesting as it coincided with the build-up to the People Power revolution that kicked off the following weekend, just as most of the delegates were flying home. This conference was well-attended but left me with the strong impression that, while it was undeniably useful to have everyone together and enjoying cross-cultural fellowship with co-workers from other countries, the most helpful work would probably be best done in the local context.

Most of my visits to the various FEBC fields around Asia included program training, helping leadership and programming staff alike to understand more critically what it takes to

communicate the Gospel meaningfully by radio in their cultural context.

So that was how I continued for the next few years, basically doing many things myself, and driven by optimism and endless opportunities. Before long I re-connected with Ross James who had spent time with us in Manila. His specialty was training. He first came there to be dean of the ThM training program in 1985 under the auspices of ATS (Asian Theological Seminary). It was designed to provide skills in communication to faculty of Asian Bible colleges and theological seminaries and to show them how to teach undergraduate courses when they returned. With that completed Ross came to fill in at FEBC for a few months after the head of our Overseas English department, Anne Norris, had passed away in 1988. Ross then went on to Pakistan where he worked on a project with Feba Radio, led by Interdev.

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Ross and I delivered joint training events in Indonesia – which we dubbed the “Ross and Frank Show”. We went to Russia and conducted training in Khabarovsk in the Russian Far East. Later we went to Cambodia and staged some similar events there during the start-up days of FEBCambodia, around 1994.

It was while doing training together in Phnom Penh that Ross first suggested that I spin-off some of my activities to others. These included training and research in particular but there



Ross leading session in Jakarta

were also related disciplines that needed to be covered. Something of this kind was needed especially since around that time I was elevated to the position of Chief Operations Officer under the

FEBC-US presidency of Jim Bowman. We would do well to assemble a team of people with specialist skills to serve the FEBC fields. And so the idea of the IRG, the International Resource Group, was hatched.

### [The International Resource Group](#)

The IRG team idea was presented to Jim and he accepted. I was also given a budget to help facilitate all the activities of the team, most of whom were on missionary support. We were a geographically diverse team that covered the following disciplines: Programming, Research, Training, Engineering, Digital Developments, New Technologies and Frequency



The Research Decision-Makers Conference in Manila was one of the IRG's first (1996)

Management. As a team we now had levels of expertise between us that could be used to resource FEBC's field ministries.

Wherever possible we tried to meet quarterly mostly in Asia but also in UK and USA. Our biggest challenge, and a recurring theme, was 'how to lead from behind.' It became evident that much innovation was needed but what was the process by

which such changes could be introduced and accepted into the various FEBC fields?

### Radio Programming Roles

Training now took on a higher profile under Ross's leadership. At that time he was a research fellow in the School of Public Health at Curtin University in Perth, Australia. Describing himself as a 'pracademic' Ross had been a pioneer in adapting communications, and radio in particular, in addressing health issues in the developing world. Together we co-authored the training handbook *Radio Programming Roles* published in 1997. It was to become the flagship of FEBC's program training and the development of Hands-on-Training (HOT).

Over the years Ross and I became good friends, but FEBC funding ran out in 2003 and Ross was led to establishing his own NGO, Health Communication Resources, based in Australia. His experience in community-centred radio was to

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become key when we were later to work together in Aceh following the 2004 tsunami. Ross brought to FEBC programming a professionalism that was badly needed and ran training events that were to have long-lasting impact not least in community development projects.

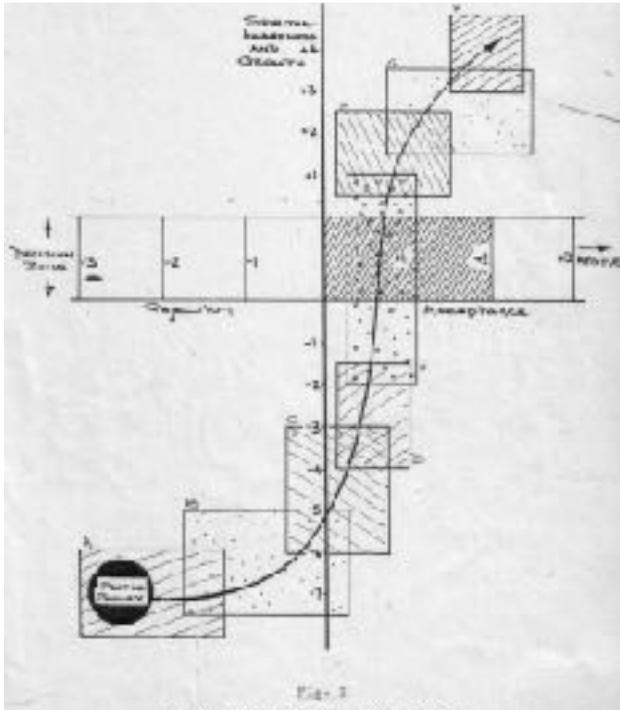
Working under Jim Bowman's leadership gave me ample opportunity and encouragement to innovate. It felt like the sky was the limit in terms of what media could bring to Christian

ministry, so long as we were willing to experiment and sometimes fail. And Southeast Asia was the real world for me, a world open to innovation. Southeast Asian people I generally found I could relate to very well. I learned a lot from them and the longer I engaged with them the better I understood their world. It was most encouraging to share ideas and insights and to see them take them on board and run with them. They are very resourceful people and very industrious. Point them in the right direction and they will run with it.

Many of the peoples of Southeast Asia had been blighted by years of colonial rule and domination. There were therefore sensitivities and barriers to be overcome and trust to be built. It was also a learning experience for me.

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*Radio Programming Roles* was in essence a compilation of the various ways radio could be used in Christian ministry built around what I was learning from programming innovation in FEBC. This 84-page booklet provided a platform for sharing these ideas throughout the FEBC family and beyond. In simple terms it categorised Christian radio programs into fourteen specific roles – and illustrated each of these from examples of programs on air in various FEBC contexts.



The earliest public appearance of the Gray Matrix in 1983

### The Gray Matrix

*Radio Programming Roles* also contained a chapter based on The Gray Matrix. This formed the backbone to much of FEBC's program training.

In 1996 FEBC had adopted the theme of *Close to the Listener*. It was inspired by reading the management book *In Search of Excellence*. In that book chapter 6 is entitled 'Close to the Customer' and opens with a quotation from the editor of *Business Week*, Lew Young:

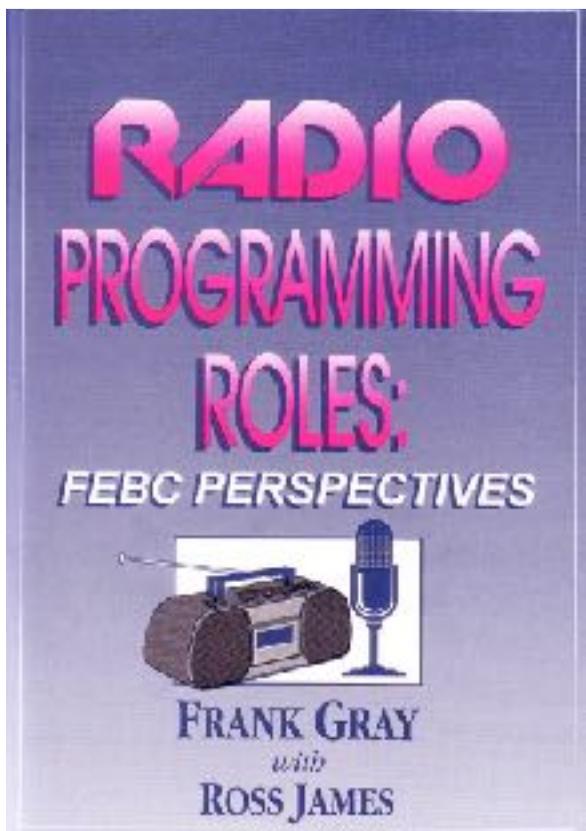
*Probably the most important management fundamental that is being ignored today is staying close to the customer to anticipate his needs and wants.*

It struck me as being so vitally important for how we regard our listener. Hence *Close to the Listener*. It made a lot of sense and clarified our mission. In many respects this encapsulated the idea behind the Matrix, because ultimately what we need to do is to bring a meaningful presentation of the Gospel, to some degree or other, into the everyday life experience of our listener.

The basic premise of the Matrix is that there are essentially two basic components that need to be present in our Christian communication and ministry – and they usually work independently of each other. The more obvious of these addresses what people need to know in order to believe and be discipled. But the second element is that which concerns our feelings, attitudes and relationships.

These two elements, the vertical (knowledge) and the horizontal (relationship), combine to form a simple (x,y) matrix. It also suggests that we might need to do a lot toward building a relationship and encouraging an openness toward the Gospel before we can do much imparting of biblical knowledge.

The recommendation of a two-dimensional model was first presented back in 1976 just before I graduated from Wheaton



Cover of Radio Programming Roles (1997)

and was largely prompted by my own experiences in Laos. It was used in my Wheaton '83 RICE paper but it was not until 1997 that it was published by FEBC in *Radio Programming Roles*. Ross suggested that the Matrix complemented the fourteen roles so in the chapter *Fitting the Jigsaw Together* we demonstrated how various radio roles

could be used for people at various stages along the pathway to faith. It was also on his recommendation that I adopted the

name *The Gray Matrix* for the model. I had found that it was being used quite widely without reference to its origin and without due credit being given.

Dr Ross James, now with his PhD, became FEBC's director for Training and developed the Hands-on-Training (HOT) curriculum around 2000. One of the ten basic modules is on *The Gray Matrix* as it was deemed to be an essential component of FEBC's programming philosophy.

More exciting frontiers were yet to present themselves – in the Insider Movement and the use of radio in disaster response. Both of these frontiers were 'high risk' among some of the Muslim communities of Indonesia.

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**NOTE:** This is the 9th chapter in the Adventure series. You will find all previous chapters available on line at [www.francisgray.com/adventure/](http://www.francisgray.com/adventure/)

**Picture on front cover:** Standing next to bust of Karl Marx in Khabarovsk during training session (1992). Wonder what he might have thought...?