



The script filled 21 pages, double-spaced. Most previous remarks given at RTNDA conventions had been off the cuff, but Edward R. Murrow took the unusual step of writing out his address in the months leading up to the 1958 gathering in Chicago. He intended to have it distributed, he said, he intended to make a bold statement. In accepting the invitation to speak, he told RTNDA's board of directors, "Somebody ought to make a speech on one of those occasions which would outrage our employers."

On the night of October 15, he gripped those 21 pages as he walked to the podium in the Sheraton-Blackstone Hotel. For nearly 40 minutes he delivered a brusque assessment of the news industry that echoed well beyond the Mayfair Room, where the news directors thought they'd be treated to dinner, drinks and a rare appearance by a superstar, but were treated instead to a significant moment in broadcast history. It wasn't just the message that made people take notice; it was the messenger.

Five decades later, Murrow's "wires and lights in a box" speech still resonates in broadcast newsrooms. Today's journalists share many of his frustrations with the business of storytelling, and they wonder how he might respond to new pressures and technologies we face. So in this special issue of *Communicator*, we look at some of the central themes his speech covered: entertainment versus news, the role of opinion in the newsroom, how to uphold basic journalism tenets in spite of changing technologies and how to prepare for the business models of the future.

Ironically, Murrow himself didn't put much stock in his influence; a short time after the speech, he told the *New York Times*, "I have not detected any indication that it has had any effect as far as the industry is concerned, but it did stir up a little talk."

RTNDA and RTNDF's commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Edward R. Murrow's "wires and lights in a box" speech is supported by a grant from the McCormick Tribune Foundation.

As RTNDA celebrates the anniversary in this issue, and at industry events throughout the year, it is our goal to stir up a little talk, too.

Stefani Blair
Managing Editor



Though serious about the job, Edward R. Murrow was never too serious for a good laugh with American broadcast producer Fred Friendly behind the mic on "Hear It Now."



See It Now

For more information on Murrow's speech, including the full transcript and other perspectives—such as CBS newsman Sig Mickelson's account of watching Murrow's bosses read his address—visit RTNDA.org and click on 50 Years of Murrow, under Popular Picks.