

# watch!

YOUR EYE ON ENTERTAINMENT

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# contributors



**Byron Pitts**

CBS News correspondent Byron Pitts served as the network's primary correspondent at Ground Zero immediately following the Sept. 11 attacks. In this issue of *Watch!*, Pitts recounts the event and its aftermath ("The Day That Changed the World").



**Deborah Norville**

Host of the nation's top newsmagazine show, *Inside Edition*, Deborah Norville is no stranger to the behind-the-scenes chaos of TV. An author and former anchor of *Today*, Norville shares her own list of insider secrets ("10 Things You Don't Know About Television").



**Jonny Mendelsson**

Illustrator Jonny Mendelsson shares his interpretation of a Hollywood star's most important accessory ("Celebrity Entourage"). The former Londoner now calls the British countryside home, working in the basement of what was once the village store.



**John Filo**

Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer John Filo is the director of photo operations for CBS. He also has held editing positions at *Newsweek* and *Sports Illustrated*. *Watch!* enlisted Filo to capture this issue's heist-themed fashion spread ("To Catch a Thief").

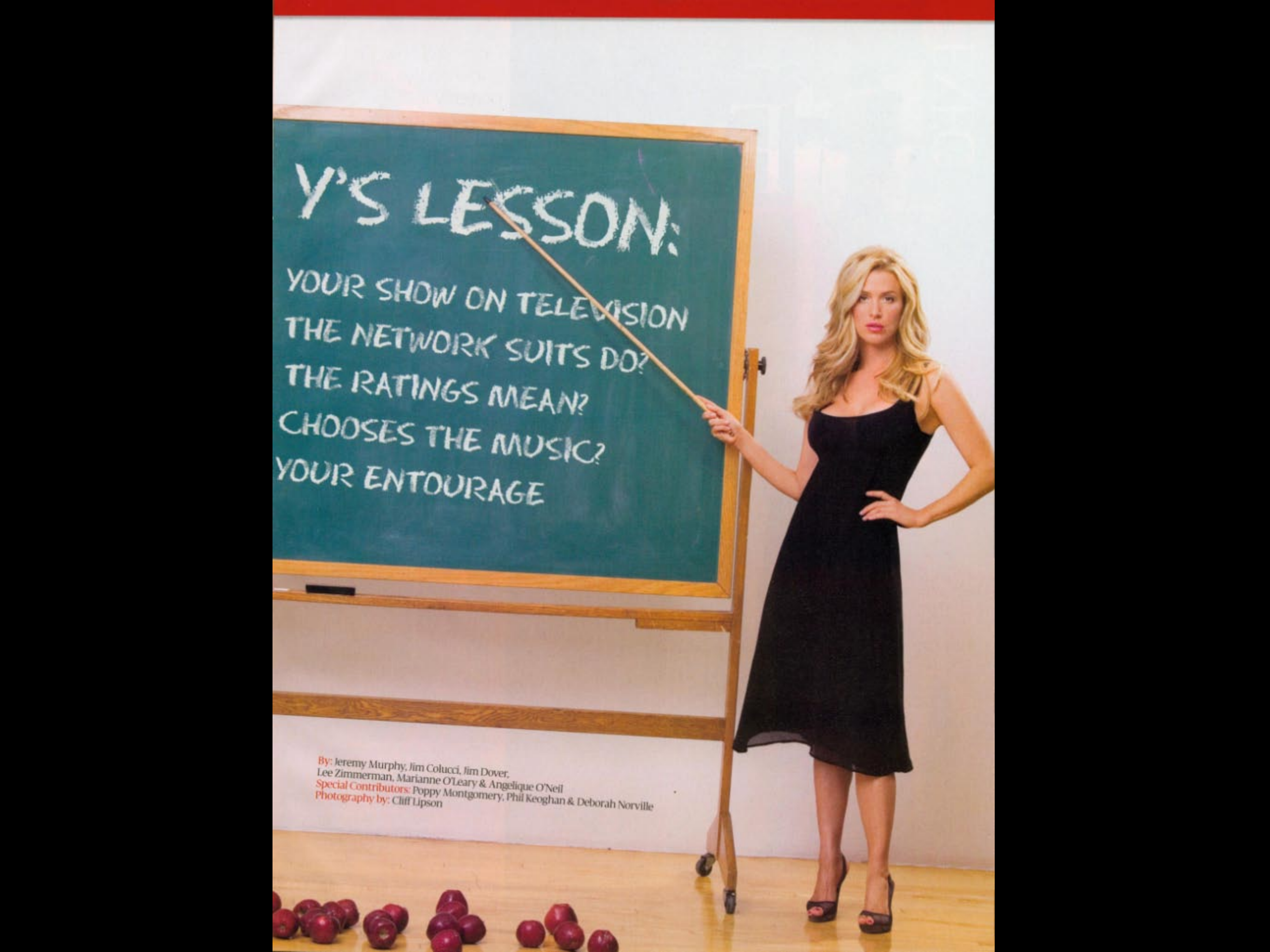


**Jim Colucci**

Contributing editor Jim Colucci is the author of the TV companion books *The Q Guide to The Golden Girls* and *Will & Grace: Fabulously Uncensored*. In this issue, he tackles TV's "Invasion from Down Under" and "A Day in the Life of a TV Executive."

# THE 101



A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a black sleeveless dress and high heels, stands next to a green chalkboard. She is holding a wooden pointer stick that points to the text on the board. The chalkboard contains a list of questions in white chalk. The floor is light-colored wood, and there are several red apples scattered on it in the foreground.

Y'S LESSON:  
YOUR SHOW ON TELEVISION  
THE NETWORK SUITS DO?  
THE RATINGS MEAN?  
CHOOSES THE MUSIC?  
YOUR ENTOURAGE

By: Jeremy Murphy, Jim Colucci, Jim Dover,  
Lee Zimmerman, Marianne O'Leary & Angelique O'Neil  
Special Contributors: Poppy Montgomery, Phil Keoghan & Deborah Norville  
Photography by: Cliff Lipson

# Life AS A Suit

Programming executives are privy to every upcoming story line and plot twist. So what are these "Suits" behind the camera hiding? By Jim Colucci



**T**hey find out who the killer is before the *CSI* team does. They understand *Criminal Minds* as well as anyone on the BAU team. They may even be more aware of *How I Met Your Mother* than they're letting on. They're the "inner circle." They're in the know. After all, they're among the first people who get to see, and comment on, the scripts.

As current programming executives—that is, the network "Suits" who oversee programs already on the air—Senior Vice President David Brownfield and his department are tasked with voicing the network's opinion on every aspect and phase of their shows' production. From hiring the shows' writers and directors to approving story lines, an exec ensures that every episode delivers the goods.

#### JUST A FEW NOTES ...

Brownfield's department first hears of an episode, he explains, when it's merely a one- or two-paragraph description of the story. Then the execs review an outline, which can be anywhere from three to 17 pages, depending upon how detailed the executive producer likes to be. "If there are any drastic changes to be made," Brownfield says, "we make them before we approve the outline."

And just what is the network keeping an eye out for? Brownfield says the execs' main concern is keeping writers from getting too far down the line on a story already done on another show, or falling into a story trap the network has identified from doing shows in the past.

"For example, in the case of *CSI* or *Without a Trace*," he says, "we didn't do a lot of personal stories in the first season. Because we've found that when someone's missing or dead, the audience isn't interested in going home

with an investigator and finding out he has marital problems. It ruins the mystery. So instead, our rule of thumb for the writers is to leave what we call 'personal bread crumbs,' just little hints about a home life."

A show's current executive reviews each episode's finished script. "We check that the script makes sense, that it's not confusing, and that the characters we've come to know are behaving consistently," Brownfield says. But the Suit doesn't always have to be the bad guy. Sometimes, a show's executive can be its best advocate—helping to negotiate a compromise with, for example, the legal or program practices department over issues of language or violence.

The whole process, from approving a story line to reviewing the episode length and music cues in the rough cut, can take about a month. And then, even as the process starts anew with next week's episode, it's not over. As a show's liaison within the network, an exec attends weekly scheduling meetings in order to disseminate details to other departments within CBS.

#### EVOLUTION OF A SUIT

Seven years ago, Brownfield himself was a sitcom writer, penning episodes of ABC hits *The Drew Carey Show* and *Boy Meets World*. When a comedy drought descended on the television industry, Brownfield jumped to the other side of the desk. Now he says that he finds having once been a writer is helpful when handing down sometimes unwelcome network notes to fellow scribes. In fact, most executives in these top jobs, he notes, have some kind of background in either authoring their own TV episodes or in analyzing, or breaking down, scripts. "A lot of the job," he says, "can only be learned by doing it."

Many current executives move on to work in series development, which, Brownfield says, is considered to be the sexier of the two departments. After all, staying on top of all of the overlapping details of current production can become an overwhelming cycle—one that Brownfield says he personally finds really rewarding.

"Development is a slow gestation process, where you spend six or seven months producing one pilot," he says. "But being a current executive is a tough, busy, fast-paced job for eight months of the year. What's great is that you're actually producing shows all the time. You get to work with incredibly creative people, and you get a report card every morning with the Nielsen ratings. And most of all, you learn you can't get too tied down to any one thing, because there's always something interesting coming along behind it." **U**