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English III

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### Raj Mathai: The Man Behind the Camera

“So I moved here when I was seven, and I remember turning on the TV for the first time and Monday Night Football was on, and I was just mesmerized just looking at the TV like, wow, and it wasn't necessarily the game. It was the announcers talking about the game. And I said, that's what I want to do. I want to be a sportscaster. I want to talk about these big events. And then as things evolved, I said, all right, now I want to be a newscaster” (R. Mathai).

A news anchor's job is to be objective. There is not a lot of room to insert your own opinions and personal life into the job. It is very important that people are able to remove the news from the person who they are hearing it from. News anchors represent many different communities and backgrounds through the news they produce so it is very important that they are producing it with the utmost accuracy and objectivity. But who are these anchors that are giving us the news, and what does their job and day-to-day entail?

Raj Mathai is a successful home-grown news anchor. For 22 years, he has been breaking the news, interviewing prominent politicians such as Colin Powell and Kamala Harris, and traveling the world for various important events such as the Olympics and documenting the pandemic. In addition to being a news anchor he is also a dedicated father and husband with two children.

Raj immigrated to the US from India at the age of seven. Where he settled in Los Altos, California. From the age of seven, he knew he wanted to be in the news, so from then on he took every opportunity to chase his dream. He reflect on growing up in a very supportive home: "My parents said, do whatever you want. Just make sure you have good grades, but go in whatever direction you want. Want to be a lawyer, you want to be a journalist, want to be an engineer. You want to be a pro athlete, Go do it" (R. Mathai). He attended San Diego State University and during that time interned at the NBC Affiliate in San Diego. At that job, he learned everything he could about the inner workings of the newsroom. He had worked at many different local NBC affiliates, ranging from Fresno to Arizona before he moved back to Los Altos and started working at NBC Bay Area.

Raj and his wife, Sonia, met in September of 2000. "We had mutual friends who were heading up to San Francisco, and they have this big caravan van, like 14, 15 passenger vans. And both of our mutual friends called us and said, hey, we're going out to this city. Let's rally and I was already in the van, and we pulled up to this driveway and out walked Raj and his best friend from London. And he sat right behind me in the van. And so it was history." Sonia watches the news everynight and always makes sure Raj is looking as presentable as he can. Texting him if something is off with his hair or telling him to straighten his tie.

Instead of leaving early in the morning and coming back from work in the evening, Raj has a special schedule that sometimes poses a challenge when trying to connect with his family and friends. Over the years, Raj has been able to adjust and learn how to use that time the best he can. However, his schedule has never stopped him from being a hands-on father. "He's that guy that loves rolling around on the grass with the kids. They have a lot of respect for him. There's a lot of love. They have their own little games. They're like the hand

game...He's a very involved, active parent. And I know there's, again, just so much love," Sonia explains. Raj has most of the morning free with the exception of a daily call with the newsroom and after that then reports to work around 3pm and gets home around midnight.

During these calls, Raj and his coworkers talk about what content NBC Bay Area will produce that evening. These calls highlight the importance of a well-rounded and diverse newsroom. Janelle Wang, Raj's co-anchor, explains: "Everybody, you know, grew up differently, has different backgrounds so we give our input and then we pick like the top ten stories to cover that day. So I think that's the great thing about having such a diverse newsroom is that you can get different sides for every single story and pick the best story that will appeal to our viewers."

Representing diverse viewpoints along with reporting truthful news is more important now than ever. According to the Pew Research Center, "About two-in-three U.S. adults (64%) say fabricated news stories cause a great deal of confusion about the basic facts of current issues and events... Overall, about a third (32%) of Americans say they often see political news stories online that are made up" (Barthel, et al.) "If it's something that doesn't seem right to us that we can't verify, we just walk away from it because we don't want to get into that position where we're reporting fake news or things that aren't completely true. We do make mistakes. Occasionally, I make mistakes and right when I do, we'll immediately try to correct it," Raj explains.

As technology has evolved, so has the news. According to St. Bonaventure University, "The future of journalism in the digital age will require news outlets and journalists to adapt and completely change the status quo on how they report and distribute the news"

("Journalism in the Digital Age"). Raj and his coworkers are ready for these changes and are always making adjustments so that their news reaches the most people possible. "If we stay on our butts, but we're going to get beat. So we just have to find how to get people to correct. So now we do a lot of streaming stuff. We do a lot of stuff on digital. In fact, soon it'll be more digital based than regular TV based, but the product is still the same.

There are many skills you need to have to be a news anchor. According to NBC Bay Area's job description of a news anchor, one of these skills is "Building relationships with the community and community leaders for the purpose of developing connections to story leads." Human connection is an essential part of this job. Raj has proved himself to be an excellent connector. He has interviewed many people who are in the public eye and have had meaningful conversations. Many celebrities and politicians have reason to dis-trust journalists because sometimes journalists will produce or write things that are not the full picture. However, through watching Raj's interview with Kamala Harris, anyone can see the trust and authenticity that Raj enstills in interviews. In our interview, Raj recalled the interview he did with Colin Powell. "I asked him directly about the US war in Iraq, and this was years after the war. But I asked him about it, and he still was very pissed off in a way at my questioning. But I knew I was getting to him that that wasn't my intention, but I knew I was getting some real stuff...he answered very honestly, very directly, very candidly." Raj was able to receive answers to questions that many Americans had.

Objectivity is key in producing reliable news. Part of this means keeping your own emotions out of the broadcast. However, this does not mean that broadcasters do not feel the heartbreak and emotions any less. "We're just not newsreaders. We don't just read a teleprompter. We're actually really invested in our community, and that's why we're

journalists, because we're like everybody out there... We live here. Our families are here. We are raised here. We work here. So we also want, you know, the best Bay Area it could possibly be. So we're invested in all the stories because we feel like if we tell the stories, the people are interested also because we're in the same shoes they are," Janelle exclaimed. Raj talked about how he always feels particularly affected by stories that involve harm to children.

What does the future have in store for Raj Mathai? "I would always want to keep learning whether I'm 30, 50 or 80. I want to keep learning and keep being challenged. I've always said at the moment this job on TV is not challenging or interesting to me. I want to walk away, I don't want to just be doing it just because that's all I know, or that's a paycheck or whatever. So I'm always looking to stay challenged and stay engaged. And so far, in 25 years on television, it's been that way every day." You can feel the passion and excitement Raj feels about his job. For years, Raj has made people's stories heard and represented my community, the Bay Area, with such passion and genuinity. Raj Mathai is not just a news anchor, he is a humanitarian.

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