

Part Three

DEAL WITH IT

"Working In The News Environment"

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Working In The News Environment

The News environment is a constantly changing challenge. We work in every possible type of weather. In fact, the worse the weather the more likely we'll be out in it. News means extremes. The stress of deadlines forces many people out of the business.

This section of the book deals with working in the News business. The "Real World" offers challenges that most professions would never dream of having to work through. The horror of spot news has caused me many sleepless nights. You can never look at the world quite the same way once you have seen people cut in half. How do you deal with tragedy.

The News focuses around interviews. These sound bites are not always easy to get. In fact many people hate to be on camera and dislike the press. How do you get these people to talk? This section of the book shows you how.

The News is a cut throat business. Competition plays a large part of news gathering. The news shows live and die by rating points. If the show doesn't do well the whole staff could get fired. It is not unusual for drastic measures to be taken. Therefore, whoever gets the best video and sound bites wins. If your station is known for having the best coverage on a consistent basis you will win viewers. Get the Beat on your competitors.

Much of what we cover deals with crime. Wherever there is spot news there will be police. There are ways to handle

yourself in front of lawmen which you should be aware of. Start out on the right foot by studying how "the Heat Is On."

If you want to keep your job your attitude is of prime importance. How you act around your co-workers can be to your benefit. How does the assignment desk consider your work? Can you be trusted with the big story under extreme pressure? Good attitude covers a multitude of sins.

Your lifestyle is also important. If you come to work constantly hung over, with a griping attitude you will not last long in this business. How you treat your body and mind determines in a great part your work skills.

You know how to use the equipment and what pictures to get in order to make the story work. It's now time to learn how to "Deal With It," working in the News environment.

Feet Wet

Generating Story Ideas

Before diving into the "Real World" of News the novice reporter must first get their feet wet. The shallow waters of ENG are filled with story ideas. The idea is the bait. The reporter must then go for the story. With luck, you'll come up with an award winning catch.

The journalist must have the ability to generate story ideas. Lots of them. In most smaller markets there is not a lot of action going on. This is when the reporter calls on their creativity. I sometimes jokingly refer to this process as "invoking the News Muse." There seems to be a little voice or feeling you get in your guts when you know there's a story just around the corner.

Coming up with ideas is not always easy. However, the "News Hole" (how much time is left in the show after commercials) must be filled. After all, TV is a split second business. Management would not be pleased if the show was ten minutes light and the station went to black for the remainder of the newscast.

It is your job as a journalist to gather the news. When there is little news to find you must track it down. Here are a few ways for you to come up with story ideas.

1. Go from the broad to the specific.

Read the paper and watch the national news. Look specifically for local angles on national stories. How does the jump in gas prices affect the local economy? "Man on the

street" interviews work well with many stories. People like to hear local reactions about what is going on.

During the War in the Persian Gulf many of the towns in my area were devastated economically by the soldiers going overseas. There were many opportunities to tie the national story into what was happening locally. We talked to merchants and restaurant owners. "Business has been so bad we'll go under if the war doesn't end soon." Sound bites such as these made for poignant TV.

Sidebar stories could also be found from the war coverage. A sidebar is an angle related to the main story. We covered the Hinesville (home of the 24th Mechanized Infantry) Post Office crammed with mail from Saudi Arabia. Shots of packages stacked to the roof drove the story home. We followed mailmen delivering heavy boxes and listened to them talk about how, "my back is killing me."

With creativity you can always find a local angle to a major national issue. Find out specific ways that the issue affects your local area. Call your Congressmen or Representatives for their comments. Don't be afraid to use the power of the media to find out information.

2. Contact the Major Players regularly.

The bureaucracy in your area can provide a gold mine of story ideas if used properly. The first step for the novice reporter is to hit the streets and meet the Major Players. The common ones include the Mayor, Fire Chief, Police

Chief, City Aldermen, County Commissioners, Detectives, Jail Administrator and Fire Investigators. Environmental groups, Human Resource departments, and the Department of Natural Resources can also provide a wealth of story ideas.

Get your feet wet by calling these people on the phone or going by to see them in person. Many of these individuals are elected officials. The word "elected" should mean something to you. Politicians live and die by the press coverage they receive. Most are friendly. They have good reason to be: the more they are on TV the more likely they are to be re-elected.

Name recognition is everything to politicians. Use this to your advantage. Call up and ask them "what's going on?" They can usually come up with some reason for you to do a story. After all, they want the coverage.

Getting story ideas requires the personal touch to do well. Take the time to meet the individuals and let them know you are interested in what they have to say. If you keep in touch with them on a regular basis you will get the beat on the competition as well as fill the news hole.

3. Develop a filing system.

Always save your scripts for all packages you write. Keep a list of all the packages you shoot. Know where the B-Roll can be found if you need it. File the information under subject headings. Regularly inspect these files for update information.

When news days are slow look for updates in your files. Go through each of the major stories that have been done in the last few weeks. How is the work coming on the new school or roadway? Have there been any problems at the jail since the murderer was locked up? How is the drug war going? Have there been any new wrinkles on the story worth following up on? Creativity is the key. Use your brain, and your filing system.

4. Use the Rolodex.

Telephone numbers generate ideas. Regularly contact people whom you have done stories with and ask them what is up. Keep your Rolodex updated daily. Keep the phone numbers of everyone you do a story with. When the well is dry, head for the Rolodex.

5. Get on mailing lists.

Most government agencies send out information for public record. Go to the library and write these addresses down. Tell them you are with the media and are interested in their department. They will flood your box with possible story ideas.

This idea also goes for civic groups and Chamber of Commerce in your town and surrounding areas. With the advent of the fax machine, information can be at your fingertips almost instantly.

It pays to investigate what is happening in the small towns in your area. Ask them to send you a list of agenda items for

the County Commission. If residents are having a public forum on a possible medical waste incinerator in their area there might be a good story to be had.

6. Discover the major issues in your community.

This is done by talking with people, and listening. What are they concerned about? What are they interested in? Ask, and learn.

The best stories deal with issues that people have a vital interest in. We did a story about lead in the homes. This caused major interest around the community. Lives might have been saved because we asked ourselves, "what do people want to know?"

7. Follow up on invitations.

When you cover stories, individuals often invite you to come and see them again. Do it. Let them know you are interested in their situation. Show them the types of stories that are worth covering and encourage them to let you know what is happening. It is a good idea to develop contacts in every small community you go to in your ADI (Area of Dominant Influence--the areas your signal reaches). Call these people on a regular basis.

8. Other media.

It is not a sin to get story ideas from competing stations or the newspapers. It is poor journalism, however, to do the same angle. Look for novel ways to do similar stories. The newspaper report is at least twelve hours old. The morning

paper is "put to bed" around midnight. It is not new. Call the people involved and see if you can get new information, updates, or other angles.

Developing story ideas requires creativity, initiative and hard work. Many of the ideas may never be used. Do not be discouraged with this fact. Believe me, the assignment editor and news director still take note that you are coming up with ideas on a regular basis. For many news organizations the ability to generate story ideas is THE criteria for whether or not the reporter/photographer is doing their job.

So get your feet wet by coming up with a story idea, and following the trail of information. The better your ability to come up with story ideas, the higher the likelihood you will cover bigger and better stories.

To Talk Or Not To Talk

Capturing The Interview

In the "Real World" people are not eager to talk to reporters. Point a TV camera in a person's face with a six hundred watt light bulb blasting their eyes and even the bravest person gets nervous. The news business lives and breathes sound bites. The interview makes up at least half of most packages. We must get people to talk. This takes communication and people skills to do well.

There are two basic types of people on the streets. The first group loves to be on camera. They are the "Hi Moms" of the world that do just about anything to get in your way. They love to stand behind the person you are trying to interview and wave. They are the bane of live TV.

There are ways to deal with these people. If you are doing an interview in a public place advise the too-friendly crowd NOT to "shut up" but "If you want to be on TV--just act natural." These people want to be on TV. They know how to stand there and be quiet. That makes me happy. They get a chance to get on TV. That makes them happy. The story works.

If this tact doesn't work explain, "If you wave and act dumb we will do it again without you." It always pays to be nice. Never cause a scene. They are our viewers. Be firm with people, most of them want to help. You may need their assistance tomorrow.

The second group seems to be the exact opposite. They are extremely camera shy. They might have been on TV before and

they hated the way they looked. Perhaps they had a sound bite used out of context. The second type of person is much more difficult to handle. They do not want to be shot because they are afraid of looking bad.

If you want to get an interview out of a reluctant person you must first placate their fear of looking bad.. Here are some good lines of argument to try.

1. "You look great." Lie if you have to. It seems elderly women are the most sensitive about their appearance. Tell them their dress is pretty, their hair looks fine.

2. "I'll just shoot from here (point to your chest) up." This line comes in handy when they gripe about how they are dressed.

3. "If you don't like it we can start again." Be truthful with this line. Explain to them about the editing process. Tell them we only use the best stuff. Take the pressure off them to say something perfectly.

4. "If you don't like it we won't use it." I rarely have people take me up on this line. It does seem to help, however. If they have gotten through the interview and feel happy about it, they don't seem to mind us using the sound bite. They are afraid of doing it in the first place. Once it's done they're happy.

5. "It'll just take this long." (Snap your fingers and start setting up.) Most people figure interviews take a long time. They probably have something to do or are "just on my way to,"

Use your speed. Set up while you're talking to them. Don't give them a chance to back out because they are having to wait around for you to get the camera ready. Capturing the difficult interview is a split second task. If the shy person can escape they will. Cut off as many excuses as possible.

6. "Oh--You'll be fine," and start rolling.

The important thing is to keep trying. If the person is just scared talk to them as you are setting up. Try and act casual. Ask them questions as you get the camera ready. Keep talking and keep them talking.

The most critical moment is when you turn on the light. Shy people usually freak out at that point. They know something is going on. Point the light straight up and turn it on. This eliminates most of the light. Gradually turn it towards them and keep asking questions. Roll tape and continue talking. If the person is at ease they will answer your question even when the camera is rolling.

If the subject sees you behind the camera, with the light on it is reasonable to assume he knows he is being recorded. The point is this: roll tape until they stop you. The worst thing you can do to a shy person is ask them, "Do you mind if we talk with you?", before you are set up. If you think it is likely that the individual will not talk you must walk up to them with the camera rolling. Does this sound like an ambush? Maybe it is. I prefer to think of it as stacking the odds in my favor. If you are fumbling around with your deck while

trying to persuade the person to talk it is likely that you will miss the interview.

I personally like ambushing people that are crooks and have something to hide. It does not make me popular with the "bad guys." I was covering a trial concerning a major federal investigation of a cocaine ring. I caught three of the defendants leaving the courtroom. I was talking to them as I walked backwards down the street. One of the defendants became extremely angry grabbed some rocks and started throwing them at me. One caught me in the head, another cracked my camera lens. The other individual punched me in the kidney as I turned to leave. I brought the rock thrower up on charges. They didn't leave the trial unwatched again. Capturing unwilling soundbites is on the edge of ENG. Unfortunately, I didn't have a backup. Working as a "one man band" can be very dangerous, especially in high crime areas.

I do not like having to ambush people that are shy. I would much rather try and talk them into going on camera. Go through the listed arguments, roll tape and see if they still raise a fuss. People are not stupid. They know you work with TV. If you raise a camera on their face they have been given fair warning that you are taping. I do not believe you have to go out of your way to tell them. I do not shoot hidden video. I do not shoot from my hip, trying to be sneaky. I am obvious when I shoot.

If they are really adamant against being on TV, go into the

FAIRNESS ANGLE. Americans love to be fair. It is one of our main beliefs. We wait in line for our turn, we want our fair share. Journalists can use this very basic tendency to our advantage. Mention to them:

1. "We need to have your side of the story--or else you'll look really bad." No one wants to look bad. This line is the truth. If the person will not go on camera and tell their side of the story it looks bad. The audience believes they probably have something to hide. Why else wouldn't they go on camera. This is a very powerful argument.

2. "We pride ourselves on being fair--won't you try? We want you to look good." This is the opposite side of the same argument. Some people don't want to look bad. Others want to look good. It is the same thing, but the wording can make all the difference. Believe me, it's the truth. If your station is known as the "good guys" you can really play up this side of the argument.

I remember getting an interview with a man who was a convicted child molester. What do you think was the chance of me getting that interview? I went through all the arguments and started on the "We need your side of the story." I laid it on heavy about how "We feel it is our duty to be fair." This was the absolute truth. We do want to be fair. I don't always go around preaching about it, however. He was moved. He decided he wanted a fair shake. I got the interview. Don't give up on the "impossible interview." The Real World

is much stranger than fiction could ever be.

As a rule--whoever you're talking with, you are on their side. If you can establish rapport you will be a lot further along getting the interview. I know this sounds hypocritical. The fact is you can't be on both sides. However, if you want the interview you have to appear to be on their side. At the very least listen to what they say and try and understand their point of view.

The Real World judges you on your appearance. What you tell people is very important in getting the sound bite. It may not seem ethical, but if you want the interview you have to do what it takes to put the person at ease. Do not get the impression that what I am doing is wrong. It is not. You are creating rapport by seeming to be on their side. They have the opportunity to give their side of the story. If I did not do this they would be in a bad situation and probably gripe that we were not "being fair." Some of my more high-minded colleagues would not try this tactic. They give a half-hearted attempt to get the other side, are refused and then say, "The defendant refused to comment." This is the truth, but still makes the defendant look guilty.

Let me give you an example. I was covering a trial where a police officer was supposed to have beaten a man. The evidence was not strong either way, but the defendant was a known drug felon. I didn't like him, and didn't believe a word he said. Do you think I should have come up to him and

said something like, "I can't believe you brought a suit against that Officer. You're just a thug. Got any comment?" I might have gotten "the bird," if I was lucky. Instead, I took a deep breath and told him, "I can't believe that cop beat you up. They're all crooked." Now that statement creates rapport. Suddenly he thinks you're on his side and wants to talk. If you want the interview you use this type of tactic. If it offends you face it: the Real World is often offensive. Again, the only reason I do this kind of stuff is so the story is balanced: fair.

Whatever happens--KEEP TRYING. Use different tactics:

1. Friendly--Wear a big smile. Shake hands. Tell them how nice they look. People relate to you better if you are nice to them. It doesn't take a brain surgeon to figure out why. If you are surly to people don't expect them to help you out.
2. Cajoling--"If you don't talk you are going to lose in the long run." People don't want to look bad. Help them to weigh the consequences. Be firm with them. You are the expert, use that to your advantage.
3. Reprimanding--I've done stories where neighbors were complaining about a certain county employee. Only the negative people would talk on camera. The people who thought the employee was doing a good job wouldn't talk. (He had done them "favors.") I told them, "If you really want to help your friend you need to talk with us. If you don't help he might be in big trouble." They decided to talk.

Sometimes it is necessary to get a "Natural Sound" interview. If you cannot get them to talk directly to you, then "listen in" while they explain their side to the cops or officials. Many times they will be so intimidated by talking to the cops that they will not even notice you. This is the time to use a shotgun microphone if you have it. Shotgun microphones are much less intrusive because they are mounted to the camera. For some reason, people assume unless you have a microphone near their mouth you are not recording sound.

This tactic is hard for some people to use. It seems intrusive and sneaky. News gatherers have to be somewhat hardboiled. It is difficult to roll tape while people are crying over just having run over a child. It is not easy to get right up to the police while they are interviewing someone. It takes guts. A willingness to be yelled at.

This process of gathering Natural Sound Bites is difficult. When you do it around the Police it becomes somewhat of a game. The media does the law enforcement departments a great service by showing wanted criminal's faces on the air. They try and cut you some slack. If they yell at you, half of it is just for show. They know you don't take it personally. At least you shouldn't. The rules of the game are as follows: Do anything you want until they tell you to back off. Go back only as far as it is necessary for them to stop bothering you. If they say, "Get back there!" Where is "there?" Take two steps back, keep rolling. If they define there--behind the

cars--do it, no questions asked. That's the game. They are in charge. Follow exactly what they say. If need be apologize to them afterwards. I am positive they understand your point of view. They do not like you getting in the way of what they are doing. You should never disturb the crime scene.

Keep track of who the police talk with. As soon as they let the witness go, get them. Pump them for information. They are in a talking mode at that time. They have practiced telling their story and are probably somewhat rattled. Usually they have no problem talking with you at that time. If doing whatever it takes to get the sound bite bothers you, then develop nice ways to get the information instead.

Some subjects are hostile. I have had people throw bottles at me and threaten to beat me up or have me killed. It seems drug indictment cases and domestic violence scenes are the worst. These felons yelled that I was "dead meat" and that I wouldn't last out the week. Most of what they say is hot air. Still, watch your back.

These thugs mean business. It helps to shoot the whole time you talk with them. Two reasons: your tape provides evidence of possible foul play to come, and your face is covered. They can't find a person if they're not sure what you look like. If you do get beat up, never list your home address on the crime report, always use the station's.

Getting threatened by criminals is not pleasant. Many

larger markets require shooters to wear flack jackets. The photographer is a target. The night light generates attention. In bad neighborhoods, attention can get you killed. Don't shoot if they're aren't cops to keep the scene under control.

If you are in a bad situation, here are some lines to try:

1. "I don't like having to do this, but it's my JOB. My boss will get mad if I don't get it." People relate to doing things that are unpleasant because it's work related.

2. "I have the right to be here."

Public property is fair game. No one can prevent you from shooting on a sidewalk. Cops know this. Unless you are hampering the investigation you have every right to shoot from public property.

You are not officiallly trespassing on private property until you are told to leave. After all, how can you ask permission unless you go on the property? If further challenged explain: "We were looking for the owner" and "we didn't see any signs."

Any good shooter should be aware that there are rights of privacy and liable/slander laws. Know when you are on shaky ground. Ask your news director where your station stands on the liable laws. Some stations are more suit shy than others. This is a legal minded society. Everybody wants to sue. Be careful.

Worst case scenario---Someone starts to attack you. Protect

your head. Keep your face covered as much as possible. Call out, "If you want to be on TV, I'll put you on TV." Roll tape as the incident occurs. I've had several occasions where people have come at me. This is your last and most powerful defense. People hate to be caught in the act.

The tape provides powerful evidence of the crime being committed. If they harm a media representative they are in big trouble. If you have a battery light, turn it on. Thugs hate bright lights. Call out, "You touch me and I'll sue you for everything you've got." Threats work. Most people will immediately back off.

Remember why you are there--to get an interview. After a confrontation, immediately try and establish rapport. Run through the arguments again, especially: "it's my job," and "we just want your side of things or else you'll look bad."

Interviewing people is the bread and butter of the news business. The photographer usually does not have to get the interview. The reporter for the story generally has this already set up. However, there are many times when they have failed to get the person to talk, and you can chime in and swing the scale in your station's favor. This is especially true when you are working with women reporters trying to interview men.

Learn from your mistakes in handling people. Being obnoxious destroys rapport and creates problems for the stations. We have had reporters at our stations who handled

situations very poorly. They were rude and said uncalled for things. That reputation will follow you. These individuals were reported to our news director by the person being interviewed. Believe me, I could hear them getting yelled at through the door.

This is a PEOPLE BUSINESS. Treat people like you would like to be treated. Getting the important interview is a challenge. Use the techniques in this chapter and increase the your chances of getting them to talk. This business runs on sound bites. Capture them.

"Just The Facts, Ma'am"

Gathering Information/Writing the Story

Gathering information in the field is what ENG is all about. If you use a knife it has to be sharp. Your journalism skills are honed razor sharp against six questions: who, what, when, where, why and how. Without referring to these six basic questions, elements of the story will almost certainly be missing. It is a horrible feeling to get back from the scene and realize you didn't ask who else was involved or when the crime happened. The sharper the questions the better the information.

Perhaps the most critical piece of data you gather is who is involved in the story. Get people's names. Make sure the spelling is correct on all the individuals you talk with. Find out from them if they know anyone else who might be able to help you. Don't forget to get the person's title. What are they in charge of? Do they have a nickname they would prefer? Find out as much as you can about the person you are talking with. Write this information down. It can help with future stories.

Rapport is the ability to build bonds between people. In order to glean information from the person they must have a reason to talk. Perhaps its politically expedient for them to get the word out. Maybe they are furious about road conditions. Lots of times people will talk just because they like you. Getting people to open up on camera is a skill. Gaining rapport with people comes under the "who" category.

You are not just gaining information about a subject, you are learning about a person.

I like to think of myself as a detective. I look for clues as to what the person is about. Our county manager wears a belt buckle that says U.S. Marines. I talked to him about how he thought the war was going. He knew military strategy and enjoyed talking about his experience with the "War College." Gain rapport by discussing subjects the person likes to talk about. One of the women leaders in our community wears beautiful turquoise jewelry. Mention how beautiful her jewelery looks. If it is significant to them and you like it, you become important to them, too.

If you want to learn more about building rapport with a person you are interviewing read the book, Unlimited Power by Anthony Robbins. He explains a branch of psychology called Neuro-Linguistic Programming. Basically, it relates how people process information. He mentions that one of the best ways to gain rapport is by mirroring body language. Sit the way people are sitting. Put your arms the way they do, copy the way they move their hands. It is amazing how close you can get to a person merely by mirroring their body language. Try it. See if it doesn't help you get more rapport with people.

If this is a person you interview on a regular basis, it pays to build a portrait of the person's significant others. How many kids do they have, what are they interested in? Does

the person like sports? What are their favorite teams? If you start your conversation with something they enjoy talking about they will be more likely to discuss more uncomfortable subjects.

Building rapport is critical. It is important how you treat people. My news director has a saying, "We are the guys in the white hats." If someone cuts us off in traffic, do we cuss and shoot them "the bird?" No. We are the "guys in the white hats." We are nice to people even if we can't stand them. It creates rapport.

Once you know "who" is involved you must learn "what" is going on. Most reporters are given a "tip sheet" before heading to the story. It has most of the pertinent information about the subject. There will often be a news release printed by the organization to further help the reporter. Many stories are well researched before we even go to them. In fact, some reporters write the story before they attend the meeting. They already know most of the facts. I don't recommend this. News occurs when it happens. People get burned foretelling what they think is going to happen. An issue may come up that is even more important than what we first thought was happening. If your mind is closed to what is going on you can miss the main event.

I cover lots of press conferences. The time you spend before the actual conference can be very valuable. Talk to people in the meeting. I shot a story about the "Silent

Witness" program. It is a valuable resource to the police whereby citizens call in and tell what they saw. It was a good story. Before the actual meeting, however, I talked to the police majors in the room. One of them told me about a bounty hunter in the area that had discovered a murderer in our area. Apparently he was more valuable than Silent Witness could ever be. It was an interesting insight and made for a good story idea. Keep your mind open to future "what's happenings."

One of the most simple questions you can open the interview with is, "What's going on here today?" Ask the organizer of the event. They can fill you in on details that the press release might have overlooked. This question often ends up being the sound bite that is used. Don't forget to ask the simple questions. They are often the most effective.

The "what's going on" question can often be the meat of the package. TV is a visual, action oriented medium. The more movement, the better. If there is nothing going on it is probably not much of a story. The grim truth of the Real World is we often have to come up with something even if there doesn't seem to be a story there. This is especially true when the "news hole" is large. If few commercials were sold, we have to fill more time. Therefore, on light days what would normally be just a VO or a VOSOT turns into a full fledged package. This can be difficult. Keep a good attitude and realize that creativity can overcome almost any obstacle.

We have a saying in the newsroom, "I can package air." We come up with something out of nothing. I cover lots of drug marches in Savannah. They happen regularly. The larger the news hole, the more chance that we'll cover them again. I went to one where there were four people sitting around in chairs getting ready to march. I called in and said, "There is nothing going on." They replied, "We have to have a package, see what you can do." The reporter and I looked at each other, rolled our eyes and waded into the situation. What was going on? Four people sitting in chairs. What was unusual? Two of the people were young children. We decided to take the youth angle. How were they affected by this? The story didn't win any awards, but it did fill the news hole with something meaningful.

Creativity can solve most problems. Attitude plays a large part in this. Some people don't see stories anywhere. They complain that they "never get a good story." They seem to always pick the "bogus" assignments. Working with these people is a pain. They find the negative side in everything they do. The story is important to the people that we are covering. Do your best with the material even if you think it is not newsworthy. Some of the best packages were enterprised out of weak assignments. These reporters discover interesting "whats" no matter where they go. They are the winners in this business.

The next best question to ask after, "What's going on?" is

"Why is this important?" The why question often brings the people angle into the story. Television is an intimate medium. It works best when the story relates to people. Why is this story important to people? Ask the person "Why are you having this event?" These are obvious questions, but they often produce the sound bite that is needed to make the story work. The "importance" question should bring to light the reason you are doing the piece. It also helps people understand why they should watch the story.

Our station does charitable stories on a regular basis. Perhaps a family had their home destroyed or a person has to have surgery and it is very expensive. Many times these folks will ask us to do a story on them in order to help raise money. This is one of the ways that the media can actually help people in a concrete way. These are good "why" stories. The audience likes to be involved with the newscast. They like to help people, too.

The news needs to be current. The "when" question should generally be answered "today", even better "right now"--live. There are other sidebars to this question, however. When was the project started? When is the expected completion date? When did the prisoner escape? When was he discovered missing? The closer you get to the exact time the problem occurred the more accurate the newscast will be.

If you say, "The prisoner escaped at 3:30 this afternoon," it sounds more official than, "He escaped this afternoon." If

you follow it up with, "They have been searching for eight hours straight," people understand what the cops are going through. Time is an important element of the story. Make sure you get the facts right as to "when" things happen.

The location of the event is also important to the story. If there is an escaped convict around, people want to know "where?" "Southeast Georgia" is not specific enough. If you say, "He escaped from the truck at the intersection of highway 17 and 196," the audience immediately knows where you are referring.

It is sometimes a good idea to include a map of the area in your story. I have covered hurricanes and people love to see where the storm came from and the probability of where it is going. Computer graphics are excellent for illustrating the "where" question. On the escaped convict story we had a line drawn down the highway as to where he escaped, the chase and where he was finally caught. It turned out that a viewer had heard the description of the guy. The criminal had come into the viewers' convenience store. The manager pulled a gun on the guy and told him, "Wait here until the cops come."

"Where" is an important question. It is not always a location question, however. "Where do you go from here?" asks about future efforts of the agency. I covered an annual event called "National Night Out." All the neighborhoods were supposed to turn their lights on from eight to ten P.M. This was supposed to slow down the crime rate. The next day we did

a follow up. An obvious question was "Where do you go from here?" The organization's representative said they would, "Continue to educate the public on the need for well lighted areas." A similar response could have been garnered by the question, "What does the future hold for your organization?" Make sure and find out what the individual hopes to attain by the event. You should be on the look out for future stories. Follow ups can make interesting packages. However, if you don't know their goals it is difficult to determine rather they reached them.

Crime scenes almost always evoke multiple "how" questions. "How did he rob the bank?" "How" is a mode question. "Was he using a gun? What type? How did he get away?" All these questions help you to paint a word picture of what happened at the scene.

It is important to feel the pulse of the organization you are dealing with. "How has business been? How is it going since the new road came through?" The "how" question can help you get a handle on the current status of the group.

These six questions can help you get a grip on the situation. As a journalist you must get the facts right. Your accuracy is absolutely critical. You are judged as a news person by your ability to get the story correct.

When you are writing the story or taking notes at the scene it is imperative that you are clear. Clarity can make the difference between a great story and a poor one. Be

particularly careful about using unspecified pronouns. Who are "they?" Not being specific causes confusion. Our news director makes a point to tell us that we are writing for people with an average of a fourth grade education. Use common words. Write like you speak. We are not in the print medium. We have to be clear on the first go around. The audience can't reread your story.

If you attended journalism school you probably heard of the "inverted pyramid." This type of writing puts the most important fact first and continues in matter of priority. This style of writing can work in the news setting as well. What is the most important aspect of the story? You have a limited amount of air time to present what happened. Make sure that what ends up on TV is the essence of the event.

Be careful to avoid phrase which date the story. You should not say "Today there was a fire on the west side of town." What if the story is run the following morning? The narration would then be wrong. The same goes for words such "yesterday," and "tomorrow." They do not work in our business.

Always watch the video before you write the story. If you mention something that was not shot your narration is not going to match the video. People expect to see what you are voicing over. You may get ideas for an opening from the video. Perhaps there is a particularly good piece of natural sound that you could write to. The best reporters always shot

sheet the video (make a record of when shots occurred on the tape). This makes the package stronger because the audio describes the video. You know what you can refer to when you write.

Let the subjects carry the weight of the story. You are not the expert in their field, they are. You did not get burned out of your house, they did. Let them speak. When you write your narration be sensitive not to repeat what someone else has said or will say in your package. Don't waste valuable time by being redundant.

As you are gathering information in the field, keep in mind that you must save at least two pertinent facts of the story for the "lead" and the "tag." The lead is what the anchor reads to set up or introduce your package. This fact "leads into" your story. The anchor has probably been in your station longer than most reporters. Give them something worthwhile to say. The tag closes out your story. A common tag might be where they can call for more information.

Do journalists have goals for their writing? Are we trying to persuade the audience to do something? In our profession we must do everything we can to be objective. It is our job to show both sides of the issue. This drives some people out of the business. I know reporters that quit because they had to be so unbiased. You have to give the "other side" the chance to give their point of view, no matter how much it may gall you. Journalists should show what happened in as clear

and accurate a manner as possible. Hopefully your writing will be interesting as well.

The best way to learn how to be a good writer is to practice. Do you enjoy writing? Does it come easily to you? Most good writing is re-writing. The producer often helps edit your work. Don't be too "thin skinned" during this process. You (and everyone else) are still learning.

Watch and pick up ideas from the best people in the business. Listen to the way they turn a phrase. Determine what works best for you, and listen to other people's opinions of your writing. Whatever happens, make sure you are accurate. Use the six questions in this chapter and get "Just the facts, Ma'am."

Get The Beat

First With The News

There's a saying amongst pilots who fly fighters, "I feel the need for speed." News has a similar mentality. The show waits for no man. Either you have the story done, or you don't. This feeling of "rapid deployment" is especially true when it comes to beating other stations with the story.

Electronic News Gathering is an intelligence operation. Stations seek solid information and rush to get it on the air first. Whoever wins this game "Get's the Beat." Being first with the news is every station's goal. If you break the story it means your station is on top of the situation. The community comes to realize that if they want to learn what is happening in their area they have to watch your station.

During World War II a common theme was, "Loose lips sink ships." You had to be careful what you said. This thought is true for the news business as well. If you want to keep the news boat afloat you have to watch your mouth. News is an extremely competitive business. The walls do "have ears" whenever you're around someone in the news business.

One of the biggest challenges in ENG is beating the competition with sound bites, better video and better story ideas. Over the years I have learned ways to "Get The Beat." You may find some of these ideas ridiculous. They work. Take them seriously, or you'll get beat in the street.

Getting "the beat" involves security measures. Most news organizations depend on 2-way (walkie-talkie) traffic. So:

1. Limit your conversations to ambiguous information or get to a "land line" (telephone).

Your 2-way traffic is monitored. The paper, the other stations, and even the radio stations will probably have your frequency in their scanner. If the person running the desk is stupid you will get beat on countless stories. I've raced to a murder scene confident we would be the only people there (we had a viewer tip us off). The assignment editor got on the radio and said, "They found a suspect, the address is East Broad and Liberty." I almost had a stroke. Sure enough, five minutes after I arrived on the scene the competition showed up. Watch what you say on the radio.

2. Talk in code. Say, "Has Mr. B called?"

Make it as difficult as possible for the competition to figure out what story you are working on. If you cover an assigned beat the other stations may have an idea who you are talking with. The mayor and city alderman are probably frequent interviews, for instance. The more ambiguous you are on the radio, the better. Of course, you need to leave a detailed list with the assignment editor as to what calls you are expecting. Your station needs to know the people you are referring to.

3. Your base station is monitored. On critical stories depend on cell phones. These portable phones are the safest way to transfer information. A cell phone has the convenience of the 2-way with the confidentiality of the land-line.

Never say things like "This is really big--send the live truck," over the radio. The competition will be alerted. If you want "the beat" watch what you say.

People that have been in this business for a while have learned a few "specialized" skills. They have become professional snoops for information. The best reporters have a "nose for news." They are eager to gather information. If you had a problem ethically with staging action in the "Seven Shots," you may have difficulty with these ideas as well. Just be aware that even if you don't use them, your competition probably does.

1. Practice "overhearing" your competition or the subject as they talk. Read a newspaper as you listen. This works in many situations, especially court cases. Hang around the lawyers and their clients. Listen and take note of the conversation.

I was covering a court case once about this man who was supposed to have killed his wife. I sat and "read" a newspaper while he and his attorney talked. It gave me valuable insight as to his thinking. He seemed to have a complete lack of remorse about what had happened. He was found guilty. I believe the jury came to the correct decision. He was a completely different man in front of the court than he was with his confidants. You may never be able to use the overheard information in your package, however it can help you ask the right questions.

2. Perfect the ability to read upside down. Many memos are just laying around. We cannot use this "glanced at" material in itself--but it does give us the opportunity to learn what is going on inside the organization. Most of the data lying around doesn't matter. Some of it does. Keep alert to opportunities that present themselves.

3. Practice the art of lip reading. Watch TV with the sound down to perfect this. I have found this skill particularly useful when coupled with binoculars. I've covered many chemical spills. The media is kept a great distance from the scene. With luck, you can "listen" with your eyes from a hundred feet and still gather what is going on. You will be amazed how well you lip read already. With a little practice you can be quite good at it.

4. Talk with secretaries and security guards. They are a wealth of information. Secretaries know everything that is going on in an organization. Who do you think types all the memos? Get to know these people. They can really help you out.

I remember talking to one secretary about where her boss was. She mentioned that he had left the office feeling bad. With further probing she mentioned that he had been having heart problems. He turned out to be in the hospital. This was not a story in itself, however, it enabled the station to keep track of his recovery and increase our rapport with him.

Secretaries can also fill you in on inside relationships

between members of the boards you are dealing with. One secretary mentioned a particularly heated set of letters between two commissioners. I asked commissioners about these letters and got some great sound bites. Pay attention to what secretaries have to say.

Security guards and deputies also seem to know everything that is going on in the building. If I want to know how a case is progressing I go straight to the deputy in charge of courtroom security. They usually cut straight through the bull and tell you whether the jury is close to a decision and how they feel it will turn out. They are often an accurate barometer of what is going to happen.

The "little people" can be big sources of information. Spend time getting to know the people behind the scenes. Usually they are dying to talk to somebody. Occasionally they can turn you on to big stories.

5. Listen in on conversations at local restaurants. What are people talking about? What are they interested in? You can get amazing story ideas like this. It pays to keep your finger on the pulse of the community. The news should fill a need in people's lives. If they want to know "How the county gets away driving their big dirt trucks sixty miles and hour down small roads?", perhaps you should be interested, too.

6. NEVER give information to competing stations, unless it's misinformation. In my book, if they do not have the hustle to find out on their own, they are not going to find it

out from me. I am often the first person on the scene. I have usually discerned what has happened and who I need to talk with in the first few minutes. There have been many times when I am packing up to leave when the competition is just getting to the location. The first thing they ask me is, "What's going on here?" Say things like, "nothing to it, no big deal," and continue to pack up. With luck they may just drive right off. You can't believe how much joy I get out of that. If you snooze, you lose. If you're too lazy to get out of the truck and check things out for yourself you deserve to get burned by the more astute news person.

7. Watch where you park. On really big stories, I drop my gear off and hide my truck. This does two things: It gives the competing station a false sense of security. They don't hurry if they don't think you're there. Hiding the car also prevents tipping them off as to where the action is.

I covered a murder victim's body that was found out in the country. I set up the live truck and shot the video I needed for the package. It was close to news time and I was extremely sensitive to beating the competition. Until we had done the live shot I was in a "silent running" mode. I had all the lights out in the truck and was in essence invisible from the road. They never found the place because they couldn't see me. It was a great "beat."

8. Get the other station's data. Pump your competitors for information. If they are new they will not know any better.

It's hilarious to ask these new guys what's going on and hear them spill the beans on everything they know. Just look at them straight faced and keep asking questions.

Try asking them:

1. Who are you going to see? Find out future stories.
2. What is going on?
3. Any good stories today?

Seem friendly, be friendly, but get information out of them. When they ask you just say, "Same old stuff," or something equally ambiguous. If they have been around for a while they will say this type of statement to you. Don't get burned. Be aware when you are being pumped for information. The best way to get data from people is by acting that you already know everything that is going on.

This is a competitive business. Take pride in getting more and better information out of people than anyone else. Don't be afraid to take chances. Ask people the hard questions. They don't always say "No comment." Develop your ability to question people. Be smarter and faster than your competition and you will get "the Beat."

The Heat Is On

Dealing With The Police

I didn't always like the police. When I saw those blue lights in my rearview mirror my heart would pound. My question to them was, "Don't you have anything better to do than hassle people going eight miles over the speed limit?"

Those days have changed. I see the police with totally different eyes. I understand what they have to deal with. They are underpaid and grossly overworked. Most wear flack jackets so they don't get killed when some punk with a gun takes a shot at them. They go into environments that are extremely dangerous against felons that have assault weapons.

Law enforcement today is tough. The tidal wave of crack in our nation has spawned a generation of thugs that live only for a quick buck and don't expect to live past twenty. Criminals laugh at the legal system that lets them out on parole before their cell bed is hardly warm. The more I learn about cops, the more respect I have for them.

Journalists have to deal with police officers. I prefer the police beat over any other: this is where the action is. If you want to live on the edge of ENG the cop scene is where it's at. Few things can match the thrill of chasing cops down an alley with guns drawn searching for criminals. Why do they do it? They like the rush of adrenalin. It is a pure high. Many of these officers are war veterans, either with Special Forces or Rangers. They are tough professionals. If you don't like cops, you will have a hard time dealing with them.

The more you understand what they are going through, the better your relationship with them will be.

ENG is field work. Spot news is the ultimate use of ENG: especially when it is live. Most spot news stories have the police in the picture somewhere. It is important to remember several things about police officers:

1. The police are used to being in charge, avoid testing their authority. The fact is on a crime scene they ARE in charge. If you mess up evidence by tromping through the area to get pictures you will be in big trouble.

Follow their orders. Don't do more than what they tell you, however. If they say, "Stay back," take two steps back, no more. Discover the "edge of allowability." Do the minimum it takes to comply. Do your duty as a civilian and they will be more likely to bend the rules. If you don't do what they ask they will remember it.

The police are not required to let you anywhere near the crime scene. They don't have to tell you anything. They can always say, "Talk with the PIO." (Public Information Officer.) These PIOs are generally not cops and hardly ever give you as good a sound bite as the officer in the field.

2. The Police are doing their job, just like we do ours. They get in trouble for not following orders, so do not expect them to treat you differently just because you are with the media. It is not always possible to get right up to them, but try. Subtlety is the name of the game. Don't announce your

presence. Just walk up with the tape rolling.

The police have procedures they follow when processing any crime scene. They rope off the area with a plastic tape that usually says, "Crime Scene", they garner all witnesses, and look for evidence. Be aware of this process and capture the elements on tape. If it is a major crime, such as murder, shoot as much as possible. The video will probably be used many times. It is critical to have enough raw footage of the area.

Capture the crime scene in sequences as much as possible. Break elements down. Shoot the officer getting the crime tape, rolling it out, taping to the fence. These action shots provide great opportunities for gathering natural sound. Listen to what is going on, watch for the photo opportunity.

3. Be friendly with the police. Get to know them. You will see them over and over again. In most smaller markets the crime scenes will have the same detectives. If you establish rapport with those individuals your job will be a lot easier.

Savannah has a horse patrol, a bike patrol, various foot patrols as well as the patrol cars. I have done stories on most aspect of the patrols. I covered the horse patrol training course. The officers insisted I give it a try. I raced around the barrels on "Apollo," a muscular quarterhorse. I'll admit I had the fear, but the officers still talk about my ride. Perhaps you can guess the rapport I have with the

horse patrol.

One of my favorite units of the police department is the Emergency Responce Team or SWAT. I shot the group in a training session scaling a building and rappeling down. The sequence included racing up stairs and jumping through windows. After the practice was over they asked me if I wanted to rappel down the building. I said, "Sure!" Of course this got their attention. They hooked me up, constantly making comments like, "Your life insurance paid up?" and "You know the fall won't kill you, it's that sudden stop that does it." I leaned over the edge and went down six stories. It was great. Of course there was a lot of back slapping when I got to the ground. They thought I was one of "them." That is the essence of rapport. Those guys still help me out on stories.

If you are trusted you can access locations and information you never would have dreamed of. The regular cop on the beat is a gold mine of insights. Cultivate those friendships. They can help you when you need information.

4. Talk with all the officers, not just those in charge. The regular police on a beat may not be able to talk to you on camera, but they can give you background data that often helps the story. Most of the police have to eat on the run. They often frequent fast food places. Wendy's is their favorite in Savannah. We eat their a lot of times as well, just to talk with the police. I've learned from these guys that there is

often a disparity between the official word and what is actually going on in the street.

It pays to know both sides of the story. A lot of times you may have access to the Chief or the Majors that the regular patrol officer does not. You can help the flow of information by telling the men in charge that you heard "such and such is going on, is it true?"

5. Get as close as you can to the roped off area. Be gutsy, but smart. Back off only when told directly by a police officer, or when in danger. Push the limits of what is allowed. The closer you get the better the natural sound and the story will be. Natural sound bites are more spontaneous and generally have more emotion than staged interviews.

6. Try different approaches to the crime scene. Even the FBI has limited jurisdiction. They can throw you off the property, but you can stand right beside them if you are on the neighbor's land. I covered a story where a man's house was filled with stolen property and weapons. The FBI was on the scene. When they flash that federal badge in your face, believe me, it gets your attention. I tried a different approach. I asked the next door neighbor if I could get some shots from her yard. She said, "No problem." I was able to get close to the Feds and they couldn't say a thing. I was off the property and posed no danger to the crime scene. As long as you follow their instructions they have to stay off your case. The trick is to think of ways around the

something big is going on so the airwaves are clear for important traffic.

10-4 Acknowledgement (OK)

10-5 Relay information

10-6 Busy, unless urgent

10-7 Out of service

10-8 In service. When the officer leaves the station they usually call their unit number and say they are "10-8."

10-9 Repeat message.

10-10 Fight in progress

10-11 Dog case. "We have a loose 10-11 said to be biting children."

10-12 Stand by. (Stop)

10-13 Weather, road report

10-14 Prowler report

10-15 Civil disturbance

10-16 Domestic problem

10-17 Meet complainant

10-18 Quickly

10-19 Return to _____

10-20 Location.

10-21 Call by telephone

10-22 Disregard

10-23 Arrived at scene

10-24 Assignment completed

10-25 Report in person (meet)

- 10-26 Detaining subject, expedite
- 10-27 Driver's license information
- 10-28 Vehicle registration information
- 10-29 Check for wanted
- 10-30 Unnecessary use of radio
- 10-31 Crime in progress
- 10-32 Man with gun
- 10-33 EMERGENCY
- 10-34 Riot
- 10-35 Major crime alert
- 10-36 Correct time
- 10-37 Investigate suspicious vehicle
- 10-38 Stopping suspicious vehicle
- 10-39 Urgent-use light, siren
- 10-40 Silent run-no light siren
- 10-41 Beginning tour of duty
- 10-42 Ending tour of duty
- 10-43 Information
- 10-44 Permission to leave___ for_____
- 10-45 Animal carcass at _____
- 10-46 Stalled car, assist motorist
- 10-59 Convoy or escort
- 10-60 Squad in vicinity
- 10-61 Personnel in area
- 10-62 Reply to message
- 10-63 Prepare make written copy

- 10-66 Message cancellation
- 10-75 In contact with _____
- 10-76 En route to _____
- 10-77 ETA Estimated Time of Arrival
- 10-80 Chase in progress
- 10-81 Breatherlizer report
- 10-89 Bomb Threat
- 10-91 Pick up prisoner/subject
- 10-95 Prisoner/Subject in custody
- 10-98 Prison-jail break

You may have noticed there are gaps in the numbers. I listed all the major 10 codes. I rarely, if ever, hear the other numbers. When you move to a town, check with the assignment desk at your station as to what signals are used in that 10-20. The police also use code numbers. For instance a code "3" might be "in progress" or the "Subject is still at the location." The desk should also have these code numbers. The codes are usually different for every city. Be aware that the fire department may use different codes than the police department.

Learn these numbers as quickly as possible. When you are riding the streets your ability to respond to dispatch in unison with the patrol cars greatly enhances your ability to catch spot news. If you hear something important always call the information into the desk. They may not have heard what went on. Listen to the scanner, not the radio.

9. In dangerous situations, especially at night, stay close to the police. Thugs do not like their picture taken. Our overnight producer got hit in the head and had his cell phone and two-way radio stolen while covering a crime scene. The crowd was angry that he was shooting the video. Instead of standing by the police he moved back towards the street. Fortunately he wasn't hurt very badly. If the mob gets unruly always shine your light on them and take their picture. This guarantees that you can identify them at a later date. The police provide a bubble of safety. Stay near them. If there are no police at the scene and you are by yourself my advice is to keep on driving. It is a war zone out there.

NEVER turn your back on a hot situation. Advise your reporter to watch out for you. While you are fixated on the viewfinder someone can smash you in the head. I remember shooting a package on crack houses. The "Boys in the Hood" were standing on the corner yelling obscenities at us. I would never have shot that video by myself. You have to have someone watching your back.

I shot another known drug area where I had an intern watching out for me. I was shooting low video of the parking lot where drugs were commonly sold. Suddenly I hear, SMASH, SMASH! Two beer bottles landed inches from my skull, showering me with glass fragments. The video showed bottles exploding and shards crashing into the camera lens. The intern looked at me and said, "Do you think they were

trying to hit you?" I asked her, "What do you think?" You have to trust the person you're working with. You can get killed otherwise.

10. It is common for news photographers to shoot walk downs. A walk down is when criminals are led out from the police headquarters to the jail transportation. The best way to do this is to get in front of the criminal and walk backwards. It is important to scope out where you will be walking backwards. It is bad form to back into a pole or fall in a hole. Get close physically and keep the camera wide. This will produce good shots and help steady the camera.

Some police departments get bent out of shape if you ask the suspect anything while they are being walked down to the transportation. If they don't care, ask the criminal for a response: "Why did you do it?" Any answer is better than none. You can never tell what they are going to say. Some criminals are real loud mouths and provide great natural sound.

The most important fact to keep in mind is to always treat the police with respect, they can make or break the story. If you act professionally most police officers will help you out. When the "heat is on" remember that everyone acts differently under pressure.

The Horror, The Horror

Dealing With Death And Destruction

How many dead people have you seen? Were they in a casket and look "almost alive?" The closest most people get to the horror of Real World News is when they drive by a wreck. They slow down seemingly try to catch a glance of carnage. The police call it "rubber-necking". I call it my job:

News covers grim reality at its worst. News gatherers are a select group. Normal people do not see what we see. The most horrible video is never aired. It is too graphic for the show, yet it is imbedded in the reporter's mind forever.

Some people start out "gore hungry." They seem to enjoy the blood and guts. They think it's "cool" to see dead people. They joke in the newsroom about the horrible things they've seen. After a while you realize the humor is a protective device for them. They either laugh it off, or it drives them out of the business.

I sometimes refer to the news business as "Life in the War Zone." We see the slimy underbelly of man and society at its worst. The most horrible, unthinkable atrocities become common to the person in news. It may be common, yet it still plays havoc with your mind.

The worst scenes to shoot deal with children. I remember going on a call around two in the morning on a Friday night. It was wet, and the roads were slick as ice. I drove through a fog looking for the lights that would signal the wreck's location. I came prepared for the worst, I thought. The

scanner mentioned a "46" of a child---a dead baby.

I slowed down around a curve and saw a police car lighting the scene. The car had flipped over on its roof. There were children's toys scattered on the road. I got out of the truck and grabbed my camera. I switched on my battery light and moved closer to the wreck. What I saw chilled the blood in my veins. The infant had been decapitated, the car landing on her head squashing it into a pile of red jelly with hair.

If it sounds bad, how would you like to see it in real life? News is no movie. What I shoot is real. The blood is real. The bodies are real. This story was particularly hard on me because I had a newborn at home. I kept thinking, "This could have been Ashley." I was shook up. I spent hours holding my daughter thinking how glad I was that she was alive.

The pure horror I have seen surpasses anything Hollywood could come up with. I remember getting a call on a bad truck wreck on Interstate 95. I pulled up to the scene, there was sheet metal everywhere. I got to the front of the truck and the cab had been sheared off. I asked the State Trooper if the driver was alive. He replied, "Nope." I got the camera and started looking through the wreckage. The trooper mentioned, "It's pretty rough in there." I gave him my best "I've seen it all" look and stepped over the divider. I hadn't seen this: the man was cut in half. The top half had been erased by a concrete support beam for the overpass. The man's legs were still in his blue jeans. He was grossly

overweight. You could see the fat around his midsection. What really got me was the spine. Eight inches of vertebrae stuck out from the pile of guts. I shook my head and fought off the urge to vomit. Anyone who tells you what a "glamorous business" this is has never been involved with spot news.

Savannah has a drug problem. The scum that deal in crack have turned this city into what often seems like the "Wild West." We have shootings nearly every night. Most involve one drug dealer shooting another. We even had a series of women being killed who were suspected crack prostitutes. I got the call to check out a body that had been found at the waste water treatment plant. I cruised over to the location and saw a group of men huddled around a trash dumpster. I asked them if they had seen the body. They said, "Sort of." I got my camera out and asked them where it was. They pointed in the direction of a pile of refuse. I told them I didn't see anything. They asked me to, "Look closer." I scrutinized the area and saw what they were talking about. A forearm and five fingers stuck out from the top of the mound. "There's a leg over there," he pointed to his left, "and the scalp is over here." I got a few wide shots, interviewed the men and left. There was nothing specific that we could even air. How would you like to see something like that while you're eating dinner? The woman (they could tell by the bone structure) had been put down a lift station. This is a huge propeller that

drives sewage to the treatment plant. It had chopped her into chunks. It was not a pretty sight. I still have nightmares about the "Body Parts" story.

The point of these stories is not to gross you out. It is to illustrate the all-too-real nature of the News business. I want you to understand what you are getting into. This is a grim occupation. I have seen gallons of blood spilled on the sidewalk. I have heard screams of intense pain and wails of grief stricken family members. I have walked down sewers where the smell of decay permeated my clothes.

That is the news. It is not pretty.

My advice to you:

1. Talk it over with the other photographers and reporters at the station. They can relate. Every reporter on the staff has their share of "war stories." We are a tight group. Average people cannot relate to what we see on a daily basis.

War veterans may know where you're coming from. There's a difference, however. Many of these tragic situations occur to innocent civilians. They weren't doing anything wrong, they just happened to be at the "wrong place at the wrong time."

The people at the station can talk about what you have seen and know where you are coming from. Just being able to talk with people who shake their heads with understanding helps. Get the story out of your system. It is a catharsis to discuss it with the other people. Don't keep it inside.

2. Try and dwell on the good stories where you actually

helped someone. We do stories with people who are facing a disaster in their lives. Perhaps they have cancer or maybe their home was destroyed by a fire. We publicize their dilemma and there is often an outpouring of help because of our broadcast. That is something to be happy about. These stories can help ease the pain of seeing the horrible side of the news.

3. Believe that the memory will fade. It will. No matter how horrible it was eventually you will be able to think about it without it bothering you too badly. Just grit your teeth and hang on. Think about the good things.

4. We cannot show the most graphic video, so do not go out of your way to look for it. Some people seem to be consumed with getting every possible angle of the scene. I'm one of those people. Yet when it comes to stuff we won't use, why shoot it? Why even look at it? The less you can input into your brain the better off you will be.

News is horrible. Don't let it get to you.

Stay In

Keeping Your News Job

Television News is a turbulent business. I have seen a near total turnover of reporters and photographers at my station. This is true for several reasons. The first cause is purely economic. The "golden years" of network and affiliate TV are over. Every station, no matter how large, runs on advertising dollars. Today, there is cable, VCRs, movies, radio and print media scrambling for the advertising buck. The money that used to flow like molten gold has now slowed to a trickle.

The business is hurting. Belts are tightened and jobs are threatened. The News Director might serve as the assignment desk and the producer in order to save money. The concept of the "One-Man-Band" or the reporter that can also shoot and edit is becoming more and more prevalent. I hope you noticed that I put a great emphasis on the technical end of the business as well as the job of gathering news. If you don't know how to run a camera and come back with the pictures you need to make the story work, you won't get that first job.

Think of it this way. When the networks lay off the whole bureau in Atlanta suddenly twelve seasoned professionals are looking for a job. The hungrier they get the less money they'll work for. What chance does a journalist fresh out of school have against a person who has covered literally thousands of stories in the Real World? Not much. This book will give you the ammo you need to put the odds in your favor.

Economics also effect job turnover at the salary level.

Most smaller markets do not expect their best reporters to stay for long. Management assumes they will move on after a couple of years. Why? Because smaller stations are limited by the amount of money they can pay their staff. A starting reporter/photographer makes around \$14,000 a year. If they stay at the station for several years they may make \$17,000. It is difficult to support yourself, much less a family, on this kind of money.

Stations know this. If you want to make more money you have to get a job at a larger station in a bigger market. For instance, if you move from market 100 to market 30 you can expect to make around \$25,000 a year. That is nearly eight thousand more dollars.

People are not expected to stay in one station for long. Of course, the further up the market scale you go, the more likely it will be that you stay at your job. People don't want to move if they're getting a good salary, doing a job they like, in a place that's nice. I know photographers in Atlanta who have been there for twenty years.

There is another wrinkle to the picture. Not only do smaller stations pay you less, they often work you harder. As a starting reporter at a small station you will probably have to shoot, write and edit everything you do. You will not only be responsible for at least one package a day, but also one or two VOSOTs or VOs. That is a lot of work. As you move further up the scale the work load decreases and the quality

increases. You might be responsible for only one package, but it had better be good. Mediocre work is not acceptable. At a small station, if lighting is poor or the white balance is off the video is likely to still be used. That is not the best thing to do, but that's life in the Real World at a small station. You have to fill the news hole.

The second major reason for the lack of stability at TV stations is: ratings. We live and die by how many people watch the show. It is as simple as that. Advertisers want to reach the most people possible in their spots. Your ratings are broken down into the number of Houses Using Television (HUT rating) as well as demographics (age, sex, and income of the viewer). If your news show does not pull in the numbers the whole news staff can be yanked off the air. I mean the whole staff--anchors, news directors, reporters, anyone can get the axe. The farther up the market scale you go, the more likely it will be that you will be caught in a "purge" somewhere along the line. In fact, the latest figures I have seen indicate that a reporter will be fired at least twice during their career purely because of budget cuts or consultant recommendations.

Magid is one consulting company that offers its services to TV stations. They are the people that poll the public to find out what it is they like or dislike about your station. Consultants try and boost your ratings points. It is common for them to say, "Your anchor's hair looks bad, she has to

to get it cut." Or even more drastic, "Your sports reporter is terrible, fire him." And terminate him, they do.

There is no job security in the news business. This is true for everyone: anchors, news directors and photographers alike. You can, however, stack the odds in your favor. Gathering news is serious business, so is keeping your job. Here are some methods to help solidify your position with the organization.

1. Get to work early.

Know how long it takes you to be ready to hit the streets. If you are the photographer, have all of your gear on line and ready to go by your "get to work" time. If you are one-man banding, have story ideas ready and read the paper before you get to work.

Management notices if you are constantly late. Time is money. We are on a constant deadline in this business. A wasted few minutes can make the difference in getting the story or not. Take the extra time you need to make sure you "hit the ground running."

2. Take care of your gear.

Repair of equipment consumes a large part of the budget at a news station. If the gear is constantly going down because of operator error, it is likely that they will be fired. It is just too expensive to keep them on. It is common for any staff person wrecking a car to be fired on the spot. Be careful.

Be aware of the weak points in the equipment. These may be the umbilical, the viewfinder or the loading door in the deck. Pamper these spots. Study the section on gear protection in this book and live by these guidelines.

Watch out for your news truck. Check the oil, water and battery levels on a regular basis. If your truck dies because it was low on oil, you probably will be fired. It is easy to ruin equipment. Don't get the reputation as a gear abuser.

3. Attitude check.

Smile. No one likes to work with a person who always seems depressed. Look for the bright side in situations. Be patient with others. Do not gripe. It is a bad habit which assignment editors and news directors cannot stand.

4. Get along.

Look for people's good points. Look hard. Compliment people when they do well. Many of your friends in the news room will probably move on to bigger and better things. You need contacts. The opposite is true as well. If you get the reputation as being hard to get along with, it will follow you for years.

5. Do your best work.

Do not be satisfied with mediocrity. Look for ways to improve your technique. This might be in the audio, lighting, or camera movement fields. Keep learning, keep growing in your skills. The better you are, the more valuable you are to the organization.

6. Hustle.

Extra seconds count. Many people take their time, then run late and miss deadlines. People appreciate hustle. Do not walk if you can run. Hurry every chance you get. It makes a difference.

7. Look for story ideas.

We are field operatives. We are the eyes and ears of the station. We hear and see what is going on in the community. People at the station are isolated from the story. Therefore, we must constantly be looking for story ideas, new angles, and updates.

8. Read the paper/Watch the newscasts.

Stay informed, there are many local angles to national stories. Reporters that are beat oriented, (city, county, courts, cops. . .) may not know what is happening on the other beats. Make sure you know.

9. Meet people.

Make it a point to shake hands and be friendly with people. Ask them what is going on in their areas. Many people have great ideas and are only waiting to be asked. Work hard at remembering names. Write them down, call them occasionally. Keep in touch.

10. Flexible, Dependable, Able.

Be known as the person that "will do anything for the story." TV news is a 24 hour, on call business. It requires great stamina and dedication to do well.

If you are asked to work nights, do it. Weekends? Do it. Day break. . . do it! When the chips are down, when the crunch time hits, management should know they can count on you.

11. Be straight.

Stay off drugs. They make you old before your time. They create dependency. You need your wits about you to do this job. Don't kid yourself. If you are getting high all the time people notice. Your work suffers if drugs are in the equation. This goes for alcohol, too. If you booze, you lose.

Many stations require urinalysis before you can be hired.

12. Tell the truth.

Everyone makes mistakes. You may get a name wrong, not write balance, or lose a piece of gear. Do not make excuses, do not rationalize, do not argue with management. Tell them you are sorry, and it will not happen again. If you start lying, and happen to be found out, you will lose your job for sure. This includes sick leave. Do not call in sick if you just want a day off.

It is important to realize that the Real World is not always fair. You can do your best, but it's not always up to you. You can, however, make sure that your end of the equation is up to speed. If I could give you one piece of advice to live by it is this: "Always do your best." Push yourself to the

limits of excellence. The people who get ahead have this attitude. They win in the game of News as well as the game of Life.

Life Styles

Dealing With Yourself

The news business takes its toll on you. The stress of the deadline, coping with the blood and guts, dealing with management, all wear you out. To do your best work you must treat your body, mind and spirit well. You do not work in a vacuum. There are internal as well as external influences. You must take these pressures seriously. If you neglect any part of the body/mind/spirit triad you and your work is in jeopardy.

This business affects you physically. Humping eighty pounds of electronic gear in the field is hard work. Add a heat index of a hundred degrees in the summer and you are headed for problems. Take care of your body. Here are some methods that work for me.

1. Get enough sleep; it keeps you sharp and rearing to go. It is easy to get into the late night party lifestyle. One reporter I work with falls asleep if we're in the car more than five minutes. He is tired all the time and comes closest to missing deadlines on a regular basis. Because of this he is not trusted with the really big story that requires split second editing skills.

Find out how much time your body needs to be really rested. Stick to a regimen as much as possible. If you continually deprive your body of rest you are heading for long term illness. Your body cannot cope with the stress of working in the news business without being well rested. Get some sleep.

2. Stay off drugs and alcohol. If you abuse your body you will pay the price. Substance abuse is rampant in this business. Learn to cope with stress early. Major markets have drug tests to make sure their employee are straight. They cannot afford the liability of having an employee who cannot be counted on to do the job.

3. Eat right. Do not get into the fast food rut. It is an easy habit to get into. Stay away from too much grease---it slows you down. It makes you fat and clogs your arteries. Avoid caffeine. It increases the feeling of pressure. This job makes you jumpy enough without adding to it.

4. Get regular exercise--especially on your days off. Keep your tolerance up for the heat and heavy work. Work on your flexibility. Back exercises can help you avoid disc problems. Stay in shape. Endurance is a big part of the job. Make sure your body is fine tuned. You will feel better and your work will improve.

5. Know when to push and when to relax. Save your big push for when you need it. You need to think like James Bond. He is totally cool until it's time for action. The more you can put yourself into "neutral" the more energy you will have when it's needed.

You only have one body. It's imperative that you take care of it. When your competitors are at the same scene the person in the best shape will usually get the best shots. News is a physical thing.

Are you familiar with the phrase, "Mind over matter?" It is the truth. You can do anything if you want to bad enough. I've been on twenty-four hour stories and still done the job purely because my body was ready and my mind made me do it.

Your mind is your most important asset. Your ability to think, and to create will drive you upwards through the ranks. Just as your body needs food to survive and grow, your mind must be well "fed." Here are some ways to take care of the mental side of the triad.

1. Read books, magazines and newspapers on a wide variety of subjects. We make work in TV, but the best way to stay on top of things is to read. Reading flexes your mental muscles. Most people in this business make it a priority to read the local newspaper every day. The print medium goes into more depth than we can. Learn as much about what is going on in your society as you can. The more you know, the faster you grow.

Read every chance you get. Have reading material with you at all times. If you have to wait for an interview, read. Never waste time when you could be learning. These little blocks of seconds add up. I read at least thirty books a year on down time between shoots. In fact, I wrote the majority of this book in between news assignments!

2. Vary your interests. Strive to learn something every day--about your craft, yourself, your world. Don't pigeon hole what you know. Be eclectic. News is a wide ranging

subject. Pay attention to the stories you do. People would love to be in your position. Think of all the important people you are exposed to on the job. You are hearing first hand the un-edited edition of what is going on in your area. News gathering is an exciting and informative way to spend the day.

3. Memorize worthy uplifting statements: "Improvise, adapt, overcome!", "Go the distance," "Do your best." I carry four by five notecards with me whenever I read. If I see something that catches my eye, I write it down. I have a note keeper mounted to my windshield where I place these cards. While I drive, I memorize these statements. It helps me keep my edge during depressing or frustrating times.

4. Do not take yourself too seriously. TV is not a life or death situation. If you miss a deadline the world does not end. Of course, if you do it too often your job probably will. It's easy to get caught up with being in the News business. People wave at you and think you're special. We are just regular people. If you think you are really something great, you are heading for a fall.

5. Learn to handle stress. The best way to beat deadline pressure is by careful use of the time before the crunch occurs. Make use of the "spare" minutes. Make every second count. Be aware of how long it takes you to write a VO or edit your package. Make sure you are back in time to get your work done.

6. Take pride in what you do. Care about your product. Be careful with the equipment. Pride goes a long way in making sure your mental state is great. If you don't care how things look on the air, believe me, your work shows it.

7. Do not be overly sensitive. People say things they do not mean when they are under pressure. Try and re-establish rapport with everyone in the newsroom. You may need their help some day.

Tempers often flair during edit crunch time. You may have to bite your tongue in order to keep World War III from breaking out in the newsroom. Just try and remember how you felt when you had three minutes till air time and you still had the B-Roll to lay for your whole package. That kind of stress makes people crazy. If you know the person is "under the gun" to get the piece finished, don't bother them. If you do, expect your head to get bitten off.

You are more than just your mind and body. You have a spirit that pulls the whole triad together. This is an important element that many people overlook. Your attitude at work often depends on how your spiritual life is going. You may wonder, "What has this got to do with ENG?" Everything. People lose their jobs or quit the business because they don't really know why they got into it in the first place. Here are a few ideas for you to consider.

1. Get in touch with what makes you tick. What are your goals: for this day, week, month, year, five years, ten years?

If you do not have goals, how will you know when you have won the game of life?

I am a big believer in goal setting. I have a bumper sticker on my wall by my desk that says, "Shooting gives me aim in life." It has particular significance to me because I am a photographer. We all need an aim in life. We are happiest when we have something we are striving for.

What are you trying to get out of your job? Is it money, fun, adventure? Are you at this station purely because you couldn't find a better job? Are you desperately trying to leave because you hate where you are at?

Bad attitude is a habit. It is easy to get into the rut of thinking everything is worthless or stupid. You must focus your mind on the good things that are going on around you. Ask yourself, "What can I learn from this?" or "What is funny about this situation?"

2. Practice quieting your mind. Try breathing exercises. Listen to your breathing and focus on a peaceful, happy scene from your life. Meditate on where you are and where you have come from. Taking deep breaths has a positive effect on you. When the going gets rough take a deep breath and do it.

If you cannot control your mind, someone else will do it for you. Your spirit determines how happy you will be. In the long run this is a decision only you can make. No one can force you to be happy.

3. Strive for excellence. If you do your best, your spirit

will be happy. At the end of the day you can look at what you have accomplished and be grateful for the success you encountered.

4. Remember to remember. Tough times never last, just tough people. I find it useful to remember the catastrophic events I have covered. I've seen people maimed, unemployed and homeless. At least I still have my health, my job, and my home.

Use the ideas presented in this chapter to help you deal with the problems that occur in your life on and off the playing field of ENG. Take care of yourself. Your happiness depends on your ability to strike a balance between your mind/body/spirit triad.

Check Three

1. What are the two basic types of people you find in the street?
2. Describe the personality that loves to be on camera. Explain how you deal with this type of person.
3. Describe the reluctant interviewee. List six possible arguments to try on these people.
4. What is the "fairness angle?" What are the two lines that go with this argument?
5. As a rule--how does the photographer stand with each person? How should they relate with the subject?
6. List five possible tactics to try in getting an interview.
7. What should the photographer/reporter always do when getting a difficult interview?
8. How is it possible to "listen in" while the subject is talking to the police?
9. What are two possible lines to use in a hostile situation?
10. What is "Getting the Beat?"
11. Why is it important to watch what you say on the two-way?
12. Why should the reporter never give information to a competing station?
13. Why is it important to watch where you park on big stories?
14. List three sample question to use in order to get information out of competing stations.
15. You are at a crime scene. Describe ten ways to deal with the police.

16. It is night. You are entering a dangerous neighborhood, on a shooting call. There are no police around. What should you do?
17. Is there ever a time to question the police's authority?
18. A police officer tells you to stop shooting. You are standing on private property---outside of the crime zone tape. What should you do.
19. What is a "walk down?" Describe how you would do this shoot.
20. You have just shot a car wreck where the victim was horribly mangled. List four ways to help you deal with the situation.
21. Describe why it is important to get to work on time.
22. Why should you watch the local newscasts and read the paper?
23. Why should you hustle when you work?
24. How many story ideas should you generate a week?
25. Why is it important to tell the truth when you make a mistake?
26. Describe five ways to be good to your body.
27. Describe five ways to strengthen your mind.
28. Why is it important to know what you want out of life?
29. Describe eight methods of generating story ideas. For each of the methods list five sources or ideas you come up with.

30. Why is having a filing system important. Describe typical entries in a Rolodex.
31. How can being on mailing lists generate story ideas?
32. How do you gain rapport with people?
33. Describe the six questions used to get the facts. Think of five typical questions under each of the six categories.
34. Describe the ethical dilemma journalists face in gathering information by using unorthodox means.
35. List each of the major "10 codes."
36. Describe methods used to keep your news job.
37. What part does economics play in the news business?
38. Why is it important to get enough sleep?
39. Why should you eat right?
40. Why is regular exercise important?