

## Regional

# Communication is the key to career success

Beyond specialized knowledge, employers today are interested in prospective employees' ability to work as part of a team, their aptitude for critical thinking and their communication skills. No matter the area of work, these abilities are essential to success. A good example of such a career is journalism. And a good example of a person whose career has depended on these skills is Steve Jankowski.

Jankowski, who was born in Rolla, Mo., obtained his bachelor's degree in mass communications at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. Today he is the director of alumni affairs and executive director of the SIUE Alumni Association. But his original goal was a career in broadcasting.

"I was a student at SIUE in broadcasting and I heard that there was an opening at WSIE, the university's radio station, in the sports department," he said. "Having had no experience in broadcasting at all – but falling into what I came to love as my career – I applied and auditioned for the sports department and was given the task of doing a sports cast in the evening here on this radio station in 1972."

Within a few months the position of news director opened and Jankowski was given the job. He soon learned the strengths and responsibilities of being in a broadcast position, and the costs as well as the ethics involved. Yet from the 70s to today, the communications industry that Jankowski came to love has undergone great changes.

"The biggest difference I see is



Steve Jankowski

Denise McDonald/SIUE

what was determined to be newsworthy and how that happened," he explained. "We used to look at six criteria that we would lay over any news story: the importance, the impact, the proximity, the timeliness, the curiosity or unusualness of a story and any controversy involved. So you would take a story and score it from 1 to 10 on each one of those areas. A story that came close to 60 would be a story of great importance." Now, he said, sensationalism is the new focus of the news.

"The most sensational and what can be teased and dangled out there from an emotional standpoint, as opposed to what really is important or has impact for the viewers or listeners to hear and partake in," is how he described today's news coverage.

When he started doing television news, film was still being used. "We would shoot black and white film on a scoop and gate millimeter camera and that is with my first job in Fort Smith, Ark., doing TV news," he said. "We would be able to do a sound bite of 25 to 40 seconds, so someone could make a full statement. As opposed to the way it is now, where we were directed as late as a few years ago that if a sound bite was longer than 11 seconds then it was too long."

He said that he thinks that viewers and listeners are not really getting the level of service from broadcast journalism that they used to. Also, he said, can be added the problem of the unreliability of the news today.

"Part of the reason we have a free

press is to protect our democracy, and I fear oftentimes we have a society that is not getting the full story or a balanced report. So they really don't have a clear understanding of some of the key issues and what they should believe," he added.

"When a student will quote Wikipedia as a source, there is a problem. When someone will view the Jon Stewart show and say, 'I watched a newscast tonight,' that's a problem," he said. "As Charles Osgood, the great writer and CBS anchorman put it, 'We have tremendous abundance of information and a horrific lack of wisdom.' I think that comes from the fact that we often rely on sources that may or may not be accurate."

Now Jankowski is in a different field as director of alumni affairs at SIUE. Yet, he knows that what he learned as a communicator has made a tremendous difference in his current job, and that is why he thinks that for today's students it is essential to develop communication skills regardless of what profession they are going to pursue.

"For instance, right now we are reviewing scholarship applications," he said. "The alumni association provides more than \$30,000 worth of scholarships each year. And when you look at the scholarship applications and you look at how a student has written or communicated what they want to do, what goals they may have in life in an essay, you look at the language they use, the grammar they use, or even the lack of unreadable writing."

## Aldemaro Romero Jr. College Talk

He blames the problem in part to social media. "We have literally lost the ability to sit down, face to face and have a decent conversation with someone, or write a letter, communicate our thoughts and feelings eloquently and effectively," he said. "I think students now need to understand that they may feel like texting is the greatest thing, but when you're out in the professional world, that person who is looking to hire you is going to what to know if you can write a sentence? Can you go out and meet with a customer? How well do you carry yourself? Do you dress professionally? Do you act professionally? And those are all skills that I think through our alumni programs, whether it is mentoring or otherwise, we try to communicate to current students that it is incredibly important. It is just as important to be able to communicate with someone as it is to get your degree and then go out and get that job."

*Aldemaro Romero Jr. is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His show, "Segue," can be heard every Sunday morning at 9 a.m. on WSIE, 88.7 FM. He can be reached at [College\\_Arts\\_Sciences@siue.edu](mailto:College_Arts_Sciences@siue.edu).*