

BOLD & BRASH & BRITISH

BY GREG ARCHER

Think you know Piers Morgan? The factors behind his success are far from just attitude...

PIERS MORGAN HAS TALENT. That's evident. And it's a good thing to have in the fickle business of network news and entertainment. But you need more than that to survive, especially on a behemoth like CNN, where the popular Brit currently shines. So, how did a guy born in the country town of Surrey, England, a lad who lost his father at a very young age only to go on to fight (hard) against professional criticisms, manage to succeed—real big—in a world that now prefers social-media addiction to old-school news ethics?

Morgan chuckles. "Drive."

Well, that, and adaptability. (Morgan now has more than a million followers on Twitter.) But flashback to the early '90s and you'll find the sophisticated man both adapting and tilling new soil on the media landscape. Back then, at 28, he became the editor—one of the youngest ones in history, in fact—at Rupert Murdoch's attention-grabbing *News of the World*, where he soon developed a reputation for his unwavering confidence.

"The essential thing is that you have to push yourself," Morgan says about success. "I think people can have medium talent and take themselves a long way with a ferocious drive and work ethic. And then, there are people who are naturally talented and don't have the drive, and never really make it as big as they should. I see that in all spheres of entertainment." >>>



A MOMENT WITH MORGAN:

d!: One of your biggest inspirations?

PM: Murdoch, of course ... But my mother was a massive figure and remains so. She is somebody who has always worked incredibly hard and has always shown kindness and incredible generosity to people. She taught me the important values in life and for me, family is more important than anything else.

d!: Best advice you've been given?

PM: Live life to the full. You cannot take yourself too seriously. Too many people, especially in the news business, are terribly serious.

d!: One of the most interesting things you've been learning about yourself lately?

PM: I have a very low boredom threshold. I was running a big newspaper in Britain and I had forgotten the rush of breaking news. I think that's why I love being back in the middle of things. In my heart, I will always be a news guy.

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Morgan's talents certainly created a compelling tenure at *News of the World*, where he was both praised and criticized for his bulldog-like determination, especially when it came to uncovering "real" celebrity "news." Still, he managed to elevate his celebrity and professional prowess. He'd eventually draw more attention at the *Daily Mirror* until he was forced out in 2004 due to behind-the-scenes brouhahas.

Even during challenging times, though, Morgan's resolve was unshakable. He was man enough to admit to mistakes, yes, but was never one to bow down to critics who questioned his core professional judgments.

"Well, I like being deliberately provocative," Morgan admits, addressing some of the criticisms he's received over the years. "Anyone that follows me on Twitter knows that I like calling people out; joking feuds, being provocative in opinions. [Now], I think being on cable news, you have opinions and if you have opinions you're going to upset people. Not everyone is going to agree with you. It doesn't mean you should stop.

"I think once you work in the British newspaper industry, you develop a high profile and you develop very thick skin," he adds. "I have the skin of a thousand rhinoceroses. Literally, there's nothing anybody can say to upset me."

Eventually, all that self-assurance won producers over on *America's Got Talent*—and *Britain's Got Talent*—and it was there, on television, where audiences began seeing beyond his headline-making intensities and warmed up to the human being that was Piers Morgan. Nabbing top honors on *Celebrity Apprentice* in 2008—that on-air feud with contestant Omarosa was ratings gold—further thrust him into the American spotlight and, eventually, helped Morgan walk up a new career zigzag—right into Larry King's soon-to-be-vacant timeslot on CNN.

Of *Piers Morgan Tonight*, which debuted in January and is a show that sprinkles both hard news and celebrity features into the big media soup bowl, the host says it's been "incredibly exhilarating."

"The global impact is huge," Morgan notes. "But when you replace an American legend it's not easy. Larry King is a remarkable man. Our shows are instantly very different and it takes time to build up a relationship with an audience. I think we're getting there and we've done stories that have established my journalistic credentials."

Is there a trick, then, to being a good interviewer, and how has he succeeded at that?

"Being empathetic to people when they're talking about really upsetting issues in their lives, without hectoring, is key," he

reveals. "And if you're interviewing a politician on controversial issues, you do want to be in their face a bit. I always call it Robin Hood TV. You want to look after the good ones and go off as the sheriff of Nottingham."



Morgan interviews *Late Night* host Jimmy Fallon on the set of CNN's *Piers Morgan Tonight*.

Interestingly enough, this for-the-good-of-all trait, which may not be the most publicized of Morgan's, appears off the air, too. It inspired the 2006 launch of *First News*, a refreshing British journalism concept in that it's "the first proper newspaper for young children," ages 7-14. Morgan is editorial director and the publication is now in one in three schools in England.


"I am a great lover of newspapers and I want children to be able to read them, too," Morgan humbly notes. "I think a lot of kids now speak in this text speak [from text messaging]. I want them reading a proper newspaper using proper words—with news from Britain and around the world, in simple language that they can digest."

Children, in fact, play a significant part in Morgan's personal life. At 46, he's the father of three sons (with ex-wife Marion Shalloe) and is expecting another child with wife Celia Walden.

"I always tell my sons, 'work as hard as you possibly can for exams and so on, and if you're not good enough on that subject, move on to something you are good at so you can focus on it all the time,'" he points out, perhaps mirroring the winning aspects of his own success story.

But ask Morgan what is the best thing about being a father and he exposes his rarely seen softer side.

"It's that my kids make me laugh so much," he opens up. "They've all developed a very sarcastic British sense of humor. So they are always 'sending me up,' as we call it, or taking the 'mickey' out of me. Talk about inspiration. To watch them play soccer and cricket—I find that an incredibly emotional experience. I find their freshness and excitement about life, and their humor inspiring. I love being a father.

He pauses before adding ... "Your kids—they are what you're left with; family is what you're left with. Nobody is going to judge you, particularly, on high-life and career. They judge you on the type of friend you are, the type of father you are, the type of family man you are. It's those things that are the most important. That's how I'd like to be judged." 



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