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Countdown to Complete Meltdown

Keith, Chris, and a network in turmoil.

By Stephen Spruiell. September 09, 2008, 6:00 a.m.

In late October of last year, MSNBC moved its offices from Secaucus, N.J., to NBC headquarters at 30 Rockefeller Plaza. "It was cool," one longtime MSNBC employee says of the move. "All these old offices with so much history . . . you'd be walking around and someone would point out John Belushi's old office."

But one MSNBC employee wasn't happy with his office. According to two sources who worked for the network at the time, Keith Olbermann, host of MSNBC's *Countdown*, didn't like his door. It had a window. He wanted a solid one.

He called the building manager. "They told him, 'Look, it's an old building, we're not changing the doors,'" the longtime employee says. "So Keith calls [MSNBC president] Phil Griffin and says, 'I want a new door or I'm not going on the air tonight.' And so Phil went and got him a new door."

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In retrospect, this was probably the beginning of the end of Olbermann's stint in the anchor chair. When I interviewed him for the cover piece, I asked [Center for Media and Public Affairs](#) president Robert Lichter if he thought MSNBC would change its approach in response to conservative criticism. He answered, "Journalists are not going to change their coverage because of what John McCain says. They are going to change their coverage because of what Jon Stewart says." Now that MSNBC has [decided to replace](#) the anchor team of Olbermann and Matthews with NBC News White House correspondent David Gregory, Lichter's words seem remarkably prescient.

Olbermann will, of course, remain the host of *Countdown*, and Matthews will still have *Hardball*. And, with the addition of a new show hosted by Air America's Rachel Maddow, MSNBC's prime-time will remain a haven for left-wing bloggers and others who believe George W. Bush should be indicted for war crimes. But for the time being, it appears that the grown-ups at NBC News have reasserted control over what was fast becoming the Olbermann Broadcasting Network.