



**PRESIDENT'S AWARD**  
for Impact on Media

# AN Eye-Opening SHOW

THE 'CBS MORNING NEWS' TEAM TRIES A NEW APPROACH AND CAPTURES THE PRESS CLUB'S PRESIDENT'S AWARD FOR IMPACT ON MEDIA | BY ALEX BEN BLOCK

**C**BS has been a leader in primetime, news and sports for decades, but it has been frustrated in efforts to compete in the morning against NBC's "Today" show and ABC's "Good Morning America." Since 1954, CBS has launched 10 breakfast time shows—and scrapped nine of them.

The network has finally found the right eye opener with "CBS This Morning." Since it went on the air in 2012 with a different mandate than "GMA" and "Today"—to present serious news using original storytelling, analysis and discussion—it has won over critics and seen

its audience grow by over half a million viewers in the past year alone. Much of the credit goes to the on-camera team of Charlie Rose, Gayle King and Norah O'Donnell, along with Executive Producer Chris Licht.

"CBS This Morning" comes out of a tradition dating back to when CBS was the Tiffany Network, with a mandate to bring viewers the top stories of the past 24 hours told through reports, interviews and commentary. There isn't even an AI Roker doing weather (instead, weather comes via local CBS affiliate meteorologists).

"CBS This Morning" has significantly shrunk the ratings gap since Rose, King and O'Donnell took their seats around the circular desk with the eye symbol. More importantly, the program lives up to the best practices in contemporary journalism. "The news is back in the morning," is a mantra for the show and the anchors.

That is why the Los Angeles Press Club has chosen to honor Rose, King, O'Donnell and "CBS This Morning" with the 2015 President's Award for Impact On Media. The prize recognizes the show for bringing integrity back to morning news.

The show began taking shape when Licht was hired. He had previously served as executive producer of "Morning Joe" on MSNBC.

Licht said from the start he wanted to take an out of the box approach. There would be no cheering crowds on an outdoor plaza, no cooking segments and no comedic bits. While both "GMA" and "Today" tend to shift after its first segments to soft news, features and personality profiles, "CBS This Morning" keeps drilling down on the most important events, people and global game changers.



Norah O'Donnell, Charlie Rose and Gayle King, above, form the news team and cover top stories such as the presidential inauguration at far left.

Licht's goal was to redefine the morning TV landscape with domestic and international reporting that was lively while still being serious, featuring interviews with leading figures in business, politics and entertainment.

It is a collaborative effort with the three hosts. O'Donnell told the *Washington Post* in November 2014 that the producers pay attention to the anchors and care what they think.

"That's the beauty of our show," O'Donnell said. "If we don't want to do something, we say something, and actually they listen. We've turned down major celebrity interviews because we're like, 'What's the story?' We have to have a news peg. There has to be some value."

"The vision," as Licht told the *Daily Beast* in July 2013, "was to dispense with a lot of the dross that had made morning shows morning shows—the live pop concerts, the centenarian birthdays, even the weatherman, and focus on what makes people turn on the TV in the first place. Instead, 'CBS This Morning' would find out what is going on in the world."

The casting of the anchors showed how serious CBS was about getting it right. Rose brought both instant star quality and a seal of journalistic integrity. He had hosted "CBS News Nightwatch" in the 1980s, worked with Bill Moyers at PBS and contributed to "60 Minutes," but was best known for the thoughtful, often

provocative interviews with top celebrities, politicians and business leaders he has conducted on public television since 1991.

One of his big coups for "CBS This Morning" was an interview with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. When it won a Peabody Award, it was declared, "the biggest journalistic get of 2013."

King, known as Oprah Winfrey's best friend and sometime business partner, also brought a strong background in news, talk and opinion. Among her credits was 18 years as a reporter and news anchor for WFSB in Hartford, Conn., as well as shows in recent years for the OWN Network and elsewhere.

The last to join the team, more than six months after the show's re-launch, was O'Donnell, who moved over from being CBS's chief White House correspondent. She was named one of Washington's 100 most powerful women by *Washingtonian* magazine. She is also an occasional guest host of "Meet The Press."

At a time when the chemistry among the stars of the two top-rated morning shows has occasionally turned toxic, the surprise on "CBS This Morning" is how successful the chemistry has been among this trio.

"It's great when you can be part of something that is turning the ship around," O'Donnell told the *Huffington Post*.



## PRESIDENT'S AWARD CBS THIS MORNING



"You can't put a price and you can't put a formula on chemistry," added Licht. "If you put these three names on a piece of paper and say these people are going to connect with each other and thus the audience in a unique and successful way, they would laugh you out of the room. And I think that's why



it has actually been successful, because you couldn't focus-group this."

The accolades and the decision to focus on hard news and serious matters has had another effect, one that might surprise people in the short-attention-span era: a climb in the ratings.

From June 2014 until June 2015, "CBS This Morning" was the only two-hour daily morning show from a big three broadcast network to record ratings gains among the key demographic group of adults 25-to-54. "CBS This Morning" was up 29% in the demo. It also increased 17% among total viewers.

Amidst the super competitive broadcast, cable and digital media landscape, "CBS This Morning" in one year added 560,000 viewers, closing the gap with NBC and ABC by 710,000 viewers. For the first time in generations, there's less than 1 million viewers on average each day between first and third place.

And, for the first time in a long time, there's a place to get serious over that morning cup of coffee. ☕



We proudly congratulate our client  
**Norah O'Donnell**  
and the entire "CBS This Morning" team



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