

By Tom Dolan

Producing the Perfect Management Team

Even the best team needs a good coach and a good plan to achieve success.

Your management team seems perfect: years of journalism experience, great reputations, smart, fast and even kind of fun to be around. They were carefully chosen and mentored with care. So why is this Dream Team still giving you a hit-or-miss product and missing your ratings goal? Maybe it's time to take a closer look.

What's the Plan?

You have a news slogan and even a mission statement, but do you have a real working management plan? Too often newsrooms have strong managers but lack the management focus to overtake the market leader.

Having a plan means pursuing a clear coverage position that differentiates you from your competition. That plan needs to be clarified and validated every day in terms of stories and presentation. Your managers need to know who is in charge at *this moment*, and who has the authority to make *that decision*.

Have you written and shared your management structure with your staff? Are you sure your job descriptions are clear to the staff? Managers simply function better when they understand their role and the staff knows the expectation.

Idea: Sketch an organizational chart for your next budget presentation...but also post it on your bulletin board.

Content Manager vs. Show Doctor

The most overlooked division in management duties is content vs.

show production. Even if you don't have the budget for a managing editor, think about the players on your management team and ask yourself who guides content and who makes good television.

You need both to succeed. Choose one manager to drive newsgathering and individual storytelling. Identify another to turn it all into a compelling and relevant newscast. Think of it as a "right brain, left brain" scenario. Don't just throw good EPs at poor, unmanaged content. Let the two managers combine their expertise to win viewers.

Idea: If you do not have the budget for a managing editor, upgrade your assignment editor for this role. Make him or her produce a newscast occasionally to better understand production issues.

The Neglected Morning News

Everyone knows morning news has become a more important revenue stream as your viewers go to bed earlier and get up earlier. It may be a moneymaker, but it's hard to keep experienced staff on the shift—and even harder to find a talented manager to keep it all on track.

If you can't budget for a morning executive producer, at least assign another EP to stay on top of the morning news direction. That manager can accomplish many of your goals during the day.

Require a review and critique at least twice a week. Mornings can be a promotional platform and a lab for innovation. Show your morning team



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they are just as important as the other shifts, and help them understand your vision for morning news. Give them this key manager as their point person. And then, set your alarm and hit the overnight shift yourself for an occasional visit.

Idea: Redeploy at least one general assignment reporter to an early morning shift. He or she can help set up stories, give the newscast immediacy and boost morale!

Produce the Morning Meeting

Your morning meeting is the first test of your managers' day. It is the platform for selling the ideas of the day. You want a wide attendance and a diverse group, including reporters and photographers. But you also want good ideas. Make an enterprise idea or story angle the admission "ticket" for the morning meeting.

Use your content manager to keep the meeting on track, but produce the meeting like a newscast. Lead with the key stories, potential *lead* stories, but *not* the daybook. Focus the coverage and talk about *how* the stories will appear on the air, not just *what* you are covering. Talk about strategic stories that validate your station position and set you apart.

Your promotion manager should play "viewer" and have a reserved seat and a loud voice. Your EP should be sketching out the newscasts on the dry erase board, looking for holes and opportunities.

Idea: Have your managers and producers attend a routine station sales meeting to see the difference. You have to show up prepared, present your plan and outline how you will meet weekly and quarterly goals. The spotlight is on every account exec.

The "Active Anchors" Approach

Many newscasts still win based on the station personalities. But while viewers feel many newscasts look the same, one of the best opportunities to dif-

ferentiate remains giving your anchors a more active role in the newscast.

Include the anchors when producing your lead story. Have them frame up a story geographically, or with special background bullet points that prepare your viewer for the reporter angle coming up next.

You also could have your anchor offer a short "explainer" piece using animated graphics. The cable networks used this approach very effectively through the early months of the Afghan War as the "war without video."

Robert Hager has made a career out of using this presentation style on NBC. But it doesn't have to be a plane crash or a story about laser-guided bombs. Your anchors can use this technique in everyday health stories about blocked arteries, in business stories like Enron to show where the money went, or even accidents where the animation "explains" better than "wallpaper" video.

Idea: If you trail in the market, use this "explainer" technique as a way to showcase special stories and grow your anchor's image...regularly.

Help! My EP Just Quit!

Stop and analyze your current team. That great EP from your friend's shop might *not* be a great EP for your team. Remember, you need a content manager *and* a "great TV" manager. They need to be in synch but not alike; you want healthy debate. You want good journalism *and* compelling television. Understand how this new manager will build on your vision, and write down your ideal EP's profile before you make a single phone call.

Legendary consultant Frank Magid once called recruiting "the bane of our existence," and if anything, it's getting worse. Recruiting is the greatest irritant for busy news directors under constant demands to compete round the clock. The old way of calling your friends isn't enough.

Idea: Write down the qualities

needed in the profile for the new manager and score the candidates as they interview. Don't "fall in love" with someone who can't answer the profile demands or execute your plan!—Tom Dolan, a former news director, is now president of Dolan Media Management. Wendy MacNeill, former news director and now consultant/recruiter with Dolan, contributed to this article. Both can be reached at www.smartrecruit.com.