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Subject: Pros and Cons

Author: Thom Wilborn/ARRB Composed: 10:33 AM TodayReply: Pros and Cons-----

-----I agree that ABC got slammed by the NC jury. But the networks' constant pursuit of audience building stories was only due to backfire. As a reporter, I watched good journalism eroded by sensationalism. CNN may have taken the shots of Cosby's son in a pool of blood off the air, but you should ask yourself why it broadcast the pictures in the first place. There are no dunderheads making decisions at CNN. They recognized that death is a very private matter, they just didn't care if it would get them a few more viewers. Specifically regarding the ABC case, it used to be a cardinal rule of journalists that a reporter identified himself as such immediately. The phrase NBC News, or AP Radio almost becomes a part of your name. But in cases such as this, where ABC knows of wrongdoing, can't get an individual to step up to say what's going on, it was left with a single alternative. Go after the story. It isn't new for a reporter to seek employment with a company to find out what's going on. There is nothing illegal about it. People just think its sneaky and underhanded. Just as in this case, the company is usually being sneaky and underhanded, in addition to violating a few laws. The producers who worked at Food Lion were more in the role of whistle blowers than reporters. I do think that they should have returned the wages they earned at Food Lion. I believe that would have limited ABC's exposure to the lawsuit. You legal types know more than I. At Associated Press Broadcast during Mr. Reagan's term, there was hot debate whether to report his on-air quips before his weekly radio addresses. You remember, "The country is going to Hell in a handbasket." "We reached a resolution to the Cold War. We launch in 20 minutes." Were these serious comments? Should they be reported since they were jokes made during microphone checks? We decided to report them because he was President of the United States, (apparently) knew what he was saying and knew he was saying it in front of a live microphone with all the networks tuned in. The fact that CBS, NBC and ABC jumped on the story immediately somewhat affected AP's judgment, but the debate over the ethical decision to report "WAS BEAUTIFUL, MAN." As a professional journalist, I dislike what's being presented as news today, but I have to commend the story ABC broadcast. They found a wrong, and tried to right it. If ABC had paid more attention to journalism ethics (not an oxymoron) than broadcast sensationalism, they would have been completely vindicated. But shed no tears for poor ABC. Even though ABC lost \$5.5 million, viewership of its newsmagazine will probably increase. It could be a trend. Who knows, with the declining numbers at CBS, Dan Rather may finally admit to making a mistake.

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