

**The  
Resource  
Guide  
for News  
Managers**

**Ready,  
Set,  
Lead!**

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## *RTNDF Welcomes You to* **Ready, Set, Lead!**

**M**any local television news directors are thrust into management positions with little or no formal leadership training. They have been trained in the craft of journalism but not in how to manage working relationships, create a newsroom culture, or develop a vision that inspires the staff. As a result, many news directors learn primarily through trial and error. While on-the-job training has value, news managers need more to be successful leaders.

*Ready, Set, Lead!* is not meant to be read in one sitting or necessarily from front to back. Instead, use it as a reference when you encounter problems, need encouragement or want practical advice and tips from fellow news leaders. It is designed from the busy news manager's perspective, with an understanding of daily challenges including limited resources, personnel pressures and tight deadlines. Make it your own personal management tool by turning to these sections as needed:

- **Newsroom Leadership**
- **Managing Up (and Sideways)**
- **Creating a Positive Culture**
- **Recruiting and Retaining**
- **Time Management**
- **Conducting Feedback and Evaluations**
- **Resolving Conflict**
- **Recommended reading and online resources**

This publication was produced through the Radio and Television News Directors Foundation's *News Leadership Project*, which aims to provide local news managers with specialized training through resources and seminars. We believe that developing your leadership skills will not only help your staff be more productive, cohesive and positive but also will ultimately help you succeed in your own career as a news manager. We hope this resource will help you hone your leadership skills, and we encourage you to contact RTNDF if you desire additional information about our news leadership offerings.

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# Ready, Set, Lead!

## *Acknowledgments*

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# Newsroom Leadership

**T**he news business is notorious for promoting well-qualified journalists into leadership positions with little or no formal training. “I was handed three sheets of ‘important contacts’ from the previous news director and given a set of keys,” one news director says, describing an experience that is all too typical.

As many news managers and their staffs have discovered, just being good at one’s craft does not necessarily prepare someone well for a leadership position. Management consultant Peter Drucker says there may be such a thing as a born leader, but there certainly aren’t enough of them. The good news is that leadership can be learned and leaders can improve if they’ll just invest the time.

Why bother? Effective leaders make everyone around them more productive. They create a healthy newsroom atmosphere in which everyone can contribute and grow. And plenty of evidence suggests that good leaders have more successful careers.

News directors need to understand the difference between management and leadership — and develop the skills to be good at both.

### Leadership vs. Management

Becoming a manager requires nothing more than the right title and job description, but neither makes you a *good* manager, let alone a *leader*. “You have conferred power because you have a title,” says associate news director Janice Gin of KTVU-TV in Oakland, CA. “To have influence is much more difficult.”

Managers and leaders both have influence but in different ways. “Managing is processes,” says former news director Marci Burdick, now senior vice president of Schurz Communications. “Leadership is seeing the big picture and creating an environment where employees can excel.”

Another way to look at it is that managers are about the *business*, while leaders are about the *people*. News directors need to be concerned

with both. As a manager, the news director *establishes systems and procedures* to support and produce the best possible journalism. As a leader, the news director *inspires and motivates the staff* to get the job done. “To lead is to set direction and establish a vision,” says Harvey Nagler, vice president of CBS Radio News. “Leadership is giving up power and empowering the people who work for you to take responsibility. People are your most vital asset to success, and we as leaders must always keep that in mind.”

For many news managers, that sounds easier than it is. In their previous roles as reporters, producers, assignment managers and photojournalists, they may have become accustomed to doing everything themselves. They often had to when no one else was around to help. Delegating responsibility to others does not come naturally, but it’s a critical skill for news managers. “Trying to do it all, every job in the shop, alienates and offends,” says Hearst-Argyle vice president of news Fred Young. “It stifles other people.”

Leaders also refrain from solving every problem in the newsroom. Instead, they help others learn how to solve problems themselves and leave them to it. “When I first started, one of my big deals was to prove I could make a decision,” says News 8 Austin news director Kevin Benz. “All that does is remove decision-making from the rest of the newsroom.” Now he encourages people to take chances and try something new. “People should not fear they’ll be berated or written up for making a mistake,” Benz says.

## LEADERS ARE

**Visionaries**  
they see the big picture  
and set direction.

**Ethical**  
they establish values  
and earn trust.

**Optimists**  
they look for the  
positive.

**Learners**  
they never stop  
growing.

Risk taking is not just accepted by strong leaders, it’s encouraged. “Otherwise, you’ll be the same as everyone else,” says Andy Still, news director at WYFF-TV in Greenville, SC. “You can’t be better without taking risks.”

Good leaders clearly identify objectives and hold themselves and others accountable for meeting them. That requires communicating newsroom goals with everyone, inside and outside the department, and doing it often. “People

get crossways if the objectives are gray,” Burdick says.

Communication is central, veteran news managers agree—and not just from the top down. Leaders need to listen at least as much as they talk and probably more. “To have an impact on an organization, you have to know the people as individuals,” says NPR managing editor Bill Marimow, former editor of *The Baltimore Sun*. “You have to know their hopes, their fears and their skills.”

## Leadership Style

Volumes have been written about leadership styles, and most of them come to the same conclusion: There is no single “right way” that fits all circumstances. “My style is still evolving,” says Mark Miller, news director at WBAL-AM in Baltimore, a job he’s held since 1990. A strong believer in coaching in the newsroom, Miller says he sees his role as “charting a general course and making sure everyone knows what direction we’re going in, then letting them do their jobs.”



**“You do not lead by hitting people over the head—that’s assault, not leadership.”**

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER



## Section 1

Former news director Jill Geisler, now head of the leadership and management group at The Poynter Institute, has identified seven typical newsroom leadership styles that she has observed. Her list notes both their pluses and minuses:

- **Commandant** Decisive, top-down autocrat who may manage by fear
- **Parent** Caring problem solver who takes concerns too personally
- **Team Captain** Strong teamwork advocate who may not pay enough attention to individuals
- **Coach** Good listener who works one-on-one to help staffers grow
- **Expert** Highly skilled journalist who may be too hands-on
- **Buddy** More of a peer than a boss who is good at fostering collegiality but may struggle with tough personnel decisions
- **Remote Controller** Isolated and distant administrator (manages by memos)

Geisler says that every manager has a style that is most natural to him or her. Good leaders, she says, learn to alter their styles to suit different situations and individuals. “The three key elements to having real influence on others are competence, integrity and empathy,” Geisler says.

When she first became a manager at age 21, Burdick says, “I thought [Gen. George] Patton was the model of a successful manager.” She now admits she had a lot to learn—and the biggest lesson was that people matter most. “I found my comfort zone where my No. 1 motivation was helping people succeed. If people succeed, the product succeeds.”

That requires taking a long-term view, which isn’t easy in the deadline-driven, results-oriented business of journalism. But KTVU-TV’s

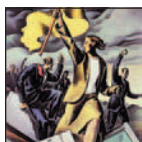
Geisler counsels patience. “Create wins, for your staff and yourself,” she says, even if progress comes in baby steps. “Find opportunities to feel successful.”

Focusing on people also means recognizing that people have lives outside of work. “If things are going on that can affect their performance, they need to know they can come to you and say what’s going on,” says Janet Evans of KRLD-AM in Arlington, TX. That doesn’t mean acting as “newsroom parent,” however. Experienced managers say it’s important to be compassionate, but it’s not healthy to be too involved in the staff’s personal problems.

Nor is it healthy to be too remote. News directors need to get out of their offices and into the newsroom, says Young of Hearst-Argyle. Too many news directors spend their days tied up in meetings, issuing memos, having little to do directly with the people and product of the newsroom. Staying connected is critical, says Evans. “You’ll see problems before they become huge, and you’ll find opportunities you would otherwise miss.”

Multiple strategies can help to keep a news director connected, especially in larger newsrooms:

- **Participate** Be there for morning meetings and post-show debriefs. Use these opportunities to share news philosophy and reinforce the vision.
- **Ask for updates** Make sure you are kept in the loop on special projects, sweeps plans, and morning and weekend coverage ideas by requesting written updates.
- **Vary your schedule** Show up occasionally at 4 a.m. to see how the overnight staff is doing. Drop in over the weekend, too
- **Support middle managers** Offer training, mentoring and feedback. Cultivate the newsroom’s future leaders.



**“Managing means you get through the day. Leading means you empower others.”**

BARBARA COCHRAN, PRESIDENT, RTNDA AND RTNDF

## Motivating Employees

The first step to motivating employees is getting to know them individually. “Find out people’s passions, what gets them jazzed up,” says Evans. For some on the staff, it may be the challenge of a different assignment or an opportunity to try something new. Giving employees some say over their work and encouraging them to exceed their own expectations can work wonders. “People will work harder if they know you care about their success,” says Susana Schuler, vice president/corporate news director of Nexstar Broadcasting Group. Listen to your employees’ aspirations and help them progress.

“My job is not to get everyone to be as good as the best employee but to close the gap between performance and potential,” Marimow says. The way he sees it, if each person on a staff of 20 can perform 20 percent better, that’s the equivalent of four new hires. In a time of shrinking budgets and increasing demands, that’s nothing to sneeze at.

### LEADERS SHARE POWER

#### *Seek Input*

Include your staff in setting goals for the newsroom

#### *Delegate*

Make everyone in charge of something

#### *Support*

Help your staff solve their own problems

#### *Communicate*

Often, with everyone

Recognizing and rewarding good work is one way to get more of it. Rewards can run the gamut from food to free tickets to sporting events to special training opportunities. “If I owned the station, I’d have \$50 gift certificates to include with a note,” says Marimow. But praise alone can work wonders. Knowing each staff member and what works best for them enables a manager to provide the right kind of motivation. Some people thrive on public praise, but others may prefer a private email.

In many newsrooms, however, some staffers simply cannot be motivated. Harvey Nagler of CBS Radio News says, “Up to 20 percent of the people won’t do what you want them to do.” Rather than fretting or expending huge amounts of energy on those staffers, Nagler counsels putting them in positions where they will do no harm if you cannot let them go. “You may need to isolate those people who infect the operation and hinder success,” he says.

## “New” Newsroom Managers

**A**sk veteran news managers what they wish they’d known when they started out, and the list is long. Says Burdick: “I wish I had been more comfortable that I didn’t need to know everything—that I could use the brainpower of everyone around me and would not be considered less of a manager for it.” Lee Giles, who retired in 2003 after 35 years as a news director at WISH-TV in Indianapolis, has a different regret: “I wish I had been more decisive about resolving conflict. I let it go on longer than I should have.”

New managers in every industry make similar errors, according to business

consultants. Scholar and author Warren Bennis, who founded the Leadership Institute at the University of Southern California’s Marshall School of Business, calls the first leadership experience “an agonizing education.” Among the most common mistakes:

- **Acting too fast**
- **Failing to communicate clearly**
- **Not delegating enough**
- **Continuing to identify with the troops**





## Section 1

Former news director Scott Libin, now at The Poynter Institute, says he had to force himself to observe and listen when he first moved into management. “You have to overcome the tendency to want to make a splash immediately,” he says.

“People watch so closely the first decisions. One of the biggest decisions you make is where to start.”

To figure out where to start, WTSP-TV news director Lane Michaelsen met one-on-one with every member of the news staff during his first few weeks on the job in Tampa, FL. “People thought I was going to tell them what they needed to know,” he says with a laugh. Instead, he listened and learned what needed to be done. Michaelsen admits it’s not easy to go slow. Television stations expect results tomorrow. But his advice is to do nothing for at least 60 days. “If you start with ‘We’re going to do *this*,’ you are setting yourself up to fail.”

New managers also have to learn to communicate carefully and fully. Evans of KRLD-AM says she’s a rapid-fire emailer and had to teach herself when not to push “send.” Emails don’t convey context and can easily be misconstrued. Now, Evans says, she tries to recognize when she should deliver a message in person, “so they see what’s going on behind it.”

General manager Ric Harris of WEWS-TV in Cleveland says that new managers often are unaware of

### LEADERSHIP VALUES

Take risks

Embody hope

Stay connected

Show compassion

as news director at WTIC-TV in Hartford, CT. A simple comment—“This sounds interesting. Check it out.”—was interpreted to mean, “Let’s do it.” Now, Lewis says, he’s careful to say either, “This story is worth doing,” or “Somebody make a call and tell me if this is a story.”

Many first-time news directors have trouble

the additional weight their words carry, now that they’re in charge. “Few department heads speak in a whisper” even if they are soft-spoken, Harris says. “Be mindful that your views can set into motion a lot of work that may not be intended.”

Paul Lewis says that’s a lesson he learned the hard

letting go of their previous jobs. Former reporters want to rewrite scripts. Exec-producers want to tweak the rundown. It’s natural to gravitate to what you’re good at, but veteran managers advise against it. “Accept that people will not do it as well as you would have done it the first time,” says Nagler of CBS Radio News. “With guidance from you, they will get better.”

A manager who is too involved with daily details may not consider the needs of the newsroom as a whole. “Remember to think globally,” says KIVU-TV associate news director Gin. “It’s not about your segment, show or task any more.”

Fledgling news directors who are promoted from within often struggle to redefine their relationships with longtime colleagues. “I made the mistake of thinking I

### EFFECTIVE LEADERS

Ask what needs to be done

Ask what is right for the enterprise

Develop action plans

Take responsibility for decisions

Make sure they are understood

Focus on opportunities rather than problems

Run productive meetings

Think and say “we” instead of “I”

PETER DRUCKER

could be everybody's friend," says Evans. Among other things, Evans learned to stop by social occasions and then leave. "People will have different discussions when you are around," she says.

Managing veteran journalists can pose a challenge, especially for first-time news directors. Experienced staffers concerned about the change may be cynical. It may help to consider the newsroom from the veterans' perspective. Benz of News 8 Austin believes long-timers often are fearful when a new news director arrives. "They want to be valued and respected, too," he says. "They want you to ask them for their help, and they want to feel a part of the team." Benz suggests using the veterans as mentors and tapping into their experience. At the same time, he says, veterans want to be challenged and crave constructive feedback. They are also concerned about quality of the product and want the news director to hold them and the newsroom to high standards.

All new managers need help, but they may not know where to find it. Here are some suggestions for first-time or relatively new managers:

- **Join an association** Many associations like RTNDA provide low-cost training and publications with guidance for newsroom leaders. Attend regional or national meetings to network with other news managers. Make a personal investment in your own success, and make yourself more valuable.

## MOTIVATION METHODS

Share control

Provide lots of encouragement

Set reachable goals

Celebrate and reward successes

## LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

Honest

Forward-looking

Inspiring

Competent

Fair

Supportive

BENNIS, MASON & MITROFF

- **Find a mentor** Ask a good leader to advise you. You may find a peer in a similar market, a corporate news executive, or even someone in another business. It's the leadership qualities that matter most.
- **Learn about leadership** Consult industry sources and read books about leadership. Be sure to ask your boss for plenty of feedback on your performance.
- **Work on your weaknesses** Are you disorganized? Can't read a spreadsheet? Take a class to hone your skills. These problems can get in the way of your success.

Michaelsen, a former photojournalist, says the best advice he got upon becoming a news director came from a general manager in his station group who told him not to forget where he came from. "Who you are and what skills you have got you the job," Michaelsen says. In his case, that didn't mean his ability to shoot steady, sequenced video. It meant his ability to negotiate—a skill he used daily on the street in gaining access to shoot stories—which he now draws on as a news director working with other department heads.

WBAL-AM news director Miller, a former reporter, says it also pays to learn new skills. He advises aspiring news directors to take an accounting course—especially if they're one of those people who can't balance their own checkbooks. "Unless you do budgets well, you can't ask for things that will make your newsroom better."



## Section 2

# Managing Up (and sideways)

**N**ews managers can become so focused on the product and the people in the newsroom that they forget to look *up*. That's a mistake—because relationships outside the newsroom, with the general manager and other department heads, are critically important to a news leader's long-term success. Managing those relationships takes time and effort, but veteran news directors say it's well worth the investment.

### Managing the Boss

Lee Giles, who served 35 years as news director at WISH-TV in Indianapolis under seven different general managers, understood the importance of managing up. "One GM said the secret to my longevity was that I was adaptable," he says. "I adapted to *their* styles." What Giles was actually doing was managing his bosses—figuring out how best to work with them so he could be a better advocate for the news department. But he also clearly understood his role. "I always

remembered that they were the boss and their word was final."

Tension between journalism and business values is almost unavoidable in commercial broadcasting, and it often manifests itself in a bumpy relationship between the news director and general manager. "There is disagreement over doing what is right for the viewers vs. what is right for the bottom line," said one news director at an RTNDF brainstorming meeting. In an ideal situation, participants agreed, the GM and news director are a mutually respectful team. "In the real world, however, the corporate bosses are putting a lot of pressure on the GM," another news director said. At the same time, "All the departments are fighting for the GM's attention, love and money. It's one big fat war zone."

Understanding that situation can help a news director build a better relationship with the general manager. "Respect the pressure [GMs] are under from their bosses," says News 8 Austin news director Kevin Benz. "Everybody answers to

somebody, and it affects their decision-making.”

To do a good job of managing the boss, you need to know that person as an individual—just as you need to know your staff in order to lead them well. “Managing is not about you,” says Janice Gin, associate news director of KTVU-TV in Oakland, CA.

## WHAT THE BOSS EXPECTS

No surprises

Respect

Honesty

Support

Solutions

scheduled meeting every week, but go more often so there are no surprises,” he says.

Be sensitive about the boss’s time. Know what he or she is working on, and know the difference between “got a minute” and “got an hour” conversations. But find the time to speak to your boss in person at

least once a week. “There is no substitute for face-to-face time,” says Benz.

Learning *what* to tell the boss is just as important as figuring out *how* to communicate it. “Ask yourself: If I were the GM, what would I want to know about content, personnel and strategy?” advises former news director Marci Burdick, now senior vice president of Schurz Communications. While Burdick belongs to the “school of no surprises,” she says that doesn’t mean she wants to know every detail or every development every day. “Know what rises to the level of a surprise that you need to notify the boss about,” she advises.

When you need to tell the boss about a bad decision or outcome, make sure the conversation includes lessons learned and steps to keep problems from recurring. General managers say they don’t appreciate it when an employee holds back information or spins a situation to avoid accepting responsibility.

Not all potential surprises are bad ones. Don’t forget to let the general manager know about good things happening in the newsroom, too. “Bosses need information,” Burdick says. “That’s not sucking up. There’s nothing wrong with sharing information that makes you look good.”

Angie Kucharski, recently promoted from news director to station manger and vice


## Communication First

Communication is essential to a good relationship between the news director and the general manager. That sounds simple, but it’s not. To make things go smoothly, a news director first needs to know how and when to best communicate with the boss. “Understand each other’s style of communication—who you are and who the person is that you are talking to,” says Ric Harris, general manager at WEWS-TV in Cleveland. “Before we can lead the team, we need to know how to communicate with each other.”

Does the boss prefer email, written memos, phone calls or personal visits? Does the preferred method depend on the timing and topic? What are the best times to speak with the boss—what day of the week or time of day? Is your boss a “drop by” person, or should you make an appointment? How do your needs fit with whatever else the boss is working on?

Some of the answers may be obvious. A closed-door boss is unlikely to welcome drop-by visits. When you’re just starting out with a new boss, there’s nothing wrong with asking directly. But stay flexible. The boss’s preferences may change depending on the context.

WTSP-TV news director Lane Michaelsen in Tampa, FL, believes it’s important to see the general manager in person every day. “Have a



**“Before we can lead the team we need to know how to communicate with each other.”**

RIC HARRIS, GENERAL MANAGER AT WEWS-TV



## Section 2

president of news at KCNC-TV in Denver, advises news directors to “know what decisions the boss wants to be involved in—especially with regard to hiring, discipline and termination.” In most cases, your boss will always want to be included on important personnel issues and decisions. “When it comes to recruiting or interviewing, ask your boss which candidates he or she would like to meet.” Although the new hire may report directly to you, they are joining the bigger team that your boss leads.

Pulling your boss into things such as employee contract renewals also can be a win-win. In Kucharski’s previous job as news director, she tried to make sure her general manager always knew when she was ready to sign contract renewals with employees. “When I could, I tried to include the GM, so we could both take an opportunity to thank the employee for their commitment to our team.” Her team appreciated the effort, and the general manager appreciated being included.

Bosses also need people who disagree with them privately. “I value open, honest conversation,” Cleveland GM Harris says. “All of us have a blind side. I want people to shed light on my blind side.”

When you come out of the office, support the boss. “Never make the boss look bad; never second-guess the boss in public,” Burdick says. Watch your language, too, says Hearst-Argyle Television vice president of news Fred Young. Referring to the boss as “they” and the newsroom as “we” sends the wrong message. Michaelsen agrees. “Part of the news director’s responsibility is to make sure the staff respects the GM,” he says.

NPR managing editor Bill Marimow says that in dealing with a new boss, you have to play it by ear and trust your

instincts, at least at first. He believes that a good relationship between news manager and boss is based on some universal principles:

- **Communication** Communicate one-on-one—in writing and in person—and tailor the communication style to your boss’ preference
- **Openness** Ask your boss whether there are unresolved issues you need to discuss
- **Respect** Agree that if you disagree, you will be reasonable and thoughtful
- **Trust** Live up to the letter and spirit of every commitment you make
- **Information** Understand the relationship of the business side to the journalism, and ask for training to understand it better
- **Candor** Provide constructive, candid, even job-imperiling criticism when something is wrong
- **Integrity** Be prepared that you might lose your job if you manage with integrity

Retired television news executive Lee Giles, who now teaches at the Indiana University School of Journalism, says he learned a valuable lesson from one general manager: “You gotta know when to go to the mat.” He did just that when a GM pressured him to fire one of his most aggressive reporters, someone who had angered the governor. “Even though he sounded rude, he asked the right questions,” says Giles. “I

didn’t like the approach, either, but I wouldn’t fire him because he was doing his job.” Giles felt sure he was going to lose his job for taking that stand, but in the end the GM eased off.

The budget is a common source of tension between the general manager and news director. As Benz of News 8 Austin points out, “Newsrooms feel abused because they’re looked at as spending all the

### MANAGING THE BOSS

Touch base daily

Know what the boss is working on

Be sensitive about the boss’s time

Disagree in private; support in public

Give positive reinforcement



## “Recognize that all the departments contribute to the success of the station.”

SUSANA SCHULER, CORPORATE NEWS DIRECTOR FOR NEXSTAR

money.” News directors should remember that the general manager has two primary responsibilities: protecting the license of the station and increasing the bottom line.

Former news director Paul Dughi, now general manager of KNDO-TV in Yakima, WA, and KNDU-TV in Kennewick, WA, says knowing the business side is critically important. News directors should stay on top of the budget every day and be adept at forecasting expenses. While he knows the pressure news directors are under to show quick results, his advice is to take a longer-term view and pre-sell your needs. “If you need a new live truck, complain about it often so the GM knows it’s an issue, not a reaction to something that just happened.”

### The Importance of a Strategic Plan

News managers are often so preoccupied with immediate issues and deadlines that they lose sight of their ultimate objectives. That’s why strategic planning is crucial to leadership. The station’s plan should be visionary and conceptual, yet realistic and attainable. A good plan will serve as a framework for decisions, provide a basis for more detailed planning, and stimulate change. It can also help the general manager and news director to strengthen their working relationship because it sets out a shared vision and common long-term goals.

If your station lacks a strategic plan, you might want to invest the time in the formal process to create one, with input

from all department heads. A manageable and memorable plan can establish a station culture that supports the overall mission. To make sure it is not just a piece of paper or a set of empty slogans, follow up in ways that ensure the plan is implemented:

- **Share** Make sure everyone knows the *plan*, then post a summary and share it with new employees.
- **Evaluate** Do a progress check regularly, at least every 18 months.
- **Revisit** Look at the plan frequently to remember what you said you were going to do. If changes are needed, make them.
- **Encourage diverse ideas** Thinking differently can help achieve shared goals.

### Working Across Departments

At many if not most stations, news is the 800-pound gorilla. It’s the station’s identity and its biggest moneymaker. It’s also the station’s biggest spender. Those basic facts can cause strain

between the newsroom and other departments. News managers also tend to be demanding and impatient, which can make other department heads frustrated and resentful.

“Recognize that all the departments contribute to the success of the station,” says Susana Schuler, vice president and corporate news director for Nexstar Broadcasting Group. “Sometimes other department’s priorities may come first.” Young of Hearst-Argyle says news directors also need to remember that every

### BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS DEPARTMENTS

Get to know people as individuals

Agree on priorities

Compromise when necessary

Offer help and ask for help

Keep working on the relationship; you are never “done”



## Section 2

station is part of a bigger company. “TV is a business; there is a bottom line,” he says. “We can’t be where we are without a sales department.”

Harris of WEWS-TV believes it’s his role as GM to make sure department heads see each other every day and interact. Instead of holding a strategic meeting once a week, he now convenes a daily department-heads meeting. Meeting regularly allows the leadership team to agree on priorities, decide on the day’s plan, and discuss what it takes to accomplish the plan. Department heads also raise problems from the day before and act immediately to fix them. Harris calls it a model of daily teamwork that has a positive ripple effect on everyone in the station.

If effective teamwork is not the standard in your newsroom, veteran managers say you’ll need to begin building relationships with other departments on your own. “The relationships you have with other department heads are the key to whether you have a smooth ride as news director,” Schuler says. “Deal with department heads like you’re working a beat. Don’t expect them to know how to deal with you.” Get to know the other department heads one-on-one, just as you would with your own staff or your general manager,

### FOSTERING TEAMWORK WITH OTHER DEPARTMENTS

Promote collaboration among department heads

Understand the functions, opportunities, challenges and goals of each department

Advocate for news, and educate other departments about news issues

Be willing to take a back seat and let other managers lead

Participate actively in station initiatives that do not include news

Communicate problems early—no surprises

Stay focused on the product; forget about the politics

Schuler says. “Develop partnerships. Make the investment. They appreciate it.”

To build a strong working relationship with other department heads, from the sales manager to the chief engineer, both sides must agree on priorities, goals and some basic principles:

- **Respect** Recognize that each department has goals, priorities and other considerations.
- **Ethics** Agree that there are journalistic lines that cannot be crossed.
- **Understanding** Understand each other’s roles and stresses. Create and support cross-learning opportunities so news employees get a better grounding in the business side and sales people can understand journalism ethics.
- **Communication** Hold regular face-to-face conversations. Share each department’s criteria for success, and jointly celebrate wins. Don’t make or tolerate negative references about other departments.
- **Effort** When problems arise, try to solve them together before asking the general manager to intervene.



**“Avoid victories over superiors.”**

BALTASAR GRACIAN, SPANISH JESUIT PHILOSOPHER AND WRITER 1601-58

Keeping other departments in the loop is essential. “Make them feel part of the mission, part of the news operation,” says Giles. Let sales know you are doing a story that will affect a client even though you are continuing with the story.

Burdick of Schurz Communications says news directors also need to ask what they can do to make things go more smoothly. “Recognize that other departments cannot turn on a dime,” she says. “One of the news director’s goals should be to make the other department head a success.” Among her favorite questions: What can we do to help you? How can we be more efficient?

When things go wrong, asking questions first can avoid misunderstandings and lead to simple solutions. When Scott Libin was news director at KSTP-TV in St. Paul, MN, newscast audio problems were an issue almost daily.

## AVOIDING DISSENT FROM YOUR BOSS AND OTHER DEPARTMENT HEADS

Bring issues to the table quickly; don’t let them fester

Look at issues from the other’s perspective

Understand and appreciate different roles and priorities

Agree to disagree, but show a unified front

Envision outcomes, not obstacles; avoid negative thinking

Be willing to ask for help

Instead of assuming technical incompetence, he asked engineering what was going on and learned that the newsroom was the source of the problem. Anchors and reporters were showing up late on the set and trying to do mic checks at 30 seconds to air. The rigid guidelines Libin instituted for pre-show mic checks not only solved the problem they also sent a message to engineering that the news director cared about their issues.

It takes time to build relationships, Schuler says, so news directors need to be patient. There are times, however, when all the patience in the world won’t pay off. “Make sure, if you’re going to get ugly with another department head, that the general manager is on board,” she advises. “And recognize the GM has the ultimate call and you may lose.”





## Section 3

# Creating a Positive Culture

**A**ll organizations have a culture—part climate, part custom, part values. The culture can inspire excellence or destroy initiative. It can encourage collaboration or reward confrontation. The culture is largely established and nurtured by an organization's leadership. In a newsroom, that means the news director.

When Lee Giles was first approached about becoming a news director, he wasn't sure he wanted the job. "The newsroom was a place of infighting and backbiting," he says. "People who were afraid of getting fired were inhibited from doing their jobs." Giles overcame his misgivings and went on to lead the WISH-TV newsroom in Indianapolis for 35 years. One of his first tasks,

however, was to change the newsroom culture.

"I wanted a team working together so it could be fun as well as work," Giles says. To get there, he became the newsroom's No. 1 cheerleader, dispensing frequent praise and showing enthusiasm for the work. He was also careful not to micromanage the staff. "Give people creative room to do the job," Giles says. "Don't be on their backs all the time."

Giles knew his station's culture well. He had worked there as a reporter, weekend anchor, producer, and on the assignment desk before moving up to news director. A news director coming into a new station, however, will need to assess the existing culture before

deciding whether changes need to be made. Former KSTP-TV news director Scott Libin warns, “It takes more than reading anonymous smear sites (Internet chat rooms gossiping about the journalism business) to understand a newsroom’s culture.” You need to talk to the people who work at the station.

Edgar Schein, a professor of management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and an expert on organizational psychology and culture, says that, more than anything, culture is a pattern of shared basic assumptions. Those assumptions guide decisions and actions in a group and may be so deeply imbedded, for better or worse, that they are taken for granted.

The role of the news director as a leader is to unearth any negative assumptions and replace them with constructive alternatives. For example, at some television stations, staffers assumed that photographers worked for reporters in gathering stories instead of *with* them. It fell to smart news directors to change those assumptions. With careful and consistent attention and reinforcement, they advocated “reporting in teams,” something that has today become a way of life at stations with strong connections to the National Press Photographers Association.

Observe your staff in light of these questions to gain insight into your newsroom’s

## THE MANAGER’S ROLE IN A POSITIVE CULTURE

Model positive  
behavior

Encourage open  
communication

Reward  
accomplishments

Be accessible and  
consistent

Hold yourself  
accountable

culture: Are staffers defensive and turf-conscious? Or do they pitch in and collaborate? “One symptom of a dysfunctional newsroom is when people admit they saw an error but figured somebody else would catch it,” Libin says. “In a healthy newsroom ... quality control is everybody’s job.”

When the Reader-ship Institute at Northwestern University’s Media Management Center conducted a formal assessment of newspaper cultures, it found that most have a defen-

sive culture, where employees protect their status and security either aggressively or passively. Staff members tend to be perfectionists, working long hours to meet narrow objectives, and confrontation often rules. According to the Institute, that’s not the most productive way to run a newsroom. The ideal culture, found in a minority of newsrooms, is constructive. “Constructive cultures encourage members to work to their full potential,” the assessment report stated, “resulting in high levels of motivation, satisfaction, [and] teamwork.”

### Changing the Culture

To move a newsroom toward a more constructive culture, managers need to model positive behavior, encourage open communication and reward accomplishments. They need to be accessible, accountable and consistent.



**“I’ve visited places where I love the newsroom culture—but nobody has explained to me how to create one, and more important—how to change a culture.”**

NEWS DIRECTOR AT RTNDF BRAINSTORMING SESSION



**“The task of the leader is to get his people from where they are to where they have not been.”**

HENRY KISSINGER

The news director sets the tone for the newsroom every day. Something as simple as a cheerful “good morning” and a polite goodbye can help to create an atmosphere of respect and appreciation. If there’s open warfare in the newsroom, however, it will take more than a smile to begin to turn things around. “Identify cliques and try to penetrate them,” advises Fred Young, Hearst-Argyle Television senior vice president of news. “Figure out who’s for you and against you. Be a cheerleader at the same time as [being] a law enforcement officer.” Former news director Marci Burdick, senior vice president of broadcasting and cable for Schurz Communications, agrees. “It’s OK to say there’s a new sheriff in town and the rules have changed—and the rules have to be the same for everybody.”

Favoritism—real or imagined—is a newsroom negative. People who perceive they are being treated unfairly often become less productive. Scheduling issues, for example, can lead to resentment and outright hostility. “I’m a big believer than you can’t screw with people’s personal lives,” Burdick says. “Little things like days off really matter.”

A constructive newsroom culture also keeps everyone in the loop. Regular staff meetings, in addition to daily editorial meetings, are essential to make sure all employees understand the direction of the station and the goals of the newsroom. Weekly memos can reinforce the message. “Because newsrooms churn so much, it’s an ongoing effort,” says

Janet Evans, assistant news director at KRLD-AM in the Dallas-Fort Worth market.

At News 8 Austin, news director Kevin Benz works hard to keep communication flowing. “We initiate debates and invite everyone to participate,” he says. “The most important thing is to make clear that no matter who you are on the job, your voice is appreciated and respected because each individual has a different perspective.” Benz believes that when people feel free to discuss, argue and dissent, the story selection improves. To make that happen, he says, he’s had to teach the managers to be open-minded and really listen to what others have to say. “No shaken heads, no rolled eyes,” he says. “It doesn’t work if people think the boss is right all the time.”

Former news director Paul Dughi, now general manager of KNDO-TV and KNDU-TV in Yakima and Kennewick, WA, respectively, says he used the morning meeting to explain his values. “I would pick a story that gave me an opportunity to explain things philosophically,” he says. “Find one thing that people did well, and show-

case the behavior you’re trying to get other people to model.” At KSTP-TV in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Scott Libin began each morning meeting by celebrating a success from the day before. “Even the career cynics who were rolling their eyes initially felt it was cool to see their work held up,” he says.

Building this kind of positive and inclusive culture is a slow process in which every small step counts.

## VALUES OF A CONSTRUCTIVE CULTURE

Quality

Creativity

Cooperation

Openness

Risk-taking

Learning and growth

The following principles will help along the way:

- **Share decision-making** Put some of the power in employees' hands. Encourage everyone to attend editorial meetings.
- **Meet the newsroom's needs** Ask every single person in the newsroom what they need to do their job. If you can't afford things right away, develop a priority list and make sure everyone knows when a need has been met.
- **Stay positive** Keep your expectations high and offer tough, constructive criticism, but don't do it in a mean-spirited manner. You want people to feel they are learning, not being attacked.
- **Encourage mentoring** Enlist your senior staff as newsroom mentors. New employees often look up to veterans and will listen more closely to what they say.
- **Keep the door open** Don't bury yourself in the bureaucracy of management. Make yourself visible, and encourage your employees to communicate with you throughout the day.
- **Create and maintain systems**  
Newsrooms need effective systems that support the culture.

Hiring, promotion and training also play a role in newsroom culture. KRLD-AM regularly offers training to employees. "It sets a culture where you never stop learning and growing," Evans says. At WHBQ-TV in Memphis, TN, news director Ken Jobe says part of the culture is to promote staff from within. "They feel rewarded from a journalistic standpoint." It's a useful point to stress when recruiting new employees, as well. "It shows people they have the ability to move up," Jobe says. Thor Wasbotten, former news director at KGUN-TV in Phoenix and now at Pennsylvania State University, cautions that hiring from within can backfire if not done correctly. Managers promoted from within need support, training and resources similar to that offered to new people walking in the door. All too often, this is overlooked.

Diversity also is an important part of many newsrooms' culture. "You need a variety of opinions," Jobe says, "Married, single, older, younger,

## Twelve Questions for a Healthy Newsroom Culture

The Gallup Organization has trademarked a set of 12 employee survey questions that it says are terrific predictors of a successful workplace culture. The details are outlined in *First, Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently* by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman of The Gallup Organization. According to Gallup, "Employee agreement with these 12 questions consistently correlates to higher employee retention, higher customer satisfaction, higher productivity, and higher profitability in all kinds of companies in a wide variety of industries." These 12 questions can serve as an instant health check for your newsroom:

1. I know what is expected of me at work.
2. I have the equipment and materials I need to do my job right.
3. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
4. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.
5. My supervisor or someone at work seems to care about me as a person.
6. There is someone at work who encourages my development.
7. At work, my opinions seem to count.
8. The mission/purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.
9. My associates are committed to doing quality work.
10. I have a best friend at work.
11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
12. This last year, I have had opportunities to learn and grow.



## Section 3

white, black.” Many news managers make a concerted effort to recruit and mentor diverse job candidates as a way of reinforcing the newsroom’s commitment to diversity. Some newsrooms, like KRON-TV in San Francisco, have set up committees to discuss and monitor diversity in staff and content.

The staff-developed job expectations, or “automatics,” at WTSP-TV in Tampa, FL, have become part of that newsroom’s culture. (See “Automatics,” under the Conducting Feedback and Evaluations section.) Such clearly defined job expectations show “the newsroom’s professionalism and dedication,” says news director Lane Michaelsen. “We discuss them before hiring, and it can be a selling point.”

### Building Morale

KRLD-AM’s Evans says she tries to live by three simple rules: “Be fair, be flexible and have fun.” Keeping it fun at her station means celebrating staff birthdays and providing food on holidays. It’s good for morale, which establishes a positive newsroom culture. Many morale boosters cost little or nothing:

- **Break bread** Take an employee out to lunch. It could even be fast food, but it shows you care. Be sure to remember people who work nights and weekends by buying them a pizza to show how much you value their work. Provide food on holidays.
- **Send notes** Mail thank-you notes and holiday cards to employees and their families.
- **Loosen up and have fun** Consider a staff picnic or music after the newscast. Celebrate birthdays and employee anniversaries.

WBAL-AM news director Mark Miller says having fun is a hallmark of his newsroom — and a selling point to new hires. “We all get along because we all laugh at each other,” he says. “We don’t pay them enough *not* to have fun.”

An army travels on its stomach, the saying goes, but it’s true of newsrooms as well. Food is a sure-fire morale builder. At WGAL-TV in Lancaster, PA, news director Dan O’Donnell often cooks for the crew—from holiday turkeys to Saturday breakfasts before training sessions. Providing food during big stories is always a welcome gesture. It’s a good idea to make food available to crews in the field as well as the staff in the newsroom.

At WHBQ-TV, Jobe keeps a big candy dish in his office and fills it often. “It’s easy for a news director to be isolated from little problems,” he says. When people come in for candy, he talks to them about things other than work. “That lets me hear what the problems are.”

### Maintaining the Culture

To keep the culture on track, managers need to lead by example. It’s not enough to talk the talk; you have to walk it, too. If the goal is a newsroom culture that encourages risk-taking, the news director can’t second-guess every decision. If the goal is a newsroom culture that respects a balance between work and personal life, the news director can’t spend 18 hours a day in the newsroom.

Encourage teamwork by breaking down the walls between work groups and departments. At KSTP-TV, former news director Scott Libin says, the rule was that no “discrepancy report” (a report filed after a newscast when something goes wrong) could be put in writing until it was discussed with the people involved. “It’s harder to judge someone when you’re looking them in the eye,” Libin says. “People began to establish relationships that did not exist before.”



**“The art of progress is to preserve order amid change and to preserve change amid order.”**

ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD, ENGLISH MATHEMATICIAN AND PHILOSOPHER, 1861-1947



**“A good leader inspires others with confidence in him; a great leader inspires them with confidence in themselves.”**

ANONYMOUS

Another way to maintain the culture is to set high standards, but don't be afraid to admit your fallibility. WBAL-AM's Miller believes strongly in the value of self-deprecating humor. “The boss needs to laugh about himself in front of people,” he says. “It shows we're human.”

### **Do Your Systems Support Your Culture?**

According to Jill Geisler of The Poynter Institute, one of the most important aspects to maintaining a culture is to check your systems because systems reflect chain of command, work flow, priorities, departmental connections, expenditures, communication and quality control. If you've really worked at it, they reflect your values, too. “I think systems are the place where leadership and management intersect, where leaders make certain that their vision isn't just

philosophy but, rather, a part of the everyday engine of the business,” Geisler says.

Edgar Schein, in his book *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, says, “One of the most powerful mechanisms that founders, leaders, managers or even colleagues have available for communicating what they believe or what they care about is what they systematically pay attention to. This can mean anything from what they notice and comment on to what they measure, control, reward and in other ways systematically deal with.”

Geisler advises newsrooms to check their systems to see whether the culture that they claim exists is truly embedded in their daily routines. If you can't discern it, then those systems could be defeating the very culture you hope to build. “In organizations, we get what we plan for (or fail to plan for), what we prioritize, and what we reward,” Geisler says.



## Section 4

# Recruiting and Retaining

**L**eaders who are interested in building a better newsroom know that it takes “good people”—the right people with the right skills in the right jobs. NPR managing editor Bill Marimow says hiring the right people is the most important thing any manager can do. “You can have the best management structure in the world and have the wrong people and have a bad news organization.”

Recruiting, hiring and retaining good people are, therefore, essential to the news director’s success. How does a news manager find and hire those people? What does it take to get them to stay, given that turnover is a fact of life in most newsrooms?

One way to stay on top of the personnel carousel and find those “good” people is to stay in recruiting mode at all times. Instead of feeling overwhelmed by the stacks of resume tapes threatening to overrun your office, think of the tapes as a way to keep tabs on candidates with potential. Consider scheduling time to review a few tapes at a time on a regular basis, even if you’re not hiring.

“Recruiting is a 24/7 part of the job, particularly in medium and smaller markets,” says Ken Jobe, vice president of news at WHBQ-TV in Memphis, TN. To make sure he has a strong pool of candidates when an opening occurs, Jobe invests a lot of time in finding and tracking

potential employees. “If I see a person with promise, I’ll write them with comments on their tape even if we don’t have an opening,” he says. Jobe routinely critiques several people once a quarter. It takes 20 minutes, he says, and can really pay off.

“Pre-planning is the most important part of hiring,” says KTVU-TV associate news director Janice Gin in San Francisco-Oakland. “Evaluate the needs of the newsroom separately from the job you have to fill.” Gin suggests asking two basic questions: What are your objectives for the team you are trying

to build, and what is your commitment to the new hire? “You should also hire people who will fit your newsroom and station culture. If your culture values diversity, you will want to make sure your new hire enhances that value.”

Gin also urges hiring managers to consider whether they have the time to train a new employee before bringing in someone who needs hands-on guidance. “If it’s budget time, you may not be able to afford to hire someone you need to pay close attention to, unless you have someone on staff who can do the coaching,” she says. Once you know your personal commitment to a new hire and the newsroom’s overall needs, says Gin, it’s easier to recruit the right people and to trim down the list of candidates.

Knowing the newsroom’s strengths also makes recruiting easier. WBAL-AM news director Mark Miller says he sells his Baltimore station as a place where people will want to work by selling the quality of the reporting. That tells candidates they can learn from the best. “I make clear up front that I am going to try to grow [their] careers,” Miller says. Letting job candidates know how current and former employees have excelled in the profession can make your

## RECRUITING TIPS

Attend journalism conventions and critique tapes to spot talent

Screen and respond to promising tape submissions

Stay in touch with potential hires

Enlist your staff in spotting talent

Mine close-by markets

newsroom a more attractive destination.

The Poynter Institute’s Scott Libin, former news director at KSTP-TV in Minneapolis-St. Paul, believes a constructive newsroom culture can be a recruiting tool. “Let potential hires roam the newsroom and get the real story. They can learn things from non-managers, and even if not all of it is flattering, it’s best to get it out at the outset.” WTSP-TV’s vice president and news director, Lane Michaelsen, shares his station’s written job expectations with potential hires because they

reflect the importance of making work fun and they speak to the environment of the newsroom. (See “Automatics” under the Conducting Feedback and Evaluations section.) Michaelsen says, “People tend to enjoy working here.”

Because a “good fit” matters to Gin, she questions prospective hires to see how much they know about the station. “I want to see if they’ve done their homework.” She also has prospects meet with all newsroom managers so the other managers can weigh in.

### Diversity Matters

Recruiting a diverse workforce takes additional effort, news managers say, but the payoff is worth it. “You need to have a mix of ideas, backgrounds, cultures,” says general manager Patti Smith of KVUE-TV in Austin, TX. A diverse staff not only reflects the diversity of the community, but it also brings ideas and perspectives into the newsroom that might otherwise be missed. “Building diversity takes a long-term commitment,” says Susana Schuler, vice president and corporate news director of Nexstar Broadcasting Group.





## Section 4

A variety of strategies can help build a more diverse staff:

- **Patience** Be willing to wait a little longer and look a little harder to find well-qualified, diverse candidates.
- **Accountability** Hold managers more accountable for hiring a diverse staff.
- **Partnerships** Ask people of color on staff whether they would be willing to help recruit new employees. Work with minority journalism groups to enrich your applicant pool.
- **Awareness** Be aware of the climate in your newsroom and community and understand how that climate will affect minority employees.
- **Support** Help new hires make the transition to both the newsroom and the community.

### Hiring Processes That Work

Resume tapes are a starting point when you're looking for candidates, but Jobe says he never hires from a resume tape alone. "I call back and ask for an average week of stories or broadcasts," he says, to get a better idea of the person's day-to-day work. If they make the cut, he'll bring them in for an interview. In addition to strong

### RETENTION TIPS

Demonstrate that you care

Encourage professional development

Set high professional standards

Give praise and recognition

Show a path to career advancement

journalism skills, he looks for a strong work ethic and a passion for the business. Jobe also wants to learn more about candidates as individuals. "I'm a dinner-and-a-beer guy," he says. "I want to know what they do for fun."

When Schurz Communications executive Marci Burdick was a small-market news director, she says, she knew that many of her new hires wouldn't stay with her long. "I spent a lot of time ... asking what people wanted to be after

working for me, and then helping them achieve. I told people upfront, you will make mistakes. New hires got assigned to a person for 90 days who would be signing off on their work and looking at tapes."

Once a decision is made about filling a job, it's important to let everyone know—including any finalists who were not selected. Instead of sending an impersonal letter, Jobe calls those candidates to tell them they didn't get the job, and why. Often it's because he has promoted someone from inside the station, so he'll encourage applicants to try again. "When they hear that someone was promoted from within, it tells them that if they got in, they could be promoted," he says.

### Getting New Hires Started Right

Letting someone know they got the job isn't the end of the hiring process; it's just the beginning.



**"The best leader is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it."**

THEODORE ROOSEVELT



**“You’re only as good as the people you hire.”**

RAY KROC, FOUNDER OF MCDONALD’S

Before a new staffer even arrives in town, here are some things you can do to help them get acclimated:

- **Send a welcome packet** Include the basics about your station’s brand and newsroom philosophy as well as background on the community and advice on finding housing.
- **Make them read** A subscription to the local paper or a link to the online edition is one way to help a new hire feel a part of the community even before he or she arrives.
- **Introduce them** Provide the new hire with email addresses or phone numbers of key newsroom staff, including the anchors and producers they’re most likely to work with at the start. Encourage them to touch base before the start date.

Orientation at many television stations consists of a whirlwind tour, during which the new hire gets a photo ID, a packet of forms, and a computer login. For many new hires, the first day on the job also includes writing or reporting for one or more newscasts. Bringing someone in who can hit the ground running is a goal in most newsrooms, but without some preparation, a new hire can trip and fall flat and may even harm the news organization. Investing time at the front end can pay off over the long haul.

News 8 Austin (a 24-hour cable news operation) has developed a formal four-week orientation program. Each new employee gets a 30-day training plan—a checklist of skills to master and assignments to complete—that a supervisor must sign off on, one by one. Every reporter and photojournalist spends a week on the assignment desk, a week with producers in the control room, and a week learning online web production. Associate producers spend a week with photographers in the field. The training guides also

include steps to complete to be eligible for promotion. An entry-level associate producer can see clearly what the career path is to producer and then to executive producer. News director Kevin Benz says that providing a career path gives employees hope for advancement and places the responsibility for success on the employee.

News 8 Austin also pairs new staffers with a mentor on the same or similar schedule. An incoming assignment editor is paired with a desk mentor, who provides daily guidance and weekly progress reports to the employee and the assignment manager. An associate producer works with an experienced producer mentor and meets weekly with an executive producer to discuss performance. The system ensures that new hires get training and support.

Other stations take a variety of steps to bring new hires up to speed:

- **Make the rounds** Introduce the new person to all departments, not just the newsroom, and don’t try to do it all in one day.
- **Show them the ropes** It may seem obvious, but new hires need time to adjust to new systems: voice mail, email, scripting, and editing.
- **Pair them up** Even if you don’t have a formal mentoring program, put new reporters with veteran photojournalists, or let new producers shadow your best producers.
- **Be social** Organize an informal gathering to help your new hire start getting to know co-workers on a more casual basis.
- **Stay available** Touch base every few days at the start, to see how things are going. Check in with other news managers as well as the new hire’s peers, and provide frequent feedback for the first three months. (See the Conducting Feedback and Evaluations section.)



## Section 4

### Retention

In 35 years as a news director at WISH-TV in Indianapolis, Lee Giles hired plenty of people, many of whom stayed around for the long term. That wasn't just happenstance. "As I hired I looked for two things," Giles says. "People who wanted to work for this TV station and stability—people who liked the Midwest and wanted to stay here."

Jobe uses similar criteria in Memphis. "If I have two equal applicants, I will pick someone from here because they hit the ground running and because I think they'll stay longer," he says. "That has proved to be true."

Hiring people who want to make a long-term commitment to the community is one way to build your retention rate, but it's not the only way. Obviously, a competitive starting salary and regular raises help keep employees satisfied, but research shows that people generally don't stay in jobs just for the money.

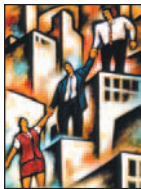
According to a study of nearly 6,000 workers across all industries by human-resources consulting firm Towers Perrin, other factors matter more:

- **Relationships** People leave jobs when they have to work for bad managers.

- **Reputation** People want to work for a winner. A station's reputation as a good employer helps to keep employees engaged.
- **Teamwork** People stay when they like their colleagues and co-workers.
- **Clarity** People stay when they feel fully informed about what the company expects and what they can expect in return.
- **Recognition** People appreciate being recognized for good work, and rewards don't have to be financial.
- **Development** People want the chance to learn new skills, to grow and to move up.

Mentoring, formal or informal, can help a newsroom keep and groom good employees for advancement. At WBAL-AM in Baltimore, staff veterans serve as mentors to new hires, providing regular coaching and guidance. (See "Coaching for Success" under the Conducting Feedback and Evaluations section.)

Studies say the No. 1 thing that motivates people to leave jobs is their relationship with their immediate supervisor. "A bad manager causes you to leave," says Chris Michalak, talent management practices leader at Towers Perrin, "but that doesn't mean a good manager causes you to stay." What employees really want is a sense that their work is valued and that they are contributing to a good organization.



**"A strong leader knows that if he develops his associates he will be even stronger."**

JAMES F. LINCOLN, AMERICAN INDUSTRIALIST AND PHILOSOPHER, 1883-1965



# Time Management

It's critically important for news managers to be good *time* managers so they can not only perform the daily duties required of any boss but also deal with relationships and develop and communicate their vision for the newsroom.

Even though good time management skills are essential to a news director's success, many often feel swamped by everything they must accomplish in a day. "I need to know how to keep control over that stack of papers dumped on my desk," said one news director at an RTNDF brainstorming meeting, as well as "how to make sure each staffer gets enough time from me."

Paperwork, people, projects, problems — it's no wonder that many news managers feel overwhelmed. They may need help in becoming more organized so they can find what they're looking for quickly and avoid feeling out of control. They also may need to break some bad habits that cause them to fritter away the time they desperately need to get the job done.

### Take Inventory

To track where the time goes, it may be helpful to take inventory of the following:

- **Tasks** Responding to email, memo writing, redoing routine work
- **People** Taking phone calls, interruptions, repeated conversations
- **Meetings** Long discussions where little is accomplished
- **Information** Looking for stuff you can't find quickly

One reason managers feel overwhelmed by the demands on their time, experts say, is because they're always fighting fires. "They assume that the business will come to a crashing halt without them," writes Sumantra Ghoshal and Heike Bruch in the *Harvard Business Review* (March 2004). "[They] allow real or imagined day-to-day work demands to subsume their own judgment."

It takes discipline to become a better time manager. Being busy all the time is a habit, born out of a desire to be indispensable. Breaking that habit can save you both time and frustration — and help you become a better leader in the newsroom.

<b>ORGANIZE YOURSELF</b>
Use a planner
Eliminate clutter
Set priorities
Schedule time

or next to your desk. Put everything else away. Otherwise, it's the opposite of "out-of-sight, out-of-mind." If you can see it, it will be on your mind, even if there's no good reason. By keeping only immediate priorities in view, you can focus on them and get them done.

## Get Organization Down to a System

Most people benefit from using an organizer or planner. It can be a date book, a personal data assistant like a Palm Pilot, or a computer program like Microsoft Outlook. Choose whatever system works for you, but make sure it's portable and easy to update. One advantage of an electronic system is that you can back it up. Just be sure you do, and often, because losing an organizer is tantamount to losing your brain.

Organizers have three basic components: contacts, calendar and tasks. Make time every day to add contact information. Enter meeting dates and times as soon as you know them. Write down your daily "to do" lists. Carry the organizer with you so you can add to your task list whenever you think of something that needs to be done. Use the system not just for work but also for the rest of your life —home, family and community. As a busy news director, the only way to be sure you *have* a life may be to schedule it.

If you use an electronic system, learn all of its capabilities. Know how to use email folders; how to set rules to direct incoming messages to the appropriate folders; and how to search for messages, contacts and other information. Kevin Benz, news director at News 8 Austin, created a folder just for messages from his general manager so he can easily tell whether anything new has come in from the boss without scrolling through his entire in-box.

Studies have shown that the person who works with a messy desk spends, on average, one and a half hours per day looking for things or being distracted by the things in view. Keep working files in plain view—in a standing file on

## Prioritize

"When news directors say they don't have time, it's often because they don't have a clear focus on priorities," says Jay Elggren, a senior consultant for the consulting firm FranklinCovey, who worked with managers at KLAS-TV in Las Vegas to prepare for an RTNDF newsroom time management workshop. "Getting a handle on priorities is the key to successful time management" he says. To set priorities, FranklinCovey advocates sorting each task into one of four quadrants:

<b>Urgent Important</b>	<b>Not Urgent Important</b>
<b>Urgent Not Important</b>	<b>Not Urgent Not Important</b>

Author Stephen Covey says that most people spend far too much time on urgent tasks that are not important and neglect important tasks that are not urgent. By setting priorities, a busy manager can budget time for strategic thinking and planning—important tasks that are not driven by deadlines.

Consultant and writer Ken Blanchard uses slightly different quadrants:

<b>Have to do Want to do</b>	<b>Don't have to do Want to do</b>
<b>Have to do Don't want to do</b>	<b>Don't have to do Don't want to do</b>



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In both models, the lower-left quadrant seems to be the biggest problem area. Deadline-driven news managers tend to focus on what is most urgent (what they have to do) at the expense of what they really need or want to do (like working on next year's budget) that may be less urgent. Setting priorities helps you make time for those important but less urgent tasks.

Elggren's formula for success is simple: Think it. Write it. See it. Whenever you think of something that needs to be done, write it down, and do it in such a way that you can see the timeline for accomplishing the task. Doing tasks "as they come up" may keep you from finishing more important projects first. Scott Libin of The Poynter Institute, former news director at KSTP-TV in St. Paul, MN, says that one of the most important things he ever learned was Covey's notion of "first things first." "Little things will fill up your day, leaving big things undone," he says. "Decide what really matters and start there."

Angie Kucharski, station manager and vice president of news at KCNC-TV in Denver, uses both a planner and a big desk calendar that she carries around the building. "I may look strange," she says, "but it really helps me keep a focus on plans and events." Kucharski also color-codes tasks in her planner and her project folders so she can see priorities at a glance.

Paul Dughi, general manager of KNDO-TV in Yakima, WA, and KNDU-TV in Kennewick, WA, is an inveterate list-maker. "I start the day by printing my calendar and task list. Then I review the list and cross off those I won't deal with today," Dughi says. That makes the daily list

manageable, and the remaining tasks just carry forward in his computer planner. "It feels great when I can mark a task as done."

### The Four D's

When issues arise during the day—and they will—the "Four D's" approach can help:

- Do it
- Dump it
- Divert it
- Delegate it

If a task will take only a couple of minutes, just do it, says Eric Hulnick, managing editor at KLAS-TV in Las Vegas. Hulnick fine-tuned his time management skills by meeting with a FranklinCovey consultant to prepare for an RTNDF workshop. One lesson he learned was how to deal with the email that filled his in-box. "I could never get through the whole list," says Hulnick. Even though he sorted his messages into subfolders, "to do" items always remained in the in-box. "I created a new folder and called it 'to be done.' Before I do today's email, I go back and deal with everything from yesterday." Hulnick says his goal is to have an empty in-box when he leaves work.

Dughi not only dumps email from his in-box during the day, he does it again from home both at night and before going in to work. "I get rid of the junk and I know what the crises are so I can think about them on the way in," he says. "It keeps me from feeling overwhelmed at the start of the day."

Tasks that will take longer should be diverted from the daily list to a time when you will commit to getting the work done. "Scheduled time drives out unscheduled time," says Paul Lewis,



**"What causes me the most personal stress with my job in the newsroom is the amount of time I spend away from my children and wife. I am terribly troubled by that . . . especially where my children are concerned."**

NEWS DIRECTOR AT RTNDF BRAINSTORMING SESSION

news director at WTIC-TV in Hartford, CT. To make sure something actually happens, he says, you have to put it on your calendar.

One of the hardest time management lessons for some news directors to learn is to stop doing everything themselves and to delegate tasks to others. If you tend to be a perfectionist, it's hard let someone else do a job you think you could do better. Part of being a leader, however, is letting the staff do what they've been hired to do. As Dughi puts it, "Find good people and trust them."

## Guard Your Time

News directors also need to guard their own time so they can focus on big projects like the budget. People who keep an open-door policy may find themselves overwhelmed by "drive-by" conversations—those "knock, knock, got a minute?" requests that can turn into hour-long discussions. Lane Michaelsen at WTSP-TV in Tampa, FL, had to train his staff to work within his schedule. "When people ask me if I have a minute, I'll say, no, I have five," he says. "It became a joke. Now people ask for 2 1/2 minutes or 10."

Benz of News 8 Austin also keeps his door open unless he's involved in a major project. In that case, he lets others know why the door is closed. "I want the other news managers to know when I'm working on the budget or interviewing a potential hire, so they won't interrupt," he says.

Establishing patterns can protect your time as well. Set aside a specific time of day for planning or other things you have to do and stick to it. Let your staff know your new schedule, and don't let people divert you unless it's a crisis. Some people like to set a block of time for certain tasks. Stay focused on that task and only that task. If you fear getting so involved that you forget to come up for air, set an alarm to remind you to put the task aside after a set period of time.

Checking email every time the "new mail" sounder goes off is a sure way to get interrupted

## STOP PROCRASTINATING

Plan tasks for peak time

Break the work down

Set interim deadlines

Reward yourself

dozens of times a day. Consider turning the sounder off if you're trying to get a project done, and check and respond to email on your own schedule. To regain control over the email monster, one news director decreed that email could be used only for group messages, not one-to-one communication.

Word is that it cut the newsroom's email traffic by 30 percent.

Hulnick sometimes sets an out-of-office message on his email for a day or a few hours, even when he's in, if he's working on a task that requires total concentration. He doesn't do the same with voice mail, however. He always picks up the phone when it rings. "I live in fear of missing a story," he says. "But I don't always talk right then. I may take a number and call back." Scheduling a time to talk can keep phone tag to a minimum.

## Learn to Plan

Planning is not a skill that comes naturally to people who live by daily deadlines. "We're good at crisis management. We don't plan," says Susana Schuler, vice president and corporate news director of Nexstar Broadcasting Group. "Build time for preparation into your schedule."

Everyone has a time of day when they're sharpest. Plan to tackle the most demanding tasks when you are fresh and focused. Having a plan can help control procrastination—the tendency to put off difficult or disliked tasks.

How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time, the adage goes. Get an early start on long-term projects and they'll seem less overwhelming. Hulnick begins work on the budget process six months before the final budget is due. He sets aside an hour or so every so often to make slow but steady progress on the budget. He keeps a schedule for getting evaluations done, too, with interim deadlines for getting materials from others. "It takes the same amount of time to do if you do it early," he says.



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“The fewer things you do on deadline, the better you’re going to feel.”

Dughi of KNDU-TV and KNDO-TV also believes that planning has helped him find a balance between life and work. “Some days I have to force myself to leave,” he says. “But I now take time for a son’s soccer game because I know I’ll be answering viewer emails at 11 at night.”

Some people find that planning a reward for a job well done adds to the satisfaction of crossing an item off the daily task list. Treat yourself to a little something, and then get back to work.

### Effective Meetings

Meetings are an inevitable fact of life in every newsroom, and they’re sometimes painful. Libin of The Poynter Institute says it’s tough to strike the right balance between helping people feel heard and managing the clock. A meeting that is too open can run on seemingly forever. But failing to let people finish their thoughts can quash their desire to contribute ideas the next time. NPR managing editor Bill Marimow has three basic meeting rules: Be polite, be efficient, and get done on time, no matter what. To stay on track, he always has an agenda and sticks to it.

Dughi’s meeting rules are similar: Don’t meet without a purpose and a stated goal. He’s been known to run a stopwatch during meetings, limiting department heads’ comments to

## BETTER MEETINGS

Start on time

Have an agenda

Avoid tangents

Focus on decisions

Spell out next steps

End on time

just two minutes and saving the rest of the time for group brainstorming. At one station, he recalls, the news director shortened the daily editorial meetings by holding them standing up around the assignment desk.

Pre-meeting assignments are another way to keep the meeting focused. Instead of starting with the assignment manager’s

recitation of the daybook, Dughi suggests giving others a role to report on the news of the day based on what they’ve seen in newspapers, on websites, or heard on morning talk radio.

Former news director Tom Dolan, now president of Dolan Media Management, says producing the meeting like a newscast can help keep it from losing focus. Begin with the best potential stories instead of a list of events by timeline, he suggests. Among other things, reviewing the big stories first will help provide an early game plan for promotions.

Editorial meetings can get bogged down in details such as which newscast will get which stories. In this case, WHBQ-TV’s Ken Jobe suggests holding a separate meeting among the producers for newscast story selection. “There’s no need for reporters to know at 10 a.m. that they’re a package at 5,” he says. Dughi suggests pre-assigning the obvious stories of the day so reporters and photographers can get on their way instead of being stuck in the newsroom until the meeting ends. However you do it, make sure everyone is clear about what they need to do next before the meeting concludes.



**“Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that’s the stuff life is made of.”**

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN





# Conducting Feedback and Evaluations

One of the most common complaints from the staff in television and radio newsrooms is that they don't get adequate feedback. Providing regular feedback is an important leadership skill because it is a way of establishing and reinforcing the newsroom's mission, making sure your expectations are understood, and holding people accountable for meeting them.

Former news director Scott Libin, now at The Poynter Institute, says it's impossible to give too much feedback and difficult to give enough. Feedback is critically important, however, and not just for your employees. "Each time you provide feedback, it is a chance to share your vision," says Angie Kucharski, vice president of news and station manager at KCNC-TV in

Denver. Besides, says News 8 Austin news director Kevin Benz, "We make our jobs easier by making our people better."

In a healthy newsroom, feedback comes often, in many forms, and it's framed in a positive way. When employees get feedback only when they do something wrong, they can become defensive and resentful. Constructive feedback, on the other hand, offers an opportunity for professional development and can motivate staffers to do better work. (See "Motivating Employees" under the Newsroom Leadership section.)

To be effective, feedback must be both timely and specific. Nexstar vice president and corporate news director Susana Schuler expects the

group's news directors to demonstrate "a religious dedication to feedback." She advises them to give the staff feedback daily in one form or another and to hold informal, one-on-one sessions to review tape at least once every six weeks with each staff member or newscast group. "It is one of the most important keys to success," she says. New hires should get the most frequent feedback—weekly for the first three months, Schuler advises. You either get a great employee or you know it in 90 days," she says.

Paul Lewis at WTIC-TV in Hartford, CT, is one of many news directors who use a variety of methods to provide feedback. "I send out daily love notes," he says. "I pump them up. Some people like to get an email because they can keep it. I do a handwritten note if it's really special. And for extraordinary work, I may get the general manager involved and ask him to send a note." Lewis also puts out a weekly memo highlighting good work and asks the staff to nominate "wins." He believes it spurs a healthy competition for recognition and leads to better work.

Lewis even gives feedback during the interview process. "I take a lot of time to break down a tape. I talk about the things that are important to me," he says. "With finalists, I'm testing them to see if they can handle it." Lewis tries to meet one-on-one with each staffer for half an hour or more, at least every six months. The key, he says, is to put feedback sessions on the calendar to make sure they really happen. It's also important to schedule them to fit the employee's workday. Location matters, too. To make sure the news director's office does not become associated with negative conversations, call employees in

<b>MAKING FEEDBACK WORK</b>
Schedule time to conduct feedback
Provide feedback to everyone
Don't do it all yourself
Make it a two-way conversation

for purely positive feedback every so often.

It can be difficult to focus on the product in the midst of a busy news day. Mark Miller, news director at WBAL-AM, archives every story and newscast in digital format for later listening. Once a month, he schedules uninterrupted time to listen to each person's work and then arranges for a one-on-one review.

During that conversation Miller plays examples of the employee's work to illustrate the points he wants to emphasize.

To make feedback sessions most productive, they need to be conversations, not monologues. News directors cite the following helpful techniques:

- **Ask questions** Have the employee evaluate his or her own work. Begin with what they're proud of. Then ask what they'd like to improve.
- **Show and tell** Come prepared to demonstrate both what's working and what needs improvement.
- **Be specific** Spell out any changes you would like to see and offer practical suggestions for improvement. Don't ask for better standups; explain what it takes to do better standups.

News directors don't have to do all the individual feedback sessions themselves. It's not only OK, it may even be desirable to delegate responsibility for some of the routine feedback to other news managers. The chief photographer can offer feedback to the photojournalism staff, for example. It's crucial, however, for the news director to model the approach and to



**"Our chief want in life is somebody who shall make us what we can be."**

RALPH WALDO EMERSON



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make sure all newsroom managers know what the expectations are for each employee they supervise.

To reinforce the importance of feedback in the newsroom, managers can create a culture in which feedback is not just their job but everyone's responsibility. How to do it:

- **Involve everyone** Ask employees to nominate colleagues for recognition for work that might not otherwise receive credit.
- **Create an award** A formal award, with financial or other perks attached, can recognize an employee or a team.
- **Go public** Put a dry-erase board in a central location where everyone can contribute positive comments.
- **Look for teaching opportunities** Ask one employee to explain to others how he or she accomplished a good piece of work. This rewards the employee publicly and provides valuable training for others.

Each feedback session should be tailored to the content and the specific needs of the individual. Praise in public, criticize in private. In general, says Marci Burdick, senior vice president of Schurz Communications, novices need gentler handling than veterans. She believes in coaching novices through their mistakes and being direct with veterans if they're not producing.

Some of the most productive feedback sessions are not conducted in private. Many news directors use the daily editorial meeting to highlight a "win"—something that went right or was done well the day before. NPR managing editor Bill Marimow calls that "incidental public praise." It's less about rewarding the person responsible than it is about teaching others. "Establish the

principle you want to reinforce and illustrate how it was met," he says. WTIC-TV's Lewis practices what he calls "pre-emptive feedback" during editorial meetings. In discussing how a story will be done, he offers specific suggestions that reinforce the newsroom's goals.

Post-newscast meetings are a great time to provide constructive feedback, but at many stations they wind up being a recitation of mistakes. "Show debriefs are not about finger pointing," says Schuler, "they're about feedback and quality control." When Libin was at KSTP-TV in Minneapolis-St. Paul, he instituted daily debriefs. "In the past, they tended to occur only if things went wrong," Libin says. "Of course, you want to address errors before they repeat themselves, but the key is to have a meeting every day and focus on what goes right."

If you give feedback often, the formal employee evaluation should go more smoothly. Letting employees know how you think they're doing on a routine basis is a good way to avoid unpleasant surprises at performance review time. "Regular reviews let people know where they stand," says WHBQ-TV news director Ken Jobe.

### Performance Reviews

Stations use a variety of methods and timetables to conduct performance reviews. Some schedule reviews on employees' anniversary dates. Others do all of them at the end of the year. At KLAS-TV in Las Vegas, the station does detailed "360 reviews." A dozen co-workers, selected by a news manager, are asked to fill out evaluation forms for each employee—rating them on everything from knowledge and skills to dependability, teamwork and professional growth. It's a time-consuming process, so it's spread throughout the year. Managing editor Eric Hulnick says he completes two reviews a month, on average. The employee sees a summary of the co-workers' feedback in addition to the supervisor's rating.



**"People are not motivated by failure; they are motivated by achievement and recognition."**

F. F. FOURNIES, AUTHOR

The employee and supervisor meet, develop an action plan, then meet again and sign off on the plan. Hulnick finds that co-workers' ratings mean much more to the employees than what supervisors say.

KCNC-TV's KucharSKI covers four areas in her employee feedback sessions: the person's strengths, weaknesses (paying special attention to areas of specific and immediate concern), setting goals and establishing timelines. It's not enough to note what needs improvement, she says. Employees need to agree on a specific plan and a schedule for making progress.

Thor Wasbotten, former news director at KGUN-TV in Phoenix and now at Pennsylvania State University, stresses that "nothing in the formal performance review should be a surprise to the employee. Areas to be worked on should be addressed throughout the year." He also reminds news directors that reviews should be based on the entire year's performance, not just last month's work.

To be prepared for formal performance reviews, KucharSKI recommends some timesaving systems. Here are some suggestions:

- **Make a feedback file for every employee** Save a copy of any written feedback you send. Make notes about conversations and file them as well. At review time, the file provides specific examples of each employee's performance.
- **Take and send notes** Jot down what you notice about employee performance for easy reference and recall. Keep dated notes in the individual's file. Take a half-hour weekly to review the notes and send written feedback, if warranted.
- **Tap consultants** Save notes from the talent coach to review before conversations with employees.

EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK
Effective feedback
Timely
Specific
Written and oral
Public, if positive
Private, if critical

## ■ Schedule reviews

Put them on the calendar well in advance to give you and the employee time to prepare and to make sure they really happen on time.

Managers may also consider asking employees to reflect on their own performance. Many news

directors ask the employee to critique his or her own work before the news director offers guidance or suggestions. They elicit and respond to employee concerns.

News managers should also find a way to get honest feedback from the staff on their own performance. "Ask about ways you interact with them and what they think of it," says Schuler. This can be done through informal conversations or by asking employees to fill out an anonymous questionnaire. Either way, it's important to stress to employees that you really want their candor. You must also make a commitment to yourself that you will not bear grudges if you don't like what you hear and that you will work on your weaknesses.

## "Automatics:" Setting Daily Performance Expectations

Evaluations are built around expectations, which have to be clear, consistent and well understood. At WTSP-TV in Tampa, FL, each working group has set its own expectations. When Rich Murphy worked at WTSP-TV as chief photojournalist (before moving to WTTG-TV in Washington, DC) he initiated the idea of "automatics"—which WTSP-TV news director Lane Michaelsen describes as a list of "what you expect of yourself every day and what others should expect of you." The photojournalists took a couple of months to develop their list, in a process Michaelsen describes as agonizing but worth it. "It built a lot of trust, and it took care of simple things that get in the way of getting work done."

Since then, the station's reporters, producers, tape editors and assignment editors have



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developed their own automatics. Each list begins with the statement, “I will ...” and includes 20 or more specific promises that employees say they will keep every day.

Michaelsen says the automatics are used routinely to keep tabs on performance. “Instead of waiting for something to become a real problem, we can meet and talk about problems along the way.” At annual evaluation time, staffers rate themselves on each automatic. Supervisors rate them, too, and then meet one-on-one with employees to discuss their performance. One reason the system works, says Michaelsen, is that it’s not top-down. “The most important thing is that it has to come from the working group. The process is as important as the product,” he says.

Other newsrooms have adopted the “automatics” concept and developed their own lists. News 8 Austin even incorporated the idea into a formal training program for new hires. (See “Getting New Hires Started Right” under the Recruiting, and Retaining section.)

<b>SAMPLE OF WTSP-TV AUTOMATICS</b>
<b>REPORTERS WILL</b>
Bring story ideas every day
Talk to the photojournalist
Write quickly
Learn something new
<b>PHOTOJOURNALISTS WILL</b>
Always have a tape in the camera
Always use an earpiece
Keep in touch with the desk
Report failed equipment ASAP
<b>ASSIGNMENT EDITORS WILL</b>
Answer the phone courteously
Communicate with producers
Check for new information before newscasts
Update the story idea file

while improving their work. WBAL-AM’s Miller says he coaches during story development by asking reporters what’s missing or what else is needed to tell the story well. Three weeks later, he does it again. “I make them think about what worked, what didn’t and how would we do it differently.”

The key to effective coaching is to ask good, open-ended questions and to refrain from imposing your own judgments. Coaches have to watch not only their words but also their body language and facial expression, which can so easily convey disinterest or disapproval.

Managers must learn to coach rather than fix their employees’ work. For example, when reviewing a script, advises Jill Geisler of The Poynter Institute, “Sit on your hands. Keep your mitts off the copy. Talk, don’t type.” As news director at WITI-TV in Milwaukee, Geisler says she trained herself to ask reporters to tell the story orally before she looked at what they’d written. Then, after reading the script, she could make specific suggestions based on what they had said and let them make the revisions. “On tight deadlines

### Coaching for Success

Coaching is an approach to providing guidance and feedback that can help employees grow

I would ask their permission to type a change in their copy,” she said, to show respect for the writer.



**“The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated.”**

WILLIAM JAMES, AMERICAN PHILOSOPHER, 1842-1910

In a broadcast newsroom with effective coaching, staff members share responsibility for what goes on the air. Photographers help reporters write. Reporters and photographers offer material for teases and tags to newscast producers. And managers ask questions instead of just giving orders.

In a coaching newsroom, people aren't shy about seeking the help they need, and they often turn to peers to get it. Chief photographer Bob Gould at WZZM-TV in Grand Rapids, MI, invites other photographers into his edit bay to screen stories that he's working on. It's a reality check, he says, "to see if an edit works, if sound is understandable."

Miller has established a formal peer-review process for new hires in his newsroom. "I pair

them up with one of the two or three people who really get our philosophy of news coverage," he says, and they act as coaches for the new hires. "The best ones also learn from it, so it's a win-win." The result of the peer review is a newsroom with a coaching culture, where reporters routinely ask each other for help on stories.

At Northwestern University, research on newspaper newsrooms found that older journalists often felt underused and underappreciated. The veterans also said they wanted to mentor younger journalists but were not encouraged to do so. Many broadcast veterans probably feel the same way. Newsrooms might consider establishing a mentoring program to help younger journalists build new skills while keeping veterans fresh and engaged in their work.



# Resolving Conflict

**T**ensions are inevitable in newsrooms. Mix deadline pressure with creative, skeptical people and there's bound to be some conflict. News managers need to be able to recognize conflict and resolve it before it causes more serious problems. How you handle conflict can be important to your success as a leader.

"Adrenaline is high, emotions are high, but it's a myth that it's the norm for people to stand toe to toe in the newsroom and scream the F word at each other," says former news director Marci Burdick. "None of this has a positive impact on getting the job done."

Burdick, now senior VP of broadcasting and

cable for Schurz Communications, says news managers need to intervene quickly when conflict arises. That's much more easily said than done, of course. Most people instinctively avoid confrontation; it's unpleasant. But so is the stress level

in conflict-ridden newsrooms. Mark Miller, news director of WBAL-AM in Baltimore, agrees. "If you let them go on too long they become a cancer on the team spirit of the newsroom," he says.

Jill Geisler, who teaches leadership seminars at The Poynter Institute, says the most valuable thing she learned in a graduate study of conflict resolution was a simple definition she shares with news man-

### OVERCOME CONFLICT AVOIDANCE

Lack of time?  
Schedule it.

Lack of information?  
Investigate.

Fear of failure?  
Prepare and practice.

Sense of futility?  
Create an action plan.



**“I wish I had been more decisive about resolving conflict. I let it go on longer than I should have.”**

LEE GILES, 35-YEAR NEWS DIRECTOR, WISH-TV, INDIANAPOLIS

agers: “Conflict is my perception that you are interfering with my goals.”

The perceptions may be grounded in fact, but that doesn’t help resolve the conflict. As a news director, Kevin Benz of News 8 Austin says he had to learn a basic truth: “I can’t change attitudes. I can change the behavior that’s causing the problem. My ‘Aha!’ moment was when I realized it was about changing behavior for the benefit of the rest of the newsroom.”

The first step in conflict resolution is understanding what really happened. Investigate the situation as you would a news story. Go in with an open mind, and check with everyone involved. Make it clear that the goal is not to find someone to blame but to learn how to avoid the conflict in the future. “Clear the air,” says Paul Lewis, news director at WTIC-TV in Hartford, CT. “Don’t let things fester.”

Geisler encourages leaders to help people achieve their goals while also preserving their relationships, something known as a win-win approach. She identifies five main styles of conflict resolution, all of which involve a balancing act between our goals and our relationships. She says most people have a favored, or “default,” style but need to learn when each style works best:

- **Control/Competition** I value my goal over our relationship. I will “win.” You will “lose.”: This style works when the goal is critical and the relationship isn’t. Controllers often see too many situations

as “critical” and miss opportunities to build relationships.

- **Collaboration** I work with you so we can both reach our goals and build our relationship. This approach may take more time and creativity but is a key leadership skill.
- **Promise** Both sides make concessions or trade-offs based on an appeal to fairness. This approach can provide a quick, short-term solution and is a good fallback position but shouldn’t be your consistent first choice when collaboration is possible.
- **Accommodation** I give up my goal to preserve our relationship. This is not a bad approach if my goal is relatively unimportant but the relationship is very important. (We often accommodate our bosses.) Used too often, however, it can mean we have abandoned our goals.
- **Avoidance** I give up my goal *and* our relationship. This approach should be a last resort, used when the other person is potentially dangerous, but it can help bullies thrive and conflicts fester.

When two people were in conflict at her station, Burdick says, she would bring each one into her office, shut the door, and ask for their side of the story. “I asked a lot of questions, even if I knew the answers,” she says. “Be clear about what’s not acceptable,” she advises, and if it’s a power struggle, “be clear [about] whom you expect to make the decision.” To give the

## HANDLEING PROBLEM BEHAVIOR

Make expectations clear

Apply standards fairly

Provide help and guidance

Give regular feedback  
Explain consequences





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participants a chance to create their own solution to the problem, Burdick would meet with them together and ask how they would handle things differently should the situation arise again.

If the same bad behavior recurs, a forceful warning is in order, along with a written note in the file. "If pointing out a problem and coaching doesn't fix it, then you go into defensive management mode and start documenting," says Lewis. "Put them on a plan with specific goals. Here's what you are doing. Here's what you need to do. Here's when you need to do it. Here's when we'll meet again." Lewis says he often quotes the employee's job description back to them when describing his expectations. He also lets the employee know that he promises to help them meet their objectives.

When problems need to be addressed more than once, it's a good idea to keep your boss in the loop so he or she can back you up and to get advice from human resources. It may also be wise to include a third person in the meeting, to witness and document the conversation.

### Difficult Conversations

It's hard to confront problem employees, so these kinds of conversations require planning. "Know going in how tough the conversation will be," says

## DEALING WITH CONFLICT

Investigate ahead of time

Anticipate how the other person will respond

Meet privately and allow no interruptions

Avoid emotional reactions

Keep the conversation to that one issue

Ask for a commitment to a solution

Nexstar vice president and corporate news director Susana Schuler. "Pause and reflect. Deal with the situation when you are not in crisis mode." Don't delay too long, however. The longer you wait to have a difficult conversation, the more likely it is that something will blow up or melt down.

Preparation means covering all the bases:

■ **Time** Get it done as soon as possible. Avoid Fridays so you can follow up immediately if necessary and so the employee doesn't stew for two days.

- **Place** Choose a private, quiet location to avoid interruptions.
- **Facts** Investigate before coming to any conclusions, and don't make decisions until you hear all sides.
- **Emotions** Plan to keep your own emotions under control. Anticipate resistance and emotional responses and prepare for how you will handle them.
- **Language** Watch your words—don't nag, condemn or belittle. Rehearse or outline the conversation in advance.
- **Outcome** Know what you want to accomplish, and have solutions ready to present.

WTSP-TV news director Lane Michaelsen agrees that it's important to schedule the conversation in advance so you have time to pre-



**"Great leaders are almost always great simplifiers, who can cut through argument, debate and doubt to offer a solution everybody can understand."**

COLIN POWELL

pare. “I practice conversations all the time, even in the car on the way to work,” Michaelsen says. “I figure out what they might say and plan my response. I might have five scripts based on different answers. I try to make it so there are no surprises. I know what road I’m going down.”

Knowing the outcome you want helps you design a way to get there, and planning helps keep emotion out of the discussion. “Never design the conversation for the manager to feel better for having unloaded on the employee,” says Burdick. Follow these guidelines during difficult conversations with employees:

- **Focus on the work** Don’t attack who they are; discuss what they do. Emphasize your mutual goal: changed behavior, for the good of the entire newsroom.
- **Listen carefully** Ask open-ended, non judgmental questions. Ask how and what instead of why. Watch body language for nonverbal clues.
- **Seek understanding** Be prepared to change your mind. Restate what the employee says to be sure you have a clear picture. Take notes.
- **Stay on message** Don’t bring up and don’t allow the employee to bring up unrelated issues.
- **Find solutions** Let the employee propose solutions and develop an action plan and a timetable for changed behavior.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS
Be prepared
Be honest
Be direct
Be specific
Be compassionate

Following up means more than another meeting. Benz advises making notes about the conversation and keeping a copy in your files. Look for opportunities to reinforce the results of the meeting—recognize and praise good behavior and act immediately if the bad behavior resurfaces. Benz also suggests paying close attention to your interactions with the employee. “You must be the role model for how your relationship will continue,” he says.

Not all difficult conversations go smoothly. It’s important to know when to get out. If the meeting is getting out of control, it is better to continue at a later time.

GOOD QUESTIONS FOR TOUGH CONVERSATIONS
What is the real cause of the problem?
What do you think about that?
What is the solution you are proposing?
Have you discussed this with colleagues?
What do you need from me?

- **Be firm** Once you agree on a plan, the discussion is over. Make sure the employee understands the consequences of failing to abide by the plan.
- **Follow up** Schedule a time to meet again within 30 days to review progress on the action plan.

**Firing** Miller of WBAL-AM cautions that sometimes the conflict just cannot be resolved. “People admit they’re not in a good marriage every day, but it’s hard to admit when you’re not in a good working relationship.” Such an admission is difficult, not just for the employee but also for the manager. Having to let someone go for any reason other than budget cuts represents failure, says Poynter’s Geisler, “either a failure of



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managers to hire and train well, a failure of staff to perform to standards, or both.” If you must fire someone, keep these things in mind:

- **Respect the person’s dignity** Meet privately, and don’t send them out of the meeting into a room full of people.

- **Be direct** Explain the purpose of the conversation right from the start. Don’t belabor the point or harp on past performance issues.
- **Stay calm** Do not be defensive or emotional, even in response to personal attacks.
- **Be prepared** Provide details about the separation plan, including any financial compensation or continuation of benefits, or have human resources on standby to do so.



**“Employees who bully other employees is one of the issues in my newsroom that causes me the most stress.”**

NEWS DIRECTOR AT RTNDF BRAINSTORMING SESSION



## Recommended Reading

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## Online Resources

*Best Practices: The Art of Leadership in News Organizations*

<http://www.freedomforum.org/templates/document.asp?documentID=16166>  
(by Shelby Coffee III for The Freedom Forum)

*Executives of Color: What It Takes to Succeed*

[http://www.namme.org/career/publications/report\\_to\\_industry.pdf](http://www.namme.org/career/publications/report_to_industry.pdf)  
(by Keith Woods for the National Association of Minority Media Executives and the McCormick Fellowship Initiative)

*Growing Your Culture: A Best Practices Guide*

[http://www.jrn.columbia.edu/events/race/growingyourculture\\_intro.html](http://www.jrn.columbia.edu/events/race/growingyourculture_intro.html)  
(by the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism Workshops on Journalism, Race & Ethnicity)

*In Their Prime: Motivating Senior Reporters*

<http://www.mediamanagementcenter.org/center/web/publications/prime.htm>  
(by Sharon L. Peters for the Media Management Center, Northwestern University)

Leadership Tip Sheets

[http://www.poynter.org/content/content\\_view.asp?id=31895&sid=14](http://www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=31895&sid=14)  
(Quick suggestions from The Poynter Institute)

Newsroom Leadership: Reflections on Leadership

[www.newsroomleadership.com](http://www.newsroomleadership.com)  
(Suggested readings and archives of Reflections on Leadership newsletter. To subscribe, email [miller@newsroomleadership.com](mailto:miller@newsroomleadership.com).)

*Recruiting for Diversity: A News Manager's Guide, 8th ed.*

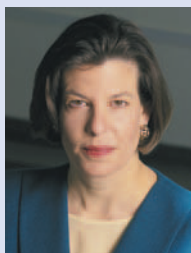
<http://www.rtndf.org/diversity/guide.shtml>  
(Directory of sources for finding diverse job candidates by the Newsroom Diversity Project of the Radio and Television News Directors Foundation)

The Radio and Television News Directors Foundation's News Leadership Project

<http://www.rtnda.org/resources/leadership.shtml>  
(Resources, training opportunities and research about broadcast news management from RTNDF)



## About the Author



**Deborah Potter** is the executive director of NewsLab, a nonprofit training and research center in Washington, DC, that works primarily with local television stations to find

better ways of telling complex, nonvisual stories. Potter spent 16 years as a correspondent for CBS News and CNN. She covered the White House, State Department, Congress, national politics and the environment, and later hosted the PBS series, *In the Prime*. Before joining CBS, Deborah anchored all-news radio in Philadelphia and produced television news in Washington, DC. Potter spent three years on the faculty of The Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg, FL, and a year as assistant professor at American University in Washington, DC. She is a past executive director of the Radio and Television News Directors Foundation. Potter is a featured columnist for the *American Journalism Review*, writing about broadcast news. She is the co-author of the *Poynter Election Handbook: New Ways to Cover Campaigns*. She has a bachelor's degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a master's degree from American University.

## Biographies of Contributing News Leaders

**Kevin Benz** has been the news director of News 8 Austin ever since AOL/Time Warner launched the Austin, TX, 24-hour news channel in 1999. Benz's focus on staff training and cultivating a positive newsroom culture is apparent from the success of his news team, which has won numerous local, regional, and national journalism awards, including the 2004 Edward R. Murrow National Award for the news documentary, "News 8 Explores: Child Abuse"; a 2002 duPont-Columbia honorable-mention award for a series on illegal immigrant workers in central Texas; and the Walter Cronkite Award for Excellence in Television Political Journalism for its 2002 coverage of state and local elections.

**Marci Burdick** is senior vice president of broadcasting and cable for Schurz Communications, a media holding company. Beginning her career at a radio station in her hometown of Rapid City, SD, she has worked in the media continuously since age 14. Burdick honed her leadership skills in many different roles throughout her career as a news director, president and general manager, and vice president for a television group. News departments under her supervision have won many awards for journalistic excellence and community service, including six regional Emmys, several regional and two national Edward R. Murrow Awards, the Iris Award for long-form programming, and dozens of state broadcast association awards. Burdick is a trustee of the RTNDF and treasurer of the NBC Affiliates Board.

**Tom Dolan** is the president of Dolan Media Management, a management recruitment firm for television news and promotion based in Washington, DC. Drawing upon 25 years of news experience, he builds management teams for

television stations. Before starting his own company, Dolan served in many leadership roles in various markets, including as vice president of news, news director, managing editor and assistant news director. His news programs have won both Associated Press and Emmy awards.

**Paul Dughi** is the general manager of KNDO-TV in Yakima, WA, and KNDU-TV in Kennewick, WA. He has 25 years of experience in the broadcast business, working as news director, producer and station manager. In addition to winning numerous awards, Dughi has served as a strategic consultant and trainer at some of the country's top television stations. He is the author of *Weapons of Mass Distinction* and many articles for industry trade journals that have also appeared in *USA Today* and *Newsweek*.

**Janet Evans** is the assistant news director of KRLD-AM in Arlington, TX. She is an award-winning journalist with more than 20 years of experience in broadcast news. Evans serves as Radio-Television News Directors Association's regional director for Texas and Oklahoma and as a chairwoman of RTNDA's Freedom of Information Committee.

**Jill Geisler** heads The Poynter Institute's Leadership and Management group, guiding its seminars for newsroom managers in all media. Before joining Poynter, she worked as a reporter, producer and anchor at WISC-TV in Madison, WI, and WITI-TV in Milwaukee. Her appointment as news director of WITI-TV in 1978 made broadcast history: She was the country's first female news director of a major market network affiliate. During Geisler's 25-year tenure at WITI-TV, the station underwent three changes of network and five changes of ownership. Not surprisingly, she teaches leadership and management skills at Poynter, including how to deal with change. She emphasizes building systems and cultures, with special attention to motivation, collaboration and trust.

**Lee Giles** accepted the appointment of visiting professor at the School of Journalism at Indiana University, Bloomington, after he retired from WISH-TV as news director and vice president. Giles's 40-year career at the Indianapolis CBS

affiliate included 35 years as news director, setting a national longevity record for television news directors. Prior to his appointment as news director at WISH-TV, Giles served in various other capacities in the newsroom, including editorial director, anchor, statehouse reporter, and managing editor. He has won numerous awards and was inducted into the Indiana Journalism Hall of Fame, the Indiana AP Hall of Fame, and the Indiana Broadcast Pioneers Hall of Fame for his contributions to the profession.

**Janice Gin** is the associate news director at KTVU-TV in the San Francisco-Oakland market and is a veteran broadcast journalist. Her newsroom positions have included reporter, producer, managing editor and executive producer. Gin is known in the industry as a teacher and a seminar and workshop facilitator on diversity, ethics, leadership and producing. Gin is a member of the RTNDA Board of Directors and is the chairwoman of the Diversity Committee.

**Bob Gould** is the chief photojournalist, overseeing a staff of 13, at WZZM-TV, the Gannett station in Grand Rapids, MI. He has been a news photojournalist for 14 years and has won numerous awards, including an Emmy and the Michigan Television News Photographers Association's Station of the Year award. Gould served as the president of the MTNPA for six years and is committed to the photojournalism field.

**Ric Harris** is vice president and general manager of WEWS-TV in Cleveland. He has had a wide-ranging media career including work in radio, newspapers, television and advertising. Throughout his career Harris has contributed his leadership skills and followed his personal motto, "Think Big." He says, "I'm the sort of person who respects people, enjoys collaboration and thinks it's best to empower others."

**Eric Hulnick** is the managing editor of KLAS-TV, the CBS affiliate in Las Vegas. Hulnick has held numerous positions throughout his career, sharpening his leadership skills in positions such as news director, vice president of news and operations, executive producer and assignment desk editor.



**Ken Jobe** is the vice president of news at WHBQ-TV, the FOX-owned and operated station in Memphis, TN, and is a veteran broadcast journalist. He has been a reporter, photographer, writer producer, executive producer, assistant news director and news director. Jobe has taught at The Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg, FL, on several occasions and served on the board of NewsLab in Washington, DC. He has also served as the deputy regional director of the National Association of Black Journalists and as the president of the Nashville Association of Minority Communicators.

**Angie Kucharski** is the station manager and vice president of news at KCNC-TV, the CBS-owned and operated station in Denver. She has been a leader throughout her career, holding news director and assistant news director positions in various markets. The newsrooms under her supervision have won many awards, including the 2004 Edward R. Murrow National Award for Newscast as well as an Emmy Award for Best Newscast and Best Spot News Coverage. Kucharski is a graduate of The Poynter Institute Newsroom Management program. She is a facilitator of RTNDF's leadership programs and a visiting faculty member at The Poynter Institute. She is currently on the Board of Directors for the RTNDA and is a trustee of the RTNDF.

**Paul Lewis**, an award-winning journalist, is the news director at WTIC-TV, the FOX affiliate in Hartford, CT. Since his arrival in 1996, WTIC-TV has won many awards, including four AP Mark Twain Awards for Overall Excellence and more than a dozen Emmy Awards—including three Emmys for Team Effort. At the same time, the station's ratings have grown steadily. In addition to his work in the newsroom, Lewis also teaches broadcast journalism as an adjunct instructor at the University of Hartford.

**Scott Libin** is the director of development and outreach at The Poynter Institute, where he leads seminars for journalists. He also conducts training at television stations and journalism conferences nationwide. From 1995 to 1998

Libin was a faculty member at Poynter, specializing in broadcast leadership and management. During the interval between his different positions at Poynter, Libin was the news director of KSTP-TV, the ABC affiliate in the Minneapolis-St. Paul market. Libin has substantial experience outside of the classroom, holding such positions as vice president of news, news director and managing editor. Stations under his leadership have won numerous national and regional awards for their newscasts and coverage.

**Bill Marimow**, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, joined National Public Radio in May 2004 as managing editor. Marimow brings to NPR more than 30 years of extraordinary experience in journalism and newsroom leadership, with a special focus on investigative reporting. As editor of *The Baltimore Sun* from 2000 to 2004, Marimow led a newsroom of 385 journalists. Before serving as editor, he worked as managing editor, metro editor and associate managing editor at the Sun. Marimow also spent 21 years at *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, where he was a reporter for 15 years and later served as New Jersey editor, city editor and assistant to the publisher.

**Lane Michaelsen** is the vice president and news director at WTSP-TV, the Gannett-owned CBS station in the Tampa, FL, market. Prior to his current position, Lane worked as a news director, director of photography, chief photographer and a Gannett corporate news executive, consulting nine different television stations. He also spent a year as a visiting professional at The Poynter Institute. Michaelsen has won hundreds of awards, including national Murrows, Emmys, the National Press Photographers Association's Regional Photographer of the Year award, and medals from the New York and Houston international film festivals.

**Mark Miller** has been the news director at WBAL-AM in Baltimore since 1990. He has worked his entire career at WBAL-AM, starting in 1979 as an intern. Under his leadership, the WBAL-AM news department has won many awards, including numerous national Edward R. Murrow awards, the Associated Press



Broadcasters Award of Excellence, and the New York Festivals Grand Award. Miller's leadership outside the newsroom includes his involvement in RTNDA, the Chesapeake Associated Press Broadcasters Association, and the Advisory Board for the Department of Electronic Media and Film at Towson University in Towson, MD.

**Harvey Nagler** was named vice president of CBS Radio News in 1998. As such, he is responsible for CBS Radio News operations, including newsgathering, programming and its relationship with its thousands of affiliated stations around the country. During his tenure at CBS Radio News, the network has won many national and international awards, including five major citations from the RTNDA in 2001.

**Dan O'Donnell** is the news director at WGAL-TV, a Hearst-Argyle television station in Lancaster, PA. Throughout his career, he has demonstrated his talent for leadership in many management positions including assistant news director, managing editor, executive producer and assignment editor. O'Donnell is a member of the Pennsylvania Associated Press Broadcasters Association board of directors.

**Susana Schuler** is the vice president/corporate news director of Nexstar Broadcasting Group, which owns or operates 23 stations in medium and small markets across the nation. She oversees the news operations of those stations, working with each news director on management, content, anchor hires, training and recruitment. Schuler has honed her leadership skills throughout her career in positions such as news director, assistant news director and assignment manager. She is currently on the RTNDA Board of Directors.

**Patti Smith** is vice president and general manager of KVUE-TV, the ABC affiliate in Austin, TX, and a Belo subsidiary. Her career in the television industry spans more than 29 years. Previously, Smith was the general manager of the NBC affiliate in Rio Grande Valley, TX. She developed her leadership skills through various positions throughout her career, including news director, executive producer, local/regional sales

manager, promotions director and director of broadcast facilities. Smith serves on the executive committee as vice president of the Texas Association of Broadcasters.

**Andy Still** is the news director at WYFF-TV in Greenville, SC. He has been a journalist for more than 40 years, 19 of those years at WYFF-TV. Still and his newsroom have won numerous awards, including more than 30 Emmys. In 2001, Still was inducted into the Silver Circle of the Atlanta Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

**Thor Wasbotten** became the general manager of television operations and senior lecturer of communications at Pennsylvania State University in 2004. Previously, he worked as a news director, station manager, managing editor and weekend assignments editor in various markets. Wasbotten's news teams have won numerous awards, including a national Walter Cronkite Award for Excellence in Television Political Journalism, various regional Edward R. Murrow awards, multiple Associated Press awards, and many Idaho Press Club awards.

**Fred Young** is the senior vice president of news at Hearst-Argyle Television and oversees news operations in 25 markets as well as the news operations at the Hearst-Argyle Washington News Bureau. Prior to his position at Hearst, Young served for 25 years at WTAE-TV in Pittsburgh as vice president and general manager, news director and other news management positions. During his years at WTAE-TV, the station received numerous local and national awards for quality programming and community service. He was also instrumental in the original campaign to admit television cameras into Pennsylvania courtrooms.