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The Biz Blog

media, Hollywood and celebrity

Larry King: The Exit Interview

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Lacey Rose is a Los Angeles-based Media and Entertainment Staff Writer for Forbes.



At a promotional event for his latest venture as a partner and spokesperson for the Original Brooklyn Water Bagel Company, CNN host Larry King sat down with Forbes to discuss his post-show plans, his partisan rivals, his rumored replacement Piers Morgan (see his thoughts on who should inherit his desk [here](#)) and what he'll miss most (and least) about the daily grind.



Forbes: You're leaving a very different cable landscape than you entered 25 years ago. What has been the biggest change for you?

King: The biggest change is competition -- and the competition that is fiercely soap-boxed and biased. Nothing wrong with that -- and I don't deny anyone a living; it's just not my cup of tea. If I'm a liberal Democrat, I don't have to watch a liberal Democrat. Basically, these programs preach to the choir. I don't think anyone came away from Fox News and said, "I think I'm a conservative." Or came away from MSNBC and said, "Boy, I'm a liberal." So again, you're preaching to the choir. Some do it well, some not so well. But my opinion is that they don't impact elections. Fox News became dominant the year Obama got elected -- it was a big election and they were totally against him everyday.

And yet those types of sharply partisan shows are luring viewers.

But because you watch them doesn't mean they affect you. For example, CNN made more money last year than it ever made. So sponsors like CNN because the average viewer has a higher income than the other networks; I think they have a broader appeal; and the other thing people forget, which is enormous, is CNN.com. Ratings are a different story -- they're cyclical, I think.

Your CNN colleague Campbell Brown stepped down not long ago, admitting she was frustrated by that opinion-themed competition. Have you felt that same pressure and frustration? And did that factor into your decision to leave?

I was never pressured to give an opinion. CNN's pressure was to not give an opinion. The only pressure that I've felt is having to do stuff that I didn't like doing: the tabloid stuff. But I never felt the pressure to be Fox.

Has it frustrated you to see those shows succeeding and, in most cases, out-rating you?

I don't know if frustrates is it. It is what it is; it's like fighting windmills. I might regard it as sad. I don't think the public is well served, but I also would never ever stop people from talking. The only thing that separates us from most of the world is the first amendment.

When big news breaks, how will you feel not being there at 9 p.m. to weigh in?

That's going to be tough. I hope that there's something or somewhere that I'll be able to use my talents to aid in a big story. Let's say a horrible story like Sept. 11. For 9-11, we were on for something like 37 straight days. I would hope that my talents were such that someone would call me and say, "Can you get down there for us?" Maybe CNN would say, "Get down there for us and do the fire commissioner or talk to the mayor. We have some good people but that's your specialty."

Periodically come back much the way Tom Brokaw has done in recent years at NBC?

Yes. In fact, this deal and Brokaw's deal are almost identical. Brokaw does specials for NBC. He doesn't want to do commercials but he could. And he's free to make speeches and anything he wants -- and occasionally make other appearances on NBC. I'm sure Tom doesn't like days when a big news story breaks and he's not on at 6:30 p.m. And for me, it's going to take some getting used to I'd imagine -- and some understanding from friends, family, people around me. It's going to affect me.

What will you miss most about the daily grind?

Big news and interesting personalities who don't necessarily make news. Like the guys who do the whale show, [Animal Planet's *Whale Wars*]. They go out and stop people from killing whales. It's not big news but it's fascinating. Why they would do this? How they do it? So I won't have that. Maybe I'll do specials that could cover things like that.

And least?

The tabloid stuff. I'm not going to miss the girl missing in Aruba. Nothing against her mother or father, but that's a non-story made a story to me. Cable does it all of the time -- I have insatiable curiosity but it doesn't go to that story. So I won't miss that.

What do you hope your legacy is at CNN?

That I informed and entertained. That I added to the knowledge of people and at the same time gave people some enjoyment. The nicest thing I hear now is from people who think I'm retired, which I'm not because I'm going to do other things, yelling out, "Don't retire! 'Please don't retire!" Derek Jeter came over to me at the All-Star Game [Tuesday night] and said, "There's a lot of talk, but you are a true legend." That was a thrill to hear that from a captain of the Yankees. It also means you're old. There is no such thing as a young legend. [laughs]

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