

Who says I'm so relaxed?



*Make your tensions work for you instead of against you—
that's the secret of TV's most successful star.*

by Perry Como *as told to Beverly Jablons*

I GET A KICK OUT of the caricatures of me falling asleep in the middle of a song. Some of the teenagers I meet expect me to sink slowly to the ground out of sheer inertia, so occasionally I'll kid them and suddenly drop my head to one side and close my eyes. That breaks them up. The older folks invariably shake their heads and say: "You're so relaxed. How do you do it?"

Sure, I appear relaxed and my general nature is a calm one. That's the way I am. But I'm not a nerveless straw man and I'm not a superman. I've had lots of good luck in my life, but I'm not so lucky that I can do anything I want well, without working at it.

Someone recently mentioned that they had heard me sing "Summertime" on the show and it appeared as though I had just thought of it at the moment and decided to sing a few bars. That's great, because I enjoy singing for people and if they get that easy impression, it means that I'm coming through. But the truth is I didn't just happen to sing "Summertime" on a whim. Our producer, Clark Jones, would have a nervous breakdown in the control room if I did.

First I discussed it with Ray Charles and the arrangers, then rehearsed it with Billy Rowland, the pianist, then with Mitch Ayres and the boys. The next step was on stage and I sang it again and again while they set up the camera shots. We did it at dry rehearsal followed by a dress rehearsal. By the time we sang it at 8:17 Saturday night we had put in an aggregate 14 hours on a song that took three minutes of show-time.

It may come as a surprise, but I'm known to some as a perfectionist. I can't really define the word because perfection means something different to everyone. Being able to relax doesn't mean I don't care. I'm deeply concerned with everything I do and with every performance. I have tensions; everyone does. But the trick, I believe, is to make these tensions work for you instead of against you.

No one can lay down rules for anyone else. For that matter, I don't know whether I deliberately made rules for myself or whether it's all part of my kind of personality. Rules or nature, I'll try to answer those people who ask me, "How do you stay so relaxed all the time?"

First, I try not to get involved in the small details and lose sight of the more important overall picture. Recently I signed a big contract with Kraft Foods and, during the time the deal was being set up, I told my lawyer and agent that I didn't want a detailed description of the negotia-

tions. They are the experts and I trust their judgment. On the other hand, my wife, Roselle, is in charge of the house, but she doesn't have to take the garbage out—that's our son David's chore.

I've learned to accept the inevitable. Every rehearsal day is scheduled to the last 30 seconds, but somehow we're always running late, perhaps due to a change in a song arrangement or maybe one of the guest stars is caught in cross-town traffic. The clock keeps ticking and you can't turn it back, so you either grow an ulcer or pass around the latest joke and have a cup of coffee.

Next, I'm not given to anger. This doesn't mean I don't feel anger. I just don't believe you win by blowing your top. You only hurt others and often create more tension in the atmosphere around you. I usually count to 10 and by that time something else has come up that's more important.

I play golf. I'm not pushing golf in particular—just something you enjoy that will take your mind off the way you make your living or whatever it is you do day in and day out. Golf happens to be my game (who cares why, I just love it), and when I play I don't think of anything but golf.

I talk to my wife. This business of talking to somebody you love and trust is a great way of unwinding—probably the best! Sometimes she just says, "Yes, dear, you're so right, dear," and she's not fooling me one bit. By the same token, she gives me the whole routine about the washing machine and the piano lessons that weren't practiced, and I say, "That's too bad, sweetie." And we both feel wonderful.

Because of my crazy schedule, we don't get around much and our social life is fairly quiet. All I can manage on weekday nights is to stretch out on the couch, watch television, eat all the fruit in the refrigerator, and talk to the kids. It may not sound like much, but it's what makes me happy. I also make the most of the people I see every day. I wouldn't normally meet a Carol Haney or an Oscar Hammerstein, and when they're on our show I get a thrill out of chatting with them between camera shots. We have a great stage crew and there are a lot of laughs and much to talk about while waiting for cues. When the day is over, I don't feel that it's been all work.

Everyone has a different goal in business or at home. For us it's the little red light that goes on each Saturday night at 8 o'clock. At that moment, I know we've all worked hard, given it the best we have, so there's nothing more we can do—except enjoy the show and relax.

COVER

Our cover tribute to the greatest woman in the world—Mother—is the work of nationally known artist Arthur Sarnoff. Inside, you'll find a special Mother's Day report, "Open Letter to Mothers-to-Be," on page 6.

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