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Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one-to-one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today I'm joined down the line from New York by Galen Gordon, senior vice president for talent strategy and development at ABC News. An award winning journalist with more than 25 years experience in both network news and sports, in his current role Galen aims to demystify what opportunity looks like for people across ABC News on-air and behind the camera. Galen joined ABC from the NFL where he was vice president of talent management for the league's media division. He was previously a coordinating producer at ESPN and a producer for CNN and WABC in New York. Galen, thank you for joining me.

Thank you for having me.

What an extraordinary time to be a TV music executive. I mean, with the war in Ukraine, coming hard on the heels of COVID and a presidential election, you must be very busy.

We're incredibly busy to your point. It's a midterm election year. There's Supreme court hearings going on right now, now for Ketanji Brown Jackson. And then we got to your point the war in Ukraine and the subsequent humanitarian crisis as well. So we're busy and we're spread out across the globe covering stories.

Tell us how ABC news is managing the challenge of reporting from a warzone? I appreciate you can't go into specifics to protect your staff there, but just more generally, what are the challenges it's presenting?

I would say that our primary concern is the safety of our people in the region and that's our top priority. But the biggest thing that we do best is we tell stories and we're bringing the reality and the tragedy of what's happening in the region in Ukraine and Poland to our viewers. And so we're proud of our journalists in and around the region, their commitment to shining a light on the war and the humanitarian crisis, it's courageous and both commendable as well. So we're thrilled that they're there, but happy to provide the opportunity to tell those stories from overseas.

They're so incredibly moving. It must present challenges from a humanitarian point of view if you're covering this because to what extent do you cover the depths of the suffering? You want to accurately convey to the world what's happening, but you also don't want to be gratuitous.

Absolutely, absolutely. You're sensitive to that, but sometimes you have to tell and show, unfortunately the images of war and that comes with the job. So there are images that we've seen over the last couple of days, weeks of bodies being buried in random fields and things like that. There's the indelible image of the pregnant woman who was rescued from a bombing only to find out she and her baby died a few days later. So that that's part of the storytelling that comes with covering the fog of war.

It brings to me a very sharp focus on the value of an established network news provider. You've got experienced staff and producers, you can get these stories to air so that people can see what's happening, but it must make you proud because journalism is under attack as never before because we're in an era of online disinformation, fake news, the previous president attacking journalism itself.

Incredibly proud. We hold the line of being a straightforward news organisation, that's what ABC news is. We do recognise that we're in an era of disinformation and attack. Not just from those in the social media world, but to your point, world leaders as well. But we stay committed to the truth and that is always one door.

I'm fascinated by your job. I mean your brief is to retain a workforce that mirrors our audience and help us to build a truly representative inclusive culture, that sounds in incredibly noble goals. How do you go about doing it? I suppose I'm sort of in my British way, trying to politely say, what do you do? What does a typical week look like for you?

I recognise that it started for me early on in terms of recognising my role in this business and who I was and what I brought to it and I noticed looking around seeing that there wasn't anyone that looked like me in this space, which made me even dive more, commit more to being a really strong producer. I started writing for a newspaper the summer of my senior year, the summer going into my senior year in college. And that summer continued through that year. I only had 24 hours left to graduate. And so I scheduled it where I had no classes on Mondays, Wednesdays or Fridays. And so for me, just being in this space and looking around and being at different events, I noticed that there weren't as many people that looked like me covering news, but more importantly producing news. And so the word I use now, today is intentional in terms of that reflects your audience, that reflects the world that we live in. Diversity is a big part of that, but you have to be intentional in how you go about looking for people in addition to how you hire them and develop them.

It's incredible because obviously it's right that people of colour get every chance available to them, but I've often thought even sort of in a short sighted way that if an organisation doesn't recruit anyone of any talent and seeks to

sort of a minority, they're actually shooting themselves in the foot because they're sort of reducing the pool of talent that they're fishing from.

I would agree. Not only that, reducing the talent that they're fishing from, it's a missed opportunity for the business. And that's one of the things that I recognised in my last job when I joined the NFL Media Group. I took a look at the roster and there were, I'll just say, disparities, where we were overcast in certain demos and non-existent in others. And I told them this is a missed opportunity for the business and to their credit, they got that, they recognised that. And we work together to change that, reimagine the staff, but also change the narrative about the news division as well. And that was really, really cool.

The BBC here in Britain have what they call a 50-50 initiative where they compel producers of all programs to look at the gender balance of guests on news shows. And at the end of the month, if it's not 50-50, there's something wrong. And I think it's a very noble initiative because actually what a lot of the people taking part have said is that it's forced them to look at blind spots, they've inherited a list of guests for their program that are largely male and white and they just go with them because they're regular, they've not met enough effort to find people of colour and people of different genders, ethnicities, and so on and so forth. Is as much of your job sort of raising awareness of well-meaning people who have blind spots?

I think it's all of our job as leaders of organisations, especially media organisations where content consumption is large. I think it's a big part of what you have to do. You constantly have to ask the question, who's in the room? Who's in the room on editorial calls? Who's in the room in senior staff meetings? As you're making decisions for your show units, who's in the room? As you're making decisions for the business, who's in the room? And you hit the nail on the head, when you're forced to consider that it just makes you a better leader. It makes the organisation better because you're taking into consideration the thoughts of others. I go back to my days as an early news producer in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I was hired within a month of graduating college. And this was in Tulsa, Oklahoma, battle belt region of the country, red state, if you will. And I am this associate producer that's hired to basically write the copy for the shows. I would sit next to the producer, write the copies for the shows. But I would sit through editorial meetings as well. And as I would sit through editorial meetings, I would often hear stories that were pitched that didn't affect me or anyone that looked like me. And that drove my desire to really pursue producing, even though it was a news director's desire to make me know a reporter. I stuck with producing. I studied the art of producing and what I mean by that is recording shows from my home market in New York, having my parents record them, I should say, and send them to me. And I would look at that at night and I would write by day. But it was all towards levelling the playing field, if you will. Because if I made it as a producer and if I brought my authentic self to the newsroom, then automatically we're a better newsroom because I'm telling you my experience as a black male living in Tulsa, Oklahoma, much like anyone else would bring their authentic self to their job. And so it's an important part of recognizing the differences that we have and how those differences make us better news organisations.

We have a lot of aspiring journalists and people that want to start a media career listening to this podcast. Could you give listeners a flavour of what day-to-day life as an on-air news producer is, what are your responsibilities? What does a typical day look like?

A typical day looks like for me, mind you, I started in 94 and I'm telling you that to say for me a typical day was reading the newspaper. I don't know too many folks who read newspapers.

Sorry, newspapers? What are they exactly?

Exactly. So I would read several newspapers just to get a flavour of what was going on in my community. Nowadays, I imagine producers are looking at websites, local websites and things like that, but you're really reading into what's happening locally. And at the network level, you're reading up on what's happening in Washington and across the country and finding those stories that have resonance, finding those stories that make a difference, I always say, and it's a mantra that I've adopted from a mentor of mine that says "give people information so they can make informed decisions about their life." And so when you have an opportunity, when you have a platform as a producer, as a reporter, talk to people, find out what's important to them, find out what's happening in their community. Find out what's happening in their city. Find out what's happening in their state. What laws are happening locally that could have an impact nationally, all of that stuff. So it's really being versed on a lot of different subjects and topics and thinking about, and reading about things that are outside your comfort zone, your demographic, if you will. When I started in Tulsa, I was a five o'clock associate producer for the five o'clock show and a six o'clock show. Why do I tell you that? The majority of the audience that consumed that show were women, white women. And so I had to think about the audience and write my copy, write my stories and just be cognizant of who is consuming the content. And so a big part of that is yes, being read in on a lot of different issues and topics and also knowing your audience.

I mean, as you've said there's the news gathering aspect of it, keeping your eyes and ears open as to what's happening in the community and finding a local angle for the national news stories. Is there an additional challenge being an on-air producer that you've got logistics to consider, not to demean print journalism, but you can watch a TV show or ring a contact and then write it up from the office, but you've actually got to get a satellite or a microwave van there and a producer, and you've gotta think, well can we visualise it? Can we film it live or has it already happened? How can you get imagery?

Yeah. And that's a great point. I remember back in the day, print reporters would always say that TV producers steal their material and put it on there, print reporters are on the ground. There's some truth to that. But at the same time, a story is a story, right? So a writer can paint an amazing picture of detail of a fire, or the devastation overseas. They can write that and you can visualise it in your head. With television, you see it, you hear it, it's a little bit more tangible to the senses. And so as I went from Tulsa to my next local station with Joplin, Missouri and that was Market 147, the

reason why I went down in markets is because I went from associate producer to producer. And so that was my first full time producing job. And the resources that I had there were limited as opposed to the resources that you would have had in New York, but it doesn't change your job in terms of how you're going to tell this story and how you're going to put reporters in the field, how you're going to bracket your coverage, say there's a tornado and there were often a lot of tornadoes in that region of the country. The first reporter would give you the nuts and bolts, and then you might put your weather person first in the studio to show where the storm track is. Then the second person would be a reporter in the field showing the devastation, and then you might have a third reporter or fourth talking about the community reaction around it. So those are the ways that television media is different from print or digital. But it's still an opportunity to inform viewers of what's going on in their region.

What's the highlight of your day as a TV news producer, was that you'd put a package together, the show would be brilliant, the news anchor sort of signs off with the music and then fade to black, the show's done and everything went well and it was great stories. Is that the high or is it just one continuous series of different highs?

It's a fantastic question. When I was producing, I always loved building the rundown and working with reporters on their stories and where it would land in a rundown, how we would tease certain stories, how we would go to commercial break. So there were different highs throughout the day, it all culminates with when you go to the control room, you put your headsets on and you are managing that show from whether it's 5 to 5.30 or 11:00 PM to 11.35. Making sure that you get on, on time and hopefully you get off on time. Hopefully things are clean in between. And so as news breaks in between, or during that newscast, you have to get the news story in, but you also have to take something out and what are you sacrificing? And so the adrenaline rush is actually being in the control room and managing that show, this concept that you've created throughout the course of the day through the opening tease, through the end credits. Actually, they don't do end credits anymore, to the goodbye. Back in the day you might see a producer credit or an executive producer credit in local news, those days were long gone.

I know, and I used to look at it when the news anchor had that music bed that would escalate and a headset would say "they're gonna crush the end music and then they didn't and you'd go, woohoo." I was gonna ask, a client of mine showed me around his office a couple of years ago. And he brought me to where his office was and he showed me his desk. And I'll never forget what he said. He said, "this is where I sit and wait for things to go wrong." And I've always loved that joke. He was being lighthearted, of course, but when you are on air or you're in the gallery and you're putting the show together. Surely things happen, stories break on air, and you have to throw out your existing schedule, mishaps happen. Is it a bit like you're on tenterhooks all the time? Anything can happen.

You are, you absolutely are. And to me those were some of the best times. And honestly, it was a measure of who was a strong leader or who was a strong producer versus not. And the reason why I say that is that news can break 30 minutes before

your show, 30 seconds into your show and how you respond in the moment will determine where that show goes. In other words, you can't overreact. You have to recognise what's happening in the moment and be decisive in the moment and by the way, if it's happening during the show, and I had great anchors when I worked at CNN. I had great anchors in most of my stops, but at CNN in particular, because the reason why I bring it up is because there were 24 hour news networks. There was much more real estate throughout the day. And so we would do two or three hour shows on whether it was storm coverage or hurricane Katrina when I was there. And as things happened, the anchor is waiting on your direction in many cases. And how you communicate to that anchor in that moment, they can sense your tension or they can sense your calm. If you are calm, they're calm. If your voice is elevated and panicky, they feel that. And sometimes that energy reflects with transfer, or I should say on-air. And so when those moments happen, when news breaks or things shift, and you know you have to change your rundown. You have to remain calm. You have to be in the moment, remain calm in the moment and most importantly, lead through the moment. Because as a producer, as an executive producer, the team is dependent upon your direction.

So you're the voice in the anchor's ear with those clear ear pieces that they're wearing. I've always thought the only people that ever get away with wearing those are news anchors and the secret service, protecting the president.

Exactly, dare I say you are the voice of reason in their ear trying to manage the local station or manage the network through this story, while considering your competition as well.

Absolutely. I was actually gonna ask that. I just realised that there's also the people in The Matrix, they also wear those ear pieces, the ones that were after Neo. But I've been in news galleries because as you were saying there, you've got to keep an eye on what's happening on the other channels as well. So you must have fingers in many pies and have to look out for lots of different things, really?

The competition, especially during breaking news, I look for what we have versus what they don't have. And the reason why I say that is because I would look to put our viewers and our team and our audience ahead of the competition. So I'm asking questions like, where is this person? Where is that person? Where is this thing happening there? How close are we to that? So if not, then we'll go to this reporter or that correspondent that might have an exclusive angle. So you're constantly trying to inform the public of what's going on, but also along the way and this is just me just being competitive, thinking about where we are versus the competition, what they're doing, what we're doing versus what they're not doing, or in some cases what they're doing, what we're not doing, which might inform you maybe we should be doing this as opposed to that. I loved being in the control room because you just never know sometimes, especially during breaking news, anything can happen and at CNN, we had great reporters and correspondents that had access and reach in different areas of the world and different spheres of influence, whether it be Washington DC, world leaders, the whole nine. And we were able to leverage those resources to the benefit of the audience, same much like we do now at ABC News,

I was gonna ask you about ABC News, because it is one of the finest news gathering organisations in the world where you rightly should be proud of it. It's incredible. And as you've just said then, CNN being also good at what they do doesn't attract from you being excellent and what you do as well, a rising tide lifts all boats and so on. But what is it that makes you particularly proud to work for ABC News?

So many things. I joined this organisation in December of 2020 as head of talent, for me it's owned by the Walt Disney company. And so this is my essentially third time with the Walt Disney company starting at WABC leaving for CNN. Then coming back to ESPN, I spent 11 years.

The real question I want to know is do you get to jump the line at Disneyland?

Not necessarily jumped the line.

And the real question is, can you help me jump the line? Sorry. I rudely interrupted, carry on.

No, no. All good. So I joined the organisation at a time when the organisation was in transition. Transition in leadership, transition in a way they wanted to think about talent and the way that I lean into the development, the hiring and the development of talent. So it was really, really a transitional time for the organisation. And part of the reason why I said in one of my earlier statements upon joining the organisation of demystifying, what opportunity looks like is basically giving people the opportunity to develop and stretch themselves beyond the day to day. Providing people stretch opportunities outside of their day to day, so if you're a reporter, providing you with occasional anchor opportunities, not everyone. UBut those that might have had anchoring experiences in their background or if you're a producer allow you the opportunity to stretch and produce a special, or to work on a special or to work on another program within the news division. And so for me, my career is characterised by different experiences. I started out as a local news producer, became a network news producer and then became a network executive sports producer. Then after 11 years of doing that, I went into the talent space and it's all a culmination of the different experiences that I had that rolled up to what I do now. And so I have an appreciation for the need to exercise different muscles. When you're assigned to one job, occasionally exercising different muscles.

What started you out on this journey? Did you always want to be a journalist? And what were the very first steps that you took along the way? Did you choose to study a certain subject in college, for example?

Great question. When I got to college, I was a business major, in the business school of business marketing major. I did that for a year and realised that this was not my path. And I knew that I was intrigued with the media. And so I switched to the school of communications and with an emphasis on public relations and advertising. So my degree is in PR and the reason why I did that is because I wanted equal exposure at

the time to radio, television, film, et cetera. But I also knew that I loved writing. I recognized that I had the ability to write well, and I could write a paper, I could crash a paper in the last minute and still get an A, not that I'm encouraging any student to do that, take your time, do your research, the whole nine yards, but writing came natural to me. And so that's a very strong foundation of journalism and storytelling. The summer going into my senior year, I interned at a newspaper and that was everything. I just took a journalism writing course, and I wanted to stretch myself by getting some experience before I graduated in that field and what started out as a summer internship, went through my entire senior year. So by the time I graduated, I had a full year's experience as a working journalist and then was hired essentially by the local NBC station in Tulsa to be an associate producer for that local station. The story up to that was long, but I got exclusive with an athlete that plays for the New York KNS that lived in Tulsa and that exclusive was on me when I met the news director at the NBC station, she hired me, she offered me a job on the spot. I interviewed a week later and she hired me to become an on-air reporter, which was never my goal. But I was thrilled to have a job right out of school, in media and in doing what I liked. And I learned quickly that writing for print is completely different from writing for TV. Writing for print, you can kind of get the who, what, when and why mostly in a sentence or two, but in writing for television, it's typically one thought per sentence. So, as I continued along that journey, I would ask my parents to take the five, six, 11 o'clock newscast of WABC and WMBC and what I mean by tape for those that are listening, VCR, this is back to 1994, when you can record shows.

VC what, sorry? What was that?

They would send me a week's worth of shows from WABC and WMBC. And I would literally sit down and watch those shows at night, just to see how they opened the show, to see how they saw how they wrote teases, how much time they gave weather, down to the core details of like, how much time did they give a map? If you had a full screen map, how much time did they give that and why? And so that was kind of my teacher while I had this job and also had some mentors along the way. And so my goal at that point, literally early on in my career, was to be a New York news producer. And the only reason I chose New York was because I'm from there and I wanted to do what I enjoy doing at home. It just happened to be the number one market in the country, but that was my goal. So that was the spring of 94. And by the spring of 2000, I was hired at WMBC to be their 11 o'clock producer. So six years later, it's been a journey to say the least.

It's been quite a journey. You mentioned there about VCR. I was telling my teenage niece a few months ago about VCRs. She's used to everything being available immediately. But I was telling her that when I think it season five of Dallas where we found out who shot JR. First of all, we had to wait a year to find out after you guys had aired it. And secondly, if the show before ran late for ten minutes, if it was football, we missed the last ten minutes of Dallas, because of course we only set the video to record between eight and nine, if finished at ten past it was game over.

Right. Exactly. And imagine the era now where you can just stream any and everything you want on demand.

The kids today don't know, do they? Actually, I was gonna ask, what advice would you give to a young starter who's inspired by your journey? What are the qualities that you would look for that would inspire success? Both for them, but also in terms of you interviewing someone, What would they say? What would they need to be? What do they need to do to impress you?

I would ask them what they wanted to do and what they were doing, what steps they were taking to achieve that, what mentors did they have along the way? Because my goals were my goals and we can say they were basic now, in the sense that when I started, I wanted to be a producer in New York and six years later, I'm a producer in New York. So I was like I need new goals. So at the end of the day, what I would ask young people is what do you want to do? And what are you doing to get there? And who is helping you get there? I often say that I have a personal board of directors and what I mean by that is I have people in my life that will be honest with me. They could be mentors, they could be family members, they could be colleagues. But you have to have people in your life that will be honest about how you're going about your goals and someone that can hold you accountable, which is why I always talk about being honest. I looked at it when, when I graduated, I mentioned being competitive, when I graduated I thought of it as there are hundreds of students at my school that are graduating and were all competing in the same job market. And that's just as my school, that's not at the university of Tulsa down the street or whatever. And so I always said to myself, how am I going to set myself apart from the field? How am I gonna distinguish myself from the field? And that still applies to this day in the job that I occupy now. I'm head of talent for ABC news, we're doing pretty good as a news organisation, but how are we going to distinguish ourselves in the marketplace in terms of how we recruit talent in terms of how we lead talent, how we develop talent, all of that. So what makes you unique and distinguishable, that someone would wanna give you a job or an opportunity.

I mean, it's almost a cliché to say it's so profound, isn't it? But an organisation is nothing, but its people and its culture. And that starts with the people that it's hiring. I'd say that your job is probably amongst the most important jobs that ABC News has.

It's certainly significant because to your point, who you bring to your organisation are the individuals that can be ambassadors for your culture and the culture that we have here at ABC News is a great one. I'm not just saying that for say, I truly believe it. We're led by an incredible president in Kim Godwin. One of the main things I truly appreciate about Kim is that she is just as competitive a journalist as the next person, but she also leans into her personality in the sense that she expects all of us, basic things, to be kind, which is something you never ever hear in at this level of news production. I worked in the era of news back in 2000, at WABC or WMBC or at CNN, where it was okay to verbally undress someone in front of a newsroom. And I just never understood how someone was supposed to feel motivated behind that. But Kim is the type of leader that pushes you. She wants you to bring your best to the job. She challenges you, but also at the same time, she expects you to be a kind citizen along the way both internally and externally. And that's one of the great things about working here at ABC News

It does seem that society's more polarised than ever isn't it. And that there seems to be a lack of kindness, a presumption of bad faith as well across both sides of the aisle. And we're no different here in Britain, there seems to be a sort of poisoning of the well of civic society, where kindness seems to be underrated, but for me kindness is everything, is it not?

It should be. And I'm glad you have an appreciation for that because you can get a lot out of people simply by being kind, you can get a lot out of an organisation by leading that way. People might associate kind with being dare I say, soft. That's not it at all. But it's treating your fellow man the way you'd wanna be treated, that doesn't make you any less competitive. That doesn't make you any less of a journalist, a storyteller or a leader. I often lean into the idea of providing and giving feedback and in doing so, I make sure when I talk to when there's one of my own direct reports or someone else's direct reports, I make sure that those individuals know what their strengths are and where their opportunities to grow are, I never say weaknesses because it's only a weakness if someone told you about it and you did nothing about it, right? So I say there are opportunities for growth, and we all have opportunities for growth, myself included. And so I try and lean into my blind spots, my opportunities for growth to become a better, more effective leader.

Well, speak for yourself. I don't have any opportunities for growth. I'm largely perfect and I have nothing to learn. Do you still enjoy the buzz of what you do? What's the best part of your day?

The best part of my day is talking to and engaging talent, talking to not just internal talent, but talent that we're trying to recruit into the network and seeing those storytellers. And again, I'm not saying those that are just on camera telling stories. Because I think a producer is just as much of a storyteller because they have to tell a story through a rundown, as an on-air reporter. So the best part of my day is engaging with those talents and finding out what makes them tick, finding out how to get the best out of them. But also leaning into what this organisation is, who we wanna be in the marketplace and making sure that everyone's a really, really strong ambassador for the ABC News storytelling brand, but also the brand of who we are behind the scenes as well, the organisation.

Tell us about your time at the NFL. How did it happen? How did it go? And what did you learn?

It was an unexpected shift in career and I would say it was unexpected, but also expected and I'll explain why. I spent 11 years at ESPN and I left CNN as a network news producer and joined ESPN as an executive producer where I was basically creating and developing shows for the network. And one of my last assignments was a show called SportsCenter Coast To Coast. It was called Coast To Coast because there was one anchor literally in Los Angeles. And the other anchor was in headquarters in Bristol, Connecticut. But about year nine into my time at ESPN and nine is a long time, I realised that even though I was at the number one sports network and I was creating these shows that were highly rated and I was working with these high profile personalities. I realised I'd lost sight of my own career path.

Not that I felt like I'd arrived, but I just got married, kid. I became a family man and I realised that I'd lost sight of my growth. And so I started to look into the business of media, the business of what we do. And what I mean by that is I wanted to find out can I create a show? Yes. Can I produce a show? Yes. But what about the infrastructure around it? The business around it. And so a friend of mine told me about an executive leadership development program provided at the university of Virginia. I applied for it. I got in and I was one of about 40 executives if you will. I was the only journalist in the class. Most of the executives were either marketing or finance, some were in their legal departments, all that, but it was all about learning the 360 of business, even down to negotiations, financial spreadsheets, all that. It was a year long course. And at the end of it my mind was expanded into looking at the business of what we do. And so the NFL reached out, I wanna say summer of 2017. And they were looking for essentially a senior executive producer. I wasn't necessarily interested in the job, but I did have the conversation and we met in Los Angeles. I was out there for SportsCenter Coast To Coast. We spoke for about an hour and a half. And what I hadn't realised then, which I do now was I was typically speaking as a producer, an executive producer, blah, blah, blah. But what I realised afterwards, because they told me I was speaking more as a leader. And so the job changed from, instead of you coming in as a senior executive producer, they wanted me to be their vice president of talent. And I was taken aback at first because, and when that made me taken aback, my first gut reaction was no, because remember I'm a journalist. I'm always about having my hands in content and producing content and creating content and all that stuff. But when I took a step back, I realised that my years in local and network news, I know what a good reporter and an anchor sounds like my 11 years at ESPN, I realised in creating and developing sports debate shows and things like that, I realised that I know how to help an athlete or a journalist form an argument on air to debate a sports topic. All of those skill sets roll into this job at the NFL media group, which is basically hiring and developing sports reporters, sports anchors, and former athletes that are attempting to make the transition from playing to being a media personality, not everyone can do that. Not everyone can do what Michael Strahan did. What he's done is admirable. So, getting back to how I made that transition, I realised that this was the next evolution, if you will, of my career. And so I accepted the challenge. I moved my family to Los Angeles and I started this executive phase of my career of leading and developing and reimagining what opportunity looks like for talent.

It seems to me that you've, you've moved from stories from journalism to being about people, making sure that you are attracting and retaining the right talent. Has that been a skill that you've acquired? Can you learn it from a book? Are you just going with your gut? Because if someone's sitting at the other side of your yard desk and you'd sort of interview them, how do you get a sense of who they are? Everyone sort of wants to put their best foot forward, don't they in an interview? Do you have some techniques to sort of try and get under people's skin?

I try to be transparent and honest in every engagement. And what I mean by that is as a producer and executive producer, I'm often going and forth with a producer, second producer or talent about what I think they did well. And again, a blind spot that they had through a certain engagement. And so I can think, I believe I'll develop a reputation for that over time again and not in a bad way. But if you ask me about

something, I'm going to tell you what I see, and I'm gonna be honest with it. I'm gonna lead with, hey, you did this really, really well, you could have done these other things even better. And so over time what I realised is that I've developed a reputation for that and for transparent, honest feedback, but also, and it feels weird saying it but being a leader that people can trust. And so I'd never been in this space before. And so to have the opportunity prior to 2017, really 2018, because I saw in January of 2018 at the NFL. So having that reputation go before me to the point where a network would offer me a job to be head of talent when I'd never done that is incredibly humbling, but it also speaks to a reputation that I've developed over time, as being someone that will handle your career with care. And it's no different when this opportunity came up at ABC news with how I look at talent and because everyone again, has that desire to one know where they stand, but also know how far they can go. And part of this job is really, really getting the best out of people and managing people through that and helping those around them manage them as well. So I'm not sure if I answered your question, but that's a big part of what we do.

Thank you for bringing your crystal ball with you for this section of the podcast. But I was wondering about the future of news, are you optimistic for the future of news given it has competition from TikTok, from YouTube. I had the editor of the BBC's flagship news program on last year and he was saying that the challenge they have with appointment to view bulletins news bulletins is not just 24 hour news. It's also Twitter and so on. That every single person coming to that news already knows the news. As recently as 20 years ago, you'd watch the news bulletin to be told the news. Whereas now you know the news, you're looking for extra insight and analysis, are you not?

Yes and no. I think the future is bright, but it's also evolving if you will. And you're absolutely right. If you're wondering why the local sports broadcasts are smaller or shorter, that is the exact point. By the time the sports anchor sits down, everyone knows what happened and how it happened. And they've seen it a few times. And that's just a sports lens, but the opportunity is the basic tenets of storytelling are still the same, whether it's appointment viewing, like at 6.30 Eastern, you'll see David Muir, at 7:00 AM Eastern, you'll see Robin Robertson, Michael Strahan on Good Morning America, that's appointment linear television. But in this streaming space you're charged just to tell a story doesn't change whether you get it instantly or whether it's appointment viewing. And so now we're living in this era where people are consuming content on all sorts of devices and yes, that's the opportunity that I think a lot of organisations have to permeate those lanes as well, and ABC News are doing an incredible job of reimagining that space for news and our news consumers. I see it as a dual path of linear television where there's point viewing, but there's also the Hulu of the world where you can watch news when you want and consume news when you want. But again, when your number's called, are you telling the appropriate story? Are you telling the right story? Are you giving people information so they can make informed decisions about their lives? I don't think it changes.

No, absolutely or not. I think it's as important as it, as it ever was really. But my next question was going to be about this so-called news fatigue. It might seem strange to ask you with all people is there too much news, but on the other hand, as you've rightly said with Hulu and all of the platforms, I get so many

breaking news alerts on my emails and on my phone that sometimes I just want to switch off and actually do what watch one bulletin. I wonder sometimes whether it's very difficult to sort of cut through the noise, is it not?

That drives me crazy. When I started producing back in the nineties, the breaking news banner was the sacred banner. Now it's everywhere. And for things that aren't remotely breaking news. And so to your point, how do people sift through the noise? That's a really, really good question. It's a really good question because there are some networks that have diluted what news is. And some of it is the nature of 24 hour news cycles. And I know I worked for one of them back in the day. And the other part of it is the constant streaming or feeding of content through social media and other lanes. It's a critical time now, especially in this country as we're heading towards our midterm elections and around the world, the war and the humanitarian crisis, where people are getting straightforward news. And what concerns me a little bit is do they know which outlets are providing that? If that makes sense?

No, absolutely does. And in fact, you sort of preempted my next question, which clearly is a journalist you're very good at doing, you're doing my job for me, which is great. But I was going to ask you what are your worries? What keeps you up at night? What is the big challenge that you are facing at the moment?

For me, I'll stay local, in my lane in space. Honestly, the big challenge for me is succession planning. Not that I'm succession planning.

I'm available.

There you go. Looking at all of our shows and platforms and it's identifying who's next? Who is that young bright journalist that's gonna be the future of this business. That's gonna be the future of ABC News. And those are the questions that keep me up constantly in terms of identifying that talent and putting those talents in the best positions to succeed and eventually grow to be the next leaders, storytelling leaders, with the ABC News division. It's a great opportunity and I know people would die to have that opportunity, dies a strong word, but it's an opportunity that I'm blessed to have. And that I'm proud to share with the amazing team of executives here at ABC News.

You need to cancel that search now that we've met.

Absolutely. Yes, this is true. We've got Paul so, yes.

Thank you again. I appreciate it. Last couple of questions, because I appreciate you being busy and I very, very much enjoyed this conversation. What's next for you personally? And of course you can tell me to go to hell. It's none of my business, you're happy in your current job. I get all that. No one's ever answered this question if I'm honest because it is presumptuous, but do you have next steps in your career planned?

Absolutely.

Ooh, do tell. Could you tell I was wrong footed there?

No, so I look at it this way. If you told me back in 1994, which is almost 30 years ago that as a young associate producer that I would be head of talent for a major network, I would've called you crazy. And so my goal back then was to make it to New York. And I did that by the grace of God. I was able to do that in six years and I realised it's not about setting this one goal, but it's setting a goal and achieving it. It's about being your best self and putting your best foot forward wherever you are. And that may lead to something else. And so I answered that question by saying, I'm seeking the greatest expression of myself in this business and wherever that leads, so be it. And so that's how I started looking at it from essentially 2000, 2002, 2003 on because had you I wouldn't have told you that I was gonna be a network news producer. I wouldn't have told you that I was gonna be a network sports executive producer, creating original programming. But all of that has led to where I am now and who knows what the future holds. But I do know I'm determined to bring my best authentic self to work and we'll see where it goes.

Galen, mentorship is very important to you. Could you tell us about it?

Absolutely. I mentioned earlier when I first got in the business that I asked my parents to tape the five, six and 11th newscasts of WABC and WMBC. I learned within a year or two after that, that the news director at WMBC was speaking at a regional, NABJ convention. An NABJ is a national association of black journalists. And so I went to this regional convention in Dallas and found out that the news director there was not only a black female, but she was Jamaican. My parents were Jamaican. And so I immediately found someone that I could identify with, but I was a producer in market 147 in Joplin, Missouri. And so I remember walking up to her, her name was Paula Madison, and I gave her my car, and I said, hi Paula. My name is Galen Gordon. I'm from New York. I am not ready for New York right now, but it is my goal one day to produce in that market. And she said, wow, it's a pleasure to meet you. She gave me her card and hadn't thought much of it, the next year, that's not true, but the next year I'm a producer in St. Louis, Missouri and morning show producer. And I call her, I have the card and I'm going home to visit my parents in Long Island. And I pick up the card and call, now mind you her card said vice president of News WMBC. And so I pick up the card and call. And the last thing I expected was for her to answer the phone. I call, not only does she answer the phone, but she says "Paula Madison." So I was a little tongue tied at first and I said, hi, Paula, I'm not sure if you remember me, my name is Galen Gordon. We met back last year in Dallas at a regional convention. She goes, I remember you and I said, hi, I just wanted you to know that I'm gonna be in New York visiting my parents. And I just wanna know if it was okay if I can come by and say hello. She said, I'll do you one better. Why don't you come up and spend the day, you can sit through our nine o'clock editorial meeting. You can spend the day with our producers and then you can sit in the control room for five o'clock. That was everything I needed to know one how the sources get made, how shelves are produced. At the one station, one of two stations that I wanted to work for there.

What an incredible opportunity.

It was a great opportunity. And I remember flying home to St. Louis and my producing just got that much sharper and better. The next year I was hired in Cleveland by a news director who hired me on a Friday and then left on a Monday to be news director in Dallas. So she hired me as her 11 o'clock producer in Cleveland, and then left the next Monday. She told me she was leaving, but left the next Monday to be news director in Dallas. That person was Kim Godwin. The current president of ABC news is, so this is actually the first time I've worked for her. I spent 14 months in Cleveland. And then I was hired at the CBS station, KDKA in Pittsburgh. I started there in January of 2000, in late March of 2000, I'm an early adopter of aol.com. Don't judge me.

There was judgement but I withhold.

And I had two different AOL emails and the original, the second one I used was I used it for more personal stuff. And the first one was just I would get all this spam, but I realised I'd given Paula that first one. And I checked an email that she sent me two or three days prior saying, hey Paula at WMBC, mind you, she said, hey, where are you checking in? I might have an opportunity for you here at WMBC. I saw this email two or three days later, so I called her immediately. And I said hi, Paula, I'm sorry, I saw the email late, she said, where are you now? I said, I'm in Pittsburgh. She said, well, I have a weekend opening here at WMBC. And I said I just took this job. She goes, did you sign a contract? I said, no. She said, well, you can at least come have a conversation. I said, I can come have a conversation. And so mind you, you have to remember what WMBC represented to me at that time. And so long story short, I go there, politics herself out of the process. And I interviewed with the assistant news director and all the executive producers. And not only did I get a job, I was hired as the 11 o'clock producer at WMBC. And so I say all that to say that is the power of mentorship. You just never know how you can influence an individual. And so to this day, I still talk to Paula Madison, to this day, I'm working for Kim Godwin again for the first time. So you just never know what impact you can have on a young person's life and where that individual can go. So I'm glad you asked that question, because I think it's important for mentors and mentees to know how they can go about their career journey.

Galen, this was an incredibly enjoyable, but also genuinely inspiring conversation. Thank you ever so much for your time.

Thank you, Paul. This was a great conversation, I appreciate it. You're an incredible journalist and you asked some great questions. So I look forward to staying in touch with you.