

Kaj Johnson-O' Mara – Cedar Rapids, IA (KCRG)

1) Describe your job and the duties you must fulfill day to day.

I would say my job is quite fun, and I consider myself lucky to be where I am. I am the weekday morning meteorologist at KCRG-TV, Cedar Rapids, IA. My day starts at 3am and ends at 12pm, weather pending. 95% of the time this is the shift and those hours will not change. During severe weather though, they can change certainly. Our duties include issuing a forecast for our local area (35 or so county areas), updating the forecast for web, mobile devices, email, radio (16 stations), and creating closed captioning for our deaf viewers. We will also update our KCRG weather blog, facebook page, and twitter account. As you can see....many mediums to cover. Then, we utilize our render boxes to create good quality graphics for the weathercast that the public can understand easily.

2) What are some of the positive things about your job?

You can usually work at your own pace and be creative in your job. You can also have a little fun while doing it. Another positive is doing school talks. Watching kids learn about the weather is a very nice thing and is usually a nice break in-between shows. Salaried pay, meaning the same pay every pay period, is a positive.

3) What are the drawbacks of your job?

Hours can be very hard at times. Your family MUST be able to adapt and understand that you revolve around the weather. If you get called away from your dinner and have to go back into work for a tornado warning, and your wife/husband throws a fit, that relationship will not work until they get this very important point. For everyone else at dinner in your viewing area, YOU are that soothing voice that informs them of the weather - they will respect you for it. Holiday work can be annoying too. Salaried pay is both good and bad. You work 30 hrs in a week = get paid for 40 = GOOD. You have 3 outbreaks of severe weather, work 90 hrs in a week = get paid for 40 = BAD. Also, you can't use all your knowledge in your job. What? The public doesn't understand QG Theory?

4) What are good qualities and attributes to have if you want to be a broadcaster?

Need to be able to talk comfortably with a camera. Outgoing personality preferred. Viewed by many people, so must be able to take criticism....you will NOT please everybody no matter what you do. It's life, and you have to deal with that. This is just a fact of the business too, but it's preferred for young folks just getting into the business to be somewhat in shape as well. It's a visual medium. Don't go overboard here, but that's just a fact.

5) Should you intern somewhere and where?

YES. ABSOLUTELY. SI SENOR. YES. FOR SURE. Interning NEEDS to happen. Your local TV station will suffice.

6) How can you prepare to become a broadcaster?

Practice on CEOTS (Cy's Eyes on the Skies). Once you try and do about 5-10 episodes and you seem to enjoy yourself, you know that TV is for you. If you don't like it, that's fine too, but now you know to pursue something else. Get comfortable talking about the weather, whether on TV, Radio, or to yourself on a long I-80 drive through the Iowa corn. I also did play-by-play sports for the KURE radio station in Friley - very good experience thinking on your feet with no script. That's what broadcasting weather is

all about.....you have NO script and better be able to think fast on your feet. The radio really helps since all TV stations do SOME sort of radio weather. We do a ton at our place, 16 stations, plus 3 live radios hits too during morning shows. Some practice on CEOTS, a little radio, and some interning is what I did. Some people think about taking as much journalism as possible. My answer to that will surprise you - DON'T BOTHER. Focus on getting the meteorology program done and succeeding. I'm a firm believer that journalism classes are not needed to become a great broadcast meteorologist. Hands-on experience (CEOTS, KURE Radio, Interning) outweighs book learning (Whatever ISU Journalism offers) by 100 times, if not more.

7) What are good tips to keep in mind for being on the wall and presenting the weather?

Whew....take a deep breath. Relax. Have a little fun :) Don't try to over-explain (as much as you'll want to) a weather situation. Imagine a typical day for a viewer before you go on the air. Most will go to work or school. Some work weekends, and will have that weekday off. The 5 day work week is no longer in effect. Tell them what the weather will be where they 1. LIVE, 2. WORK, and 3. PLAY. I have an agriculture area where I broadcast to people, with career ranges of farmers, to outdoor contractors, to daycare workers, to office professionals. All of them will drive. Be sure to think about all your viewers and what they do. Do a good job connecting to them. A good way to do that - think about different ways to say the same thing. I mention major highways, landmarks, rivers, etc. "Snow for you folks off to the north off highway 20" sounds a lot better than "you people up north will stand the best chance of seeing snow". Why is #2 worse? It makes it sound like it's a chore for you to forecast for them, and by saying the highway, you know the area, and respect where they live, work, and play. Be sure to use appropriate hand gestures, and be sure NOT to cover up key data either.

8) How do you go about making a tape to send out to jobs?

You'll want to do a VHS and a DVD, though it seems DVD's are the way to go now. For your first job, simply include two full 3:00 to 3:30 weathercasts, with your best work on the first show. If the news director likes it, they'll move on to number 2. Maybe make sure there's some weather somewhere in the country (if not in the local area), to show the news director that you truly can explain the situation in a compelling manner. You can simply use a slightly tweaked version of a show used in your station that you intern for - it'll probably come out the best for the 3:00-3:30 timing. Also, make your first 15 seconds count!! If the news director is not impressed (they ARE busy people), they will eject your tape and disc and it'll become Oscar the Grouch food, if you get my drift. Apply for every job you can unless the ND (news director) specifically asks for 5+ years of experience. I got my first job with the ND wanting 2+ years. The ND knows when they've found the right person, experience or not.

9) What are tips that you have for making it in the broadcasting field?

If you want it, you'll get it. If you want it, but say it's too hard, you won't have a chance. Life is hard work, but if you follow the pointers above, you will be a top 10% candidate. Most college kids think jumping on the weather wall is easy and choose not to intern and practice. When you have a TV weather job after practicing and paying your dues, and they finally get one 1 year down the line, buy them a DQ Blizzard and tell them how important CEOTS and pre-graduation experience really is. Truly - some CEOTS, Radio and interning will get you leaps and bounds. Also, something to keep in mind - this is a small business, and we all know each other. If you knock a chief's socks off at your intern station, and he recommends you for a job where the hiring ND is on the fence, you'll win, every time. :) Work for it, and you'll be fine. Get critiques from both professionals in the field, and your peers. Some people have little quirks that they don't see or realize.

10) Any other comments on the broadcasting field?

It's a tough field to get into and is highly competitive. However, let's imagine something for a second. TV requires a skill set that not many other jobs require. You've got a bunch of kids fighting for a TV job that all have degrees, but only 10 applicants have interned 1 semester. Those kids with no TV experience are going to be discounted. Interning in college, practicing on CEOTS, and doing KURE radio IS TV EXPERIENCE. It's the best you can do while in college right? That shows you are taking initiative to go to the next level - the ND sees that as a great opportunity for you to be a good addition to the team. You're going to be a little shaky on some stuff, but once you get the first job and regular on-air work, that'll change fast. There's also some talk that the TV industry is dying. That's not necessarily true. While people are going to the web more, plenty of people are still watching local TV. In fact, about 70% of our market is tuned to local TV, especially in the mornings. One last thing - don't get frustrated!! It'll take time, but if you really want to be in this business, you'll enjoy yourself once you get here! :)