

33+ Tips and Tricks for Better Storytelling

By Professor Les Rose

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1. **Know that there is a PROFOUND difference between covering a story and storytelling.** Covering a story is the JOB but storytelling is the JOY.
2. **STRIVE** to put feature storytelling elements in hard news stories. (REPEAT)
3. **REWARD THE UNREWARDED:** Called Donut Diplomacy...recognize the unrecognized.
4. **BE KIND TO INTERNS AND THE NEWBIES.** YOU WERE ONE ONCE.
5. I DON'T KNOW THE MODEL OF THE CAMERA BUT I JUST WANT IT TO WORK. IT IS A TOOL TO TELL A STORY.
6. You must **ANTICIPATE** what a human being is going to do before they do it.
7. **YOU ARE MERCHANTS OF MOMENTS.** No story is great without a LEAST one great moment you captured.
8. **AVOID ANYTHING THAT REMINDS PEOPLE THEY ARE WATCHING TV.** You want them to watch a **STORY**.
9. **READ YOUR SCRIPT ALOUD BEFORE TRACKING!** You worked all day on your story but your viewer will only hear what you track!
10. Practice word emphasis on every word in: *MARY had a LITTLE lamb.*
11. **AND...**the Beatles are a **GREAT** band and the sky **IS BLUE**.
12. Put the power of your sentence at the end: The Queen, my Lord is **DEAD**.
13. Keep learning and going to any seminar or workshop that will help you get better. **BE A LIFE LONG LEARNER!**

14. **Journalism REALLY is a voice for the voiceless.** Do NOT tell just the stories of the rich and powerful but seek ways to help the less fortunate, less educated and those you want to help!.
15. You cannot change the world but you **CAN** change a small part of it. Pretty amazing gig, isn't it?
16. **Be the Other.** Think what it is like to be a female Latina doctor if you are a white male. Be a blind person.
17. Be bored for about 20 minutes. Forget the phone as it occupies your thoughts and there is no room for original ideas in your head. Creativity will flourish.
18. My three favorite questions: Bob Dotson asks his subjects "Where do you find joy?" Steve Hartman and I would ask, "What is your greatest struggle?" Both take you down places you would never expect. Finally, the final question is usually, "Do you have anything else to add?" needs to be replaced with "If we knew you better, what should we have asked???" **HUGE** difference.
19. When you interview children, be a few years **BELOW** them (new library...Moby Dick...ASK "WHY DO WE NEED BOOKS???").
20. **WORK YOUR TAIL OFF ON THE MEDIOCRE** stories, so you will have the skill set when you do get a **GOOD ONE!**
21. Lightening separates pros from amateurs. Shadow side to camera is the mantra. The darkest side of the face is **CLOSEST** to the camera. Think of the reporter sandwich: ***The reporter is always BETWEEN the key light and the camera. ALWAYS.***
22. **1249 journalist KILLED since 1992/Motive confirmed...25 years...I DID the math...50 per YEAR.** Basically, one journalist dies every week. They died seeking truths, holding officials accountable, and making democracy possible.
23. **SHOOT INTERVIEWS AT EYE LEVEL OR SLIGHTLY ABOVE.**
24. Look to the greats for inspiration. Find a reporter or photographer you admire and look at the work until it becomes part of your DNA. 20, 30 times watch their best work then watch the work without sound several times to see how they made it

great. Then turn your back to the screen and **REALLY** listen to the natural sounds and wiring. Your work can only improve.

25. When walking forward with the camera, practice heel to toe, heel to toe. Backwards is toe to heel, toe to heel. Think of "ROLLING" your foot. It works.
26. **SILENCE is not a waste of time** in a story but the very best use of it. Gives the viewer a chance to take a breath and absorb what they just heard and prepare for what's to come.
27. In many cases keep the camera far away from the subject: It puts the subject more at ease and will improve depth of field. Be careful you are not waving your arms if doing this. It is called "Pulling a Farkas" after Ray Farkas who pioneered the look.
28. Camera Shadow in your frame or the shadow of anybody but the subject can easily be avoided and is sloppy.
29. Name animals and children to make the story personal and heartfelt.
30. **MIC A DOG. EVERYTHING** makes a sound. MIC a mailbox, MIC a leather book.
31. Shoot exteriors of homes, business, barracks, or schools. It opens up your chances for writing and natural sound.
32. Shoot VO material first, do the "formal" interview, then more b-roll of anything they mention. This relaxes the subject more and gets them more comfortable with the process.
33. You should almost always do an informal, off the shoulder, interview after the formal well-lighted interview. Quite often the very best sound bites!
34. **ALWAYS BE A HUMAN** before you are a journalist. Help your fellow man.