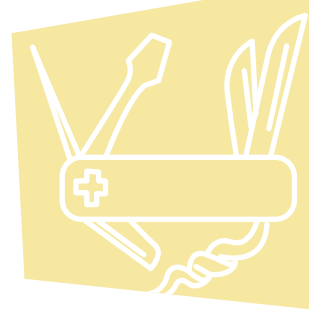


BE prepared



Every job comes with surprises, and you can't possibly anticipate them all. But here are some you should probably be prepared for when you first become a news director.

“There are surprises every week, things you don't anticipate. Expect the unexpected.”

Dave Grant, • KAKE-TV • Wichita, KS

It's not all about news

First-time news directors say they're surprised at how little time they actually spend with the news product. “You can go through a whole week and realize you never saw a rundown,” one news manager said. That's a big adjustment, especially if you came up through the producing ranks. Expect to spend at least 60 percent of your time on non-journalism issues—administration, personnel, budgets and the like. “The paperwork and the sheer amount of meetings you have surprised me,” says one news director.

You will be scrutinized

Your staff will watch you closely from day one. “Every sigh, every facial expression, even the way you walk in the newsroom is being examined,” says Angie Kucharski, vice president and station manager at WBZ-TV in Boston. Think carefully about the message you send in person and in writing. Expect that your staff will discuss and interpret your gestures, reactions and comments.

The welcome won't always be warm

Some people in the newsroom may not want you to succeed, at first. Maybe they've been through a lot of news directors, and they don't think you'll last. Some people may not believe you want them to succeed. Maybe they liked the previous news director, and they suspect you'll try to get rid of them. Expect to face some resistance, and plan a heart-to-heart conversation with each of those people. "If you have a good plan, and you're communicating how you want to move forward, then eventually you start to get through to the people who want to be on the team and want to win," says WBZ-TV's Kucharski. KVVU-TV's Adam Bradshaw suggests finding an ally who's been at the station a while and who is trusted by the staff. "Once the staff sees that that person trusts you, it really helps." But you also should be prepared to deal with people who won't stop being negative. "If their attitude is one that is cancerous, get them the hell out of there," says Joyce Reed, vice president of strategy for Griffin Communication.

You can't do it all

If you're not careful, you may find yourself working around the clock because the job is never done. "I would like a big sign in every news department: There is no badge of honor for working more than 10 hours a day," says Reed. "Train your staff so that they can do the job without you," says one news director. "Then trust them to do it." Expect that you'll need to create a system that allows you to delegate, so you can focus on what's most important and also have some time for yourself. Set a firm time to go home, and stick to it. "What you do is important, you've got to be driven to be successful, but you've got to have a life," says Kathleen Choal, news director at KVOA-TV in Tucson, AZ. (See "Balancing Act," page 27)

Sales thinking may dominate

Decision-makers above you may be focused less on how to build the product than on how to sell it. If the GM comes from sales, that may be the first thought that comes to his or her mind. Expect the focus outside the newsroom to be on the bottom line, and be prepared to defend the independence of the newsroom. (See "Ethical Issues," page 25)