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Paper No. 17
While I was wracking my overtired brain one fine morning, trying to put some coherent thoughts together so as to be able to stand here this afternoon to smother and bowl you over with my “pearls of wisdom” believe you me that I was completely up against a blank wall!

Before I could sink into the depths of amnesia or be swallowed up by the whirlpool of sheer panic attacks, I took a deep breath and decided to at least read the topic one more time before I gave in and sank into the bottomless pit of darkness and despair “Serving the Young” screamed the topic and I had that peg to hook onto and pull myself up inch by inch out of the fog, shake off the suffocation, prise open my clenched eyelids and breathe again. That magic word, ladies and gentlemen is the word young. Which one of us present in this forum today would not give an arm and a leg for just a taste of that fountain of youth? Which one of us would deny the dizzy ecstasy that we have all experienced when we were young, full of vitality, full of hope, ambitious, dreaming of conquering the world at the ripe old age of 22 or even 23! Do we all not agree that it is that magic, musical word young, that can still make our hearts beat faster, our eyes misty, our hands tremble, our tongues drool not to mention how we pull in our stomachs, straighten that bent spine, walk just that wee bit faster and dress just that wee bit dandier? Fair enough but on a more serious note that other word that makes one stop and think is the work – serving. TV programming serving the young. It makes me ponder and think.

I represent a public broadcasting organization called Pakistan Television Corporation which at present can boast of having 5 transmission and originating centres in Islamabad, Karachi, Quetta, Peshawar and Lahore. I have the privilege to head that last station Lahore as General Manager, the only woman to date in the 34 years history of PTV.

Very briefly let me give you an over view of how the PTV transmission operates and how we in Pakistan TV are attempting to serve the young in and of Pakistan.

PTV began it’s transmission on November 20th, 1964 from Lahore and since then has extended it’s reach to cover over 75 % population of the country.
PTV 1 (as our major channel is known) begins transmission at 6:00 a.m. every morning and continues until 10:15 a.m. The programmes begin in and with the name of Allah, the Almighty and most Merciful. After an hour of religious programming, we move to our children. These can be cartoons, songs, games, quiz shoes etc. After this segment we switch to 30 minutes of live current affairs issues followed by 60 minutes re-runs of the most popular programme from the evening before. It is now time to sign off. PTV 1 then goes on air again at 3:00 p.m. and continues until close to mid-night.

The programmes mix during every afternoon (and evening) covers just about every kind of audience, age group, preferences and tastes. We have dramas, documentaries, talk shows, news, current affairs, magazines formats etc. The transmission is a constant balancing act for our policy and decision makers. It must contain a bit for children here, and a bit for women there, a smattering for the elderly here and a touch for the soap lover there and so on. For PTV 1 due to pressures, demands and a constant tug of war between producers, programmers, commercial sponsors it has been possible only to produce a weekly 50 minutes slot for our younger audiences. I am referring here to teenagers as well as those just stepping out of college and entering the world of the professionals. An extremely popular programme this youth show which has music, debates, poetry, prose, quiz and all the other ingredients required is now going to travel abroad inviting the Pakistan youth in other countries to introduce themselves to their counterparts at home. For younger children we manage to put on a half an hour programme every afternoon. These 30 minutes are divided between ages of 4 to 12 years. They can be a drama one day and a music programme the next. PTV 1 also has been telecasting a weekly programme for children entitled “Islamic Encyclopedia” in which our younger audiences are informed and educated about people, persons, places all in association with Islam. We also include other relevant information related to and about our religions in this programme.

About a year ago, it was felt that the gap between PTV and our younger audiences was growing. Our youth thirsty for entertainment was looking for precisely that on other channels. We were losing our younger minds, their enthusiasm, their creativity and their
immense potential in the direction of our competitors. It was time to take stock of the situation before it was too late.

An indepth analysis brought about the launching of another channel last July in the form of PTV WORLD focussing and targeting the youth of the country. Pakistan Television separated the prime time of it’s channel PTV 1 created PTV WORLD which now reaches out to 37 different countries. The objectives at the time were simple.

1. Keep PTV 1 as the home channel for the national audience.
2. Keep it in line with PTV’s three basic criterias set way back in 1964 when PTV was inaugurated in Lahore and these were – inform – educate – entertain This is what PTV 1 continues to do and do very well.

However when it came to PTV WORLD, the audience focus was international, it was younger and dynamic. The viewer of PTV WORLD was technologically way ahead of it’s counterpart who watched PTV 1. This viewer had a vision that was piercing through into the next millenium and the buzz word was entertainment. So today after just a short life of 10 months, PTV WORLD, the "young peoples" channel of Pakistan has increased it’s transmission time from the original 5 hours to almost 12 hours daily and has succeeded in enticing back the youth of Pakistan to watch PTV WORLD. The screen is colorful, vibrant, alive and in tune to the needs of our young people but in total conformity and harmony with our religious, cultural and family values, We, as senior programmers in PTV, hope that we are preparing our youth to enter the new millennium with a confidence and excitement that will enable them to face the challenges of the new century with pride all of the above I may add is what they fully deserve. If we succeed in achieving just a miniscule of this, we as programmers have fulfilled our responsibilities well in programming and serving the young.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as a media person who has spent more than half of my professional life in public broadcasting and as a mother of two now grown up sons I have felt a huge burden of responsibility each and every working day of my career. It has been the responsibility of serving the young, protecting their values, nurturing their growth, caring for their future and loving their inner souls. Where it has been my pleasure, pride
and honor to project and produce programmes for the young people of my land, it has also been at times my pain and anguish to have watched them rebel, turn away, reject and discard some of my work. Not because it was sub-quality, not because it was poor in content but because it was at times totally out of synch with what they wanted to see.

I could not hold their eyes but not their minds least of all their hearts. Those were the times when I questioned myself more and more.

We, in public broadcasting must understand and respect the wishes and needs of our audiences. We need to keep abreast and at par with their galloping minds. We have to give our younger audiences freedom of thought and expression, we have to respect their youth and their enthusiasm.

In the third world and developing countries such as the one that I belong to, the public broadcaster is at a huge disadvantage. Why? Because we are being bombarded and invaded constantly from all sides by images, visuals, programmes and productions which are not US. They depict neither our culture nor our heritage. They project neither our family nor our moral values. They are in fact as alien to us as those creatures in the UFOs that one reads about and fears. But in this case unfortunately some of us are too small, too helpless or too defenseless to combat this assault but as a profound optimist that I have trained myself to be be. I interpret this onslaught more positively. I call it a blessing in disguise. I say “If this is what I am competing against, if this is what my youth is turning to then I have to find ways and means in tune with it to capture my audience’s attention.” So while competition from the sky can be a curse, it can also make me work harder.

Criticizing, maligning, heart burning will not solve the issue. Rational analysis and a clear focus will. To serve the young, we first need to understand how do they want to be served. And then do it in the most acceptable way, acceptable to them, acceptable to us. It’s called simple, balanced programming. No one loses, everyone comes out the winner.
Pakistan TV is trying to maintain that balance. It is juggling what should be done for our younger audience with the needs and dictates of it’s audience, but making sure that there is no compromise on quality or principles.

Coming up in May, PTV will once again take the lead in South Asia by launching two major initiatives, once again catering to the needs and dictates of it’s viewers.

May 1st will herald a 60 minutes daily transmission for the women of Pakistan on PTV 1, a challenge for the programmers, a major breakthrough for our female audiences. Pakistan TV has accepted the fact that the women of Pakistan want now to be taken seriously and want a slice of their own in the transmission time. I have the privilege of heading this hugely challenging task of designing the WOMEN’S HOUR of PTV.

May 7th, Pakistan TV brings a Sports Channel to it’s viewers just in time, before the Cricket World Cup, again another initiative to live up to the expectations of it’s viewers.

I end my presentation today by simply appealing to all of you present to hear my suggestions and give me your suggestions.

We in South East Asia share a similarity of culture, of family values, of heritage. We may dress differently even pray differently but our commitments to the world of media and communication has brought us together here this week. We need to share more, exchange more, discuss more, talk more, interact more.

The upcoming global media horizon knows no boundaries. Up in space there are no passports, no visas. We all are fast becoming citizens of a new world, a world of technology and cyber space, a world which embraces all frontiers, a world which unites us in our pursuit of excellence.

We must introduce this new world to each others children and each others youth and where we must share freely what is ours and take equally freely from them what is theirs. These cultural exchanges across borders must lead to more interaction and more co-productions, it is in this manner that we will best serve each others young. They must
learn from our past, we must merge ourselves with their future. Through their vision, we must look for enlightenment. Through our experiences, they must find strength.

As the saying goes we do not inherit the world from our ancestors. We borrow it from our children. And what is borrowed must be cherished and cared for. And then returned with love and affection in the hope that the next borrower will be kinder to it than us.

To serve the young is to serve that child that lives within all of us. And that child in our moments of solitude chides us for not giving it that freedom, that expression, that sympathy, that respect that it craved for.

But it is never too late.

Let us listen to that child. He or she may be our past but if it still speaks to us in our moments of solitude, it is alive and most important of all, it is our future.

Let us today make a vow to ourselves and to each other that we will serve our young honestly and to the best of our abilities. We will listen to them and talk their needs and wishes with us while planning our programmes for them, a vow that would need to be repeated for to ourselves every day:

End with a verse from our national poet Allama Iqbal who says: