



CULTURE check

You may have been hired to be “the avenging angel of change,” as one news director put it, but you need to really understand how your newsroom works before you decide to blow it up and start over.

Observe and assess

Take time to observe the newsroom and how people work together. Get a feel for the “chemistry” in the room. Are your staffers watching your newscasts or the competition’s? Are they spending time browsing news gossip sites on the web? Don’t preside over the morning meeting at first; let it unfold as it always has so you can assess how it works. Time spent at the assignment desk will tell you a lot about how the staff interacts.

Evaluate systems

Look at work flow, lines of communication, chain of command and quality control systems. See what the newsroom measures and rewards. These things often reflect a newsroom’s culture.

Ask for insight

Talk with the senior members of the newsroom to get their views of how things are done and why. Then talk with newer hires, and watch for differences in their descriptions of the newsroom. If you do a newsroom survey, ask people to describe the work environment. (See “Newsroom Surveys,” page 39)

Review the history

Learn where the station has come from as well as where it’s going. How does the staff view the station’s legacy? Looking back over past disciplinary actions is another tip off to a station’s culture.

Adapt and adjust

Instead of making wholesale changes, see if you can build on what your newsroom does right. “Sometimes, you can make your greatest victories doing that,” says KRIV’s Kathy Williams, because people will see that you kept what was working well and be more willing to go along with your changes.