

MOVING on up



If you're promoted into your first news director job from another job at the same station, you have some advantages that can serve you well. You already know your way around the computer system and the tape archive. You understand the corporate culture and the community. But don't think you know it all, even if you've worked at the station a long time.

Get to know the staff—again

Take time to meet with the staff individually, even though you already know them all well. People often see it as a fresh start when there's someone new in the news director's office. Put aside your preconceptions and find out what they believe their challenges are. "You see a different side to people you don't see when you are not in charge, good and bad," says one former assistant news director who was promoted to the top job.

Let them get to know you—again

Understand that the staff may have preconceived notions about you. "I had to convince people I wasn't the same person as the news director who got fired, when I had been number two for so long," says one new news director. "I wasn't there to disagree with her philosophy or management style, so they were unaware that my management style was going to be very different." You may want to set the record straight about that in a full staff meeting, early on.

Prepare to play a different role

News directors who've been promoted from within say their relationship with the staff inevitably changes. You already have established relationships inside and outside the news department, but now that you're the boss, the dynamic will be different. "I'm not the person they seek advice from, I'm the decision-maker," says Dave Grant, news director at KAKE-TV in Wichita, KS. "I've been their advocate before; now I have to tell them no." Don't make the mistake of thinking you can be everyone's friend. Avoid the appearance of having a clique of special people in the newsroom, and expect your staff to have a clique that doesn't include you.

“What I’ve had to learn is that I’ve had to change more than them.”

Dave Grant • KAKE-TV • Wichita, KS

Expect the unexpected

As a member of the management team, you’ve probably been involved in the day-to-day running of the newsroom, but you may not be aware of all the long-term commitments your predecessor has made. “There was a lot of stuff I didn’t know,” says one news director who was promoted from assistant news director. Spend some time finding out what the newsroom is already committed to in terms of projects or specials. Do some research before you make any decisions.

Provide reassurance

Recognize that people generally don’t like change. There may be some tension in the newsroom when you take over, but it’s not necessarily directed at you. One newly promoted news director says his first job was to make sure everyone knew that things were going to be okay. “What we needed was stability,” he says.

Make positive changes

If you’re in a newsroom that has lacked leadership for a while, show that things are changing for the better by taking action on something you know the staff will appreciate.

