

Hey folks,

Fair warning: this is long! Please read it when you have time -- it is important.

I wanted to send along a few thoughts for your on-cameras -- this applies to standups/bridges, rants/walk-and-talks, and lives. It wasn't sparked by anything in the show yesterday, or even in the last week -- it's something I've wanted to send out for some time now. It's also probably *more* applicable to reporters who report regularly for the local show, but I've gone ahead and sent it to ALL TV reporters anyway (hopefully I didn't miss any).

Since I've arrived, I've seen many of you try to push your limits, experimenting with new ideas and really trying to add some dynamism to your on-cams. I've been loving it. It can really set you apart as a reporter (which is great for your career), and particularly when I think about our 6 o'clock newscast, it plays a role in setting the newscast itself apart from others.

That being said, it's easy to fall back into a routine -- doing lives where you're just standing in front of a camera, talking, for example -- and I think we need to continually push ourselves to put on good TV. There was a rule in the Montreal shop -- you don't package a story without an on-cam, unless it's an obituary. Full stop. Because otherwise, you're nothing more than a faceless voice and there's no connection to *you*, as a journalist. As a viewer, do I

trust you? Do I believe what you're saying? Do I like you? On-cams are important so our audience knows there are human beings behind our work -- and I think most, if not all of you, understand that. But it's also important to take that to the next level: performing *interesting and dynamic* on-cams. Otherwise, maybe there's a face to the voice -- but in an absolute worst-case scenario, people will see you as boring, and they will just hear *blah blah blah*.

So here's what I'd challenge you to think about, next time you're on-location: why are you there? (*I know, I know, sometimes you ask yourself that question a million times and still can't answer it*)

The key to an effective on-camera, as a reporter, is to give me something that I can't do myself, as an anchor, in studio.

Say you're live on-location, and your live consists of you standing in front of the camera and talking for 90 seconds. While you certainly bring your expertise as a reporter, you're not really providing me with anything I couldn't have otherwise done myself. We could have gotten all your information ahead of time, written it into some anchor copy, and had your camera operator shoot the scene for us -- without you in it. So what are you bringing to the table? Hopefully more than just a different face speaking different words.

The real value in having you at a location away from the studio is to **take viewers with you**. You should

be making them *feel* like they are right there beside you -- and that you are explaining *to them* what's happening where you are. That requires more than just standing in front of a pretty background and talking. It also means more than just panning the camera left and right. So here are some things to keep in mind:

1. Give me three dimensions. The problem with simply panning left and right is that your scene stays flat -- two-dimensional. I don't really get any better of a sense of your environment than if I were looking at a photograph, and you might as well be in front of a green screen. *Show me depth.* That means giving me left and right AND forwards and backwards.

Ask yourself this: how many times have you seen footage of some location on TV... then actually *gone* to that location, and thought to yourself: "Ahh, so THAT'S what it all looks like?" The experience of being there in-person usually crushes the TV experience -- but that's only because we most often see TV footage as static shots and tilts/pans. What's less common is the moving POV shot -- I think of Brady's (REPORTER SINCE 2009) recent story about the speedboater in court OCTOBER 2015., and that camera shot chasing him up the stairs. That gives you depth, and it gives you a better sense of the stairwell than a static shot would I'm not saying every shot should be a walking POV shot... but your on-cams have the power to really make people feel like *they're there* -- if you give them depth. More often than not, this requires

asking your camera operator to shoot on the shoulder, and NOT on a tripod... but it can also mean having the camera operator stay still while *you* move around.

2. The camera is your audience. Yes, when you're doing a live hit, the camera is your conduit to me, the anchor. So you talk to the camera the way you'd talk to me. But once you're full-frame -- that relationship no longer exists. *The camera is your audience.* So talk to them the way you'd talk to a human being -- a viewer.

If you were trying to show somebody how full a garbage dump was -- would you just stand in front of it, have them stand 5 feet away from you, and ask them to look to your left and right while explaining what it is they're seeing? Or would you take them right up to it? Walk them around the area? Maybe crouch down by a small mound -- and then gesture upwards at that *other* mound, that's ten times higher? Or maybe you'd ask them to stand still while you go waaaaay back, and get them to take it all in from an ultra-wide perspective -- with tiny, faraway you, for scale?

If you were trying to show somebody how foggy it was -- would you just stand there and explain it? Or would you back up from them, 10 feet -- to show them how you can't see through the fog, even at very short distances? No explanation will ever be as effective at describing a foggy scene, than for you to disappear in it.

3. Interact with the camera. You have a tremendous opportunity in explaining a scene to viewers, in that you can "order around" the viewer as you see fit. You can start your on-cam with your camera operator standing in one position, while you move around -- then with a simple "come look at this", you can bring your camera operator -- and the viewer -- down to look at some particular detail. Even if you don't want to 'speak' to viewers that way, you can choreograph your movements with the camera operator to have you move away from them to show something, have them catch up, or even send them off in a different direction.

4. Ask yourself -- is this good TV? Simple question. Is what you're about to do, on-camera, good TV? Or is it just radio with a face? Answer that question as honestly as you can, and that should help you decide what to do next.

5. Yes, all this stuff isn't always possible. I think of Renee's (Fillippone) hits yesterday for the budget... there's probably not a heck of a whole lot you can do there, in terms of dynamic lives. If you're standing outside the legislature talking about balanced budgets and child support clawbacks, please don't walk me up the front steps and talk about the brickwork! :) That's not what this is about... it's about those stories and opportunities where you are at a specific location for a specific reason.

6. Yes, there are other factors beyond just your own motivation/ability to do a compelling on-camera. There may be technical restrictions, manpower restrictions, or maybe the kinds of stories you tend to tell don't lend themselves to this, or sometimes things are just so crazy out there that you don't have the time to think much about your delivery... but by and large, the sort of thought process outlined above is something we need to work towards... and if there are big, persistent obstacles, please send me back a note. Heck, send me a note with your feedback, regardless -- and we can start working through the issues.

There are some tremendous opportunities to make our coverage more interesting by injecting a bit more *you* into your reporting, so hopefully you'll re-read those first four points again and give it all some thought. **It's not about turning our newscast into MuchMusic News or anything radical like that -- it's about putting a stop to doing radio on TV.** And again, while you can't use this advice for *every* live you ever do, what I WILL say is that we are definitely missing opportunities in the lives we *do* do.

Doo doo.

Cheers,
Andrew

p.s. oh and if I've forgotten any reporters on the list,
please feel free to forward this e-mail to them.
Thanks!