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BROADCAST JOURNALISM STREET SMARTS: 20/20 VISION FOR 2020 AND BEYOND

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CHANGES

So much has changed in journalism since I wrote the first volume of the Broadcast Journalism Street Smarts series in 2012.

Too much, actually.

Sadly, most of those changes have not been for the better. And the worst of them did more damage than any penny-pinching General Manager or clueless News Director.

Ethics.

They pretty much disappeared at the network level. All that stuff we learned on the very first day of Journalism 101 class seems to have been tossed aside. The basic tenets of the industry are now seemingly no longer relevant to some at the highest levels of the profession. Simple stuff, really.

-Be objective.

-Show no bias.

-Check your opinions at the door.

Ironically, the thing that originally opened up new avenues for the news business is the one that exposed media's tricks and all its flaws.

The internet.

Social media, blogging, you name it. The public became wise to those reporters and anchors who slanted the news in the quest to push an agenda. In many cases, the network reporters who had been ironically forced out of the business because of their objectivity decided to write tell-all books and columns about the behind-the-scenes machinations of their former employers. Now it was easy for the viewers to decipher the code words for bias. Former CBS correspondent Bernard Goldberg even wrote a book titled "Bias."

Don't get me wrong, bias is nothing new. But it used to be very subtle, nearly subliminal, so that you wouldn't notice it unless you were really looking for it. A descriptive word here, an unflattering graphic there, and the message made its way into the subconscious. You were getting an opinion and probably never knew it.

Now the bias is in your face. Some networks and reporters don't even try to hide their opinions. They're either liberal or conservative and don't care who knows it. A few refer to themselves as "opinion journalists" which is, if you think about it, an oxymoron.

News is no longer about information, but affirmation. That means viewers like to watch people with whom they agree. No one wants to watch a network that tells them they're wrong, or stupid, or both.

And network agendas have crept into the entertainment division, with many shows using casting, plots and dialogue to get the message across. Johnny Carson must be spinning in his grave over what passes for late-night comedy these days. The "jokes" have basically become lectures, humor not required.

Bias, more than any budget cut or the advent of the one-man-band, has hurt the business to the degree that the general public now trusts journalists as much as used car salesmen. Maybe even less.

Some say journalism is dead. Maybe so, because I certainly don't recognize the business I entered in 1982. I prefer to think of it on life support. To the point a doctor is standing over it with a defibrillator and yelling, "Clear!"

Whether it flatlines or not is up to you.

There are still plenty of reporters and anchors out there who remain fair and objective. Most work on the local level. If you're reading this you're probably one of them. So there is hope.

But in this case, it will have to be saved from the bottom up, not the top down.

Not only that, it's actually backwards. The young people coming into the business have to actually set an example for those biased veterans by following the basic rules of journalism. This is how totally screwed up things are. The veterans need the rookies as role models.

Can you be one of those?

Of course if you came from a college with an agenda driven faculty, it might be tough to forget what you've heard as far as opinions are concerned.

And here's the funny part when it comes to winning back the public trust. You don't have to do it by breaking the story of the year, by being the best reporter at your station, by doing clever standups or killer live shots.

All you have to do is be objective. Every single day.

That's it. That's how you build trust with the public. By letting the viewer know you're giving them the facts and only the facts. By making sure viewers have absolutely no clue how you vote.

That's all the public wants at this point because they have tuned out the networks and know exactly where they stand. So present the facts and leave your opinion out of it.

Pretty easy for a starting point, huh? And, what a concept, it took no effort on your part other than being fair.

If you do that, you're already ahead of the game.

We're going to talk about the future in this book, and while doing so bring back some old-school stuff that seems to have been forgotten. (The second part of the book is the original Street Smarts text, because some things never go out of style. The term "resume tape" no longer requires actual tape, but the meaning is the same. Packages are still put together the same way, with solid reporting, editing and video.) I'll show you how to avoid the traps that give you a bad reputation. And, as always, we'll talk about office politics and (probably the number one reason you are reading this book) job hunting.

We going to do the job search part backwards. It used to be that you'd help someone get the job, then teach them the rules. But in this current situation, your knowledge of the rules before you apply for the job is crucial. Sure, you still need a great tape to show off your talent.

But if you want to work in a real newsroom that still follows the rules, the bottom line is objectivity.

Without that, you honestly can't call yourself a journalist.

If you want to be known as a good one, turn the page.



HOW THOSE PESKY OPINIONS SNEAK INTO YOUR STORIES

Back in the day those in my journalism class were given an assignment to do a profile of a notable person. (There were no broadcasting classes there, only print.) Since my university was a college town in Connecticut with little else in the way of businesses or famous people, we all set out to find someone interesting who worked for the school. I ended up with a university official who happened to be the first woman to hold her position. Which, at that point in time, was unusual. So my story had a hook.

Anyway, our teacher always liked detailed descriptions of people in our stories, so I made sure to paint the picture of her appearance. When it was my turn to be reviewed I sat across from the teacher's desk and watched as he looked at my work, red pen at the ready.

Suddenly his eyes widened, the pen hit the page and he drew a line through one sentence. "You can't have opinions in your stories. You know that."

I furrowed my brow. I was always very careful to be totally objective, as I knew any opinion was a huge red flag with my teacher. I couldn't imagine what he was talking about. "I'm not sure I understand. I didn't say anything about her politics and I always try to be objective."

"I know, and you've never had an opinion in your stories before. Until now." He tapped the paper with the red pen. "You referred to her as attractive."

I shrugged. "She is. I mean, she's not a fashion model or anything, but she's a nice looking woman."

"In whose opinion? Yours? Maybe someone else thinks she's ugly."

"Seriously? That counts as being opinionated?"

"Yep. Everything else in your description is fine." He looked back at the paper. "Petite brunette, dark eyes, tailored red suit, single strand of pearls... it's all okay. But you can't say she's attractive."

I slowly nodded. "So it's basically an eye of the beholder thing when it comes to opinions."

He smiled. "Now you're getting it."

Sure, that was an extreme example but he taught me to be really careful when it came to avoiding opinions in my stories. It's like the story of the baseball pitcher who threw rocks as a kid, then found out throwing baseballs was easier. He'd never actually throw rocks in a game, but doing something extreme taught him something and made the actual process simpler. Once my teacher showed me an opinion that was a real stretch, it became easier for me to spot opinionated words.

Now think of how those little things can be misconstrued by viewers if you're not careful. One word can change the tone of the story... and suddenly your opinion becomes that of the viewer.

Mayor Jones had no comment on the alleged scandal involving city hall.

Embattled Mayor Jones had no comment on the alleged scandal involving city hall.

One word in the second version can convey several messages to the viewer. When you hear "embattled" you think of someone under fire, not getting along with anyone, a person who is unpopular. That one word constitutes an opinion. The viewer might assume the guy is guilty of something, that he's corrupt, that everyone hates him. When, in fact, all the Mayor gave you was "no comment" on a situation that is alleged, a situation that might not even involve him.

So take a step back when writing a script (hopefully your station has script approval). Because even the slightest opinion can label you as biased.



FAKE NEWS & FIGHTING BACK

Politicians can be rude to reporters. Trust me, I've interviewed a few. It's part of the deal, and expected. The politician knows you want something and he's going to make it hard for you to get it. These days he's on guard for gotcha questions. The "relationship" between the media and politicians has always been a delicate one. On the one hand you as a reporter want to be professional and polite, on the other hand you don't want to let a politician tap dance his way out of an answer. Firm but fair is always the way to go.

And you absolutely cannot fight back if a politician treats you badly.

But what I'm seeing now from the national media crosses the line. For whatever reason many reporters think that because they're being attacked by politicians it gives them license to fight back.

Uh, no.

Just because a relationship is contentious doesn't give you the right to attack someone. Your job is to report facts, not to let your personal feelings get in the way.

It's sort of like the relationship police officers have with the public. They can be insulted but can't retaliate.

Reporters shouldn't retaliate either. When you do, it shows you've taken a side.

I've never seen so many thin-skinned network reporters as we're seeing now. Don't be one of them.

Now to fake news.

Is it real?

You betcha.

The amount of corrections I'm seeing in both broadcast and print is off the charts. Part of the problem is the rush to judgment, the race to get something, anything on the air or the internet, without checking facts or taking a step back to consider what your reporting will do.

The other part is the desire to make someone look bad by taking things out of context, stretching the truth, or flat out making things up.

And this is a big part of what's causing the public's distrust of the media.



RIGHT OR FIRST?

Social media didn't exist when I was a reporter. No Twitter, no Facebook. Because the internet didn't exist. (I'm sure you find this hard to believe, but life and a TV career was a lot better and more fun without technology.) If we wanted to tease a story, we shot a little ten second clip that aired mid-afternoon or during prime time. That was it. The nice thing about teases back then is that if stories changed before they hit the air, we could kill the tease and no one would be the wiser.

Now, of course, many reporters are required to tease stories on the internet. Even if the story isn't done. Even if the reporter is in the middle of working the story. Or hasn't even left the station. We see these all day on Twitter or the station's website. And once you post something online, you can't exactly kill it completely. Sure, you can delete it, but not before viewers have seen it. Some news item hits the air or the internet, and in the case of the latter, it spreads like wildfire. People take screenshots of stuff and pass it on. Since you can't put the proverbial genie back in the bottle, it can take on a life of its own.

And then when it turns out not to be true, the correction or retraction is buried. People don't re-tweet mistakes, they only do so with the juicy stories.

The big difference is that back in the day a viewer couldn't "forward" a broadcast tease like re-tweeting something on Twitter.

So if your original tease on Twitter turns out to be wrong, it may have grown exponentially by the time you correct it. And those who see it will believe it.

Corrections? Those are often buried because, let's face it, they make the reporter and news organization look stupid. That's why an incorrect front page story results in a correction on page 37 next to the obituaries.

The old saying "I'd rather be right than first" seems to have been reversed. Now it is "I'd rather be first, and if I'm right, that's a bonus, and if I'm wrong, whatever." Well, guess what. People do care, and every time you tease a story that turns out not to be true, you lose credibility. For yourself and for your station.

Your News Director may demand you tease every story on the website and your Twitter feed, but that doesn't mean you have to promote something you're not absolutely sure is true. You can still write a tease that will pique the viewer's interest without risking your own credibility. Even if you haven't left the station.

Example:

"Congressman implicated in scandal! Details on our station website and at 6pm on I-missed-it News!"

Obviously this is going to get a lot of interest, will probably get people to check the website and start googling the Congressman for more dirt. It already sounds like the Congressman is guilty. So, wait for it...

It. Must. Be. True.

At least that's what the viewer thinks. So it gets re-tweeted and spreads like a virus. It might end up on talk radio and all sorts of political blogs.

Even though you haven't talked to the Congressman yet or shot one frame of video.

But hey, the News Director requires you to tease it, so you did. And when the story turns out to be a bust, you're the one who looks like an idiot when you have to post a retraction. Half the time news organizations don't even bother.

But you could have done it a better way that not only interests the viewer but protects you in case the story turns out to be much ado about nothing:

"Congressman responds to alleged scandal, tonight at 6pm on I-missed-it News."

So here we're still teasing the basic story, but telling the viewer you're actually going to present the other side and give the politician the opportunity to respond. You've changed "implicated" to "alleged" which is one of the most important words a reporter can use. What. A. Concept.

And, as a bonus, there's no retraction possible. Because all you've told the viewer is that you're working the story and getting the other side.

If the Congressman has a legit alibi and is not connected to the scandal and can prove it, you've done nothing wrong. And the viewer will appreciate that you did not jump to conclusions. If the Congressman refuses to respond, you can say that, but still let the viewers draw their own conclusions.

Your tweet may only be 140 characters, but those letters may be the most important ones you write all day. Think about it... if you're only writing one or two sentences, how hard is it to be careful? Don't look at the internet tease as something to be done without any thought because you want to get it out of the way. While an online

tease doesn't go on your resume tape and won't get you a new job, it's too important to simply write without taking time to make sure it's accurate.

After you write your tease, read it aloud or to someone else. Does it interest the viewer without jumping to conclusions? If it tells the viewer what you're working on without making judgment, you've done your job.



ANONYMOUS SOURCES

“No source on the record, no story.”

That was my journalism teacher back in the day. And in the movie *All the President's Men* you can see Jason Robards yelling, “When the hell is someone going to go on the record in this story?”

But these days we're seeing more stories with anonymous sources than ever before. Lead stories, front page stories, leaks with no attribution, you name it. It's almost as if the old newsroom joke, “Never let the facts get in the way of a good story” is now a motto in some newsrooms.

Here's what the viewer thinks: if the anonymous source won't go on the record, the story might be true... or it might be fiction. Why should anyone believe the story if you don't have one single person who will give you a sound bite? Sure, you can fall back on “a reporter never reveals a source” but that used to be reserved for stuff that would get the source in serious trouble. These days you can bet a lot of these anonymous sources have some sort of agenda.

And if your anonymous source is one side of the story, what's the other side? How can you as a journalist legitimately ask someone to respond to an anonymous source? People have a right to face their accusers. Still, I often see reporters use an unnamed source without bothering to check anything.

So, how do you handle someone who gives you some information but doesn't want to go on the record?

You don't simply take the information and run with it.

You press the source for more.

“Are you sure you don't want to go on camera? Or let me use your name?”

“I hope you'll know I'll check this out. Can I come back to you when I get a response?”

“Is there anyone I can talk with who can corroborate your story?”

Of course, if you still get nothing, this one sentence might get the source to crack a bit:

“I can't promise this will hit the air unless I find more information.”

Throw that one out there and see what the reaction is. Perhaps you might get more, perhaps not. But if you don't take a shot, you'll never know, and you're doing your audience a disservice.





PHONE SKILLS

It is no secret the young generation is obsessed with cell phones. You may even be reading this book on one. Amazing devices, really, allowing you to watch TV on a three inch screen instead of that 4K 55-inch set in the living room. I can certainly understand why one would want to go cross-eyed instead of enjoying something in spectacular high-def.

Can you tell I simply don't get the appeal of cell phones? (Yeah, I'm old. Get off my lawn.)

I never saw the problem in always having some dimes or quarters in my pocket when the station contacted me on the two-way radio and asked me to call in so the conversation wouldn't hit the scanner. I'd find a pay phone, drop a dime (that's where the phrase comes from) and talk to the assignment desk.

Of course cell phones make communicating with the newsroom easier, although when the first analog versions came out conversations ended up on the police scanner. As there was a traffic light next to our station, we heard all sorts of racy calls in the newsroom when the light turned red and someone was on the phone. Alas, digital has taken the fun out of everything, just as Caller ID killed the simple joy of making prank calls.

The downside of a cell phone? It's an electronic leash. Gone are the days when the station called and you could simply say you weren't home.

But back to present day and how cell phones are part of the news business and the fact you can't live without one.

Problem is, most of you guys don't use them to actually make phone calls.

And therein lies what has become the near death of a valuable reporting skill. Actually talking on the phone.

It's truly an art for a reporter, and a lost one because we have a whole generation that grew up texting, posting and whatever-gramming on the latest new social media trend.

If you think you're going to beat the competition finding great stories and gathering information with emails and texts, think again.

You have to actually pick up the phone and talk to people if you want the best results.

A while back there was a newspaper story about the problems public relations companies were having with employees right out of college. The gist of it was that the new grads were actually scared to place phone calls and converse with someone, which was a key part of the job.

If you want to see the best example of a reporter "working the phones" then watch *All the President's Men*. Sure, it's an old movie from the 70s but probably the best film ever produced about the news business. In particular, pay attention to the scene in which Robert Redford makes a series of phone calls while jotting notes down on a pad.

When you send a text or an email, the person receiving it really doesn't get an impression of who you are. You're a name and a number and a bunch of words on a computer screen. But when you make a call they can hear your voice, whether you're friendly or not, a pushy reporter who demands something or one who politely asks. You can take the opportunity to make small talk, develop a relationship. And they'll probably call you back.

So, how do you do this? Well, you can start developing your phone skills by actually making calls to your friends and family while ditching the texting and emails. When you're actually speaking with someone on the phone, the words carry extra meaning. You can hear whether the person is happy or sad, interested or bored. Do they

sound excited to hear your voice, and can you hear that excitement in theirs? And while you're doing this, don't let anything interrupt your conversation. "I've got another call, gotta go." Sorry but whoever invented call waiting was probably a rude person. When you ditch one call to do something else, you're telling the person they're not the most important thing at the moment.

One more thing about cultivating sources; they love to be thanked. Let's say you needed some help from a public relations person for your story today. The PR department clears the way for you to get some video or an interview. The next day, pick up the phone and say thanks. Trust me, that will go a long way when you need help from that person in the future.

Here's the other problem with texts and emails. You have no earthly idea if they've been received. When you pick up the phone, you either get to talk to the person, leave a message with someone else, or a voice mail. If you leave a message with someone, at least you can ask if the person you need will be available later. Perhaps the person is out of town, in a meeting, whatever. But at least you know something. That's a lot better than sending something electronic and waiting.

When I work for a network or syndicator, they always call rather than text or email, because they *absolutely have to know* I've gotten the message.

Finally, get your head out of your cell phone. You've seen those hilarious videos of people walking into fountains or falling down stairs because they're looking at their phones and not paying attention. They're missing the world around them. You're doing the same thing if you're a reporter. Put the phone away and start looking around. You're bound to get some story ideas that you won't get if you're focused on your phone.



TOO. MANY. QUESTIONS.

Sometimes talking with the young generation of reporters is like having a conversation with a child under ten years old. The questions never end, just like when I chat with my niece. "Why do you drive this car? How come you don't have any video games? What's the wi-fi password in this house?" (Answers: I like this car, I'm too old to play video games, put down your phone and go outside and play.)

In my first job as a manager I had to deal with a few rookies. The veterans knew their job and were low maintenance for the most part. They got their assignments, set up interviews, figured out what b-roll they needed and off they went. The new kids on the block... well, they drove me nuts with the constant questions about why we do things the way we do.

This was typical:

Reporter, tapping on door to my office. "You got a minute?"

"Sure, come on in."

"I have a question about my story."

"Okay, you need some direction on who to interview or what to use for b-roll?"

"No. I'm wondering why we're doing it."

"Because it's interesting, no one else has the story, and it's promotable. You should be happy I gave you an exclusive."

"I don't find it interesting."

"Well, there are no boring stories, only boring reporters. Your job as a reporter is to make it interesting so the viewer watches the whole thing." (At this point I'm saying to myself, "Why the hell am I trying to justify my decision to a kid who's been in the business six months?")

Reporter rolls eyes. "Whatever. Is there any way someone else can do this? Maybe I can swap with—"

"I gave you that assignment because I know you'll do a good job with it."

"But why—"

"Because I'm the boss, and I said so."

At this point the reporter gives me one more "whatever" and leaves in a huff.

Then the reporter tries the classic "If Dad says no, I can try Mom" tactic by going to the Executive Producer in an attempt to get out of doing the story.

One common denominator about millennials is that they tend to question everything. And I mean everything.

Questions should be reserved for the people you interview.

The questions for your Assignment Editor or News Director or anyone else in management should be about your work, story coverage. When you question the decision of someone in management, you're basically telling that person they're stupid. Sure, I've been handed absolute dogs as assignments like every reporter, and I've complained about them when I was young and thought I was smarter than those in management. I'm sure a few times I was right, but it didn't matter.

I wasn't the boss. Pleading my case didn't change a damn thing. It's about as effective as arguing with an umpire in a baseball game.

Which brings us to the actual topic of this chapter.

How to make management consider you a good employee even though you still have questions. Because there's a right way to ask a question and the wrong way; the latter of which could land you in the dog house. (And sometimes if you're in the dog house, you are assigned more stories that are, appropriately enough, dogs.)

Now, remember that reporter mentioned above that made me pull the antacid bottle from my desk? Let's try that same scenario

asking questions in a way that lets the manager know you're a team player.

Reporter: "Do you have a few minutes? I need some help on my assignment."

News Director: "Sure, what's the problem?"

Reporter: "Well, I don't want the viewers to be bored since the topic is not terribly exciting... so I was hoping you could give me some ideas on how to make the story interesting."

Nothing makes a manager or senior staffer feel important more than a young person asking for advice. By doing this you're telling the person you're willing to learn, to accept guidance and feedback, and, most important, that you really don't know a thing.



SHOULD YOU GET A MASTERS DEGREE?

I do not have a Masters Degree. My bachelor's degree isn't in journalism or broadcasting either.

Personally, I learned more in a one month internship at a radio station than I did in four years of college. So I always thought pursuing a higher degree was a waste of time.

But I wish I had one and I'll tell you why. The reason might save you years down the road.

As a means to improving your reporting skills, I've always felt a masters degree is a colossal waste of time and money. What exactly are you going to learn out of a book or classroom that you won't pick up on the street? I'm sure you've all noticed the "real world" of broadcasting is a lot different than what you experienced in college.

As a career move, get the degree. Here's why.

I'd been in the business about twenty years when a college president approached me one day while I was on his campus. "Just wondering if you're tired of reporting. We're going to need a journalism teacher next year."

Hmmm. I was intrigued. I was also burned out and hated my News Director. I'd done a career day class at this college and had a blast. They had a good instructor and the students asked good questions. Apparently word had gotten back to the president about it. I'd also donated some old editing equipment to the school and did play-by-play for the college's basketball team on radio. "Sure, I'd be interested."

"Great, let's set up a time for you to come by my office and talk."

The more I thought about this, the more I wanted it. Having the opportunity to help young reporters sounded fulfilling, especially considering my wife was a teacher and former students were always coming up to her and thanking her.

Flash forward to my visit to the president's office. We chatted about what he was looking for, how I'd teach the students, what sort of hours I'd keep.

And then he asked the question that killed it all. "Where did you get your masters degree?"

"I don't have one."

He exhaled and looked down. "I hate to tell you this, but state law won't allow you to teach in a college unless you have one."

Oh, you gotta be kidding me. So let me get this straight. The powers that be at the state board of education, who had probably never been outside of a classroom, would rather hire someone who had jumped through hoops to get a degree instead of an actual reporter with twenty years experience.

Bottom line, he couldn't hire me.

Even if I had wanted to work on a degree in those days, it would have been impossible. I never had a job near a university that offered one and getting a degree online didn't exist.

Well, it does now, so you have an opportunity I did not.

Trust me, the time will come when you're thinking about getting out of the business. And since I doubt there will ever be a shortage of journalism students, becoming a teacher would offer you a way out. But you might not be able to do it without a masters depending on the rules of the state or the college.

By the way, if you've never hosted a career day at a high school or college, give it a shot and see what you feel. You might discover something really appealing. And you'll get lots of questions students won't find in a book... even a few from the teacher.

I did one career day at a high school in the nineties in which the teacher was an old tenured guy who had never worked a day as a reporter. Finally I finished my talk and asked for questions. Most of the students raised a hand but the teacher asked the first question.

"I wish you'd spend a little time talking about film developing since they'll need to know that."

It was all I could do not to laugh. "Well, film really hasn't been used since about 1982 when it was replaced by videotape."

"That's not true."

I barely knew how to respond. "Actually it is. Any other questions?"

He then proceeded to argue with me.

Anyway, be prepared if you do a career day.

So check around, see who is offering the degree you want. There should be some options online. Maybe work at it one class at a time.

You may never use it, but if you do need it as I did, you'll be glad you have it.



THE CURRENT EVENTS TEST

When applying for a job you'll always have to go through the basic interview, but a lot of managers go a little deeper to find out if you're really a news person or simply want to be. You might meet everyone in the station and have dinner with the News Director, but there's a curve ball headed your way in the form of a current events test.

Not every manager gives one of these, but I did. I had a twenty question test covering a little bit of everything, from politics to sports to pop culture. I didn't expect applicants to get every question right, but the test was a good indicator if a person was well read and up to date on current events. The knowledge of a good general assignment reporter is, as the old saying goes, equally average on everything. And if you're applying for a producer's job, you *really* need to be up to date on everything.

Some of my sample questions looked like this:

- Who is the Vice President of the United States?
- How many justices make up the Supreme Court?
- What team just won the World Series?
- Name the Big Three car companies.
- What's the difference between a US Senator and a State Senator?
- What movie just won the Academy Award for Best Picture?

While most applicants did pretty well on this, a few bombed so badly it was obvious they had never read a newspaper or watched a news broadcast. Incredibly, one person got all twenty questions wrong, with answers that boggled the mind.

And one applicant blew the test before even taking it. I handed her the list of questions and she actually said, “Why do I need to know current events if I’m going to be an anchor?” (Thank you for saving the station the cost of taking you out to dinner.)

So, how do you prepare for something like this?

You can’t really do it overnight. You simply have to get in the habit of reading a lot, watching a lot of different newscasts and networks. When you read a newspaper, don’t simply read the sections that interest you, read it cover to cover. The financial page might seem boring, but some day you might have to do a story on mortgage rates. You might hate sports, but one day the sports anchor gets sick and you have to cover a football game. Being well read means being one of those people who can talk about anything.

As for the newscasts you watch, don’t simply watch one station or network. Networks especially are so polarized that you get two completely different slants on the same story. (The truth usually lies somewhere in the middle.) If you spent the last hour watching the Fox Network’s Sunday morning show, spend the next hour watching the NBC offering. You’ll wonder if you suddenly beamed to a different country.



MORE RED FLAGS THAN A RUSSIAN PARADE

There are a lot of big things that can knock you out of the running for a job. Some are obvious and haven’t changed in decades. Stuff like showing up late for an interview, being obnoxious, dressing poorly. But we live in a different world, and young people live in a very different world than my generation (those who grew up when dinosaurs ruled the earth and still would rather hang out with said dinosaurs.)

News Directors now have a whole bunch of red flags on their radar, any one of which can kill your chances of being hired. These red flags fall into two categories: social media footprint and appearance.

“But wait, didn’t you just say something about dressing poorly?”

Yeah, I did. But there’s more to your appearance than a wrinkled suit or showing up in jeans. The appearance factors we see now didn’t exist back in the day. There were no women with tattoos, no people with blue or pink hair, no pierced noses or other facial piercings, no forked tongues, no multi-colored fingernails, no scraggly beards that make you look like Scooby Doo. If the person doing the hiring is from an older generation, showing up with any of these can be a turnoff, especially if you’re applying for an on-air position. No News Director wants to send a reporter out looking like a Smurf who answered the staple gun when the phone rang.

You can do whatever you want off the clock, but when you’re applying for a job, old-school conservative is still a must. (And guys, please learn a couple of life skills called ironing and shaving. I’m tired of seeing young men who look like they slept in their clothes.)

Now, the big problem for young people: social media.

I know what you're thinking. "My social media posts are private. Employers have no right to look at them."

Yeah, good luck with that. You put something on the internet, it's fair game and, even worse, it's forever. You might delete something a minute after posting it, but if someone takes a screenshot it can live forever and come back to bite you. And it's pretty hard to un-ring that bell. We're even seeing situations where people dig up tweets from teenage years. Everyone makes mistakes, but don't post them online. From a manager's point of view, checking social media of an applicant is no different than calling up references. I started checking social media posts twenty years ago, and what I found crossed a few people off the short list. After a while I could tell who was going to be a problem and who wasn't, who was "normal" and who had an agenda.

For whatever reason, many young people overshare the most intimate details of their lives. Put yourself in the viewer's shoes... do you really want to read about a reporter's sex life?

From the manager's standpoint, here are the red flags that have popped up most often:

- Tales and/or photos of getting drunk and/or using illegal drugs.
- Opinionated statements about politics, religion, or social issues.
- Your current sexual orientation.
- Following people with radical viewpoints and agreeing with them.
- Negative comments about previous employers.
- Anything about sexual encounters or dating.

What does a good social media footprint look like? Something right out of the 1950s. Photos of your family, your cat, your vacation. Comments about places you've visited, restaurants you like, recipes you want to try.

Get the picture?

Be boring.

A News Director looks at those kinds of posts and just like that you're over a hurdle you never knew you had to clear.



THE OTHER GOOD REASON to play your cards close to the vest on the internet?

There are stalkers out there.

Never post your regular routine, places you hang out, days you're on vacation. (That last one like is ringing the dinner bell for burglars. You may as well leave your door unlocked if you're telling thieves you're out of town.) Turn off the location setting on your phone or tablet for any personal posts when you are traveling.

Before the internet and social media, stalkers targeted TV people. Women would get calls at the station, calls at home, letters in the mail (many from prisoners for some odd reason.) A few shared the letters with me and it was stuff that would curl your hair. A few women I know were often harassed in public and actually wore fake engagement rings to keep the guys at bay. Back in the day I recorded a few answering machine messages for the women in the newsroom, the theory being that any man who called them and heard another guy would move on. It worked.

But these days everything is an open book, so you need to be careful.



THE JOB INTERVIEW

So, you've sent a resume tape and the News Director likes it enough to invite you to the station for an interview. If this is your first job interview, you have no idea what to expect. And even if you've been through several interviews, there's always something different you could experience.

Some News Directors simply sit down and talk with you for an hour. Others might invite you to stay for the entire day, put you up in a hotel, and have you attend the morning meeting. Some are friendly, some are arrogant jerks. Many will try to keep the upper hand when it comes to bargaining position.

Still, there are common denominators that will be part of every interview. There are no guarantees, but you can improve your chances. And if it comes down to a tie between you and someone else, it might be the little things that set you apart.

-Preparation: Let's say you're living in Ohio and have an interview at a Florida station. You can't just get on a plane without doing some homework. And here's where the internet can make that a lot easier.

You'd better know a lot about your current market and state, so make sure you're up on the current events of Ohio, know who the Governor and Senators are, what the big stories are and have been for the last few weeks. Then it's time to search the net for the same information about Florida and the market you're visiting. You're not expected to be able to name every single politician in the Sunshine State, but you're hopefully well versed enough in what's going on. And don't forget the obvious about Florida; if your interview is in August, a heavy wool suit is a bad idea.

Take the time to watch the station's newscasts. Note the style and type of stories they cover. Is the station a flash-and-trash scanner chaser or do they actually have reporters do enterprise stories? Note some stories that make an impression on you. Are there veterans on the staff who might make good mentors, or is the station one manned totally by rookies?

Do a little research about the News Director as well. (Start at rickgevers.com which lists the comings and goings of managers, along with an archive to see where they have worked before.) Thankfully, people aren't shy about sharing opinions about management on those broadcasting gossip sites. Is the current ND one who has been there a while, or a job hopper? On the way up the ladder or down? (The ones on the way down are generally not very pleasant people.) Perhaps you share something in common... maybe went to the same college, grew up in the same market, root for the same baseball team. Anything that can help you make small talk always helps.

-Travel: Make sure you have contact numbers for the station and News Director. If your plane is late or your car breaks down, you'll need them.

Also, take everything you'll need in a carry-on bag if you're flying and spending the night. Lost luggage can leave you without anything to wear for that interview; you don't want to show up in jeans and a sweatshirt because the airline sent your bag out of the country.

-Arrival: Needless to say you need to arrive early. (Of course if your plane is late or car breaks down, this is sometimes unavoidable.) Nothing gets an interview off on the wrong foot than an applicant who shows up late.

-The initial interview: Okay, you've arrived and are sitting down with the News Director. Get things off on the right foot by thanking the ND for the opportunity to visit. Then listen without waiting to speak. As the ND asks questions, make sure you listen to the entire question before answering.

At some point the ND will stop asking basic questions and say, "Do you have any questions for me?" And you'd better have a few. Getting a ND to talk about himself is a no-brainer. "How did you start out in TV news?" Asking about the availability of a veteran mentor will let the ND know you're willing to learn and be receptive to advice. And ask the ND about getting feedback, that you would appreciate it; the most common complaint I've heard (and made myself) is that reporters rarely get feedback from management. The old saying, "I must be doing okay because I never hear anything" is a very common one.

-The newsroom: The most common practice, if you're going to stick around for the rest of the day, is for a ND to "drop you off" in the newsroom. Management wants to see if you will sit at an empty desk buried in your cell phone or if you'll chat up the people on staff. Generally after you leave a News Director will talk with some newsroom staffers to get their opinion of you. If the ND hears, "Seems like a smart woman" or "He was very friendly and asked a lot of good questions," that can help. But if the ND finds out you were simply killing time and didn't talk to anyone, that's not good.

-The General Manager: You may or may not meet the GM. Same deal, have a few questions about the station and the company, ask the GM about starting out in the business.

-The restaurant: If you're taken out for a meal, this is a chance for you to act casual and relax a bit. Try to keep the conversation going, don't let the ND carry it alone. Show that you've got a decent personality away from the newsroom, that you have other interests besides news.

Do not order any alcohol, even if the others at your table may do so. You want to be as sharp as possible.

Be polite to the wait staff. There's an old saying women used to have about their dates; the way a man treats a waitress is a good indi-

cator of how he'll treat other women. When you get back to the hotel make sure you watch the late newscast.

-Morning meeting: If you're staying overnight, ask to attend the morning meeting though you'll probably be invited. Get up early and watch the morning newscast. And if you do attend the meeting, make sure you bring a couple of story ideas, but be polite when pitching them.

-Note how you're treated: True story. One of my clients flies to an interview. The News Director interviews her, then drops her off at the airport. He hands her a candy bar and says, "I don't have time to take you to lunch." Needless to say, she did not want to work there.

-Thank you notes: The day you get home, get them in the mail. No blanket email to the people who interviewed you. No form letter sent the same way to everyone. Handwritten note, handwritten envelope, old fashioned stamp. Nothing says old school like this, nothing says you've been raised correctly with class, and nothing separates your letter from the rest of the newsroom mail like something handwritten. Keep it simple. "Thanks for inviting me to your station. I appreciated the hospitality and enjoyed learning about the opportunities. I look forward to hearing from you."

-Don't be pushy: The ND may have told you a decision would be made by a certain day. Good luck with that. Two reasons: These days, management is risk averse and terrified of making the wrong decision, and every day they don't have to pay someone is money saved. This is one reason stations have consultants, so that they can blame a bad decision on someone else.

On one occasion I went on an interview on a Friday. The ND told me I was the last person being interviewed and a decision would be made one way or the other the following Monday. Monday I stared at the phone like a teenager waiting for a date to the prom. Monday, no call. Tuesday, no call. No call that week. Or the next. Or the next.

One month later... I'm offered the job.

So resist the temptation to call and ask if a decision has been made. If you're that desperate to know if the job has been filled, get a friend to call the newsroom after hours and ask whoever answers if there is still an opening. People on the night crew are usually open books without management around.

As soon as you're done sending thank you notes, try your best to forget about the job opportunity. Focus on the next one.



CONTRACTS

You may think contracts always favor management, and in many cases they do. But when I went into management I discovered they can be a double-edged sword.

That two year contract you think ties you to a station? It can also saddle a News Director with someone who quickly falls out of favor. Someone you can't get rid of.

I've never been a fan of contracts for either side. As a friend from Texas once told me, "You can ride a horse longer with loose reins." A reporter or anchor with a contract has to worry about timing when it comes to finding a new job, out clauses, whether the contract will be renewed, any number of things. A manager has to wonder if it's a good idea to renew a contract, or if the contract that ends right before sweeps will leave the newsroom shorthanded if that person finds another job.

Like I said, not a fan. I don't see the advantage for either side.

Alas, most stations like to put people under contract. Makes sense for anchors, not much for reporters, especially rookies.

But you're reading this chapter for advice on a contract, so let's get to it.

First, when you're offered a contract, you *absolutely have to get a lawyer to review it*. Maybe you can't afford it, but trust me, it could save you some major problems in the future. Of course if this is your first job, you pretty much have zero negotiating leverage.

Anyway, a few key items that are critical in every contract:

"Other duties as assigned": This clever little clause is found in just about every contract, and is basically management's "out clause" to use the classic "make you miserable so you'll quit" tactic. For in-

stance, a person is hired as a main anchor. For whatever reason, management is dissatisfied and wants to get rid of this person. But with a contract, it might not be possible. So they reassign the main anchor, demoting this person to the morning shift or a weekend reporting gig. Management could even take someone off the air and assign them to a producer's role.

"Liquidated damages": Perhaps no clause is as nebulous as this one. What this means is that if you leave before the contract is up, the station can take you to court and hit you up for a certain amount of money. Basically the station would argue that it spent money promoting you and needs to recover that money. Enforceable? I've seen it happen, especially if that person is an anchor. I've also seen a reporter negotiate a lower amount as a buyout to avoid legal action.

"Out clause": This is something pretty much everyone wants in a contract. Here's how it works. It gives you an escape from the contract if you meet a certain criteria. For instance, if you have a contract with a top 20 out clause, that means if you get a job offer in one of the top 20 markets you are free to leave as long as you fulfill the stipulations in the clause. That might be something like requiring you to give a 30 day notice.

No two out clauses are the same. In some cases, people want a specific market out clause. If, for instance, you're from Miami and want to go back to your home state, you might ask for a Florida out clause. So if you get a job offer anywhere in the Sunshine State, you're good to go.

No News Director is going to offer an out clause and stations hate to give them. You have to ask, then negotiate. The first thing you'll always hear is "this company doesn't give out clauses." Generally, this isn't true, and if you do some digging you'll find someone who has set a precedent in the past. Negotiating is a delicate thing in the case of out clauses; you don't want to appear that you're already looking to leave, but you're politely asking for something important

to you. You might get it, you might not. But if you don't ask, you'll never know.

Salary: As previously mentioned, if this is a first job, the salary offered is pretty much set in stone. If not, everything is negotiable. One important job of a News Director is to stay within a budget. Therefore it behooves the ND to hire people at the lowest salary possible, so generally the first offer is lower than what can actually be paid. The ND often leaves some wiggle room so if you do ask for a little more money, there's some flexibility. From personal experience I've noted that wiggle room seems to be about ten percent, so don't ask for the moon.

Perks: This is often something the station can "trade out" for advertising and doesn't really "cost" as much. Basically this is the ancient barter system. Things like hair and makeup, clothing allowances, health club memberships are all common perks. And let's be honest, it costs a lot more for women to get their hair done than for guys to get a haircut, so this is one many stations do offer the women. Again, doesn't hurt to ask.

Contract length: It boggles the mind that some stations want to sign rookie reporters to three year contract, but it happens. There is absolutely no reason for you to sign for that length of time if this is your first job. If it's not your first job, three years is common for anchors, two for reporters. Again, anything is negotiable.

Contract negotiations are probably the most stressful part of job hunting, but they are a necessary evil. But keep a cool head, don't be too demanding, and chances are you might be able to get a little more than the original offer.



MORNING SHOWS: THE VAMPIRE DIARIES

Recently a client was being considered for a morning show. This person had never worked the morning show and asked me what it was like.

So, for those of you who have never worked the vampire shift and might run into this situation, I thought I'd give you a taste of what life is like as a nocturnal creature.

Being a night person, I always dreaded filling in on the morning show. At one point in my career we were shorthanded, and I had to do it for two months. After that I vowed I would never, ever consider a job as a morning anchor or reporter. (By the way, those of you who are offered morning reporter jobs should know that you'll NEVER get to do a good package. You'll just chase the scanner all night and do follow-ups. It may be the worst reporting gig in all of television. I had one client who worked this shift for two years. I asked her to send me some packages. She hadn't done a single one. Good luck getting a resume tape.)

Anyway, here's a typical week:

-Monday thru Friday: The alarm goes off around two or three in the morning. If you have a significant other, this person gets a rude awakening, mutters something unintelligible, and goes back to sleep.

You stagger off to the bathroom and hope a shower wakes you up. (If you're a guy, you discover that trying to shave with one eye open leaves you looking as though you've gone ten rounds with an angry cat, so you start shaving before you go to bed.)

After getting dressed, you drink coffee and try to decide if you should eat breakfast. You really don't want breakfast, but you think

you'd better eat something or you'll run out of gas by the time the newscast starts. (Thus the "morning show weight gain syndrome" begins.)

You chase the raccoons away from your car and head to the station. Oh, if you live in a cold climate, you'll have to either shovel the driveway (you don't dare crank up the snow blower and wake the neighbors), scrape your windshield, or both. What fun!

You notice birds are flying around in the middle of the night. Oh, wait. Those are bats. You wave at them. Professional courtesy.

After arriving at the station you discover your muse doesn't work nights and you try to write intelligent copy as you drink more coffee. Your co-anchor checks your copy and informs you that Reagan is no longer the President and is dead, to boot. If you're a weather person, you try to remember what state you're living in and note that all your weather cam shots are pitch dark. You start to get hungry again... didn't you already have breakfast? Or is there another name for meals eaten at three in the morning?

You notice you have put on two different colored socks, your shoes don't match, or both.

After the newscast you have to deal with those pesky cut-ins for a few hours. Staffers start to drift in, looking refreshed after a good night's sleep.

After cut-ins you're hungry again, so you eat breakfast for the second time. And if you work for one of those stations still crazy enough to run a noon show, you have to prepare another newscast so you drink more coffee.

So maybe you're home by one in the afternoon. You're dog tired, but do you take a nap now? You curse the fact that you don't have dark curtains. And if you take a nap, you might not be able to go to bed by seven and end up staring at the ceiling till eleven and getting three hours sleep. Your option is to fight to stay awake all day. Oh, yeah, it's time to eat again.

Around six your other half arrives home and is ready to eat dinner. This is now your fourth or fifth meal of the day.

Now you have to go to bed at seven. Nice social life, huh? You turn in, but you've still got too much caffeine in your system even though you're exhausted. You toss and turn till nine.

Saturday: You relish the thought of "sleeping in" but your body clock is so screwed up you wake up at five. Your other half mutters something unintelligible and goes back to sleep. Hmmmm. Time for breakfast.

Your other half sleeps in and gets up at 9, wanting to go out to breakfast. What the heck, you eat breakfast again.

If you're a guy you decide to play golf with some friends, as you need sunshine. By the third hole you need a nap and are so out of it you use your putter to tee off.

Then it's Saturday night, so it's time to go out with your other half and friends. You start yawning at seven o'clock and fall asleep in the movie theater during the coming attractions.

Sunday: Ah, now you've got this "sleeping in" stuff down cold. You wake up at a quarter to six! Your other half mutters something unintelligible and goes back to sleep. You eat breakfast for the 14th time this week.

Sunday afternoon you start to feel normal. You enjoy Sunday dinner... or is it lunch?

Late Sunday afternoon fear hits you in the face like a cold bucket of water. You have to fall asleep soon! But your body clock is messed up again! You go to bed at seven. You finally fall asleep by nine and get about five hours of sleep. Except when your other half crawls into bed at ten and wakes you up. You mutter something unintelligible and stare at the ceiling for thirty minutes trying to fall asleep again.

One Month Later: You're now eating 22 breakfasts each week and have a box of Count Chocula stashed under the anchor desk for times you need a sugar rush. As you put on a pair of pants, the but-

ton gives way, ricochets off the mirror and hits you in the face. You'll shoot your eye out, kid!

There are those who love morning shows, and more power to them. They always argue that "you can get things done during the day!" (That's right, they think grocery stores are not open after six.) So people on a normal shift might actually have to shop until seven. The horror!

But if you aren't a morning person, think long and hard before even considering a shift like this. Your life will be dominated by the thought of going to sleep. You'll have absolutely no social life. Your friends will stop calling because they don't want to wake you up. You'll age two years in six months.

But you will discover the incredible number of choices in the cereal aisle.



LIFE IS NOT FAIR

And in broadcasting, it's *really* not fair.

If you think the best person for the job always gets the job, well, you're dreaming.

There are main factors that go into hiring; sadly, many have nothing to do with your qualifications or abilities.

So let's go down the list and show you how the stars truly need to align for you to come out on top of the short list.

-The News Director: Every ND has his or her own opinion about what kind of person is needed to fill a particular job. One ND may look at a tape and think that reporter is awful; another may look at the same tape and fall in love. It's totally subjective, a matter of taste. Personally, I liked reporters who were good storytellers, who did clever standups, who could turn a phrase. But that was me. I happened to walk in on one of my News Directors while he was watching resume tapes. *With the sound off.* I asked him if he was looking for anything in particular. He said, "If they don't look good, I don't want them." Clearly, appearance was his only priority.

-Money: All News Directors have to work within a budget, and sadly, the salary factor is crucial. You might be the best candidate but the ND might have someone equally as talented who can work a lot cheaper. Guess who gets the job? Or you might be dead even with another candidate. You demand a lot more than his offer, the other person doesn't. Again, guess who gets the job? Of course there is no way of knowing what the ND can afford, but you can do a little research and find out what the market is currently paying people.

-Quota: No manager or company will ever admit there is a quota to be filled, but it's true in every station. The staff tends to reflect the

demographic makeup of the market. You might be the best candidate but the wrong color, sex or both.

Years ago stations actually ran ads that targeted certain applicants in a backdoor way. "Co-anchor needed to work with our veteran female" meant women need not bother to apply. "Minorities encouraged to apply" meant don't bother if you're white. It might not be out in the open anymore, but trust me, the sex and demographic factor is huge.

-The Barbie/Ken factor: Pretty much every station has one or more of these. Someone who has an on-air job simply because they are beautiful or handsome. Brain not required.

Years ago it seemed that every woman who had won a beauty pageant went directly to television news without passing GO. Thankfully, pageants are pretty much a dying breed, but the appearance factor is still definitely prevalent.

This might be the most frustrating thing you'll encounter if you are not one of these people. Someone who leapfrogs over you simply because he or she is the best looking person on staff.

Years ago we hired one of these pageant winners. Everyone in the newsroom was leery of the hire, and it turned out we were right. One day the News Director asked me if I could help her with her scripts since she couldn't write. "So why did you hire her?" I asked. No answer, not that I needed one since it was painfully obvious. The woman was drop-dead gorgeous. Anyway, she was actually a very sweet person so I helped her out. And of course she soon had a major market job. (Where I'm sure someone like me wrote her stories.)

Don't let this stuff drive you crazy. Nothing you can do about it.

-Nepotism: Mostly seen at the network level. People with famous or well connected parents who never have to pay dues. Chris Cuomo, Chris Wallace, Anderson Cooper, Joe Buck, the business is loaded with people who started at the top simply because of a famous parent.

-Versatility: You're one of two reporters the News Director loves and you're dead even with the other person. But the other person has experience filling in doing weather and you don't, therefore your competition is more valuable to the newsroom.



IN THE GRAND SCHEME OF THINGS...

Does the story you do today really matter? Sure it does. Today. But, as the old saying goes (before the VCR existed) once a story is broadcast it's gone to Pluto (before NASA said Pluto was no longer a planet.)

I've been thinking about the times I fought for a story, or against one. Sometimes I had a valid argument, sometimes not. But on several occasions I took a stand for something really not worth the trouble. I look back and think of all those newsroom discussions, and honestly I can only think of one that really would have made a difference...

In the grand scheme of things.

Most of the time I got all worked up, putting the journalism hat on my head over things that really didn't matter to the viewer and to our news coverage. There is a time to argue your point with management, and most times it's better to simply either shut up and do your assignment or politely discuss different ways of covering the story.



STREET SMARTS CLASSIC EDITION

Some things never go out of style. How to put a good package together, how to deal with office politics, job hunting tips, dressing for success.

So the rest of this book is most of the original Street Smarts text.

I say “most” because I have gone through it and tried to remove the really dated stuff (should I send a VHS tape via media mail?)

So if you think I’ve missed something in the first part of the book, chances are you’ll find it here.

Still got a question? Happy to answer it. My contact information is at the end of the book.



FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

(If you're already out of college, skip this short chapter and move on.)

Every time I've been a guest at a high school "career day" two questions are always asked. (After the inevitable, "How much money do you make?")

"Where should I go to college?"

"Should I major in journalism?"

There are obviously a ton of factors that go into choosing a college, the primary one these days being the ridiculous cost. But let's put that aside, because you can get just as much out of your education at a public institution as a private one. And you can be just as successful majoring his history or political science as you can with a degree in journalism.

How?

The key to getting the right education for a broadcasting career lies outside of a book. I can tell you how to be a reporter or a producer and save you a lot of time with the shortcuts in this book, but until you get hands-on experience, you'll have a harder time getting to the next level. You could get a masters degree in broadcasting from the most prestigious university in the country, but if you've never picked up a camera or a microphone or edited a piece of video, you're going to be far behind the kid who has spent his college years learning in the field during internships.

So, with that in mind, here are some very important things to consider when choosing a college:

-Does the school have journalism facilities (newspaper, radio station, television station) that offer hands-on experience?

-Does the school have a relationship with local television stations as far as providing internships?

-Have the teachers actually worked in the industry?

Let's start with the facilities offered by the university. If the school offers opportunities in both print and electronic journalism, that is a huge plus. Working on a newspaper will teach you to write in a different style, which works well for the web. This is a different style of writing for broadcast, but good writing is good writing and you'll learn about editing, how newsrooms work, deadlines, interviewing skills and much more. Besides, most stations will require you to re-write your stories for the website, so you'll need long-form skills anyway. Radio can teach you about sound, delivery, voice inflection, and editing. And television can prepare you for your eventual career. The point of all this is to have as much media experience when you graduate so that your resume has more than just a degree on it.

Internships at working newsrooms (mostly during the summer) are invaluable when applying for that first job. Not only will you find out how a professional newsroom actually works, you'll make valuable contacts for the future. In many cases, many interns are hired for part time jobs while still in college, and have full time positions waiting for them after graduation. In most cases, you'll have to find your own internship, but some colleges work closely with nearby stations and often provide those stations with interns.

The faculty at an institution can be a huge plus if the teachers have real world experience. It is important to check out the backgrounds of the instructors. Have they actually worked in the field of journalism, or are they career students who have never stepped off a campus and teach nothing but theory? In most cases, those who have been in the trenches can teach you a lot more than those who haven't.

Choosing a major is a much debated topic. Once again, there are many factors at play here. Are you absolutely sure this is the career

path you'll follow for the rest of your life? Or do you want a background that can help should you need to implement Plan B?

You can be successful either way. Majors in subjects like history or political science can be very useful, in that you'll have an excellent grasp of how government works. Since many stories covered by news reporters fall in this area, you'll have an advantage. These are also good majors in the event you change your mind down the road and decide to go to law school, which happens quite often. But if you pursue any major outside of journalism, make sure the school offers media opportunities like those described above and at least some journalism courses.

If you choose a journalism degree, make sure you take a good amount of courses in history and political science. So many grads come out of J-schools knowing everything about television presentation but not having any concept of how government works. You don't want to graduate not knowing the difference between a State Senator and a US Senator.

Television news has a huge turnover rate and a high burnout rate. The stress, the deadlines, the office politics, and the low starting salaries chase a lot of young people away from their dreams. So be prepared. You may be totally convinced that television news will be your lifelong career, but until you actually work it on a regular basis, you really won't know. An internship can tell you a lot. I've worked with many interns who changed their majors after realizing that a broadcasting career was not for them.

THE INTERN'S GUIDEBOOK

Right about now many of you in college are soon to be spending part or all of your summer in a real, live television station. If you were smart enough to set up an internship, good for you. You are about to

learn more in about two months than you did in four years of college.

But only if you use your time in the newsroom wisely.

Over the years I've come to the conclusion that there are two kinds of interns. On one side you find the dedicated, passionate kids who truly want to work in the business and make a difference. The other half want to get college credit for doing an eight week impersonation of a doorstop and look at an internship as summer camp.

I will never forget a batch of interns we had one summer. Shortly after their arrival, reporters began complaining that their computers were all screwed up. One call to the Chief Engineer and we discovered that the kids had loaded instant messaging capabilities along with all sorts of games onto all the newsroom computers. Incredibly, they were sitting at desks messaging people who sat two feet away. (You should have seen their faces when we took all those features off the computers. They actually had to speak to one another.)

There were a few interns that year who were above the games and truly interested in learning. One in particular was a very energetic young lady, who would drop in my office every day and asking to do something new or if I needed help with anything. She was smart as a whip and I had a hunch she was the real thing, so I piled the work on her to start. She never complained and did a thorough job on everything I assigned her. By the end of the summer she was actually bringing me story ideas and showing up at the morning meeting. She was only a sophomore, so the next two years she set up internships at a network and another local station.

Four years after I met her, she was working as a reporter in a 30's market. At the age of 23. She's now an anchor.

You want that for yourself? Listen up.

On day one you must be resigned to the fact that you basically know nothing. You may have been taught out of books printed during the Carter administration which talk about developing film. Or

you might have had a teacher who never worked in the business and is obsessed with journalism theory. You may have been lucky and been taught by someone who worked in the industry. But until you've actually spent time in a newsroom, you cannot possibly know how things work.

Rule number one: you must be a sponge. Every minute you spend as an intern must be spent soaking up knowledge.

Even if you just want to be a reporter, I encourage you to spend time with as many different people as possible. Learn about the gear from photogs, as chances are you might start out as a one man band. Spend time with producers, and find out how they put newscasts together. Sit in the booth during a newscast, then sit in the studio for another so that you get both points of view. Ride along with the field crews, and help carry the gear. Attend the morning meetings. Learn how to edit video. Learn how the mast goes up on the live truck, and how a satellite truck works. Read the wires and every newspaper in the shop. Constantly ask people if they need help with anything. Beat calls, changing the toner in the printer, making coffee, sorting mail, whatever.

And don't be afraid to ask questions, no matter how silly they may seem. The only silly questions are the ones not asked. If you don't know something, ask. We all understand that you have a lot to learn.

At some point you'll be "initiated" if newsroom staffers see you as someone who is legit. You might be sent in search of the "chroma-key" or a photog may ask you to put a reflector back in a bag (a time-honored tradition which is hilarious to watch.) Be a good sport.

Dress nicely. We don't expect you to show up in suits and dresses, but "business casual" is good. Act mature. We don't want to hear how hammered you got in college, or what you are considering for your next tattoo. Leave the body piercing jewelry at home. We're not taking someone into the field who looks like he was attacked by a staple gun.

Be on time. Very important.

At the end of your internship you can ask a reporter or photog to help you put a tape together. If you've been helpful and sincere, people are usually glad to do this.

I've worked in many stations in which interns have been hired after their internship because they made such a good impression. So treat this like a job, not just another class. It is, in reality, your foot in the door. It's just up to you to show the staff that you belong.

THE ALMOST GRAD'S GUIDE TO THE REAL WORLD OF TV NEWS

Many of you will be or already are sending out resume tapes, and soon you'll take that first step up the ladder.

For many, the transition from academics to the real world will be a major shock. No parents around to coddle you, no ribbons for participating, no Disney bluebirds to do your laundry. You'll have bills to pay, food to cook, and, for the first time, co-workers. You'll share a newsroom with people your own age and some older than your parents. And you'll have to deal with office politics, perhaps a tougher art to master than the live shot.

Real life, it has been said, gives the test first and the lesson later. So let me try to give you a cheat sheet on some of the lessons and hopefully save you some years and headaches in the process:

-Beware the "bait and switch" job offer. This is a favorite tactic of News Directors hiring entry level people. They know you want to be a reporter, but offer you a producer's job and promise to "move you into reporting when the opportunity arises." Problem is, it rarely does. There's a producer shortage (due to over-staffing at the position, but that's a rant for another day) and so the odds of you getting out of the booth and onto the street are slim.

-Long contract? Fuhgeddaboutit. A three year contract for someone right out of college is ridiculous. Most people don't need to spend that much time in their first job. Two years is about average for contracts, one is great, none is better. Learn what an "out clause" is in a contract (basically an escape route to a certain size market, and we'll touch on that later in the job hunting section of the book) and make sure any contract you sign is read by a lawyer before you sign it. And if any News Director tells you that you "have to sign right now" or the job will go to someone else, leave skid marks.

-Aim high with your resume tapes. You'll hear from many so-called "experts" that you have to start in a tiny market. You don't. Some people have a tremendous amount of natural talent, and that talent deserves to be seen everywhere. Market 50 and up is a good place to start, but lots of people have been hired in top ten markets for their first job. If you're interested in a particular market, take a shot. You have nothing to lose.

-Photogs trump all. In this day and age, going to a station with photogs can jump start your career. If you've got two offers and one is from a station with photogs, that's the gig you want.

-Beware the "occasional one-man-band scenario." If a News Director offers you a job and says something to the effect of, "You may occasionally have to pick up a camera," your radar should go up, because "occasionally" often means "every day." Yet another ruse from the bait-and-switch department.

-Get your resume tape checked before you graduate. Too many grads wait until they're out of school to discover their tape wasn't good enough. Now is the time to find out if your tape needs fixing, because you still have time to fix it.

-If you don't ask, they won't offer. When you're looking for your first job, you really have no leverage as far as negotiation, but you can still politely ask for a little help with things like moving expenses. The key here is "politely."

-Consider the road trip. Many managers love seeing fresh young faces drop off a tape in person. It's great to see a kid take the initiative, and it saves the ND from having to fly someone in for an interview. Lots of people have gotten jobs this way. (More on that later in the job hunting section.)

-It's the tape, and nothing else. I'm sure this will tick you off to no end, but no one cares what your GPA is or even if your degree is in journalism. News Directors hire people who have good tapes that show potential. You may have gone to a prestigious school, but if some kid from a no-name college has a great tape, that person will get the job. And internships on a resume trump degrees every time.

-Write a decent cover letter. I couldn't care less if you tell me you'll work hard, you're a team player, and you'll go the extra mile. That's in every cover letter these days. Your cover letter should tell a story; what makes you special? And please, no cover letters that start with "Channel X has a long history of solid journalism and I want to be part of that tradition." These are pretty transparent attempts to butter up a News Director, and they don't work.

-Don't let power go to your head. There are entry level jobs for anchors and producers, and if you get one of these, don't start ordering people around. Nothing annoys veterans more than kids right out of college who act like dictators.

-Be the sponge. When you start that first job, listen and learn. Better yet, ask for advice and feedback. You may think you know everything about the business, but in reality you know very little. Seek out a mentor at the station, and if you're fortunate to work with competent photogs, soak up all the advice they dispense.

-Avoid the gossip chain. The aforementioned office politics can saddle you with a bad reputation if you're someone who stirs the pot. Stay out of office gossip and be nice to everyone.

-Start your retirement fund. Yeah, I know that sounds crazy when you're 22, but even putting one percent of your salary away will make you comfortable 40 years from now.

-Your co-workers are not the competition. You may be competing for a lead story or an anchor opening, but your co-workers are your teammates. The competition works for the other stations in the market. Be the team player that everyone claims to be in the cover letter.

-Remember that any day could be the day you get your big break. Never phone it in. You may have plenty of good stories on your resume tape, but you never know who's watching the feed or what ND is driving through town or visiting family that happens to live in your market. Doing a solid job every day assures you that you'll be ready to grab the brass ring when it comes around.

-Have fun. You're not waiting tables, flipping burgers, or working on an assembly line. You may be underpaid, but you're doing something that can change the world. Enjoy the friends you make and the experiences you share. The ladder isn't going anywhere, so enjoy your stop on each rung.



PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE

What's the most difficult skill to master in television news?
Live shots? Nope.

Editing? Uh-uh.

Reading the prompter? Not even close.

The most difficult thing to master in our business has nothing to do with technology, reporting skills or writing ability. It's something internal, and something that can help your career or send it running off the rails.

Give up?

It's patience.

And for this instant download generation, it's even harder to control than it was back in the day.

The problem for most people in the business is two-fold. First, many people are working in bad situations. Second, most people have dreams of reaching the top rung on the ladder.

The result is often a knee-jerk response to any job offer that comes along. "Anywhere but here" is a battle cry heard in many stations. Problem is, there are a lot of places just like the station at which you're working.

Jumping at the first thing to come along can be a huge mistake. The rose colored glasses we all wear in our youth turn into 20/20 hindsight when we realize we've made a mistake.

Yes, competition is fierce, and always has been in this business. But if you're talented, you'll be in demand. Problem is, some people aren't sending out enough tapes. Then, when the only offer comes, they jump.

I've heard people actually say they've been told to send out five tapes, then wait, then send five more.

Why?

Why not send out a bushel of tapes all at once? If you only send out a handful of tapes and get one offer, you'll never know what else could have been out there.

As with any job offer, take time to step back and breathe. Sleep on it. Take off the rose colored glasses. Do some homework on the station and the News Director. Track down former employees and get honest opinions about the place.

And if it sounds just like the bad situation you're in, pass.

Learning to be patient can be incredibly difficult when you're broke and chomping at the bit to move on. You see other people less talented getting great jobs, and suddenly you just to go. Right. Now.

The term "lateral move" is often associated with salary, but it can also describe the situation. If you're in one bad station and go to another bad station, you've made a lateral move.

Wait for the right job. It will pay off in the long run. And when you think about it, the long run is the only thing that matters.



THE PACKAGE

The backbone of every newscast is the "package," a self-contained story that often runs about a minute and a half or less. It usually contains the following:

- A reporter standup, in which you stand in front of the camera.
- Voiced-over video.
- Sound bites, which are quotes from people who have been interviewed.
- Natural sound, which is sound other than that provided by the reporter or the interview subjects. Examples are birds chirping, cars roaring by, train whistles, protestors chanting, etc.
- Graphics, which can illustrate various points of information and can make stories with lots of numbers easier for the viewer to understand.
- Music, which is often used in feature stories.

If you look at this list, you probably notice that you've got a lot of elements you can use in your story. And a lot of them will be provided by the photographer. (Then again, that person may be you.)

Think of a package as spaghetti sauce. You've bought the tomatoes, and the photog has picked up the oregano, basil, parsley, onions and garlic. If you don't use the photog's ingredients, your viewers are eating ketchup.

Most packages done by young reporters (and some old ones) look a lot like this:

- voiceover
- sound bite
- voiceover
- sound bite

- voiceover
- standup close

Looks pretty boring when you put it that way, doesn't it? To illustrate my point, I'm going to write a package two ways. First, imagine you've just returned to the station and the photog has handed you the tape. The first thing you should do is watch the tape and log your sound bites, shots, and natural sound. Once you have a list of your available elements, you can begin writing the script for your package. And remember, you have to "write to video" so that your voiceover actually references the video seen by the viewer. You can't talk about that train roaring by if we don't see or hear it.

This hypothetical package deals with hurricane preps. Here's what you have on the raw tape:

- Sound bites from a fisherman, a Home Depot manager, and a supermarket customer
- A standup from the reporter
- Video with natural sound:
 - generator starting up
 - plywood being pulled off shelf
 - batteries being scanned at checkout line
 - supermarket checkout line
 - cash register scanner
 - kid bagging groceries
 - tight shot of hand grabbing last loaf of bread and tossing it into cart on top of peanut butter
 - long shot down empty frozen food aisle of supermarket, music playing
- OK, now I'm going to put this package together without any natural sound...
- VERSION #1*

Anchor Intro: Tropical Storm Izzy is bearing down on the coast, and everyone is preparing just in case. Nick Doppler hit the streets to find out what's disappearing from store shelves.

Voiceover: With a good chance that power will go out, generators are going to be hard to come by tonight, as Home Depot just sold the last one this afternoon. Even though they sell for eight hundred dollars, people are desperate.

Sound Bite/Fisherman: "I don't really have eight hundred dollars to spare but I'd hate to lose all those shrimp I've got in the freezer."

Voiceover: And of course everyone is boarding up his home with plywood and getting ready for power outages with batteries. Those items will be gone by this evening. The manager at Home Depot says this is typical whenever there is a storm coming.

Sound Bite/ Home Depot Manager: "There are two rules in this business. People always wait until the last minute and they always panic when there is any kind of storm."

Voiceover: At the supermarket the usual staples are selling like hotcakes and no one wants items from the frozen food aisle. Customers want things that don't spoil, like peanut butter and bread.

Sound Bite/ Supermarket Customer: "Even though it is hot outside ice cream is useless. I'm loading up on beef jerky."

Voiceover: Bagboys have been bagging groceries at a steady pace all day, but soon they won't have anything left to bag.

Standup/Nick Doppler: So as the gulf gets ready for Tropical Storm Izzy, the shelves are getting empty. Nick Doppler, I-missed-it News.

OK, I admittedly did a bad job of writing on purpose to illustrate my point. Not only did I avoid natural sound, I didn't write into my sound bites. Remember when you were taught about writing to your video to make your words match the pictures? You can also "write to sound." Listen to your sound bites and natural sound, then make your copy lead into them.

Now let's take that same tape and use everything the photog has given us.

VERSION #2

Nat Sound/ Generator starting up:

Voiceover: You won't hear that sound at Home Depot this evening, as the last generator is gone. This model was reeled in by a local fisherman, and might just be his best catch of the day.

Sound Bite/Fisherman: "I don't really have eight hundred dollars to spare but I'd hate to lose all those shrimp I've got in the freezer."

Nat Sound/ Plywood being pulled from shelf

Nat Sound/ Batteries being scanned at checkout line

Voiceover: The usual suspects vanished from store shelves after being stocked to the ceiling according to the Home Depot rulebook.

Sound Bite/ Home Depot Manager: "There are two rules in this business. People always wait until the last minute and they always panic when there is any kind of storm."

Nat sound/ Supermarket checkout line

Nat Sound/ Cash register scanner

Nat Sound/ Kid Bagging groceries

Voiceover: And if you lose the shrimp in your freezer, you'll need something else to eat. Something that doesn't require refrigeration.

Nat Sound/ Tight shot of hand grabbing last loaf of bread and tossing it into cart on top of peanut butter

Standup bridge: "Adults might not be big on peanut butter sandwiches, but tonight all the bread and Skippy are outta here."

Voiceover: But you could fire a cannon down the frozen food aisle and not hit anyone.

Nat Sound/ Muzak playing over shot of empty frozen food aisle

Sound Bite/ Supermarket Customer: "Even though it is hot outside ice cream is useless. I'm loading up on beef jerky."

Voiceover: So when the going gets tough, the tough go shopping. I'm Nick Doppler reporting.

Did you see how little you have to write when you use all the photographer has given you? Even a seemingly boring shot of an empty aisle with music playing can be useful to illustrate a point. Natural sound is also effective when changing locations, as in this case it gets us from the Home Depot to the supermarket without saying, "meanwhile at the supermarket."

Writing into a sound bite isn't that hard. You know you have a sound bite with a fisherman coming up, so be a little clever with your voiceover before the bite.

And you don't always have to tell the viewer what is being shown. We can see the plywood being sold; we don't need to hear it from the reporter.

Adding as many elements as possible to your package gives your package energy, makes it more appealing, and can save you valuable time.

HOW TO CUT TIME FROM YOUR PACKAGE

Every station has rules about package times. Some like stories that run about 1:30, while others prefer what I call "packlets" that run 1:10 or less. Personally, I allowed stories to run more than two minutes if they were really good.

Regardless of your station's parameters, hitting time limits is often difficult for young reporters. You've got a good story, but it runs too long... so what do you cut? A sound bite? Your standup? Nat sound breaks?

Nope. The easiest thing to cut is your voice track. Trust me, packages are loaded with tons of extraneous words. You may look at your script and think it's impossible without changing the meaning or taking out facts, but it's easy if you know how to do it. Your package will be tighter and just as informative while keeping management and producers happy.

So, let me give you a few examples of how to "red pen" your script.

Let's say we're writing a story on health care. We've got our bites, nat sound breaks and standup in place but we're still ten seconds too long. So take a look at your copy.

"Opponents of the health care bill say that many doctors will stop taking Medicare patients. And that could make it harder for seniors to get a doctor's appointment."

Okay, there's really nothing wrong with those two sentences, except everything could easily be said in one. There are plenty of extra words in there... do we really need to say "health care bill" when our entire story is on the subject?

Now try this:

"Opponents say seniors could face problems since many doctors might stop taking Medicare patients."

Five seconds, outta here. Did the story change? Nope.

Now let's try some really simple stuff and deal with lead-ins to sound bites.

"Senator Knowitall, who chairs the committee that is reviewing the bill, says the new system will bring big changes to the country's health care system."

Hmmm... do we really need you to tell the viewer what the Senator is about to say? So let's try this to lead-in to the sound bite.

"Committee Chairman Senator Knowitall."

Wow, that's pretty simple. Another five seconds, outta here. Did the story change? No, because the Senator's sound bite is untouched. You didn't need to paraphrase the bite if you didn't have the time.

Remember, the last things to go in a package are your standup, nat sound, and critical sound bites. When seconds count, the easier things to cut are your own words.

EVERYTHING I NEEDED TO KNOW ABOUT B-ROLL I LEARNED IN THE 3RD GRADE

Gently tucked between class discussions on the Cuban missile crisis and the "duck and cover" exercises in case someone nuked the Big Apple, was the weekly classroom feature known as "show and tell." Everyone would have to bring something, get up in front of the class, show it off and talk about it. It might be a frog someone caught, a Mickey Mantle baseball card won in a game of "flip" or something brought back from an exotic faraway place, like New Jersey. If a student didn't have something to show, your class participation grade suffered, as "telling" without "showing" just didn't have the same effect. Talking about your brother's pet iguana didn't carry the same punch unless you brought the iguana and scared the girls in the class half to death.

So it puzzles me that I'm seeing a trend of reporters that use an endless parade of talking heads in their packages. B-roll? Nat sound bites? They almost seem like an afterthought. The result is a package filled with sound bites, a standup, and little in the way of compelling video.

You're not showing the iguana. When you boil it down, television news is just electronic show and tell.

For whatever reason, young reporters tend to think the whole story is about *their* copy, *their* standup, and *their* talking head interviews. That leads to a frequent discussion in photog lounges across America that goes something like this:

Chief Photog: "I watched your story yesterday..." (pauses, waiting for an explanation on why the story was so video-poor)

Photog: "I shot a ton of great b-roll but the (colorful adjective) reporter didn't use any of it."

I used to have a good News Director whose favorite phrase while watching a newscast was "seen here." If the reporter hadn't used any b-roll, or the cover video didn't match the copy, you heard it. Your

copy might read, "Times are tough at the cash strapped high school," while your video might show perky cheerleaders at a football game because you didn't take the time to write to your video or edit your story properly. Or, even worse, you used the dreaded file tape. "Seen here," he'd say sarcastically.

So, did the package you turned today "show" or just "tell?" Would you get a "seen here" from my old boss? It's called *television* for a reason. If you're going to take your work to the top level, you have to learn to think visually, like a photog. If not, you aren't doing much more than radio.

Some suggestions for making your packages more compelling while limiting the talking heads:

- Talk about the story with the photog while you're on your way, then look around when you arrive before you interview anyone. What video might convey the story to the viewer if the viewer had the sound turned off?

- Ask the photog what shots he liked on the way back to the station.

- Watch your video before you start to write your package. This is perhaps the biggest mistake made by young reporters. You can't possibly know what the photog has seen until you take the time to look at it.

- Write to your video. This is crucial. Make a shot sheet of the b-roll that you have, then tailor your copy to fit it. Then when you edit, make sure it matches.

- Sound bites can be covered with b-roll. There's no rule that says the video portion of a talking head has to air without cover video. You can start the sound bite, then cover it with supporting b-roll after a few seconds.

- Not every story needs a sound bite. Ever see a photo essay? Nat sound is just as effective as a sound bite, sometimes more so.

-Nat sound breaks are as important as anything else. Put these on your shot sheet, and use them instead of copy to convey information, feelings, mood. You can write into or out of these little gems to make your package more interesting.

Let's give you an example. Your story is about that cash strapped school system that doesn't have money to replace its failed air conditioners. You walk into the school and a wall of heat hits you in the face. You interview the principal, who talks about how hot it is and how they'll have to just get through the year. You interview a teacher who talks about drinking six bottles of water every day and a few students who say they can't concentrate. You know you've got more classroom video back on file at the station if you need it, so you just shoot some generic classroom stuff. It's hot and you want to get outta there.

You end up with a parade of sound bites that *tell* the viewer how hot it is. You may as well be on the phone with someone in a cooler climate, saying, "It sure is hot here." Did you *show* the viewers anything that *says* heat?

Now, take a minute and think. What video is available to show the viewers what the people in the school are going through? A tight shot of a bead of sweat rolling down a small child's face while the kid's sleepy eyes show his attention is fading fast. A teacher at a soda machine (nat break! can falling into slot!) running the ice cold can across her forehead before she opens it. Students eating lunch outside because the cafeteria is unbearable. Cafeteria workers standing in the walk-in freezer to cool off. And having you sweat during your standup wouldn't hurt either. Maybe some generous viewer will pony up the cash for the a/c, and then (thanks to your clever use of b-roll) you've got a happy ending follow-up.

Think audio when you're using talking heads, because that's all you need. Cover 'em up as much as possible. Work closely with the

photog and ask his advice before you write your package, and while editing.

If you want to show people the iguana, you've gotta bring it to class.

B-ROLL IS YOUR FRIEND WHEN YOU HAVE TOO MANY SOUND BITES

With the possible exception of Celine Dion and Central Park mimes, nothing annoys me more than packages with "single source" sound bites. That's when a reporter does one interview and chops it up so that we keep going back to a sound bite with the same person... over and over and over and over.

Sometimes you need a second sound bite from an interview subject, but there's no rule that says the person has to be on camera for bite #2. Since nothing is more boring than a talking head, you can avoid this by covering some or all of that bite with b-roll.

Example: You're doing a package on swine flu. You've interviewed a local doctor and you are going to use two sound bites from the guy.

First bite (on camera): "We're hoping to get enough vaccine to treat all the young people in the school district."

Okay, now you have to go back to the guy who is going to talk about why young people need to be vaccinated.

Second bite: "Kids in school are in close quarters, and many still go to school when they're feeling sick, so it's easy for the flu to be transmitted in the classroom."

So, instead of showing the doctor's face again, why not cover that second bite with classroom video? It's simple, makes your package look better, and it follows our "show and tell" rule.

When shooting your package, always make sure you have enough b-roll. If you hear something during your interview that might be

covered with video, make a mental note to get b-roll that's appropriate.

DEVELOPING AN "EAR" FOR NATURAL SOUND

The biggest weakness I see in packages done by young people is the inability to effectively use nat sound. Many don't use it at all, or if they do use it, it's only once in a blue moon.

You need to develop your "ear" for nat sound.

OK, don't laugh at this exercise, but if you're a young reporter it really will make your packages better. Take a pen and paper and go to the mall. Walk around for an hour. Don't buy anything. Instead of looking, I want you to listen. Write down every piece of nat sound you hear. Cash registers, bad elevator music versions of the Rolling Stones, screaming kids, clanking silverware in the food court. Close your eyes if it helps. Don't leave until you have a list of 100 different sounds. That may seem like a lot, but you'll be amazed at how quickly you fill the list.

I've done this with a lot of people and it really makes you more aware of natural sound, so that you can keep a sharp ear out for it on your stories. Then make sure you implement it when editing your stories.

THE ONE-SIDED STORY

I look at a lot of tapes from young people, and of late I've noticed a trend that needs to be corrected. I'm not sure if this is what they're teaching in college, or if NDs aren't being good mentors for entry level people (more likely), but one thing needs to disappear from resume tapes.

It's that single source sound bite again.

When a ND looks at a resume tape and sees a package in which you've only interviewed one person, there's only one word that goes through his mind.

Lazy.

Remember that "two sides to every story" thing they teach in Journalism 101? Well, in TV you need as many sides as possible, from different angles and points of view. When you just talk to one person, you are "phoning it in" and not doing the legwork necessary to a good story.

I'll give you an example: You're assigned to a story in which you have to profile a crime victim. Some poor woman who was assaulted and now faces a hard road back to a normal life. So you sit down and chat with her at length, then use several of her sound bites and a little b-roll of her getting around. You think you're done because you've shown the viewers a little bit of what life is like for a recovering victim.

Well, you're not done. You need to visit a rehab clinic, to show what people in similar situations have to go through. You might even shoot some of her b-roll there. You need to interview her physical therapist. Her boss who is letting her work part-time while she builds her strength. A volunteer who drives her around because she can't drive. The teenager next door who does her grocery shopping for her. And you need to tag your story with what happened to the bad guy. Still at large or a guest of the state?

This package needs as many "elements" as possible: several sound bites from different people, lots of nat sound, several locations. A News Director needs to see the legwork you've put into the story, the fact that you've gone the extra mile to find another point of view, to see how this woman's life has touched and affected others.

There's always a second point of view, or a third, or a fourth. It's your job to find as many as possible. Stretch your imagination, ask

yourself how one person's story affects someone else, and soon you'll almost have too many elements for your story.

I'll give you another example. You're sent out to do a piece on a charity that provides coats for the poor in the winter. You do a long interview with the guy running the charity, get lots of b-roll of coats, do a standup, and slap a package together. Since this story is a positive one that no one could possibly be against, you assume there are not two sides to the story.

In reality, you're missing many sides. I want to see someone donating a coat, then find out why they did it. Guilt? Looking for a tax deduction? An honest charitable soul? Well, you won't know until you talk to the person making the donation. On the other side of the coin you have the poor person receiving the coat. What does this mean to the woman who can now send her kid to school in a nice warm coat? Wouldn't a sound bite with the kid be a nice warm and fuzzy touch?

But wait, there's more!

You have a chance to get involved. Don't just tell people they can bring coats to the charity, tell them how cold it is going to be tonight, how they can get a nice tax deduction.

And by searching for more sides to the story, you'll end up with more natural sound for your package. You can use the coat being donated and being handed out.

So you see, even in a story that is obviously one-sided (there's nothing negative about handing out coats to the poor), there are still many sides to the story. Every action has a reaction; every story affects more than one person. It's up to you to find the angles, to find the people.

If you've just talked to one person, you can't possibly tell the whole story. Always look for two sides, and then put your mind to work and find a third and a fourth if you can. Your packages will be

much more interesting and tell the whole story instead of just a part of it.



COMING UP WITH A STANDUP

When I first broke into the business I would go out with a photog, get my sound bites and b-roll, and then inevitably hear the photog ask, "Standup?" Oh yeah, gotta do one of those. It's a rule.

So I'd knock out something without much thought and generally throw it at the end of a package.

Standups are often uncomfortable for young reporters. After all, it's not natural to stand out in the middle of a location and talk to a camera while stuff is going on around you. You worry how you look, how you sound, and if the standup makes sense. So you throw something simple together for a standup close.

In reality, you should start thinking of a standup the minute you start doing the story.

There's a reason you start a resume tape with a standup montage. And there's a reason News Directors want to see standups first. It's because they're important, and show your ability to think creatively in the field.

So don't leave your standup to the end of your shoot. When you arrive at your first location, start thinking about how you can incorporate a standup into the package.

-Perhaps the story has two locations, and a standup can get you from one to the other.

-The story may cry out for something to be demonstrated. Don't talk about how something works, show me.

-The story might need some sort of re-enactment, and you can lead the viewers along the way.

-You might want to get involved in the story. Don't tell me about the opening of the sports complex with the batting cage, pick up a bat and swing away.

-Show and tell is always the best thing you can do.

There are no rules about standups. You can be as creative as possible. And remember that a clever standup bridge is always more effective than a standup close. Walking standups add energy to the package.

Remember that your standup not only gives you face time but showcases your ability to tie a story together. Once you get in the habit of looking for standup opportunities, you'll be able to see many possibilities instead of struggling to throw anything together for the end of your package.

WHY STARTING A PACKAGE WITH A STANDUP IS A BAD IDEA

For years, most reporters put their standups in two places... the middle of the package or the end. It's always more difficult to do a standup bridge, because that actually forces you to think in the field. Bridges always look better and tell a News Director you're clever enough to figure out how to use a standup as a transition. Standup closes are old and traditional, and very safe.

Lately I'm seeing reporters begin their taped packages with standups. While going from anchor to reporter looks fine in a live shot, doing so with a taped piece always looks awkward because the anchor and reporter are not "talking" to each other.

But the other reason you shouldn't start with a standup has to do with the director, switcher, and master control equipment. If your package doesn't start exactly at the beginning, you're going to look silly and your package won't make sense.

I'll give you an example to illustrate. Let's say your standup open reads like this:

"A city spokesman says there's no truth to allegations that the mayor had an ongoing affair with a stripper for the past two years."

Now, let's throw human error, a mis-punched button, and old equipment that is infested with gremlins into the mix. For whatever reason, the director can't take your package until it has already rolled a few seconds, and your package starts this way...

"The mayor had an ongoing affair with a stripper for the past two years."

Gee, that sure changes the meaning of your story, doesn't it? (Not to mention the fact that your station would be sued by the end of the newscast.)

OK, that's an extreme example, but things like that have happened. It is always safest to start a package with a few seconds of natural sound. That gives the director a safety net in the event of any technical problems, or a simple mis-punch. And it's just smoother than starting a story abruptly with a sound bite.

Bottom line, avoid standup opens. They look weird and can totally ruin your package.

ENDING A PACKAGE: DON'T LET YOUR STORY DROP OFF A CLIFF

Imagine you've been reading a story in the newspaper. It's an interesting story that has held your attention. You're getting to the good part and then just as

Pretty annoying when I don't finish a sentence, isn't it? Incredibly, that's how many reporters these days finish up a story.

I cannot tell you how many stories I've seen that end with a soundbite followed directly by a sig-out. And when you end a story

that way, you've basically given the viewer a package without an ending.

(On the other side of the coin, we have the "opening-line-of-the-package-is-the-same-as-the-lead-in syndrome, but that's a topic for another day.)

Stories need an ending that wraps up what the viewer has just seen, and that is best provided by a line or two of voice track. When you end a package on a sound bite, and then tag it out (probably because you can't think of anything else to say) it's jarring to the viewer.

Imagine fairy tales without "and they lived happily ever after." *So Prince Charming put the glass slipper on Cinderella's foot. The End.* If you were reading the story that way to a kid, the child would ask, "And then what happened?"

Think of it as a "cool down" when you exercise. You don't go all out on the treadmill and then pull the plug. You gradually slow it down as you finish your workout.

When you reach the end of your script, you need to look back at the whole thing and come up with a few words that sums up the package. Tie it all together in a smooth manner, then tag it out. Your packages will have a smoother flow and feel more comfortable to the viewer.

MAKING A "MEETING STORY" INTERESTING

Perhaps the worst thing about being a reporter on the evening shift is the fact that you often get stuck with meeting stories. Public hearings, council gatherings, school boards, whatever. You get handed a press release at three in the afternoon for a meeting that starts at seven. So you kill time, go to dinner, and knock out a package that features video of people sitting in chairs and speaking at a podium.

Riveting.

You have just missed out on a great opportunity.

A great meeting story takes a little planning, and a good assignment editor knows these things are in the file several days in advance. If I know there's a meeting about a proposed steel mill on Tuesday night, I'm going to give that assignment to my evening reporter a day or two ahead of time.

But, you're thinking, if the meeting doesn't take place till tomorrow, what's the big deal?

The point is to avoid as much meeting b-roll as possible. So if I know I'm going to be talking about that steel mill tomorrow, I need to get my mill video today. If there's already one nearby I go there. If not, I call the network for b-roll or an affiliate in a market that has steel mills. Then I go out to the neighborhood that will be affected and talk to the people while they're at that location. I want to know how they're going to deal with the pollution, the traffic, and whatever else a new business might bring. I'll hear about it at the meeting; I'll see it out in the field.

Let's say you have a school board meeting to cover about the system buying new computers for the classrooms. If you got that assignment the day of the meeting, well, school's already out for the day. If you got it the day before you can go to a school and show what the kids are currently using and what new computers might mean.

Sure, you can pull a bite or two from the meeting and use one set-up shot, but *90 percent of your story needs to take place away from the meeting site.*

Remember, it's all show and tell. If you're going to tell what the meeting is about, you've got to show what any decisions might mean.

THE VIEWER'S POINT OF VIEW

My parents often told me about the days before television, when families would gather around the radio for entertainment. Radio was, and still is, a "theater of the mind," as you have to use your imag-

ination to see the pictures that go along with the sound. If you ever get a chance to listen to the shows from that era, you'll note that the writers were masters when it came to creating the scenes in your mind.

Sadly, many of you may as well be broadcasting your stories on radio. Because the pictures often don't match the words. The basic premise of television is that video can accompany sound and bring the total picture to the viewer.

This was illustrated many times in 2010 when covering the gulf oil spill. When the story first broke, I watched story after story about "booms" being deployed in the gulf.

Fine. What is a boom? I don't exactly have one in my backyard. How does it work? Is anyone out there going to show me? Apparently not.

When it came to stories in the field, no one took the time to "show" the viewer what was being done. Sure, we saw booms being dropped in the water, but would it have killed someone actually demonstrate how the things work? How hard would it have been to drop a boom in a small wading pool and pour some oil on one side?

We all saw plenty of graphics on how that containment dome was going to work, and that was good. Why not demonstrate the process? Take a running garden hose and drop a funnel over it. Simple, but no one thought to do it.

When doing stories in which you are describing how something works, put yourself in the viewer's place. If you're not going to show me how it works, I can read about it in the newspaper. TV people have a huge advantage over other media types in that we can use pictures and sound to describe what we're talking about. Too many reporters are so obsessed with the sounds of their own voices that they forget the viewer is sitting there, waiting for something to watch.

Always put yourself in the viewer's place. When you're assigned a story, think first about ways to show what you're going to be talking

about, not about who you're going to interview. The viewer wants to see the story as well as hear about it, and talking heads are useless unless accompanied by effective b-roll or a standup that demonstrates what you're talking about. If you're doing a story on making a pie, show the process. If you're interviewing a teacher who no longer has funding for paper, show her going to the store and buying it out of her own pocket. If you're talking about Wall Street, show me a stock broker actually making a trade or someone doing it themselves on-line.

Photogs have an old saying: "Without us, you're radio." Until you grasp the basic principles of show and tell, you may as well be broadcasting in the 1930's.

ARCHITECTURAL STUDIES

I once had a News Director who had a term for a certain type of video. You see it in packages all the time. It's the lame b-roll of buildings, streets, and skylines used in lieu of anything actually happening.

He referred to the video as an "architectural study."

Example: You're talking about a town in your market that is booming. Lots of new shops, all kinds of industries opening up, etc. But instead of actually walking in the doors of these new establishments and showing people working, you give me wide shots of streets, company signs, and other static shots that turn into video wallpaper.

And if a News Director sees this on your resume tape, he has a better term than "architectural study" video.

That term again would be "lazy."

It all goes back to show-and-tell. While shooting a story most good reporters sort of "lay the story out in their heads" while at the location. By that I mean you basically know what you're going to need for your package as far as b-roll is concerned. (And if you are

working with a photog, you should be talking about this on the way to your story.)

Let's go back to our example of the booming town. You arrive and see a new coffee shop that has just opened and a manufacturing plant that makes blenders. You could set your camera up in the street and get wide, medium and tight shots of the coffee shop. Or, what a concept, you could actually go inside and get video of the barista making coffee, the nat sound of a cappuccino machine. You could shoot several exteriors of the blender factory. Or you could actually walk inside and see blenders rolling by on an assembly line, and get the nat sound of an employee plugging in each blender and testing it.

It's fine to get an establishing shot of a location. But after you establish where you are, the viewer needs to see what you're talking about. If you tell something without showing it, you're not doing television, but radio.

BEFORE WRITING YOUR PACKAGE, CHECK THE VIDEO

I used to work with a reporter who carried around one of those mini voice recorders. She would hold it with her microphone, then listen to everything when she got back to the station and wrote her package. She never looked at the video that had been shot. Someone asked her why she did this, and she said, "It's all on the audio tape. Same thing."

Uh, no.

The first thing you should do when returning to the station after shooting a story is look at your tape. And if you're not doing this, start today. Trust me, the quality of your packages will go up 100 per cent.

You may think you know what you or a photog has shot, but until you actually look at the tape you can't appreciate what the camera has captured. Pay close attention to the b-roll; your "money shot"

might be in there somewhere, a piece of nat sound you didn't notice may jump out, something happening in the background might change your story.

But if you don't know it's there, you won't use it. The camera sees things differently, and so does a photog. So it's up to you as the reporter to carefully screen everything on the tape.

So grab a pad and log everything on your tape. Sound bites and standups, sure, but make sure you have a good idea of what your b-roll shows and sounds like. It may change the direction of your package, and it will most certainly make it better.

REPORTER'S CHECKLIST

Putting as many elements as possible into your package can make it more interesting and move it along at a faster clip. It's important to think about all the possibilities as you arrive at your location. (Better yet, think about this stuff before you leave the station.)

- ☐ This is a checklist to help you see the elements that are possible:
- ☐ -Are you covering both sides of the story, and interviewing more than one person?
- ☐ -Have you looked for a third side of the story to show another point of view? With that in mind, what are other points of view that you can think of... and who might you talk with to illustrate them?
- ☐ -What are the natural sound opportunities for this story?
- ☐ -What video would best illustrate the story?
- ☐ -Do you have a compelling opening shot or piece of nat sound to begin the package?
- ☐ -Do you have an interesting clip that would make a good tease for the producer?
- ☐ -Does the story have a lot of numbers, and should you use a graphic to make it easier to understand?

-What standup would illustrate the story best, and “show” what is going on?

-Are you “showing” the viewer what’s going on rather than just “telling” the story?

-Is your b-roll interesting, or just static shots of inanimate objects?

-Can you shoot everything at one location, or would going to more locations make the story more interesting?

-Have you written to the video, the natural sound, and the sound bites?

-Have you written an anchor intro that is different than the first line of your package?



MANAGEMENT’S AGENDA... NOT ALWAYS ABOUT POLITICS

These days we pretty much know which networks are conservative and which are liberal. As a freelance field producer I was able to work for all the networks, one of the few people in the country who did work for both NBC and Fox News. It got to the point that when I worked for NBC people assumed I was liberal. When I worked for Fox they thought I was conservative. I’ve got a closet full of stuff with network logos I never wear unless I’m working for that particular network, since I really don’t want people making assumptions about where my opinions lie. (You might see it on eBay some day.)

Local stations are different. I worked for seven local stations and only saw an agenda in one newsroom when a very important story with national implications was killed because of a manager’s political leanings. But for the most part, you don’t see the bias on local stations that you do on the network, at least not to that level anyway.

But there’s an agenda that goes beyond politics, and is often more important.

Money.

Because without revenue, you don’t have a job.

So when the sales department gets involved with news coverage, things can get pretty uncomfortable.

I’ve seen this particular scenario at several stations:

Either the GM or the Sales Manager pays a visit to the News Director. Shortly thereafter, the ND arrives at your desk and hands you an assignment.

“Got a story I’d like you to do.”

Reporter, looking at assignment sheet and realizing this “story” doesn’t remotely constitute news. “Uh, really?”

“Yeah. So set it up and you can shoot it sometime this week.”

“May I ask... how is this a story? And how exactly would I do it? What would I use for b-roll?”

“The GM says it’s a story and wants it done. So just do it.”

What you’ve been handed is basically a production order for a free commercial. Some client probably signed a contract with the stipulation that the news department would run a story about the business during the newscast. It has absolutely no news value, there’s no reason to do the story. But it will generate revenue for the station, and money talks, so you’re stuck. You can complain till you’re blue in the face, play the “I’m a journalist, not a commercial producer” card, or just shut up and do it.

Sadly, I’ve had to do the latter several times.

The worst was when I was told to do a series on a particular business. One package would have been tough enough, but five parts was impossible. It was not remotely interesting, there was nothing new or unusual about the business, the “story” had no hook. And I realized there would be very little in the way of video. I tried to get out of it using the argument that there was no b-roll, but it was a no-win situation. In situations like this you end up using still-frames and graphics, and try to put the whole experience behind you. (Fortunately for me I left the station before having to produce this disaster. I often wonder who got stuck.)



GET A MENTOR

One thing about young people that has never changed regardless of the generation is the feeling that when you get out of college, you know everything. You don’t need advice, especially from the older generation, because everything is better now and you’re smarter and what the hell do adults know. Hell, half of them can’t even figure out a cell phone. (I’m one of them.) You’re also bullet-proof, which is a topic for another chapter.

True story:

Back when cable TV was brand new I was looking for my first job in television. I basically carpetbombed stations and networks with resumes. Many of them went to “blind boxes” listed in Broadcasting magazine. The ad would read something like, “Great entry level position with amazing company looking for enterprising person willing to grow with us while enjoying the lifestyle of a great market.” Loosely translated this means, “Last place affiliate located in Upper Buttcrack looking for gopher willing to be abused for minimum wage. The last sucker we hired left after a week.”

Anyway, I got a call one day from one of those employers. A new company I’d never heard of in a place I had absolutely no desire to live. It was an entry level job, but the person calling said since the cable network was brand new I’d be on the ground floor and could work my way up the ladder quick. But I wanted to be a reporter and this was a production position. The job sounded beyond boring, so I politely declined.

A few days later my father asked me how my job search was going. Of course, I being armed with a college degree knew more than my dad, a blue collar guy who barely finished high school and had

spent his life running a delicatessen. What did he know about broadcasting? He was an expert on pastrami sandwiches and cheesecake, not television news. Anyway, I told him about the job offer and he told me I was crazy not to take it. "You'd be in on the ground floor of a new company! Call them back!"

I shook my head and then said one of the dumbest things I've ever said in my life. "C'mon, Dad. They'll be out of business in six months. Who the hell wants to watch news on cable television twenty four hours a day?"

You guessed it. The company was CNN.

Yeah, I was the smartass kid with the college degree. Why should I listen to a guy who made sandwiches for a living? (Though they were damn good sandwiches. So much so, I actually have a deli slicer in my kitchen. And I still use the cheesecake recipe.)

By the way, if you're wondering if I had a mentor back then, I did not. Even though I knew the President of ABC News who lived a few miles away. (The same woman cut our hair and had introduced us.) I was the cocky kid right out of college who knew everything. Did I use the amazing resource whose office was a five minute drive away? I did not. Idiot.

If I'd had a mentor back then or even listened to Dad, my career would have no doubt gone in a different direction. God only knows how many years I wasted because "I know what I'm doing" and was too proud to ask for advice.

Guess what? College degrees don't cover life experience. Or common sense. You may have gotten straight As for four years, but that doesn't mean you have any clue about the real world of broadcasting. Half the people teaching journalism in college have never had a reporting job. Sure, I could run my Dad's store when he went on vacation and knew a lot about the food business, but I was a babe in the woods when it came to TV news.

The point of all this is that I never had a mentor, even as a young reporter, and probably would have turned down advice had it been offered. It was the biggest mistake of my career. It will be your biggest mistake if you do the same thing.

So if you don't have a mentor, you need one. And you don't necessarily need advice from the most successful person you know, because some of those people got where there are because of blind luck, incredible good looks, their famous last name (see: Wallace, Chris or Cuomo, Chris) or their wealthy parents (Anderson Cooper is Glorinda Vanderbilt's son.) Many of these people never paid dues like the rest of us. Sometimes the best mentors are people who have made mistakes, who haven't reached their goals and know why. Who want to share knowledge so that you'll not make the same errors. If you're reading this and taking advice from it, keep in mind that I'm one of those people.

I spent many years as a reporter and network field producer, but the best work I ever did was being a mentor to dozens of interns and young reporters. Over the years interns had gravitated toward me because I often did feature stories that were fun. I found I enjoyed working with young people.

I'd made so many mistakes I couldn't bear to watch some bright young kid fall into the same traps and set a career back a few years because of one missing piece of advice. I'm happy to say I helped a lot of people avoid some serious headaches. Was my advice always right? Of course not. There's no perfect formula for success in this business. But when I shared information about my mistakes, that made a difference.

Would I have reached my goals if I'd had a good mentor? No way of knowing. But it would have given me an advantage. So get yourself an advantage.

It doesn't cost anything to ask for help. Trust me, veterans are often glad to provide it. You don't always have to take it, but you need another point of view.

And if you send me an email asking for advice, I'll be sure to answer it.



HOW TO FIND A STORY

In 1988 photographer Rick Pennington and I were hustling back to the station when we both spotted a school playground filled with dozens of kids playing.

No big deal, but they were all playing with hula hoops. I hadn't seen anyone with a hula hoop since the 60's.

The next day we drove back and discovered the school had a very low athletic budget, so the phys ed teacher had gotten creative with a stash of hula hoops she'd found. The woman had created some bizarre backyard games that the kids thoroughly enjoyed. Rick shot some great video, I found some vintage black and white film of hula hoops, we edited the thing to some doo-wop music, and we had a package.

It won the Associated Press award for best feature. All because we were paying attention.

That's just one way to find a story.

There are many others, but you have to know how and where to look. So stop looking at the Assignment Editor.

The AE has the toughest job in the news department, and these days many people assume this person has the duty of coming up with all the story ideas and handing them out. Sorry, it doesn't work that way. It is a reporter's responsibility to find stories that will interest the viewer. One month into my career, I complained to my first News Director that the assignments I got from the desk were boring. He told me, "Then come up with something better." From that day on, I found my own stories.

Now that you've stopped looking at the Assignment Editor, put down the local newspaper. That's not the answer either.

The one thing they don't seem to teach young reporters is how to dig. The reliance on the local newspaper and the police scanner has become a crutch, which results in the typical press release/scanner driven newscast that bores viewers to death. To get the viewers back, reporters have to give them something unique.

Finding stories is really simple. You just have to do three things. Open your eyes, talk, and read.

Reporters spend a lot of time in the car, so make good use of it. Don't just fall into highway hypnosis, look around and really see. Recently one of my clients found a great story when he spotted a man sitting on a toilet in his front yard. (Yes, fully clothed.) Turned out the guy was protesting a proposed sewage plant. He got the attention he wanted, and the reporter got a good package.

People post signs for just about everything these days, whether they're selling something or protesting. Check out the light posts and telephone poles. Rick and I once found a great story that way when he spotted a sign that read "Handmade Rifles" with an arrow pointing down a dirt road.

Did you just see a group of people assembled outside? Stop and ask why. Did you spot a person doing something unusual? Don't just keep driving, stop and ask.

Which brings us to the "talk" part of this assignment. As a reporter, you should know that everyone has a story to tell. But you'll never know unless you start a conversation.

Stopping for gas? Ask the attendant if there are any good stories in the area. Eating lunch off the beaten path? Chat up the waiter or waitress. Going grocery shopping? Wear something with a station logo and you'll be amazed at how many people come up to you. Talk to the person next to you in the checkout line.

You interview several people every day, but that doesn't mean you only have to talk about one topic. When you're finished interviewing the guy about high gas prices, just ask, "Got any other good

stories I should know about?" Rick and I were wrapping up a story with a guy who designed fiddles for country music stars when Rick simply asked the guy, "So, do you play?" Turned out the guy did and was playing a benefit for a handicapped children's summer camp. We added that to his story, then did a series on the camp... which we didn't even know existed. One story can turn into another, and another.

And finally, you have to read. A lot. Yes, you have to read the local paper, but taking stories from that source doesn't count. With the Internet at your disposal you can read just about every newspaper and magazine in the country. Take a story from another city and localize it. Read the little weekly papers from the outlying towns in your market; they are usually chock full of features. And don't just read the news section. Be well versed in money matters, pop culture, consumer issues and anything that would interest the average viewer. And check out the local classifieds. You can find anything from wild court cases to great features.

You won't develop this skill overnight, but eventually these tactics will become second nature to you.

AND AFTER YOU'VE FOUND THOSE STORIES...

Here's part two of the equation. You have to pitch those stories and get approval to do them. Of course, it helps if your News Director has a morning meeting that is actually receptive to ideas... some NDs just shoot down everything on principle, in a pathetic attempt at conveying power. Others like to clip things out of newspapers and hand out "assignments" in this manner.

Still, you need to come to work every day with two or three good ideas that aren't in the local newspaper and haven't been done by the competition. And you need to have an angle that will make the story different than what you'd expect.

Notice I said stories that haven't been in the "local" newspaper. There's nothing to prevent you from reading out of town papers on the Internet to get your creative juices flowing. My dad used to mail me batches of New York papers every week, and I'd often find interesting pieces that I could localize or take in a different direction. Sometimes articles from out of town can send your mind off on a tangent that will result in an idea that had nothing to do with the original article. Bottom line, if you read a lot, you'll come up with ideas.

But that's just part of the equation. To be in touch with your local community, you need to have a plan of attack.

-Sources: At my first station, we had a veteran reporter who didn't do packages every day, but when he did them they were really good. The ND told me he was our "snoop." He'd work his way through the courthouse, police station, and various political offices every day and come up with all sorts of gems. It was old fashioned reporting you probably can't do now due to time restrictions, but you can do the same thing with your cell phone. Touch base with your sources often, and don't just "use" these people. Have an interest in their lives and let them know you're actually a human being.

-Business cards: You should be burning through these quickly. Every person you meet needs to get one, whether it's an official you interview, a man-in-the-street, or the woman in the line at the grocery store. Hand them out with this simple line: "If you ever have a good story, give me a call."

-The commute: When you take the same route every day, you don't really "see" anything. Everything is wallpaper. Taking different routes forces you to notice different things, and what you notice might lead to a good story. I can't tell you how many stories I've found in this manner. If you take the same route every day, you'll never see anything new.

-Tangent stories: So you're interviewing some guy on an economic story and you finish asking questions for your package. Are you done? Nope. While you're packing up your gear, ask the person if there's anything else of interest he might know about that might make a good story. The guy might have a great political tip, a human interest story, or a lead on something big. Every person has varied interests and knows lots of people; it's silly to assume the person you just interviewed is only versed in your topic for the day.

-Different angles: (Lots of math terms today, I know.) Every story has two obvious sides, but there are often third points of view that aren't being considered. You need to think of other consequences to the story besides the obvious. Example... You're doing a story on a natural disaster and how it has stranded travelers. On one side, you have the airlines losing money, on the other, you have people stuck in airports. What's the third side?

Well, all those people stuck in the airport are spending money in the airport restaurant, which is doing a booming business. As are the airport hotels. Meanwhile, all those people that would have been headed to popular vacation spots are causing a negative effect on the other end.... how much money are the restaurants, hotels and shops in the destinations losing since their customers are stuck in an airport?

Story ideas are everywhere, you just have to dig for them. Read a lot, talk a lot, work the phones, and think out of the box every time you see something interesting. Eventually gathering story ideas will become easier, and something that becomes second nature.

ROUNDS CALLS THAT DON'T INVOLVE THE SCANNER

Nothing is more boring, tedious, and lacking in imagination than rounds calls. You call the usual sources... police, fire, hospitals...and ask if anything has happened recently. And you can tell

from the tone of the person answering the call that they're as thrilled to hear from you as you are to make the call. You may as well try telling a joke to someone at the Department of Motor Vehicles.

For those of you assigned to a beat (which seems to be a dying facet of this business for some bizarre reason) you have a list of contacts to check on a regular basis. But if you're stuck for a story, there are a whole host of public relations people out there just dying for coverage on any number of topics.

The problem is, their press releases often end up in the trash after being sorted out by the Assignment Editor, a newsroom secretary or an intern.

Nothing works like a personal touch. When you want stories, don't wait for them to come to you.

I used to have a great relationship with a terrific PR guy who worked for the school system. Anytime I was stuck for a story, I'd call him. He'd always have a list of interesting stuff going on. Some school was going on a unique field trip, another had a physics teacher that was going to catapult watermelons, or some kid genius was taking his SATs at the age of 12. The guy always came through for me.

There are numerous PR people in every market like that guy. People who work in interesting situations that have good stories... and many times they don't send out press releases about them. It is often up to you to take the initiative to create a relationship. After a while, the PR person will get an idea of what you're looking for, and give you a call when something interesting is going on.

So drag out the yellow pages and create *your own* rounds call list. Every company, every organization is filled with people who have interesting stories. Don't just assume that because a business does something dull that they don't have great tales to tell. I once did a story about a letter carrier who was a champion dancer and competed nationally on a prime time network show. Behind every seemingly boring task often lies an interesting story.

The more people you call, the more relationships you create... and the more good stories you find.

EVERY STORY NEEDS A "HOOK"

In fiction writing, every plot has a "hook" or something unique that makes it different from anything else. For instance, you could say that John Grisham's "The Firm" is a legal thriller. But the hook is "Young lawyer gets what he thinks is dream job only to find out the firm is in cahoots with the Mob."

In reporting, even though you're dealing with non-fiction (well, at least some news organizations still are) you still need a hook, something to make the viewer glance up from a Sudoku puzzle and think, "Hey, I've gotta see that."

Sadly, about ninety percent of what I see on local news doesn't have a hook. The stories have become so similar that it's all video wallpaper. Thirty minutes go by and I can't even remember what stories I just saw, because they're exactly the same as the ones I saw yesterday and the day before.

If you as a reporter have fallen into this trap, you need to learn how to recognize a good hook in order to make your stories more interesting. I'm not saying you have to change any facts, you just have to develop that third eye which can spot those little hidden details that can turn an average story into a great one. (I know, at this point you want an example.)

Right now economic stories are dominating the news. But every single layoff package I've seen lately has these elements:

- Video of cars driving away from a business.
- Sound bites with people who lost jobs saying, "I don't know what I'm gonna do."
- Video of restaurant across the street from closed business with no customers.

-Sound bite with restaurant owner saying, "I don't know what I'm gonna do."

-File tape of the business during its heyday.

-Sound bite with realtor saying, "I don't know what I'm gonna do."

Get the picture? If you've done this story in this manner, you've done it without a hook.

Now, let's say someone got a decent severance settlement from the company. That someone is going to take that money and start a small business... and probably would never have done so without the severance check or the lack of security. The story might look like this...

Reporter: "For twenty years Joe Lineworker assembled cars. But when he found himself on the unemployment line, he turned to his first love... fixing cars."

Sound bite: "My dad was a mechanic and I still love working on cars. I took my settlement and bought a one-bay garage."

Reporter: "Business is already good. With people not buying cars, they need someone to fix them... and you know how hard it is to find an old-fashioned mechanic."

Get the idea? Here's a guy who, back to the wall, turned his situation into a blessing in disguise.

Of course, you have to look for those stories. Too many of you just "show up" and shoot what's available. That's not what a reporter does. Your job is to dig, to talk to everyone, to find the hidden nugget of information that will turn your assignment into something special.

Great stories are out there. But you'll never find them unless you do some old fashioned reporting and find the hook.



THE MAIDEN VOYAGE ON THE ANCHOR DESK

Back when dinosaurs roamed the earth they broke in reporters on the anchor desk by having us do the morning cut-ins. It was basically reading ninety seconds of news, toss to weather, and that was it. Throw in a vo/sot or two, and you were basically on camera for less than a minute. Do that four times a day for five days, and by Friday you were pretty comfortable on the desk. And comfort is essential if you're going to be a successful anchor.

Why News Directors don't do this anymore is beyond me, as it is one of the best ideas of the past that has disappeared. Why throw someone in the deep end of the pool when you can let them wade in from the shallow end?

Anyway, after a few weeks of doing cut-ins, a full newscast wasn't a big deal for me.

But since you probably don't have the luxury of practicing during cut-ins, some suggestions.

-Schedule a practice session, perhaps between newscasts when someone can run the prompter for you. Then look at the tape to see how you're doing.

-On the day you anchor, make sure you read your script *aloud*. By doing this you'll spot the places you might run out of breath. If this happens, you need to break up the long sentence into two shorter ones.

-If a producer is going to write your script, you need to re-write it to your own style. It's easier to read your own words than those of someone else.

-Learn to mark your script. Separate the sentences with "breath marks" if you like. If you have a camera change between stories, mark the change on the bottom of the page of the *first story*. Let's say your first story is on camera one and you'll be doing the second one on camera two. On the bottom of the first story write "C-2" with a big arrow pointing in the direction you'll be turning. And write it with a bold magic marker. You want to know *the change is coming*, not discover it when you begin the next story.

-Go over the script with the director before the newscast. He'll point out any problem spots and make you feel more comfortable.

-Learn to read off the paper script. Prompters die all the time and you need to keep up the old fashioned way when they do. And you'll be able to see those breath marks and camera changes.

-Make sure you have plenty of breaks in the first newscast. Packages and vo/sots give you a chance to regroup. Nothing is worse for a rookie anchor than to have four straight minutes of copy at the top of the newscast, because if you stumble out of the gate you'll be a snowball going downhill.

-Read normally. Psychologically you'll speed up, since you want the thing to be over with as soon as possible. What this does is make you stumble and causes your voice to get higher, same as a record played at a faster speed. (Sorry for the dinosaur reference, but it's the only way I know to explain it.)

-Make sure you have water on the set. Cotton mouth is a really common problem among rookies.

-What the heck, ask the ND if you can do some cut-ins before your debut. Your morning anchor sure won't complain.

Meanwhile, you can practice reading the prompter at home:

<http://www.cueprompter.com/>

ANCHOR CHECKLIST

Over the years I've worked with a wide variety of anchors; some who were top of the line and others who phoned it in and picked up a check. You can find great anchors in small markets and lousy anchors in big markets. Some are leaders in the newsroom, others feel it is their job to read the prompter and do nothing else.

If you're new to the desk it can be a daunting experience. The toughest thing for a young anchor is not getting a big ego. That anchor title can do weird things to normal people, and turn friendly co-workers into monsters. Great anchors are still team members, still "one of the guys" who will do everything from knocking out a package to changing the toner cartridge in the printer. Lousy anchors look at the rest of the staff as underlings, and won't even make a fresh pot of coffee in the break room.

Being a great anchor is a combination of talent and psychology; you need the gravitas to carry the newscast while maintaining your humanity to treat even the newest intern with respect.

Along with the items we talked about in the previous section, here's the checklist:

-Know what you're talking about. (And on any election night, that's a must.) If you find a story in your rundown and don't know anything about it, take some time and do a little research. The Internet is an encyclopedia at our fingertips, so there's no excuse for reading a story and not knowing what it is about.

-Get a pronunciation guide. If you can't pronounce the President of Iran's name, learn, lest you sound like an idiot.

-Learn to change cameras seamlessly. Finish story number one on camera one, look down at your script, and then look up at camera two. Easier for the director to punch, and a smoother look for you.

-Ask reporters about their stories when they get back to the station. Don't depend on your producer to do it. Stories change, and what looked like the lead in the morning meeting might really be a story that belongs in the second block.

-Take responsibility. The producer may be putting the newscast together but your face is the one on camera. If there's something wrong in the script, fix it before you go on air. The buck stops with you.

-Don't take a two hour dinner break. Nothing separates anchors from the rest of the staff more than this. If you're one of the guys, act like it.

-If you find any stories that might be questionable, discuss them with the News Director. If the ND isn't around, pick up the phone.

-Do the menial stuff. Make coffee, take the script to the director, bring food back for the staff members who don't have time to get something to eat.

-Remember that interns are not your personal servants. They're there because they want to learn something. Take time to teach them.

-Take your producer and director to lunch once in awhile.



WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL ANCHOR?

This is a great question I hear quite often. Yes, you need to be competent reading the prompter and it sure helps your credibility if you can pronounce the names of foreign officials, but there are a lot of intangibles that can make or break your time on the desk.

Over the years I've worked with incredibly smooth anchors and train wrecks. Really sincere people and total phonies. So I've seen a wide spectrum on the desk. Here's my take on what it takes to make your mark as an anchor.

-Be well read. This is especially evident on election night, when anchors who simply read the prompter and nothing else are exposed as people who really have no idea what's going on in the world. Instead of wasting time social networking and playing on the Internet,

use the Internet to access information. Thousands of newspapers and other publications are available for free. Use them.

-Don't be afraid to show your true personality. There are anchor robots, and those who come across as real people. Be serious when reading a tragic story, have fun with your delivery for a feature. Ad-libbing during cross talk is more of a gift than anything; if you can do it well, it's a big plus. Viewers connect with anchors who are warm and come across as real people who actually care about the news they're presenting.

-Get involved in the community. An anchor's job is never done, because you are the face of the station. Hosting charity events, pitching in at fundraisers, and being a go-to person when the community needs help will only solidify your standing.

-Talk to everyone you meet like a real person. Whether it's in the line at the grocery store or at a restaurant, be friendly and take the time with anyone who comes up to you.

-Never show your wild side. You may be a party animal, but those days are now over. (At least in public, anyway.) You can't get falling down drunk (and yes, I've seen one staffer literally do just that) and not expect that story to spread like wildfire. And with cell phone video, you'll be on YouTube in no time.

-No mug shots. Don't drink and drive or break the law. Nothing kills a career quicker.

-The sincerity factor. Okay, this one can be faked, but your true colors will come through when you meet people in person.

A few years ago I was visiting a friend at a network and he was giving me a tour. We were about to pass the network anchor who was sitting at a desk. My friend leans over and says, "Don't even say hello unless you've been granted an audience." Me: "Who does he think he is, the Pope?"

Apparently this anchor was not well liked by the staff but was popular on-camera. But I lost a lot of respect for this person because I had a personal experience.

-Treat the staff equally. Yes, that kid running camera may be right out of college but he deserves as much respect as anyone else. And as much of your attention. Everyone is equal in the newsroom, as you're all part of a team.

-Pay it forward. Someone helped you up the ladder, now it's time to be the mentor to the young people on the bottom rung.



HOW TO WRITE A TEASE WITHOUT TICKING OFF YOUR VIEWERS

Few things drive producers and anchors as crazy as tease writing. You understand the concept of news, the news pyramid, the block system, and kickers. But nobody ever told you about the advertising part of your job. Tease writing.

Teases walk a fine line. Some fail to deliver on a promise, which really annoys the viewer. Others simply give away the story within the tease. The trick is to keep the viewer watching and leave him feeling that it was worth it to stick around. And if you can turn a phrase while doing it, you'll probably do well in the producer's chair. The difference between a show stacker and a producer is the ability to write, to tie all the stories together into one thirty minute package. The teases may comprise a total of sixty seconds of the entire newscast, but those may be the most important words you write.

In most cases a tease will touch on more than one story that is coming up. And most times they are from different blocks and may be totally unrelated. You as a producer have to find a clever way to link the two while still whetting the audience's appetite for the stories that you're teasing.

Let's have a few examples. You have two stories to tease: the infamous water skiing squirrel (your kicker) and a city council meeting that ended up in a big argument. The average producer would say that there is no way to connect the two and write something like this:

"Coming up... find out what has these members of the city council all riled up.... and meet a animal that loves to hit the beach."

OK, not bad but pretty average. I'm assuming you're using video of angry politicians and the squirrel on skis. But if you think about what might link the two by using a clever phrase, you might come up with something like this:

"When we return, the fur was flying at today's council meeting... and it was skiing down at the beach."

Trust me, viewers appreciate it when an anchor can turn a phrase (even though he or she didn't write it.) Let's try another. Your two stories are a man who has a store that sells nothing but hula hoops and a political debate. Once again, here's the average tease:

"Up next... the final debate before the election gets a little heated... and meet a man who sells nothing but an old fashioned toy."

Now, contact your muse and figure out something; a phrase, a metaphor, anything, that links the two.

"When the news continues, the candidates go round and round over health care, while this man runs circles around the competition."

You'll have to practice to get really good at this. Start by looking at any newscast rundown and pulling out two stories that have nothing in common. Then find something. Eventually you'll start to see clever ways to link things, and make your teases more enjoyable for the viewer, while making yourself more marketable for that next job.

Part two of this lesson is learning how much to give away. Remember, a "tease" is just that. You want to give a little hint about the story. Let's say you have a kicker about an artist who creates sculptures out of junk he finds in the garbage. A bad tease would be something like this:

"After the break, meet the man who turns household trash into valuable sculptures."

Well, that just gave away the whole thing. Let's try again...

"Coming up, find out how this man turns dumpster diving into a six figure income."

In this case you've appealed to the viewer's curiosity, as well as his greed. Personally, I'd love to know how someone makes 100 grand digging through trash. Meanwhile, that story had better measure up to the tease. Nothing ticks off a viewer more than hanging around past bedtime for a story that turns out to be totally lame, or one that has basically "tricked" the viewer into staying around.

Let's say your story is about a woman who finds incredible bargains while shopping. If your tease reads, "Meet the woman who is more skilled at hunting than any man," then you are misleading the audience. I'd be watching, waiting to see Annie Oakley with a rifle, and instead I get a woman who clips coupons. That kind of tease is enough to make a viewer not only turn off the set, but maybe change the channel at news time for good.

Hopefully this will help you write better teases and improve your newscast. Just keep in mind that sometimes a dozen well crafted words is the difference between a viewer bailing after weather and one sticking around till the end of the newscast.



CLOCK MANAGEMENT

"Backtiming" is an editing term by which you can make your video or music end at a specific point.

It is also a good way to manage your day and make sure you never miss a deadline.

Young people always have problems with deadlines, usually because they don't manage time correctly during the average news day. The culprits these days are different than they were twenty years ago. (Computer games, the Internet.) But if you use some simple backtiming principles, you can avoid some common problems.

Here's what I've often seen from reporters who can't hit deadlines:

9:30 reporter has received assignment

9:35-10:15 reporter surfs Internet

10:15 reporter sets up story

2:00 story in can, reporter back in station

2:00-3:15 more Internet surfing, phone calls, socializing

3:15 reporter starts putting story together

4:30 reporter complains all the edit booths are taken

5:30 reporter begins to panic, and slams story together

5:58 package in can being raced to control room

Can you see all the wasted time? Stay off the Internet and stay off the phone until your package is done.

By "backtiming" your day, you'll never have a problem. Let's say you have a package running at 6pm.

You want it in the can by five. That's your goal. Because all sorts of things can go wrong, slow you down, and make you race the clock.

So let's go backwards when planning your day.

- 5pm package in can
- 3:30 start editing
- 2:00 start writing
- 9:30 start setting up your package

Obviously it is not a perfect world. Some packages take forever to set up, some take a lot of time to shoot and edit. But if you always set your deadlines an hour early and eliminate the time you spend fooling around, you'll hit your deadlines.

In fourteen years as a reporter I never missed one. You can do the same.



HOW TO PRODUCE A NEWSCAST AND HAVE TIME FOR A RELAXING LUNCH

The year was 1982. My first reporting job was in Roanoke, Virginia. The staff consisted of reporters, photogs, and anchors, a News Director and an assignment editor.

No producers.

"What?" you ask. "How did you ever get a newscast on the air?" Well, the anchor produced the show. Reporters wrote and edited the packages, intros, voiceovers and vo/sots. The anchor wrote copy stories and teases, then tied everything together. We had one IBM Selectric typewriter that had an "Orator" font typeface. We typed scripts on these five part carbon sheets that had to be split before the newscast, then taped together so they could be run on a conveyor belt under the teleprompter camera. Rundowns were typewritten, and we dealt with changes by using Wite-out. The anchor picked out color slides that served as over-the-shoulder graphics. During the commercial breaks the director would tell the anchor how we were doing on time, and the anchor would decide which stories to drop if we were heavy.

Now flash forward to the present. Newsrooms are top heavy with producers, usually with one for each newscast and with an assistant producer. Computers have replaced typewriters. Wite-out? You gotta be kidding. No scripts to split, no taped together paper sliding off the prompter. Everything is electronic. Changes to the rundown are made with a few keystrokes.

So when I hear young producers, who have all this incredible technology at their fingertips, tell me they have to work eight straight hours and can't stop for lunch and have to eat at their desks, I honestly don't get it. (And yes, I have produced many newscasts. I still don't get it.)

The problem may be that you are the product of your environment. Or you can't write fast enough. But I'm betting the main culprit is time management, or the lack thereof.

Regardless, I'll show you how to knock out a great newscast and have plenty of time to eat like a normal person. Take coffee breaks. Creative types need to get away from the desk and recharge, and this will make your work and your newscast better if you're fresh during crunch time instead of exhausted.

As an old anchor once told me, this is the only business where you have to be at your absolute best at the end of the day.

OK, so you're a producer for the 6pm newscast. You've just left the morning meeting, you know what the packages are, where the live shots will probably be, what your lead might be. As always, everything is subject to change, but we'll get to that later.

Let's say it is 10am. Make a quick check of the wire to make sure nothing major has broken, then get cracking. (And by the way, there are plenty of other people in the newsroom who check the wire as well. All the anchors, reporters, photogs, and especially the assignment editor... so don't tell me you have to watch the wire every single minute.) Check the network feed rundown to see what might be interesting, or coming down later.

Now, start your rundown. Put in your commercial breaks. Now you're responsible for 22 minutes.

Put in weather and sports. Now you're responsible for 16 minutes.

Let's assume you are going to have three packages, two in the first block and one in the second. Let's assume two of them, one in each block, will have a live shot. Put all three packages and live shots in your rundown. (Obviously blank till the reporters get back.) While you're entering the live shots, put in the location supers if you know them and the reporter supers which you already know. Three packages and two live shots ought to knock out another five minutes, so you're down to 11 minutes, one of which will be taken up with teasers.

Now you've got a skeleton of your newscast. Now, look at your vo's and vo/sots that are on the board and figure out which ones "flow" with the packages. Sometimes the "news pyramid" doesn't coordinate with having *flow*. In other words, don't lead with a political story, then go to crime, the back to political. Think of your topics as "mini-blocks." If you're leading with politics, look at the board and find stories that relate.

Let's say a Presidential candidate is in town campaigning and that's your lead. You might also have a vo/sot with a local Congressman about a new bill. And you might have a vo about school construction that has just begun with shots of politicians breaking ground. That last story may not be the third most important story in your newscast, but it "flows" with the first two.

Now you're up to your second package, which is about consumer spending. Doesn't seem like it relates to the first mini-block, so simply write a line that will tie the two together when the stories are in house:

"While kids will soon enjoy their new classrooms, they might not be wearing hundred dollar sneakers, as consumer confidence is low."

Okay, you might re-write that later, but just start thinking about how to tie things together.

Now, go through the rundown and create your mini-blocks. You may look at your show timer and see that you are a few minutes light. And here's the trap that many producers fall into. They think "It's early. Something will move on the wire or on the feed."

You don't know that, so start collecting things to fill in the blanks *now*. Make a list of wire stories and things *already* on the feed that you can use *if nothing else happens*. The problem with early morning feed rundowns is that they change, and if you depend on a piece that ends up being a bust, you'll be scrambling in the afternoon.

It's probably around 11am if you're organized. Now you can start writing your teases.

"What? How can I write teases if none of the reporters are back?"

Well, just look at your rundown, but I want you to work backwards.

Find your kicker, and let's face it, your kicker isn't likely to change during the day. Kickers are worth teasing twice or three times, at the top of the newscast and with the weather tease.

Let's say your kicker is about our friend the waterskiing squirrel. You already know what the story is about, and you know you'll have a weather forecast. Those two things will not change. So go ahead and write the tease before weather.

"Coming up... John has the very dry forecast... but things are all wet for one creature at the beach."

Bada Bing. One tease out of the way.

The squirrel will come after the last break. Write the tease.

You can "pencil in" this tease at the top of the show as the last tease of your open. You know the candidate will be first, and you might look for something to get you from politics to the squirrel. (Sounds weird, but work with me here. That's the challenge of producing.)

Now let's say your B Block story is a consumer piece on how to change your driving habits to save gas. That's not going to change either, so go ahead and write the tease at the end of the A Block for that story.

So now you have three teases done and one outlined. You have your packages, live shots, and stories in the rundown. You have a list of wire stories and feed pieces that you may or may not use. It still isn't noon.

Just before noon, you might touch base with your field crews to see how their stories are going. Check the wire again. Check with the assignment editor. Look at the board.

Now, go to lunch. Go on, go. And go with someone. Relax and talk about stuff that isn't related to work.

Okay, you're back. Check all the stuff you checked before lunch to see if anything has changed.

As the reporters and photogs trickle back in, it is time to shine. Don't just tell them, "You've got a minute twenty." You need to ask about the story, and in the cases of teases, you need to ask the photog or the one-man-band what the best video would be. Many a "money shot" misses the top of the newscast because a producer didn't know it existed.

It is now 2pm. Your anchors arrive and there's probably an afternoon meeting. Bring your anchors up to speed on what you've got, and chat with the 10pm producer so you don't go over the same tracks.

Your anchors should now be your first line of defense. They should be keeping an eye on the wire while helping you write anything that needs to be written or rewritten.

3pm. Go to the break room, get some coffee, then hunt down your director and give him a preliminary rundown of the show to see if there are any problems from his point of view. Make sure he knows where the live shots are.

The rest of the afternoon: Actually look at the video that is being cut, especially for vo's, vo/sots and teases. Nothing makes a newscast appear more stupid than copy that doesn't even come close to matching the video. Adjust your copy accordingly.

Add any breaking news that happens, but remember to adjust your copy if it has disrupted your "flow." Look at the stories before and after to make sure the intros and outros make sense.

If all goes well you should have no problem printing your script at 5pm. Remember, the earlier you get the script to the director, the more technically trouble free the newscast will be.

While I realize this is not an exact science, hopefully you've learned to get the stuff that isn't going to change out of the way early so that you have time to adjust when the big stories do hit late in the day. I've seen too many producers waste those precious morning hours surfing the net, talking with friends on the phone, or squandering time when they could be getting the easy stuff out of the way and making time for...

Lunch. Bon appetit.



INTERVIEW TIPS

"There are those who listen and those who wait to speak."

I'm not sure who originally said this, but the quote speaks volumes. You can't conduct an effective interview if you don't listen to what is being said.

The biggest rookie mistakes made by young reporters fall into two categories:

- Not listening to the answers
- Asking too many questions

Most young reporters don't want to miss anything, so they'll write down a list of questions before any interview. In reality, many veterans do this as well. And it is fine to ask all the questions on the list. Just don't forget to listen to each answer before moving on. One of those answers may trigger a follow up question, or send the interview off on a tangent that will result in the sound bite you'll eventually use. So pay attention before moving on to your next question.

Asking too many questions can come back to bite you in the editing process. Television news is a fast paced business, and if you have to spend too much time looking for a certain soundbite, you can miss your deadline. Some reporters actually stop their interview when they hear a soundbite that sums everything up perfectly. The point is, if you have to wade through twenty minutes of videotape to find one soundbite, that's going to take a lot of time. Unless you are doing a profile piece on an interview subject, it is best to keep your interviews as short as possible. Five minutes will usually do the trick, and most interviews are even shorter.

Finally, a great tip from a network anchor who had done a lot of work with politicians. He told me that politicians simply cannot

stand dead air, so if you don't like the answer to your question, stay silent. Eventually the politician will start talking again.

POLITICAL INTERVIEWS

Growing up in the New York area, I quickly learned to carry money in my front pocket. Putting it in your back pocket makes it easier for a pickpocket to steal, and they're so good at it in the Big Apple you'd never even notice.

Politicians can be the same way, only they can deftly steal your objectivity. And you might not even know it's gone. A little charm, an exclusive or two, and suddenly you're in someone's pocket.

I took a few years off a couple of times to run political campaigns, and it was certainly interesting being on the other side of the fence. What gave me an advantage was that I knew exactly what reporters wanted, but more important, I knew how to make their lives easier. And I also knew one key fact that many successful political campaign managers have known for years.

Many reporters are lazy, and if you do their work for them, they'll let you.

I'll give you an example. On one occasion I knew that the person likely to be covering a political speech was a clock puncher, someone who didn't consider journalism a career or a calling, but just a paycheck. I wanted to make sure my candidate's message came across perfectly, so the day before his speech I sent a verbatim copy to the reporter. Sure enough, the reporter never showed up, but the sound bites from my speech did in the reporter's newspaper. I had done the reporter's job, and in doing so I controlled the media in that instance. Had the reporter bothered to show up he might have heard some other interesting sound bites that weren't in the speech.

On another occasion a local businessman I knew decided to run for public office. Members of all the media organizations turned out,

but left quickly, never getting anything of substance. He pulled me aside and asked me how he could make reporters stick around. "You only need to remember four words," I told him, remembering my first campaign. "Lunch will be provided."

He scheduled another news conference a few weeks later and pulled out all the stops. A sit down catered lunch and an actual band. Over the top, yes, but every reporter stuck around through the meal and was in a good mood when the candidate came around and did his interviews.

Sometimes it's the candidate who picks your pocket, sometimes a member of the campaign staff. You simply have to keep one thing in mind when covering politics.

These people all want something from you. Sure, they want good coverage and to make sure the right sound bites end up on the air or in the paper, but all of that pales compared to the top request.

They want you to *like the candidate*.

These days many national reporters and talk show hosts are so transparent about their political views you could read a newspaper through them. And so much is being made about media bias, that the general public has become wise to the tricks of the trade. Clever editing can make even the most eloquent politician look stupid. Bad lighting can make someone look scary. Opinionated copy can turn something innocent into a topic of discussion. During the early part of a Presidential campaign, one of the candidates had some strong words for a reporter. The anchor copy read, "the candidate lost his cool" but anyone watching it could see the politician was simply defending his stance on the issue and was being passionate about it.

Now, more than ever, objectivity is key. Even a hint of favoritism and you've lost your audience.

You can like a candidate all you want, and vote for anyone. But you must always strive to tell the public *what you know, not what you think*.

Keep your opinions in your front pocket, along with your money, and no one will have any idea how you voted on Election Day.

For many of you, the next election season will be your first real campaign. You're probably still at that stage in which you think politicians really have the public's best interests at heart. (Don't worry, you'll get over it.)

But regardless of your political coverage experience, you owe it to both yourself and the viewers to ask not only tough questions, but questions the politicians are probably not prepared to answer. Politicians are routinely prepped with stock answers to the common questions, the ones most likely to be asked. It's up to you to figure out what the candidate *isn't* prepared for, so you get an answer that might offer some true insight. Not a gotcha question, but something legit. Voters want to elect real people, not robots who simply regurgitate answers formulated by their handlers.

I don't need to be a fly on the wall of any Presidential campaign to know that by the time the main debate rolls around, both candidates will have prepped their answers on the economy, oil prices, the middle east, lobbyists, and a dozen other issues. Over the years, the best debate moments have come when a candidate rolls off the tracks into territory for which he or she is not prepared. (Gerald Ford on the subject of Poland is a classic example.)

So how do you come up with stuff that isn't covered in the campaign war rooms? Think simple.

Remember that scene in the 1992 campaign when George Bush (the first one) hadn't seen a supermarket checkout scanner? That spoke volumes about how "in touch" the man really was. Granted, we didn't expect the President to do his own grocery shopping, but stuff like that tells voters what kind of world politicians really live in.

Does the candidate you're covering have any idea how much a gallon of milk costs? Do any of them know how to swipe a credit

card and pump gas? Maybe they do, maybe they don't, but sometimes little stuff like that can tell you a lot about a politician.

So when you interview someone who is a "man or woman of the people" it is up to you to find out if the candidate really has his or her finger on the pulse of the voters, or is simply a puppet. Think of simple questions... stuff the average citizen could easily answer. Some of the answers might surprise you.

Let's face it, when most of you first heard the John Edwards scandal was being reported by a supermarket tabloid, you probably dismissed it as a sensational rumor.

Then it turned out to be true.

So what can you learn from this about political reporting? Probably what many veteran reporters already know. In any campaign, there's always someone who feels wronged, has an ax to grind, or simply works for another candidate and wants to take down the competition. The trick is to find those people...

Or, let them find you.

Several years ago I got an anonymous tip on the phone that sounded so bizarre it couldn't possibly be true. But the person calling was very articulate, and I just had a hunch there might be something to it. So I brought it up in the morning meeting, and of course everyone had a good laugh. The reporter who had that beat said he'd check it out, but I could tell by the look on his face that he wouldn't. And he didn't. A few days later it ended up on the front page of the local newspaper. The tip turned out to be true.

Do you think that "source" ever called me again? Of course not. He probably assumed I'd simply blown him off, and after not seeing the story on our station for a few days, moved on to the next media outlet.

So, two little lessons here. First, check out everything, no matter how ridiculous it may sound. You might just end up with something really good. Second, when it comes to politics, there are always skele-

tons in closets, and always someone who knows where those closets are. So when a campaign worker that you've dealt with suddenly leaves a campaign, you owe it to yourself to keep in touch.

Be open to any tips that come your way. Many will be bogus, but some will lead you to good stories. When sources know you are seriously interested and will follow up, they will continue to call you with good stuff. And if you don't check out a lead, trust me, there's always someone else who will.

Don't let your exclusive end up as the lead story on another station. And just because a news organization doesn't have a great journalistic reputation, don't discount any stories it does.

INSIDE THE MIND OF THE POLITICIAN

Back to that classic quote. "There are those who listen and those who wait to speak."

The latter describes politicians perfectly.

But here's the problem for the viewers: they're watching a group they don't trust (politicians) being interviewed by another group they don't trust (the media.)

Part of the reason is the lack of straight answers by members of both parties, and part of that problem can be traced to the lack of tough, persistent questions by reporters.

Back to our original statement. If you've even interviewed a politician, especially one on the campaign trail, you'll note something interesting while you're asking a question.

The politician isn't listening.

You can see it in the eyes. You may be asking the question the viewers want you to ask, but the eyes are far away, rehearsing a stock answer designed to avoid the question.

Trust me, you could ask something that doesn't even make sense, and you're going to get the stock answer. Because they aren't listening.

Reporter: "So, what's your take on the fact that male members of Congress are going to vote on health care while wearing capri pants?"

Politician: "What the people need to know about health care is...blah, blah, blah..."

Most politicians (and both parties are guilty of this) have mastered this art. Especially when your interview is live. They can basically kill all of your air time (it's called the media filibuster) without giving you what you really need.

That's why political interviews are best done on tape. You've got all the time and tape in the world.

And that's why I've always liked starting an interview with something totally off topic and light. It breaks their train of thought. "So, who's in your bracket for March Madness?" They've got stuff ready to go, and you've derailed them with something they don't expect. Then, when they're relaxed, go for the tough stuff.

So when a politician tap dances around your question, ask it again. A good reporter will say, "Let's get back to our original question..." and ask the question again. And if you get the run around, ask it again. And again. And again. "Yes or no?" No reporter did this with Elizabeth Warren when she continually refused to admit whether or not taxes would be raised to pay for her health care plan. They all let her off the hook.

The only way the media is going to get off the hook with the public is by not letting politicians get off that same hook.

And to understand politicians, you must understand what drives them.

When they're campaigning, they're trumpeting all the things they're going to do for you. But for the most part, their number one concern is getting re-elected.

True story: I had done a few stories on a guy running for public office and he had always been nice to me. In the middle of the campaign his mother passed away, and I thought I'd put the journalist hat away for a few minutes and drop by the wake to pay my respects.

So I visit the funeral home, offer my condolences, etc. While I'm leaving I notice a whole bunch of politicians clustered a few feet away. As I pass them I overhear a conversation that made me ill. They were in the middle of a political strategy session. With the guy's dead mother lying in an open casket a few feet away.

If that doesn't speak volumes about politics, I don't know what does.

There are, of course, some politicians who are decent human beings and are truly interested in doing the right thing and making the world a better place. And sometimes it's hard to sort them out from the rest of the self-serving majority.

But most are driven by ego, and, in many cases, change once they get into office. I've known people who changed dramatically once elected, adopting the bullet-proof attitude of a teenager. It's why so many politicians make such stupid decisions; they think they're above the law and the basic principles of morality no longer apply to them.

Several years ago I was walking to the station and a viewer came up to me and shook my hand. "I want to give you something," he said. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a two-dollar bill. Across the top he wrote, *follow the money*. "That's your guide to covering politics," he said. I don't know why the guy was handing out two-dollar bills, but I thanked him and put it in my pocket.

I have that two-dollar bill in my wallet to this day. If you want to find out if a politician is the real deal or just another guy out for himself, that's great advice.



WORKING THE TWILIGHT SHIFT: PLANNING AHEAD IS ESSENTIAL

Ah, the night shift. It's a welcome break if you work in the sun-belt, a chance to work in the cool of the evening. Winter up north is another story.

But the night shift is a different animal when it comes to finding stories. In many ways you're at a disadvantage, but in one way it forces you to think.

Because your crutch, the official sound bite, is often not available.

Many stations hold 2pm meetings to talk about how the day is going and assign stories to the night reporters. And if you're not bringing enterprise stories to the table, you're liable to get stuck listening to the scanner or following up on a story done by a dayside reporter.

So, waddaya do when your enterprise ideas just won't work at night? When you don't have that "official sound bite" crutch? Now you have to come up with more "real people" stories. Or at least include their side of the story.

A few things you need to know about the night shift before you start looking for stories:

-It helps to call the newsroom and ask to be put on a speaker-phone during the morning meeting. Even if you're lying in bed, you'll at least know what stories are kicking around for the dayside staff... and this might give you an idea for the night shift.

-If you think you're going to find an official on Fridays, you're going to be looking on the golf course or the beach. Trust me, "public servants" book out of their offices early at the end of the week.

-Find out if you'll be covering any meetings during the week. If so, get the agenda, pick a highlight, and set up your story away from the meeting in advance.

-If you have an education story and need classroom video, you'll have to come in a little early since most schools let out at 3pm.

-Sources are a great help for those on the night shift, so use them. Politicians may leave their offices at five but there are all sorts of political events at night. Charities often work with volunteers after hours. Parents are chauffeuring kids to all sorts of things after school. Find out what's happening in your market that might be interesting or different. Always ask the question, "So what do you guys do after work?"

-Many stories don't end when the sun goes down, they just change. The gulf oil spill is a great example.

-Plan ahead. Trying to hit the ground running at 2pm is tough. Setting as many stories up a day ahead will make your life a lot easier. And if you know you're going to need an official for your story, calling at 2pm and hoping to track that person down by five is usually a lost cause, so set things up the day before.

Sadly, we're now a 24/7 world. Stores are open round the clock, people are working longer, parents are obsessed with filling every waking minute of their childrens lives. In reality, more interesting stuff goes on when people are off the clock than on.

You just have to talk to as many people as possible to find out what's happening.



LIVE SHOTS MADE SIMPLE

Long, long ago (about 1989) in a galaxy far, far away, a lot of the fun and quality went out of television newsrooms when a meeting like this took place somewhere at a consulting firm:

Consultant #1: "We need to put more excitement into newscasts. How about more live shots?"

Consultant #2: "Suppose there's nothing going on that's live?"

Consultant #1: "Who cares? We'll go live for the sake of live! We'll do it in all caps with exclamation points! We're not live anymore, we're LIVE!!!"

Consultant #2: "Won't the reporter look stupid being live where nothing is going on?"

Consultant #1: "You're missing the point. The audience gets excited when you're LIVE!"

We can be LIVE! two or three times each newscast! Doesn't matter if there's anything going on. The reporter will be LIVE! so it will seem like a big story!"

And that's why so many of you do so many meaningless live shots. ("We're live at the scene of a car wreck that happened so long ago the insurance claim has already been paid.") That's one reason you don't have enough time to put together quality packages. Chances are that's not going to change, so we might as well deal with it. Problem is, so many people have never actually been schooled in the care and feeding of live shots. If you're one of those people who have been thrown into the deep end of the pool, you're probably wading through these uncharted waters by just winging it. And live TV is no place to do that.

Live shots are hard to teach. Some 20-year veterans can't knock out a decent live shot, while occasionally you see a rookie who is a natural. But you can make live shots more manageable and less stressful if you simplify them.

Problems generally fall into two categories; nerves and memory lapse. If you've been brought along with a teleprompter a live shot is akin to working without a net. So many things can go wrong it is scary. But don't drive yourself nuts worrying about technical problems. Reporters need to focus on getting comfortable. If you can master that part, it's half the battle.

But the biggest problem young people face is trying to do and/or memorize too much. The result is a stumbling, read-off-the-pad live shot that looks awkward and doesn't deliver much information. (Tricks on how to get rid of the notebook in your live shots are coming up.) So start with baby steps, and then work your way up as you get comfortable.

There are two rules to make your live shots simpler when you are just starting out. The first is to put the bulk of information in your package and the intro for your anchor. The second is "short live intro."

So let's start with our hypothetical live shot and our two reporters, Jim Goodhair and Susie Smart. Both are young reporters. Jim wants as much face time as possible in his live shot, so his live intro is very long and his package is short. Susie wants to hit her roll cue perfectly so her live intro is short and to the point. She has also put some key information in the anchor intro. (In case you hadn't figured this out, Jim is a Ken-Doll with the IQ of a tabletop. Susie sat in the first row of her class.)

ANCHOR: The long awaited meeting at city hall is over. Jim Goodhair is standing by live with the details...Jim?

JIM GOODHAIR: Well, the proposed tax hike made for a packed house at city hall and a close four-to-three vote in favor of the bill.

When all was said and done, there was plenty of bad news to go around. There will be a five-point-seven percent increase on property taxes, a new garbage fee of fifteen dollars per household, and an increase of the driver's license fee of five dollars per year. Most of those new fees will be implemented during the next fiscal year that begins on October first.

Did you get all those numbers? Because unless you're a CPA standing by with a calculator you'll have to buy the morning paper. And don't you want to know if your councilperson voted yes or no as soon as possible?

Okay, let's give Susie a crack at this. Remember, think short and simple and don't be afraid to delegate some information to the anchor intro.

ANCHOR: The cost of living just went up in the city... as four council members voted to pass the long debated budget. Susie Smart is standing by live...Susie?

SUSIE SMART: Well, if you own a home, drive a car and throw out the trash, it's going to cost you more to do it. The new budget will cost your family about two hundred dollars each year...now meet the people who passed it.

We're only about fifteen seconds into the newscast and already we know the budget passed by a close vote, how much the taxpayer is going to get hit, and what's going to cost more. Susie used three key words on her notes: home, car, and trash. She only needed to memorize two sentences to hit her roll cue and she's into the package identifying the evil council members who raised taxes. Jim, on the other hand, loaded his intro with numbers that needed a graphic (Susie, being the smarty that she is, put that in her package) and had to read them off the pad to make sure he got them right.

You can save more information for your live outro because you don't have to worry about a roll cue. If you're going to stumble and lose your place, better at the end than the beginning. Psychologically,

you'll be less nervous if you've nailed your two-sentence intro. You can now take a breath during your package and relax.

By the way, if you can't remember roll cues, here's a trick. Many reporters just say, "Take a look." Just make sure the producer and director know this is your style.

TRICKS TO GET RID OF THE NOTEPAD

Maybe it is just me, but when I see a reporter doing a live shot with a pad, that tells me the person really doesn't know the story all that well. For the most part your live shot will look better if you are talking instead of reading. Boil the points you want to make down into key words, and then hide the notes. (For those of you who did this in high school, it should be a breeze.) So here are some tricks to let you cheat with what is basically a low budget teleprompter.

-Write key words on the inside of your fingers. You can use your hands to gesture while stealing looks at your notes.

-Write your key words on a piece of cardboard, and then clip it to the tripod or bottom of the camera lens. (But don't clip them to the lens if the camera is going to move or if it is windy.) If the camera is going to be moving, put your notes on the ground.

-Make objects your notes. For example, if you are doing a live shot after a hurricane, you know you're going to talk about a damaged hotel, a closed bridge, and military presence. So you are going to point to those three things in a walk-and-talk instead of trying to memorize them. And it is always nice to actually show something besides yourself during a live shot. Get the camera to move around if there is something interesting. Remember, show and tell. You can use chalk to mark your spots on the ground if it will help.

THINGS THAT MAKE GOOD LIVE SHOTS GO BAD...

-The Big-Ego anchor. Occasionally you'll run into an anchor who likes to throw curveballs to reporters on live shots in the form of really obscure questions. I once heard an anchor say "it keeps you guys on your toes." In reality, some anchors do this to make themselves look smarter on camera. Bottom line, it makes the reporter look unprepared, and the station look foolish. Work it out with the anchor and news director. (One major network actually has a rule that the reporter must say the anchor's name twice. I am not making this up.)

-Questions that have been previously set up. Is there anything more transparent than having an anchor ask those seemingly obscure questions and the reporter remarkably coming up with an answer? ANCHOR: "So, Jim, I guess the new nuclear power plant will mean lots of jobs. By the way, what is the atomic weight of uranium?" REPORTER: "Well, John, it happens to be 238.0289." You're really not fooling anyone. The only time for a question should be if you are honestly live with breaking news.

-Live shots & alcohol mix about as well as Bailey's Irish Crème and tonic water. If you get stuck with a live shot in a bar or covering something like Mardi Gras, you might as well tack a "please harass me" sign on your back. If you're a woman, take along a CSI team to dust you for prints. Doing live shots surrounded by sloppy drunks, guys cheating on their wives, and people who have called in sick is just a recipe for disaster. Make your live intro and outro as short as possible if you are assigned one of these.

-The Mix/Minus problem. Occasionally someone at the station forgets to throw a certain switch. All of a sudden your own words are coming back into your earpiece on a two second delay. This can be really confusing. If this happens, pull the earpiece out of your ear. Someone at the station will notice and fix the problem.

Hopefully this will clear up some live shot problems and make life a little easier for you. As you get more experienced you'll get more comfortable with the process, and eventually you'll be able to do live

shots on autopilot. But as for how to make a ten-hour old car wreck interesting, I have no clue.



STAND-UPS & PACKAGE TIPS

The "stand-up" is just that. The part of the story in which you stand up before the camera and say something. It is this "reporter involvement" that gives you "face time" but should also convey information. Just getting your face on camera for no reason isn't enough. A good stand up can move the story along, wrap things up, or help the viewer grasp the information easier. Most stories contain one standup. Most News Directors prefer that every story contain a standup, so that the viewer will be able to connect with the reporter. (The only kinds of stories in which standups are considered inappropriate are funeral stories.)

The standup is the chance for you to shine, to show some personality, to be clever. And since resume tapes open with a montage of standups, they are critically important when looking for a job.

There are several kinds of standups. Walking standups, standup bridges, standup opens (not recommended) and standup closes.

Standup open: Frankly, these kinds of standups just never seem to "look" right and are rarely done. As mentioned earlier, starting a story with a standup is a bad idea for one very important reason. If the newscast director doesn't hit things just right, the meaning of your standup could change drastically. Here's another example:

"An investigation disproved the allegation that the mayor has been beating his wife for some time."

Remember, all it takes is for the director to be two seconds late. If the viewer misses the first two seconds, here's what the standup says:

"The mayor has been beating his wife for some time."

While this is a wild example, you can obviously see how the loss of even a few words can totally change the meaning.

Standup bridge: These are the hardest standups to do because you have to think in the field. A bridge falls in the middle of a package and can help a story shift gears, change locations, add information, or any number of things. But you have to make sure the standup will fit in the middle of the story.

Standup close: These are the easiest standups, and most often favored by young reporters. You can simply summarize the entire story and wrap up your package with your "sig-out." (Name, and name of newscast. "John Smith, News Center 1)

Walking standups: This style has been debated for years. On one side of the argument are people who find that walking standups add energy to a package. On the other side, others contend that simply walking for no reason at all doesn't add to the news value of the story. Personally, I like them, and I think they make your resume tape more marketable, so I'll show you how to do them.

The first thing to do when doing a walking standup, is to start walking before you talk. In many cases, reporters start talking, then walk. If you are already walking when you begin your standup, it will add more energy and look more natural when you edit the standup into the package.

Obviously, it helps to have a beginning and a destination since a walking standup will take you from one place to another in the story. For example:

"The fire started here about six hours ago... when the wind picked up, it jumped to these nearby houses."

The main reason for a standup, journalistically speaking, is to put the reporter on the scene. To show the viewer that the reporter was actually there and is bringing an up close and personal view that you can only get by being on the scene.

The main reason for a standup, when it comes to your career, is to brand that story with your signature. It's your chance to shine, to show your creativity, to tie a story together. A great standup can take

a package to the next level. There's a reason resume tapes start with a standup montage.

If you can't do a decent standup, you won't go very far in this business.

So put some effort into your standups. Your first preference is a standup bridge. A standup close is okay but shows you can't think in the field. A standup open is never a good idea, as the meaning can be changed if the director punches you up late. (Though some News Directors insist on them when doing "look-lives" which are fake live shots.)

And don't be afraid to walk and talk. Movement adds, well, movement to the piece.

And we are, after all, shooting video, not still pictures.

REPORTER INVOLVEMENT DOESN'T ALWAYS REQUIRE WORDS

One of the most common problems I hear from young reporters has to do with standups. Many times you get out there and you just can't think of something profound to say. Or a standup would just seem awkward.

But sometimes a reporter can be involved with a story without saying a word.

Remember, TV is nothing more than show and tell. And sometimes you just need the "show" part.

Example: You're doing a typical citizen vs. big company story. You've got plenty of sound bites and b-roll with the citizen, but you're getting nowhere getting the other side of the story.

Typically, most reporters simply throw in a line saying, "We tried to contact XYZ company but our calls were not returned." This line is usually covered with a shot of the building in which the company is housed.

But as a viewer, why should I take your word for it? Should I believe you actually tried to contact the guys at the company? Don't tell me, *show me*.

Give me a shot in which you're walking up to the door, knocking on it, and pulling on the door to show it is locked. Or showing up at the front door and being asked to leave by the security guard. Or dialing a phone and letting me hear you try unsuccessfully to get through to someone.

Now, instead of a package in which I've never seen the reporter, I'm seeing a reporter *actually try* to bring me both sides of the story. And you didn't have to do a real standup to do it.

This can work for other stories as well. Can't think of anything to say? Get involved.

Example: You're doing a package on a truck driving school. You have lots of different bites with students and instructors, and plenty of b-roll.

Why not try driving a truck yourself? Again, show, don't tell. You could say something like, "After trying to maneuver an 18-wheeler, the instructor told me to keep my day job."

With the exception of funeral packages, a reporter needs to be involved in every package one way or another. Sometimes you do it with a traditional standup, sometimes you just "get involved" with the story.

But we need to see your face. As one network executive once told me, "If I don't see a reporter in every story, why am I paying that person?"

EDITING NATURAL SOUND

Natural sound, or "nat" sound as it is referred to around newsrooms, is just that. Naturally occurring sound.

You can edit natural sound into your package in two ways. In one, the natural sound simply rides "under" soundbites or your voice over. In another, natural sound is used as a "break" or "pop" to add another element to the package. Natural sound can set a tone, help change settings, and in general give the viewer a better sense of what is going on at the location.

THE LAZY PACKAGE

One thing News Directors don't want (and can't afford) these days are lazy reporters. You may think you're a hard working, nose-to-the-grindstone journalist, but your final product might suggest otherwise. If your legwork or digging doesn't show up in a package, you might end up with the lazy tag; in this business, that's someone who phones it in, who does just enough to get by.

Here are some of the most common "lazy tags" that show up in packages:

-Single source sound bites: We've discussed this before, but this means interviewing one person, and one person only, and then chopping the interview up into several bites. A News Director looks at this and thinks, "So, six billion people in the world and this reporter only talked to one of them." Remember that "two sides to every story" thing you learned about in college? Well, if you only talk to one person, you're... wait for it... only getting only one side of the story!

-The b-roll repeat: Nothing annoys me more than seeing a package with lots of video possibilities and seeing the same b-roll more than once. If you have limited b-roll, at least get wide, medium and tight shots so you can mix things up. If you run out of b-roll because it is very limited (a perp walk, defendant walking out of courtroom) then use that wonderful non-linear function called slow motion. Or throw in a graphic.

-The lame close: The reporter who can't think of anything to wrap up a story often just throws together a basic sig-out that falls right out of a sound bite. Would it kill you to write one sentence and tie the package together before saying your name and location?

-The missing graphic: A story with too many numbers and no graphic doesn't make sense to the viewer. Graphics are one of those great elements a ND looks for to make confusing stories understandable.

-No standup: Unless you're covering a funeral, every package needs a standup.

-The dreaded meeting video: Yep, we've all been stuck covering meetings, and if your package has nothing but meeting video, you were too lazy to get the agenda before the meeting, find out the topic, and get 90 percent of your story before the meeting. For example, if there's a meeting to determine the location of a sewage plant, go to the neighborhood, show the location, and, what a concept, talk to the people who live there. Meeting video should be kept to a minimum.

-The dreaded official sound bite: Apparently no real people live in some neighborhoods, as some reporters only talk to officials. Again, McFly, that's one side of the story.

-Earthquake video: As a News Director you might think the United States is plagued by constant earthquakes in all fifty states. You have a tripod for a reason. Use it.

-Mood lighting: You wanna have dinner by candlelight, fine. I don't need to see a news package that looks like late night on Cinemax. You have a light kit for a reason. Use it.

-Shotgun mike interview audio: Ah, the lovely sound of someone being interviewed in a barrel. Shotgun mikes are for natural sound, not interviews.

I realize that many of you are time crunched these days, but this is basic stuff. If you want to grab a News Director's attention, show that you care about the basics.



EXCUSES, EXCUSES...

I used to work with an executive producer who had a great comeback when reporters would come back with various excuses about story coverage. Not enough time, interview fell through, forgot to do a standup, whatever.

The line is this: "Excuses are little lies we tell ourselves."

You hear excuses a lot as a manager, and when you're a reporter excuses are an easy crutch. They're a convenient way to blow off a day that didn't go exactly right, because, let's face it, it wasn't your fault.

Which brings me to former NFL football coach Bill Parcells. He once made a famously tacky quote regarding complaints from players:

"Don't tell me about the pain, show me the baby."

Which, in a nutshell, means that the only thing that counts is what hits the air. The viewer doesn't care if you were running late, if your camera had problems, if your photog was in a bad mood, if you forgot your notepad out in the field, or if you ran out of tape.

We once had a consultant visit our station and invite everyone to bring a few stories to a Saturday session. One reporter played a story that was just okay, then boasted about the fact he'd shot nearly an hour's worth of tape and had worked really hard, only to have the story turn out in a mediocre fashion.

"Who cares how much tape you shot or how hard you worked?" said the consultant. "Is the viewer ever going to see the raw tape or know how hard you worked?"

Back to Bill Parcells again: "You are what your record says you are."

In our blameless society, we have become conditioned to blame outside forces if things don't go perfectly on any given day. Excuses, excuses.

Little lies we tell ourselves.

If you want to be successful, to really achieve your goals, there are no excuses. Sure, stuff happens in the field and unforeseen circumstances can change your story, but it's the reporter who can adapt and go with the flow who will make it to the top.

-Key interview fell through? Find another.

-Story isn't what you expected? Take it in another direction.

-Not enough time in your day? Take care of your text messaging and Internet habit when you're off the clock.

-Your standup didn't record because of a crease in the tape? You should always shoot a safety.

-Not enough b-roll? Get in the habit of shooting more than enough.

Just as excuses can become habits, so can good work habits. Learn to get all the basics while planning for the stuff that might happen. Photogs always have extra tapes and batteries, a spare microphone, and a clunker tripod in case their good one falls apart. They pack their news cars with rain slickers and boots for foul weather, shorts if it gets hot, sunblock if they're shooting at the beach. They're prepared for every contingency. By the same token reporters need to equip themselves with spare ideas and backup plans. You need to pack your brain like photogs pack their cars.

While stories can and often do change during the day and equipment can make you pull your hair out, there's no excuse for having a sub-par story.



BUILDING A SEQUENCE

Nothing is more impressive than a resume tape that shows a terrific ability to edit. A tape without jump cuts, with great use of natural sound, can make a good resume tape into a great one.

But very rarely do I ever see what is known as a "sequence" anymore. You might not know what a sequence is, but you've seen one. They generally appear in feature stories, but they can greatly enhance a news piece as well. They can be made up of two shots or as many as you care to include.

Here's an example of a simple sequence. You're shooting a man at his desk, talking on the phone. You have a camera in front of him with a tight shot that includes his face and the phone. Then you shoot more b-roll from another angle as a wide shot, but in each shot the man *must be doing the exact same thing*. You shoot the man hanging up the phone in both shots. Now, when you edit the two together, you cut in the middle of the action of hanging up. If you've shot your b-roll correctly, these should match perfectly, as you are going from a tight shot to a wide shot of the same thing.

You've just built a two shot sequence. Easy, huh?

Want to get more creative? Add more shots to your sequence in the same way.

Let's use an example of a man getting on a horse for a ride. You'll have to shoot him doing the same thing a few times for this to work. Once again, the man must be doing the exact same thing each time.

Shot one, wide shot of man approaching horse.

Shot two, tight shot of saddle, man's hand reaching into frame.

Shot three, medium shot of the man's foot going into stirrup.

Shot four, front in front of the horse, wide shot of man pulling himself up and grabbing reins

Shot five, tight shot of hands grabbing reins.

Etc. You can build as elaborate a sequence as you like. It's just like building a little movie with the camera offering different points of view.

Put one of these in your resume tape, and a News Director will take notice.



AVOIDING THE JUMP CUT

I was very lucky in that I learned to edit from a CBS network producer. And the very first lesson he taught me was that jump cuts are taboo. I was very proud that in all my years as a reporter, a single jump cut never hit the air.

But now it seems that every resume tape I see has jump cuts, and in this era of non-linear editing that is simply inexcusable. Jump cuts are jarring to the viewer and label you as an inexperienced editor. However, I have also discovered that many young people simply don't know they are breaking editing rules, or even know what a jump cut is.

So, let's go back to lesson 1 of editing 101. What is a jump cut?

A jump cut is an editing sequence that is physically impossible. In other words two or more shots that simply cannot occur in a natural timeline.

Common example: Your first shot is a man loading plywood into his car in preparation for a hurricane. You then directly cut to a sound bite of the man in front of his car. He has, in effect, "jumped" from the back of the car to the front.

Another example: You show a politician speaking on the floor of the legislature. You then directly cut to a shot of the politician in his office. He has "jumped" from the floor to the office.

This not only breaks editing rules, but it just looks awkward. Especially when there are three very easy ways to avoid these. Cutaways, dissolves, and getting your subject out of frame.

For the first example, you need a shot between the plywood loading and the sound bite. You could use a cutaway (shot of the Home Depot sign); you could follow the plywood into the car and get the man out of the shot completely; or you could use a quick dissolve, which allows you to "soft cut" between the two original shots. (A dissolve implies a time change. A soft cut is a dissolve of just a few frames.)

Unless you are using a dissolve, you need cutaways, and you should be thinking about these when shooting your story. They will make your editing much easier and your story will look a lot better.



JOB HUNTING

BEFORE TARGETING A MARKET, DO SOME RESEARCH

A while back a female client got some interest from a certain market I knew to be primarily a war zone. I had done one story for the network there, and on that occasion we got a hotel in another town because we didn't feel safe parking the sat truck or our personal cars there overnight. She asked me what I thought of the market, and I said, "If you were my daughter, I wouldn't want you living there."

Many times I hear from young people who throw out names of markets they have as goals, and I think a lot of times people simply grab names they recognize. Just because a city is a big market, doesn't mean it's a good place to work or live. By the same token, you shouldn't discount cities in small markets that are great places to work and live.

It's nice to look at the market list and dream of working in one of the top markets. But you really need to do some homework before blindly sending out tapes. You need to do this in two areas.

First, do some research on the city itself. Along with the obvious stuff like cost of living and climate, consider important figures like the crime rate, as this may have a definite affect on the stories you cover. Does this market have the top murder rate in the country? Well, then, you might be covering nothing but crime every day. Does the market have almost no crime? You might be covering more substantial stories.

The second thing you need to research is the station itself, and lucky for you, many stations put their product on the internet. Before sending a tape to a particular station, watch their newscast. Is it

solid, with the kind of stories you like to do? Or is it a bunch of flash and trash, with lousy photography from reporters who are obviously one man bands? Don't rank these according to their ratings, but according to the quality of the product.

I used to send out tapes blindly to places I knew nothing about. A few years ago I drove through a city to which I'd sent tapes years ago and all I could think of was, "Why would anyone in their right mind want to live here?"

Doing research is even more important today since so many stations hire over the phone. And if you've ever been on a blind date, this is basically the same thing, except you don't have a friend fixing you up.



NETWORKING

My dad used to constantly tell me, "It's not what you know, it's who you know." Of course, he was pretty much always right, except that one time he bought a race horse.

Connections in this business can sometimes be the difference between a decent career and a great career, between a good job and a major market or network. And while many broadcasters are born with built-in connections (nepotism), the average news person often has to make his or her own luck.

Networking is one way to do that.

There are two ways to network, and of course face to face is the best. Conferences such as RNTDA and others will offer you terrific opportunities to shake a lot of hands and make a great first impression. But even if you can't afford to attend a conference, you can still network while covering stories every day and by sending resume tapes. (I piqued your interest with that last part, huh?)

Let's start with the conference. I've been to a bunch of these and of course have seen lots of young people wandering around. But let

me illustrate a mistake many make with a story about what happened to me back in the 1980's at my first RTNDA.

Back then I was a starving reporter (I know, redundant) and a friend of mine gave me a one day free pass. I registered like everyone else and got this badge with my name in big bold letters. People wander around these conferences not looking at anyone in the face, but looking at the badges. While there I ran into a very well known guy that I knew from a network. We'll call him Mr. Jones and he was a household name in the industry. Anyway, Jones asks if I'm staying for the whole conference and I said that I only had a one day pass and couldn't afford to stay. Then he took off his badge and handed it to me, telling me he was flying out shortly.

The next day I was back, only I was big network executive Mr. Jones. People who wouldn't give me the time of day the previous evening were now more than happy to come up and introduce themselves.

But you know, Mr. Jones wasn't always a network bigwig. He started small like everyone else. So if you go to a conference, don't just look for the badges of the big wheels. Meet as many people as you can, because many of those people who are in small or medium markets today will be big wheels in the future.

And don't just say a brief hello. It is perfectly acceptable to hand someone a DVD or a business card (the ones you never take out of your desk). Then collect as many cards as you can and follow up. Don't wait for a job opening, just send another tape a few months later with a nice note reminding the person of your meeting at the conference. Remember, NDs love these impromptu interviews because it can often save them the expense of bringing someone in for an interview.

Don't forget to dress for the job you want, not the job you have. Too many young people show up casually dressed, and while these conferences are casual, you want to dress for an interview.

Now on to the part you're waiting for... networking with resume tapes. The key is twofold: first, you must make a connection with all the other news people you run into, especially your competitors. Then you have to get the jump on everyone else by sending tapes *where there aren't any openings*. You heard me right.

For example, you have the city hall beat and constantly do the same stories as two reporters from the competing stations. So instead of treating them as the enemy, treat them as friendly competitors. If one gets a job before you do, you now have a connection in that market. Wish the person well, then drop him a tape down the road and ask him to pass it on to the ND.

As for sending tapes when no openings are posted, this gets your work into the pipeline when the ND isn't deluged with boxes of tapes. Even if it is a market for which you're not ready, there's nothing wrong with sending a tape with a note that you'd like to work there someday and would appreciate feedback. You'd be surprised at the response you'd get... and now the ND knows your name and knows you're a person open to suggestion.

These are all more hooks in the water for your job search. Don't be like everyone else and just wait for openings.... take the initiative.

"DO NOT CALL" MEANS... WAIT FOR IT... DO NOT CALL

Let me preface this by saying nothing irritates me more than people who don't return calls. In fact, when I get someone's answering machine, I generally hang up rather than leave a message. I'd rather just call later because I know that half the time the person won't call back anyway.

However...

The rules are different when you're a News Director.

The most common complaint from job hunters is that News Directors simply don't return calls. When I was a reporter I felt the

same way. Then when I went into management the reason hit might square in the face.

It simply isn't possible. Not enough time, and emotionally draining.

Let me illustrate what happens when a job is posted. (And those NDs who fail to put "no phone calls please" at the end of the ad are just asking for trouble.) Despite the fact that the ad specifically tells candidates not to call, you'll get a call that always starts like this...

"I know the ad said no phone calls, but..."

And then you just shake your head because the person couldn't follow a simple direction.

But back to the unreturned calls topic. I would guess that the average response for any on-camera job opening is somewhere between 100-300 tapes. Along with the deluge of mail, you'll receive dozens of emails which you probably won't open because the station has a policy regarding internet viruses. And then there are the people who call. Even if the job ad says nothing about phone calls, there is absolutely no reason for a News Director to talk with anyone before seeing the tape. You might have the best phone manner in the world and a great voice, but unless that translates into on-camera work, there's no point.

Then there are the people who call after sending a tape, looking for a critique, thinking you will actually remember every tape you've looked at. "I sent you a tape and wanted to know what you thought of it." Remember, 90 percent of the tapes don't make it past 20 seconds. And if you've watched 200 tapes, the only ones you'll remember are those on the short list.

Okay, now let's move on to the part of the search where the ND is narrowing things down. Let's say you've got six tapes that you like. Before you show them to the GM or send them to corporate, you need to know if the people are still available and what sort of money they are looking for. And you want to get a sense of the candidate's

personality. So you call. This of course gets the applicant very excited, and also seems to give that person license to start calling the ND. And then the ND doesn't call you back. Some possible reasons:

-The ND hired someone else.

-Your tape didn't impress the GM or corporate and the ND was overruled. (This happens a lot.)

-Someone else of equal talent will work cheaper, or lives closer and doesn't need moving expenses.

-Someone already at the station was promoted from within.

-A hiring freeze or some budgetary change eliminated the opening.

-You drove the ND nuts with phone calls.

(Something else to consider: some stations send an application to *everyone* who applies. This does NOT mean they are interested, nor should it encourage you to pick up the phone.)

So before you think a ND is being rude, consider that point of view. Would you want to make dozens of calls to people who really have no shot at a job? And would you want to receive a call like this?

So once again, send it and fuhgeddaboudit. Don't sit around waiting by the phone, even if you've gotten a "short list" call. Assume nothing. Keep sending tapes.

COVER LETTERS: AN EXTRA CHANCE TO SHINE

A while back a News Director got a typical letter from a job applicant, saying, "Your news team has a long history of providing an excellent product to the viewers, and I'd like to be part of that team."

One problem. The station was a start-up, and had never been on the air.

(Cool! A cover letter from the future!)

I've received hundreds of cover letters over the years with similar sentiments. People who have never set foot in the state suddenly know of your station's:

- Commitment to journalism
- Top quality product
- Excellent news team

Please.

Do these people acquire this knowledge by osmosis, or are they astrally projecting themselves into your newsroom?

Unless you've grown up in the area or spent a good deal of time in the market, telling a News Director how great his product is just doesn't make sense. Blowing smoke is more transparent than a politician, and makes you look like a brown-noser.

Leave the flattery out of your cover letter. ND's just roll their eyes when they see this kind of stuff, and it doesn't help you one bit in your quest for a job at that station.

Let's continue with common mistake number two when writing a cover letter; telling a News Director how great you are.

Here's a typical letter with the News Director's thoughts in italics:

"I'm an award winning reporter..."

Yeah, everyone's got awards of some sort.

"I'm a take-no-prisoners reporter who fights for the lead story..."

Geez, I sure as hell hope so.

"I've broken some big stories during my two years here..."

Uh, that's what reporters do.

"I'm a terrific writer..."

Says who?

Okay, get the point?

The one thing News Directors don't need is a reporter who thinks he or she is the greatest thing since sliced bread. Your current ND may think you're great, you may have a wall full of awards, you

may indeed be a terrific writer, but no ND is going to believe it until you actually work in his newsroom.

Keep your cover letter modest when talking about yourself. You still want a clever cover letter, but be humble when writing it. Let your tape showcase your on-air talent. If you're as terrific as you think you are, the ND will be able to see it on your tape.

As a News Director, I want to know about you, and I want you to tell me in a clever way that proves you can turn a phrase. Every single applicant is willing to work long hours, be a good team player, yadda, yadda, yadda. What makes you different?

You have to look for something that will hook the News Director. Your cover letter has to tell a story. Think of things that make you different. Perhaps it is something unusual about your personal life. Maybe you have a brother who plays major league baseball, or your father was a milkman, or your college part time job was working as a sidewalk advertisement wearing a chicken suit. Something that got you interested in the news business. Maybe you have an unusual talent that has nothing to do with news. Just think of something and try to incorporate it into your letter. Put some personality with the name, something that will complement what the News Director sees on the videotape.

If I were getting out of college today, and taking my own personal experiences into account, here's what I'd write.

Dear News Director,

During the last eight years I've made thousands of sandwiches while working in my dad's delicatessen. I've learned that a good lunch is made up of more than just a roll and some cold cuts. A customer needs meats and cheeses sliced paper thin and piled high on bread fresh from the bakery. Top quality condiments like spicy mustard and fresh tomatoes can make a sandwich something special. Top it off with a crisp dill pickle, salty chips and an ice cold crème soda and you've taken lunch to another level.

In much the same way I'd like to take my news stories to the same level. I know that a story is much more than just video and sound bites. But I'm young and have a lot to learn when it comes to those ingredients that can make any story something special. I'm looking for a station that will provide a mentoring environment to help me develop my skills.

And from this point, you can tell a little about your news experience before wrapping things up.

In this example, I've taken the years of working in my dad's store and made a little analogy to news. A cover letter is just like a news story. It needs a clever lead to hook the viewer, or in this case, the reader.

You'll also note that I'm "asking for help" toward the end of the letter. One major problem I've seen with young people is that they tend to question every single order given by a manager. "Why do I need to do this story?" "Why can't I do the story I pitched?" "Why do we have to do it this way? We did it another way in my last job." You get the idea. By admitting you're young and willing to learn, you are deferring to the wisdom of someone with more experience. Nothing impresses a news veteran more than a young reporter who admits he or she doesn't know everything.

So stray from the flock and put as much thought and effort into your cover letter as you put into your resume tape. Your tape still gets you the job, but a great cover letter must just be the difference when you're on the short list.

WRITING YOUR WAY INTO A JOB

Oh, I loved giving writing tests when I was hiring people. And sometimes I got the results before the candidate even started writing. No sooner had I said, "I'd like you to take a writing test" than the beads of sweat would blossom on the candidate's forehead and the eyes would glaze over. These are usually given in conjunction with

current events test. Once an anchor candidate actually asked me, "Why do I have to know current events if I'm going to be an anchor?" You guessed it, she didn't get the job.

So the first thing you have to do when presented with a writing test, either in person or over the phone, is to react as if it is no big deal. Letting a ND know that you're not confident about your writing is a red flag.

You may also be asked to tie stories together, especially if you're applying for a producer's job where things like tease writing are critical. The ND wants to see if you are clever and can turn a phrase.

These days tests come in two forms, as part of the in-person interview or via email, in which you are given a certain amount of time to complete the exercise. Many NDs will give you three or four stories from the wire to re-write, to see if you can compose decent broadcast copy. As you do this, make sure you read your copy aloud to check the pacing. Just as we talked about in the anchoring section, if you run out of breath before the end of a sentence, that sentence is too long. Cut it in half.

Let's practice on this story from a few years ago. Just re-write it to make it more conversational and interesting.

"Things are heating up on the campaign trail this week. Senator Barack Obama is busy campaigning for votes in California's wine country with his wife Melissa and their three daughters, while John McCain and wife Cindy are on a bus tour through the South. McCain, a Navy pilot, stopped to visit the Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida and talked with pilots about his ordeal in a South Vietnam prison camp."

You see, I, being the devious sort that I am, liked to give reporters copy to re-write that had factual errors; the kind of mistakes that no news person worth his salt would miss. If you didn't catch the four blatant mistakes in that story, it would raise a red flag that you are all style and no substance. So while you're not only being checked for

your writing style, there might be a subliminal test buried in the copy you're asked to re-write.

Anyway, let's punch up that copy a bit...

"Things are bubbling up on the campaign trail this week, as Barack Obama pressed the flesh with those who press the grapes in California's wine country. Meanwhile, John McCain went back to school of sorts, visiting the Naval Base in Pensacola, Florida where he learned to fly."

See, same story, but more interesting as we've turned a few phrases. Instead of having copy to "read" the anchor is now able to "talk" to the viewer in a more one-on-one conversational tone.

I'm often asked if a person can be "taught" to be a good writer. Personally, I think great writers are born with that talent, but that anyone can work hard to become a good, solid news writer. It takes practice and study. Listen to the copy on the networks and major market stations, pay attention to their clever phrasing, and then grab the worst wire copy you can find and do it yourself. (It helps if you don't watch the TV, just listen.) If you apply yourself it will become second nature, and a fun challenge for you to make even the dullest stories interesting.



WHAT TAKES SO LONG?

"I've called him six times, left messages, sent emails. He still hasn't called me back. And last month he told me he was really interested."

No, that's not a transcript from *The Bachelor*. This is what I'm hearing over and over from clients who grow both frustrated and confused over the speed of the hiring process in television news. And in recent years, things have actually gotten slower. Let's face it, if you're looking for a job, it must seem as though continental drift moves faster.

So why does a business that must deal with daily deadlines and newscasts timed to the second move at a glacial pace when it comes

to making hiring decisions? And what does a News Director do all day? To understand why moss may be growing on your resume tape, we must answer those two questions.

First, why does it take so long to hire someone when a News Director will tell you "I'm looking to hire as soon as possible" or the ad reads "immediate opening?" Well, there are so many factors that go into hiring these days that even a good intentioned ND will find corporate and legal stumbling blocks that prevent him from moving quickly. The ND may be ready to hire you today, you may be his top choice, but those pesky stars have to align for you to actually get the offer. And the stars in broadcasting don't move quickly. Here are the top reasons that delay hirings:

-Money:

(Yeah, I know, what a revelation.) Let's take a hypothetical opening for a reporter that is budgeted to pay \$36,000 per year. Let's say it is the middle of July, viewership is down in the dead of summer, half the staff is on vacation, and the November sweeps are several months away. So the ND may not see the hire as critical for this particular time period. The News Director could hire you right now, or simply wait and save that salary till September. By not filling the position for two months, the ND has saved \$6,000, which can be used to perhaps offer you a better salary, or, more than likely, buy more equipment or pay for any number of expenses. Or the ND might be over budget due to something like high gas prices and need to cut back for a few weeks. In many cases the timing of a job opening is directly tied to the speed of the hiring process. Meanwhile, consider the logistics and expense of bringing applicants in for an interview. Why spend \$1,000 to fly someone in this week when you can wait two weeks and get the same plane ticket for \$250?

-Legal Stuff:

Depending on the company, the hiring rules can be very easy to navigate or filled with congressional style red tape. Some companies

have rules by which every person who sends a resume will be sent an application. (Therefore, just because you got an application back doesn't mean the ND is interested.) Some require that all applications be returned before a final decision is made. Some stations require a "posting period" by which a job opening must be advertised for a certain number of days. Many are starting to do background checks and/or drug testing. Many require that a minimum number of people be interviewed. And with people applying from all over the country, this can take lots of time.

-Corporate Obstacles:

At just about every station at which I've worked the News Director needed some sort of approval from a higher power before making a hire. In many stations, the GM must sign off. In others, your tape must not only get the rubber stamp from the GM, but from a corporate person who might be in charge of news for the group. So, remember that original phone call in which the ND told you he loved your work? Well, you might not be what the GM had in mind. The corporate suit might like someone else. Or have twenty other stations with which to deal.

-The Job Opening Is Not A Top Priority:

Unless the opening is for a main anchor position, don't expect news executives to drop everything and put every waking moment into filling a position. There's too much on a News Director's plate as it is.

-Paralysis By Analysis:

With so much at stake, every hire is carefully examined. No one can make a decision anymore, and no one wants to be the person responsible for pulling the trigger. Why? Because in our blameless society, no one will want to take the responsibility when a good employee goes bad and have to endure a scene like this one.

"Well, she's just not pulling the ratings up."

"Well, you hired her!"

"You loved her tape too!"

"Only because the consultant liked her! I never thought she was that good."

In the end, these managers spend so much time looking for the perfect employee that they often miss some really talented individuals.

-Checking References Can Take Time:

You really can't be too careful these days. Most NDs will take the time to make sure the person on the tape is the person they're actually hiring. Over the years I've seen two people hired with bogus tapes. They didn't last long, and you can be sure the NDs who hired them double-checked their replacements. And most NDs will google you and sift through your social networking pages for any red flags.

Okay, on to part two. What does a News Director do all day? (I asked this question all the time when I was a reporter.) In a perfect world, your resume tape would arrive, the ND would immediately pop it into his VCR, and you'd know immediately if you were in the running.

But the world of management in TV news has become filled with things that really have nothing to do with news. Here are just some of the things that can quickly burn up a News Director's day.

-Interruptions: Number one on the list. I cannot tell you how many hours are spent on stuff like phone calls from viewers, reading press releases, sales people trying to pitch things like editing systems, weather computers, etc.

-Meetings: Some stations love meetings and have them several times each week. Some stations almost never have them. Regardless of the amount, the News Director gets dragged into all of them, whether it is a department head meeting, one with the promotions department, one involving the station's charity efforts, etc.

-Equipment problems. Wrecked news cars, crashed computers, dropped cameras, reporters locked out of cars, you name it. When something's broken, you call the ND.

-Complaints about everything from the staff. This takes up a huge amount of time. (And yes, when I was a reporter I was as guilty of this as anyone.)

Throw all of this into the mix, and that phone call he was going to make to his top candidate got put on the back burner for another day.

Finally, a story about the phrase "we'll keep your resume on file." I once got a call from a News Director *two years* after sending a reporting tape. The conversation went like this:

"I've just looked at your tape..."

"Excuse me, who is this again?"

"You probably don't remember sending a tape, but we keep things on file."

"People actually do that?"

Yes, they actually do. Sometimes tapes wander in that are really impressive but you don't have an opening, so you put them aside for the day that you do.



RESUME TAPES

I'm betting many of you skipped the first part of this book and came directly to this section.

(First, I know that no one sends actual "tape" any longer, but some labels stick forever. Call them reels, samplers or whatever, they're still resume tapes.)

Because, bottom line, your tape gets you hired. Not your paper resume. Not phone calls. Not emails. Not persistence. If you don't have a good tape, you don't get the job. Plain and simple.

While television and technology have changed immensely over the years, the job hunting process for on-air jobs has not. You still have to catch a News Director's eye with your tape. And in many cases, you need to do it in the first 10 or 20 seconds. Not fair, you say? Well, sorry, that's the way it is. But since you now know that little fact, you have to make sure you do everything you can to keep the tape rolling.

I'm going to take you through a step-by-step process of putting your tape together all the way to mailing it out. While there is no foolproof method of making a successful resume tape, you can improve your chances by avoiding the mistakes that often make a News Director hit the eject button. Let's start at the very beginning.



NEED A RESUME TAPE? RENT A SHOOTER

This is a major problem for many people starting out in the business. If you're in college, you can simply make a tape using its facilities. If you have an internship, you may be able to use the equipment if you have a good relationship with the staff.

But if you don't have either of those options, what do you do?

The best resource is your local television station. Every news department has photographers that freelance on the side. Many shoot weddings, graduations, etc, and many have their own equipment. Simply place a call to any local station and ask for the Chief Photographer. Tell him you'd like to hire a photog to help you put a resume tape together. Chances are you'll end up shooting a few stories on a weekend and spending some time with the photog editing your tape. The result will be a resume tape that looks real and won't cost you a fortune. Photographers are a very kind breed, and many enjoy helping young people.

Of course these guys don't work for free, but you're not going to get clobbered. You'll also get good looking packages and standups because this is what these guys do every day. Need dubs? A photog can do that for you too.

You may spend a day or two out in the field, changing into a bunch of different outfits. You'll end up with something good, because 99 percent of photogs take pride in their work and enjoy helping young people.

Just remember to buy lunch.

MAILING A RESUME TAPE?

You may be asked to send a DVD via snail mail. Ever tried to find something you recorded at home but didn't label? It's the same in a News Director's office. Incredibly, some people send their discs out without labels.

For DVD's, put a label on the disc itself with your contact info, and another on the box.

Tip: Some people include little slips of paper with a tape or print the menu on the DVD label with a rundown of what's on the resume tape. You do not have to do this. News Directors don't have time to

look at what's coming up and they don't care. They simply play the thing and watch.

MENUS ARE FOR RESTAURANTS

When I was a kid there was a restaurant across the street from Grand Central Station called "Horn & Hardart." It was what was known as an "automat" in that there were no waiters. It was a unique place and the food was behind these little glass doors. You'd put a dime in a slot, the door would open, and you'd pull out a bagel. Same with sandwiches, salads, desserts.

Their slogan was "You can't eat atmosphere." Those who ate there (my dad loved the place) were only interested in the content behind those little doors.

Same with resume tapes. The only thing that matters is content.

For those of you who are sending out your work on DVDs, please, please, PLEASE ditch the menu system.

I don't want to click on one thing for "packages" and another for "anchoring" and another for "live shots." I don't want to click something else for references and another for your resume. In fact, I don't want to click on anything once I load the disc.

Set it up so that when you pop the thing in the machine, it plays without having to push a button. No ND has time to navigate menus, nor do any of them care about the fact that you've separated your work. I don't want to watch packages, then have to go backwards and find the live shots.

Time is precious when you're watching tons of resume tapes. You'll gain points with a News Director if you can save some time with yours. Keep it simple.

MAILING & PACKAGING

You have a few options when sending your tape. Depending on your time frame and budget, you can make the appropriate choice.

Overnight mail: The most expensive way to send your tape. You should only do this when you know time is crucial. Sending your tape in this manner does NOT mean your work will receive any more consideration than those sent regular mail. I've heard some people say, "It shows the News Director I'm serious about the job." Once again, the only thing that matters is the content, not how it got there. And in many cases, the ND has someone else open all the packages and stack up the tapes to be watched.

Regular/Priority mail: The most common, and not very expensive considering the weight of a DVD

Media Mail: A little known classification for sending books, DVD's and computer discs. It used to be cheaper to send tapes this way, but is no longer the case.

If you're not using those free boxes from the post office, padded mailers work just fine. Avoid packing peanuts, as they not only make a mess but little pieces of Styrofoam can actually damage a DVD player.

E-MAILING LINKS

There are of course electronic ways to put your work out there. A few websites will let you post your resume and tape so that News Directors can view them on their computers. While this doesn't guarantee your tape will be viewed by everyone, there are some News Directors who prefer to watch resume tapes this way. It is also a nice option when a News Director is looking to fill an opening in a hurry and can simply view possible applicants online without waiting to run an ad and wait for the mailman.

Another trend among young reporters is to put a resume tape on a personal website and email the link to a News Director. While this

is convenient, fast and free, please be advised that many managers can get hundreds of emails each day, and sometimes only open the ones from people whose names they recognize. While this is obviously the cheapest way to go, the percentage of News Directors who will actually view your tape will be smaller.

I get a lot of questions from young people about sending a resume tape via email. Many are curious as to why they've sent out dozens and gotten almost no response.

The answer lies in your own email box.

Open your email inbox on any given day, and along with the messages from people you know are countless pieces of junk advertising discount Viagra or telling you that you've won a lottery in Nigeria. While some email companies are better at filtering out spam than others, some junk still manages to find its way.

Now put yourself in a News Director's shoes. On any given day a ND might find a few hundred emails waiting to be read, and no one has time to read two hundred emails. Many stations also have rules governing emails and viruses... unless you know the sender, you simply hit the delete button. So if someone is sending you a resume tape attached to an email, chances are you'll never see it.

Some job postings ask the applicant to mail a tape. While you may think this is a stone age mentality, there are several reasons for this. DVDs are easy to go through quickly, and when you're narrowing the field you want to be able to put the good ones in a box to review later. At some point the GM or corporate is going to want to review those as well, and they don't want a bunch of forwarded emails to do it. And in many cases, more than one person is looking at resume tapes, and you don't want a bunch of people crowded around you, looking over your shoulder. The News Director always has the worst computer in the newsroom, and half the time stuff sent via email won't play. The same is often true of General Managers.

The day may come when all job postings ask for tapes to be emailed, but it isn't here yet. If, however, the job posting directs you to send your tape electronically, then do so.

That said, many of those companies who will post your resume tape online do get a lot of visits from News Directors, but that's different than sending an unsolicited email. A ND can go to the site and watch a bunch. They're all formatted the same way and there's not a problem playing them.

And there's nothing wrong with having your own personal site with a bunch of packages or anchoring, just in case a ND calls you and wants to see something quick, or has looked at your first tape and wants to see more.

But just sending emails cold doesn't do the trick. If you want to make sure a News Director actually receives your tape, you've got to do it the old fashioned way and stick it in the mail.



OPENING SLATE

A slate is the first thing that should pop up on your tape. It should last no more than ten seconds and contain your name and contact information in nice, easy to read letters.

I've seen some people send out tapes with elaborately produced slates complete with flying pictures, video wipes, etc. All you need is your contact info on a black background. A creative slate will not improve your chances.



OPENING MONTAGE

Generally, most News Directors will want to see what you look like right off the bat. Sadly this is a very superficial business and your appearance will play a major part in your career. But regardless of your appearance, this is the part of the tape in which you must put

your best foot forward right at the top. Saving your best work for later in the tape won't do you any good, because the News Director won't be watching. I'm not kidding when I'm telling you that many tapes only last ten seconds before the eject button is hit.

A montage is just that. A collection of on-camera work that can show your talent, versatility and personality. Most montages consist of about a half dozen short on-camera segments, consisting of a combination of standups, live shots, studio intros and anchor segments, depending on your background. And while you may be the most serious reporter in the world, at least one of these standups should show your smile.

People are constantly debating the "correct" way to start a resume tape. Some produce elaborate slates with flying pictures and exotic graphics. Others create a montage of "clipped" standups that just show brief glimpses of various standups. Some insist on starting with live shots. And finally, some just start with a package.

While there is nothing set in stone about the accepted way to open a resume tape, it is generally accepted that one "rule" will get you the best results.

Your absolute best clip had better be the first thing a News Director sees. Don't "bury the lead."

Keep your slate simple and short, but when that montage starts you had better knock my socks off in order to keep me from hitting the eject button. Your first clip must be something that shows you in your best light; something that makes you look your best, shows creativity, shows your personality, and displays your energy. It does not matter if the first clip is a live shot, standup, keywall intro, or newsroom live shot. Just make sure it is your best work. Keep this in mind: if you were only allowed to put one clip on a resume tape, which one would it be?

As for the rest of the montage, try your best to mix things up. Day and night standups, live shots, keywall shots, anchoring. Show yourself in a variety of settings and situations if you can.

By the way, it is perfectly acceptable to use something in your montage that will appear in a package later in the tape.

I receive many tapes that start with packages in which I have to wait up to one minute to see the reporter. While some NDs may have that patience, many don't. And even though we hate to admit it, this is a very superficial business. NDs will judge you on appearance, and want to see what you look like. I once worked with a ND who watched resume tapes with the sound off. Pretty scary, but I'm sure he was not alone.

So remember, best foot forward. You only get that one chance for a first impression, so make it your best.

Your montage might look like this:

1. Standup in field
2. Live shot
3. Live intro in studio
4. Anchor segment
5. Standup in field
6. Live shot

This is just an example, but there is no formula. If you're an anchor who never gets out of the studio, you might have a montage of all anchor segments. The same is true of reporters who never anchor. If you're in college, chances are you're not going to have any live shots, but don't worry, News Directors at entry level shops know most college stations don't have live capabilities.

But if you have a nice variety, by all means use it. Just make sure that your very first piece of video is your absolute best work.

You can edit the segments of your montage together, or you may put one second of black between each segment. When we get to the package and anchoring portion of your tape, you will definitely need

to separate your video with a bit of black. And make sure you have one second of black between the last clip of the montage and the first package or anchor segment.



PACKAGES & ANCHORING

I've always gotten a chuckle out of college resume tapes that feature a student standing in front of a very distinctive building in our nation's capital. "Live at the White House, I'm Joe Reporter." Sadly, students often spend time and money traveling to DC to shoot what they think will be an impressive standup. Do they think any News Director believes a 21-year-old is covering the White House?

By the same token, throwing "big stories" on your resume tape often doesn't carry much weight either. What may have been a lead story in your market is just another story elsewhere.

But the big problem I'm seeing is that people are confusing big stories with resume tape stories.

Example: Tornado whips through town, causing extensive damage. I can almost predict what the package will look like, because I've done it myself a dozen times. Nat sound breaks of chain saws cutting trees, men in bucket trucks restoring power, people walking through the rubble that once was their home.

Now I want you to think about this: Does a story like this really require any special reporting skills? Everything is there, laid out for you. You don't really have to play Woodward & Bernstein here. Everyone wants to talk, video and nats are plentiful, emotion is right in your face. You could write the script in your head before you even get there. Challenging? Not even close. Honestly, an intern could do it.

And while this may have been a major event in your market, or even a national story, it looks like every other resume tape package when you put it on your tape.

While a lead story in your newscast has to be the most important of the day, the lead story on your resume tape has to set you apart. I don't want a reporter who can show up after the fact and report the obvious, I want someone who can dig, find the unusual angle, enterprize a clever story. I want to see something memorable, because if I remember it, chances are the viewers will too.

Several years ago we were doing hurricane prep stories for the umpteenth time and a friend of mine came up with a really different angle; he went to the zoo and did a story about evacuating the animals. Who would ever think of that when hundred mile per hour winds are taking dead aim at your home? It was a terrific story, a different take on something that had become routine. (He ended up with a major market job, by the way.)

I always laugh when people say, "It's a good news market," as that phrase usually refers to a place with a lot of scanner stories. Every market is a good news market, if you're willing to dig. Every market has great stories. You may be stuck in a tiny place, but trust me, there are great stories to be had if you're willing to look. Don't just wait for a "big story" to put on your tape, because chances are it looks like everyone else's "big story."

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE "ENTERPRISE" STORIES ON YOUR TAPE

Okay, your montage is complete and you're ready to move on to the next stage of your resume tape. And if the News Director has gotten this far, you've caught his or her attention.

You'll generally want three packages for your resume tape. (If a News Director makes it to the end of the tape, you'll probably get a call.) The same rule of quality that applied to the montage applies here. You want your best work first in line. And choosing the first piece drives news people crazy.

Again, and I cannot stress this point enough, many young people believe that the most important story in terms of news value should be first. I've seen many tapes in which young reporters use lead stories as the first stories in their resume tapes. But just because a particular story was the most important of the day, that doesn't mean it will show off your talents in their best light. That first story has to show a little bit of everything; your reporting ability, solid writing, editing style, use of natural sound, personality, voice and delivery. And it has to be a memorable topic.

Stories that are "video poor" are not good choices for resume tapes. For example, doing a story about a very important city council meeting in which the only shots you have are from the council chambers is visually dull. Architectural studies feature video of buildings because there's nothing else to show. Some stories are simply better suited for newspapers than TV. You want a story that has lots of interesting video and good natural sound possibilities.

Scanner stories (car wrecks and fires) may seem exciting to a young reporter, but these do little to show off your talents. The police provide most of the information, so little reporting ability is needed. And these stories all look the same. They are known as "video wallpaper" which means the video just fades into the background like the wallpaper in your kitchen. (Think. Right now. What does the wallpaper in your kitchen look like? You probably don't know.)

The types of stories that can really make your tape stand out are known as "enterprise stories." These are stories that you as a reporter have found on your own. Not clipped out of a newspaper, not heard on a scanner, but stories that have taken some digging and effort. You might have stumbled on the story, have been tipped off by a viewer, or found it by talking to someone in line at the supermarket. And that's half the battle, because not all enterprise stories are resume tape stories. A good resume tape story has lots of elements. You not only

need good video, nat sound and a great standup, but the topic should be memorable as well.

And you need three of these.

In general, two of these stories should be of the "hard news" variety and the final story should be something lighter, a human interest story or fun feature that shows another side of your personality. By the way, many people think the definition of "hard news" is anything found on the police scanner. Wrong. Hard news can deal with the economy, politics or a number of important issues.

News Directors love reporters who can enterprise their own stories. If an ND doesn't have to "find something" for you each day, you become a valuable member of the news team.

ANCHOR SEGMENTS

Anchor segments should be just that. Segments. One of the problems a lot of young people make to edit one line from many different stories together. You end up with an anchor segment that has a big problem; it appears as though you can't get through more than one line of a story without stumbling. Anchor segments should last at least a story or two.

You'll need to show your personality range on these as well, so you should include different types of stories. From hard news lead stories to consumer stories to soft features, you'll need to show examples of your delivery. And don't forget, you need at least one piece of anchoring in which we see your smile. A feature in which we see something other than your "news" persona is a great choice to end your tape.

A News Director also wants to see how you interact with the other members of the news team. That means you need to include some cross-talk with a co-anchor, another reporter (on set, or from a live shot), weathercaster, or sportscaster. This is another opportunity

to let your personality shine. Viewers want to know the people who deliver the news are serious journalists who have a human side.

TAPE ORDER

Your tape should reflect the type of position you're seeking. In fact, many on-camera people have two tapes, one for anchor jobs and one for reporting jobs. If you have both anchoring and reporting to show, your tape might look like this for a reporting job:

1. Montage
2. Reporting / 3 packages, the last of which should be a feature
3. Anchoring / 3 segments, cross-talk, feature

An anchor tape would simply reverse the order of the reporting and anchoring.

Now suppose the job opening is for something that requires both talents, like a weekend anchor. In this case, you should put your anchoring first, since the anchoring is seen as the more important duty by the News Director. If the position is for a reporter with fill-in anchoring duties, you should lead off with whatever you feel is your stronger talent.

THE BACK END OF A RESUME TAPE

Traditionally, resume tapes run between five and ten minutes. You've got about a minute for the montage, then three packages, or a couple of anchor segments.

Traditionally, people will tell you that your tape should never run longer than ten minutes.

Well, guess what? You can make your tape as long as you like. Why? Because if a News Director is still watching after ten minutes, chances are he really likes your work anyway and probably wants to

see more. If someone is still watching after ten minutes, you'll get a call, or get hired.

So, after your greatest hits montage and three best packages, what should you throw on the end of the tape?

Well, that's your chance to show your versatility. If you're a hard news reporter, throw an extra feature at the end of the tape. If you're a perky morning anchor, let's see a hard news package. If you're a weather or sports guy, how about a news package you did in a pinch. And if you're a general assignment person, a look at the time you anchored or filled in doing weather doesn't hurt.

The back end of your resume tape is free time. With DVDs, there's plenty of free space on the disc. Why not use it?

The resume tape police aren't going to come after you if your tape runs longer than ten minutes. If you've got some good stuff, it never hurts to add it to your tape.



SOMETIMES YOU NEED TWO DIFFERENT RESUME TAPES

We're going to conclude this section with a tip that some of you might not have considered.

Let's say you're a reporter who has filled in on the anchor desk a lot. You're looking for a job and you don't really have a preference if it is a reporter or anchor gig.

So why would you send a reporter tape for an anchor job, or vice versa?

That's why many people have two tapes, one for reporter jobs, one for anchoring. If you do this, you'll need your packages first if you're applying for a reporter job, your anchoring clips first if it's an anchor job you seek.

Weekend anchor job? Then your anchoring goes first. A ND sees those skills as more important when hiring for that position.

Finally, sometimes you run into a station that just does things differently; maybe they like long form stories and your regular tape has nothing but minute-ten packlets. So you knock out a special tape just for that station. Or there's a station that does "real stories" as opposed to scanner chasing. Make a separate tape if necessary. Do your homework, and find out the style of the station running the ad.

Remember, consider each job opening carefully and don't just send stuff out blindly. Sometimes switching things up a bit can make a big difference.



JOB HUNTING STRATEGIES

“Omerta.”

Among the Italians, the word means "code of silence."

When job hunting in this business, it is best that you adopt this code, lest your career get hit with a management torpedo. In other words, don't tell anyone, and I mean *anyone*, where you're sending tapes, who you've talked to, what markets you like, or where you might be going on your day off.

I have two good friends who had offers in major market stations. Neither was breaking a contract. The NDs doing the hiring loved them, had made offers, and were preparing contracts. They had both gone through fantastic interviews and were making plans to move. In both cases their current ND found out and the offers mysteriously disappeared. The NDs who were ready to hire them no longer returned their calls.

Both of these people were very competent, had a ton of talent, and didn't have any ego problems. They were well liked in the newsroom.

So what happened? What was said? Who knows? Maybe the ND told the guy making the offer a contract existed when it didn't. Maybe he said the person was difficult to deal with.

Doesn't matter. The job offer was torpedoed. Oh yeah, this happened to me as well.

Maybe your ND doesn't want you to leave. Maybe he's just vindictive.

Doesn't matter. If the ND doesn't know where you're going, he can't launch a torpedo.

That's why you all need the code of Omerta.

So, here are the rules when hunting for a job:

-Tell no one where you've sent tapes.

-Tell no one what markets you like.

-Tell no one what openings you've just spotted.

-Only make job related phone calls on your personal phone. (Don't put your station's phone number on your resume.)

-Do not send emails from a station computer. (While they cannot hack into your email, they can print out every word you've typed and figure out what you've sent. And it is legal for any company to check your email sent on company equipment.)

-Do not do job related research on a station computer. If you want to look at station websites, do it at home. A manager can easily call up your history.

-If you have an interview and you're an on-camera person, don't talk to anyone that you don't have to at the airport.

-Don't even imply that you're looking for work.

-If you have to fill out an application, make sure you check the appropriate box which prohibits the new employer from calling your current employer.

-If you get an offer and turn in your two week notice, *you do not have to tell anyone where you're going*. You can do that when you get there.

Does all this sound like paranoia? Well, as the old saying goes, you're not paranoid if they really are out to get you. And sometimes they are.

Lots of people have had good jobs torpedoed. Don't let yourself be one of them because you cannot keep a secret.



WHAT'S WRONG WITH MY RESUME TAPE?

A female anchor once told me, "News Directors are just like single men. They say they'll call, but they never do."

Nothing drives on-air people nuts more than wondering what actually happens to their resume tapes after they send them. Did the ND watch my tape? Is it sitting in a giant pile unopened?

And the big one.

Is my resume tape good enough? There are no definitive answers to any of these, but you have to keep one thing in mind to maintain your sanity.

In many cases, it is not a matter of hiring the *best* person for the job, but the *right* person. Here are some of the comments I've heard over the years from various managers after watching really good resume tapes. Preface all of these with "great tape, but..."

"Too old."

"Too young."

"Not another blonde." (from our blonde assignment editor)

"But we need a male/female."

"Overqualified/not enough experience."

"Won't fit with the current co-anchor."

"I'd rather hire someone local so we can save moving expenses."

You get the picture. It is a lot like that episode of *Seinfeld*: "It's not you, it's me." In many cases, the stars have to align for you to get the job. Your tape may be just fine, but you are not what the ND is looking for. Or your tape may need some improvement. (More on that later.) But in order to understand how the hiring process works, we need to take a peek inside the News Director's office.

Let's start at the beginning. There's an opening. The ND runs an ad. (He thinks he'll save himself a few headaches by putting the term "no phone calls" in the ad only to have the phone ring one nanosecond after the opening hits the website.) Then the tapes begin to arrive. (Let me preface the rest of this discussion by saying that when I made the transition from reporter to manager I made myself a promise that I would watch every resume tape as soon as it came in. This promise died a grisly death when we ran an ad for a sports an-

chor and had 100 tapes show up in a week.) The tapes begin to pile up the next day thanks to the wonders of overnight delivery. The sad thing is, if the job was just posted, the applicant has just wasted fifteen bucks. ND's don't think any more of a tape which arrived via Fedex than one that was sent Media Mail. The only time to send a tape overnight is when it is requested, or when you know for a fact the News Director is making a decision tomorrow.

Okay, back to our story. Now there's a giant pile of tapes in the ND's office, or if he has an assistant, in the assistant's office. Every ND has his or her own system. In one case, I as the assistant news director was asked to go through the tapes and only bring the best ones to the ND. Since he and I had the same taste in reporters, this worked well. In another case, the ND watched them all himself, then asked me and the Executive Producer to watch what he considered the finalists. At another station, the ND piled up the tapes and invited the whole news staff to watch them after the 6pm newscast and honestly listened to everyone's opinion. And finally, I worked as a reporter at a station that changed News Directors. I noticed the new guy watched resume tapes with the sound off. When I asked him why, he said "if they don't look good, I don't want them." (Not being anything close to a male model, I sent out a dozen tapes the next day.) When it is time to watch the tape, here is what generally happens. The envelope is opened and the tape, resume and cover letter are pulled out. The tape goes in the machine while the ND takes a quick glance at the resume to see the person's name and the current station or university. "Okay, we've got Joe from Wichita." The "play" button is hit, and the show begins.

Okay, your slate has rolled by and your first standup begins. It had better be your best work or the "eject" button will be hit very quickly. At this point you're asking, "How can this be? This isn't fair! The ND hasn't even gotten to my packages yet!" Bud sadly, in most cases, this is true. Most managers are looking for their own style of

on-air person. So your first few seconds of tape had better show some personality, creative writing ability, ability to communicate, animation, connection with the viewer. Remember, first impressions count the most. And, yes, this is a very superficial business. Some ND's are very concerned with how you look. Once again, not fair, but that's how the business is. So, if you're lucky your tape is still rolling. If an ND watches a package or two, you'll make the short list. The tape will be put aside. This is generally when your cover letter is read, and this is a chance for you to shine. A clever, well-written cover letter can set you apart from one filled with grammar and spelling errors.

So now all the tapes have been viewed and the ND has narrowed it down to maybe six. In most stations, the GM will want to approve on-air hires, and in some cases, approval must come from corporate. The list is narrowed, usually down to three, and the interview process begins. The rest is up to you.

Things to improve your chances:

-A tape that really moves. A nice montage of standups, a great live shot, and three great packages. If you're an anchor, make sure to include some crosstalk and a good variety of stories. Make sure at some point in the tape we can see your smile. (If you're a college student, we really don't expect you to have a live shot.)

-Your personality *must* come out. The world is full of cookie-cutter people; what makes you different? Don't tell me, *show* me.

-Make your first package an enterprise story or something in which you've done some digging. Sadly, many reporters start with a spot news package. Remember, the police do most of the information gathering in spot news, so unless the story is really unique, don't lead with it. (That's why many stations let interns cover car wrecks.)

-A story with some kind of emotion or humor. A lot of times managers will be talking about applicants and one will say "she's the reporter who did that homeless story" or "he's the reporter with the

waterskiing squirrel feature." Make an ND laugh or cry and you'll be more memorable.

-Anchoring in which your energy and personality comes through the screen. Too many anchors send tapes in which they are simply reading. *Talk* to the viewer.

And here are some things that can work against you:

-Voice. Nothing takes you out of the running faster than a wicked accent. No one wants an anchor who sounds like "The Nanny" or Scarlett O'Hara. (In a bizarre bit of irony, you can't get to New York if you sound too Noo Yawk.) If you've got an accent, get rid of it and make a new tape.

-The work is not your own. News Directors are like detectives in spotting little things that don't add up. A favorite trick of a college intern is to "borrow" a local or network reporter's package, re-voice it and add his or her own standup. But it is often obvious this is not the applicant's work. In one such case a young man was well into his package when his "exclusive interview" included a sound bite featuring a hand holding a microphone. The hand had beautifully manicured long red nails and an engagement ring. Outta here.

-Misspelling the News Director's name on your cover letter. Why would you hire a reporter who is supposed to have attention to detail if he or she can't spell your name correctly? If the name is not listed in the ad, call the station and ask for it. (Even if the ad calls for you to submit a tape to Human Resources, you want your cover letter addressed to the ND.) Ask for the correct spelling, and if it is one of those names that can be male or female, like Terry, Kelly, or yeah, Randy, ask if the ND is a he or she. My name is Italian and really isn't that difficult to spell, but I've had mail addressed to "Tonto," "Toronto," and my favorite, "Ranno Tanno." I once had a phone call for "Mr. Tomato." (I'm sorry, would you like the number for Sesame Street?)

-Getting the call letters wrong in your cover letter. We realize job applicants send the same cover letter to everyone, just make sure you match the ND with the station.

-Bars and tone on the tape. For those who don't know, bars and tone are used by engineers to set broadcast levels and to chase on-air people out of master control. They are not necessary on a tape. You may as well just mail a screaming baby with your application.

-The DVD is blank. Amazingly this happens more often than you would think. Check each tape before mailing.

-Calls to find out if your tape has arrived. ND's know this is an attempt to get feedback and can find these calls annoying. Just use the US Postal Service delivery confirmation if you want to make sure.

-Beauty pageants listed on your resume. If you're attractive, it is obvious on your tape. While I know many pageant vets who are competent journalists and nice people, there is a stigma that pageant people are all style and no substance. If you're going to list a parade of pageant victories on your resume you might as well just tattoo "high maintenance" on your forehead. Enter as many pageants as you want, just leave them off the resume. (I actually worked with one anchor who listed her dress size on her resume.)

-Modeling portfolio photos. Once again, if you're attractive, it is obvious. Sending photos of yourself in a bikini just labels you as superficial. Sending any kind of still photos is a colossal waste of money.

-Packing peanuts. Not really a mistake, but a good way to get an ND in a bad mood. Proponents of packing peanuts often send their tapes in giant boxes sealed with enough tape to bind Tony Soprano to a chair. The ND struggles to open the box, then endures an explosion of styrofoam. Since most stations no longer have maintenance men, this sends the ND to the Chief Engineer, who presents him with a 1958 Electrolux vacuum cleaner that makes more noise than the generator on the live truck.

Now a word about feedback. Don't call for it. A good way to get some is to include a self addressed stamped postcard asking for it. You're bound to get some response. But there are two kinds. Good old-fashioned constructive criticism is always welcome, especially if it points out something of which you might not be aware. Make a note of those NDs, fix the problem, and send a new tape when you do. On the other hand, there are some NDs who seem to enjoy writing feedback that demeans the job applicant. If you get feedback like this, ignore it and be thankful you don't work for someone who would be that mean spirited.



TWO OF THE BIGGEST RESUME TAPE MISTAKES

I've seen it for years, though it seems to have gotten worse of late with those who have recently graduated or are in their first jobs. I pop in a resume tape, and more than half the time the first package is something from the scanner. A car wreck, a murder, a fire. The package is loaded with police, fire or official soundbites. If it is not that, it's a "vulture package" with multiple teary-eyed soundbites from a victim's family members. And while these stories may have led your newscast, here's the point you're missing when trying to impress another news director.

These stories take almost no reporting skills.

But, you're saying, "I still have to get the who, what, when, where, and why and organize it into a story! Isn't that journalism?"

If you want another job, nope. If you're showing up at a scene, getting information provided by an official, and re-writing it, that's no big deal. An intern could do it.

There's a difference between being a "reporter" and being a "news gatherer," and if you want to impress someone with your work, you must show your reporting skills. You must have the ability to "act" and not "react" to a story. You must be able to dig, to unearth facts no

one else can find, to find the angle no one has thought of, to find the third and fourth and fifth sides of the story. And, while doing this, you need great video, sound, editing and copy that enhances the story.

To stand out from the crowd, you need enterprise stories on your tape. Stories that you've found and worked and turned into something memorable and informative for the viewer. If you have never watched "All The President's Men" please do so immediately and see how old school reporters turned a story.

The second recurring problem is the use of the infamous "single source sound bite." This tells a News Director you've only put the minimum amount of effort into getting the story, and were too lazy to talk to anyone else. Unless you're doing a profile piece, I don't want to see more than one sound bite from anyone. Talk to lots of people, cover all bases and angles, and you'll be amazed how much better your packages will be.

Remember, your resume tape must and stand out from the pack. You must show a News Director that on any given day you'll show up in the morning with your own ideas and not wait to be handed a press release or to hear something on the scanner. Show a ND you can make his or her life easier, that you're an old school reporter who loves to dig, and you'll get the job.



THE BIGGEST ANCHOR TAPE MISTAKE: 27 DRESSES

It goes without saying that you want your resume tape to be perfect, and if you're an anchor you certainly don't want a tape that shows you stumbling all over the place. So naturally most anchors take a whole bunch of shows and pick out the best parts, then edit them together onto a tape.

But if you're using more than two shows to do this, you are sending a subtle message to a News Director that you can't get through one newscast without any mistakes.

How do managers know this? Clothes.

While a montage should be a nice mix with a variety of looks and locations, the anchor segment of your tape should be taken from as few newscasts as possible. I've seen quite a few tapes that are a hodgepodge of clips, and the attire is a dead giveaway. You might see a female anchor read the first story in a red suit, then the second in a gray pinstripe, then the next in a purple dress, and so on. When I see that on a tape, it makes me wonder.

This is why so many NDs who like your first tape will often call and ask you to send your most recent newscast. They want to see one entire show, not a bunch of clips that are cherry picked.

So, for your anchor segment, try to stick to two shows. One, of course, is even better, but two are fine. Let's see some stuff from the A-Block, B-Block, a fun feature, and some cross talk with weather and sports.

One other possible problem is that your resume tape might be a little old. Let's say I get a tape today in which an anchor says, "Incredibly, gas could hit four dollars a gallon." Well, I know it has been quite awhile since the anchor put that one together. If you can, try to avoid stories that "date" your tape. Sometimes that's tough, but it will keep you from having to update your tape so often.

While you obviously have to show good communication skills and a personality that fits the story you're reading, you may be unwittingly making a mistake that sends up a red flag.



THE BIG STORY MIGHT NOT BE A RESUME TAPE STORY

I noticed it right after Hurricane Katrina. Resume tapes started leading off with Katrina packages, even from faraway places that

didn't get a drop of rain. Most focused on relocated victims. Each package had a tearful story of a lost home and file tape of the storm for B-roll.

As far as resume tapes go, those stories were a big yawn.

Why? Sure, Katrina was a huge story. But if everyone is doing the same thing, what's the big deal? Most of those out of market Katrina stories took absolutely no reporting skills. Setting up an interview and using network file tape is not exactly challenging. If everyone's got the same b-roll and the same story, I'm gonna hit the eject button.

So think about the first story on your tape when you're putting your resume together. It may be important, it may have been a lead story... but are other people going to have the same thing? Your lead story may have been huge in Podunk, but unless it has some truly unique element to it, a News Director will pass.

It's the days when nothing is happening and you turn a huge story that will get you noticed.

MAKING THE SHORT LIST

Many of you probably wonder how a News Director whittles that giant stack of tapes down to the few people who will get a phone interview or a plane ticket. While the process of interviewing people has changed over the years (more phone interviews and lately Skype interviews than plane tickets) the system of narrowing down the choices is pretty much the same.

Let's take a hypothetical situation in which I'm a News Director and I need a reporter. I don't need any specific type or demographic, just a basic General Assignment person. So I run an ad and 200 tapes magically appear.

First step: watch all the tapes. I've set up a box for the ones I want to look at later, and the rest go in the trash (sorry).

As I watch the tapes (in no particular order, by the way) it's pretty obvious which ones make the first cut. Some tapes are just really bad, some are people with potential who just need more experience. (If I'm a nice ND, I'll put those aside and maybe send those people some suggestions.) The tapes that jump out at me go in the box. In many cases I can tell within the first 20-30 seconds if someone bears a second look, and I'll watch the entire tape again later.

Okay, I'm done with the first round and I've got maybe a dozen tapes in the box. This is not to say the tapes I've tossed in the trash were bad... they're just not the type of reporter I'm looking for. And, this is important; another ND might end up with a box filled with *twelve different tapes*.

Now, I'm going to watch each tape all the way through. If the person had a great montage but can't put a decent story together, they're outta here. So now I'm down to maybe 8 tapes.

At this point I'm going to read the cover letters and see if the person can turn a phrase. While the cover letter is not as important as the actual tape, it can definitely be a difference maker if I'm torn between two people.

I'm also going to look at resumes to see if there's anyone I know on the reference list.

I have two plane tickets in the budget, so I need to narrow my choices down to my two favorites. But if any of the top 8 are local or within driving distance, I can do more interviews.

Now I start my phone interviews. I need to get a feel for the personality of the applicants, and this is a good way to do it. I like to hear energy on the phone; a person who is both excited yet professional. Occasionally I hear someone who just doesn't seem that thrilled about the opportunity, and that person is history. I will then rank my choices and start calling references.

After that, I've pretty much got my top two people that I'm going to fly in for a face-to-face interview, along with anyone who might be able to drive.

And what happens to the other people on the short list? Well, if I'm smart, I hang on to those three or four tapes I liked. I might need someone in the future, or I might not care for anyone I interview in person.

That's how most managers come up with a short list. And just because you don't make one short list, don't get discouraged. The person who is a disaster to one ND is the number one choice to another.

THE FOLLOW-UP RESUME TAPE

Many young reporters think their resume tape is done once it hits the post office, but there is often a surprise waiting for you when you get a call from a ND.

I call it the "followup" resume tape. And there's a catch.

The catch is this: the ND will ask you to send the last three or four packages you've turned. Think about that if you got the call right now... how good were your last few stories? Were they up to par with those on your resume tape, or did you just phone it in because you had enough good stuff on your reel? (If you're an anchor, the ND will ask for your last few newscasts.)

The reason many NDs use this tactic is to see if you've turned more than three good stories during your year or two at your current station. Or if the anchoring on your tape is consistent with what you do every night.

You might be stuck doing a dog of a story, your muse may have taken the day off, or you simply feel burned out on a particular day. But that could be the day your work might get you a job... or cause you to lose it.

Put yourself in the ND's shoes. You've just watched a really good resume tape, and can envision that reporter doing the same quality packages for your station, so you ask to see more. Then you look at an average day's work and discover it doesn't remotely resemble what you saw on the tape. Chances are you'll move on and continue your search.

It's the same premise that tells you "you're in ratings every day." It may not be May, November or February, but you still owe it to yourself to do great work on every story. Viewers watch every day, not just three months of the year. The same holds true of NDs looking for new talent. If they can't count on you to turn in a great effort every day, you'll be passed over.

Do your best every single day. No excuses. Do every story like it will be your last, or the only one on which you'll be judged.

You never know who will be watching.

APPLYING AT THE SAME STATION TWICE

I want you all to take a minute and think back to your days in high school. Now I want you to name every person in the school you *never* talked to.

Can't do it, right?

Well, it's the same as asking a News Director to name every job applicant *he didn't want to hire*.

Here's the point. You have absolutely *nothing to lose* by sending a tape anywhere.

I continue to get questions like, "Will they think badly of me if I send a tape?" and "Suppose they laugh at my tape?" and "I don't have enough experience to send a tape."

Well, let's see. What could happen if you send a tape?

A News Director might eject your tape after 15 seconds. He might roll his eyes watching your first standup. He might just think, "Not what I'm looking for."

The horror! Just imagine how it would feel if a News Director 1,000 miles away that you'll never meet doesn't like your work! How will you ever get through the day? And what happens when the resume tape police show up in your newsroom, point fingers, and laugh at you!

The other thing that could happen if you send a tape? Uh, you could get the job.

Trust me, I can't remember a single tape I watched over the years that I didn't like. When you're watching hundreds of tapes, you don't have time to worry about the mindset of the person sending it. You watch for a few seconds and eject the ones you don't like. At the end of the day you can't remember the names of the tapes you ejected.

And here's another news flash. If you send another tape a few months later, the ND that didn't hire you the first time won't remember that you previously sent a tape.

So just send the tapes and stop worrying about what people think. You might just get your dream job. Just like the lottery, you can't win if you don't play the game.



SENDING TAPES TO CONSULTANTS

There is a lot of confusion about the practice of sending your resume tape to a well known consulting firm, especially when someone has contacted you and asked you to send one. So let me tell you how this works, since so many of you believe that you are, in effect, getting a "free" agent.

Most consulting firms maintain "talent banks" which are mountains of resume tapes they have viewed and liked for whatever reason. If you've sent a tape and it passed, you're in the giant stack. I have of-

ten directed clients to send their tapes to consultants I like, and consultants call me every few months to ask if I've run across any new talent. No money changes hands here; I help them and they help me.

When stations hire consultants, part of the package usually includes help in filling job openings. For instance, let's say I need a female anchor for a morning show, and I'm looking for someone with five years experience. I would call our consultant and say, "Send me all your female anchors who would consider doing mornings and have around five years in the biz." In some cases the consultant would simply look through the vault of tapes and send the ones that fit the criteria. Or the consultant might actually have a few people in mind, having watched some good tapes and knowing the style I'm looking for.

So just because a consultant called you, or told you he liked your tape, don't think that he is out there beating the bushes trying to find you a job. That's what agents are for. Consultants are merely providing a service to their client stations. If you are someone who can help a client station, he'll send your tape.

You have nothing to lose by sending tapes to consultants. Plenty of people have gotten jobs this way, and it is just another hook in the water for your job hunt. You have nothing to lose. But don't bug a consultant after you've sent a tape. Once again, you must follow the "send it and fuhgeddaboutit" rule.



AGENTS

Anyone can call himself an agent. No rules, no degrees, no training required. You don't even need experience in the industry. If you want to be an agent, poof, you're an agent. There is no regulatory agency. While organizations like the NFL require agents to be registered with the league and meet certain specifications, television news has no such rules.

That said, most agents have experience in the industry. Some are former reporters, News Directors, producers, etc. Others worked as assistants to veteran agents.

You have to keep a few things in mind when considering an agent. There are very good agents and very bad agents. And, please take careful note of this, *getting an agent is no guarantee of getting a job*. Even the best agent cannot wave a magic wand and create a job for you.

Many young people are lured by the prospect of getting an agent. It's impressive to say, "I have an agent," but it doesn't mean anything if you have a bad one. And just because an agent contacts you, that doesn't mean you're talented or ready to move up. Some agencies sign everyone in the hopes of getting a commission by using the "volume, volume, volume" approach. When you've got a kazillion clients, some of them will find jobs and you'll get a commission.

Another thing that clouds the issue is the "moving on" section of websites. It seems that every single person has an agent. But people who get jobs on their own don't bother sending notices about their career moves. And there are a lot more people without agents than people who have them.

Remember, a good agent knows your talent and your goals. He'll send your tapes to stations at which you might be a good match. He doesn't send your tapes to Minneapolis if he knows you hate the cold. He doesn't send your tapes for morning show openings if he knows you have no desire to work that shift. He returns your calls or emails promptly and is realistic about your chances. Hopefully he has contacts that can open a few doors that might otherwise be closed.

A bad agent puts your tape in a box with every other client in the hopes the ND will pick someone and create a commission.

Be very careful when choosing an agent. Do your homework, talk to other clients, and even ask your former News Directors.

Signing with the wrong agent can be devastating to your career.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

While I'm sure you all know that television ratings drive the industry, you might not know that there are ratings periods known as "sweeps." These occur every February, May and November, during which ratings are taken. If you watch a lot of television, you'll note that stations and networks pull out all the stops during these months, with special stories, programs, etc. This is important because the ratings set the rates for the sales department. Which means if your station gets great ratings in May, the sales staff can charge more money for commercials.

With that in mind, you should know that most people get hired outside of ratings months. You'll not that the minute a ratings period ends, the personnel shuffle begins on a nationwide basis. People move on, jobs openings are posted. To find the exact days of the sweeps periods, simply go to www.nielsenmedia.com. You might take some time to browse and find out exactly how the ratings systems work.

Why is this important? Because it is generally accepted that you do not make job related calls during sweeps months. Newsroom people are much too busy trying to do a lot of extra work. There's a lot of pressure on a News Director during a sweeps month, and you'll want to contact an ND when things have calmed down to a normal level.

Meanwhile, here are other tips on the days of the week and time of day. You might think that just calling anytime would be fine. But you have to put yourself in the News Director's place. You want to catch an ND when he is available and not stressed out. While you can't be a mind reader, you can avoid the days and times when you're more likely to get someone that is really busy.

Generally, most News Directors are tied up on a daily basis for morning and afternoon meetings in which stories are chosen, news-

casts are discussed, etc. generally these meetings take place between the hours of 8:30-10am and 2-3pm. So those hours are out.

Now you have to take into account that the level of intensity in any newsroom goes up as the day goes on. This is especially true in late afternoon, so you should not call after 2pm anyway. Where does that leave you? Well, you have a few good windows when the ND has some time to breathe. 10:30-11:45am is a good time. Then you can try to catch the ND after lunch between 1:15 and 1:45pm.

As for days of the week, you should simply avoid Mondays. The ND has just walked in after the weekend and found hundreds of emails, complaints from the staff slid under the door, and more than likely has to deal with the General Manager about something that happened over the weekend.

Fridays are a great time to call. The weekend is near, and most people are in a decent mood at the end of the week.

CLEAN UP YOUR DIGITAL FOOTPRINT

It's one thing to check references when you're trying to hire someone. It's another when you go on an Internet fishing expedition to see what you can dig up on a job applicant. News Directors can be like Woodward and Bernstein when it comes to checking backgrounds. Yes, they can pay a few bucks to find out if you've got a lead foot and shouldn't be driving a live truck, or if you've got a police record. They can make you take a drug test. But many times the most damaging things they can find are out there on the Internet.

If you're about to graduate, now's the time to erase your wild party past and clean up your digital footprint. Photos of you getting drunk at a frat house? Outta here. Social networking sites talking about your drug use? Those had better be gone. YouTube videos of you acting like a party animal? Erase. Political or religious statements

of any kind? Hit the delete button. Bad language on a personal site? Clean it up.

News Directors want to hire adults for entry level positions, not partying college kids. They know that college is a place to let your hair down, but they don't want viewers to find out anything unprofessional about you. You may be the best candidate for a job, but if you come off looking like Charlie Sheen online, you're gonna have a hard time finding a job.

FINDING A JOB OPENING

It's ironic that people who are good at digging up stories aren't very good at finding job openings. Like many businesses, the television industry advertises job openings. But in many cases a little bit of research can provide some job leads that aren't common knowledge. We'll get to that part a little later in this section. First, let's start with the basics.

DECIPHERING THE JOB POSTING

The most classic job posting story goes back to the early 1980's, when videotape was replacing film. 3/4" tapes were expensive back then. One station was known for running bogus job ads when there were no openings. The reason? To build up a stock of videotape without having to pay for it. Tacky, huh?

Of course that doesn't make sense in the era of disposable DVDs and putting your work online, but the mystery behind job postings continues. What are the rules, what do the postings actually mean, what does it mean when they disappear...and re-appear?

You can drive yourself nuts trying to figure this stuff out, and the big piece of advice here is...don't try to figure it out. Because there are no rules, and postings mean different things at different stations.

Postings fall into all sorts of categories, and I'll try to give you some of the more common ones:

-The job posting with an expiration date: The most common posting, and often reflects the rules of the corporation. For instance, the beancounters in charge may have dictated that jobs remain posted for two weeks. So let's say the job posting reads November 1-15. Does this mean you can't apply after November 15th? Of course not. Does it mean this particular station adheres to the hard and fast rules of the dates set forth by corporate? Maybe, but probably not. So send a tape.

-The blind ad job posting: Usually used by small markets in undesirable places to live, but sometimes by News Directors who are trying to avoid phone calls. So send a tape.

-The *now-you-see-it, now-you-don't* job posting. You've been watching one particular station and a job that you've applied for. Then, one day, the posting disappears. Does this mean the position has been filled? Maybe, maybe not. In many cases postings have expiration dates. Sometimes the ND has gotten enough tapes and pulls the post. Sometimes the budget changes and the job no longer exists. Sometimes a secretary screws up and deletes it by mistake. So send a tape.

-The *I-sent-a-tape, the-posting-disappeared, then-came-back* job posting. So you're thinking, "Okay, I sent a tape, they didn't like it (or anyone else's) so they re-posted the job." Again, not necessarily. Maybe corporate has a rule to keep the job posted until the new person starts the job. Maybe the ND is still looking. Maybe the secretary screwed up again. So send a tape.

-The posting for the job you applied for months ago. So, you sent a tape and didn't get the job in the spring. There's an opening in the fall and you don't send a tape because you figure, "I didn't get the job last time, why would they hire me now?" Hello, McFly! Every situation is different. Did it ever occur to you that maybe you came in sec-

ond for that last job and might be the first choice this time around? Maybe they wanted a lifestyle reporter and you did hard news, but they want a hard news person this time. Maybe they needed a guy last time and now they need a woman. Maybe there's a new News Director. So send a tape.

-The posting requiring a ridiculous amount of experience for the market size. Do you really think News Directors in tiny markets get a lot of applicants with three years experience? If you're right out of college and have talent, you've got a good shot. So send a tape.

Get the picture? There's really no way to figure out what's behind every job posting. So....wait for it.... send a tape!

If you think finding a job is as easy as reading the job listings, you're wrong. The job lead is just the beginning, because a little research will help you in many ways. You can find out a lot by reading between the lines as well. So I'll start with a little history.

Here's an example of a very common style of ad that ran years ago:

"Main 6 & 11 pm co-anchor needed to complement our female."

Obviously, this meant that the News Director was looking for a male to fill this position. Of course, this now qualifies as sex discrimination, but we all know that almost all co-anchor teams are comprised of a man and a woman. You may have the best tape of all the applicants, but if you're the wrong sex, well, chances are you're out of luck. Occasionally you'll see dual female teams on 5pm, noon and morning shows, but you almost never see two men anchor together. The ads today will no longer specify the gender that is preferred, so you have to do some digging.

In the case of main co-anchor jobs, it's pretty easy. You need to find out who left the position that is now open. You can do this in one of many ways. You can visit the station's website to see who is still the main anchor. If it is a man, you can be reasonably sure the ND is looking for a woman, and vice versa. You can check the "on the move"

sections of websites. And simple internet searches about the station usually turn up a story or two from a local newspaper about an anchor that is departing.

What does all this mean? This tells you whether to send a tape or whether it is a waste of time. Obviously, if the station is looking for a woman and you're a man, you don't have much of a chance.

Here's another example that often discourages recent college grads.

"General assignment reporter. Two years experience preferred."

Most rookie reporters wouldn't bother applying to something like this. But note the ad reads *preferred*, not *required*. Big difference.

So do you have a chance here if you have no experience? Once again, do some checking. Visit the station's website and check out the background of the current staff of reporters. Do their bios all tell you that they're working in their first jobs? That means this station is an entry level shop. The News Director may be *hoping* for someone with experience, but his track record is one of hiring people right out of college.

And with stations putting their stories online, you can sample their product. Check out as many on-camera people as you can. Do you fit the "style" of the station? Are the people on staff performing at a level similar to your own?

Here's another ad with a clue that's right out in the open.

"General assignment reporter. Must be able to carry thirty pounds of gear."

This one's a no-brainer. The job is for a one man band, so you'll be shooting your own video and working alone.

What does this one tell you?

"Weekend anchor/reporter. Send tape to Human Resources Director. No phone calls."

This means two things. First you have to find out the name of the News Director. Even though you are mailing your tape to the

Human Resources Director, that person will not be evaluating you. So you want your cover letter directed to the ND. The HR person more than likely simply logs the names of the job applicants to comply with federal employment guidelines and passes the tapes on to the ND.

As for "no phone calls" there's no hidden clue here. But this rule is the one most often broken by job applicants. Many young people think, "I'll just show the ND that I'm aggressive, so he'll know I'll be a take-no-prisoners reporter." Uh, wrong. Nothing ticks off a News Director more than people who can't follow simple directions. I know one ND who automatically disqualifies job applicants who break this rule.

The other reason for not calling? It can drive your salary down if you are indeed someone who is being considered. Constant phone calls only label a job applicant as desperate. And if a ND knows you're desperate, he also knows a lowball offer will get accepted. So play it cool.

Emails are less annoying, but generally, "no phone calls" means "no contact."

Here are some more examples:

"Two years experience required."

"Required" still doesn't mean anything. Because a ND will look at your tape before your paper resume. If he loves your tape but finds out you don't have enough experience, do you really think he'll care?

"Significant live experience required."

Probably means the station is obsessed with live shots, and might be a scanner chaser. But it might not. Do some homework and watch the product online.

"Reporter needed to join dynamic newsroom."

That's a matter of opinion, so the ND might have an ego problem.

"Anchor needed in 60s sunbelt market."

You can narrow this blind ad down by seeing which markets between 60-69 are in warm places. If you have time and it's not too many markets, call the stations and ask if there are openings. Mystery solved.

"Join our number one news team."

Again, check the product online. There are plenty of number one stations out there putting out a lousy newscast.

"You may be required to (insert duty here.)"

You *will* be required to (insert duty here.)

"Journalism degree required."

Ignore this. Nobody cares if your degree is in Journalism (mine isn't) or nuclear physics if you have a great tape.

Hopefully you see the value of reading ads carefully and doing a little research.

Finally, one of the most important things you'll find in a job posting, and this is one that caused me a lot of headaches (and probably money) as a reporter.

That one line at the end of the ad that reads, "Send salary requirements."

And just like that, you're at a black jack table wondering if you should hit on 15 while the News Director peeks at his hole card and smiles. (Note: management always has an ace.)

So here's the deal on this crucial little sentence. It's an attempt to get you as cheaply as possible.

Let's say I'm a News Director and I can spend 30k on a reporter. I get a tape I really like and the person tells me he needs at least 25k to take the job.

Terrific. I've just saved five thousand dollars and the reporter thinks he's gotten a great deal.

So, a couple of things you can do when you see this in an ad. First, conveniently forget to mention salary requirements in your cover letter. Or, if you get an actual application with a box asking for

a number, simply write "negotiable" in the space. You can deal with salary when the ND calls you or brings you in for an interview.

Now, let's get back to that 30k job. The ND calls and tells you he loves your work and would like to bring you in for an interview. Then he asks the dreaded money question. "How much are you looking to make?" A good tactic here is to shoot a little higher than what you'll really take. So if you wanted 30k, you might say, "I'm hoping to make around 33 thousand." The ND might say, "Well, I've only got the budget for 30." And you can tell him that the amount is doable.

If you shoot too low, you've taken yourself out of any negotiation.

Of course, if this is an entry level job, it doesn't apply. You have absolutely no bargaining power, unless you have more than one offer at the same time.

Play your cards close to your vest when negotiating. You don't want to jump at the first offer, or seem too excited. Even though the ND holds all the cards you can still get the best possible salary by not showing all of yours.

HIDDEN JOB OPENINGS

Most of you probably visit tvjobs.com to check out the openings. As a manager I always posted openings there, and so do most stations.

But there are some that like to keep the hiring process quiet. Some NDs just don't want four hundred resume tapes wandering through the door and a deluge of phone calls (despite the "no phone calls" notation in the ad.)

Ever seen one of those "moving on" posts that announces a new hire? One for an opening you didn't know about? You probably said, "Hey, that wasn't fair. I didn't even see an ad for that job."

Well, the person who got that job knew about it.

So, how can you find these "secret" job openings?

You know that "no phone calls" rule I have about calling News Directors? Well, it doesn't apply to calling anyone else in the station.

Pick a market in which you'd like to work. Then call the newsrooms of the stations at night. Doesn't matter who answers the phone; trust me, it won't be the ND. Then simply start a conversation by telling the person you're looking for work... are there any openings, or any coming up? Anything cooking in that particular market? People on the night shift love to chat about stuff after the managers have gone home. And, while that phone call might not bear fruit for that particular station, you might hear something like, "Our competitor just lost someone... they're looking for a male anchor."

And don't forget to check those "moving on" notices every day. When someone moves, that means there's an opening at their old station.

When you hear, "nothing's happening" don't believe it. This is a big country with more than two hundred markets. People retire, move, get out of the business or get fired every day.

And if the job hasn't been eliminated, someone has to replace them.



A HYBRID IS A CAR, NOT A JOB

We all know there's a producer shortage. There are many reasons for this; it's not a fun or glamorous job, and news departments have become "producer happy." My first station had no producers at all... the anchors produced the shows. Now a simple cut-in needs an entire staff. But that was then and this is now.

Which brings us to the latest hiring trend to "lure" unsuspecting reporters into the producer's chair. The "hybrid" job is officially

known as "Reporter-Producer" but in reality its proper definition is "a way to fill a producer position by dangling the reporter carrot."

Many times this is a very subtle proposition. You'll answer an ad for a reporting job, get a call from a News Director, and have your hopes shoot thru the roof. Then, after the hook has been set, you'll hear this casual question toward the end of the conversation. "Would you be willing to produce a day or two every week?" You want desperately to be a reporter but, ah, what the hell, it's a foot in the door and you can produce a show once in awhile, right?

Wrong. As red flags go, this is a big one.

Here's what usually happens. The new employee starts out reporting a few days each week and producing the rest. Then a producer leaves. All of a sudden the reporter is told, "We'll need you to produce full time till we find someone." Weeks turn into months, etc. Suddenly your dream of being a reporter begins to fade. You look at your contract and realize you're stuck. And to make matters worse, since you're not reporting anymore you can't get a decent resume tape together.

If you want to be a reporter and have no desire to be a producer, a hybrid job should send chills up your spine. Be afraid. Be very afraid. I know several young people who have been lured into these jobs only to be shifted to a producer's role a short time into the contract.

While I've always advocated spending a day in someone else's shoes, this is not the way to do it if your heart is in reporting. If you're good enough to be a reporter three days a week, you're good enough to do it five. Be patient and wait for the job you really want.

As they say at Barney's department store, "Select, don't settle."



THE MARKET SIZE MYTH

If you've ever seen the Gene Hackman movie "Hoosiers" about a small town basketball team, you've gotten a subtle message about television news markets. Toward the end of the film Hackman takes his team to the state championship. The day before the game he walks them around the court, takes out a tape measure and shows them that the basket is still ten feet high and a foul shot is still fifteen feet. It is the same, whether you're playing in a backyard or on the world's biggest stage.

The same holds true for television news. A package is a package, whether it is done in market 210 or at the network. In each case you still need good video, nat sound, strong writing and creative editing. Along with solid reporting skills, of course.

So it makes me shake my head when so many young people think they have to start in a tiny market, or can only jump a certain number of markets for their second job. I'm not sure if college professors are telling kids they have to start really small, or if it is simply a myth that is so old it has become reality to some.

The truth: plenty of people have gotten their first jobs in New York or at the network. If you're talented, the sky's the limit. You have absolutely nothing to lose by sending your tape to any station. Limiting yourself to markets 100-210 can only set you back two years if you truly have talent. You may eventually end up in a small market, but you may not. The same applies for a second job. If you can turn a package with the best of them, once again, take your best shot. The rules of broadcast journalism don't change from market to market. I've seen great products in tiny markets and horrible ones in large markets. The business is getting younger, as veterans see the hand-

writing on the wall and bail out. So when someone tells you that you have to start small, don't believe it. If you're told that maybe you can make it to market 50 in your second job, fuhgeddaboutit.

Talent knows no age or experience. If you've got it, aim high.



RATINGS AND QUALITY ARE OFTEN MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE

Someone recently asked me how to find the ratings of a station when applying for a job. The thinking here is that if a station is number one in the market, it must be the best place to work and have the best news product.

Uh, no.

Ratings are perhaps the most deceiving statistic of any station. In some cases, the station that has been on the air the longest is number one because it is the first station people watched in TV's early days. In some markets one network is dominant and it trickles down to the local station. Stations in hyphenated markets (in which stations can be in different towns many miles apart) can often divide the audience geographically, especially if the market extends across two states. And in some cases, the audience just likes trash. (All you have to do is look at reality TV to support that statement.)

I worked for one last place station where I had a ball. Everyone cared, everyone hustled, everyone laughed and cried together. (Some of us would actually meet on Saturday morning in the newsroom to watch the episode of *Dallas* that the anchor had taped the night before, since no one could afford a VCR in those days.) The ND taught me a lot of good stuff. We did some great stories, but never managed to get those ratings to move. The audience was too set in its ways.

On the other side of the coin. I worked for a number one station which featured reporters that phoned it in, photogs that wouldn't use tripods (I'd never seen that anywhere else) and a newsroom at-

mosphere that resembled a library. We could have run color bars and still been number one.

When looking for a job, forget ratings, as they mean nothing when it comes to your career. Your only concerns should be the following:

-Will this station offer me the opportunity to develop my talents?

-Does this station offer a supportive atmosphere, one in which people help one another?

-Do the veterans or the ND at this station mentor the young people?

-Does the company treat people well?

-Does the newsroom have positive management? (In other words, does the ND motivate people without using fear and intimidation tactics?)

-Does the current product look good? Is the newscast filled with quality stories, or just a parade of scanner items?

Ratings? Who cares. Find a station that will be good for you and your career, one that will appreciate your contributions, and the ratings won't mean a thing.

A FOOT IN THE DOOR CAN OFTEN RESULT IN A BROKEN FOOT

When you're young and hungry and cannot wait to get your career started, you're likely to have several pairs of rose colored glasses. You don't ever see what lies down the road, but only what's on the surface. It's a lot like going on a first date; you don't consider the baggage that might be in the trunk, only the flashy new car.

Such is the case with your first television job. I've been there. I've said, "I'll go anywhere and take anything. Do anything. Any shift."

While that is a normal attitude for an entry level job, sometimes it carries over into your career. You hate the current job so much that if someone told you Wal-Mart was starting a network you'd probably send a resume tape. You jump at the very first nibble, don't negotiate, and end up in the same situation in a different market.

So here's my advice for today. Learn to breathe.

Pull off the rose colored glasses and trade them in for those with X-ray vision. While there are many good places to work out there, every place has some warts. Bad News Directors, cheap companies, lousy equipment, whatever. Doesn't matter. You have to look down the road.

The thing you should consider first is this question: "Will this job help me get to my ultimate goal?" If the answer is yes, fine.

But if this is just a "get me outta here" job change, trust me, you'll end up in the same situation six months from now. Because I did exactly that.

Always look long term. Consider all the options. Look at the good and especially the bad points of any new job.

Look before you leap.

WILLING TO GO ANYWHERE? CONSIDER THE NEWS DIRECTOR'S POINT OF VIEW

One of these days it would be nice if someone would rank markets on desirability, not size. There are tiny markets that are wonderful places to live and big markets that resemble the ninth circle of hell. Markets that are similar in number may be miles apart in lifestyle. San Diego and Indianapolis are mid-20's markets...but I'll venture to guess that San Diego stations get about ten times more resume tapes. That market probably gets more tapes than New York as well.

And that's something to consider when looking for a job. You may think you're not ready for a certain market, but if that market is an undesirable place to live you might have a better chance than you think.

There are plenty of factors here, weather being the biggest one. Since this is a business in which we primarily work outdoors, many people don't want to live in a place that is either freezing cold or blistering hot. (Though I'd rather schlep around with gear in the heat than the snow.) There are other factors, depending on your personality. Markets on the water are always popular, while those in high crime areas are often not. And there are dozens of markets that qualify as "middle of nowhere" places.

How does this translate to the job hunter? Well, if you're a News Director in a place not likely to have any brochures in a travel agent's office, you often have a hard time attracting people. Many NDs will cruise online resume services looking for people because, believe it or not, they don't get enough resume tapes.

So in some cases, the ball may actually be in your court. The ND might not have many good job applicants...in fact, you might be the only one.

Keep that in mind when thinking about market size. A market may seem much too big for you until you consider the fact that no one may want to live there.

ROAD TRIPS

This is a truly pro-active approach to job hunting and it takes some spunk. Packing resume tapes for your vacation or hitting the road with a trunk full of DVDs may seem old-fashioned, but I've seen this tactic work many times. In fact, I once hired someone that way.

Here's how it works. Let's say you're getting ready to go on vacation. About two weeks before your arrival date, start contacting the local newsrooms in the area you'll be visiting. (Remember, the "no phone calls" rule only applies if a station has an opening and has stated that rule in the ad.) And you don't necessarily have to call the News Director. You might try the Executive Producer or Assistant News Director, who are generally more receptive to phone calls.

You might pitch a visit like this, and make it very casual.

"Hello, I'm (name) and I'm going to be in your town two weeks from now. Is there any chance I might drop off a tape and say hello?"

Chances are that some of the people you'll call will invite you to stop by. There are several reasons for this. One, stations turn over employees quite often, especially in smaller markets. And two, any time a manager can interview someone without buying a plane ticket or booking a hotel room, that's a plus. There may not be an opening that particular day, but eventually there will be one. If you can make a good face-to-face impression, that News Director might think of you in the future.

If the manager is not interested, there's nothing to stop you from dropping off a tape with the receptionist or whoever happens to be at the front desk. The resume tape police are not going to arrest you. But if you go this route, remember to really use your personality to make an impression on the person you meet. It might be a sales guy wandering through the lobby, a photographer, doesn't matter. You must also be dressed for a job interview, even though you don't have one scheduled. Many times people from the front office will hand deliver a tape to the newsroom, and offer a comment like, "A very nice young man dropped this off."

The point is to get your tape on the right person's desk, and this is a good way to do it if you have the time and money.

THE GREAT FEEDBACK TRANSLATOR

Sending resume tapes can be incredibly frustrating. Back in the old days, NDs returned 3/4 inch tapes, since they were fairly expensive. Now, any DVD that doesn't make the cut gets tossed... and you'll never hear a thing. No form letter, nothing. It sometimes seems as if there's a great black hole out there that sucks resume tapes into a vortex from which they'll never emerge.

But every once in awhile you'll get a note, or an email, or a phone call from a ND who can't hire you right now... but gives feedback nonetheless. When you run into something like this, pay close attention and file that NDs name away for future reference. That ND may not hire you now, but the fact that he wrote back shows two things: he's probably a decent human being, and he thinks you have potential.

-If you hear something like, "You're not ready for this market, but..." and get positive feedback or suggestions, listen closely. If, for example, the ND says, "Your packages could use some more nat sound breaks," then take the suggestion. Then, send another tape in two months.

-If you hear, "I don't have an appropriate opening right now, but keep in touch," it means exactly that. He may have already filled the job, you may have been the wrong demographic, whatever. But when you get a "keep in touch" that's a very good thing. Again, send tapes every two months.

-If you hear, "I don't have anything right now but would like to talk with you," then by all means, call. This means the ND might have something down the road and wants to get a preliminary phone interview out of the way to see if you might be a good fit.

-If you hear, "What's your contract status?" that means the ND is very interested. Answer honestly.

Now, if you get an application with a form letter, that doesn't necessarily mean anything. Many companies routinely send applica-

tions to every person who applies. It is just company policy for some. Don't read anything into it.

Also, bear in mind that NDs change jobs as often as reporters, so keep tabs on the people who responded. The ND in one market may move to another, so why not greet him with a new tape when he gets there?



INTERVIEW DOS AND DON'TS

The young man looked me right in the eye with a straight face. "So, dude, is my hair gonna take me outta consideration for this job, or what?"

I looked back, trying not to laugh as he sat there with his royal blue locks which were accessorized by his numerous facial piercings. He looked as though the phone rang and he had answered the staple gun. "Your hair? Uh, no. (long pause) Dude."

As an Assistant News Director at the time, it was my job to "screen" prospective job applicants, sending only the best upstairs to meet the News Director and General Manager. I like a practical joke as much as anyone, but bringing someone with Smurf colored hair to see the ND would not have been well received. That young man may have been a genius, a great writer, a terrific news person. We'll never know, because he broke the number one rule of interviews.

Dress for success.

Over the years, I've seen it all. A prospective anchor who showed up dressed as if he were ready to mow the lawn. A woman with a low cut dress and her name tattooed on her chest. Short skirts from the Kardashian fall collection.

Okay, I've made my point. And yes, there's a lot more to an interview than your wardrobe. But that's a good place as any to start, because your appearance is, after all, the first impression you make. And by the way, this applies even if you are applying for an off-air position. Or any job. You need to get off to a good start, then you must close the deal. Here's what to expect.



WARDROBE

Men should stick to the classics. Dark suit, white shirt, red tie. Light colored suits make you look too young. Shine your shoes. Get a haircut a week or two before the interview. A French-cuffed shirt and cuff links are a nice "old school" touch. (And we old people love old school.)

Women have a little more leeway. A tailored suit is always a good choice. Skirts shouldn't be too short. Slacks are fine. No crop tops. Wear whatever color looks best on you, though if you need to look older, stick with dark colors. Keep jewelry to a minimum but if you need to look older a single strand of pearls helps. Hair can hit the shoulders but really shouldn't be much longer. I know a lot of women in sports have really long hair these days, but that is the exception rather than the rule.

When you've chosen your interview outfit, dress up and show your parents. Chances are the people interviewing you will be the same age and have similar tastes. Think classic and conservative.



THE INTERVIEW

Okay, you've made it past the receptionist into the News Director's office. Chances are the first question will be either "tell me about yourself" or "why do you want this job?"

The absolute worst answer to either of these is "I've always wanted to be on TV." Remember, even if that is true, you're a future broadcast journalist, not a TV star.

It is natural to dream about seven figure salaries, network exposure and book deals. Everyone does. But at this point in your career, you just want your foot in the door. You can think about climbing the ladder later. You are there to learn. You are a sponge. You don't know anything about the business or the real world. The biggest turn off for a manager is listening to a 22-year-old who knows everything.

You can make an older person feel better about you simply by admitting you need help.

Back to the interview. Most News Directors have a process. He or she will chat awhile, give you a tour of the station, let you say hello to the General Manager, and then return you to the newsroom where you will be "turned loose." I worked in four stations as a reporter, and this happened to me on my interview each time. The ND wants to see how you mingle with the staff. Are you outgoing, friendly, curious? Or do you sit in the corner out of the way? And how do you relate to the veterans on the staff? Believe me, the ND will ask them after you've left. Try your best to "fit in."

At some point you may be asked to take a current events test, a writing test, or both. (I once handed a young lady 20 current events questions and she asked, "Why do I need to know current events to anchor?" Her chances instantly went down in flames, especially in light of the fact she thought Hillary Clinton was the Mayor of Buffalo.) If you don't read a newspaper everyday, start. Today. If you know more about Jennifer Aniston than Dick Cheney, you're in trouble. Read, read, read. A good knowledge of history and politics are very helpful. And don't forget to do your homework about the city and state you're visiting. Know the US Senators, Governor, a few facts about the region.

As for the writing test, you'll probably be given some wire copy and asked to rewrite it. Wire copy is notoriously dry, so do your best to turn a phrase where it is warranted. Quietly read what you've written out loud to yourself. Do you run out of breath? Then the sentences are too long. Writing conversational copy is an art. NDs don't expect you to be the next Charles Kuralt right out of school, but you must show some potential. Get some wire copy off the Internet and practice.

Finally, you might be asked to stay through a newscast, perhaps watching from the studio, the control room, the newsroom or the

ND's office. If you've been at the station for several hours, that's a good sign. Managers don't spend that much time on someone unless they are interested. At this point you might be asked if you have any other questions. An offer might be made, or you might be told that you'll be contacted shortly.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

This is a simple thing, but it shows a lot of class. Send a thank you note to the News Director. And not an e-mail or something you dash off on your computer. Make sure it is hand written. Put it in the mail the day after your interview.

Now start thinking about your experience. Is the job a good fit? Did you like the News Director and the people in the newsroom? Is there someone who would be a good mentor, or will you simply be thrown into the deep end of the pool? Remember, you want the job but you want to make sure the job will help your career. Always think long term.

OUT CLAUSES

An out clause is something in your contract that permits you to leave before the end of the contract, provided you meet the parameters of the clause. For instance, let us say you signed a two year contract in market 80. You have an out clause that lets you leave after 18 months to go to any station market 40 and higher. That is known as a "Top 40 out." So if a station in market 34 offers you a job in the last six months of your contract, you can leave. If a station in market 41 makes an offer, you can't.

There are no rules for out clauses, as they can be written in any manner. A good friend of mine had a "specific market out clause" for his hometown, since that was the only place he wanted to go. When

he got an offer there, he was legally entitled to leave. Most times out clauses are based on market size, and kick in toward the last part of the contract. Some people negotiate out clauses with a bunch of markets, or a specific state.

Now, back to the original question. Usually when a ND wants to hire you, he will offer the worst contract and salary, in hopes you'll say yes. He might say, "three year contract, and we don't give outs." Well, guess what. **EVERYTHING IS NEGOTIABLE.** Remember that phrase. Because if someone wants to hire you bad enough, they'll bend. Some people won't, but it never hurts to try.

So let's say you don't want a three year contract, but the ND won't budge on that. You can say, "How about a two year contract with a top 40 out during the third year?" Therefore, you've effectively cut your contract down one year, provided you can find a job in a top 40 market. If you can't, you're stuck the full three years. (By the way, three year contracts are way too long for a first or second job, unless the offer is really good.)

Let's say you're from Texas, and you want to go back home. You might ask for a Texas out, or an out clause that states you can leave to go to Dallas, Houston, or San Antonio. And you might want to include cable operations in your out clause. For instance, if a Dallas cable outlet offered you a job, you might not be able to leave unless your out clause included cable. That's a gray area, so make sure everything is spelled out.

Now, if you're doing a market size out clause, you'll want a realistic number. For instance, if you're in your first job in market 150 and your ND offers you a top 10 out, that's ridiculous, because odds are you won't make that kind of jump. Make sure your market is reasonably attainable.

As always, it is imperative that you have a lawyer review any contract, and especially any out clause you have in the contract. Stations

can play hardball when it comes to contracts, and unless you follow the parameters to the letter, you might be stuck.

News Directors know that just about everyone will leave at some point, especially if you're from another part of the country. It is ridiculous to assume someone from New York has a lifelong ambition to work in Peoria. As long as you ask for an out clause politely, and don't make it seem as if you'll bolt in a few months, you should be okay. Out clauses generally kick in toward the end of a contract, so as long as it appears you'll work out the majority of a contract, most NDs won't have a problem with that.

One more tip: Many NDs will say, "This company doesn't give out clauses." Well, it's up to you to put on your reporter's hat and find out if that is true. Check with some other stations in the group and find out if other people have outs. If they do, you know for sure that getting one is possible.

TAKING NOTES DURING THE INTERVIEW

A few years ago one of my clients got a call from a News Director who wanted her to come in for an interview. She was told the contract was two years, with a top 50 out. We discussed it, it sounded good and she decided to go on the interview. Only problem was that the station did not pay for plane tickets, so she drove about eight hours for the interview.

She was offered the job, but it had magically transformed into a three year contract with no outs. When she told the ND this was not what was said on the phone, the ND wouldn't budge, conveniently forgetting the original offer. The manager probably figured the woman had driven a long way and was ready to accept anything. Thankfully, she was smart enough to read the handwriting on the wall, turned it down and ended up with something much better.

Yes, selective memory is a common malady among managers. It's right up there with restless leg syndrome... you wouldn't think it actually exists, but it does.

That's why it is imperative that in any phone conversation or face to face interview, you take good notes. If something isn't in writing, chances are it is gone forever.

So, how can you protect yourself? Well, if you're doing a phone interview and the ND says, "Two years, top 50 out," write it down. Then say, "Let me write this down... two years, and a top 50 out, correct?" This lets the ND know you're taking notes and he'll have a hard time changing his tune if and when you arrive for a face to face interview. You might also review things at the end of the phone call. Then ask the ND to send you an email detailing the parameters of the job. That puts any offer in writing, and now you have a paper trail.

The bottom line is that if the job parameters change between the original phone call and the actual interview, then the ND is someone you don't want to work for anyway. If a manager lies to you before you're even hired, imagine what it would be like to work for that person.

NEWS DIRECTOR'S PLAYBOOK: WELCOME TO THE DEALERSHIP

My dad came with me when I bought my first car. Of course, I had stars in my eyes as every guy does for his first set of wheels, so I was ready to sign no matter what the salesman said.

"Thirty six hundred," the salesman said. (Yes, this was a long time ago.) I grabbed the pen.

"Thirty four," said my dad.

Salesman shook his head. "I can't go any lower—"

"Let's go," said my dad, standing up and heading for the door.

Long story short, after the salesman met with the manager (yeah, right) he came down in price.

Salary negotiation is a lot like buying a car. You spend ninety percent of your interview time talking about journalism, and then you suddenly find yourself in a car dealership opposite a man in a polyester suit who's trying to sell you undercoating.

Of course these days you can't walk away like you could when the economy was decent. But there is still some wiggle room that can get you a few more bucks. So here's what the ND is thinking (with his thoughts or strategy in parentheses) during a typical negotiation.

ND: "I think you'd do a good job here." (Watch reporter's face light up, knowing a job offer is coming.) "Of course, I'm looking at two other strong candidates." (Watch blood drain from reporter's face. There may or may not be two other candidates, but the point here is to make the reporter think that if he doesn't grab this job, someone else will swoop in.)

Reporter: "Well, I'd like to work here."

ND: "I can offer you thirty-six thousand. That's all I have in the budget." (Never make your best offer first. You have to lowball the candidate. If he takes it, you've saved some money for your budget. If not, you have some wiggle room to negotiate. And with creative accounting, there's almost always wiggle room.)

Reporter: "Well, I make that much now. I was hoping to make forty in my next job."

ND: (At this point the ND is gauging the body language of the candidate. Is the guy desperate, or will he really walk without a better offer? And how badly does the ND want to hire the reporter?) "I don't have that in the budget, but let me talk to the GM and see what we can do."

(At this point the ND leaves his office. He may actually go and talk to the GM or he may take a walk to the break room and have a cup of coffee. All part of the game.)

ND: "I talked to the GM, and we can offer you thirty-seven five. But that's as high as I can go." (ND gauges reaction of reporter. By up-

ping the offer, even a little, the ND has put himself "on the reporter's side" as if to say, "I fought for you." Maybe true, maybe not. The ND may still have a few cards to play with benefits and such, but doesn't offer them yet.)

Reporter: "Could you at least throw in some moving and relocation expenses?"

ND: (Those were the last cards, and darn, the reporter saw them.) "Sure. We can give you fifteen hundred for moving and put you in a hotel for two weeks. (The hotel costs nothing, since it's a trade for commercial time, and the moving expense was in the budget anyway. Nothing lost here, but the reporter feels as though he's won another one.)

Reporter: "Okay, you've got a deal."

Would the ND have gone higher? In this economy, the wiggle room isn't a wide as it used to be. But keep in mind that *everything is negotiable*. If you can't get salary, you can always try for perks.

THAT SECOND JOB

If you're still in college preparing for a career in television news, the top question is, "How do I get my foot in the door?"

But if you've already gotten that entry-level position, you know the basic job-hunting process. Now you have to concern yourself with not only moving up to the next rung but also choosing the right ladder. The question, "What should I look for in a second job?" is one of the most common, along with, "Is my News Director a Cylon?" and, "Why do we tell viewers to turn off their sets and go to our website fifteen times every newscast?" A second job can set you back a few years or catapult you up that ladder. You want to make a thoughtful decision, not just rush headlong toward the first opportunity that comes along.

It's not a matter of jumping a certain number of markets, but moving up in quality and going to a station that will help your talent grow.

If you're currently sending out tapes for that second job, you've no doubt had those rose-colored glasses you wore in college shattered beyond recognition. You've discovered this is a business, and there's no spring break. You've been to the puppet show and seen the strings. Hopefully you've picked up enough street smarts to see beyond the smoke and mirrors.

So, let's start with the things you should consider in your job search.

-Market Size: It's the elephant in the room, so let's deal with it. I am truly amazed when I hear from people looking for a second job who are afraid to send tapes to markets larger than 50. Seriously, anything is fair game, as big markets aren't what they used to be. There are rookies starting out in top 20 markets, so experienced people should know the sky's the limit if you have a great tape. Do not be afraid to apply to top markets; what have you got to lose? I travel quite often and have seen some truly green reporters in major markets, along with some very gifted young people. Hey, if you're talented, you're talented. Take a shot. Don't listen to the opinions of others who say it can't be done. It has been done, and done often. My clients have routinely made 100 market jumps. The only opinion that matters is the one belonging to the ND doing the hiring.

-Experience: I once ran an ad for an experienced reporter and received a tape from a graduating senior that knocked my socks off. This young person was a true natural. At first I was a little concerned with the lack of experience, but this person had the best tape, hands down. In fact, it was better than those submitted by reporters with ten years experience. After the interview I was convinced, made the hire and wasn't disappointed. If you see an ad requiring more expe-

rience than what you have, and you're confident in your work, once again, take a shot.

-The Company: Here's where things get tricky and you have to do your homework. Is the company one that is well respected in the industry and in the market? Or is it one of those cheap, bottom line outfits run by bean counters that have no concept of quality? Check around.

-Style of News: If the station has a website that lets you watch the product, do so. (Also, if you are invited to an interview, there is nothing wrong with asking the ND to send you an aircheck.) Is the newscast professional, or does it have an amateurish look? And most important, what is the quality of the photography? You want to work with shooters who will present you in your best light. And finally, is this the type of news you'll want to cover? Is the newscast scanner driven, not offering reporters a chance to enterprise stories? Or are the packages the kinds that end up on resume tapes? You'll never get anywhere covering car wrecks, so try to avoid those stations that do nothing but death and destruction.

-The News Director: Reputations you hear are often accurate. Is the ND a cloven-hooved screamer, one who rules through fear and intimidation? You'll never get anywhere walking on eggshells. Or is the ND one who will mentor you and help your skills improve? The best way to get this kind of info is to track down former employees and ask. Chances are you'll get honest feedback. And if you get a bad feel during an interview, listen to your inner red flags and leave skid-marks.

-Get it in writing: I can't tell you how many times people have told me, "He promised I wouldn't be a one-man-band more than six months," or, "I was told I'd be anchoring after a year." There are so many factors at play here you can't imagine. The ND could be blowing smoke, his opinion could change, the GM could overrule him (happens more often than you think) and the obvious one, the ND

moves on and you're left with someone who has no idea what you were promised and no intention of honoring someone else's agreement. Get it in writing and pay a lawyer to look at any contract. Once you're in the door, many NDs suffer from selective memory. And if the ND says something like, "we don't need to put this in writing," then be afraid. (It is ironic that we work in a business in which we ask the public to trust our product, yet we often cannot trust our own co-workers.)

-The Interview: Hopefully this is of the face-to-face variety and not over the phone. This is when you can really get a good indication if you're a good fit with the station. Are you able to have a nice conversation with the News Director, or is everything forced?

Some other questions to consider: Do you like the News Director, and does this person appear to be someone with whom you would enjoy working? Is the ND one who will offer feedback, or just one of those who never says anything unless it is negative? If you can, ask to be included in the morning or afternoon meeting to see if the ND is open to story pitches or simply maintains a dictatorship.

As mentioned before, the ND will drop off the applicant in the newsroom to see how that person "fits" with the crew. During this time you should have your radar up. Does the staff seem happy and challenged, and do they seem to get along? Or do they look like they're walking in the Bataan Death March? How does the ND interact with the employees?

Finally, how are you treated personally after the interview? Did the ND roll out the red carpet and take you to a nice lunch or dinner? Did the station put you up in a decent hotel? Or were you unceremoniously dumped at the airport with something from a vending machine in lieu of lunch? (Incredible as that may seem, it actually happened to one of my clients.)

Don't just take the first thing offered. Ask for reasonable concessions. The worst the ND can say is "no." I once took a job (when I was

young and foolish) at a station and during the interview the ND told me, "this company does not pay moving expenses for anyone." During my first week another reporter said to me, "Thank goodness they paid for my move." (My Sicilian temper got a workout that day.) It is in this area where you need to check around, and once again, former employees are your best source. If the ND wants you bad enough, and you can probably tell, he might bend. But don't be so arrogant as to push things. Ask politely without jeopardizing any offer.

-Contract length: A two-year contract is fine. Three years is a little much for a second job, unless it is a really good market with a fabulous company offering a great salary. More than three years for a young person is just plain ridiculous. Always, always, always ask politely for some sort of out in your contract, but find out if other people in the company have one before you do.

-Job description: Most contracts have this wonderful little nebulous clause that reads, "other duties as assigned." It means that even though you're hired as an anchor, an ND can demote you to some other job. Unless you get something in writing. Once again, talk to your lawyer.

And speaking of job descriptions, no doubt you've noticed that anchors are treated better than reporters. If you're applying for an anchor job, you have a better chance of getting more money and perks. On the other side of that coin, the contract might be longer. (In my personal opinion, the best of both worlds for a young person is a weekend anchor position. You get experience at both anchoring and reporting.)

-Money: This too is usually negotiable. It all depends on how badly the ND wants you. But to keep the ball in your court a little more, there are a few things you can do. Don't pester the ND with phone calls. That just screams desperation. Every time you call the offer will go down. Send your tapes and fuhgeddaboutit. The more you look like you really need or want the job, the lower the offer will

be. This is one area in which a reporter doesn't need to be aggressive. (It's just like dating. If you want people to be interested in you, ignore them.)

Ask about overtime. If it is a salaried position, find out how many hours the job requires, but don't ask the ND about this. Again, talk to a former employee. Some people are hired for a salaried position and end up working fourteen-hour days. You're not going far if you look like an extra from *Night of the Living Dead*.

-Benefits: Find out if health benefits start on day one or if there's a three-month waiting period. It can be expensive if you have to buy your own temporary insurance. Ask for moving expenses. Ask to be put up in a hotel for a few weeks while you look for a place to live. In fact, ask about everything. Hair, makeup, clothes, health club membership, parking space, anything you can think of. If you don't ask, an ND won't offer.

-Vacation: Ask about the company's policy. At some stations you might find yourself working two years before you get two weeks. Extra vacation time is sometimes negotiable but not often. You should also ask if the station has a comp day policy.

By now it should be clear that you need to use your reporting skills and do some research. While this sounds like a lot, it is no different than what you're doing everyday. Take the time and don't look for the shortcut. Right now you may be desperate to move on, but be patient and make the right move. It may take you a little longer to move up the ladder, but in the long run the choice you make will be the best for your career.

PHONE INTERVIEWS: REACH OUT AND HIRE SOMEONE

Dead air is a killer. On radio and television. (see: the final episode of *The Sopranos*)

But it's even worse during a telephone interview. So if you're about to go through one of the more popular methods of hiring these days, you need your gift of gab to be on top of its game.

If you're looking for that first or even second job, you're probably going to run into some stations that conduct all interviews over the phone. Personally, I always thought this was pretty scary from both points of view. You can never really judge a person until you meet face-to-face, and, if you're the job applicant, taking a job without checking out the station or the town is a blind leap of faith.

So along with shining your shoes for a face-to-face interview, you need to polish up your phone skills.

(I should point out that in many cases where there is a great distance between the employer and prospective employee, a phone interview can be a preliminary to a face-to-face.)

So, you've sent your tape, the News Director likes it, and wants to chat about the job on the phone. If you're lucky, the ND will contact you in advance via email and set up a time. But you'll need to be on your toes in the event you simply get a cold call. And preparation for this kind of interview is just the same as if you were putting on your best outfit.

Here's your checklist:

-Voice and inflection. The News Director is going to have to "hear" your energy, so make sure you are excited about the job when you get the call. I once called a guy for a preliminary phone interview that went like this:

Me: "I just looked at your tape and thought I'd chat with you a little about our weekend anchor position and tell you about our station and the town."

Applicant: (sounding like Ben Stein from "Ferris Bueller") "Uh, okay."

Me: "So, have you ever been to our city?"

Applicant: "No. I don't care for that part of the country and I'd really like to move to Florida."

As Bruce Willis would say, "Way wrong answer!"

That applicant not only didn't get a plane ticket, the phone call only lasted a few minutes. I don't even remember the rest of the conversation because I just kept thinking, "*Why did this person even send a tape?*"

With that in mind, you must force your adrenaline into your voice. Sound excited about the possibilities. Let the News Director "hear" your smile. Next time you watch a newscast, just listen and don't watch. Note the reporters who sound interested and who tell a story by talking and not just reading. That's the kind of tone an ND needs to hear. And lighten up. Job hunting is serious, but the ND needs to know you're a friendly person.

-Have a list of questions. You should also ask about cost of living, quality of life, etc. It helps if you've gone to the station's website and checked out the product if possible. "I notice you do a lot of live shots." Another good question that shows you're serious is, "Could you send me an apartment guide?"

But don't ask frivolous stuff. I was always amazed at the percentage of young job applicants who asked, "What's the single life like there?" (Geez, I don't know. Can't find a single nightclub that plays the Bee Gees.)

-Have a list of topics. The ND might not be a world-class conversationalist, so find out some things about the market to talk about. "You guys had a really big story there last week." When you hear a little dead air, jump in and fill in the gaps. Don't just wait for the next question.

-Be ready for a current events and/or writing test. The ND may fire a few questions just to see if you actually know what's going on in the world. I've had a few clients who, at the end of the conversa-

tion, were told that some wire copy was about to be emailed and they would have 30 minutes to re-write it and send it back.

-If you know when the call is coming, make sure your surroundings are quiet so that you can concentrate. I really don't want to talk with anyone with rap music (oxymoron) playing in the background.

-Hold off asking about money until the very end. It shows you are more interested in the job and the opportunities offered.

-Have something to drink nearby. You will probably be nervous and your mouth will go dry.

-Finally, and I can't believe I have to say this, don't pick up another call if your call waiting beeps. I once had a woman call me about a job, then put me on hold when she got another call. Guess who wasn't on the line when she came back?

So get your voice in shape, just like your resume tape. Because sometimes you can get your foot in the door without taking a step.



TYPICAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

You've sent the tapes, you've gotten the call, now you have to close the deal. The interview is one of the hardest things to endure for a news person. After all, we're usually on the other end asking questions. While you should always just "be yourself" in any interview, there are some things for which you should be prepared. There are some questions News Directors will use to trip you up, and other seemingly casual questions designed to find out what truly lurks beneath your television exterior.

So here are a few standards to help you prepare.

"What got you interested in television news?" This was my favorite question, because if the answer was, "I've always wanted to be on TV," I knew the person had an ego problem and was more interested in self-promotion than in journalism. This question offers you the opportunity to talk about your interest in gathering stories, be-

ing part of a news team and community, making the world a better place by informing viewers. It's about the rush you get when you've got an exclusive and if you don't get it on the air you'll explode. It's about your passion to find the truth and present it objectively to the viewer.

"Where do you see yourself in five years?" This question has been around forever, and while the answer we're all thinking is, "A bigger market or the network," the more polite response would be, "Working at a place that keeps me happy and challenged. I don't know where it is. It could be right here."

"So, what did you think about the (big story of the day yesterday)?" This is a little test to see if you actually read newspapers and watch newscasts. If you're on a plane, use every minute to read as much current news as you can. If you go to a hotel the night before your interview, get up early, watch a newscast and read a paper. If you have no response to this question and have no idea what yesterday's top story was about, it will tell the ND you're a news presenter, not a news reporter.

"Tell me about yourself." An opportunity for you to show that you're more than just a reporter. "Well, I grew up in the New York area, worked in my father's delicatessen for eight years, but even when I was a kid I knew I loved to write, so my first job was at a newspaper. A customer in dad's store owned a radio station, and that's how I got interested in broadcasting. When I'm off the clock I love to watch baseball... and I'm hoping the station has a softball team. And I love to cook." A little history, a little about you behind the scenes.

"Okay, are you ready for the current events quiz and writing test?" You'll get one or both of these in many interview situations, so make sure your facial expression remains casual. Any show of fear isn't good at this point.

Do not bring up the subject of money or contracts. Let the ND do it. This shows you're more interested in the job than in the num-

bers, even though the compensation is very important. And when the ND does throw out an offer, remember that the first offer is almost always negotiable. You can politely ask for more money, perks, moving expense, contract outs, etc. But do that after you've had a chance to think about things and review the contract. You might get a "no" but it never hurts to try.

THE REVERSE INTERVIEW

A few people have recently asked about interviews; specifically, what questions to ask when the ND invariably says, "So, do you have any questions for me?"

Most people get caught off guard by this, stammer and say, "Uh, no."

But this is not only a good way for you to get some good information, but show that you're interested in more than furthering your own career. It also shows you're a curious person, and considering we're in the business to dig up stuff, that's a good thing.

And, some questions might turn up a few red flags as well.

So, when you get this question, try some of these.

"How did you get into the business?" Ah, nothing gets a ND's ego going like talking about his own career. You'll get brownie points for this one. Don't forget to use the husband-tuning-out-wife-bobblehead as you listen to what may be a long and drawn out story.

"What's your news philosophy?" Always a good way to find out if you'll be doing real stories or chasing car wrecks.

"What is your feeling on one-man-bands?" These days, this is a critical question. You'll probably get a definite answer one way or the other. If you hear something like, "Well, you might have to pick up a camera once in a while, but I don't see that happening too often," that's a red flag. A statement like that is right up there with, "Honey, I'm just going out with the guys to hit a bucket of golf balls."

"What happened to the person I'm replacing?" Always good to know if the person moved up the ladder, quit, or was pink slipped. If the answer is, "We can't discuss personnel matters," that's a red flag. It might not reflect badly on the ND, but you need to find out the answer.

"Do you give regular feedback?" The biggest complaint I hear from people is that they never hear anything from management unless it's bad. You always want a mentoring environment, even if you're experienced.

Remember, keep your end of the interview casual. Be a good conversationalist, be interested in what the ND has to say, and act like you want to be part of a team rather than just someone who is looking for a stepping stone.

Finally, do a little homework on the ND before your interview. Find out where the ND is from and where he's worked. Sometimes managers are on the way down, or move around as much as reporters do. If you've got a ND born in Florida who is working in South Dakota, you can bet there will be resumes going out of his office as well.

INTERVIEW SIGNS

Every time a client has an interview, I get a call and a recap. Then the inevitable question. "What does it mean?"

Well, sometimes you leave an interview having a good idea where you stand. Other times you can't really tell if they liked you or not. But there are signs that can often tell you how things went.

These are signs for scheduled interviews, not those you score on road trips by simply dropping in.

-The longer the interview, the better. If you just met the News Director and were out of the building in fifteen minutes, not good. If the ND spends a good deal of time with you, then sends you to

meet the Assistant ND, the EP, etc. That's a good sign. He wants to get feedback from the rest of his management team.

-You're taken to lunch. NDs don't waste a casual lunch with someone unless he feels a connection. With that in mind...

-You're flown in to an interview. They're really interested. Nobody blows money on a plane ticket unless you're on a very short list.

-You drive to your interview, but get dinner and are put up in a hotel. Again, the interest level is high. The more money spent on you, the higher the interest.

-You're taken to meet the General Manager. Very good sign. This shows the ND likes you and wants the GM's approval or feedback. GMs don't want their time wasted on casual candidates, only serious ones.

-You're asked, "How soon could you start?" Great sign. Offer probably coming.

-You're told, "Well, I am talking to other people." Sometimes this is true, sometimes it's a Jedi Mind Trick to either gauge your interest or drive down the salary. If you hear this, try not to react as if someone ran over your dog.

-You hear, "Thanks for coming by," after a short interview. Not much serious interest there.

-You're told, "Keep in touch." Means exactly what it says. There may be a future opening, or the ND likes your potential. Send a tape every two months.

-You're told, "I'll be in touch." Right up there with a man telling a woman he'll call her after a first date. Maybe he will, maybe he won't. No way of knowing.

DON'T FORGET THE REFERENCES

Paper resumes are generally the last thing a ND looks at, after checking out your tape, and (if he gets that far) reading your cover letter.

While your resume should only be one page I continue to be puzzled by people who put "References will be provided on request" on the bottom. This drove me crazy when I was in management, because, drum roll please...

It forced me to make an extra phone call.

Keep things simple, and make things as easy as possible for a News Director. Include a separate page of references, and, this is important, *make sure the phone numbers are correct.*

It makes absolutely no sense to leave references out of your resume. Are they some deep, dark government secret that will only be revealed if we reach DEFCON One?

Three references, from different places, with working phone numbers. You'll make a ND happy.

WHY YOU DIDN'T GET THE JOB EVEN THOUGH YOU HAD THE MOST TALENT

I have a big whiteboard in my office, with the names of clients, their locations, and where they want to go. Some are extremely talented; some are raw, but growing by leaps and bounds.

This year some got jobs, some are still looking. Is there a common denominator? Nope.

I know that many of you are frustrated as we come to the close of the year. Your goal may have been to get out of dodge by a certain date and you might still be there. The industry is going through major changes, filled with layoffs, cutbacks, and every cost cutting measure you can think of. But things run in cycles, and it will turn around.

Still, none of that may have had an effect on jobs for which you applied that were filled. You may have been the most talented, you may have had a kick-butt tape, but you still didn't get the job.

While we can file many of these under "life is not fair" there may be other reasons that have absolutely nothing to do with the quality of your work, or you.

-You're not what the ND is looking for. The ad may read "equal opportunity employer" but in many cases the station has a target demographic in mind. They may want a female anchor to pair with their male anchor who has blonde hair, so if you're a blonde woman you're out of luck. They may want a bi-lingual male and you're a woman who only speaks English. They may want a female meteorologist and you're a guy. They may want old and you're young, or young and you're old. You can be the wrong age, sex, ethnic background, you name it. In other words, sometimes you're not in consideration before you send the tape. And you'll never know, because any ND who reveals something like this will get himself sued.

-You live too far away. Okay, so I'm an ND and I've got two equally talented reporters. One lives down the street and the other lives three thousand miles away. I pay no moving expenses with the local reporter, so that's the one I choose.

-You're not as versatile. You were the best reporter but someone else can fill in on weather or sports.

-Someone else will work cheaper than you will.

-You made a phone call when the ad specifically read, "No phone calls." I know a few NDs who will not consider anyone who cannot follow simple directions.

-The timing of your contract didn't work, and someone else's was perfect.

-The ND doesn't think you'd make a good fit in the newsroom. Maybe the whole place is Ivy League and you're blue collar, or the other way around.

-This one will make you mad. You're *too* talented, and therefore you'll leave in a year or two. Maybe the local reporter with no big market ambition will stay forever.

-You're single and easier to relocate than someone who is married with kids. Or you're single and therefore more likely to move on than someone who is married with kids.

Are you getting the point? It's like someone breaking up and saying, "It's not you, it's me." Many times there is absolutely nothing wrong with you or your tape. The stars simply didn't align. So don't beat yourself up trying to re-think every single rejection, because in many cases you weren't really rejected... you were never in consideration. There is a big difference.

That's why I continue to tell you to send tapes everywhere. It is truly a numbers game. The more hooks in the water, the better chance you have.





FREELANCING: A POSSIBLE FOOT IN THE DOOR OF A BIG MARKET

These days it's not uncommon for people who have been out of college for awhile to find themselves out of work and heading back to mom's basement. Job hunting has never been tougher, as there are as many overqualified people out there as there are rookies trying to make their mark in the business.

So what do you do if you can't get a full-time gig?

A few years ago I had a client who was about to be out of work and faced with the prospect of moving back with mom and dad. She had a lot of talent and a good tape, but there weren't any offers out there. Since her parents were living in a big market, I told her to take her tape to every station and just try to get her foot in the door... freelancing, part-time stuff, whatever. I knew that if people got to see her ability on a daily basis, it might open things up.

She was hired as a freelancer, and sure enough, eventually brought on board full time.

Familiarity, in this case, was the most powerful factor. Management had grown to like her work, and when a suitable opening popped up, they knew who to hire.

Freelancing isn't for everyone. For one thing, there are no health benefits. For another, you have no idea what your income will be from one month to the next.

But if you find yourself sitting home, you'd be better off working a few days per week and letting people get to know you than watching daytime TV. (Trust me, there's nothing on.)

Visit the stations in your market and offer your services as a freelancer. Or, camp out on a friend's couch in a big market and try your luck.

From a News Director's point of view, freelancers and part-timers are a valuable commodity. Sometimes you just need a weekend person but don't have the budget for a full time position. So being able to plug a hole while not breaking the budget makes sense.



TRADE-OUTS

Before money existed, the barter system was the means of exchange. You trade me a bunch of apples, I give you an egg-laying chicken.

Seems pretty antiquated, but it is alive and well in broadcasting. The "trade-out" is a time honored sales tool in which commercial time is traded for products or services. It sometimes benefits both sides and TV station employees.

Or sometimes not.

I often advocate that people should ask for things like hair and clothing allowances when negotiating a contract, and many of you probably don't know that cash often doesn't change hands in these deals. Sometimes you can end up with good stuff, and other times the "allowance" can be worthless.

I learned of the trade-out system at my first radio station. The GM loved to trade advertising time for products, most of which we'd give away as prizes, some of which were used by the staff. When it came to prizes, the guy traded for everything from really nice radios to Caribbean vacations. He once traded with a candy company for hundreds of chocolate rabbits, which he stored in my office. (Big mistake on his part.) We tried to give away the rabbits for Easter, but people weren't that interested in driving to a radio station to pick up three bucks worth of chocolate. So the staff ate them all. (You nev-

er saw such a group on a sugar high.) At one point the GM had sold some advertising to a funeral home, which prompted his very sarcastic secretary to ask when typing up the contract, "Is this a trade?"

Which brings us back to your contract. When you are offered a perk on your contract, like a clothing allowance, you should find out the parameters of the trade-out.

In some stations you might be allowed to do your own shopping, then bring the receipts back to the station for reimbursement. You might be allowed to pick your own hairstylist. Those are the best trades. \$1,000 can go a long way if you're a smart shopper. In other situations you might have to shop for makeup at a certain store, which might not stock the brand you like and whose exorbitant prices will eat up your trade allowance in no time. And finally, you might be sent to a store which designates certain items for trade... in other words, stuff they can't sell. And chances are if they can't sell it, you don't want it. I'll never forget a female anchor who went to the designated store, came back to the station and either sat in her chair or wouldn't turn her back on anyone the entire day, hugging the walls. I finally asked her why she was acting so strange. She stood up, turned around, and the entire newsroom laughed as they saw an embroidered poodle on the back of her jacket.

So sometimes those perks are great, and other times they're basically worthless.

When checking out a station, you can often find out where the trades are without asking, as many stations run a credit at the end of the newscast. If you see "*Clothing provided by Macy's*" then you know you'll be getting good stuff. If you see "*Hairstyles provided by Joe's house of weed whackers*" then you know you might be paying for your own haircut.

As for why stations trade, well, sometimes clients would rather pay with product (or unload stuff) than cash, and many times sta-

tions have unsold inventory. Years ago the IRS didn't even count it as income, but the feds got wise to the barter trick.

Now you know how the trade system works. So when a ND offers you perks, you might want to read the fine print, and, in the case of clothing and hair, check out the staff. Are they wearing great clothes and do they have attractive hairstyles? Or is the wardrobe garage sale material and does the anchor's hair look like it was cut with a machete?

Oh, and by the way, those "gifts" you guys get at the Christmas party? They're pretty much all trade items. Brings the term "re-gifted" to a whole 'nother level. At one party my name was drawn from a hat. The manager held up a jewelry box and said, "A pair of diamond earrings!" My wife was thrilled. Till we got home and she took a closer look. She said they looked "too perfect" and took them to a jeweler. Sure enough, they were fake.

on an interview and the staff looks nervous when the ND takes you through the newsroom, it's not a good sign.

4. Open-minded to ideas. A News Director who honestly considers all story ideas in the morning meeting instead of running the place like a dictatorship is a blessing.

5. A soul.

6. Knows a little about your personal life and is flexible. Managing a newsroom can be a true juggling act, since everyone is a little different. A ND knows who lives a long way from home and needs to book a flight well in advance, who has a kid graduating from college during sweeps and needs a special day off, who is getting married and needs some time to plan the wedding. Hard and fast rules are really hard to enforce in a newsroom. A ND has to bend a little from time to time.

7. A mentoring attitude. This is especially true in an entry level market. If you're in your first or second job, the last thing you need is to be thrown into the deep end of the pool. You need someone who will give constructive criticism and help you get to the next level.

8. Feedback. The old saying is, "If you don't hear anything, you're doing okay." That isn't helpful. You want someone who will tell you when you've done a great job and when you might have done things a little differently to make your story better.

9. No helicopter. The last thing you want is a manager who hovers over employees all day. A News Director who trusts his staff gets trust back in return... and has a much more relaxed staff that does a better job.

10. A life. A News Director who eats, breathes and sleeps news thinks you should be the same way. You want someone who can turn it off and realize there's more to life than a job.



INTANGIBLES

WHEN IN ROME...

When you think about it, most of us are fishes out of water. Few of us ever get to work in our hometowns. We often end up in faraway places, where the culture and the people are different. And sometimes trying to fit in is a difficult trick.

It was (and still is at times) hard for me. I think people from the New York area and the Northeast in general have it the worst because we're so different. We're edgy, impatient, talk too fast, and can get in your face at times. My sarcastic sense of humor didn't play well in some places far from the Big Apple. And over the years I've heard, "We don't care how you did it in New York" more than a few times.

It can be frustrating trying to fit in when you're a long way from home. "What do you mean, you never heard of pastrami? Fuhgedd-aboudit."

If you are the fish out of water, you really have to almost bury your heritage while you're trying to fit in. Sometimes you're sent to cover something that seems truly bizarre to you but normal to the locals. (Like when I was sent to cover a tractor pull. "So... there are tractors and people pull them?")

The practice of telling viewers where you're from doesn't do you any good either. They just see you as a carpetbagger, yet another outsider who is just passing through town on the way up the ladder.

Then there are the people in the newsroom who are locals. They'll resent the fact that you have absolutely no intention of staying, as you consider their city just another town. To them it's special. It's home.

So remember, when hopping around the country, you're a guest, both in the newsroom and on the air. That attitude will do wonders if you're trying to fit in.



FINDING YOUR INNER "IT" FACTOR

Funny how a two-letter word can so easily describe talent in this business. Some people are born with "it" while others seem to develop "it." "It" can be fleeting... this year's "it girl" can be next year's has-been.

And "it" means different things to different News Directors. One ND may think you're the next "it girl" while another may not give your resume tape a second look. But in many cases, if you have "it" you won't have much problem finding a job.

So what exactly is "it" and if you don't have it, how can you get it? How can you make your tape look like you have it? What can you do that makes an ND stop what he's doing and pick up the phone because he absolutely, positively, must have you on staff this nanosecond?

Imagine you've arrived at a large party. You're a young woman, single, and unattached. You look around and of course you are drawn to the most attractive guy there. He is devastatingly handsome, the kind of guy who makes you melt. You strike up a conversation with him and after five minutes realize he's got the body of a Greek god and the brain of a crash test dummy. Fun for a few dates but you'd get bored long term. Then you look around and notice a circle of people laughing and enjoying themselves. You notice the person getting all the attention is an average looking guy, but he is holding the group spellbound with his stories. His eyes are full of life, they dance from person to person, his voice is filled with the delight of the story he's telling. He's animated, excited, and truly into what he's saying.

Suddenly he's the most attractive man in the room.

And that's what "it" is.

As a reporter or anchor, you have to be the most interesting person at the party. You have to be "up" every time you're on camera, your voice has to be filled with excitement and interest. It is almost like you're saying, "Hey! Viewer! I've got this kick-butt story that is really cool and I know you're gonna like it, so pay attention."

Every time you are on air you are making a first impression. Just like going to a party when you don't know anyone. You already look your best, now you have to act it. You have to force your personality to new levels, so that viewers can't help but notice you're the most interesting and attractive person on the tube, even though you may not be the best looking.

When you can do that, when you can make your stories appointment television, you have achieved the nirvana known as "it" and the News Directors will come calling.

Does everyone have the potential for "it?" Hard to say. Many are born with this special quality, but you can certainly work on it.

So go out, do your story, be the life of the party. You might find something inside that you didn't know existed.



YOUR VOICE

In fiction writing, voice is that special something that makes one writer distinctive from another. I could probably take a page from a Stephen King book and read it aloud to a bunch of people, not telling them who wrote it, and anyone who had read King would be able to identify it. His style, the way he uses words and strings them together, the "attitude" of his writing; those things make up his "voice."

While you need a good speaking voice to be a successful anchor or reporter, letting your "personality voice" come through in your copy can make you distinctive as well. If someone in your newsroom

took one of your scripts and read it, not knowing who wrote it, would that person be able to tell you were the writer?

This might sound confusing as it applies to news, so let me give you an example. Let's take a passage that you might write on an average news day:

"The council passed a resolution that will result in a five percent increase in garbage fees. This means you'll be paying twenty-one dollars instead of twenty."

Okay, pretty basic, right? Anyone from Journalism 101 could have written that, and there's nothing wrong with it. Except it has no personality.

No voice.

Now let's give that information some punch, a little kick that let's you know the reporter is a real person who understands that any increase is unwelcome in this economy:

"You may as well throw a dollar bill in your trash each week, because that's how much more it's going to cost you when you toss your garbage. City council members, who risked being kicked to the curb themselves in the next election, voted unanimously for a five percent increase."

See, that's got my brand of sarcasm in it. My own unique view of the world (and the soulless politicians who run it) came through in just two sentences.

Take some of your scripts home with you on your days off and read them aloud. Do they have your "voice" or do they sound as though anyone in your newsroom could have written them?

These days you really have to stand out to move up the ladder. Put yourself into your copy and the way you deliver it. Make your voice as distinctive as your personality.

EYES ARE THE WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

Okay, we're going to borrow Mary Hart to illustrate something.

Mary was the over-the-top animated host on Entertainment Tonight. (Look her up on YouTube.) Nobody got more mileage out of her eyes than that woman. Say what you want about her, but she never came across as bored.

Which brings us to "dead eyes syndrome."

You can be bored with a story, but you can't ever let the viewers know you feel that way. However, in some cases all you have to do is look at the eyes of the reporter and you know the person's heart just isn't in it.

Years ago we had an anchor who had gorgeous eyes, but simply wasn't using them. One day I cued up an aircheck and taped a piece of paper on the screen, covering her face from the nose down. All you could see was her eyes. I turned the sound off and asked her to watch, then put this question to her: "Do you seem excited?"

A week later we did the same thing, with impressive results. Her eyes were bright, on fire, filled with life in every story. Excited, sad, whatever, her eyes ran the gamut of emotions.

Try that with your own standups, live shots or anchor airchecks. Turn off the sound and cover everything but your eyes.

Then do the same thing with network and successful big market anchors. You'll find that all use their eyes very well.

You may be the best reporter in the world, but if you've got dead eyes, if you do your on-camera work with a lifeless attitude, don't expect many News Directors to call. Using your eyes to their full potential is simple, and can make a huge difference.

BODY LANGUAGE: THE OTHER WINDOW OF THE SOUL

Since we're on the subject of appearance, let's talk about something else that conveys your true feelings besides your eyes.

Body language.

Think about it: you've got ten or fifteen seconds in every package that you're on camera, and if you can't be at the top of your game, if you can't convey your entire life force in that short period of time, you're going nowhere.

Anchors, meanwhile, have to be at their best for 22 minutes, and often at the end of their day. And when you consider it, how much of that 22 minutes are you actually on camera?

I can hear my father in my head, spouting one of his many comments on my appearance. "Stand up straight, you don't work in a bell-tower. Go wash your face, you look half asleep. If you move any slower pigeons are gonna land on your head."

Your appearance is also part of your "voice" as well, and is a big key to your success. If you stand there slump shouldered and look as though you're just trying to get through the standup, you're not going to convey any energy. If you do a walking standup where you just...amble...along... you're not making a good impression. Power walk. Have a purpose. Look excited. Throw your head back and look like you have the world by the tail. Back to my father again. "Jeez, you're on television, for God's sake!"

Every time you're on camera is an opportunity for you to move up the ladder. Never, ever phone it in. You never know who's watching, who might call and ask to see your last three stories.

They say, "Look alive!" in the military.

Honestly, it's not that hard, and it can pay great dividends.

TALK, DON'T READ

Why do I con-stant-ly see roo-kie re-por-ters talk-ing like this? Be-cause they are prob-ab-ly try-ing to get per-fect dic-tion.

If that was hard to read, imagine how hard it is for a viewer to hear.

When you're starting out, you don't want any trace of an accent and you want to sound perfect. Instead, you often end up sounding like an android.

There's a reason we tell reporters to sound conversational; because we want you to "have a conversation" with the viewer. And it's because that's the way people actually talk. If you picked up the phone and sounded like the first sentence in this section, the person on the other line would wonder if something was wrong with you.

I get lots of new clients who are very chatty and have great phone personalities, then I get their tapes and it looks like they've been assimilated by the Borg. (For the Star Trek challenged, the Borg are an evil bunch of alien ne'er-do-wells that turn humans into cyborgs that become part of a hive mind.)

Here's what you need to remember: talk, don't read. I'll say it again in italics because this may be the most important thing you take from this book. *Talk, don't read.*

If you still don't understand the concept, listen to one of your packages. Don't watch, listen. Does it sound the way you normally talk? If not, you're reading instead of talking.

When reading a script, pretend you're talking to someone face-to-face, or talking on the phone. It will sound a lot more natural.

DON'T BE A "GENERIC" REPORTER

I have a good friend who is an airline pilot. Once he came to visit me when I was a young reporter and he said of the market, "This is a nice generic town." When I asked what he meant, he explained that pilots visit so many towns that look alike. The same chain restaurants, a Home Depot and Lowes, a mall with the same stores you find in every city in America.

The same can often be true of newscasts and reporters. When you travel a lot and check out the local news, it sometimes seems

as though the on-air people are interchangeable clones. Terms like "cookie-cutter blonde" originated because it seemed that every station had a peroxide gal who looked like every other station's peroxide gal. No offense to those of you who are natural Goldilocks, but you get the picture.

And when it comes down to looking at resume tapes, you reach a point (about tape number 50) where everyone starts to look the same. I don't just mean in appearance, but in style as well.

Several years ago I had just started at a station with two other reporters who joined at the same time. Management wanted everyone to be distinctive. I was the irreverent sarcastic reporter, the other guy was the confrontational city hall reporter, and the young lady... well, they couldn't decide what her "schtick" would be. She asked me if I had any ideas, and I said, "Well, you never see women wearing hats anymore. How about always doing a standup with a hat?" That idea didn't fly with management, but she eventually found her trademark.

Back in the heyday of Eyewitness News in New York City, a reporter named Milton Lewis covered city hall and started every standup with, "Now listen to this!" Wow, that really made viewers sit up and pay attention, since Milton usually had something shocking to reveal about politicians.

Sadly, I don't see many people who have a trademark anymore.

And if you want your resume tape to stick out, you should consider one.

A lot has to do with your personality. Are you a spunky, take-no-prisoners reporter? Are you an anchor with an incredible quick wit? Take some time and think about this:

What makes you special? And how can you make that unique feature translate to television?

Maybe you can use Milton Lewis' trick and do a standup in a distinctive way. Maybe you inject a bit more personality into your pieces without losing your objectivity. Maybe you wear hats. Doesn't mat-

ter. Just find something that can become yours, that makes the viewers recognize one of your reports will be something different.

It's nice to go out for dinner and eat at one of the chains you really like, but it's better to hit that one-of-a-kind place. Whenever we go to upstate New York on vacation we have a bunch of restaurants we like to visit; not just because they're great, but because you can't get their food anywhere else. It makes them stand out. They're special. There's only one place I know to get shrimp scampi pizza, and I have to go to a mom-and-pop joint in Albany to get it.

By the same token, you need to be that one-of-a-kind reporter or anchor that a News Director can't find anywhere else. When you're fighting for one job against hundreds of people, being generic just doesn't make it.

THAT BARN DOOR HAS SAILED

The neat thing about newspapers is that you can pick them up years later and read an old article.

But with television, unless you've taped every story you've ever done, they're out there somewhere in the airwaves, bouncing around, headed out to space to be monitored by aliens.

As the old saying goes, once you've broadcast a story, it's "Gone to Pluto."

Young reporters tend to dwell on every story, every live shot, every trip on the anchor desk as a life and death situation. And if you screw up one little thing, it seems to outweigh the 99 things out of 100 that you did right.

Some points:

-You are the worst judge of your own work. It is never as great as you think or as bad as you fear. Most times it's somewhere in the middle. And most times you think it's awful, it's really not. Funny

thing, most people who really *are* awful have no clue how bad they are.

-Most people don't notice the little things you think are glaring errors. You're a perfectionist when it comes to your work, and dwell on the tiny stuff that didn't go quite right. Trust me, the viewers didn't notice and most managers didn't either.

-The slate is wiped clean the minute you're done. Just like a baseball player who goes 0-for-4 and starts fresh the next day, so do you. Every day is an opportunity.

-You cannot change the past, despite the numerous time travel movies you've seen. (Believe me, I've tried.)

So basically we're combining two premises here since TV people need something more than the rest of the population: locking the barn door after the horse is stolen, and the proverbial ship that has sailed. Yes, that barn door has sailed, and there's nothing you can do to change it...

Except do a great job today.

Dwelling on past mistakes, especially the ones no one notices, will send you into vapor lock. So bury it, move on, and start each day with the attitude that it's an opportunity to do some great work.

Not every day goes perfectly and not every story turns out the way you envision it. But as long as you move forward instead of looking back, you'll get better.

WALLS, PLATEAUS AND STEPS

You see it all the time, especially in those first three years of a career. And in this era of instant gratification, it can be frustrating to young people just starting out.

You're not getting better fast enough.

We had one young reporter years ago who wanted to learn everything about the business in the first week. He would get frustrated

that every package didn't have every single element. We told him it would take time to master the art of reporting.

In this business, it's not about going up the ladder. It's about hitting the wall.

When most people start, the packages are pretty basic. A bunch of sound bites, voiceovers and a standup close. It's pretty much a template for all rookie reporters. No nat sound, no graphics, no writing to video.

The reporter gets comfortable with that, and then gets bored. There must be something else. He has hit a wall, then suddenly discovers the wonders of using nat sound. He becomes obsessed with nat sound, and takes a step up to the next plateau.

A few months later, same deal. Mastered nat sound but bored that all the packages look the same. Then it's walking standups. He sees a reporter he admires doing a cool walking standup, and suddenly he figures out the secret handshake. Another step up to another plateau.

Every step leads to another plateau. Writing to video, using graphics, writing in and out of sound bites, turning a phrase, doing a standup bridge rather than a close.

This seems to be a common denominator with talented people. Sometimes it takes a while to find the step, and sometimes you spend more time than you'd like on a plateau, but it's necessary to the process.

You can't master everything all at once. Take your time, learn one thing at a time, master it, then move on to another element. Trust me, if you do this in your first job you'll be knocking out great packages in a year or two.

ARE YOU TOO SMART TO BE PRETTY?

Ironically, it's always the smart ones who fail to figure out that television is a visual medium.

It never fails... I get an attractive, whip-smart client with a ton of talent who dresses herself in the equivalent of a brown paper wrapper, accessorized by just-rolled-out-of-bed hair and no makeup. These are women who you see in the newsroom every day, dressed in the brown paper fall collection, who then simply knock your socks off at the Christmas party.

Yep, some of you are simply afraid to be pretty or handsome. And I think I know why.

I've worked in plenty of stations that employed former beauty queens, and of course there's a stigma that goes along with that. "They're only hired because they're pretty." Looking back, I noticed the pageant vets who were really smart tended to dress down. Psychologically, I guess, they didn't want to be known for their appearance but rather for their credibility.

One excuse I hear from women who dress down is, "This is a small market and people don't dress up here."

Uh, wrong, Ms. McFly.

If you remember anything regarding appearance, remember this, because it really applies to television news: Dress for the job you want, not the job you have.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with dressing your best, doing your hair and taking time with your makeup. If you were lucky enough to be born drop dead gorgeous, well, then don't downplay it. I can't tell you how many times clients have told me, "Yeah, I did a great story today, but I didn't wear a great outfit." And... whose fault is that?

Look, I don't expect you to wear heels and sequins or a tuxedo while doing a live shot on a farm or in a hurricane, but on the average day, you need to look your absolute best. People might initially think you were hired for your looks, but you can change

that impression very quickly by doing a credible job and working hard.

You never know if that story will end up on your resume tape. And you never know who might be watching.

AVOIDING WARDROBE MALFUNCTIONS

Murphy's Law of television news: you wear your best outfit or most expensive suit and you're assigned to do a story at a pig farm. Or a flooded area. Or a landfill.

And if you don't have a rolling closet, chances are you'll look as overdressed as a Hollywood star going to prison.

Back in the day, most of us had other sets of clothes in the trunks of our cars. If you had to cover a story at the beach, you could pull out some shorts and a linen shirt. Plane crash in the woods? You had old jeans and shoes you wouldn't mind throwing away. Oil refinery? Some shirts and slacks that might have been destined for the charity pile.

On the other side of the coin, you may have shown up knowing you needed to dress casually for a story and something major breaks out at the courthouse. And there you are in a polo shirt and shorts doing a lead story that demanded professional attire.

Yep, we had dress clothes in the trunk as well.

Point is, you have to be prepared because your assignment can change at a moment's notice. You don't want to interview a US Senator wearing beach clothes, and you'll look silly in spike heels walking through a muddy field to a plane crash. That's why you need a few wardrobe changes you can get to quickly.

Those clothes and old sneakers may sit in your trunk for a long time, but when you need them you'll be glad they're there.

ALL HANDS ON DECK

When the space shuttle exploded a few years ago, I was outside doing yard work at the time. The Executive Producer tracked me down, told me the news, and I headed for the station.

The question today is, would you?

When I arrived that day I already found several staffers had arrived and were already brainstorming about ways to localize the story. Then I pulled out the telephone call sheet and began dialing the numbers of the staffers who weren't already there, though I knew there were some I didn't need to call. I simply knew they'd come in.

Many called before I had the chance to touch base and told me they were on their way. But some never bothered to answer the messages I'd left on their station-issued cell phones. In this day and age, it was hard to believe.

When big news breaks, and I mean the kind of news that brings the country to a screeching halt, you shouldn't have to even ask. Get dressed, get in your car, and head for the station. (If you're a young person, you probably don't know this. You do now.) First, you should *want* to be a part of a major story. And second, it will show the rest of the staff you're really a news person.

My first news director always said of these situations, "I shouldn't have to call anyone. You guys should know enough to just come in."

"All hands on deck" is an old newsroom term you don't hear much anymore. It used to be used a lot for things like election night and other major events.

Of course you can't predict when those major events will happen.

On days when the country's heart skips a beat, that's when you find out who is really in this business for fame and fortune and who is in it for pure journalism.

On days like 9/11 and the two shuttle disasters, people turn to their television sets. They not only want information, they want the

local newscasters who make them feel comfortable in times of trouble.

You should know that your station needs as many staffers as possible.

I'll never forget a very unusual act on 9/11. Our sales manager, who had been a sports anchor in a previous life, came down to the newsroom and asked if he could help. We gave him a photog, sent him out, and he knocked out a good package. On the other side of the coin are the people who simply don't answer the phone.

You may think that your station is thousands of miles away from the next big event, but stories like these are when stations can make their mark. You have so many people who don't watch television news suddenly tuning in. You can take any big story and localize it.

You have nothing to lose and everything to gain when you simply put yourself in play during a big event.

And if you don't feel that pull when you see a big story, maybe you're in the wrong business.



ATTITUDE: THE GREAT INTANGIBLE

We once had a very talented reporter who basically shot herself more than Plaxico Burress, the former New York Giants receiver who had a gun in his sweatpants go off and end his career. My *agita* (Italian for indigestion) would go up whenever I saw her heading for my office, since I knew some sort of complaint was coming. The funny thing was, the complaints were of a bizarre nature that usually had nothing to do with journalism, everything from the architecture of the newsroom to the types of reporter notebooks we stocked.

Well, lo and behold, management pretty much cracked a bottle of champagne when this gal left.

And, lo and behold, she needed a favor a couple of months later. Funny, I still haven't returned her calls.

Another guy repeatedly ripped me to upper management, then called me when he found himself out of a job. He left a tearful message, begging for help and asking me to call as soon as possible.

He can turn blue like those people in Avatar waiting for that to happen.

Bottom line, attitude is the great equalizer. If I'm a News Director and I've got an opening with two qualified candidates, and one is a pain while the other is never a problem, guess who's gonna get the job? Even if the one who is difficult has more talent, more often than not, a ND doesn't want to create an even bigger problem.

Why? Well, psychologically, if someone is a pain and gets promoted, you're basically rewarding bad behavior.

If you don't promote that person, you're sending a subtle message that said behavior isn't doing much for that person's career.

I've noticed over the years that people in their first or second jobs complain the most. They jump for joy when you give them that first gig, and within months they hate the job they wanted so desperately.

If you've been passed over, and you have a bad attitude, the answer might be in your mirror.

REPUTATION CAN EASILY TRUMP TALENT

Several years ago I heard a friend of mine had gotten fired, so I picked up the phone and gave him a call. I tried to cheer him up and told him about a few openings. I'll never forget what he said at the end of the call.

"When you get fired, you really know who your friends are."

A few years later I started a blog and my mentoring service, and heard from a few old friends, which is always nice. But I'll never forget the first time I mentioned in a blog post that I was doing freelance work for the major networks. What a surprise... I heard from

several long lost "pals" who had, at one time or another, thrown a knife in my direction.

"Hey, old buddy, long time no talk. Wow, you're working for a network. Maybe you could put in a good word for me..."

And maybe I can hit the "delete" button.

Then my cell phone rang. I recognized the number and had no intention of answering the call. Alas, there was a long, tearful voice mail from an old co-worker who had trashed me to my News Director on a regular basis, now begging for help.

Only one phrase ran through my mind. "To delete this message, press seven."

I know, most Sicilians subscribe to the theory of "don't get mad, get even." But in my case, I don't get mad.

I do nothing. When I could do a lot.

Sure, I could make a five minute phone call to a friend in the business and make long lines disappear, open doors that have been previously closed, and jump someone's resume tape to the top of the stack. But if someone has crossed me before, why trust them now? A backstabber doesn't usually change his spots.

Which brings me to the topic of reputation. You think videos can go viral? Try being a backstabber in this business. You might think that doing something shady might leap frog you over someone in the short term, but in the long term that knife you just threw becomes a boomerang and nails you right in the heart of your career.

I've worked with dozens of talented people in this business, and there are a ton of them I'd never hire. I can think of a few whose talent would just blow you away, but were absolutely hated by the rest of the staff because they were always playing games.

When I first got into management I was amazed at the many times people would wander into my office and simply trash another member of the staff in order to elevate their own careers. Most managers see through this, so in reality those who subscribe to the back-

stabbing philosophy often find their stock has dropped. In one case a talented knife-thrower had left, then found the new job not to his liking. He called, begging for his old job.

Right. I'll get back to you.

You are responsible for your own career, and a big part of that is creating a reputation that doesn't send up red flags. The person you help today might get the promotion you wanted, but that person will remember your good deed down the road, and maybe help you someday.

Every circus has a knife thrower, but the whole act is a trick. In reality, we know they're frauds.

In a newsroom, we know the same thing.

DEALING WITH CRITIQUES

It seems as though two or three times each year I get a new client who will call, confidence shattered, because someone critiqued their work and said they were worthless, had no business in the business, and should find another line of work. Then the tape will arrive, and I see the person has a tremendous amount of talent.

Why does this happen? Well, because most of you don't have the little filter in your head that will throw away the garbage and keep the honest constructive criticism. If I tell you nine things you're doing right and one you're doing wrong, you're going to dwell on the negative. Along the same lines, if six people in the television industry tell you that you're doing a good job and someone who's never worked a day in the business says you're hopeless, the negative comments are going to eat away at your confidence.

So let me give you a few rules when you're looking for a critique. (And by the way, critiques from family members don't count. They're all like my dad, thinking you're wonderful and wondering why the network doesn't dump its anchor to hire you.)

-Critiques must be objective. If the person giving you feedback likes you too much to say anything negative or dislikes you too much to say anything nice the critique isn't much help.

-Tough love is the best kind. A good critique will highlight the things you are doing right, while offering suggestions on things that need improvement. Sometimes brutal honesty hurts, but if it is offered with advice on how to fix a problem, you can actually learn something.

-A critique should always have something positive on which to build. Some clients I've had sound like they've gone through a fifteen round fight after being put through the wringer by a critique. If you get a critique like this, throw it away.

-Some criticism can be based on jealousy. News Directors are legendary for their confidence draining tactics, working under the premise that talented people need to "be kept down." Some managers never have a good word for anyone. And if your ND has never worked in a decent market or been a reporter, consider the source.

-Getting critiques from people outside your market is a good idea. If you happen to make a contact with someone in a big market who is kind enough to offer advice, send a tape every once in awhile and listen to the suggestions. Most people in big markets know what it takes to get there.

-While it is impossible to be objective when it comes to your own work, you can be objective regarding a critique. Try to look outside yourself when someone points out a problem. In other words, if someone tells you that your delivery is too slow, play your own tape, then watch a big market or network newscast and honestly compare things.

-Be open-minded and be patient. Sometimes it takes awhile for the light bulb to go on. If someone suggests something, don't just try it once and give up if it doesn't work. Have faith in your own talent, because the person making the suggestion probably has faith in you.

 ETIQUETTE

The thing many on-camera people forget in the field is that they are part of a team. Photographers can often feel left out or like second class citizens if you don't treat them as equals. And you'll get much better video if you share everything equally. So, some things to remember:

- Carry some of the equipment. Reporters usually grab things like tripods, extra batteries, microphone stands, or light kits.
- Introduce every member of your crew when setting up an interview. This is just common courtesy.
- Offer to drive the news car, fill up the gas, buy the coffee, etc. Don't leave junk in the car, as photogs have to clean it out.
- Be polite both on the job and off the clock. If you are on camera, you are in the public eye.

 GREEN-EYED MONSTERS

Many years ago I'd just started at a new station. My first day was a Monday, and at the end of the day I was headed out of the newsroom when the Assignment Editor stopped me.

"You find an apartment?" he asked.

"Yeah, but it's not ready yet. I'm still in the hotel."

"Then why don't you come by my place for dinner and watch Monday Night Football?"

Nice, I thought.

On Tuesday the reporter at the next desk asked me if I'd gotten moved in yet. When I told him no, he said, "Well, you're having dinner with me."

That's the way to welcome someone new to your station. You're in a new city, don't know anyone, your dishes aren't unpacked and you're still a little nervous about your new work surroundings.

But lately so many clients are telling me they are being welcomed to new jobs as if they are lepers. And most of this occurs in small markets. Shakespeare called jealousy a green-eyed monster, and he was dead-on with that one. The monster is rearing its ugly head with the young generation, and I think I know why.

The new generation of reporters has been raised never having been told "no" by parents. (And yes, that is the fault of my generation.) When they've been in competition, no one ever "loses" as "everyone is a winner." And then they get out into the real world and can't deal with a ND who says "no" for whatever reason. When they come in second for that promotion, they find that not everyone gets a trophy just for participating.

Welcome to the party, pal. Real life aint fair.

And when that "no" concerns a job for which they are passed over, they turn their venom to the person who got the position. Here's the typical scenario. Job opens up, everyone in the newsroom wants it, News Director hires from the outside.

The fallout: "Let's make the new person miserable."

I'm amazed at the calls I receive from young people who get venomous comments from people they barely know. Cutting remarks on appearance, style, and reporting skills are common from people who are barely out of college. They cut down any story idea pitched by the new person.

The result, the new person goes into a shell, finds a better job in a year or two. The jealous people are still stuck, now wishing they'd been nicer to the people who might be able to help them escape. You think the person they abused will have anything nice to say about them?

This is a very small business, and one in which connections are key. People that you cut down could be in a position to help you down the road... if you're nice to them and welcome them to the station with open arms.

Time to bury the green-eyed monster, kids. There will always be someone with seemingly less talent who makes more money, has a better job, and seems to get all the breaks.

Might be nice if that person were your friend instead of your enemy.

MONEY VS. HAPPINESS

You send out tape after tape after tape and hear nothing. Then, out of the blue, you get two offers in the same week. I once got nothing for a year and then got two calls within an hour. Nice problem to have, but it makes you want to pull out your hair and let loose with a primal scream.

And very often, when you get two offers, they're very different.

And every time, the first thing you consider is the money. It's just natural. Most of you are young, broke, sick of clipping coupons and eating macaroni and cheese. A few thousand dollars a year is the difference between steak and peanut butter.

But you still need to look at the whole picture.

So when you have to make a choice, take a legal pad, draw a line down the middle, and, along with the salary, consider these:

Contract length: A shorter contract offers more flexibility, a longer one more stability. (Well, sort of... they can still fire you on a whim.) But you need to check out the parameters of the contract. An out clause is extremely valuable. Perks like clothing and makeup can really save you a bundle. And always, always, always have a lawyer look at a contract.

Market size: The other elephant in the room. Many market sizes are deceiving, and we've touched on this before. Memphis and Spartanburg, SC are similar in market size, but one is a big city and other is a collection of smaller towns. Many times "big city" news "looks" a lot better... especially if you still have an eye up the ladder.

Location: Nothing, and I mean nothing, trumps working in a nice place or close to home.

Company: You know what the bad companies are, so be careful. Is the company one that treats employees well, or is it a bottom line company run by beancounters?

Quality of newscast: Another biggie. Money and market size mean nothing if you're going to be turning out garbage. It won't help you make the next jump.

Quality of photogs (if the station has them): Huge consideration. Can make a good reporter a great one.

News Director temperament and morale: On your interview, notice if people in the newsroom are smiling or look like they're on death row.

Benefits: Does the health insurance start on day one or do you have to wait three months and buy your own insurance? Does the company have a 401k match? You don't think about it when you're young, but you'll thank me when you're ready to retire.

There are more intangibles you can add when making your decision, but those are the biggies. Finally, don't make a quick decision. You can always buy more time to think by telling a ND you want to have the lawyer look at the contract.

Look long term when making these decisions. Take the job that will help you get where you want to go.

THE ONE INTANGIBLE YOU MUST HAVE

Most people in this world have jobs.

We don't. We have careers. There's a big difference.

If you have a job you can phone it in from time to time. If you have a career you have too much pride to do so.

Several years ago I had the privilege of working with a photog on his last day before he got out of the business. We were doing a sto-

ry in one location; it was obvious he wouldn't have to move much for this piece. Kiddingly, I said, "Since it's your last day, you ought to shoot the entire package without moving the camera. I'll bring people to you for sound bites, and you can just swing around and get different angles for b-roll."

We thought it was a fun idea. He locked his camera onto the tripod and started swinging it around, getting different shots. Finally, he shrugged and shouldered his camera. "Can't do it," he said.

He didn't mean it was impossible. He meant his passion for the business wouldn't allow him to phone it in, even on his last day.

Call it passion, or pride in your work, or whatever. It's what runs through the veins of the most successful people in this business.

And if you don't ever feel it, get out. Now. Because you're born with it. You either have it or you don't. You don't develop it over time. It's in your blood, down to your DNA.

Many people think they get it out of their system and leave the business, only to come back.

Passion is like marriage; it's not about finding someone you can live with, *it's about finding someone you can't live without.*

Same goes for this career.

Many young people contact me, telling me they're confused after a few years in the business. They don't know whether to stick or bail out.

So here's the answer. If you can't live without it, that should tell you you're meant to do this.

COMFORTABLE IS THE NEW BLACK

I guess it hit me years ago when I was looking to change phone companies. The young lady was explaining calling plans, and asked me what percentage of my calls would be local.

"None," I said. "My friends and family are all out of state."

And then I realized that all the important people in my life were scattered to the winds, victims of the nomadic lifestyle we lead in this business.

Several years ago some psychologist did a stress study about major life changes, and found that moving was right up there with having a loved one die. We're not only talking about the hassles of packing and traveling cross country, but the aspects of leaving behind what has become comfortable.

Gardeners will tell you it takes three years for something that is transplanted to get comfortable with its new surroundings. "The first year it sleeps, the second year it creeps, the third year it leaps."

So when you move, you are, in effect, ripping out the roots you've put down. You arrive at your new job all energized and ready to conquer the world, until the first weekend rolls around and you're alone with the four walls of your apartment. For those married with children, you can take the stress up a notch, as moving family members, especially kids, is not easy. (I'm not going to even get into what it's like driving a thousand miles with my howling Siamese cat.)

I recently spent time with someone who has reached a very nice market. This person is happy, challenged, works for a good company and likes the city. Many of her friends live there. The ND likes her work and she likes him. While she has network quality talent, *there's nothing wrong with her life.*

So she's decided to stay.

Comfortable is the new black.

Sometimes reaching the top has nothing to do with your paycheck or market size. Sometimes moving to what you think is a better situation can actually make things worse.

Obviously most of you don't want to stay in starter markets making peanuts, and that's fine. But at some point you'll make a move and find your life hitting on all cylinders. It's at that point you need to

consider putting the resume tapes in the closet instead of the mail, and making a real home for yourself.

Then you can actually talk to your friends in person instead of on the phone.

THE JOURNALIST'S BIOLOGICAL CLOCK

When you hear the term "biological clock" you usually think of women and child-bearing, but make no mistake, your career in television has its own biological clock. The damn thing ticks loud in the early part of your career, sounds like Big Ben as you reach landmark birthdays.

Time is the fire in which we burn, and in television news, we live in a blast furnace.

Thing is, the clock can make your life miserable, and cause you to miss some really good moments in your life.

When we get out of college, we set goals, and we always seem to attach them to birthdays. "By the time I'm twenty-five I want to be in this market. By the time I'm thirty I want to be at the network."

Sound familiar?

Well, the TV biological clock also comes with a snooze button. So when you hit 25 and you're still stuck in Podunk, you can hit the button and slide your goals back another year.

And another. And another.

Then you see some beauty queen start out at a major market and the clock sounds like a Chinese gong in your head.

Hit the snooze button often enough and one day you'll wake up, find a birthday cake with forty candles, and throw the clock against the wall. And if the clock has ruled your life, you'll wonder where the time went and what you've been doing since the thing started ticking.

What you've more than likely been doing is missing the best parts of your life.

Sure, the business is in a sorry state now, but would you rather have a real job, working nine to five, clock watching as the day drags on? While few other careers can be as frustrating, few offer the special moments that television news does. The great stories, those moments in the newsroom when everyone is part of a family, the relationships you have with photogs (for those of you lucky enough to work with them.)

So pull the plug on the TV biological clock. Yank the thing out of the wall and smash it to bits.

Success has its own timetable. For some people it's right out of the gate, for others it takes time.

If you like what you're doing, you've already attained a degree of success, because most people in this world hate their jobs. Remember, it's not what someone else has attained. What they do has nothing to do with you.

If you're happy, you don't need the clock.

Okay, here's the point. The "clock" that is in your head needs to be turned off, because everyone has a different timeline. There are people who hit the show right out of the gate, and there are late bloomers. And it's not when you get there, but if you can stay.

LATE BLOOMING SWANS

Someone asked me the other day if I can help anyone with my mentoring program. Well, I'd like to think so. But it got me looking back and wondering what was the worst resume tape I'd gotten since I started my mentoring business.

Now I've looked at thousands of tapes over the years as a manager, and I've seen a few that were so bad they were funny. Then I'd replay the first tape I ever did in my mind and it was probably right up

there. Even the best people on the network were probably bad right out of the gate. Few people are naturals and can hit the ground running.

A few years ago I got a tape that was a total disaster. After four years in a broadcast journalism program this person obviously hadn't been taught a thing. Everything was a mess; the delivery, the writing, the package construction. The reporter had a "just rolled out of bed" look, with bad clothes and hair that looked as though she'd stuck her finger in a light socket.

Funny thing was, the person I talked to on the phone was nothing like the one I was looking at on tape. The one on the phone was bright, energetic, had great ideas, and was willing to learn.

There was a swan underneath, ready to get out but having no idea how to do it. Sadly, whoever had been teaching this person never took the time to see the swan, probably dismissing the student as someone who would never make it anyway.

A few years later the mess that rolled out of bed has a solid job in a good market. If you put the two tapes together you'd never even know it was the same person.

Many years ago we had an intern who was painfully shy. I wondered why someone who was such an introvert would want to work in television. She eventually opened up a little during her internship, but I never thought she'd be able to make it in television, simply because of her personality.

A few years later she called me up and sent me a tape. I was truly blown away. Give that woman a microphone and a camera and she's an in-your-face pit bull who made it to a big market. Who knew?

Point is, people change a lot in their 20's, both mentally and physically. You may look at your current tape and think you're never going to make it, but your "inner swan" may not have emerged yet.

So don't be so hard on yourselves. Careers don't grow overnight. Experience can't be rushed. Learn what you can along the way and throw away the calendar and the timetable.

Again, time is the fire in which we burn. Turn off the pilot light and wait for the swan.



FINALLY, THE TOP TEN BEST THINGS ABOUT A CAREER IN BROADCASTING

In no particular order, here are the absolute best things about working in television news:

1. The "front row ticket" to life. You get to rub elbows with celebrities, people who run the country, the most interesting people on the planet. You have a lifelong backstage pass while others pay big bucks for front row seats.

2. Working weekends. Your friends will feel sorry for you, but if you've never done it, you've missed the pure joy of a mostly empty building with no managers around. You can relax, turn the scanner down from an ear-splitting level, throw a frisbee around the newsroom or a football around the parking lot. You only have to dress from the waist up if you're an anchor, as the "weekend anchor collection" might include a suit jacket, tie, cut-offs and docksiders with no socks.

3. Photogs. 90 percent artists, 10 percent psychologists, these guys should wear a cape as they seem to have superpowers. They can fix a viewfinder or a carburetor, find anything without a GPS, and know what you're thinking before you know it. They have the most pride of any group in the news business, are the most loyal, and weren't born with the backstabbing gene. They can become true friends for life.

4. Newsroom camaraderie. If you're in a great newsroom with nice people, your life can be like an episode of *Friends* every day. It's like having a second family.

5. Orphan Holidays: When Thanksgiving and Christmas roll around and you're a thousand miles from home, you can feel depressed. But the holiday orphans always get together to celebrate and create some of the more memorable holidays ever.

6. Working with creative, smart people. The news business does feature some dim bulbs, but for the most part you're working with the smartest people on the planet. All with a seriously warped sense of humor.

7. You never watch the clock. How many people in other fields can say that? Your day goes by so fast it doesn't feel like work.

8. You make a living, and this isn't even a real job. Seriously, you tell stories for a paycheck!

9. Breaking a big story. The pulse goes up and suddenly you're a kid on Christmas morning.

10. Changing the world with a story. Imagine, showing up for work not knowing what your day holds and going home knowing you've saved or changed a life dramatically. Doctors do it all the time, but we can do it with words and pictures instead of a scalpel. Nothing, and I mean nothing, feels better than this.



THE GOLDEN RULE

I'd like to end this chapter with a quote from the late Carole Kneeland, who was a groundbreaking News Director in Texas.

"It is never the wrong time to do the right thing."



A FINAL WORD

If you've been in the business for a while, you remember your very first day. If you're searching for that first job, that day is a dream.

Either way, you can't ever forget it.

If you've been around the block a few times, the business can wear you down. You can get jaded, frustrated, overworked, underpaid. You may have been passed over for the position you wanted, might have a News Director who would make Lord Voldemort look like a Boy Scout, work for a company that throws nickles around like manhole covers. You might not like your co-workers, and, the big one... you might hate the market in which you're working. You could be a thousand miles from home and a fish out of water. You've tried like hell to find another job with no luck. You've reached the point where you're ready to walk. You think there has to be something better, and perhaps there is. You've been at the same station so long that you've done the same story over and over, and feel like you're on auto pilot. Rookies come after you've been there a while and leave for a better gig... with you still there. The scripts write themselves, because they've been written before. The only time you actually put your heart and soul into a story is when you think it might be worthy of a resume tape.

And if one of your original goals presents itself and it no longer excites you, it might be time to go.

For me, it was obvious that reporting had lost its magic. Well, not necessarily reporting, but everything about the news business and what it had become. And it all became clear in one day.

We were out shooting storm video when we stumbled onto something that would become a national story. Later that evening

management called me at home, telling me the network morning show wanted me to be a live guest as a witness to what I'd seen. I'd have to be there at four in the morning. I asked the manager if this meant I would get off early, but was told I would then have to work my regular shift till 6:30pm and turn two packages. I weighed the chance to be on national television (I'd had packages on various networks several times) versus a fourteen and a half hour shift that began with getting up in the middle of the night. At my age and being a night person I knew I'd be a zombie and have the equivalent of jet lag for a few days. "Do I have to do this? Or can you politely tell them I'm not available?" I asked. The manager said it was my choice. I decided a normal night's sleep and not working a double shift outweighed national exposure.

Sure, by that time in my career I'd done plenty of stories at odd hours, done ridiculously long shifts, once worked seventeen days in a row when some of my co-workers had gotten sick or been on vacation. Anyone in this business who has been around a while has done the something similar. But on this particular day, being comfortable outweighed having my face on the network. (And at that hour and at my age, I didn't want my face scaring children getting ready for school.)

Did I remember the magical feeling of that first day when I made that decision? I did not. Perhaps I should have, and maybe realized that I had a job telling stories for a living while other people worked at real jobs and went home exhausted every day. I'd worked in my Dad's delicatessen from the time I was thirteen until I graduated from college, and I knew the feeling of being bone tired when I got home. In any event, I left reporting for management a short time later. (Which I hated, but that's a story if I ever run into you in a bar very late at night during which my Noo Yawk accent will come out.)

Back to my dream of being a television reporter and how I reached it.

I'd climbed the ladder, starting at a small newspaper, then working in radio. Every night I'd close my eyes and imagine myself braving the big story. Growing up in the New York City area, I desperately wanted to be a member of the WABC Eyewitness News team.

And that first day with a TV station in Roanoke, Virginia I was walking on air, proud to finally say I was a television reporter. The newsroom was a special place, the team my new family, every day offering something new and different. I figured I was set for life.

If you're dreaming about that first day and finally get there, trust me, it's something special.

Again, don't let that memory go.

I still miss reporting, even though I'm way past my on-camera expiration date. I've worked as a freelance network field producer since 2005, but that's not the same as doing your own story.

So if you have one of those days that everyone in the business has, go home, open a bottle of wine, close your eyes and visualize that first day. Remember how you felt, what it meant to you.

It might help you make a decision.



NOW FOR THE OTHER SIDE of the coin... you haven't gotten that first job yet.

Right now it's a dream. You watch reporters and anchors you admire and see yourself in a similar role. Maybe you're working for a network, a big market, or your hometown station. You're making great money and have the world by the tail.

And then you reach the bottom step on the ladder. That first day on the job.

You're no longer in a classroom, discussing theory. You're no longer an intern there for a summer. It's a real job in the real world. (Favorite quote from rookie reporter after a few months on the job: "When is spring break?")

You're rubbing elbows with other young reporters (who will stab you in the back) veteran reporters (who will stab you in the back because you're there to take their jobs) and about to experience office politics for the first time in your life. But you've just walked into the first day of your own private fairy tale. You might go out on an actual story or just hang out in the newsroom and do orientation stuff.

Take it all in. Memorize it. Remember how you feel because some day in the future you may hate the thought of getting up and walking into a newsroom.

Or, if you replay that feeling every once in a while, it might prevent you from getting jaded, fed up, frustrated or ready to quit and get a real job.

Your first day only happens once. Savor it. It will come in handy in the future when you have a really awful day.

Remember what it took to get where you are.

Will you want to throw all that away?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Randy Tatano spent more than a decade as a television news reporter and anchor and six years as a manager. His work has taken him from the floors of the Democratic and Republican National Conventions to Ground Zero in New York to Jay Leno's backyard. His stories have been seen on NBC, ABC and CNN, and he's been honored for his work by AP and UPI. He currently works as a freelance network field producer for NBC, CBS, ABC and FOX along with doing work for major syndicators. He is also the co-author of a non-fiction book on the television industry, "Eyewitness Newsmen" and has written several novels about the media and politics under his pen name, Nick Harlow.

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