Transcript of "Tim Heller, Talent Coach and Media Weather Consultant at HellerWeather in Houston, Texas"

Clear Skies Ahead: Conversations about Careers in Meteorology and Beyond

April 14, 2020

Kelly Savoie:

Welcome to the American Meteorological Society's podcast series on careers in the atmospheric and related sciences. I'm Kelly Savoie and I'm here with Rex Horner and we will be your hosts. Our podcast series will give you the opportunity to step into the shoes of an expert working in weather, water, and climate sciences.

Rex Horner:

We are excited to introduce today's guest, Tim Heller, who is a talent coach and media weather consultant at HellerWeather in Houston, Texas. Welcome, Tim. Thanks so much for joining us.

Tim Heller:

Thank you very much for having me. Great to be here.

Kelly:

Tim, could you tell us a little bit about your educational background and what sparked your interest in meteorology?

Tim:

Well, I've got a degree in communications and I'm also a graduate of the Broadcast Meteorology program at Mississippi State University and I've always been interested in maths and science and physics. My grandparents are big gardeners and tracked the clouds religiously. And like a lot of people in the business, I became fascinated when a tornado hit close to our home back in ... it was probably about 1974 and I was about ten years old. And that kind of sparked my interest in meteorology.

Tim:

But initially, went to school thinking I wanted to be a news anchor and when I was in college, I was offered the opportunity to do weekend weather because they needed somebody to do it. And back then it was "rip and read." You ripped from the National Weather Service, put together a couple of graphics, stood there and kind of delivered a quick forecast. And that really got me interested in meteorology and that side of the business.

Tim:

So I kind of changed my career path and went back to school. So that way I would have the meteorological experience, the education I would need in order to do the job correctly.

Rex:

And so Tim, coming off of your education, what was the first job you found based off of this interest in the field and how did that job take you to where you ended up now currently?

Tim:

Well, one of the things I always recommend to college students or anybody in the business is to look for opportunities wherever you can find them. And even if it doesn't seem to be a direct path to where you want to go, pursue it. And the reason I say that is because I knew that I wanted to work in television some capacity and probably in the news side of that. And the TV station in town had a listing on our job board there in college for camera operators.

Tim:

And at the time, they paid minimum wage, $3.35 an hour. And we worked one hour, 5:30 PM came in, charted the cameras, did the six o'clock news. Left at 6:30, came back at 9:30 and did it again for the ten o'clock news. But I did this to get a foot in the door. So when I was looking for a news internship, so I think it was probably my sophomore year of college, that's when they had the news director mentioned to me, "We'll worry about news internships as soon as we find somebody to do weekend weather." And I thought well, hey, let me try that.

Tim:

So I did that thinking it would be a good foot in the door to become a news intern someday. And then I turned out liking the weather so much that it just changed my career path. So yeah, my first job was actually a camera operator. So I have a lot of sympathy for the people that work behind the scenes because I've been there.

Rex:

That's a great angle.

Kelly:

So when you were a camera operator, how long did it take for you to transition into being a weather forecaster on the station?

Tim:

Well like I said, back then it was rip and read. And so they had a teletype machine that would print out these reports from the National Weather Service. And literally one of them would say, "There was a low pressure centered over Montana and a cold front draped from that low pressure through Idaho and Northern California." So I was taking the text and would sit down at a computer, and by the way, this is the first generation of weather graphic computers and they were very crude. But I would literally put an L over Montana and then draw the blue line just like they described it. And we didn't have a way to simulate rainfall, didn't even have a raindrop icon, but we would use the backslash on the computer keyboard, literally a text. And we would sprinkle those around the cold front to show where it might be raining.

Tim:

Whether or not it was actually raining there, it didn't matter.

Rex:

Good inventive solution.

Tim:

Yeah. And the snowflake was the asterisk. But it was fun because it was all me kind of taking all this information from the Weather Service and the majority of my time was spent figuring out how do I translate this text into pictures and to a verbal story that I can then deliver on camera. And in small markets, I had to feel like two and a half to three minutes. So I was looking for something to talk about that.

Kelly:

And so are you still doing on-air weather? Or did you transition out of that and you're strictly doing the weather consulting?

Tim:

Well, so after college I went on, got a job as a reporter, news reporter. Again, still thinking that was the career I wanted to pursue. And did weekend weather in Rockford, Illinois and realized that the news side of the business was not where I wanted to be. I didn't want to cover city council meetings and court cases. Kind of a sidebar story: I remember one of the first real Stuart news stories I went out to cover was a fire and the family's house had burnt down. And I came back from the fire and the news director yells at me across the newsroom, come to his office and he has the tape and the machine and he goes, "Where's the interview with the family?" I said, "Well, gosh you know, they were really upset. Their house just burnt down. I didn't want to interview them."

Tim:

And he's like, "That's what you got to do." And I'm like, "This is not for me." God bless those people that can do that because they do it with sensitivity and ... at least most of them do. But that is just not for me.

Tim:

And so I had the opportunity then to go back the station I was doing weekend weather for in college, they gave me an offer to come back and do the week day. And I thought, "Okay, if I'm going to do this, now I'm committing to this." And so from there I went to Jefferson City, Missouri, got a job at KRCG TV there with the idea that I would go back to school at Mizzou, which was just up the street from the station. But then I got another job offer to go to Cedar Rapids, Iowa. And it was at that point I thought, okay, my career's taking off here and I got to catch up on the meteorology side. So this is broadcast meteorology. I need more meteorology background.

Tim:

So that's when I started the Mississippi State program. And from there, went to Dallas and from Dallas to Houston. And then finally at the end of 2018, early 2019, I thought, I've been doing this for 35 years. Harvey was the pinnacle of my career and I thought, this is it. I'm done. This a good storm to go out on. And so I decided to walk away from the studio and I started my own talent coaching company strictly for broadcast meteorologist because research shows it is the number one reason people watch the news. But most of the consulting and the help that we get as broadcast meteorologist is from people who have never done a forecast, who've never stood in front of the screen and ad-libbed for two and a half minutes or for two and a half days about the weather.

Tim:

And I thought, here's an opportunity to help people who help other people stay safe during severe weather. So yeah, I transitioned out of the business, but I'm still kind of in it, but in an indirect way.

Rex:

Tell us a little bit, kind of earlier on in your career, did you have any mentors that helped provide you with guidance?

Tim:

I would say that I learned something from everybody I worked with. Growing up, there was a man on TV and what was called WMT TV back then, but it's now KGAN in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. And there was a man on the air there, Conrad Johnson. And if you're long time Iowa listeners will remember the name and he was a former civil defense man. And very straightforward, no nonsense delivery of the weather. And I remember watching Conrad Johnson every night and just how seriously he took the weather I think influenced me early on.

Tim:

And then as my career changed and my own career developed and I moved to different markets, there'd be different people that I would watch on the air and I would take a little bit from each one of them that I liked. But along the way, different people that I've worked with, I'd say that I learned something from everybody. It might've been a news anchor or even some of the amazing weather teams that I've had the privilege of working with and hopefully I've given something back to them as well. But there's not really one specific person other than Conrad Johnson that still ... like the figure in my mind, when you say the word "mentor," he was the first one that popped in my head.

Kelly:

So you were talking about your educational background and it sounds like you have a good balance between communication and the meteorology. So what other courses, skills beyond the basic required math and science courses do you think would be the most helpful to students who are wanting a career in broadcast meteorology?

Tim:

So if they're going to go into the broadcast side of it, obviously you want to take some broadcasting courses, some journalism courses. Even though you may not be covering the house fire or the city council meeting, you still need to be able to write a story either for delivery on camera or for these days, the website, and you're going to learn that in the journalism courses. But I would also take speech because you have to be able to communicate to people verbally. Debate because especially in this day and age where we're trying to convince people that yes, the atmosphere is warming. Being able to debate, people may come in handy, especially as we move forward into time here.

Tim:

And even if you're not interested in going into the broadcast side, I'd still recommend taking a course or two or especially speech because somewhere along the way, even if you decide that you want to work for the weather service, you want to go into academia. Somewhere along the way, somebody is going to probably put a mic in front of you and ask you a question and ask you to comment on it. And being able to articulate your thoughts, your ideas, your knowledge. That is critical. We need to be good science communicators. Even if we're not going to pursue a career in broadcasting, we need to be able to communicate our science effectively on multiple platforms. So speech and journalism can help you do that.

Tim:

And if you are interested in going into a broadcasting, I've a couple more recommendations that may be a little unusual. Taking vocal music will help you develop a good speaking voice, even though it's singing, you're going to learn how to breathe, how to support your voice and it kind of exercises the other side of your brain, which you've got to be able to be creative to a certain degree in this job. And then some kind of graphic design because most of the graphics you see on television are drawn by the broadcast meteorologists and many of them are poorly done because nobody's ever trained them on how to create a graphic that communicates the science to the average person at home.

Kelly:

Wow. I had no idea that they draw those. That's interesting.

Tim:

Oh yeah, yeah. In fact, broadcast meteorologists today are doing six different jobs. Obviously, the on-air side of it and the forecast, but we're also graphic artists. We're also weather producers because we're producing content for multiple platforms in different forms. Some are two minutes long, some are twenty seconds long, some are two days long if you're doing extended coverage. And then we're also digital content creators and social media managers and we're constantly switching hats throughout the day. And that's part of the reason I decided to go into the talent coaching business because nobody's teaching people how to do all of these jobs. And I've seen that in some of the interns that come into the station where what they envision the job to be is what they see on TV and then all of a sudden they see everything that's going on behind the scenes and their eyes kind of glaze over like, "Okay, how do I manage all of this?"

Tim:

And it takes a while to get used to.

Kelly:

I would say that you really need to be able to juggle a lot of things at once and be pretty organized and have some good time management. And I also would imagine that if you want to get into broadcast meteorology and, for instance, you go to a university that might not have too many broadcast meteorology classes, that you would want some experience in front of the green screen. Boy, I tried that one time and it is just so awkward when you're pointing and you don't ... and there's nothing there and you don't know where to look.

Tim:

Well, and a lot of people don't realize it until they stand there that you see ... In front of the camera, they switch over the teleprompter, which would normally have the script that the anchors are reading, but they switch it over so that you can see yourself. But what you see is a mirror image.

Kelly:

Right. It's the opposite.

Tim:

It's the opposite and that throws a lot of people off. And so they end up their arms kind of waving in general direction or they don't point at all because it doesn't seem natural to them.

Tim:

And the other thing that I noticed, I remember this so vividly, the first night I was on the air, and that is when the red light goes on. You are the only one talking. There's no feedback. There's nobody laughing. There's nobody, "Oh yeah, okay, I understand." It's like you are the only one talking and it's a little unnerving at first.

Kelly:

I bet.

Tim:

They're like, okay, the microphone's on and they're expecting me to talk now.

Kelly:

And you have no idea if what you're saying is making sense to anyone because it's just you.

Tim:

Right. And the camera operator, they're just worried that you get out on time. So they're watching the time and that's about it. But yeah, it's a little ... it takes some getting used to. And I found that true with interns that I've worked with over the years that I'll give them a countdown, three, two, one go. And at first, they're a little bit slow in the uptake and then they'll kind of stop and like, "Can I do that again?" I'm like, "No, you can't do that again. You're on the air, go."

Rex:

So Tim, what's a typical day or a typical week on the job as a talent coach teaching all this wide range of valuable skills? How do you break that down with your clients, with the people you work with?

Tim:

Well, so a large part of the job that I'm learning as I go is the business side. And that is pitching the concept of a talent coach for television stations, convincing news directors that they need to hire one. And then a lot of the coaching now is done virtually. So I can record content or the clients that I'm working with can send me a link to something that they've recorded and we can watch it together. But we do it through Skype calls. There's still some face-to-face where I'll fly to the TV station and sit down with the client and work with them. The challenge is always that they've got to cover the weather at the same time that they're being coached and trained. And so it always works out for some reason that every time you have to do some training, there's a big storm and pulls people away from the training. But we make it work.

Tim:

And it's fun. I love watching somebody's weathercasts, talking through a situation, talking through whatever that they were trying to communicate on the air and giving them some suggestions and then watching that happen. I find that very rewarding, which is good because that's what the job I decided to pursue at this point.

Kelly:

Would you say that's what you like most about your job?

Tim:

Yeah.

Kelly:

The improvements.

Tim:

I confided in a friend few years ago. I said, "I kind of had checked all the boxes off in my career." I was working at a major market, was at the number one station, had a pretty good following, significant following on social media. I'd covered hurricanes, blizzards, tornadoes, the Fort Worth tornado when I worked in Dallas, multiple blizzards when I worked in the Midwest, multiple hurricanes and floods in Houston.

Tim:

I've checked every box. And the thing that I find the most rewarding is working with interns and working with people, sharing that knowledge that I've gained over the years. And this friend of mine says, "Well, why don't you be a consultant?" And I'm like, "Does anybody do that?" And he's like, "No, nobody does it. So you could be it." And I'm like, "Okay, let me ..."

Tim:
And that's literally how it started.

Rex:
So what might be the most challenging part of the job?

Tim:
Let me refer to more the challenging part of the broadcast meteorology job, if you will.

Rex:
Sure.

Tim:
Because being a talent coach isn't that exciting, but it's fun. But I think the most challenging part of the job for broadcast meteorologist, and this is for anybody that's early on in the career or thinking about pursuing it as a career, number one, it's different every day. That's the best part. But it's also the worst part because it means that you start over every day, which is okay when it's quiet but it can very stressful when there's a major weather event.

Tim:
And then keeping the content, the forecast updated throughout the day. The models now, the high resolution models are updating every hour. We've got multiple models coming in, we've got ensemble models coming in and you can't be stuck with the forecast that you made three or four hours ago. You have to constantly be updating it. And that becomes challenging when you're in a major weather event and you're delivering information, but at the same time you're gathering new information that will change what you deliver on the air. So that can get very challenging, very frustrating.

Tim:
And the way that we manage that, when I worked at ABC 13 in Houston, for example, during Hurricane Harvey, is that I put everybody in the weather department on 12-hour shifts and we had overlapping shifts. So we always had two people on the air at the time, but we never changed out both people at the same time. That way somebody's coming into their shift would have some time to get up to date on what's going on. Look at the latest models, the latest forecast, be up to date on what watches, warnings, where the flooding was. And then we would gradually switch out that person on the air so you would have some time to absorb the new information.

Tim:
And I think that's the most challenging part is when you're in these extended hours of coverage, being able to step back and look at the data with a new set of eyes. And sometimes you have to do that in order to see the big picture and to see how things are changing. And that goes for severe weather as well as tropical weather.

Kelly:

I would imagine that since you switched from being an on-air meteorologist to the talent coach, that your work/life balance is probably better. Right? You must have better hours and that must be great.

Tim:

Oh, yes.

Kelly:

I mean, what was your shift when you were on-air meteorologist, where you like the evening?

Tim:

Yeah, I did evenings. And when I first got in the business 35 years ago, back in 1984 we did a 6:00 and 10:00 PM weather. That was it. And of course over the years that all changed. And the forecast, by the way back then was three days, just the high temperature and maybe a mention of rain or sun. But just the high temperature is all we would give people. And so of course now we're doing seven to ten day forecast. We're showing you the high temperature, the low temperature, the wind, the chance of rain, an icon. We're discussing chance of severe weather, five days out, chance of a hurricane seven days out.

Tim:

And you're not just producing content for broadcast, you're now producing content for digital platforms. You're producing content for the website and for the streaming apps, and you're updating social media. And it really had evolved into a 24/7 job and a 24/7 responsibility as well as accountability because the viewers, even if you weren't on the air, expect you do to be providing them updates on social media. And I would wake up in the morning and see a tweet that was sent at two o'clock in the morning because something happened and somebody say, "Well, are you going to update us on the storm?" You know, I got to sleep sometime.

Kelly:

Exactly. And I mean it must be great now because you can make your own hours, you don't have to work holidays, you don't have to work weekends or nights. You can kind of just make your own schedule. So that was probably another really good plus to switching to this new position.

Tim:

Look, it's a job that requires 24/7 attention. You have to work weekends, you have to work holidays. But in general there are worse jobs out there. I never complained about the work that I had to do because there were other people that were making far less money and doing worse jobs than what I was doing. Even during storms, I always felt bad for the reporters and they always let me know that I was always inside where it was nice and cool and dry and they were the ones out there in the weather. So there are worse jobs even within TV.

Rex:

You mentioned that you felt you checked off most of the boxes throughout your 35 years or so, but is there anything you wished you had done differently, either in reality or perhaps just hypothetically, a different path you might've followed in your career? A different direction?

Tim:

Part of me says, sure, there's probably something I would've done different. The one thing that comes to mind right at the top is I wish that I had known when I was in high school exactly or even college, what the career path would be for me. In the end, it all worked out. But since, over the years, I've talked with college students and even high schoolers that are interested in meteorology. I'm like, "If you're interested in meteorology, go for the degree first thing." I kind of went the back way of getting here and the long way. And if you can go to a good school right out of high school that has a good meteorology program, it'll be a lot easier for you.

Tim:

Now, that said, there aren't a lot of schools out there that offer specifically broadcast meteorology, and it's kind of nice because there are different schools that have different emphasis. For example, Colorado State University has the tropical weather. Texas Tech is more of the meteorology engineering side. Texas A&M that does more of the academia and the research. I think they do a little bit of broadcast meteorology, but it's not something that they really pushed. And then you've got Mississippi State, which has a very strong Broadcast Meteorology program with a studio and equipment and all of that. So you can get good experience before you actually graduate.

Tim:

So that would be the one thing. But at the same time I've got two sons that just graduated from college in the last couple of years and they're still trying to figure out their path in life. So if you know what you want to do, great. But at the same time, you have the rest of your life to figure it out and eventually you will.

Kelly:

Yeah. You'll find your way at some point.

Tim:

Yeah. Yeah.

Kelly:

So what professional development opportunities do you pursue to keep current in the field?

Tim:

Well, first of all, staying active with AMS. Even though I'm not an on-air broadcast meteorologist, I still consider myself to be one. So I attend the broadcast meteorology conferences, the annual meetings when I can. I still update myself on COMET modules. I keep my forecasting skills updated by still doing some forecasts for nobody but me and my wife. But I think it's important to kind of stay up to date.

Kelly:

And you just rotated off as the chair of the Board of Broadcast Meteorology. So thank you for your volunteer efforts for that.

Tim:

Absolutely.

Tim:

Yeah, that was fun. I love seeing the people grading the talent that's coming through that are applying for the CBM. And there's some good people out there. There's still a lot of people that need some work. But luckily, the AMS has opportunities for you to develop those skills. One thing by going to the conferences and meeting people and watching some of the presentations because a lot of people are putting some good stuff out there to help you.

Rex:

What other must-haves might there be on a resume for a person to gain employment as an on-air meteorologist apart from choosing the right college to go to get that degree?

Tim:

Right, right. That helps. But experience and really this is probably true of any job, but getting experience. For example, when I was at ABC 13, we required students to be a junior in college at an accredited university before we would consider them for our internships because we wanted to make sure that that's what they wanted to do. That said, if I was a sophomore and was really into weather and I was involved with forecasting club and I was involved with the student chapter of the AMS on campus, and if I was really passionate about what I was doing, I'd still probably apply if I was a student.

Tim:

And I've done that. I've done jobs that I wasn't necessarily qualified for, I would apply for them. So putting yourself out there, getting the experience while you're still in college because when you graduate, the only thing you're offering a future TV station is your potential to be a valuable member of their weather team. So you have to be able to demonstrate that somehow. And having an internship or internships – multiple -- before you graduate is certainly something you need to work on.

Kelly:

Yeah, I would imagine that just that networking ability with the internships and just getting to meet as many people and just having them be a reference would certainly help when they're trying to get a job because obviously it's kind of a small business. Most people know each other. And if you did an internship and the person you did the internship for thought you were great, you give that person's name as a reference and then that's probably going to give you a leg up when you're getting a position somewhere else.

Tim:

It really is. I mean that's it, Kelly, networking is so critical. I'll give you an example. Jordan Evans, who Kelly, you know from being on ... he was the student member of the Broadcast Meteorology Board. And a student at the Walter Cronkite School at Arizona State University, very active in the AMS, met a lot of people, was at the conferences introducing himself, handing out business cards. That led to some internships along the way. And he's working it. And I can tell you that he's ... I think he graduates in May.

Kelly:

He does.

Tim:

I think he's not going to have any problem finding a job. In fact, there's such a shortage right now of good on-air broadcast meteorologists coming out of the schools that I bet he's going to have his pick of jobs.

Rex:

So tell us, so you've gotten your first job, what's the next step for an early career professional in the field looking to move up, get the next opportunity after you've secured your first job at a station?

Tim:

Well, I always recommend that you look at every job by, where does this position me at the end of this term, if you will. Most TV stations are going to give you a two or three year contract. So you've got to kind of look at the situation and say, "Okay, where's this going to position me in two years? Will this put me in a better spot for the next job? Is there an opportunity to advance within the TV station or advance within the field?"

Tim:

I had an opportunity back in probably '94. I was working in Cedar Rapids at the time -- Cedar Rapids, Iowa -- and had an interview and a job offer from a station in Minneapolis and that would have been a big career jump in terms of market size. But I was on-air, I was the chief, the main guy in Cedar Rapids. And they were offering me a weekend job in Minneapolis, and I ended up turning it down because to me, it didn't fit. And it was the hardest thing to do is to turn down a job offer.

Tim:

And I can remember the news directors screaming at me on the phone, "You turn this down, you'll never leave Cedar Rapids. You're going to retire there, you'll die there. This is a great opportunity."

Kelly:

Oh, terrible.

Tim:

Oh my God. I got off the phone and I said to my wife ... And we were newly married and had a new child at the time. I said, "I think I just blew this." Two weeks later, I had a job interview in Dallas, Texas. So that turned out to be a good move. And that job, by the way, was a morning job, but it was definitely a much bigger market. It was bigger in terms of salary. And I felt that I could do mornings for a few years in Dallas and that would springboard me to achieve a job at any market I wanted to go to after that. Or obviously that had availability. So looking at what's my next job? It's almost like playing chess, where does this position me down the road? And the Dallas position worked out pretty well, I'd have to say.

Kelly:

So I would guess that most students getting out of school who want the job, they probably know already that, "Okay, I got to pay my dues, I got to take what I can get." And then I would imagine that you have to be super open to move or relocate wherever you can move up to that next job. Because it seems like, the broadcast meteorologists I know, a lot of them move around quite often. And I guess that's just the nature of the market.

Tim:

And really when you think about it, there're what? 220 markets and there's at least three, sometimes four TV stations doing news and there's probably three to four people at each station. There are really not that many broadcast meteorology jobs in the whole country.

Tim:

And so if you say, "I only want to work in this state or this area," you're really limiting yourself because most people are under contract for two or three years. And so the positions aren't going to come open that often and they hardly ever come open at the big stations, the powerhouse markets. I mean at ABC 13, we rarely had an opening in our weather team unless we were expanding and adding shifts, which we did a couple of times while I was there. But most of the people had been there for 10, 15, 20 years.

Tim:

So yeah, you have to be flexible on where you want to go and flexible in terms of the position. But if you lock yourself in, you may turn away opportunities that could benefit you. And who knows? I mean, Texas was never on my radar growing up. And here, I've lived here for 25 years now.

Kelly:

So you have over three decades of experience as a broadcast meteorologist. How has the job changed over that time? I mean, it must be huge differences from the time you started until now.

Tim:

Oh yeah. Yeah, just in terms of the number of platforms that we're working on, like I mentioned previously, it's not just TV now, we really are broadcasters. We are casting the message broadly and this now over multiple platforms including social media and station apps. At the station I left, KTRK in Houston, we were doing seven and a half hours of news a day. That's from when I

first started, we were doing an hour of news a day at the little TV station in Eastern Iowa. So yes, up to seven and a half hours of news a day.

Tim:

And then the forecast itself, when you think about it, has gone from three days to ten days. We now have radars that allow us to track the storms down to city streets down to the minute. The science itself has advanced, which means that anybody that's in the field has to stay current with the advances in technology and the science of meteorology. We are learning things all the time and somebody that's on the air that doesn't know the benefits of using the different products and the different channels on the GOES satellites, needs to learn that. You need to learn the advantages and disadvantages some of the dual pole doppler radar data before you use it on the air. You have to be able to explain that and not just say, "Oh, hey, there's a debris ball," but explain what's going on within that data. And be familiar, for example, with ensemble forecasting and how is that evolving and how can you benefit from using ensemble data?

Tim:

So yeah, the job has changed, the forecast has changed and I think the future, I think we're kind of on the cusp of a major change as well in terms of how we present the weather in the future.

Rex:

Well give us maybe a prediction or an educated guess about what is next? What is the future going to look like?

Tim:

Well, have you heard of the term OTT?

Rex:

I haven't-

Kelly:

Nope.

Rex:

-but tell me about it.

Tim:

All right, so OTT stands for "over the top" and it's different than OTA, which is "over the air." So traditional broadcast televisions are sending their signal out over the air and it's being picked up by cable stations and satellite companies and they're rebroadcasting that. Well OTT is over the top, meaning that it's content that you're going to get through the internet delivered through a device like Roku or Apple TV. And TV stations are just now tapping into that and setting up their own personal channels on the Roku and the Apple TV and those streaming devices.

Tim:

And if you think about it, we as a society are getting used to watching our content when we want to watch it by picking up our remotes and going to an app and turning on the app and getting the latest information, the latest program. And TV stations are just now starting to get into that space and I think that's going to be a game changer for us because viewers might still be watching our content on TV but it may not be live in the very near future. They may be watching a prerecorded weathercast that you recorded like an hour ago or they might be watching your 24 hour local weather channel on their streaming device.

Tim:

So I think we're on a major shift here in terms of how people view TV, which we're already seeing. And now TV stations are trying to figure out what is their strategy for working in that space. And the way that translates down to the broadcast meteorologist is that we've got to be better at producing good content for those digital platforms. That just taking a copy of the last weather cast and sticking it up there on the server is not good coverage. Because that information was old before it even reached the server.

Tim:

And sadly most TV stations, that's how they're putting content up on their website now. Well, we've got to be better, we got to do a better job at creating content that is relevant to our viewers and provides some essential information on a digital platform. And I think that's going to be one of the major changes in terms of how we deliver the content.

Tim:

And then the second change I think is going to happen, and this is already happening at a lot of TV stations now, but I think this is going to be the year where it really takes off. And that is the reporting of climate change. And it's something that broadcast meteorologists have been slow to embrace, mainly because it is a political issue for a lot of people. And with the help of the good folks over at Climate Central who are helping broadcast meteorologists tell that story. And by some early people within the industry, within broadcast meteorology that are doing it already and serving as examples for the rest of us, I think that is going to become more mainstream. And by the way, one of those areas that you can put that information is on those OTT devices so people can watch more long form explanations about what's going on in the climate and how it's affecting them and how we can help mitigate some of those circumstances.

Kelly:

Well that's really interesting. Well, thanks for that insight. So Tim, we always ask our guests one last fun question at the end of each podcast, what is your favorite hobby?

Tim:

Back in high school, I used to do magic shows for nursing homes.

Kelly:

My son loves magic.

Tim:

So I love magic and for a while, I thought it was going to be the next David Copperfield. Hey, you can dream.

Kelly:

Right.

Tim:

And then at one point, I decided, okay, I'm pretty lousy at misdirection. Although it's funny because in TV broadcast meteorology, we are kind of doing magic every night that we're pointing to maps that don't really exist and we're creating some magic on TV every night. But I still have the cups and balls trick and my Chinese linking rings and I still get those out every once in a while to impress my kids, but they're hardly ever impressed anymore.

Kelly:

Well, at the next broadcast conference, you have to do a magic trick for me.

Tim:

Hey, listen, it comes in really handy when you're a young dad and you're in a restaurant and they're slow to serve. I can't tell you how many times I've made the salt and pepper shakers disappear and reappear to entertain my kids.

Kelly:

That's great.

Rex:

Thanks so much for joining us, Tim, and sharing your work experiences with us.

Tim:

It's been great. Thank you for having me.

Rex:

Well, that's our show for today. Please join us next time, rain or shine.