

Top Twenty-Five Things Ya Gotta Know...by Les Rose

- 1) You are journalists...not "hosts" not "personalities." JOURNALISTS. You are willing to go to jail to protect a source. 40-60 journalists DIE every year... truth telling is THAT important.
- 2) You are NOT in this for the money. You are entering a profession that won't pay like engineering or business majors...but as your friends spend their days selling copy paper or building better machines...you will be changing the world one story at a time. And never know from day to day who you are going to meet, where you are going to go, or what you are going to learn along the way.
- 3) You must understand....and be an advocate for...the first Amendment. There has never been a famine in a country with a free press. When dictators take over a country, the first thing they do is shut down the papers, radio, and TV. A free press is THAT powerful.
- 4) You need to know how television makes money...local ad sales, national ad sales, and what is involved in that pipeline eventually paying your salary. Overall...bigger markets=bigger bucks...and bigger pressure!
- 5) TO be great, you need to study the greats. If you find a story you think is great, make it part of your DNA...see it 20 30 40 times. See it with the sound down...study the composition, editing...do you still know the story? Did the photojournalist write with the camera? Did the editor get bored in the edit room and put in too many shots? Then LISTEN to it...with your back to the screen...does the story work as a radio piece? Do the SAME with your own stories.
- 6) Great storytellers are everywhere...from Dr. Seuss to Lennon/McCartney to Sara Bareilles...there is much to learn...even from commercials! This works not only to improve your work but also to inspire it.
- 7) If somebody takes the time to give you a tip or a bit of advice...smile and take it. If you have heard 100 tips over and over...the 101st may be a game changer.
- 8) AFTER you got the basics down, try to put something that is distinctively YOU in your stories. A great opening shot, a perfect line, a great transitional edit. If it is a school board meeting, make it the best one your station has ever seen. The dull assignments...the throwaways...are NOT a time to "spray it"...but a time to improve your skills. That way, when a great story comes along, you will be ready with an improved skill set.

- 9) Not everybody has the stomach for this. You will meet people on the very worst and very best days of their lives. At all time, remember that the golden rule, RULES. Cover the story like YOU would want to be covered. Politicians are fair game, but NOT their children unless they are adults that had something to do with the story. Their spouses are off limits too unless involved.
- 10) Your mother loves you, but get a second opinion. Or a third. The Journalism Highway is littered with overconfidence of a source...all the way up to the very top.
- 11) Remember the people that helped you as an intern or a newbie. Remember your mentors. The only way you can truly pay back the folks that gave you a break is to pay it forward. Be kind to interns for the rest of your life...and the new kids in an office as well.
- 12) We are frustrated social workers...otherwise we would NOT be putting up with the hours, low pay, and freezing live shots at 5am. To paraphrase Edward R. Murrow, we gotta give a voice to the voiceless. If we don't, who will? I bet the guy living in a box behind the movie theatre has a much better story to tell than the star out front on the red carpet pushing a product. Never forget it is called show BUSINESS.
- 13) Figure out the best way to communicate with your bosses. Some like email, or texting, others want a hand written note...others are fine with "knock knock...got a second" but most are NOT. Really important? Make an appointment! But in a business of communication we do precious little with each other.
- 14) KNOW the business you are IN...who knows what NBC ABC CBS CNN MSNBC stand for? Do you know what a "dog wedding" story is? A "walk and talk"? 4x3 vs. 16 x 9? Know the VERNACULAR.
- 15) Have a work ethic to beat the band. Early is on time, on time is late, and late is almost always inexcusable. Respect your coworkers...know the name of your janitor. PROMISE he or she lives in a different neighborhood than YOU do and no doubt has a whole set of story ideas and story contacts you never thought of. Never ever forget this career is a dream even on a bad day.
- 16) Learn what should go into a hurricane bag...yes you will need foul weather gear. But also CASH (ATMs need electricity), PowerBars, water bottles, a Leatherman knife, garbage bags for your camera, a hair dryer, lots of flashlights...one will NOT cut it. Small radio. Waterproof your cell phone and get an auxiliary battery source. ALWAYS keep a full tank of fuel...never let it get below half. You can't go to the story because you have no gas? Imagine

THAT conversation with your boss! Be ready for one wild ride and don't pick up smiling hitchhikers near a prison.

- 17) Remember that everybody else...your boss, your coworkers, your subjects and most especially your viewers are counting on YOU to get it right, get it fairly, and show them something that even if they were standing next to you, is something BRAND NEW. Your job is to tell the story assigned...there are no bad stories, just bad reporters. Suck it up and make the ugly ducklings your pretty babies.
- 18) Do NOT drink at company parties...over the Holidays or not. Really, especially if you drive a company car. Once upon a time in the 80s...a cameraman...nope, definitely NOT me, put the moves on an older woman at the company gathering. He was M-F 8-4 shift, take home car. Next day...nights and weekends and the worst gear. He had too much joy juice...and the woman who had her bum patted by the guy? The General Manager's WIFE. The cameraman was fired a few months later for a minor screw up.
- 19) It is a business of details. Your writing...remember that it is what you leave out that counts at least as much as what you put in. Four frames too much in an edit can take a great piece down to a good one...just four frames. Use your headset on every shoot every time for the rest of your life...a dying battery looks exactly like a sound bite to the sound indicator. Plenty of folks do their job just good enough to stay employed. That is NOT you...you didn't get here by being mediocre. You got every chance for greatness.
- 20) Remember to have a LIFE. Be PASSIONATE about life and your career. You will be a better journalist. When I had kids I know my storytelling improved. When you get an award...put it on your breakfast table and the next day quietly look at it. Remember you're only as good as your NEXT story! Go get them!
- 21) Always have a Plan B. And C. Chances are your story will NOT be what was in your assignment editor's head...or the EP...or yours for that matter. Work on the story on the way there...think of the sound you will need and the b-roll you will need to support it. Far too many students ONLY think of the interview. The interview should be done AFTER some initial video has been taken. This puts the subject at ease and used to the process. THEN you will get a BETTER interview and THEN shoot b-roll of things they mentioned AFTER THE INTERVIEW. So it goes...initial b-roll...including exteriors of home or business...you can write anything to those pictures...lots of simple activities around the house or going for a walk. I always say, "What would you be doing if we weren't here?" And other than "watching television"...almost anything is acceptable! DO NOT forget the value of still photos and home videos...especially if you need to put your subject in a

certain time or space. When you don't have images of the past...that may be a chance for a great standup.

22) High Definition Tips. High Def shows almost everything...and that is NOT always a good thing. Have you ever noticed that TV commercials tend to show landscapes, oceans, and mountain shots? Not human faces? Because I often wonder if Heidi Klum or Cindy Crawford would look great in High Definition. Every pore, blackhead and blemish is perfectly portrayed. Makeup helps...so does great lighting...the same two things that Hollywood has counted on since silent movie days. When shooting high def, because of the 16 x 9 horizontal format...your tripod needs PERFECT balance. Anything slightly off looks REALLY off. Bringing along a lint roller won't hurt...so much bad lint and hairs show up on camera...especially on black fabric.

23) I had a conversation with a reporter in a small market in Florida, at the Poynter Institute where I regularly teach. Seems that her news director SENT her there as a last ditch effort to improve her performance. Most students beg to get in to get better, others are sent by their bosses to turn them around. Over a break, she privately said to me on her first of 6 days there; "I don't understand why I am here...I'm pretty good." To this day, I do not know why I responded the way I did. I quietly asked her, "But are you GREAT?" A YEAR later, she landed in a top 5 market...and is a dear friend. We have professions that make it so easy to be just passable. Just good enough. Basta to that! This country NEEDS great journalists...without you, America doesn't have a chance. So if you are OK, be good. Good? Be great! Great...be excellent! And if you win, feel like you are the best ever, you can STILL get even better. Teach others and pass it along. If you don't pass on what you have learned, you stole it and have insulted all of those that helped you along the way. The older I get, the more I want to learn and the less I seem to know. Cronkite... yes, Walter himself...told me..."If you put your feet up on the desk, you are in for a big fall backwards."

24) Play well with others. Newsrooms are littered with great journalists that were fired because they could not work in a true mutually supportive environment. The assignment desk, the tape librarian (if you are lucky enough to have one), the guy that brings in your live shot signals, the person that fixes the gear...they are work hard and unacknowledged until things go wrong. After literally risking my life in the Malibu firestorm...all while the reporter in a local station stayed inside the live truck, she and I returned to the newsroom to high praise in front of the newsroom. At least SHE did. I stood next to her, my eyes hurting from embers and my scalp in band aids...while the boss said, "Terrific job out at the fires, we are very impressed by your hard work." I am standing NEXT TO HER...3/4 of the newsroom knew I shot it (didn't expect the news director to know at that moment) and she said NOTHING about my efforts. I felt like wallpaper on the walls. For better or worse, she had a VERY hard time to get the best effort from graphics,

editors, the desk, and others. She eventually left to another market...smaller at that.

25) Learn well the differences of *sympathy* and *empathy*. The differences are both profound and subtle. And be THE ONE. Be the best in your newsroom... but when you are...teach others. The downside of course is when you are the best in your newsroom; it may be time to move on to a bigger market. (If that is your desire). You will get better if you have others to inspire you in your own newsroom, but if you want to stay in that market for all of the best reasons...then continue to learn learn learn. This applies to bigger market moves too...learn skill sets that make you nervous; it's how you get better! And remember, to quote my friend Al Tompkins, to "Aim for the Heart." Don't just tell the story with your brain, but with your whole heart. Your work will flourish!"