



# GETTING TO know you

**One of the most important tasks facing a newly named news director is to get to know the staff. It takes time, but it's well worth the investment to get to know your employees as individuals.**

## Reserve judgment

Some news directors suggest getting a list of the staff ahead of time and contacting people who know them to get a sense of what they're like. Others want to know as little as possible beforehand. Either way, it's important to go in with an open mind. "The best piece of advice I could give a new news director is not to allow the general manager or other department heads to tell you about the people you're going to be working with," says Anzio Williams of WDSU-TV in New Orleans. "If they want, they can write you a letter to tell you what you're going to run into, you seal it up and open it after 30 days." Clear Channel's senior vice president of news Steve Minium goes even further: "Don't look at the personnel files for the first six months," he advises.

## Ask good questions

Consider using a written survey to collect information from everyone in the newsroom. Some news directors do this anonymously, on the assumption that people will be more candid; others ask for names so they can follow up on specific issues. Ask how they would define their jobs, what they like and dislike, what challenges they face, and what their goals are. Assess the culture of the newsroom by asking what they're proudest of and why things are done the way they are. (See "Newsroom Surveys" on page 39)

## Meet one-on-one

In the first few weeks, meet separately with every member of the staff for at least 20 minutes each. Take people out of the office for a longer chat over coffee or lunch, if possible. Get to know them as individuals by asking what they do outside of work. "I asked if I could take notes so I could remember things about them—background, interests—so I could get a sense of the diversity of life experiences we had in the newsroom," says WBZ's Angie Kucharski. Find out why they work at the station and

what motivates them. Let them get to know you, as well. “In a lot of newsrooms that change hands, there’s this shroud of mystery. ‘Who is this guy? What’s he about?’” says Adam Bradshaw, news director at KVVU-TV in Las Vegas. “The first thing in the door I start meeting with people out in the newsroom, not in my office. People in the newsroom want to see you and hear you.”

### Meet as a group

Let them talk about the issues that matter to them. Listen more than you talk. Find out what they’re proudest of and acknowledge the station’s history. If you’ve done a newsroom survey, plan to hold another meeting to review some of the problems that surfaced. Meet at the station and keep it businesslike. Don’t go out drinking or socialize with the staff. “They need that time to talk about you behind your back,” one news director says.

### Make the rounds

Expose yourself to every work group and every department in the station over the first couple of months. Sit on the assignment desk and in the booth, ride in a live truck, and work every shift—morning, evening and weekend. Part of that is just learning the systems, says veteran news director Geoff Roth. “You can’t fix what’s broken if you don’t know what’s broken.” Show them you know how to work, and you’re not afraid to roll up your sleeves right beside them. Visit with engineering, promotions, sales and human resources, as well.

### Be accessible

Walk and talk in the newsroom at least twice a day, with no agenda in mind. Keep your door open and encourage people to drop in. Some news directors say a dish of candy works wonders to get people to stop by. “If you get people walking in, sooner or later they’ll talk,” says Ken Jobe, news director at WHBQ-TV in Memphis, TN.

### Face any preconceptions

If you’ve been in the business long enough to be taking a job as news director, you won’t walk into your new newsroom as an unknown. Know what’s been written about you on the gossip web sites because your new staff has probably read it. You may not need to address it directly, but forewarned is forearmed. Look for allies in the newsroom who can help you dispel any misperceptions. At the same time, don’t try to recreate your personality for every newsroom. “People need to know that you’re not a chameleon,” says Kathy Williams, news director at KRIV-TV in Houston. “Be what you really are. If you are consistent, the people who are making it up about you will surface.”