

## A News Anchor Is Not a News Reader

The concept of news anchoring has undergone a paradigm shift in the last two decades around the world. This has been primarily attributed to the flourishing of 24 hour news channels. Round the clock news has replaced news readers with news anchors. The main reason behind this transformation is tough competition coupled with live technology, both of which have made news anchoring a very challenging task.

The basic difference between news readers and news anchors is that news readers are news presenters while news anchors are journalists who understand and participate in the dynamics of news. It is important to note that the role and responsibilities of news readers and news anchors are also different. In India, the launch of the public broadcaster, Doordarshan introduced the concept of news readers. They were given a news script which was limited to presentation of the already prepared news script. Over the last two decades, the role of news readers has tremendously transformed. The launch and growth of private news channels promoted this change. As the network of news channels spread, responsibilities and demands from anchors increased. Nowadays, 24 hour news channels require anchors who are full-fledged journalists. Being a journalist, an anchor is expected to understand the nuances, the implications and the importance of news better. In breaking news an anchor carries an entire news

bulletin on his or her shoulders without any script support. This is possible only when a news anchor possesses the potential to script, analyse, understand and tweak news. This calls for continuous study, assimilation of read facts and the ability to correlate and interpret.

Another significant difference between a news reader and a news anchor is the application of live technology. Earlier, a news reader would record the bulletin in the studio which was then played out at the given news slot. This provided space for retakes that would iron out all the slip ups or fumbles by the news reader. It also provided room for correcting errors in the news script. But this scenario has totally changed with live technology, making the concept of news recording almost redundant. Nowadays every bulletin is live and there is no scope for retakes to rectify errors.

A news anchor has to be immaculate in pronunciation, clarity and language. An anchor who falters frequently or lacks confidence loses credibility in front of the audience. He or she has to be ready to react, to perform and to engage in damage control in all kinds of critical situations. Each item of news or editorial content is not always written. Hence, an anchor fills in with his or her editorial and oratorical skills. Grammatical or factual errors in the news script reflect an anchor in poor light. Hence, an anchor is expected to rectify editorial errors while speaking on-air. This comes with practice, confidence and understanding of news.

Another major difference between a news reader and a news anchor is that a news reader may or may not update himself with the latest developments in news. But a news anchor has to be abreast of the developments that create ripples in news. An anchor has to keep a tab on current affairs, irrespective of his or her duty hours. This is essential as news is often interconnected. One important miss may leave a loose end, affecting the total understanding of an issue in news. This is why news anchoring



demands continuous homework which builds a strong foundation of knowledge. Thus, news anchoring is not a soft cushion job anymore. Anchors fully participate in newsroom activities, making them an integral part of editorial decisions. This widens their horizons, promoting their journalistic growth in turn.

## Tip

As a news anchor, you will have a wider scope of professional growth in your career. Moreover, as an anchor with a journalistic background, you will have multiple skills and thus have better chances of moving up the newsroom hierarchy, as compared to news readers.

## Qualities of a Successful Anchor

News anchoring is perceived as a very glamorous profession. This element of glamour, name and fame attracts a large number of youth towards this field. But the truth is that the whole notion of glamour in electronic media is actually unfounded. This will be dealt with in detail in a later chapter. Anchors being the face of news channels have to be presentable, but this is just one facet of the needs of this profession. The other facet demands a lot of hard work, perseverance and intelligence from aspiring news anchors. It is certainly a combination of beauty and brains. Beauty is not a prerequisite for anchoring, but intellect and knowledge are definitely a hallmark of an anchor's identity.

So what makes a successful news anchor? There are certain qualities that ought to be there or need to be cultivated in a candidate aspiring to be a news anchor. Let us summarize and reflect upon each of the following qualities:

1. Knowledge of current affairs
2. Understanding of news
3. Intelligence
4. Confidence
5. Command over language
6. Impressive personality
7. A good voice



Imbibing these traits, combined with various factors that determine one's flight to the top, helps shape anchors for success. Anchors are expected to be smart individuals who can think on their feet, use their intelligence to sail through any critical news scenario and can infuse a sense of energy and vigour to a news show. Let us understand each of these qualities in detail, with the help of examples.

## » Knowledge of Current Affairs

This factor has the highest importance for an aspiring news anchor. Interest in news is a primary requirement for anyone aiming to be a journalist. Anchors are journalists first and knowledge of current affairs is paramount for finding their way in this ambitious profession. One can excel only when one has great interest in one's job. This inspires hard work and ultimately leads to expertise and accolades over a period of time.

For news anchors, knowledge of current affairs is all the more significant as it is essential for writing and understanding news. One must remember that anchors are not spoon-fed the information all the time. They have to speak extempore as and when important news breaks on-air. Several times in a day, an anchor is just given one line of information and he or she has to stretch the bulletin running into several minutes or hours, as per the editorial importance of the news. The backup information keeps coming in later, but in the event of breaking news it is the knowledge of current affairs of an anchor that plays a big role in successfully dealing with such situations.

A news anchor should have a good awareness of issues ranging from politics, economics, crime, sports and the city to entertainment. News can break any time, on any issue, making it imperative for the anchors to be well versed with developments in the country and around the world. An anchor should be

prepared to speak confidently on any of these, as and when the situation demands.

For example, let us assume that a political party fictitiously named Janadesh Party is touted to win state assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh. On the counting day, as the news about this party inching towards majority trickles out from the Election Commission, this news is flashed across all channels. An anchor should first announce the gist of this most important news. Then, there are some questions which he or she might like to consider or discuss with his or her viewers. These questions are listed below:

- What is the lead by which Janadesh Party is winning as compared to the rival parties?
- An anchor must know the size of the assembly. Also, what is the number needed for majority?
- Who is the leader of that party? Has he or she staked claim for chief ministership during election campaigning?
- If yes, what is the profile of that leader? Does he or she have a clean record or does he or she have some controversial past?
- What led to the victory? What were the issues this victorious party raised during its campaigning that struck a chord with the voters?
- Is it a win for Janadesh party or is it an anti-incumbency factor for the ruling party?
- Who is the governor? (An anchor must know his or her name as the governor would invite the winning party to form the government.)

All this comes with continuous reading and assimilation of important news events. News anchoring demands regular homework in the form of good scanning of newspapers, magazines and news content on television.



## Tip

As an aspiring anchor, you can increase your knowledge of current affairs by maintaining a diary of important news events. This can include a gist of political, international and socio-economic news with its date and year. Such a collection will be a good backup to fall back on, in times of need, for establishing coordination with interlinked past events.

## » Understanding of News

A news anchor must understand and interpret the importance of each news item in a bulletin. This is of significance because unless an anchor understands the news himself or herself, he or she will not be able to convey its message to the viewers. Several times, an anchor has to simplify the news in detail while talking to reporters on-air. Hence, an anchor must know the details and proper perspective of news. The impinging factors which form the basis of understanding this news can be gauged from the following questions:

- What could have caused it?
- What can be its repercussions or effects?
- What does it mean for the common man?

For example, the Reserve Bank of India has raised the repo rate for banks. If an anchor flatly informs the audience about this news, it does not make sense to a common man who does not understand economic terms like 'repo rate'. In other words, news should be simplified so that a layman can easily gather its meaning. A news anchor can do this by considering the following questions:

- First, an anchor must know what is repo rate.
- How big is this hike in terms of the percentage?

- What is the possibility of this hike leading to increase in bank rates?
- If banks do increase their rates, how will it affect the common man's loan?
- Will it result in an increase in the monthly EMI of various loans like the home loan or car loan?

Similarly, take the example of increase in petrol and diesel prices that takes place on a regular basis. This does not only imply the hike in petrol prices but has a large spillover effect. It leads to a rise in transportation costs, which has a direct influence on the prices of essential items like fruits, vegetables and milk. Several times this prods the bus operators to hike the prices of tickets. Therefore, there is a rise in the prices of several important services. This causes inflationary pressures, resulting in an overall drain in the budget of the common man. This is the focal news point in petrol price hike.

Understanding the gravity of news is a must for a news anchor. For example, in the event of communal strife or riots an anchor must avoid taking the names of communities or blaming any one sect. This is against the news guidelines as it can inflame communal passions. One has to be very cautious in such sensitive situations.

### Tip

In an emergency situation, keep yourself in the place of the common man and assess the impact. Break the difficulty quotient of each news breaking and simplify it, so that a person of average intelligence can grasp its meaning and effect.

## » Intelligence

An intelligent mind is a big asset for a news anchor. An intelligent anchor cruises through tough and tricky news with ease.



Intelligence helps an anchor frame good questions and helps him or her cross question reporters and conduct live interviews. An intelligent anchor knows how to extract a news point from particular news. The power to interpret also comes from intelligence.

For example, in 2010 a road mishap took place in Mumbai where a container filled with an inflammable chemical, xylene hydrochloride slipped on the Eastern Express Highway. This is one of the arterial highways for going to suburbs around Mumbai. This accident resulted in the chemical leaking out of the container on the highway. This was big breaking news. How would an intelligent anchor try to extract information out of it? The following points enumerate what to cover:

- What could be the cause of this accident? Was the container overloaded?
- How many litres of the inflammable chemical could be stored in such a container? What was the risk involved in it?
- Was there a possibility of it catching fire?
- What was being done to control the situation?
- Was there any residential colony in the vicinity?
- How could this chemical affect the people living nearby and those who travel on this highway?
- Could it lead to any health hazards?
- Was the smell of this particular chemical pungent?
- Was it spreading nearby? How could it affect infants, kids and those ailing from respiratory problems?
- What was the effect on traffic as the incident happened at peak morning time? (Hundreds of passengers commute on this site as it is the Eastern Express Highway.)
- Was the traffic being diverted through some other route? (As the tanker turned turtle the affected area must have been cordoned off.)

- Would the authorities register a case of negligence against the company?

These are all kinds of probabilities that an intelligent anchor explores in public interest.

### Tip

Intelligent anchors do not wait for the reporters or correspondents to supply them with vital information, as it may take a couple of minutes. They must know how to run their minds in different directions, for exploring various logical possibilities.

## » Confidence

Confidence is the key to good presentation in news. A confident anchor exudes authenticity which leaves a positive impact on the audience. Confidence increases with knowledge and experience. It is of great use in times of crisis. A slip of the tongue often happens with anchors, especially when anchoring continues for longer periods. This may shake the confidence for a few seconds, but self-belief helps regain composure. Confidence helps in reiterating the famous all-is-well line.

Confidence helps a great deal in speaking extempore. It helps instil the power to cruise through any crucial situation in news. Confidence is actually the backbone of a good performance during breaking news. This is because breaking news demands instant script with the right content, announced with great confidence by the anchor. Unless the anchor is confident about the content and its importance, he or she cannot leave a mark on the audience. Lack of confidence takes the sheen off a news show. With so much competition around, viewers have a big choice in terms of news content. With a click on the remote,



they can navigate news channels. Thus, a diffident attitude is neither good for an anchor's career nor for the news channel.

Confident speakers are always appreciated and confident anchors are always sought out by news channels. It would be worthwhile to say that a confident anchor adds sheen to a news bulletin. But anchors must guard against giving wrong information with confidence, as it may affect their credibility. Sometimes the enormity of some big news may overpower an anchor's confidence, but it is the presence of mind coupled with experience that helps an anchor cruise through the situation with ease.

## Tip

Confidence should not snowball into overconfidence as confidence helps achieve success while overconfidence can lead to decline. Assurance about your abilities is great, but each task holds its own significance which should be respected. Overconfidence has a direct bearing on hard work, leading to laxity. So always work on raising the bar for yourself.

## » Command over Language

Journalism is the communication of news and views in public interest. Communication is a bridge that treads on words and pictures. Sometimes a picture speaks a thousand words and sometimes the script is so good that it brings alive the scene of news in front of viewers. For this, the script has to be descriptive, crisp and direct. As mentioned already, a news anchor in breaking news has to perform without editorial scripts. So command over language is necessary to perform well. A competent anchor has to master the art of drafting pertinent sentences in a short time. While presenting news, several times anchors carry the entire bulletin on their shoulders. This can be executed on

the basis of their knowledge and information. However, it can not take place without good command over language.

Articulating the available information fluently is a craft learnt over a period of time. For starters, familiarity with news vocabulary is important. Selection of wrong words or phrases can reverse the meaning or send a wrong message. For example, consider the following sentence:

Cricketer Yuvraj Singh is affected by lung cancer. With treatment being the top priority now, this effectively signals a long break for Yuvraj from cricket.

The above news has two words 'affect' and 'effect' which, if interchanged, would read wrongly, as follows:

Cricketer Yuvraj Singh is effected by lung cancer. With treatment being the top priority now, this affectively signals to a long break from cricket for Yuvraj.

Similarly, read the following carefully

Tamil superstar Rajnikanth will be released from the hospital today. He was admitted to a hospital in Singapore after complaining of chest pain.

The correct way to represent this news item would be,

Tamil superstar Rajnikanth will be discharged from the hospital today. He was admitted to a hospital in Singapore after complaining of chest pain.

It is important to note that prisoners are 'released' while patients are 'discharged'. Similarly, a judge may 'recuse' him from hearing a case of black money, while the crucial intervention



of the court in 2010 'rescued' the 2G scam from being buried inside government files.

Therefore, an anchor has to be careful in choosing words and how they come out at the spur of the moment. Not only should an anchor choose the right words and sentences, he or she also has to convey the purpose of the news. The message in the news bulletin should be crystal clear to the viewers.

Wrong pronunciation of words leaves a bad impression on listeners, reflecting the anchor in poor light. Thus, anchors must polish their vocabulary and focus on the right pronunciation of words. There should be no hesitation in asking peers or colleagues about the right pronunciation of a difficult word, than making a fool of oneself in front of innumerable viewers. Being bilingual or having a good knowledge of both English and Hindi is of immense help in pronouncing the words correctly. Several English words in the names of places, individuals and events find mention in Hindi news. However, being an anchor in a Hindi news channel is no justification for wrong pronunciation.

## Tip

Having a good command over language does not mean waxing eloquent on important issues. As an anchor you should carefully choose your words so as to reflect the right sentiment in news. Language should be simple and direct, to successfully convey what you mean.

## » Impressive Personality

An impressive personality implies that an anchor should be pleasant and have a good screen presence. He or she should influence the audience through skills that will distinguish an ordinary anchor from him or her (an exceptional anchor). Grooming helps one look good, but it is an anchor's knowledge and expertise

that ultimately leaves an impression on the audience. An impressive anchor influences through content, style of speaking and rapport with the audience. Various heavyweight anchors like Prannoy Roy and Vinod Dua have a personality that speaks volumes about their experience and knowledge. Their conduct on-air also plays a vital role in creating a positive impression.

A good impression on the listeners is one of the best compliments for an anchor. Once the personal rapport is built with the audience, the viewers look forward to an anchor's news show. This raises an anchor's value in the eyes of the management.

### Tip

Expensive or fancy clothes do not create an impressive personality. Rather, it is the originality of thought and expression that actually wins over the audience. Do not overdo things or try to flaunt your knowledge. Your understated personal charm will reflect on its own.

## » A Good Voice

Anchors are recognized by their voice, which is an integral part of their personality. A good voice is one of the basic requirements for news anchoring. An anchor with base in voice clears the initial audition easily. The voice should have expression and clarity. Each word an anchor says should be crystal clear. Anchoring calls for good voice modulation. A news anchor must know where to pause and where to give emphasis in the sentence, so that the right word and phrase reflects by its weight. A wrong pause in one sentence dilutes the effect of the script. Voice modulation also demands various emotions. It could vary from aggression, empathy, excitement to sarcasm as per the demand of the news script. If the voice has the right expression it recreates the event in front of the viewer, while a dull voice dampens the effect of important news.



A good voice is not only needed in anchoring but also in voice-overs for news stories. Packaged news is laced with a voice-over that describes and explains the script. An impressive voice-over artist is always sought out in a news channel. Anchors with expressive voice quality are always preferred to do important voice-overs. With experience, the audience begins to identify an anchor through his or her voice in the absence of his or her physical presence.

**Tip**

Voice can be a distinct signature of your anchoring personality. Concentrate on making it as expressive as possible, so that it easily plays out various human moods which help connect with the audience.

While these are some seminal qualities that are necessary to be a good anchor, they do not represent the only qualities that an anchor requires in order to succeed at his or her work. As an anchor, one is encouraged to constantly increase one's source of knowledge and build on one's personality through a variety of ways.