



Overcome the Blah, Blah, Blah

Solutions for the dull news day.

In the newsroom the job is so much easier when there's a lot going on. But what about those other days? You know, the days you find yourself going through press releases, surfing online until your eyes glaze over and sifting through the paper from last Thursday looking for something, anything, that might be a story for air? When absolutely nothing is happening?

But those days separate the good newsrooms from the *great* newsrooms.

Anyone with training, skill, craft and a little experience can cover the Big Story, but producing compelling, riveting newscasts on the other days, when not much is going on, and still keep an audience glued to the radio or TV—that's the true "art" of this job.

How do you take a dull day and turn it into powerful storytelling? Here are seven ideas to try when nothing much is going on "out there..."

1. Use your life. Get a life, then use everything possible as a source of material. During each waking moment, consciously or unconsciously, observe and gather information for later use. What you read, eat, feel, experience and even dream—all are possibilities for story ideas. Listen to people. What are they talking about off air? If people are talking about something in the elevator, at the hairdresser's or at the sandwich shop,



chances are there's a story in it.

Of course you read newspapers, books and magazines. And watch and listen to other stations. But also try to notice billboards, commercials and labels to get ideas. Use your life's experience, both private and professional, for material.

Make friends outside the media world. Your inner circle should contain people who work outside of broadcasting with a variety of interests and experiences. Listen to them. What are they thinking, worrying and talking about?

Watch for trends. Know your audience. Keep in contact with listeners

and viewers—drink at their bars, shop where they shop, etc. Read the local press. Drive around to get a feeling for your area. Attend neighborhood functions. Meet people. Know your city. Stay curious, alive and interested.

2. Ask. Would you talk about this off air? Remember to look beyond Page

One for stories. Note conversations you've had or overheard. Bring in ideas from your own life. Real-life stories are all around us. Train your ears and eyes to catch them.

3. Brainstorm. Try getting together in the newsroom to talk about ideas. Not all of them have to be good ones. Some might be truly awful. But if one or two are usable, you are ahead. Contrary to rumor, genius is sometimes a collective thing. Ideas can be built upon, and they can come from anywhere. A "bad" idea can quickly become a good one if a couple of heads get together on it.

In *Creating Powerful Radio Workshops*, we ask producers to bring in three items to work into possible topics:

- One idea from your own life, something that has happened to you.

- Something you've observed or overheard.

- One item from the news that you would actually talk about with another person in real life; that is, if you did not have a broadcast to produce.

In each case, try to find a universal angle, or the common thread or dynamic that affects everyone. (Frank Magid's Health, Heart, Pocketbook angles always work.) Remember, the more personal you get, and the deeper

you go, the more likely you are to strike a universal chord.

Once, when I was running a news department, one of our reporters went through a bad night, waiting for her boyfriend to come home. She was a mess at work the next morning. I suggested she make a story out of her jealousy and put it on the air. She came up with an award-winning feature series called “Can a Man Be Satisfied with Just One Woman?”

4. Use your sources to get stories. Interesting, accomplished people tend to hang around other interesting and accomplished people. The next time you interview a fascinating person, on any topic, try asking if he or she knows anyone else they think might have a good story to tell. You may be very surprised and delighted at the people and the sto-

ries you find this way. Ask a friend who has a friend. Always get a phone number. Keep your database updated. Hang on to phone numbers of all sources. Today’s guests may be tomorrow’s sources. Ask them to call you when things are happening.

5. Archive obsessively, make and keep follow-up files. “One year ago today the rapist was released from prison.” Where is he now? Did he go back to the old neighborhood? Keep meticulous follow-up files and check them. Often revisiting or updating a story from the past leads to interesting and compelling journalism for today.

6. Pre-record “evergreen” stories for days like this. Like keeping frozen dinners on hand for an emergency, save evergreen stories in the “Tupperware” for later.

7. Be prepared. When was the last time you thought to yourself, “I wish I was recording this right now?” Try keeping a recorder, note pad or camera phone nearby at all times. Story ideas come in the shower, the car, the middle of the night. And when they come, write them down!—Valerie Geller is a former news and programming director who now serves as a news/talk broadcast consultant and author. She has worked with more than 500 stations in 27 countries, including the BBC. Visit www.creatingpowerfulradio.com or www.gellermedia.com.

Editor’s note: This column was excerpted with permission from Creating Powerful Radio: Getting, Keeping & Growing Audiences and News, Talk, Information & Personality.

**WTVF-TV
News
Channel 5
Nashville,
Tennessee**



is the winner of
**The
American
Legion**

2007 Fourth Estate Award
for outstanding achievement in the Field of Journalism

Visit The American Legion at <http://www.legion.org>

Advertisers

Many thanks to the companies and organizations that advertise in *Communicator*.

ADVERTISER	URL	PAGE	PHONE
615 Music	www.615music.com	5	888.615.8729
AAAS	www.aaas.org/sjwards	29	202.326.6400
American Legion	www.legion.org	37	317.630.1253
Associated Press Broadcast	www.apbroadcast.com	C3	202.736.1152
Broadcast Design International Inc.	www.broadcastdesign.com	23	760.729.9229
Devlin Design Group	www.ddgtv.com	13	970.453.9360
duPont/Columbia Awards	www.dupont.org	30	212.854.5047
The Express Group	www.theexpressgroup.com	35	619.298.2834
Focus on the Family	www.family.org	33	719.531.3371
FX Group	www.fxgroup.tv	32	407.877.9600
JVC Professional	www.jvc.com/pro	25	800.582.5825
Knight Center	www.kfellows.org	19	734.998.7666
Kovsky Miller Research	www.kovskymiller.com	7	513.981.0921
MyWeather LLC	www.routecast.com	C2	608.441.0400
NSI	www.specifynsi.com	31	800.773.2624
OnCall Communications	www.occsat.com	21	949.716.3030
RF Central	www.rfcentral.com	4	717.249.4900
RTNDF	www.rtndf.org	7	800.80RTNDA
Stephen Arnold Music	www.stephenarnoldmusic.com	C4	214.726.1010
VDO	www.vdo.tv	7,9,11	727.631.0709

Call Rick Osanski at 202.467.5200 to find out why your company should be on this list.