

The F-word on BZ, originally in Chapter 7:

Every once in a great while, they had to employ the ten-second delay. It was such an unusual event that WBZ's engineers had to remind themselves of the proper procedures. For newer engineers, like Fred Stroud and Carol Jeffery, operating the dirty-word system was a number-one priority, and they both made sure to test the system before the talk studio went on the air. Veterans like Lee Holbrook, Charlie Dinsmore and Warren Aulenback took it more in stride; for them, it was supposed to be second nature.

One night they got caught. One of those wise-guy callers was on the air, going along with an innocuous opinion, letting the words flow along, and he suddenly said "fuck" in the middle of a sentence. It didn't even make any sense where he'd said it. He just did it to see if he could get away with it.

The delay system had two trigger buttons – one for the engineer in the control room, and one for the host in the studio. This was supposed to provide a fail-safe. Jerry was concerned that Elman and engineer Charlie Dinsmore hadn't picked it up, so he punched his button. He waved at them and motioned to cut his mic. "Didja hear that?" he said through the intercom.

Charlie had heard the word. He already had his finger on his trigger button and he had put on a special set of headphones so he could hear the delayed sound and find the exact moment the man said The Word. With a careful one-two punch of the button, he could activate a WBZ jingle and cover it. Listeners would hear a little snippet of voices singing "W-B-Z." They might not even know the caller had said something he wasn't supposed to.

But Charlie hadn't reckoned on Jerry's quick reflexes. He wasn't listening to the broadcast feed, and he didn't know that Jerry's punch of the studio button had already put the WBZ jingle on the air. When Charlie gave his trigger button the neat one-two punch, he was doing the opposite of what he intended.

Listeners heard a new word in the jingle: "Boston, W-B-Z, Boston, W-B-Z. 'Fuck.' W-B-Z, Boston, W-B-Z . . ."

*Steve Elman was producing that night and remembers this well.*