

How to create leaders for tomorrow's newsrooms

Facilitators: Jonathan Kealing

Day & Time: Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019, at 4pm

>Jonathan: Hello, friends: This is a fairly small group, so I think I'm going to maybe move -- trying to decide how many we have. We can either do two big groups or three small groups? Does anyone have a preference?

> Three small.

> Jonathan: Three small? So I need one person from this person to move over here, but don't move move yet. So who would consider yourselves primarily a manager, show of hands, and who considers yourself a managee -- a word that I just made up.

So that -- actually OK, so we're good. We're distributed well. I need one person from either that table or that table to come up here and you should move to one of the other tables. I'm Jonathan Kealing. I am here because last summer at SRCCON, I went to a session that Erin put on, and I don't know, I had an epiphany of something that we were not doing well as an industry and I decided to make it a little soapbox moment for myself and so you have all joined my effort to help us create better managers in journalism. There's a quote in an article and it's always stuck with me. In journalism we take the very best journalists and turn them into the very worst managers, because in the industry that we have today, pay is hard to come by and if you want to keep someone, you have to promote them, and how do you justify promoting them? Well, you make them a manager and they manage other people, except that's not why they were good at their jobs. So I believe that one thing we have to do to try to make that better is embrace training of managers as a value in our industry. So I'm why going to ask for just some feedback pop off with words what are some good qualities of a journalist?

> Inquisitive.

> Aggressive.

> What else?

> Truthful.

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Jonathan: I heard inquisitive. What makes a good manager? Good listener. Organized? Empathetic? Yup.

Having vision. Organized. So I think you can see there's very little actual overlap in what we think of as being a good journalist and being a good manager. Sometimes I would say they were actually in conflict, not always, but some good qualities of journalists make for not great qualities

of managers, and I think that means we have to train people. I started my career at a family owned media company called the world company. They had some TV stations, some weekly newspapers and a cable company and I was fortunate to work for a company that invested in manager training so when I was like 24 years old and got my first direct reports, they sent me and like 15 other managers from the company, like the person who managed the team of cable installers and the person who managed the camera crew, I mean you know totally diverse group of people and they sent us for four days of offsite training to talk about how to be good managers, how to hire and fire. What questions you could and couldn't ask. How to give performance feedback. There's a conversation this morning that I just totally resonated with me. It was about -- it was in Katie's session and someone said their manager would save all of their mistakes up and deliver it to them in a package at their annual review and how terrible of an experience is that? So we talked about how to give good feedback in the moment and how to make sure that performance reviews aren't surprises. We talked about how to tell an employee that they have something in their teeth or that they smell or you know that there's just things that you may have to deal with it as a manager that you never had to deal with as a journalist, but they're things if you don't do well, they can truly make or break an experience in the organization.

The unfortunate thing today is the industry today really isn't in a position where it trains managers at all. So I saw a show of hands for people who are managers here, has an employer of yours ever provided you training on how to be a manager, raise your hand if yes. OK, that's good. Most organizations that I've worked with don't have a formal management training program and if you're lucky you may get to go to some sort of offsite training program that has nothing to do with your organization and I think that's a problem. So what I want us all to do today is talk about when management goes right, talk about when management goes wrong, and then talk about how we as an industry can tackle this together. I'm going to talk for probably 15 minutes at the beginning. I think, just to get us in a certain frame of mind and then you all are going to talk in small groups and report back to the group and then at the end we'll kind of talk about what we learned, and what I would like to be able to do with this one day is actually turn it into a program that we can roll out across the industry. No promises, no guarantees, there's no fairy godmother with fund waiting for that to happen, but I'm hoping if the ideas you come up together is something that we could do and I think it would move the industry mountains. So we're going to do something that's slightly controversial in the world of journalism. We're going to do one of those working-style quiz things. I don't care what your results are. I'm not even going to give you your results. If you want to know what your results are, come see me after and I will help you get them. But I'm doing this because it's a way of putting you in a frame of mind where you're thinking about the sorts of things that managers have to do. Who's done Meyers Briggs? I'm ENTJ, in case anyone's curious. Anyone done the four-color test? OK, I'm blue green, in case anyone is curious. I don't put a lot of stock in these, but I do like them because they give me a chance to think about who I am as an employee, who I am as a manager, and so as you answer these questions, if you're interested in your score, jot them down, if not, just take them and think about them and we'll move through that fairly qui

So these are 18 questions. I got the shortest one I could find because some of them are 84 questions. If you want to keep track of your score, just mark down your answer. When talking to

a customer or coworker, A, I maintain eye contact the whole time. B: I alternate between looking at the person and looking down. C, I look around the room a good deal of the time. GD, I try to maintain eye contact, but look away from time to time.

Are we good? I'm going to try to move through them quickly.

> 2. If I have an important decision to make: A, I think it through completely before deciding. B, I go with my gut instincts, C, I consider the impact it will have on other people before deciding, or D, I run it before someone before deciding.

> 3: My office or work area mostly has A, family photos and sentimental items displayed. B inspirational posters. C posters awards and art displayed, graphs and charts displayed or D calendars and project outlines displayed.

> What if it's none?

> Pick the one that feels closest to speak to you or leave it blank

No. 6, if a coworker is upset ... A: I ask if I can do anything to help. B: I leave him alone because I do not want to inare trude on his privacy. C, I try to cheer up and help him to see the bright side, D I feel uncomfortable and hope he gets over it soon.

7: When I attend meetings at work, A, I sit back and think about what is being said before offering my opinion. B, I put all my cards on the table so my opinion is well known. C, I express my opinion enthusiastically but listen to others' ideas, as well, or D, I try to support the ideas of the other people in the meeting.

8, when I make a presentation in front of a group, I am A: Entertaining and often humorous. B. I am clear and concise, C, I speak relatively quietly, D I am direct, specific, and sometimes loud.

9: When a customer or reader is explaining a problem to me. A, I try to understand and empathize with how she is feeling. B, I look for the specific facts pertaining to the situation. C, enlisten carefully for the main issue, or D, I use body language to show him or her that I understand.

10: When I attend training programs or preparations, A, I get bored if the person moves too slowly. B, I try to be supportive of the speaker, knowing how article the job is. C, I want to be entertaining as well as informative. D, I look for the logic behind what the speaker is saying. The correct answer for this one is B, guys.

[laughter]

No. 11 almost there, folks ...

When I want to get my point across to customers or coworkers, A, I listen to their point of view first and then express my ideas gently ... (Reading too fast to transcribe) (Please see slides for questions)

So that's all. The results don't matter. If you want them, see me later.

I wanted to do this, because if you're going to be a good manager, these are all the sorts of situations that you have to consider, and you will run into at one point or another. I mean the questions are some weirdness in them, but it was interesting to me as I was reviewing different options for this, how many of them reflect situation that is I actually have run into in my life as a

manager and so I think it's good just to get our minds thinking about those sorts of things. Keep them in mind and try to use those to jog your memory.

OK.

So we're going to do kind of a 20-minute brainstorm session. There are post-it notes and pens on each table. I want each person kind of individually to brainstorm one to three times you had a manager who really made your work life better, and why did it help so much. So think of a couple situations that you'd be comfortable sharing in this group. If you'd rather keep it just to this group we can ask our transcriber here to take that off the record, but think about situations you'd be comfortable sharing and then we're going to discuss them as tables and I'll kind of bounce around and hear what people are saying, and then we're going to spend a few minutes reporting them out to the whole group and putting them up here. My goal really is for these small groups to help people talk about how managers can make a difference and talk about some of the times that managers have been able to help, just to get us thinking about ways that we can do our job well and there will be a corollary coming up about the opposite, times that managers made your work harder. So five minutes. Think to yourself one to three times that a manager made your work life better. Ready, go.

If folks are close to wrapping, I'll probably give you a couple of extra minutes. Maybe more time to discuss and less time to brainstorm, so maybe one more minute or a little less and then we'll jump in.

So if you guys want, turn to your group and start discussing. Is there anyone in the room whose manager is in the room? I should have asked that -- I had it on my list of things to check and I didn't remember, so looks like we're good. So keep in mind, especially as people are revealing things personally, keep them to yourself. Part of my goal with group-sharing is that we can kind of depersonalize one of the stories and just have one person represent the experience to the group so we can take notes on that without anyone feeling like their comments are attributed to them. So go ahead and talk with each other, what experiences have you had and what did you learn from the way that your manager helped.

One more minute and then we're going to come back to the group

OK, I think we're at a place for sharing. So I'm going to ask one person from each group to kind of represent the conversation. Again, you don't need to attribute who this is, unless they really want to give credit to someone. They are going to take notes, again, though, if there's

something you want to share that you'd rather be off the record, just go ahead and share beforehand and that's OK, too. But my hope is we can get a lot of this on the record for notes after the fact or folks who may be reading them that couldn't make the session. So why don't we start up here in this table in the back.

> Sure, first and foremost, flexibility, offering flexibility in schedules, and taking seriously the things that your direct report takes seriously, so if that is the need for a flexible schedule or a different working schedule that you take those requests seriously and do something about it and just general advocacy in knowing knowing that your manager has your back and is pushing for you and supporting you either out in the open or in meetings behind closed doors with higher ups, and also constantly and pushing for opportunities for professional development, either for external development, coming to conferences like this, trainings -- all of those kinds of things, or if that's not in the budget, finding ways for professional development, to really let your direct, your direct report, the person that you're working with, know that you value them and the growth trajectory of their career. Regardless of whether or not that's at your company or somewhere else.

> Jonathan: Cool. Anyone else want to chime in with anything? We're going to go to the middle table.

> We echoed a lot of what was said over here. One of them was schedule flexibility, being open to that. Another one was encouraging involvement in new opportunities that you might not have otherwise volunteered for yourself. Support in the new role and pushing the person into a role that they may otherwise have felt uncomfortable or underqualified for and breaking up office disagreements.

Jonathan: OK, and we'll go to the back table?

> A lot of what we said was the same as what was already said. Shielding you from drama, modeling good work-life balance. Investing in your professional development. Taking stuff off your plate when you're overwhelmed, so positive taking stuff off your plate.

And then also willing to go out of their way for stuff outside of the office, such as taking you to the hospital or being there for when it's not just work.

Jonathan: I'll riff on the hospital thing a little bit because it's easy to kind of joke about, but I know two managers, one who saved his employee's life by being surprised when he wasn't at work on time and going to his house and discovering that the individual was in diabetic shock and needed to go to the hospital right away. And was a terrifying thing because we in the newsroom heard this over the 911 dispatch call. It was terrible, but he saved the employee's life because he cared enough to do that. And another manager I know found that an employee had passed away and had to go check on that. Because those aren't things you necessarily get trained for but as a manager, oftentimes you get called on to do those things. So heady situations.

So we're going to flip the script a little bit here. We're going to talk about when did a manager really screw things up for you? I suspect this will be a little bit livelier conversation. Again, everything in the small groups is off the record. If you would like something in the big group to

be off the record, that's OK, too, but really encourage you to kind of talk this through, because I will agree with what Stacy-Marie said this morning: Failure isn't a gift but we can still learn a lot from failure, and I think just hearing the way -- pay particular attention to talking about how that affected you, so not just what happened, but what the consequences were in your life for what your manager did or didn't do that made things harder for you. So we'll do, I don't know, probably 3-ish minutes of brainstorming and it 12-ish minutes of discussion. So go ahead.

I'll tell you my favorite manager screwing things up story. I had a manager who was brilliant, was a great journalist, but a terrible manager. And my boss's boss invited me to take over a project. It really created a situation where my manager felt like he couldn't trust me, and I was still fairly new and green, and I really didn't know what to do, you know -- more responsibility, more opportunity is great, strained relationship with my boss, not great. How do I deal with this? Ultimately the situation resolved itself, but it put me in a really terrible position and it was something that really bothered me about the way my boss's boss acted for a long time. So with that happy story, why don't you talk in small groups. Be thinking about what stories you want to share with the broader group, and who's going to speak. So discuss ...

Jonathan: OK, so I don't want to cut this off, but also we've got 19 minutes left, so I want to Mack sure we have time to do all this, so who from the table in the back wants to go first?

> So we had a lot. Hard to get ahold of, being too specific in micromanaging. Questionable ethical decisions about journalism. Not good work-life balance and not displaying that, but also not being considerate of work-life balance. Pitting people against each other on your team. Not advocating for you, but also being a little bit two-faced or or trying to play both sides to your detriment, not understanding the friends/manager relationship and where that line begins and ends.

Yeah. I think that's it.

With the ethics one if you guys don't want to expound, that's fine, do you think it's a situation where the manager had a poor understanding of journalistic ethics or was it a situation where they interacted in a way that wasn't transparent, or didn't work, or if you're comfortable, say a little bit more about that one because I'm curious about how that one came about.

> I think it's a little bit about everything. I've witnessed bad ethical decisions at every newsroom I've worked at except for mine, y'all. But I think the majority of things were racism, sexism problems, but in particular I had one editor who wanted to dole out favorable coverage to her friends and stuff, and that was just such an obvious like, don't do that that it was hard to even express it, because it was like, there's no way uh didn't know this was wrong. But if it's sexism, it's like, OK, let me talk you through this if you don't get it, but let's not give a big feature story to your best friend the chef is sort of an obvious thing. So that was what was most frustrating about it.

Jonathan: Good. This table?

> They don't explain the reasons for abrupt changes, and then also don't provide support. Making promises they can't keep. I had a manager who who was horribly indecisive and that was horrible and I think just not advocating for you in terms of growth or anything like that, which can kind of build resentment over time.

> Jonathan: Yeah. Cool. This group?

> So some of our broad themes included discrimination, sexism, micromanagement and kind of like belittling behavior. From various different people at the table. Did you want more detail?

> Jonathan: A little more detail, I think.

> Sorry, I managed to roll them up into --

> Jonathan: Three broad things. Yeah.

> So we had something that was clearly an ADA discrimination issue, a mental health discrimination issue that unfortunately happened and affected someone. We had people basically saying offhand sexist things about women, obviously, kind of either thinking they were jokes, not realizing they were not OK, not realizing they were belittling. Having to get permission for the most mundane tasks or not being trusted and what was the fourth one I said? Belittling, yeah, just like someone who belittled someone for coming to SRCCON:LEAD, which is really unfortunate. That person is totally welcome to join. And just belittling like criticism, kind of just like verbal abuse.

> Jonathan ... that's great. I think -- yeah, I guess I would -- for the managers in the room and people who may one day be managers, I think in all of the cases that were brought up today, a good manager has the power to help resolve those situations, even if it's not your manager. And one thing that I always, as a manager, have tried to do, is let people know that I will use whatever power I can to help make the situation right, whatever power that I have, and I think, you know, we can't make -- managers can't take the weight of the industry on our shoulders, but to the extent that we have power and can use it to make change on behalf of people who don't, I think it's really incumbent on us to do that and I can think of a couple of instances where an individual who didn't report to me but had a really uncomfortable interaction with her manager and needed someone to talk to and knew that I had kind of stated very publicly that if you ever needed an ally to help you through a situation, that I would do my best to help you and came in, and I think managers who can and do do that, can really change the tenor of an organization. Yes, Ashley?

> I'm thinking about somebody who we were talking earlier about what it means when you have a manager who's an advocate for you and I'm thinking of one manager in particular for me who's been that and really helped me get to where I am today and other colleagues who have the same manager and thought he was the worst manager they have ever had, so understanding that individuals have different communication styles, different sort of fundamental needs, and a manager may be really well equipped to manage one of those sets, but not all of them and the importance of developing a more agile approach and looking for those cues to understand that this works for me, but not for Amy.

> Jonathan: I think that's a really good point. In some ways, so every sort of manager training I've gone to has involved some sort of work style, strength, whatever test and that's why, because different people do work differently and whatever you call it, the reality is as a manager is how you adapt your style to work with people in the best way possible. So again, take them

with a pound of salt, but you know, there's a reason to do them, which is, you know, trying to be more inclusive in how you manage people. OK, so we have 10 minutes left, and maybe this slide will move to the next one. There we go.

> I want to just brainstorm a little bit as a group, and talk about how could we train managers across the country from different organizations? How do you like to learn? How do you -- how would you make something like this simple and accessible? You know, big organizations that once had elaborate training programs are ending those, and small organization, you know, I work at INN, our average member has 7 employees in their newsroom and they can't afford to, you know, put together a program that works just for their one manager. So how do we think about that? So in sort of five minutes or so, I would just love to hear ideas for how we might take something like and do it more broadly. What works for you, what ideas do you guys have? And let me ask this specific question: So what are so many ways that you think people could learn successfully at a distance? Do you like videos? Do you think discussions work better? In-person-plus videos? Live chats? Yeah, go ahead.

> So I actually teach graduate school classes online through a limited residency program. And I went through my masters and my Ph.D. in the same program, and one of the things that we've learned through that experience is that even in an online classroom, you need to provide multiple ways for students to engage in the work, so I have an additional classroom that acts as a physical space for the students to engagement it's where all the syllabi materials get posted and for every week there's an audio lecture, there's a PowerPoint, there's a reading, sometimes there's a video, there's an activity and they have to do two or three out of the four or five, depending on what I've offered and reflect back on that, because not every student can engage in every way, but they're getting provided the materials in multiple ways and engaging in that way. They also have to do an experiential. So all of my students and I teach social justice and community organizing have to do a project in the community, because online fails to make that real for people. They have to be doing something and connecting it back to the classroom. So I'm not speaking with any sort of -- you know what? I'm going to take that back, I have a Ph.D. in education, I'm speaking with a level of expertise.

> Jonathan: You do. A lot of it.

> I'm going to own this one. You've got to provide multiple modes for people to engage in the work. We also have our students are invited to campus, especially in the limited residency, not just the fully online program, two times a year, to gather and build connections and build networks and just learn from each other and even if they're not learning with each other, I used to do it with my colleagues to work in the library together to work on papers, but even that is building a collective that had shared values and was learning together. So that's one of the ways to kind of manage distance and make sure people are engaging in learning with it. With journalists they've already got an experiential learning opportunity, but I think that's why SRCCON works is because it builds a network of people here and a collective of shared values and people who can support each other, I think just applying that to whatever is developed online is absolutely necessary.

Jonathan: Cool. What else?

> One piece is just having like sort of credible testimonials from journalists that this is worthwhile.

> I think that's a huge piece, yup.

> Because it's very easy, I mean those of us who have had formal training probably have that kind of instinctive response of what percentage of this is going to actually be useful to me.

Jonathan: Absolutely.

> And so the way that I've come to think about that is well, if 10% of it is useful, I'll be better off than I was before. But I think for people to hear both from the managed and the managers about how this actually can make a difference, the work is really important.

Jonathan: Yeah, I think it's good.

> I'd just agree with Michael. --

> Jonathan: Did you say disagree?

> I agree with Michael. I rarely disagree with Michael.

> You're my former manager.

> That's true. He loved me. Take that for what it's worth. But I think, like I have been through absolutely horrific, like training, like really comically bad, like the stuff of the video parody that some people were seeing -- not a parody, though -- and then I've been through stuff that was quite useful and good but I did come to the stuff that was quite useful and good with a degree of cynicism. You know, I've said if you can come to it with an open mind and I think that's a modeling thing, too, because I feel like in my current organization, I think people do come to it with an open mind? Because everyone comes in and they're cynical and they're rolling their eyes and they don't want to be there, it's probably not going to be a good experience. But figuring out how to make people, forcing them to step away from that can be useful. We did this training and one of the most useful things in it is talking about -- I'm probably a somewhat infamous multitasker and I actually am paying attention, very little gets by me but I realize if somebody is sitting across from me and they don't think I'm listening, they think I don't care. Even that idea of being here now and setting aside other things. And the challenge of one management thing I did was thinking, OK, I have to make a lot of decisions all day long, so it's not necessarily realistic to spend one hour solely focused on someone. But the challenge is how much time could I spend realistically? So in the case of emergency, someone could come get me, but you know, no emergency, and I think it's probably 20, 25 minutes, right? And then if you can carve that time out, it makes a big difference.

> Jonathan: What you said I think underscores something that I should have said early on. Because I think it's instructive, but I'm so glad you said it. I went to my first manager training extremely cynical and walked out extremely cynical. It was only with about two years' worth of time, distance, and experience, that I realized that the experience actually had value. So I think that's a big barrier we have to acknowledge and think about how to manage, because as journalists, we tend to be cynical about these sorts of things. Not everyone. There's a lot of really good journalists who are far more thoughtful about this stuff, but I certainly wouldn't have

put myself in that camp when I was a 24-year-old idiot. It was only with time and space that I learned the value.

> One thing I'm curious about there that I think relates to that, but also the testimonial piece is that in my experience and from what I've heard from people giving testimonials is there's often portions of different programs that really work, but you do like the whole thing and you get the crap, is it actually useful at the same time as it actually is. So that's one of the things that I'm really curious about is like if there is a program, like, can you have it be more modular, like, are there different ways, so then like if someone is really is excited and has a testimonial about that one portion, you can get that part and not have to do all the rest of it.

> Jonathan: Absolutely.

> For instance, wouldn't we all like better-run meetings, right, but what does it make? Who is good at it or -- so that's something I think could be useful to lots of people, not just running them or being a participant in them or advocating for a better meeting. So I think it would be interesting to know what people's needs are.

> One thing that we are struggling and trying to figure out now that we have staff members is you know, as journalists, I think we tend to devalue things that aren't directly journalism, and like for instance as a reporter, you might like go to three or four meetings where it doesn't really net you anything and then you're like I reported all day so no big deal but if you go to a training and part of that training is shitty, you're like, uh, I hate this. So I get it, nobody wants to sit through something that's boring or whatever, but at the same time, you have to recalibrate. And we're like, OK, we have to devote a significant amount of our time to talk HR. Not super exciting, but let's just say we value HR...

[laughter]

> Jonathan: Pretend for a minute that we value HR.

> You know, and you have to wade through some of the crappy stuff, but if you want to do it well, there's not a lot of places out there and we've been researching for about a year now. So you really do have to wade through a lot of the crappy stuff. I'm sorry.

> I've doing grad school online, and there are videos, there's a lot of discussion, there's reading, you kind of get out what you put into it, in terms of distance, you could do it as a webinar or you could make it a week-long thing where everyone comes. In terms of it being boring, I just think it's a really interesting juxtaposition that we talk about the best managers out there help us with our professional development and then we're sitting here wondering, does anybody actually care about this professional development? I mean it's professional development and you could also have people who aspire to be managers or something like that, who might like it more if there's like a carrot in it for them.

> Jonathanment. Anyone else, because I think we're at time --

> I have one more thought which is a little bit less about distance learning, but one thing I was trying to pitch in our union meetings this year is to try to put more money in our training budgets and I wish there were training directors who said to an education reporter, hey, we would give you time off to go to if you wanted to go, and we could give you \$200, we can't pay for your whole way, but I also see there's a scholarship you could take part in, but they're not taking this proactive approach to suggesting to people that there are opportunities out there. They just say, well, we can't afford it so we're not going to and I wish they would at least kind of put that out

there for people that, like, we'll support you in other ways as much as we can if this is a thing you're interested in.

> Jonathan: Any other final thoughts? We've run out of time. I would say we need better managers in news for this moment in journalism. I feel like we're at the cusp of creating a better journalism system, despite the challenges that we have. And I think it means that we need better managers, and I hope what all of you have said and done will help us get there. If you happen to have post-it notes that you're comfortable sharing, just stick them on these sheets of paper for me and I would be happy to keep them and if you want to keep them or discard them, by all means feel free to do so.

If you feel like you're passionate about this and want to go down a rabbit hole and talk with me about this at another point, that's how you get in touch with me. And drop me if a tweet, drop me an email. I want to figure this out. So thank you.

[applause]