

Monk Manny's guide to source development and interviewing: All I ever needed came from The Bible and selling shampoo.

Starting the beat: Know your customer.

Whether you are covering the courthouse, the capitol, police precinct or city hall, you should read clips. Learn who is often quoted. Read the competition; see what they're focused on. Download the previous beat writer(s) for sources. Sales people rarely cold-call a potential customer before doing their homework. Doing this will give you a better idea of what the beat is like.

Out of sight. Out of mind: Leave the bunker!

Successful sellers visit customers. A source is more apt to drop you a dime in person, than pick up the phone and call. You have to walk the building you cover. Start on the first floor and work your way up. Hang out in the elevator, the stairwells. Go to the cafeteria, the water cooler. Sit outside the courtroom or legislators' office. See who visits. Report with your eyes, ears, even nose.

Everyone is a source.

Now you are in the building. Talk and hand out cards. Shampoo sellers bombard beauty parlors with cards, mailers and chit-chat. You should too. Start with:

- a) Conversational sourcing. Get to know people. Where are they from? Married? Children? Favorite sports? Vacation spots? Study plaques and pictures on the desk? Find something to identify with and talk about it. People know your job is to gather information, but no one wants to get worked like a cheap date.
- b) So who does the dirty work? A reporter's best friend is rarely a mayor or the police chief. It's the secretary, the mid-level manager, the clerk and bailiff. Figure out who writes the memos. Cultivating these sources will save you deadline time and make you look smart with your editor.
- c) Modesty is best. If you don't know something, ask for help. You don't know how to calculate the property tax increase, ask for help. You build credibility by getting it right. Don't be afraid to ask your source, what would they write about.
- d) The trip wire. All reporters must protect their beat against invading competitors. You need to develop sources who will call you when competitors snoop. Check the PIOs calendar and message book. Ask secretaries. It is called counter intelligence.
- e) Follow ups. Sales people are required to follow-up with clients. Beat sources are no different. You should call sources at least once a month, maybe more. Sometimes you won't get anything. Touching base keeps you in the game.

Interviewing: Some commandments.

- a) Truth in advertising: When you are writing about someone, you don't have to tell them every detail of the story, but make sure they know what you are going to write about them. Give them a list of written questions if necessary. Be upfront, give them a chance to defend themselves. Sandbagging kills your credibility. The Book of John (17:17) says: "Thy word is truth."
- b) Shut up and listen. The Book of James (1:19) says: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." Proverbs (11:12) adds: "A man of

- understanding holds his tongue.” Reporters often want to seem smart. Don’t. Let people talk. That’s your job.
- c) This I learned from Eric Nalder, a veteran I-teamer for the San Jose Mercury News: If someone lies to you, let them tell you the entire lie. Then you slowly deconstruct it. This will make your story even stronger. Read Luke 12:2-3: “Anything done in the dark, will be exposed by the light...”
 - d) Knowledge is power. Learn about the person or topic you are writing about. Pull public records, read clips, study the employee manual. As a result, you will write with authority. Your subject may be less apt to snow you – but if they do – you can impeach them easier.
 - e) Never hit and run. After you publish a tough story, immediately call the subject. If they are angry, let them vent. Often the subject will respect you for it.
 - f) Be polite. Be professional. We often get a bad rap because we act arrogant or smarmy. Remember the Golden Rule. If you encounter a hostile situation, be calm. Romans 12:19 says: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him.”

Closer the deal:

- a) Every good seller thanks a buyer. Do the same with sources. If a secretary drops you a memo that leads to a story, thank her. You have now deputized a source and they feel like they made a difference. At Mother Herald, sources are categorized: “Friends of Mother, Gold Circle Members or the coveted Herald Angels.”