

how you tell the story of your wonderful life.”

Hoffman, the business journalist behind *CEO Radio* on New York’s WCBS Newsradio 880, has spent nearly four decades covering the financial markets. His approach has been called “breezy, yet richly informative.” Part of that came from growing up in Pittsburgh, listening to broadcast heroes Bob Prince and Jim Woods doing their high-wire act version of baseball play-by-play on the Pirates games. “They were very, very good at it, but there sure was a lot of fun going on in that broadcast booth. So I took a cue from *The Gunner* and *The Possum*, as they were known, and applied it to business news.”

Throughout his career, Hoffman has been heard by tens of millions of listeners. *CEO Radio* has twice been recognized by The New York Press Club as “Best Business Radio Broadcast” (in 2012 and 2015). He represented *BusinessWeek* and *The Wall Street Journal* on air for a combined total of 32 years. From *CEO Radio*, which has aired daily since 2007, it was a logical extension to build something of his own.

“About five years ago I started doing some on-set video interviews for WCBS, and I was surprised how much of a knack I had for it,” says Hoffman. “I started thinking about all the careers and life stories that could and should be documented in a serious, but watchable, interview format. Think of *Legacies* and *Leadership* as a sort of *60 Minutes* interview

for home use.”

Although a biography is going to be longer than a *60 Minutes* sit-down, Hoffman says you can hold listeners’ attention by customizing each interview and breaking it into segments, especially when capturing more extensive, detailed careers. One of his first projects was a four-part biography series for a client who gave copies to his children and grandson as a Christmas present.

“In my conversation with former Nestlé USA CEO Alan MacDonald, breaking it into four segments kept the story from ever dragging. One covered his family and history. The second featured his days in the hospitality program at Cornell. Part three—the longest—involved an extensive look at not only how he built his career, but also a serious look inside the growth of the Stouffer Corporation and the frozen food industry (Alan brought *Lean Cuisine* to the world),” notes Hoffman. “The fourth part covered his years at Nestlé, stories about golf and his friendship with Arnold Palmer, and how he feels about family and legacy.”

For those of us who aren’t captains of industry, Hoffman suggests that “anyone with an interesting life, or interesting story to tell” is the perfect candidate for a video biography. No matter who he interviews, he follows the same journalistic format.

“I approach a commissioned interview how I do my *CEO Radio* interviews: under the honest and sometimes unwritten rules of good journalism,” explains Hoffman. “I do my research and come prepared with questions. In my most recent *Legacies* conversation, I arrived with 25 pages of questions. And it can be done safely, with proper social distancing.”

Reflecting on 13 years of hosting *CEO Radio* and the 1,000-plus interviews he has conducted over his career, Hoffman cites the biggest lesson learned: “Lead with character and anything is possible!”

Hoffman may have storied tales about larger-than-life CEOs, adventurers, executives, celebrities, and all kinds of entrepreneurs, but he gives everyone equal billing.

“There are so many good stories out there, and too few are being properly documented. This is one of the reasons why I started *Legacies* and *Leadership*,” says Hoffman. “I want to hear—and help share—these stories. Not just business stories, life stories.”



**Above:** Hoffman at a beach near his Stamford home.

## MUSIC NOTES

Ray Hoffman has learned life lessons from his passion beyond broadcasting and baseball—jazz.

In addition to being a jazz historian and aficionado, he is a singer and lyricist in his own right. Several of his lyrics have been recorded, including his latest, “Is There Time for Paris?” by world-class jazz singer Alexis Cole. Hoffman’s lyric, written to music by guitarist John Basile, addresses the uncertainty that many people of a certain age feel when they find themselves having to start dating all over again. Paris, in this case, is his metaphor.

“My best learned lesson from my years around music? It came from bandleader and jazz great Woody Herman,” says Hoffman. “One time he told me a story about when he was a kid clarinet player in Milwaukee, and I took it to heart. A man he described as an old vaudevillian came up to him and said, ‘Never play down to your audience.’ I just adapted it to ‘Never talk down to your audience.’ (Or, if you’re a lyricist, ‘Never write down to your audience.’)”

**Top left:** Hoffman interviews Steve Odland, CEO of The Conference Board, during a *CEO Radio* broadcast.

**Bottom left:** Speaking at Seton Hall University, Hoffman connects with future entrepreneurs.

