

Mentors

Early on, most journalists benefit from the guidance of more experienced leaders. Often the lessons carried over the years are both positive — what to do — and negative — actions to avoid, even though embodied by the same treasured guide. What are the elements of enduring wisdom?

William Hearst III

As a cub reporter, I was working on the newspaper that my grandfather had started. So I was kind of in training and I was working with a very veteran reporter, Mary Crawford, who was taking me under her wing. And she said to me one day, “You know, you may edit this paper some day. I want to ask you what you think is the most important thing to look for in a reporter.”

I knew this was some sort of important question. I was thinking “the ability to write a lead under deadline” or “hustle.” I was searching for the right answer, and I gave her one of those kinds of answers. She said, “No, it’s not. It’s integrity. Because if you lack those other things, you may get beat on your story, but if you lack integrity, your newspaper will be sued and you could lose the whole paper.” So that stuck in my mind, and it seemed idealistic for a long, long, time. It took me a long time to realize what a continuous thread that is in the news business.

Nancy Maynard

Arthur Gelb of *The New York Times* was metropolitan editor when I worked there. He said of the *Times* newsroom in the late 1960s: “I thought I was an editor, I found out that I was a lion tamer. It was so wild. We didn’t know what we were doing.” I said, “Arthur, there’s a reason we behaved the way we did,” and he asked what it was. I said, “Because what you said you wanted us to do was not what you rewarded. You rewarded our wildness. You didn’t reward our obeying your rules.”

Burl Osborne

Wes Gallagher, the late general manager of the AP, managed by sheer force of personality and the legendary bushiness of his eyebrows. When I was first appointed to

head an AP bureau, which was a big deal in the AP, I went into the New York office for my interview. Wes was lecturing me on how to manage the budget, which I then did not know whole a lot about. He said: “I’ll tell you this — if you think there is a really big story out there, and you go out and spend money to cover it and run over budget and it turned out not to be as big as you thought, that is OK. If you ever hear about the really big story and in order to save money, you do not go out, I will kick your ass out of here.”

So we had a very clear understanding from the start.

Neal Shapiro

I think (ABC’s) Roone Arledge could look at something — whether it was a set or a story — and have you take it a step back. And [he’d] say, “You know what, this does not work and you need to fix this.” That is a great skill because oftentimes, when you are in the middle of something and you get so consumed in the details, it takes someone who can look at the details but also get that larger picture.



Roone Arledge realized ... the importance of a story — and that everything had to have a story line, which is a beginning, middle and end. And there have to be characters. And there is nothing insidious about that. That is the proper way to tell stories.

Arthur Sulzberger Jr.

First and foremost is my father who taught me, by dint of example, a lot of things and whose greatest words of wisdom may well be, “Never make a decision before its time.” I think all of us when we’re younger ... have a tendency to want to appear decisive, even if [we] were not. We jump and say, ‘yes, no, blue, green, whatever.’ He taught me the power of holding back and letting decisions, in effect, come to you when they’re ready. ...

Bill Kovach, I worked with him in the Washington Bureau of the *Times* when I joined the *Times*. He has a form of leadership that’s very strong. He made you feel valued. He gave you the room you needed to maneuver. He backed you up when he thought you were right. And he’d even back you up occasionally when he thought you were wrong.

Mark Whitaker

Maynard (Parker, an inspirational editor) was actually one of the more inarticulate people. We used to call [his phrases] “MalaParkerisms.” Maynard was constantly inventing these words. He would say, OK, I have three points, one, B, C. But he had this amazing gut. When something needed to be better, he just knew it. He didn’t necessarily know what to do about it or how to fix it, but he knew it was wrong. He was completely relentless about pushing you and pushing you until it was right.

One of his favorite expressions was, “God really is in the details.” You have got to make sure that every single column, every square inch of the magazine counts for something. He would drive people nuts by bouncing one-page stories back over and

over, saying, “This has to be 20 percent better. This has to be 15 percent better.” People would say, how does he figure out these percentages?

He would not be specific. He would tell you what was wrong. He would tell you it needed to be better. But he would allow you or challenge you to figure out how to make it better. I actually think that that was better than sitting somebody down and saying, “Here is how it is done.”

And as infuriated as people sometimes would get with Maynard because he was pushing them so hard, I think at the end of the day, when they came back and they had figured out the solution that Maynard had not necessarily prescribed and he was happy with it, it really gave them a huge sense of fulfillment. They had really contributed to the process, and more so than if he had just told them, line-by-line, what to do.

Matt Storin

Tom Winship was the legendary editor of the *Globe* for 20 years. He had so many of the components that go into making a great leader and a great journalist: curiosity, boundless — almost manic — energy, an upbeat nature.

But he had a way, and he had people around him who had a way, of making you feel like you were as good as anybody at *The Washington Post* or *The New York Times*.

Some of it was unrealistic in a way. I mean, he absolutely saw the bottle half-full. And so he would tend not to dwell on what the paper didn’t do well. But, boy, if you beat the *Times* on a story, he had you lined up for a Pulitzer within 24 hours. I don’t mean literally, but he had you feeling that way.

Norman Pearlstine

I never worked for Gene Roberts, but I think of him as a mentor. When faced with a dilemma, I find myself asking: “What would Roberts do?” In his 18 years at *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, he built a better newspaper with fewer resources than I would have thought possible. From the beginning, he focused on very big stories that clearly served the public interest, even if readers sometimes scratched their heads about their length. He realized that a prize-winning, 17-part series by Don Bartlett or Jim Steele would be read by aspiring reporters and editors around the country. It made them want to come to the *Inquirer*, even if they would never get to write those series themselves.

Sandy Rowe

As editor, if you put something in the paper that, say, took a cheap shot, even down in the 20th paragraph of the piece, (publisher) Perry (Morgan) could recognize the flaw. He would circle it and write in the margin, “What, pray tell, is this?” And the next day, it would land on my desk. I would see his handwriting on this interoffice envelope, and I would just dread opening it. It was that one precise sentence on the one weak point in the story, and he would go right to the heart of that. Perry had an abiding respect for readers, and he believed there was nothing we could do that was too good for them. And he conveyed that to me.

Don't just think outside the box, FORGET the box.

Alberto Ibargiuen

A major influence in my life was John Cage. I had heard about this new thing called electronic music. I knew that he had been involved in the literature of silence, which was something of the rage in the early '60s in New York circles.

I needed to figure out what this was all about. So I went and there was a man sitting in the back of this traditional New England brownstone chapel. He had arranged steel planks in descending order, thrusting out into the audience. He put microphones along the side and stood in the back and rolled ball bearings down — making this sound.

And I thought, “My God, you can do this and call it music. If this is a concert, then anything is possible.” It was fun, it was radical. It was a way of saying, don't just think outside the box, FORGET the box. Just think about the experience.



(Publisher) Dave Laventhol [had] ... openness, flexibility, willingness to take on people with no newspaper background because they had [different] talents, abilities. He has a real passion for the business of newspapers because it makes possible the journalism he reveres.

Tom Johnson

My earliest publisher, a man named Peyton Anderson down in Macon, really showed me the importance of setting your goals very high. He was convinced that getting an education — which incidentally he underwrote for me at both the University of Georgia and Harvard Business School — was very important.

Otis Chandler believed in excellence. He really believed in editorial excellence and also in financial excellence — setting your goals editorially high, but also making sure that the business side was operated in a way so it could be a financial success as well.

Otis taught me you cannot have one without the other.

Ted Turner: He's a maverick. What I like most about Ted is that he would set a very specific goal and drive the organization toward the achievement of it. He also has just a great, great passion for news. And he was incredibly supportive, in the good times and in the bad times, at CNN. I loved working for all three.

Lou Boccardi

Sometimes I think about (former AP chief) Wes Gallagher and ask myself: What would he have done?

Wes had what I used to call a magical stomach for news. He just had this uncanny sense of where the story would go. I learned tremendously from that.

William Hearst III

I went to work for Jim Bellows in Los Angeles. Jim was kind of a Merlin figure with aphorisms falling off to the left and right, and occasionally Delphic utterances that you couldn't even make out. He had a test for the lead of a story, which he called the bar-stool test.

The notion was that we're in a newsroom and two important people on the paper are down at the bar sitting on adjoining stools. And you raced down from the newsroom to tell them that they should come back, that there's been a very big story. And you tell them what the story is. And then they ask you two or three very quick questions, just to frame it. And those are the questions which should be answered in the lead.

Jay Harris

(Things about) leaders I most admire:

The first is their absolute clarity on the things that they value professionally. And the enormous consistency in all realms of their personal and professional activities. I think of Jim Batten, the former CEO of Knight Ridder, as a person who was absolutely committed to the notion that newspapers and journalism were a public trust, that we had an obligation to our society to do that well. And every decision I ever saw him make was consistent with that.

The other thing that I took from watching my mentors was their ability, or willingness, to use their power in appropriate ways to further ends they thought were important, regardless of whether the crowd was with them. I watched, for example, John Quinn, who was the senior vice president for news at the Gannett Company, who believed deeply in diversity in news staffs and in news coverage, really use the power of his office to advance that in Gannett newspapers.

Karen Jurgensen

I worked a great deal with Ron Martin, who was executive editor of *USA TODAY*. Ron taught me to think anything is possible and not to shut down my imagination. Ron taught me to tackle anything I wanted to tackle.

More recently, Tom Curley, the publisher of *USA TODAY*, has taught me a lot about strategic planning. He has helped me to shift from being a tactical thinker, a day-to-day thinker, to more of a strategic thinker, which one has to do when you get further along.

Tim McGuire

(Publisher) Joel Kramer at the *Star Tribune* was a person who taught me that we're in a wonderful business of grays. It just doesn't pay to get upset about a lot of things when it's not clear that it's that good or that bad. Don't lose sleep over those things that are in the middle.

Be tolerant of those, be understanding of those and learn from that.

That was a special lesson.

I think the grays come around people. When we try to judge people as being wrong

or right or good or bad, we get into a lot of trouble. It's best to entertain those grays around people. Passions must [exist] for values — for that need to stimulate debate, for belief in the First Amendment, for the belief in the customer.

We can care about people. But if we judge them and are constantly trying to rate them in our mind, it's a lot harder to care deeply about them.



What we have found is that if we assign a mentor, if we have a manager who's listening to each individual, who's working with them, who's checking in with them, who's making sure their career is going well, that is the best solution.

Neal Shapiro

If you wanted to take a beach at Normandy, (former ABC executive producer) Rick Kaplan was the guy. He was a smart guy, a big guy, a forceful guy. He would say do this, this and this. So when I find myself looking at my Normandys, I say, "You know what? I am going to call on that part of Rick."

(Former ABC News executive producer) Jeff Gralnick was the guy who was the best in the control room I have ever seen. His instincts were a gift. When I am in the control room, I think a little bit, what would Jeff do? Roone Arledge had a great sense of being able to step back and just look at things. So I would try to do that.

**Look at other people,
look at mentors, think about what they do. But
do not be them. Be yourself.**

But the best advice, I think, is, look at other people, look at mentors, think about what they do. But do not be them. Be yourself. The best [advice] I can give to people is, be true to who you are. And if there are qualities you see in other people, try to incorporate those in your personality, but do not change your personality.