Broadcast Manager Concern about Newsroom Career Preparation

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This issue of Feedback was produced with support from the Henry W. Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of Georgia.
person can assign. The student producer can re-arrange story order by
highlighting a story or stories to be moved and hitting a specific key. The
producer can open a story, give it a read, and send it back to the writer if it
needs changing. If editing is done the system tracks the time changes of the
stories. Each on-air person can program their work desk for a word-per-
minute formula so the software will time stories based on individual
announcing rates.

Even with numerous writers submitting material, the software keeps
track of time so the producer knows exactly how much time is left to fill or
how many seconds must be edited from the cast. Writers also provide an eight
character "slug" for their stories, one or two words describing the story, the type
of story (cuts, interview, voice) and then a line to indicate the corresponding cart number if needed.
The system accounts for time of tapes
stories based on individual
minute formula so the software will
read, and send it back to the writer
and computes exactly bow much time is left to fill or
the cast. Writers also provide an eight
track of time so the producer knows
program their work desk for a
announcing rates.

By assigning the system to automatically handle transitions,
students can focus on their writing. This is especially important
when students are handling multiple stories and need to
have news stories ready for broadcast.

The system allows for several
things to happen in a classroom setting:
• with faculty as news
director/manager, students can
work under deadline pressure.
• allows producers to order news, send material back for rewrites, rethink transitions.
• allows for writers to submit their best shot and get feedback, at
times quickly, if the class is set up in a
newsroom lab operation.
• allows for writing teams to do
collaborative work on stories, helping to check facts and spelling along the way.
• gives students the advantage of
working with the latest copy and
gets them into the habit of not "ripping and reading".
• allows faculty to set some real
deadlines beyond "next class
meeting" and have students submit work, say "one hour after a speech" or "two hours after a meeting ends" with material being sent to the faculty computer.
• it gets students involved in current
events and tracking various stories
day-to-day and week-to-week since they are working with AP copy on
a regular basis.
• it allows finished scripts to be sent
directly to the TV studio where
they appears on the teleprompter in
"BIG" letters - editorial changes can be made in the studio if needed during a newscast.
• it creates a newsroom atmosphere
where people are working on
stories, going through the AP Search desk for additional information on stories/events,
pulling up background information on a story, and
compiling a newscast as a team using current information that is
not being taken from a newspaper.

The system has made a difference in
the way students handle writing assignments and the way they handle
time pressures. It allows faculty to emphasize the need for rewrites, for
building a newscast properly, for editing and proofing copy before it is
set to be read on-air and for understanding the value of teamwork.
Students learn the pressures of an
assignment editor, a writer, a reporter and a producer. All four titles get
involved in the final project.

Newsroom Careers
Broadcast Manager Concern
about Newsroom Career Preparation

Michael L. Hilt
Jeremy H. Lipschultz
University of Nebraska
at Omaha

There is a continuing need to
better understand the needs and wants of broadcast general managers and
news directors when they hire
newsroom employees (Basow & Byrne, 1993; Parcells, 1985). In the Winter
1993 issue of Feedback, a two-state survey found that "higher percentages of broadcast general managers saw
dedication of newroom employees as
very important, while higher percentages of news directors responded that writing skills and news
judgment were very important" (Hilt & Lipschultz, p. 18).

The present study expanded the
research from the two-state census to a
national sample. The purpose of this
study is to compare responses from
general managers and news directors
concerning newsroom hiring variables.
In particular, the focus of the present
study is on what educators can do in
assisting the development of future
broadcasters.

There are a number of academic,
professional and personal variables that
may be associated with the transition
from college student to broadcast
journalist. Based on the previous
literature review, this study develops
and examines one set of variables
broadcast managers consider when
hiring a newsroom employee. We were
interested in such variables as skills
(Hochheimer, 1991; Fisher, 1978),
media experience and college
education (Becker, Kosicki, Engleman,

Method
General managers and news
directors at commercial radio and
television stations across the United
States were selected as a "stratified"
random sample (Babie, 1992, pp. 215-
217) using the 1992 Broadcasting &
Cable Market Place. In the first stage,
the 209 television markets and 262
radio markets were each divided into
four groups based on size to
approximate major, large, medium and
small markets (television: 1-52, 53-104,
105-156, 157-209; radio: 1-65, 66-130,
131-196, 197-262). Then, 26 markets
were randomly selected within each of
these subgroups, based on budgetary
limitations. In the second stage,
individual radio and television general
managers were randomly selected to
represent each of the markets. The
sample represented roughly equal
numbers of general managers and news
directors for comparative purposes.

A total of 416 broadcast general
managers and news directors were
identified for the survey mailing list.
The survey was self-administered.
The Total Design Method for mail surveys
was used (Dillman, 1979). Personalized cover-letters, survey
booklets and business reply envelopes
were sent. The first wave of surveys
was mailed in October 1992. This
was followed by a second mailing of the
survey to non-respondents in early
November. A third wave of surveys
was mailed to non-respondents in early
December.
Table 1. Hiring Newsroom Employees

"Do you agree or disagree that the following items are important when a station hires a newsroom employee?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranked Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>t Value</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>GM</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-motivation</td>
<td>GM</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>GM</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News judgment</td>
<td>GM</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>-0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-air presence</td>
<td>GM</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>GM</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice quality</td>
<td>GM</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical appearance</td>
<td>GM</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcast news experience</td>
<td>GM</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>-1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audition tape quality</td>
<td>GM</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College degree</td>
<td>GM</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College major</td>
<td>GM</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>1.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These represent the overall mean for general managers and news directors combined.

The overall response rate was 36.3 percent (N=151), "typical" (20-40 percent) for mail surveys (Wimmer & Dominick, 1994, p. 124). Wimmer and Dominick point out that low response rates raise reliability issues. While the response rate in this study does limit generalizability, the research is exploratory, and as such, is designed to focus future examinations.

Educational Backgrounds of Respondents

There were few descriptive differences between general managers and news directors in the sample concerning their educational backgrounds.

All but two news director respondents reported formal education beyond high school, and only two general managers (3 percent) had not continued beyond high school. News directors appeared to be slightly more likely to have received a college diploma (48.1 percent versus 44.9 percent for GMs). However, it appeared that a higher percentage of general managers reported attending graduate school (15.9 percent versus 12.7 percent). General managers appeared more likely (60 percent) to have studied business or liberal arts (other than mass communication), while news directors appeared more likely (77.2 percent) to have studied journalism or mass communication.

Evaluation of Prospective Employees

General managers and news directors were in agreement on the variables used in hiring a newsroom employee. From a list of twelve items drawn from the literature review, the two groups responded that
communication skills, self-motivation, dedication and news judgment were most important. Next, in order of importance, on-air presence, personality, voice quality, physical appearance, broadcast news experience and audition tape quality.

The least important items were college degree and college major.

There were no statistically significant differences between general managers and news directors on the twelve newsroom hiring variables.

Interpretations and Conclusions

It may be that on the twelve variables used in this study to measure newsroom employee hiring, general managers and news directors respond more as broadcasters. In broadcasting, the most important skill is the ability to communicate. It is just as important for the broadcast journalist as it is for the business-oriented manager. Likewise, skills such as self-motivation and dedication have always been highly valued in all aspects of the field, whether the concern is good journalism or station profitability.

There are limitations in the present study. As noted earlier, the low response rate suggests the need for replication of the findings. Further, this exploration scratches the surface of understanding the hiring process at broadcast news operations.

However, given the limitations of the present study, the findings help focus the importance broadcast managers place on some hiring variables.

Future research should consider if there is a pattern of responses. For example, is there a relationship between self-motivation and dedication? How do on-air presence, physical appearance and voice quality relate, if at all?

This research falls short of explaining the complex hiring decisions faced by broadcast general managers and news directors. For example, a news director hiring an entry-level news reporter might have two qualified candidates -- one with previous news experience, and the other with stronger communication skills. If all the other variables are equal, how does the news director decide? Would each news director make the same decision?

It seems clear that controlling for all the variables that might be important in a particular hiring situation may be impossible. For example, a news director wanting to "balance" or "complement" existing staff would have to evaluate strengths and weaknesses of current employees. Or, a news director who places emphasis on an audition tape may not be able to articulate all of the reasons she or he "likes" an applicant.

While students and faculty might well want to predict what attributes broadcast managers want in the hiring of newsroom employees, there can be no guarantees. By following the generalizations of research on broadcast news career preparation, the student, at best, earns the opportunity to be competitive for job openings. This does not mean the student will be hired.

Notes

1. Results from the previous two-state study in the Winter 1993 issue of Feedback suggested the possibility that these variables cluster into three theoretical factors. These might roughly be called "on-air traits," "off-air capabilities," and "higher education." However, attempts to produce factor scores yielded weak loadings which may be difficult to replicate.

References


Gifted 6th Graders & TV

What Gifted Sixth-Graders Don't Know About Television

James E. Sneegas
Southwest Missouri State University

There is little doubt that children spend vast amounts of time watching television and that they are among the most susceptible audiences to television’s influences. Children have been found to spend more time with television than with any other activity out of school (Timmer, Eccles, & O’Brien, 1985). Children and teens have spent more time in front of a television than in classroom instruction by the time of high school graduation (Fosarelli, 1986). Roughly 95% percent of the time children view television is spent watching programs not strictly intended for child audiences (Comstock & Paik, 1991). The negative effects of television viewing in terms of aggressiveness, race/gender stereotyping, product consumption, perceived reality, and socialization have been well documented in hundreds of studies over the past 25 years. It is reasonable to assume, however, that the negative effects of television viewing can be mitigated by the degree to which children understand the television medium.

Several critical television viewing skills curricula have been developed and evaluated in recent years (Adams & Hamm, 1987; Dorr, Graves, &