

BEFORE YOU say yes



You want to be a news director or move to a bigger market, but is the job you're considering the right one for you? If you're thinking about making a move, you have to do your homework. Learn as much as you possibly can before you sign on.

Get to know the station

Before you even agree to an interview, get an aircheck and watch the station's newscasts. Then track down people you trust who know the station and the market, and get the lay of the land. What's the position, image and brand of the station you're considering? If the station isn't number one, which station is and why? If you're looking at a job that's publicly posted, you might even want to call the station's current and former news directors to learn more. By all means, check what's been said about the station on the Internet, but consider the source and make sure you verify the information.

Investigate the company

If a publicly held company owns the station, check financial statements and annual reports to get a sense of the corporation's profitability and philosophy. Find out how long previous news directors and general managers have stayed at the station, why they left and where they went. Check out GMs by calling news directors who have worked for them in other markets and learn what you can about corporate expectations. "If the company expects you to turn the Titanic around by November and it's September, you're never going to be successful," one news director warns.

Consider your motivation

How does the job you're considering fit with your passions and abilities? At a dominant number-one station, the news director's job often is to "play defense" to keep it on top and to maintain its successful culture. Does that sound like it plays to your strengths? If you're a person who likes to change things and rebuild, you might be more interested in a station that's in second or third place.

“As a reporter I always felt that what I found on the streets was not reflected on the air. I always said my news directors didn’t have a clue what they were doing, so that’s why I wanted to be a news director.”

Esteban Creste • Telemundo • Chicago, IL

Understand the job

Check the station’s research philosophy and its relationship with consultants, which can directly affect how you do your job. Find out what your specific duties will be, especially in radio, says KDKA news director Marshall Adams. Will you be anchoring as well as supervising? Can you hire and fire, or does that authority rest with someone else, like the program director? One news director was surprised to discover it was his job to make sure the news cars had regular oil changes!

Envision the challenges

Learn as much as you can about staffing and salaries in the newsroom. You should be able to find out how the station compares to the rest of the market, on average. Are salaries at the top, middle or bottom of the scale? You might learn that some people are paid minimum wage, and they come and go all the time. Knowing that in advance helps you envision some of the challenges you may face in recruiting and training staff.

Interview the general manager

Your success will depend to a large degree on your relationship with the general manager. “If you don’t get along with your GM, you’re going to be out the door fast,” says one veteran news director. Use your job interview to make sure you understand the GM’s goals for the news department, and how they mesh with the goals of other departments. Then find out how upper management will support you to accomplish those goals. What can you spend money on, and what can you change?

Protect yourself

Make sure you’ll be offered a contract that will give you some financial security. If the GM who’s hiring you leaves, it’s entirely possible that his or her replacement will want to change news directors. One news director says it’s important to be clear up front that if that happens, “you’re not going to pitch me out the door, you’re going to pay me for the next year.”

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS you might want to ask THE GENERAL MANAGER

- ▶ **What's** your opinion of the news department?
- ▶ **Why** are you interested in hiring me?
- ▶ **How** long do you plan to stay at the station, and what are your future plans?
- ▶ **How** do sales and news interact, and what happens if there's a conflict?
- ▶ **What** is the capital budget, and what's the current state of equipment?
- ▶ **What** continuing education is provided for staff, including me?
- ▶ **How** am I going to know if you're upset with me?
- ▶ **How** will I know if you think we've had a good day?
- ▶ **How** do we celebrate victories?