

## HOW TO BE A WEATHER IDOL...THOUGHTS ON BROADCASTER PROFESSIONALISM

You've made it to the finals of the American Weather Geek contest, and the applause is fading after your latest weathercast on the big stage. Knees trembling, your clicker nearly slipping out of sweaty palms, you face the judges for their comments and verdict.



**Figure 1. Graphics are to the weathercast what the melody is to the lyrics of a good song--perfectly married, helping to support and reinforce (Copyright 2009 KSNW TV).**

Handy speaks first, gushing over how you easily handled that incredibly awkward toss from the anchor who ambushed you wanting to know how you can get snow when the

temperature is above freezing. Noting that it is May and 84F outside, Handy applauds you for being able to think on your feet and roll with the punches. In fact, CHANGE is the name of the game in our industry. Gone are the days when you could walk in mid-afternoon and have just 2 or maybe 3 weathercasts to do in the entire day. The broadcast meteorologist of this era has to be ready to deliver product in all sorts of venues. From the traditional weathercast, to streaming on the Internet, to mobile video, to social networking, the broadcast industry is changing at a blinding speed. Responding positively to change is a critical skill for the modern broadcast meteorologist. In our KSN WeatherLab, we now provide microcasts for 5 full power TV stations; live and recorded content for a cable channel; recorded content for two radio stations; video, graphics and text content for our own website; streaming radar and storm coverage on our website; social networking updates, and, oh, yeah, we still have to make up a forecast. In fact, we make 5 complete 7 day forecasts every day! If you haven't read "Who Moved My Cheese," get it and read it.



**Figure 2. A good graphic makes the viewer feel smart. It should be easy and quick to read and understand (Copyright 2009 KSNW TV).**

Suddenly, while day dreaming of mice and tennis shoes (you'll get that after you read the book), you realize that Flara is ready to share her comments. She notes how your weathercast was like a finely crafted song—with lyrics and music supporting each other. Your graphics were interesting,

entertaining and informative without being distracting. You have clearly mastered the tools at your disposal. There are precious few stations across the country that can afford

weather producer positions anymore—so it is a good thing you have learned how to operate each of your systems and use them to get the best possible visual support for your weathercast. In fact, Flara compliments you on how your story telling fits your graphics like the lyrics of a good song are perfectly wedded to the melody. Your story was well thought out, explaining how the weather is changing, leading perfectly into the big payoff—what folks are waiting for—the extended forecast. Flara finishes by noting that your extended forecast was great—all of the icons were very easy to see and understand, and the temperatures were even laid out so that no one had to guess which low was for what night...or is that morning?

While you are pondering that last very deep point, Smalla leaps to her feet gyrating wildly in celebration of your severe weather coverage. She completely falls to pieces over how you did not...fall to pieces! You kept your head in those critical moments, remembering that if you panicked, your viewers sure would as well. Your real time analysis of the storms was rock solid, given the information that you had at that precise moment. You knew the storm environment, and what to expect. You took advantage of your resources and used them all to provide warnings that were clear and effective. And, Smalla is nearly moved to tears by the fact that you remembered the most important thing: root for the humans and not the tornado. Remember there are scared families looking to you for both warning and reassurance.

Oh my. You can tell by the look on his face that Lyman is not a happy camper. The sneer is building as he leans in, eyes narrowing. This can't be good. "I really didn't know what to expect when you started," he purrs. "I mean, really, I half expected to see a pocket protector beneath that polyester blazer." By this time your blood pressure is only exceeded by your heart rate. "And your hair. Does it ever really move? It looks like it is painted on. I mean what am I to think here?"

Your knees are locked to prevent a total collapse, and you are seriously regretting not snarfing the entire half bottle of Tums. Lyman rears up like a cobra ready to snap forward with that last, fatal dose of venom. Your life—well, really you don't have one because you are a weather geek (proud of it, mind you)—is passing before your eyes.

He pauses, as if savoring the moment. "You just blew me away," he exclaims! Lyman then proceeds to comment on how your on air performance skills were outstanding. You were relaxed, but you showed your obvious enjoyment and enthusiasm for weather. You had energy so that your presence filled the TV and came right out into the living room. There was range—gravitas for severe weather, but no fear of smiling and showing a sense of humor and humanity at other points. The basic physical skills were there, of course—enunciation with a pleasant voice, eye contact, clean and effective interaction with the key wall, disciplined use of the third dimension with the camera. But more than that, Lyman concludes, "You simply owned it. I mean you just started talking about radar and the next thing I knew I was just totally drawn in."

"I think you have four Yes's"

“DAVE ARE YOU THERE,” in my IFB so loud it hurts.

“Y-y-yes, I’m here. Mic check, mic check, 1-2-3-4.”

“OK. I have just been trying to call you and you weren’t answering. 2 minutes to news.”

Wow. No Handy, no Flara, no Smalla, no American Weather Geek. Just another day trying to figure out stupid Northwest flow storms. But at least Lyman liked me.

This is the first in a series of newsletter articles where we will discuss professional development topics and tips for broadcasters. Stay tuned!

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