

LIGHTS. TRUST. ACTION.

Building Executive Confidence Through Municipal Video

Kory Smith • City of Virginia Beach



CITY OF
**VIRGINIA
BEACH**

Our First Video/2020



QUESTION?

**How many takes do you think that
took?**

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18 TAKES

What Those 18 Takes Taught Us

- He was learning how to be recorded.
- I was learning how to direct someone who wasn't comfortable on camera.
- The goal was more natural communication. Hopefully with less takes.
- Five years later, the same City Manager volunteered for a comedy-style State of the City video. We'll save that for the end.

Disclaimers:

- Some people just don't like this stuff. Don't take it personally.
- Find your base line. Mine is a clean video where the words were spoken clearly with some form of human emotion.
- Don't be nervous. They are just people.
- Read the room. Let them set the tone.
- Your job is to make people look good and sound good.

LIGHTS

Understanding what the camera does to people

QUESTION?

Who has someone in your organization who completely changes the moment the camera starts rolling?

Cameras Are Weird

OFF CAMERA

- Comfortable leading
- Comfortable speaking
- Natural communication
- Confident body language

ON CAMERA

- More self-aware
- More formal
- More careful
- Voice, pace and posture change

CAMERA • LIGHTING • AUDIO • COMFORT

Three are technical. One determines whether the others can do their job.

Take away

**I kept trying to direct him.
I needed to direct everything
around him.**

Behind the Camera: Lock It Down

- Minimize unnecessary movement and stay out of the talent's eyeline.
- Avoid side conversations, whispering and gear shuffling.
- Establish positions before recording.
- Movement attracts attention. A calm set creates calmer performances.

LIGHTS: Lessons Learned

- Cameras can change otherwise confident communicators.
- Comfort and confidence are different.
- Another take is information, not failure.
- The environment is part of the performance.
- What changes first — voice, body language or pace?

TRUST

Everything behind the camera
matters

QUESTION?

How many of you have filmed the same executive more than ten times?

Could you name the three things most likely to throw that person off?

QUESTION?

How many of you have filmed the same executive more than ten times?

Could you name the three things most likely to throw that person off?

Trust starts before the camera turns on — and continues long after it turns off.

Know Your Talent

- Preferences: script vs. bullets • rehearsal vs. conversation • quiet vs. energy • playback vs. no playback
- Triggers: missed words • movement in eyeline • feeling rushed • too many people • conflicting notes
- Tells: speaking faster • becoming formal • restarting paragraphs • getting more robotic
- Reset buttons: pause • skip ahead • get an easy win • change the energy • clear the room

Behind the Camera: One Director, One Voice

- One relationship. One set of notes. One clear direction.
- Conflicting voices create self-consciousness.
- Maximum two note givers: one for the technical and one for the content. Delegate ahead of time for content.

How do you build trust in multiple environments?



How do you build trust in multiple environments?



Studio B

A dedicated, private studio near the City Manager's office.



Why Studio B Works

- Private and close to his office • minimal staff • ready quickly
- Same room, same lighting, same camera, same process
- Walk in → stand on the X → read the teleprompter → deliver the message → go
- Instead of asking him to adapt to production, we adapted production to him.

Stand on the X and Go

Annotate the X, teleprompter, locked camera, permanent lights and minimal crew.



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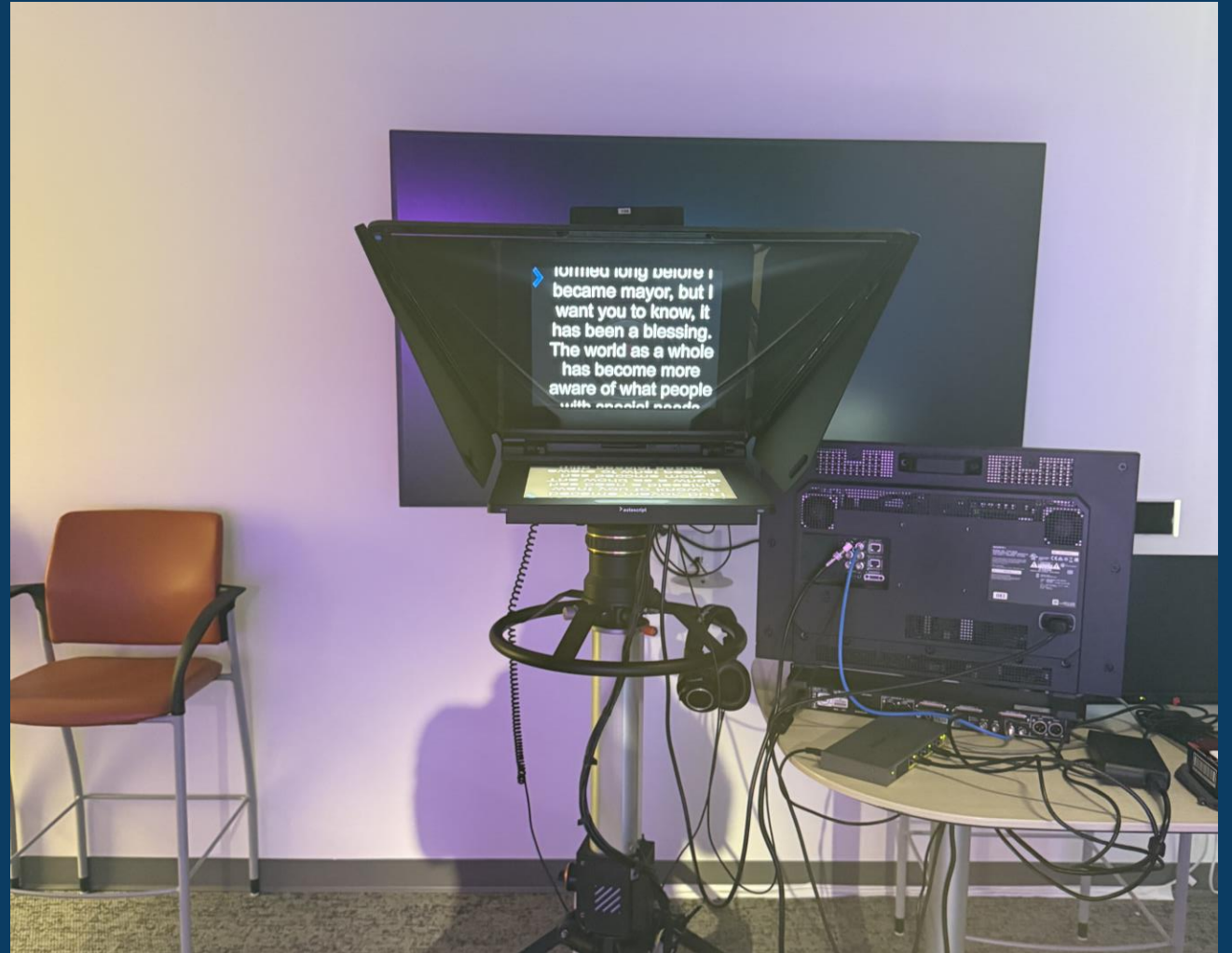
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Behind the Camera: Marks Remove Decisions

- Where do I stand? Where do I look? Who is in the room? What changes today?
- Marks control composition, focus and lighting — but they also remove a decision from the performer.
- Every removed variable leaves more attention for communication.

A medium shot of a Black man with a short beard and mustache, wearing a white dress shirt and a light-colored patterned tie. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a solid purple color. The video is framed by a dark blue border with a vertical strip of yellow, cyan, green, and orange on the left side.

under Deputy City Manager Amanda Jarrett,

**So many in our community
and beyond depend on donors**



THE ENVIRONMENT: Lessons Learned

- Predictability reduces anxiety.
- Consistency creates comfort.
- Familiarity conserves mental energy.
- Remove decisions that do not serve communication.
- Question? What variable could you remove from your next executive shoot?

QUESTION?

**Who has accidentally made
someone MORE nervous without
intending to?**

Trust the Process

- Explain the format, eyeline and teleprompter before recording.
- Explain why you need another take and what you are changing.
- Never leave talent guessing during technical delays.
- Sometimes the first take isn't for the edit — it's for the person.
- Every shoot should end with the relationship stronger than it started.

TRUST: Lessons Learned

- Learn the individual before directing the performance.
- Know their triggers, tells and reset buttons.
- The crew creates the atmosphere; one voice leads the direction.
- Explain the process and technical pauses.
- Every edit either earns or spends trust — and builds the next shoot.

ACTION

What becomes possible after trust

QUESTION?

When do you think someone finally becomes comfortable on camera?

The Camera Disappears

- Beginning: the camera is the focus.
- Middle: the process becomes familiar.
- End: communication becomes the focus.

One More Video



Personality is the byproduct of comfort.

Reality Check: Every Person Has a Different Finish Line

- Not every executive ends up loving the camera — and that is okay.
- Success may be 5 takes instead of 18, natural eye contact, relaxed pacing, or walking into the studio without hesitation.
- Comfort comes before creativity. Personality cannot be demanded.
- Question: Who has someone who may never love being on camera?

FINAL THOUGHTS

LIGHTS create the image.

TRUST creates the environment.

**ACTION is what becomes possible
when the person no longer has to
manage the camera.**

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