

# ***Life Lessons That You Can Use in the Newsroom and Family Room***

Thirteen years ago, my husband answered the phone call that would change our lives forever. We were living in Southern Utah, going to school and working multiple jobs to get by. We'd just sold my Ford Tempo so we could afford a couch, meaning that there was only one car to use between the two of us. I tell you this because on that very day, I had the car. I had driven it to the university news studio to work on a newscast and make resume tapes, so I could get my dream job in broadcasting.

However, on this fateful day, my husband couldn't wait for me to get home to share the good news. He rode his bike through the nasty weather to let me know that I had received a phone call from a news director in Missoula, Montana who wanted to offer me a job as an anchor and reporter. However, we had to be there in two weeks; I'd make \$17,000 and there was no negotiating. Two weeks later, we were living in Montana.

Now that my kids are back in school, I have a little more time to reflect on moments like this one that have made me who I am today. Someday, I'll have to write a book about all of my stories and life lessons learned as a mom and news anchor. I don't know which job is more exciting, or which one teaches me more about the other, but I find that my two roles are very much intertwined.

With this in mind, I want to share with you three life lessons that I learned in the newsroom, but that have also helped me in the family room.

## **#1 Life is short.**

The news business has a way of teaching you about life. There's no getting around the fact that there is a lot of bad out there in the world and that sometimes, the good die young.

Seeing the news play out in front of my eyes has taught me to live each day to its fullest. One of the first times I committed this to my brain was in my first year of street reporting. I was driving home from a live shot with a co-worker when we heard over the traffic scanner that a

police officer was shot and the gunman was on the run. It happened to be a block from where we were, so we immediately drove to the location where the shooter was last spotted, parked our truck and took off down an alley.

I was being beckoned to follow when a half-dozen police cars skidded to a halt behind us; we realized we'd made it there before the officers, who now had guns drawn and were running in our direction. My co-worker was yelling at me to keep on going, but I chickened out, ran in the opposite direction and hid behind one of the police cruisers. My decision was made out of fear, but after the adrenaline wore off, I promised myself that I would never knowingly put myself in danger for the sake of a story ever again. My most important job is being a wife and a mother, and nobody needs to see the video from a police chase that badly.

This experience also reminded me to live each day in a manner where if something were to happen to me, I could leave this world without regrets. Quite frankly, whether you're chasing bad guys or not, you never know when it will be your last day.

## **#2 Judge not that ye be not judged. (OK, I borrowed this from scripture.)**

None of us likes to admit to being judgmental, but we all are. We judge strangers by what they wear and what they do, what they say and what they don't say. I'm here to tell you that passing judgment on others will get you nowhere. I learned this lesson from a news story I reported on for nine long months while working in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Do you remember the kidnapping of Elizabeth Smart? I was there the morning her parents discovered her missing and I was there the day she was found nine months later. I distinctly remember a night, about a week into the investigation, when one of my sources told me that Elizabeth's father, Ed Smart, was about to break -- he was going to admit to killing his daughter. It seemed reasonable to everyone in the newsroom -- we'd been talking for days about how strange it was that he never shed a tear when we interviewed him and, under the circumstances, we

assumed he was guilty.

In the end, nothing could have been farther from the truth. After working the case and meeting with the Smarts for more than 270 days, I came to have great compassion for this family. They were the kindest, most giving and grounded people, who held the faith that their daughter would someday be found alive. I realized then that you couldn't judge someone by their emotions or lack thereof -- everyone deals with tragedy differently.

I remember as if it were yesterday, seeing Elizabeth walk into the police department alive and well. I wept for the family, and for myself, for ever judging them to be anything different than they presented themselves to be. I will take this story with me through the rest of my life. It is not mine to judge.

**#3 One man's story is another man's life.**

Everybody likes a good story to tell, and that is especially true in the news business -- everyone wants to be first and everyone wants to be right. I learned this the hard way during my first week as a reporter.

I was sent to an accident where a man had been run over multiple times by a dump truck. I went about my work, finding out details about what happened and who had been killed. Police were not releasing the name until the family had been notified and I, being a new reporter eager to get it right, went live on TV moments after the accident, reporting the man's age and how long he'd worked for the company. I was proud of myself for keeping his name out of my report and felt like I'd done the right thing.

However, I returned to the station only to be met by angry calls from the family. Apparently, the man's age and number of years at the company left only one possible person -- I'd unknowingly notified the family of their father's death before police could knock on their door. I felt so terrible about my thoughtless actions that I went to their house the next day and went through a box of pictures with them and talked about the man they loved -- not the one I so carelessly reported on in my rush to be first and right.

To this day, I think of this family as I decide what to write and report. I ask myself: "How would I say this if it were my loved one?" At home, you can use this lesson to show just how powerful words are and that we need to think about how the things we say can impact others (i.e., gossip) and how they can sometimes lead to pain for the people involved.

Hopefully your own lives are filled with a little less drama than my own. However, I hope you can still learn from my experiences and think about how you would have acted in similar situations. So, always remember that life is short, judging will get you nowhere, and the safest stories to pass along are the kind that we read to our children at bedtime.



Heidi Hatch  
Anchor  
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