

## **The Recipe for On-Air Reporting Success – A Day in the Life of CBS 3 and The CW Philly's Nicole Brewer**

By: Lee Singletary

Mix together a passion for storytelling, adventure, a trusty alarm clock, at times, chaos and add just a pinch of glamour and cough medicine (if you're sick), then you may have the recipe for a successful broadcasting career. One thing's for sure: you definitely have an idea of the daily work routine of Nicole Brewer. The current on-air contributor to Eyewitness News on CBS 3 and The CW Philly sat down with me to provide a glimpse into a "day in the life" in the profession and also recounted her past experience, detailing what it took to achieve success so quickly.

I'd been eager for a while to hear from an insider the steps needed to land a job in the fickle, yet oh-so-gratifying field of broadcasting... but how? I originally thought about infiltrating the CBS 3 Philly headquarters located on 15<sup>th</sup> and Hamilton streets in Center City Philadelphia, but decided to take the professional route and utilize a simple email message instead. A couple of weeks ago, I contacted a communications professor I had a couple of terms ago to ask for her insights unto the broadcasting job market. As a graduating senior, she understood my quest for job security and the need for answers to my unresolved questions, so she agreed to meet. After sifting through my resume, portfolio, and other materials making up my body of work, she realized that there was a friend of hers that could offer me even better insight.

Nicole Brewer was the person my former professor referred me to. Of course, I had already heard of the popular on-air personality, former Miss Pennsylvania 2005, and Miss America Pageant 2006 top ten semi-finalist, so it was exciting to know that she could be the one to answer all of my questions. When I reached out to Brewer via email, I was elated to have heard back from her and her willingness to sit down with me. I expressed to her that I was interested in "shadowing" her for a day at the CBS 3 Philly

Headquarters. I knew this was a little much to ask, but hey, why not go for it; I figured she was nice enough to respond to my email, so why not go for the win!

Brewer explained in a follow-up message that for liability reasons, non-CBS employees were not able to take part in the daily activities of their network. However, she agreed to sit down for coffee and describe for me her typical day of work. Thinking back on it, my attempt at an infiltration of the CBS 3 Philly Headquarters would have most likely proved unsuccessful, so we agreed to meet.

On Wednesday, March 16, I sat down with the slightly under the weather, yet still gleaming and personable, Nicole Brewer in a local coffee shop. We laughed about the story she produced earlier in the day at the Fireman's Hall Museum where she climbed aboard a fire apparatus before getting right into the questions I had for her. Though I did have some specific questions to ask in mind, to me, our hour of time together felt



**Nicole Brewer, on-air contributor to Eyewitness News on CBS 3 and The CW Philly.**  
*Photo Credit: <http://philadelphia.cbslocal.com>*

more like a conversation and less like an interview. To understand what it takes to make it in broadcasting, it is important to know the background behind the professional. We discussed Brewer's background including her education at Millersville University where she studied Speech and Communication with a focus in broadcasting.

Hailing from the Overbrook section of West Philadelphia, and relocating to Broomall, PA as child, Brewer recounts her dream of being a reporter from the unassuming and tender age of 6 stating, "[I] used to have a little fake microphone that [I] would carry around and interview all of [my] neighbors." If that's not the makings of a television reporter, I don't know what is. Her first eye-opening experience came when she was in

the fourth grade and reporter Susanne Lafrankie and the CBS 3 team came to report a story at Brewer's grade school. "[I] remember [I] got her autograph and kept it in [my] little autograph book and [I] knew from that young age *that* was exactly what [I] wanted to do" she said, adding, "it's interesting that it happened to be Channel 3... everything sort of came full circle for me."

Given her interest as a child, it is no wonder why Brewer has achieved her dream of being a major market reporter already at the age of 27, not to mention in an industry where people develop their skills in smaller markets. It's no secret that the drive Brewer had as a child and her experiences after graduating from Millersville are what propelled her to success in a top 5 television market. It's one thing to know that you want to report on-air, but Brewer didn't always know what exactly what it was that she wanted to report. For a while she thought about reporting entertainment. "Right out of college [I] was going through an audition process with MTV News, and got pretty far in the six month process," she said. "It came down to [myself] and a DJ from the United Kingdom."

The casting moved in favor of the DJ, so the 23-year-old hopeful admitted to thinking, "ah, there went my dream job" when she saw the cast DJ hosting the MTV Movie Awards, but she remembered thinking "maybe that wasn't the right step for me, [I] do believe everything happens for a reason." Her optimism surely paid off because she landed a new role at WLVT-TV, the PBS affiliate in Bethlehem, Pa. There, Brewer reported and produced nightly news segments and even reported a piece called "Kids and Gangs," which won a Mid-Atlantic Emmy Award in 2008. She now knew that what she wanted to report: news.

Following her tenure at PBS, Brewer got her "big break" producing and hosting a new segment called "What's Brewing" on CBS3.com. This new role was appropriately named the digital journalist position, and was essentially created *for* Brewer. Any new job

comes with challenges, especially one that has no precedent, but the tech-savvy journalist took to the streets for adventure and produced the best stories she could. “They basically threw me a handy-cam and said ‘good luck,’” Brewer said, adding, “There really wasn’t a whole lot of guidance.” She quickly became quite the one-woman television crew for the website, finding and pitching stories, shooting video, editing the video, posting the pieces online and finally, writing stories to go with them. If that doesn’t sound like a job and half, get this: Brewer also focused on reaching out to the tech community, producing stories on all of the tech buzz in Philly, which eventually made their way on-air. These new tech pieces were featured on CBS 3, which officially made her an on-air contributor, a huge turning point in Brewer’s career.

Not only was Brewer producing these stories herself, she would also make sure she was part of the action. “Whenever there’s an opportunity for reporter involvement I’m all about it,” she said.

Between the finding and pitching of stories, producing, reporting, posting, writing and now participating, did Brewer shed her pageant queen past for good? Well, she is an on-air contributor for a major news network, so the “personality” role seems a little glamorous. While the job does have its perks, Brewer is still required to be in the office at 3:30 a.m. and to produce four hours of live television with a videographer from 5-9 a.m. Brewer’s typical day ends around noon, right around the time the rest (or most) of Philadelphia workers are thinking about what to eat for lunch. A problem for Brewer? Of course not.

She says, “I didn’t dream of being Miss Pennsylvania, that was not my dream. My dream was to be in television and work in television.”

While pageants in her early 20s provided a stepping stone to television, Brewer is now where she is happiest – out in the community sharing stories. While most of her day is

spent out in the community, the newsroom is an entirely different environment, which can create pressure with its range from a quiet to a hectic environment full of editors, producers, interns, and contributors. Brewer called the newsroom a “pretty interesting place,” but while news reporting is certainly a collaborative process, she notes the importance of “having good working relationships.” Brewer said, “[I] never express to [my] boss or executive producer that [I] don’t want to do something, or that [I’m] scared to do something. You just kind of take what you’re assigned to and you run with it.” With her continuous optimism, she adds, “[I] try to always have a good relationship with everybody [I] work with.”

Getting along with everyone in the sometimes hectic newsroom helps ease the workday, but there are a few challenges in her role. Requirements for Brewer’s job such as “knowing a little bit about a lot of things,” and “being confronted with a lot of information and having to boil it down into the most important points... only having 30 seconds to say it,” can be challenging. Social media alleviates the possible challenge of searching for new story ideas. Brewer constantly looks to her Facebook and Twitter followers for insights and story ideas pertaining to Philadelphia buzz.

Regardless of the couple of challenges, this optimistic, passionate, tech savvy, storytelling, pageant crown holding, creative, jack of all trades is setting the bar high for attributing success in the on-air reporting sector of broadcast television. Brewer is quick to note that this job is “not for everyone” and that passion in this industry is what keeps her going. When asked what advice she would share with recent college graduates who have their sights set on the television industry, Brewer says “you need to be in it 100 percent or not at all, if you’re in it with passion and 100 percent, then [I] think you’re good to go, and if you’re not, that’s okay... it’s not glamorous.” In her case, she explains, “so many people complain about the hours and so many people complain about the job, but [I] wouldn’t do anything else.” Spoken like a successful on-air reporter.