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“Is Broadcast Journalism a Lost Art?”

Don Hewitt
CBS News Executive Producer
“60 Minutes”

I came here this evening because the two of us -- journalists and corporate communication professionals -- have a big stake in not letting broadcast journalism drift away further than it already has away from what it always was, and what we always thought it would be. When broadcast journalism is not what it purports to be, that's not good for either of us. If you have a story to tell, you want it told by people the public has confidence in, and I fear that confidence is eroding -- that a grand and glorious American institution is in danger of fading from view.

Broadcast journalism, as America knew it -- relished it and depended on it -- in the 40s, the 50s, the 60s and a good part of the 70s -- is becoming a lost art and may all but vanish by the end of the century. The network news divisions that once aspired to be to broadcasting what the *New York Times* was to print, are now content to be to broadcasting what picture magazines are to print -- respectable in many aspects, but hardly the end-all and be-all of print journalism ... as television's magazines have become the end-all and be-all of broadcast journalism. Let's face it; man does not live by Marv Albert alone.

And where the measure of how CBS News, NBC News and ABC News were doing used to be the kudos they got from the public for a job well done and the recognition they got from their colleagues and competitors for doing it as well as they did, today, the measure of how they are doing is what kind of promotable nonsense they can come up with to draw people away from the sitcom that's opposite them on another channel. How many times can one television magazine go looking for "Who Killed Jon Benet Ramsey?" and come up with the same answer? Nobody knows, or at least, nobody is saying. News competing with entertainment has got to mean cutting corners. You can't compete with a sitcom unless you have no compunction about being something you aren't -- or, at the very least, being something, you shouldn't be.

And what, for God's sake, makes a network think, if there aren't enough good writers, producers and actors in Hollywood to fill a prime-time schedule, that there are enough good news producers, news writers and news broadcasters in New York to do it? Believe me, there aren't. The plain, honest to God, rock bottom truth is that the network news divisions have -- at the behest of their bosses -- bitten off more than they can comfortably chew, or digest.

Would that television were blessed with more Bob Schieffers, more Tim Russerts, more Sam Donaldsons, more Cokie Roberts, it would be a cinch to fill the hours the networks call on their

news divisions to fill. But, with the exception of the occasional Phil Jones or Jim Wooten, it isn't. It isn't blessed either with a whole hell of a lot of Mike Wallaces, Morley Safers, Ed Bradleys, Steve Krofts and Lesley Stahls. Where are they? Damned if I know.

Except I do know that when Mike, Morley and I tune in "60 Minutes" from The Old Television Home, chances are the broadcast will open with "I'm Ed Bradley... I'm Steve Kroft...I'm Lesley Stahl -- followed by -- I'm Christiane Amanpour, I'm Bob Simon, those stories and a Few Minutes with Andy Rooney's grandson tonight on '60 Minutes.'"

Okay? How did "60 Minutes" stay true to its roots and last this long on the top of the heap? Some people say it's our protected time slot. That certainly helped launch us; but staying on top of the heap, once we were launched, came from knowing who we were and what we were and what was expected of us by Bill Paley who, in lock-step with another broadcasting genius named Frank Stanton, was part P.T. Barnum -- and part Henry Luce. No one had ever before played a dual role like that and no one probably ever will again... He was, on one hand, the showman who gave America Jack Benny, Jackie Gleason, Lucille Ball, Alan Alda, Carroll O'Connor, Mary Tyler Moore, Dick Van Dyke and Red Skelton. And on the other, the newsman who gave America William L. Shirer, Edward R. Murrow, Howard K. Smith, Elmer Davis, Eric Sevareid, Charles Collingwood and Walter Cronkite.

Admittedly, it was a different time and, admittedly, television was a different business. In New York where the networks had, and still have, their flagship stations, the dial stopped at 13. Channels 1, 3, 6, 8, 10 and 12 were empty. 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11 and 13 -- that's all there were! But even today, in what is a veritable television bazaar ... with the dial full, all the way up to a 100, and reaching for 500 ... I would like to believe that the founding fathers ... CBS's Bill Paley, NBC's David Sarnoff and ABC's Leonard Goldenson...were they still around...would have stood fast on what was, for them, an article of faith: news is news and entertainment is entertainment and crossing the line between them is often dishonest and always bad broadcasting! What worries me ... would worry them ... and should worry everybody ... is not that, today, that line is crossed and criss-crossed repeatedly, but that nobody gives a damn that it is.

With so much of television now little more than anything for a Nielsen number, the three nightly newscasts, Rather, Brokaw and Jennings, are still doing a pretty damned good job of telling you what happened in the world today.... Ted Koppel's Nightline is still putting some meat on the bones of what you learned earlier in the evening -- CBS's "Face The Nation" ... ABC's "This Week" and NBC's "Meet The Press" continue to put some meat on the bones of what you learned earlier in the week ... and each week CBS's "60 Minutes" continues to have more on its mind -- and on its plate -- than the mugger, the maimer and the misfit of the week. But, with a lonely exception here and there -- in that plethora of so-called "news" magazines and syndicated talk shows that have all but taken over network TV -- the kind of tasteful and important journalism that made CBS News, ABC News and NBC News giants in the news business, is -- for the most part -- gone, and nobody seems to care.

On that subject, I can understand television wallowing in the Princess Di story ... we're pretty good at "wallowing"... fact is, we're better at it than the paparazzi we keep looking down our noses at and treat as if they're befouling our nest. Remember the pictures of a grieving Prince

Harry at the gates of Balmoral Castle, kneeling down to look at the floral tributes to his mother and reaching up to grasp the hand of the Prince of Wales? A very private moment between a little boy and his father... turned into a very public one ... by the paparazzi? No, by us, by CBS, NBC, ABC, CNN and every respectable newspaper in the world. Should we have shown it? Of course we should have shown it, but let's stop painting ourselves as somehow more respectable than the paparazzi when -- more often than we want to acknowledge -- with very different cameras we're after the very same thing... candid, unposed moments to share with our voyeurs as opposed to their voyeurs....

The beautiful people don't mind the paparazzi when they serve their purpose. You want to publicize a favorite cause -- make sure your press secretary -- (press secretary if you're royalty, press agent if you're not) -- sees to it that all the stops have been pulled out to have the paparazzi lined up -- cameras at the ready -- when the limousines pull up. If you fancy yourself one of the beautiful people and a paparazzo isn't interested in taking your picture, you ain't.

Now, how did TV come down with a disease worse than a galloping case of the paparazzi? I think the flood gates were opened when the three networks which used to have something called "Standards and Practices" allowed their owned-and-operated stations to dig down in the mud and come up with reality-based syndicated talk shows that are little more than cesspools overflowing into America's living rooms -- and I'm not talking about Oprah who does what she does as well as anyone in television -- the others, for the most part, make what's on the networks' flagship stations no better than what's on the supermarket's magazine racks. We, who work for the networks, can't hide behind the fact that those shows are syndicated, and not shows we, ourselves, produced. We bring them to you ... and, quite frankly, I think we should be ashamed that the reality-based programming the stations owned by the network of Dan Rather and "60 Minutes" -- the network of Peter Jennings and Ted Koppel -- the network of Tom Brokaw and Tim Russert can come up with, are so lacking in both standards and practices.

When I was growing up in television, there was nothing the networks wanted more than to get the FCC off their backs. What they dreamed of was a television world in which they would be free to regulate themselves. What they woke up to -- when they finally got what they wanted -- was a television world in which nobody regulates anything and everybody bumps into everybody else ... and TV magazines make deals with publishers and publicists to help them sell whatever it is they're selling -- by promising them kid glove treatment, including letting press agents dictate how much time and how many appearances their client will get.

In today's television world, the plain fact is that the present carload of television news magazines that followed in the wake of "60 Minutes" would have no interest in and wouldn't know what to do with an Ed Murrow, a Walter Cronkite, an Eric Sevareid, a Charles Collingwood, a John Chancellor, a David Brinkley or an Ed Newman. Today the network news divisions are less concerned with covering news than filling time... inexpensively, I might add. Witness the call Ed Bradley got the morning after he launched a new CBS NEWS program called "Street Stories." The call came from the top dog at the network whose only comment was "Ed, I think we have a gold mine." Not a word about whether the show was good, bad or indifferent or how Bradley had handled it ... only "Ed, I think we have a gold mine." And I fear "60 Minutes" is responsible for

that. We were the ones who turned TV news into a gold mine. And now, to too many of the TV news magazines that followed in our footsteps, being a gold mine is what they go to sleep every night praying for: "Our Father who art in Chicago, Nielsen be thy name," which is intoned, not only before they go to sleep, but every hour on the hour during "Sweeps' Week," which, if you work in television is "Holy Week" -- the week they take the local ratings.

Which brings us to ABC's big exclusive this year: Cambodian dictator Pol Pot coming out of the jungle? No! Ellen De Generis coming out of the closet. And I would venture a guess that ABC couldn't have cared less if she'd come out of the closet or stayed in the closet -- as long as she did it during Sweeps' Week. And that's no rap at ABC. The same thing would have happened had Ellen been on CBS or NBC.

Looking at the glut of television news magazines, there isn't anyone in this room, is there, who believes the men who run CBS, ABC and NBC woke up one morning and said to themselves: "You know, I don't think television is doing enough to inform the American people?" What they woke up, one morning and said to themselves was: "Can you friggin believe the money that "60 Minutes" makes? ... which happens to be true but not by design. What we started out to do thirty years ago was produce a television journal that would be the broadcast counterpart of *Life* and *Look* magazines. And if there's anything we pride ourselves on more than being the number one broadcast in television once in the 70s, once in the 80s and twice in the 90s and staying in the top ten for twenty years, it's that never once did we pay the least bit of attention to a Sweeps' Week and never once did we do anything to attract a rating. Ratings sought us. We never sought them.

I had the great good fortune to come into television early, when it wasn't very good, but it was at least respectable and trying to be good. It was 1948 when I left a good paying \$100-a-week job at *Acme Newspictures* to take an \$80-a-week job in a fledgling industry that had yet to prove that it could even get off the ground, let alone fly. In 1948 television was being watched mainly in appliance store windows, behind which enterprising salesmen tried to talk customers who came in for vacuum cleaners and air conditioners into indulging themselves in the latest in home appliances ... a black-and-white Westinghouse or RCA or Dumont. Tell you how long ago it was: How many people here own a Japanese television? A Mitsubishi, a Panasonic, a Sony? Well when I started in television Sony hadn't even built its first TV set. Back then, Americans were just beginning to feel at home with air-conditioning and the idea of tel-e-visioning -- watching little pictures in a box -- was more than a little overwhelming. Besides, in 1948, the only little picture in the box worth watching was Milton Berle.

Who knew that a Walter Cronkite, a Jackie Gleason, a Lucille Ball, a Red Skelton, a Mary Tyler Moore, a Barbara Walters, a Mike Wallace, a Huntley and a Brinkley, a Wagon Train, a hospital named MASH, a frog named Kermit and a horse's ass named Archie were all there just off stage waiting to go on?

Who knew that one day, if you turned your set on after midnight and went dial-hopping, you'd find on one channel a guy telling you how to grow hair? ... On another, a guy telling you how to grow rich? ... Or another a guy telling you God loves you ... but he'd love you more if you'd send him some money? ... And that if you couldn't reach God, you could always reach Dionne Warwick, who charges more to reach a psychic than Pat Robertson charges to reach God. And if

today there's a "700 Club" to reach God, and an 800 number to reach a psychic ... there are umpteen numbers to reach a girl ... courtesy of Time Warner, the amalgamation, God help us, of two American giants, Warner Brothers and Time Magazine, who for a good part of the night in NYC, at least, on Time Warner Cable, Channel 35, goes out of the movie business and the magazine business and into the whorehouse business.

Back in television's infancy, before the preachers, the hookers and the psychics moved into the neighborhood, I was there ... one of the toddlers ... in what, in effect, was a playpen where we made television shows out of Playdough. As I said, we weren't very good but we were respectable..... Somehow, it never dawned on us that we were going to grow up. We thought it was always going to be like that ... black and white ... and preserved for posterity on a grainy, out of focus, unwatchable film called a kinescope. Videotape hadn't been invented ... The first time I heard about it I thought they were kidding ... pictures on tape? Ridiculous! I thought they were kidding about launching a rocket into space -- in those days space was something you never had enough of -- and orbiting a satellite -- whatever the hell that was -- to bounce a television picture off it and reach everybody in the world? What nonsense! Cable was beyond my ken. Wire up the whole country? You're joking. If you lived in an area where you got more snow than picture and more ghosts than real people, try a roof antenna. If that doesn't work, go back to your radio. If you wanted to change the channel, you got up and you changed the channel. It didn't seem like a big deal.

For the handful of us in 1948 putting out television's first daily 15-minute newscast, "Douglas Edwards With The News," it was enough that a picture -- no matter how snowy -- got from Studio 41 in Grand Central Station all the way to an apartment house in the Bronx. Today, it's not enough that the picture gets all the way to an apartment house in China. That Chinese family isn't going to get up and change the channel. They've got a remote to change the channel for them so they can sit in a living room in Xian and look at a CNN newscaster in Atlanta who looks right back at them ... thanks to a teleprompter that enables the kind of people Lyndon Johnson used to say couldn't walk and chew gum at the same time, to read a script and look at you at the same time ... In 1948, only movie moguls had screening rooms. Today with a videotape store in every shopping mall in America, everybody's a movie mogul. Maybe we're not as healthy as we used to be ... because a videotape store has moved in where the drugstore used to be.

Cameras that operate without cameramen, microphones that operate without wires and yet, do we entertain the public and tell stories any better than Studio One did in the 1950s, when the microphones had wires and the cameras had cameramen, and everything was delivered by coaxial cable? In truth ... three coaxial cables ... about which Ed Wynn once asked: "If the coaxial cable is round, how come the picture comes out square?" Those three coaxial cables were in effect railroad tracks. One belonged to CBS. One belonged to NBC and one belonged to ABC.

If you wanted to go anywhere, you went on our tracks or you didn't go. What the engineers saw coming and the poobahs didn't, were tracks in the sky ... the Star Wars paraphernalia that's now s.o.p. in television ... the transponders and satellites that took away the hold CBS, ABC and NBC had on broadcasting. In the 1950s we were the big three, convinced that we always would be ...Just as Ford, Chrysler and General Motors were convinced they always would be!

But just as Detroit didn't see the Hondas and the Subarus and the Toyotas crowding them off the road, we didn't see the CNN's and the C-Span, and the ESPN's crowding us off the road. Both of us could have used a better rear-view mirror.

Now about telling stories as well as Studio One told them ... telling stories has been the end-all-and-be-all of "60 Minutes." I am convinced that it is your ear more than your eye that keeps you at a television set. It's what you hear more than what you see that holds your interest. The words you hear and not the pictures you see is what "60 Minutes" is all about. Our formula is simple -- four words every kid in the world knows ... "Tell Me A Story." It's that easy.

Watching television is the ultimate in "easy." You don't have to get dressed, you don't have to find a babysitter, don't have to find a parking space, don't have to wait in line, don't have to buy a ticket, don't have to find a seat. And since you also don't have to climb over anyone to walk out, that's easy, too. Television producers can live with your walking out. What they can't live with is you're not coming back. That's what happens when stories are told by people who don't know how to tell a story in real life; as well as on television.

Pictures are, of course, essential to television, but a picture is not always worth a thousand words. Sometimes, often times, it's the other way around.

I don't remember an Oscar for Best Picture ever going to a film that won only for Best Cinematography. To be sure, an out-of-focus picture leaves a lot to be desired ... but out-of-focus sound is a catastrophe. If you don't know how to communicate with words, you're in the wrong business. And I fear there are too many people today in my business who are in the wrong business.

Now, there's got to be someone out there saying to himself or herself: What is he grouching about? He had it made under Paley...had it made under Tisch...and today has it made under Mike Jordan.

I did and I do. And I know it -- know that only a company with a healthy bottom line can afford to give a news producer a top of the line salary, like the one they give me, but my point is, does a network news division have to scrape the bottom of the barrel to stay in business? I don't think so. Thirty years ago when "60 Minutes" went on the air, a marvelous man named Bill Leonard, who later became president of CBS NEWS, gave "60 Minutes" its marching orders: "Make us proud," he said. That could be the last time anyone in television ever said to anyone else in television, "Make us proud." Because he said "Make us proud" and not "Make us money." We made them a bundle. Because he said "Make us proud" instead of "Get us ratings" -- we got him ratings -- the best ratings anyone ever saw before for a news broadcast and probably ever will again.

You see, news can be worthwhile and profitable at the same time. Maybe, not as profitable as it once was, because today the field is so crowded and the audience is so fragmented. But, certainly not as meaningless as some of it has become in the scramble to gobble up a share of that fragmented audience. Maybe it's time to put the E back in entertainment where it belongs and the

N back in news where it belongs and do something for the networks' S. & P. -- their souls as well as their pocketbooks!

As I said at the beginning, it all comes down to credibility. That's something we know to be just as important to you as it is to us. If you believe that old saw that the scariest words in the English language are "Mike Wallace and a '60 Minutes' crew are in the waiting room," try that on Dow Corning who found Steve Kroft and a "60 Minutes" crew in their waiting room ... waiting to tell the story of how they were being taken by lawyers who were manipulating juries into ridiculously high settlements, with no scientific evidence to back up their breast implant claims.

When the facts of a story run counter to what the public thinks the facts are -- as in what happened to Dow Corning -- that's a "60 Minutes" story. "60 Minutes" is not anti-business. "60 Minutes" is business -- and a very successful business, because for thirty years we have been supported by the kind of companies you here today represent ... companies that don't countenance anything that isn't what it purports to be. When Mike Wallace reported that the gas tank on a Ford Pinto had a tendency to explode, Ford cancelled its commercials on the show -- for one week! The next week they were back. Apparently, they thought guys who told it like it was, even at the expense of a client, were their kind of guys...the kind of guys they wanted to be associated with. That's when I learned that the real world portrayed in a real way is as important to our clients as it is to us.

Neither of us wants to be associated with anything that isn't honest and above board so we both have a stake in making sure that honest and above board journalism doesn't slip away from us. Now, as they say at Radio Shack... You got questions? We got answers. Fire away!