From the Classroom to the Control Room: Beginning a New Career in Television News

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by

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Abstract

After years of study in an educational setting, transitioning to one’s first job in the career world can be daunting. While there are countless resources to help graduates find a job, once one is actually hired the advice disappears, which can leave first-time employees feeling lost and alone. One must learn to collaborate with co-workers who come from different generations and different backgrounds. First-time employees are also met with more expectations and more responsibility than ever before. Outside of work they must learn how to handle varying sleep schedules, workplace demands on one’s social life and the stresses of working every day. It all starts with the first day, and new employees need to be prepared to enter an environment where they may have little experience. Through my own experiences as a first-time employee in the career world, research with professionals and interviews with experts, this guide aims to bridge the gap between college and career.

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I would also like to thank Brandon Bute and Dr. Dennis Zawadski for lending their expertise to this project.
At some point every student must leave the comforts of education behind and begin a career. Making the jump from college to career can be daunting. There are thousands of resources to help students find a job, but once they have actually been hired, the help disappears. Without a solid support group, it is easy to feel alone at a first job. After the congratulations fade, it is easy to feel lost and uneasy as first-time professionals navigate the uncharted waters of the career world. Businesses rarely operate the same as educational institutions. This change can stressful. Everything one knows is, all of a sudden, very different.

I learned just how difficult this change could be in my own transition from college to career. I was fortunate enough to spend my final semester of college working in my post-graduate position. In addition to finishing my undergraduate degree, I worked part-time as a producer at the ABC affiliate in Indianapolis, WRTV. In my position, I’m responsible for three half-hour news shows on Saturday morning and two on Sunday morning. After graduation, my status will grow from part-time to full-time.

This position has given me the opportunity to learn how the career world works before graduation. As a result, I’ve learned more about the way the world works in just a few months than I have in the final months of my education. Through research from professionals, interviews with experts and my own experiences, I hope this guide will help other students to bridge the gap between college and career.

The Beginnings

The first day of any new endeavor is both exciting and scary. The first day of a new career is especially daunting. One’s investment in one’s education has finally paid
off. The realization that it all comes down to this is very real. There’s no turning back now. It’s the first day of the rest of one’s life.

My first day was no different. It was especially difficult given my situation. I was working and going to school so there was no transition period. My schedule did not allow me to ease into the job. I work on the weekends and during the week I was in class. My first day started at midnight on Saturday morning when there were very few people in the station to help me make the transition. I did not have the luxury of a first day of introductions and acclimation; on my first day I produced 90 minutes of live television by myself. Making as stark a transition as this one turned out to be a mind game more than anything else.

I was not prepared for the challenges that I encountered. I struggled with a very real “time game.” The first day of work is a mental challenge more than anything else. Sometimes the hours will crawl by and it seemed like there would never be an end to the day. Other times the hours would fly. All it takes is a blink and it would be three hours later. On that first night, between midnight and 3 a.m., it flew. I was trying to make a good impression and I was trying to get my bearings, all while trying not to get behind in my work. It felt like a marathon. A runner starts at the gun and the first few miles will fly by. It’s easy. The other runners are worried about pacing but there’s still much more to go so it’s manageable. Then, fatigue sets in and the middle miles seem bleaker. The same was true of my first night on the job. Between three and five I was ready to give up. My body wasn’t prepared to handle the demanding tasks. I was tired, I wasn’t used to being up all night. I was physically ill and I was stressed. Then, miraculously the sun came up. The night was over and the end of the shift was near. I felt just like a marathon runner
coming into those final miles. Sure, he or she is tired and ready for it to all be over, but there’s a reason to keep running. The end doesn’t seem so far away. As soon as the sun came up, I got a second wind. I was able to keep fighting through the day.

Part of the success of one’s first day depends on how prepared one is going in and the attitude one holds throughout the experience. I thought I was prepared for the first day, only to learn later that I was not. I did not know what to expect on my first day, partly because the job is new and partly because I did not have the opportunity to settle in. The best advice I can offer is to know at least a little what the first day will look like. The more information one has going in, the more successful one will be on the first day.

Ball State University Career Center director Brandon Bute studies the changing trends of the workplace and prepares students for life after college. Bute also recommends that new professionals know what will be expected the first day. ¹ Will one be doing the full job from day one, as I was, or will the first day be introductions and paper work? If it is paper, like many first days, Bute says it is important to know what documents to bring. Many companies need copies or information from a Social Security card, bank information, citizenship documents and other identification documents.

Another first-day necessity that is often overlooked, according to Bute, is lunch. Will one be expected to bring lunch from home, or is the company taking its new hire out to lunch? If lunch out of the office is on the first-day plan, will the company be paying or should one be prepared to bring cash? Bute says all of these questions can easily be

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answered by contacting the point person—such as a supervisor, human resources professional or co-worker—before the first day.

The authors of *The Broadcast Journalism Handbook: A Television News Survival Guide*, Robert Thompson and Cindy Malone, recommend following the “O-A-A Rule.” During one’s first day it is incredibly important, they say, to “observe, absorb, and ask” ² The first day is a starting point; it sets the groundwork for the rest of one’s career. It is important to take it all in and understand what working at that company will be like. If one doesn’t understand something, one needs to ask. It is better to get things cleared up on the first day than to wait until one actually needs to know the answer and either can’t ask or will be stigmatized for not asking earlier.

The first day is also a day of first impressions. This is the day one meets all of his or her co-workers and, more importantly, the day all of one’s co-workers meet him or her. Diane Decker, author of *The First Job Survival Guide*, recommends using two different techniques to remember a person’s name. The first is to use the senses. “When someone introduces him or herself, listen to them, say their name and then repeat it back to them in conversation. If they have a business card and it’s appropriate, ask for it. Seeing the name helps to remember it.”³ Secondly, associate a person’s name with something about them that will be easy to remember. Decker offers this example. “If

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Norma is very normal looking or acting, one could associate the word normal with Norma. Normal Norma is easy to remember.” 4 First impressions are a chance to prove why one was hired and that one is competent enough to perform the tasks of the job.

Making a first impression and proving why one is suited for the job in part begins with one’s attitude. If one thinks the first day is going to be all about paperwork and it turns out to be real work, don’t let any feelings about that fact show. Decker recommends smiling and being friendly throughout the entire day. “People are more likely to approach a smiling person than one who frowns,” Decker says.5 The power of a smile and a good attitude can go far from day one. People will remember how one acts the first day. On my first day I could have complained or expressed my frustration with the way the night went, but I did not. Instead I chose to fight through the struggles and put a show on the air. My supervisors noticed and later thanked me for being a trooper and apologized for the situation. My attitude from the start resonated with my superiors and led to a positive opinion of my work ethic.

The first day is the hardest, but it’s only the first day. Each day after that gets easier. All it takes is proving to oneself that it can be done. All that preparation really does make a difference. When my show hit the airwaves, it made it all worth it. The viewers didn’t know about the marathon I ran overnight, but they got to see the finish, which is really the best part anyway. During that first night I proved to myself that, even under the worst circumstances, I still love the job and I am capable of surviving this career.

4 Decker, Hoeyemeyer, Rowe-Dimas, pg.,5
5 Decker, Hoeyemeyer, Rowe-Dimas, pg.,6
Surviving a brand new career seems like a daunting task. This is it. For the next 40 or so years, this is life. In college, if I didn’t like my schedule or my professors, all I had to do was wait 15 weeks and they would change. In the career world this is not the case. Of course there are job changes, maybe a new city or two, but for the most part, one starts a career with the plans to be there for several years. In the *Broadcast Journalism Handbook*, Thompson says the first key to surviving a new career is to “not sell yourself short. You will be overwhelmed and you will make mistakes, but you have to keep learning.” Just because one has a college degree does not mean the learning is over. Each day one will learn new skills and new ways of survival. It is not an easy task, but it is necessary for success. In his book, *How to Launch Your Career In TV News*, Jeff Lashay says surviving is about “working hard. Make the most of that job by fulfilling and stretching your responsibility and gaining valuable experience at every turn.” Working hard is going to take a lot of, well, work. Each day I strive to produce a better show than the day or the week before. A lot of that takes strategizing and planning. One has to try different things before one figures out what works. It’s about constantly evolving in one’s position. Even after a few months on the job, I’m still adjusting my approach to the work. My co-worker and I are constantly changing our workflow process or the way we approach our day to figure out what works best.

To survive in the working world, especially in the journalism world, one has to be willing to change. Thompson says the recipe for success is “a willingness to work a lot of

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6 Thompson, Malone, pg.,165
hours on any shift at any time. Be comfortable with change. Think on your feet and stick to your principles. News is a 24/7 operation. One cannot expect to work 9-5 Monday through Friday in the news business.

Lashay echoes Thompson’s sentiment with a quote from journalist Michael Eskridge: “The advice I would give someone starting out in any aspect of television is that you have to be absolutely 100 percent completely flexible and undemanding for a long time just to get experience.” As a new employee, a lot of times one just has to go with the flow. The first few months, or even years, are about learning the ups and downs of the job. Companies have established the way they operate, and while that doesn’t mean things will never change, new employees must realize they don’t have the same control as they may have had in college. One can’t call in sick or just not show up because they have other plans. As the “low man on the totem pole,” so to speak, one will probably have to work weekends or holidays or overnight. That’s the reality of the working world and one must adjust to the demands of the job. Bute sums this fact up in a few words: “Be open minded. Keep your eyes and ears open.” Surviving the working world is about understanding the challenges of the job and embracing them.

The news business has extra challenges compared to many other jobs. In news, one is constantly on the go. There is rarely a moment to even pause or grab something to eat. People who work in news can expect each day to be different. Sometimes there’s time for lunch and sometimes one has to eat with one hand and type with the other.

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8 Thompson, Malone, pg., 3-4
9 Leshay, pg., 46
10 Bute Interview, October 28, 2013
Sometimes one may have to work late, other times one can leave on time. Journalists have to be prepared for the unexpected. Breaking news can happen at any moment. Leshay says, "When the unexpected happens, TV news teams must be willing and ready at any time to drop everything they’re doing and shift gears into the more urgent story." I’ve experienced this multiple times. The show’s rundown (the plan for which stories will air and when) is never fully set. Breaking news happens quite frequently overnight and we have to adapt to that. There was one instance in October 2013 when a very quiet night all of a sudden turned very active. We started receiving reports of an armed individual on a university campus. In an instance, just hours before show time, we had to completely shift gears and send our one reporter over an hour away to cover the story. The rundown had to be completely changed. As a producer, I had to be prepared for every possible scenario. If the reporter got there in time to lock in a live camera shot, we could start the newscast with her live on the scene. If she didn’t make it in time but could get enough information confirmed, we could have her live over the phone. If neither of those options worked, we had to be prepared to report what we knew in studio. That’s the challenge of working in news, especially television news. Things change in a second and one has to be prepared to deal with that.

This situation also posed another challenge of the career world. Sometimes the staff is thin and one has to be able to adapt to that. In his book, *TV News: Building a Career in Broadcast Journalism*, Ray White says that, “at most stations the staff is small in the early morning hours. For that reason the morning reporter operates virtually alone

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11 Leshay, pg., 3
in preparation for the morning newscast."\textsuperscript{12} This is a very real possibility, especially in smaller markets. In my job on the morning show, I am one of only two producers creating three hours of news. I have only six hours to produce and write an hour-long show by myself. This presents obvious challenges on several fronts. If news is breaking at show time, or there is spot news—events like fires, car crashes or shootings—from earlier in the shift, I have to make calls for information and figure out how to handle that story, while still writing the rest of my show. This goes back to adapting. One has to figure out what works and what doesn’t to make sure all the tasks are complete and the show still goes on the air on time.

Some of these workplace challenges, especially for on-air talent, are tough to swallow. White says those pursuing on-air careers will have extra challenges than those who work behind the scenes. "They will face greater difficulties in developing on-camera careers...Career potential is a very touchy and perhaps arbitrary subject, but one that should be dealt with realistically."\textsuperscript{13} Viewers can be harsh. If they don’t like a reporter or anchor’s hair, clothing or speech patterns, they are quick to let the station know about it. Especially now with social media, viewers can hide behind a mask of anonymity and are more likely to be harsh. On-air performers have to be able to deal with the reality that they are the face of the newscast and they live public lives. Not everyone is cut out for on-camera positions and sometimes the most difficult workplace challenge is realizing this fact.


\textsuperscript{13} White, pg.,97
News is not easy. Other jobs aren’t easy either and each one comes with its own challenges. But, with each challenge comes the opportunity for a new success. The challenges are what make the job exciting. They are what keep it from becoming boring right away. The earlier one can accept that the challenges are part of the job, the easier time they’ll have adjusting to and addressing the opportunities.

**Understanding the Office**

From the very beginning, new employees will realize there is a contrasting culture between college and career. The working world is not the familiar safe environment of education. There is a completely different culture to the office and daily workflow. For example, in college everyone is roughly the same age. Most undergraduate students are in their late teens or early twenties. We have different backgrounds but are all at the same point in our lives. In the working world, however, this is rarely the case.

Ball State Career Center director Brandon Bute studies this phenomenon and works to prepare students for this change. He says the changing economic conditions have created a unique situation in the workplace. “It’s one of the first times where there are three if not four generations working in the same workplace at the same time.” Each generation has a different approach to work and the expectations of employees, Bute says. “There are different qualities and perceptions that each generation has of each other, and understanding those perceptions can create a more positive work environment.” The things one says or does can have different effects and send different messages to others in the workplace than they would to other students in the classroom. New employees have

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14 Bute Interview October 28, 2013
to realize that they are adults and they now must be aware of how other people perceive their actions. Each generation has a different approach to work, and recent graduates need to understand the challenges and opportunities other generations bring to the table. “You have to understand, not always appreciate, but at least respect and show some level of tolerance on how they [other generations] go about their work and what their expectations are and why they might have certain perceptions,” Bute says.

In my company I work with some people who are my same age, but quite often I am many years younger than the people I work with. I must get along with and collaborate with people who are in their 20s and people who are in their 60s. It’s important for one to make sure one can be taken seriously by both groups. One has to be relevant and worthy of respect to people one’s own age and people decades older. “That’s one of the most interesting challenges an individual faces, going into a work environment and working with a colleague who is perhaps 40 years your senior, and has seen a number of different things that you have never seen and you weren’t even around for,” Bute says. In the working world one cannot expect to rely on their age as a crutch, either. Regardless of whether one is 20 or 70, we were all still hired to perform a certain job.

Everyone in the working world is an adult and should be treated and act as such. In college, professors take on the role of the adult, authority figure. They are in charge and students are expected to follow their instructions, often with no input of their own. In the career world, however, supervisors are still higher than other workers and require the

15 Bute Interview October 28, 2013
same level of respect as professors, but the relationship between employees and their
supervisor is often more equal and symbiotic.

Employees can take concerns and suggestions to a supervisor and are more likely
to see results than they would in an educational setting. In college if I felt a certain lesson
or project was not working and had concerns, I could speak to my professor but he or she
was unlikely to make adjustments to the lesson plan. In the working world, however, I am
routinely asked for my input about what works and what does not. Furthermore, I am
more likely to see quick corrections to the problem areas I’ve addressed. During my first
few weeks as an employee at WRTV, we held a strategic planning meeting. During this
meeting the entire show staff was able to sit down with the news director and explain
what we felt was working and what we felt needed more attention. Our news director
listened as we explained our challenges and she took action on our concerns. We were
able to see changes in just days instead of months or years. This was a stark contrast to
the faculty review surveys I experienced in college. I could write reviews about
challenges I faced in classes or working with professors, but not once did I see an actual
change come out of those reviews. At WRTV, though, I saw a change almost
immediately.

This idea of being treated as an equal who has valuable input and ideas is new for
many first-time employees. Most of us have spent 17 years, if not more, in an educational
setting. By the time one gets to their first post-graduate job, they’ve never done anything
else but go to school. The working world is a different place, where employees are
respected for their skills and not put down or treated differently because of their
perceived lack of life experience. Different ages and varying experiences are embraced in the working world because they lead to a richer work culture.

In an office environment made up of several generations, it can be easy to fall into generational stereotypes. As first-time employees enter the workforce, they should be aware of how other generations may perceive them. In my office, I am so much younger that many people expect that I might still be out partying every night. They’re also quick to turn to me for every single pop-culture or social media question. Sometimes I fear they assume that since I am younger, I may act like the Justin Biebers and Miley Cyruses of the world, when clearly I am nothing like those individuals.

Bute says breaking out of stereotypes like this can be difficult. “It’s not an easy thing to extinguish a stereotype of yourself or your age group. Maturity is one of the easiest ways to set yourself apart from your generation.”16 He also offers tips to help prove one is old enough and mature enough for the job. He says one should do things like use industry language and demonstrate one’s savvy. “Make it sound like you’ve been there longer than you have,” Bute says. The earlier a young employee can demonstrate that he or she is mature enough and old enough to have a job, the easier the transition is going to be. Most of that begins with demonstrating that co-workers or supervisors can depend on an employee. Responsibility is key to extinguishing stereotypes. One also has to be aware of the culture and perceptions of an office and the unique culture each workplace possesses.

16 Bute Interview October 28, 2013
In any work environment part of the adjustment period includes learning the culture of the office. A working office has a different feel and a different structure than an educational institution. Bute says it’s vital for an employee to understand the expectations of the office's culture before beginning a career. It is the simple things, he says, like the company’s professional dress requirements, whether co-workers go out to eat all the time or if everyone packs their lunch, if people leave right away at the end of the day or do they stay back a little. “Understanding [the professional culture] will help you be successful.”

Part of an office’s culture is its hierarchical structure. Bute says employees need to know whether they can go directly to the top or what channels one should go through if there is an issue. In the journalism world, some news directors may be fine with someone going directly to them with an issue. Others may not. My news director is fairly hands-on and we can bring issues or observations to her attention. I can’t, however, take my problem directly to the general manager without first speaking to someone in lower-level management. I have to respect the hierarchy of my office.

Part of respecting the hierarchy involves learning the channels of communication. Ball State Career Center director Brandon Bute says that one of the biggest shifts for recent graduates is learning how to communicate within a work environment. Businesses operate with a certain decorum and one has to respect the way communication flows throughout an office. Bute says graduates have to understand “the hierarchy of an organization. There are some things you don’t say to someone who is your supervisor or

17 Bute Interview October 28, 2013
your supervisor’s supervisor.” Recent graduates have to be aware of what they are saying and maintain their professionalism.

The Daily Grind

One of the first things young professionals must learn to deal with is newfound responsibility. College helps to prepare students to take on the challenges of work, but universities often hold their students’ hands to some extent. Ball State Career Center director Brandon Bute explains why this happens. He says in college it is within an organization’s best interest to help students succeed by trying to improve them. Educational institutions want to keep students around and will go the extra distance to make sure they succeed in hopes they will graduate and get a job. But, according to Bute, it’s not in a company’s best interest to keep someone around if they’re not meeting deadlines. Instead it’s in their best interest to let that person go and hire someone who will meet the deadlines.

Bute says time management becomes key in these situations and new employees need to be cognizant of this fact. He says they need to know that they’ll be told to do something once and the company’s expectation is that they’ll do it. It’s not like in college, where one is given several reminders and chances to get things right. There is no extra credit or rewrites in the business world. Bute says one needs to be self-aware that one will be held responsible for what he or she does or fails to do.

Robert Thompson echoes that fact in The Broadcast Journalism Handbook: A Television News Survival Guide. He says employees need to realize that “you’re on your

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18 Bute Interview October 28, 2013
own. Not everyone is willing to help you if you don’t know something.” 19 Thompson recommends finding a mentor in the newsroom and continuing to embrace on-the-job-learning. 20 And, there will be plenty of opportunities to learn because for the next few decades one will be working.

Bute says one of the biggest adjustments he sees from students is having to work year-round. “There are no more spring breaks, there are no more winter breaks,” Bute says.21 I’m facing this during my first year of work. As the newest employee I do not have the seniority to have holidays off. Just two weeks after graduation, I’ll be working on Christmas for the first time in my life. It’s a hard adjustment to realize that I won’t be home with my family and instead I’ll be in the newsroom by myself and making the long commute home while others are sitting down to Christmas dinner, but that’s the reality of growing up.

Adjusting to different hours can be a struggle, too. Bute says students often have a difficult time adjusting to working earlier and working all day non-stop. He says students need to prepare themselves for that. This is also something I have firsthand experience with. My job is overnight, so I work midnight until 11 a.m. This is not uncommon for those entering the journalism field. It is likely these hours will be the hours of a first job, and even if they aren’t, there is a good chance one will be asked to work that shift at some point. News is a 24/7 operation. Working abnormal hours require the responsibility to adjust to new sleeping patterns.

19 Thompson, Malone pg., 6
20 Thompson, Malone pg., 6
21 Bute Interview October 28, 2013
Adjusting one’s sleep schedule to accommodate new hours is difficult and may actually result in a diagnosable medical condition. Dr. Dennis Zawadski, a doctor of sleep medicine at IU Health Ball Memorial Hospital, in Muncie, Ind., says abnormal work hours can cause a condition called shift-work sleep disorder. In some cases it may be referred to as excessive sleepiness.22 Sleepiness goes well beyond just being tired. Medically it refers to “an inability to remain fully awake at a time that wakefulness is expected, while fatigue refers to a subjective lack of physical or mental energy.”23 Sleep deprivation and sleepiness can be caused by a number of things including work-related situations. These may be “compressed work time, early start times, long work days, night shifts, extended shifts, shift rotation, consecutive work periods, unpredictable work periods, unpredictable work schedules or unstable work schedules.”24

Dr. Zawadski sees many patients suffering from shift rotation, which is where one works first shift for a period of time and then works second shift and then third shift. These shifts rotate periodically. To help combat shift-work disorder, Dr. Zawadski offers several tips. He says one needs to start with good sleep habits. This means going to bed at a reasonable time and waking up at the same time every single day. He also recommends

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22 Zawadski, Dennis K., MD. "Adjusting and Maintaining Healthy Sleep Patterns in the Transition to a New Career." Personal interview. 6 Nov. 2013.


24 Bonnie, George
that one limit caffeine intake and set a sleep routine. 25 Maintaining a good sleep environment is key. Where one sleeps should be cool, dark and comfortable.

For those who have to work third shift, Dr. Zawadski recommends preparing to make the change early. “Start by getting up one hour earlier each day for weeks until you are in your work schedule.” He also says to never underestimate the power of a nap. “Take a nap to help you make the transition … give yourself a one-hour or 90-minute nap. Set an alarm for it; use it as a definite time.” I have firsthand experience flipping sleep schedules and it is never easy, but finding a routine that works and sticking with it can help make the transition to overnight work easier.

If the natural transition methods don’t work, however, there are medicines one can take to help treat shift-work disorder and sleepiness. Dr. Zawadski says the first one is non-FDA approved but is all-natural. To help prepare for bed at an abnormal time, one can take melatonin, which is a chemical that occurs naturally in the brain and signals it’s time for bed. Even if bedtime turns out to be 9 a.m., Dr. Zawadski says taking a melatonin pill will help the brain begin melatonin production and, in turn, promote sleep. There are also two prescription medications that are FDA approved according to Zawadski. They are Nuvigil and Provigil. Either should be taken one hour before work begins. These prescriptions are used to help keep people awake if they have shift-work sleep disorder. Caffeine can also be used to help promote wakefulness, but Dr. Zawadski says to use it with care. He recommends drinking two cups at breakfast and one cup at lunch, regardless of what time those two events actually occur. After the cup at lunch,

25 Zawadski Interview November 6, 2013
however, one should stop taking caffeine or stimulants for the rest of the day. Even with these options, Dr. Zawadski says there will be times when one will accrue sleep debt. He says trying to limit one’s sleep debt is best achieved by staying on the same sleep schedule all seven days, even when social pressures may tempt one to change back to first shift on days off.

A social life is an important part of maintaining a well-balanced health life, but trying to manage work and life can be difficult. In my first few months as a professional, this is what I struggled with the most. Since I work nights, I miss out on evening activities and I miss out on daytime activities. With my commute there are really just enough hours in the day to work, drive home, sleep a little, drive back and work again. When all of my friends want to do things on Saturday afternoon, I’m trying to sleep, and when they want to go out at night, I’m headed off to work. It’s difficult to not get frustrated and upset by the lack of social life, but one has to try and balance friends, family and career. I’ve found it helps to have friends or a significant other who understand the situation and are willing to go out or have dinner at odd times of the day.

As hard as it may be, Dr. Zawadski recommends trying not to switch back to a first-shift schedule to be with friends and family. He says staying up a few extra hours after work to spend time with loved ones, is better than trying to change one’s schedule altogether for a few days. I’ve tried this and found mild success. It can be hard to force oneself to stay up those extra hours, but in the end it’s worth it just to have the time to decompress after a long day.

26 Zawadski Interview November 6, 2013
27 Zawadski Interview November 6, 2013
But, there is hope for those who work long, odd hours. Dr. Zawadski says now more than ever, “society is recognizing that sleep disorders and excessive sleepiness do have health impacts and productivity impacts.” He adds that companies are now beginning to make changes to hours and work expectations to help combat these issues. For recent graduates entering the work force for the first time, the outlook is even more promising. According to Zawadski, the graduating millennial generation has a healthier approach to work-life balance than previous generations.

It's a difficult transition and there's no easy way to do it. I've come to terms with the fact that I'm missing out on a lot of opportunities, but the opportunities I do have in a good job are worth it. Plus, it's helpful to know that nothing lasts forever and someday I'll probably have the opportunity to move off the overnight hours and back into a more conventional schedule. Being prepared to handle work-life balance and coming to terms with the fact that one's social life is going to suffer are some of the best ways to deal with decreased opportunities for social interaction outside of work.

**Early Preparations**

As much as students hope they are prepared to take on the challenges of their first job, there are understandably some things they are not prepared for and some skills they have not yet developed. Even though one may have already landed a job, he or she may not be entirely prepared for it. But, just being aware of these facts and taking steps to prepare ahead of time can help set one apart from other recent hires.

In his 1979 doctoral dissertation for the University of Toledo entitled “Competencies for Initial Positions in Broadcast Journalism Perceived by Radio and
Television News Directors and College Broadcast Educators,” Laurence Jankowski interviewed news directors and hiring managers from across the country on what they saw as the biggest lag in knowledge for new hires. He started by ranking the skills university professors and news directors saw as the most important for recent hires and graduates. In first place, he found, was the ability to keep up with current affairs. Next came enunciating properly. Third was listening well. In fourth place, was dealing with news sources. The list went on further, but these were the skills the news directors mentioned most frequently. The news directors went on to say that they felt they could teach employees technical skills, but they wanted reporters who could write, who could interview and who could speak clearly and concisely. Jankowski found that new hires did not have to be experts on every little piece of equipment, but they did need to have core journalism skills that are difficult to teach.

Ray White, in his book *Building a Career in Broadcast Journalism*, says that young media professionals are often too concerned about superficial things instead of telling good stories and writing good copy. He says these professionals won’t learn to become better reporters or anchors until they get past worrying about their looks. “As they gain more experience, the best reporters and anchors become less concerned about how they look and sound. Their main purpose is to tell the story effectively, so the viewers will understand.” Journalism is about telling compelling stories that mean

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29 Jankowski pg., 87

30 White pg., 99
something to the audience. People are more likely to remember a heartfelt story than how
good one’s hair looked last week. Maintaining professionalism on air in how one sounds
and dresses is important, but it is hardly the kind of things new journalists should be
focusing on.

Many of the news directors surveyed for Jankowski’s dissertation said
communication was key for their employees. They wanted people who can listen and
who can deal with sources in a professional manner. Communication, however, is a skill
Bute says students lack across all platforms.

Bute says it’s the tasks, like communicating, that seem basic to many people that
can have the greatest positive or negative impact. “I think one of the biggest challenges
students have is learning and understanding professional communication skills. Writing a
professional email with the right tone, with the right level of grammatical structure, with
the right introduction and closing. Knowing how to write a professional email and not
texting. Knowing how to write a memo or a synopsis or how to communicate ideas
effectively to a superior or a colleague, not the same way you would with a friend.”31 To
the generation who has grown up with email and texting, this seems so simple. It’s an
everyday occurrence and many students don’t think twice about it. But, in the
professional world where there are multiple generations, formality becomes a necessary
skill.

Beyond writing, speaking professionally is just as vital according to Bute. He says
new employees have to be aware of how someone may perceive the way they say

31 Bute Interview October 28, 2013
something, especially when it comes to a command versus a request. Bute says we tend to have a tone of commands, for example, "I need you to be here at this time," versus, "I was hoping we might be able to meet at this time." In a world of social media and constant immediacy, messages we intend to be succinct might be perceived as curt. This is affecting our business relationships.

Ultimately, communicating in the workplace comes down to being respectful and responsible. We all have to find a way to work together. Understanding the workplace can be difficult for those who have little experience in a work environment. The more one can immerse in the working world before one is hired, the easier the transition will be.

Internships are powerful tools to unlock doors in the career world. Not only are they vital for getting hired; they’re vital to understanding how the career world operates. I was able to land my job working for a news station before I graduated because of an internship. I spent a summer working in my newsroom and demonstrated to my employers that I was competent and able to do quality work. Then, when a position became available, I was the first person they thought of, even though I was still in college.

Internships are an opportunity for one to learn, but they can also be an opportunity to demonstrate one’s knowledge and professionalism. In Lawrence Jankowski’s dissertation on initial positions in broadcast journalism, he found how beneficial internships could be in preparing for the workplace. "The stations which had formal internship programs felt that students were better prepared than the stations without

32 Bute Interview October 28, 2013
formal internship programs."\textsuperscript{33} Hiring managers noticed the same thing. "Working with professional equipment and learning to meet real deadlines gives the news intern practical education and provides many skills which classroom training can never duplicate."\textsuperscript{34} Internships are excellent tools to open the door to the working world. They give students a taste of what the real world is like, which can only be beneficial in the jump from college to career.

Making the change from the safe, familiar environment of college to the big, scary career world can be daunting for students. But, the more prepared one is for the challenges that lie ahead, the easier the transition will be. It all starts with day one, which for some is nothing but paperwork and introductions. For others it’s the start of fast-paced work. Getting past that first day is rough, but it only gets easier from there. After that first day, new professionals move into the daily grind. They are dealing with office culture and finding their own way as a real adult. It takes a lot of hard work to survive the many long years of a career, but with perseverance, one’s career can be truly rewarding.

Outside of work there are even more challenges. Careers in news demand different sleeping patterns and may require one to give up sleep or a social life. As one progresses through the beginning of one’s career, he or she will learn to cope with these struggles and find the solution that works best. It all starts with being prepared. There is only so much that school can teach students before it becomes their responsibility to work hard and learn as much as they can on their own. There are few resources, but new employees can rely on the advice of their colleagues and fellow students who have

\textsuperscript{33} Jankowski pg., 92
\textsuperscript{34} Jankowski pgs., 91-92
already made the jump from college to career. Everyone’s first job is going to be
different. Some people may make the transition easier than others. But, as we tell our
television viewers every night, stay up-to-date day and night because being well-
informed about what is ahead is the best thing any of us can do.


Zawadski, Dennis K., MD. "Adjusting and Maintaining Healthy Sleep Patterns in the Transition to a New Career." Personal interview. 6 Nov. 2013.