

In this most esteemed forum of the Australian media, I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners – the Murdoch family.

I would also pay them my respects – but respect, like news, is something I'm just not willing to pay the Murdochs for. To the Olle family, however, I pay my sincerest respects.

It's a great honour to be asked to deliver the Andrew Olle Media Lecture. The previous speakers are truly distinguished, and to be added to the list is, for me, a truly humbling indication that I am now indisputably past my prime.

If you're asking yourself why someone with my media rap sheet is giving this address, me too. My best guess is that after suspending *The Chaser's War on Everything* for 2 weeks this year, Mark Scott reckons I owe him a bit of free content.

One thing I am certain of is that I'm the first person to give an Olle Lecture who's also been thrown out of this event. I once tried to gatecrash the Olle to do a Chaser stunt on Helen Coonan, the Minister for Communications at the time. I was forced to leave the room before the speech began – a fate that soon made me the envy of the entire audience.

To state the obvious, Andrew Olle was a respected journalist. I get none out of two on that score. But weirdly enough – I am a media proprietor of sorts. A decade ago, together with three friends, I ran a newspaper during a prolonged period of bad circulation and pitiful ad revenue ... that may not qualify me to give this lecture, but it does mean I'm suited for a position in senior management at Fairfax.

At least I can say that we had a failed media business model before it was fashionable.

But I'm not going to talk about funding quality journalism tonight. Mouthing off on topics I don't know anything about is my day job, so I thought I'd try something different here, by focussing on something I probably know too much about: offensiveness and outrage. And I want to relate them to two fundamentally important media values, self-regulation and independence.

### *Independence*

And I'll start by mentioning James Murdoch - Murdoch 2.0 - who in the recent McTaggart Lecture argued that "the only reliable, durable, and perpetual guarantor of independence is profit". Actually he didn't really argue it so much as assert it with all the confidence of a man whose independent wealth is reliably, durably and perpetually guaranteed by inheritance.

My experience has been different. In fact, based on the early days of *The Chaser*, I'd assert that the only reliable, durable and perpetual guarantor of independence is the absence of profit, coupled with obscurity. You can have a lot of fun under the radar.

In those early days under the radar, we operated more or less independently from the law. I was an employment lawyer by day and a defamation practitioner by night, conscientiously ignoring the often petty rules of libel. We always used to say you'd have to be crazy to bother suing us. And sure enough, before long we got a legal letter from the Moran family. Not the crime family, thank god, the heath care family. Rather than responding, we auctioned their letter of demand off at a party to raise money for the newspaper so that we could defame others.

We were independent of patrons too. When John Singleton sent us a cheque for \$10,000, we immediately banked it, and sent him an abusive letter telling him to back off and stop meddling with our paper.

These early days instilled a key aspect of independence: freedom from fear, or to put it another way ... a willingness to run the risk of offence, official displeasure, or worse. It's easily mistakable for stupidity. And it's produced some memorable brushes with the law. The very first was after we published Prime Minister John Howard's home phone number on our front page. The police raided the Chaser office to tell us that publishing the PM's number wasn't illegal, it was just really annoying.

There was another thing we were independent of in those obscure early days - an audience. More by necessity than choice. To be fair, this reflected very well on the discernment of the market. But one consequence of the almost total absence of customers for our content was that we developed a robustly independent editorial environment. Despite appearances to the contrary, this didn't mean a culture of 'anything goes' - in fact we had ridiculously long arguments about what was funny and what wasn't, and why.

A particularly memorable instance of this was when we found ourselves in the unique position of having a publishing deadline for a comedy newspaper on September 11, 2001. We watched the planes hitting the World Trade Centre just a few hours before the print deadline for the next edition. It was a strange night, but one that typified the way we've taken the old adage "tragedy plus time equals comedy" and turned it into a less universal dictum - "tragedy minus time equals Chaser". "Centrepont jumps two in world's tallest building" still stands out as an all-time favourite headline of mine. But it, like many jokes I've been associated with, offended and appalled many.

And I won't lie to you, delivering jokes that make some people laugh and get others really angry can be a lot of fun. What matters is who's in which group and why. And, occasionally, whether they find out about it.

But getting back to the question of independence, I believe there is an English expression for James Murdoch's claim that it is reliably guaranteed by profit. It's a technical publishing term: "bollocks". Profit, like ownership, is at best *conducive* to independence, but it does not guarantee it. In Australia the words "cash for comment" are shorthand for the obvious point that profitable media can surrender its independence, entirely, in the name of more profit.

Independence of ownership certainly helps, but independence is a state of mind, not a state of balance sheet.

This brings me to one of my core arguments this evening, and it's something I strongly believe, independence of mind also by definition means independence *from* the audience. It seems perverse- but it's true. The way to create an original and interesting product is to not worry about what the audience will think. You have to back your own judgement. In fact, I found that's what audiences respond to most: usually with praise, although occasionally with death threats.

But pissing people off is part of the job - and that's something that applies to both comedy and journalism. Therefore choosing who, when, how and why you anger or offend is something you have to take responsibility for, and I gladly do. That's very different, however, from letting the possibility that some will take offence, or even feel hurt, be the determining factor of what you do. It may seem callous, but you cannot let the targets of your comedy be the judge of what's acceptable.

All of this has been affirmed in moving from the creative nirvana of irrelevance to a much larger audience at what is, without doubt, the most heavily regulated and scrutinised media outlet in the country, the ABC.

As a public broadcaster, the ABC has certainty, for better or worse, when it comes to core revenue. Its independence is also mandated by statute. The ABC's non-commercial status means that profit does not and cannot guarantee its independence. Broadly speaking, the ABC maintains its independence admirably and it does this by creating, in a range of different ways, an editorial environment which values independence of mind. It's the ABC's editorial environment, and the independence that flows from it, which is why the ABC is an institution that's cherished, by its audience, by the broader community, by its staff, by me, by its Managing Director and by most, if not all, of its board of directors.

The point is the ABC is much loved, and by a group of people which is impossibly diverse – and I mean that literally.

In my experience, independence at the ABC is strangely two-faced: the institution maintains overall independence partially because it allows content creators a measure of independence from the institution.

In one sense The Chaser has never been part of the ABC. Everything we've done has been through independent production companies, initially through our comedy fairy godfather, Andrew Denton. My favourite clause from our contract with Andrew said he would use "best endeavours to protect the group from all non-essential dickheads". Both parties were also contractually obliged to "have an enormous amount of fun at other people's expense, unless we can't afford it, in which case it will be at our own". They're the sorts of legal promise I like to make, and keep.

The "non-essential dickheads" clause showed Andrew's commitment to creative independence. Like many jokes, it hints at something true while also being an extravagant overstatement that's very unfair. That's one of the things I like about comedy. What that joke's getting at is the relationship between independence on the one hand, and self-regulation via the 169 pages of the ABC Editorial Policies on the other. Because whereas self-regulation in the commercial media is a farce, the seriousness with which the ABC regulates itself can be farcical in a different way ... sometimes it feels like the ABC self-regulates to within an inch of its life.

At the same time, it's self-evident by what the ABC broadcasts, from The Chaser but plenty of others also – that you can push the boundaries there, and – unexpectedly for me at least – that a big *mainstream* audience can like it if you do. They might even love it. Or love hating it. But in my experience, aiming to create challenging content is something audiences respond to positively overall.

I'm now a veteran of years of "full and frank discussions" behind-the-scenes about the ABC Editorial Policies and what should and should not be broadcast. And it seems to me that, though often infuriating the substance of the ABC Editorial Policies is pretty sensible. The biggest danger for the ABC comes when those policies are applied narrowly, or fearfully, something which brings with it the ever-present risk of a bland compliance culture. I don't know how the poor bastards on staff in News and Current Affairs go, but in entertainment, avoiding this danger is the result of a fraught but functional relationship between the ABC and independent producers. Indeed, for the purposes of provocative overstatement, I'd even say that a lot of the ABC's best and most loved content goes to air as much despite the ABC as because of it.

And it's in this context that I'd like to talk about *outrage*.

Because it's been an interesting year to say the least. In 2009 with the world reeling from the GFC, this country, while doing relatively well economically, has been going through what I call

the AFC, the Australian Funny Crisis. In fact according to Wikipedia, in 2009 'Australia set a new world record for "sick new lows"'. That's a direct quote. I know, cos I posted it on Wikipedia myself.

And The Chaser was, I guess, the Lehmann Brothers of the AFC ... we tipped off what's been a year of outrage.

To recap, it all started as I said, with outrage at a comedy program for a badly misjudged sketch. Then there was outrage at a celebrity chef for abusing a tabloid TV host. The next outrage come after a breakfast radio lie detector stunt that backfired. Shortly afterwards, the same shock jock scored an outrage quinnella when he managed to make a Holocaust fat joke. Then the "victim" of that outrage outraged cyclists with a joke on a panel show, shortly before some variety show talent contestants tried to make a joke about a dead pop singer only to outrage a living pop singer. Although it did seem that the pop singer's outrage itself caused outrage, both from those who agreed with him and those who didn't.

The tendency towards the absurd in all this was finally achieved with the next outrage about the hitherto undiscovered genre of satirical panty sniffing – that outrage actually hit the media *before* the comedy program itself did.

Now I don't want to dwell too much on the rights and wrongs of each event in this outrage-athon. Not least because the one I was personally involved in was, I think quite clearly, the worst by far. Instead, I want to note some common factors and themes for the media which seem to apply no matter what the particular subject of the outrage is.

Outrages over taste and decency are nothing new of course. I'd say that a significant theme of the movement towards liberal democratic society has been the increasing priority given to freedom of expression over taste and decency concerns. But most sensible people agree that there have to be some limits. I certainly do ... which is why, by the way, the declaration of *War on Everything* was never meant to be taken literally. Titles, like jokes, work better without footnotes.

But while they're nothing new, debates about taste and decency seem different now. And that's because they are both amplified and distorted with startling efficiency thanks to the interaction of new and old media. Culturally, it's a nuclear reaction.

Taste and decency debates in the broader community were easier to dismiss when technology was less advanced. Controversial content was hard to access, or re-access, so it was easy to argue that public debate was grounded in ignorance.

It's useful here, indeed I think it's important, to distinguish between what I call the primary audience and the secondary audience.

The primary audience is mainly people who want to watch a show or at least chose to for some reason or other. They come to content through the platforms of the original broadcaster, whether it's TV or radio, or the various catch-up technologies. The primary audience at least approximates in some way the target audience for content.

By contrast, the secondary audience come to access controversial content *because* it's controversial. The secondary audience is often tends to be the very opposite of the target audience.

Today, thanks to widespread broadband access and social media applications, in particular YouTube and Twitter, the secondary audience is now much bigger and much closer than it has

ever been before ... it's now easy for them to access controversial content online. And one of the problems with giving people the ability to make up their own minds is that they do.

Thanks to high speed internet, content which is noteworthy in any way— whether its cute, inspirations, original, or involves cats - spreads like wildfire, sometimes around the world. The effect of anything can be instantly magnified by an avalanche - of YouTube postings, streams from media websites, forwarded emails, reTweets – all of which pile almost instantaneously on top of good old-fashioned cultural ripple effects like the watercooler, the schoolyard, or the B.O. infested taxi.

It means we've built the fastest most complex, high-tech cross-platform global echo chamber in history. And the impact on "debates", for want of a more accurate expression, about taste and decency is profound.

The dividing line between the primary audience and the secondary audience, where outrage blossoms, can often be observed via the timing of complaints. I first noticed it after The Chaser's Eulogy Song aired on ABC TV. The song was a deliberately provocative, but in my view satirically accurate song about the affection we tend to grant to even unsavoury celebrities posthumously (a human trait, I might say, that I hope to be the beneficiary of, though I'm in no rush). When I came in to work the morning after the Eulogy Song, the production office voicemail had 9 complaints on it. But when the song was picked up by talkback radio mid-morning, the phone went berserk, and by lunch there were hundreds of abusive complaints, many of which proudly declared that they hadn't actually heard the song.

My all time favourite voicemail complaint by the way was from an old woman who said in her message that our show was, and I quote, "filth – fucking filth".

The most dramatic example of outrage in the secondary audience is Jonathan Ross and Russell Brand in the UK. On 18 October 2008 they aired a tasteless but forgettable pre-recorded phone prank on BBC Radio 2. There were 2 complaints about it the next day. But when, 8 days later, the incident was reported in *The Mail on Sunday*, there were 1585 complaints the next day, sparking a media frenzy. Within 2 days there were 27,000 complaints.

I've got no doubt the sheer scale and intensity of these controversies now derives from how easy it is for controversial material to be accessed by the secondary audience. Email and the web also make it much easier to formalise a complaint as well.

By the way, the *Make a Realistic Wish* sketch tops the ABC complaints charts for 2009, with 4300 complaints. But to put this in perspective, while it's in the ABC's Hottest 100 of all time, it garnered roughly the same number of complaints as the decision in 2005 to cease production of *George Negus Tonight*. And both of them are more than a thousand behind the the most complained about thing the ABC's ever done, the axing of the *Glass House*, which led to 5606 complaints.

I also note that in 2008, there were 2645 complaints about the introduction of ABC1 and 2 watermarks on ABCTV shows. So if there's one bit of advice I'd give the ABC from all this, it's that the ABC should never introduce new watermarks that offend community standards – that who *really* would melt the switchboards.

But is all this just a question of niche content versus "community standards"? I'm not convinced it's as simple as that, which is something I'll come back to.

For the moment though, it's worth observing that while media technology is fanning the flames of taste and decency outrage, it also renders it impossible for censorship – which used to be the goal of outrage - to be meaningfully carried out.

For example, the movie *Ken Park*, which was refused classification in Australia, can be downloaded from the internet at the address on your screen now.

The ABC famously decided a long time back not to broadcast John Safran's pilot called "Media Tycoon" in which he rummaged through the rubbish of last year's Olle lecturer. For many years that excellent piece of TV was practically impossible to see. Now it's had thousands of views on YouTube.

By contrast, even though the ABC immediately withdrew the Make a Realistic Wish Foundation sketch from all its platforms, including the web, that sketch was practically impossible not to see. Much to our regret. Within minutes of its broadcast, it – like almost all TV content not - was digitally captured and posted on YouTube, in multitudinous acts of flagrant illegality that, as a copyright owner, I wholeheartedly endorse. Consumer-based video piracy has its upside. Banning content just ain't what it used to be. Although in that particular case, I wish our geek fans had done us a favour and not helped that sketch find a larger audience.

But it was curious to hear some in the media, especially the likes of Steve Price and Ray Hadlee simultaneously shrieking about how harmful the content was *and* urging more and more people to watch it and be appalled. The argument that it "should never have been broadcast" takes on a certain irony in this context.

I think different considerations should apply when considering the views of the secondary audience to those of the primary audience. In this context, I was interested to discover that none of the ABC's complaint systems track in any systematic way whether a complaint comes from a person who's viewed the content on an ABC platform or not. I think over time they'll need to.

The techno-fuelled taste and decency outrages in the secondary audience have a negative impact on two things: firstly, the quality of public debate; and secondly the prospects of a robust, diverse and daring broadcast culture.

In terms of public debate, the media outrage echo-chamber can mean it's simply counterproductive to engage in any public discussion. When not long ago the fine art photographer Bill Henson was in the firing line, PR doyenne, Sue Cato apparently advised him to withdraw from public altogether. I can see why. Sometimes the most you can do, is batten down the hatches, wait, and hope that some distraction comes along soon. Which is why I was truly saddened by Michael Jackson's untimely death on 25 June this year – if he'd only died 3 weeks sooner the spotlight might have moved off us earlier.

But based on the teachings of Cato the Australian, all I'd say is that it's not good for the country when the tone of public debate is such that having little or no relations with the public is the best public relations strategy.

At this point I want to take a gratuitous swipe at the Prime Minister. And I want to make very clear, I'm going out of my way to do this as an act of petty personal revenge because he went out of his way to criticise us, especially as he hadn't seen it. To me Kevin Rudd's enthusiasm for buying in on any cultural controversy – from Bill Henson to The Chaser to Gordon Ramsay - is a bit unseemly, and at risk of sounding old-fashioned, not very Prime Ministerial. Frankly, I was stunned a few weeks ago that Mr Rudd wasn't tweeting alternative names for Vegemite's iSnack2.0, or phoning Indonesia to see if as well as those poor Sri Lankans, they'll also give

asylum to the poor bastard who came up with the one name in Australia less popular than "Kyle Sandilands".

Kevin Rudd clearly fancies himself as an intellectual leader of this country. But being a true intellectual leader means more than tossing off the odd economics essay for *The Monthly* between nanosleeps on your weekend off. It means setting the tone for the national discourse and resisting, rather than inciting, hysteria.

As well as reducing the tone of public debate, the second negative impact of taste outrages is, as I said, on the possibility of a robust, diverse and daring broadcasting culture. And this is where I'd like to say a few things about the latest vogue in media self-regulation: the **cultural sin bin**.

No-one's got a red card yet, not even Kyle Sandilands. But he's had a couple of yellow cards. The rule book for the cultural sin bin isn't really clear, but I don't think you can get a third one.

Of course the ABC gave *The Chaser's War on Everything* a yellow card with a 2 week suspension. I don't think that was an outrageous decision, or an indefensible one. To be honest, personally, it was a bit of a relief. But I do think it's a dangerous precedent for the ABC to decide what it broadcasts from week to week because of outrage over taste and decency, especially when the Prime Minister has a nasty habit of weighing in with a jerk of his knee. Getting caught up in the short term hysteria of media outrage has the potential to damage the independence and integrity of the ABC.

Sin bin decisions are, by definition, made in the eye of the media storm. And in the eye of the storm, the views of the secondary audience – that is, people who only know about the content because it's controversial - loom way, way too large. Both its size and its import will, almost inevitably, be overestimated.

And I don't believe there's any convincing evidence, or even a theory, that taking steps to try and placate the secondary audience is prudent, or can be effective. I tend to think it only fuels the fire. But I recognise that's just as hard, probably impossible, to prove too.

What I do know for certain is the effect that outrages and the way they're handled have on something I think most Australians value, and which matters even if they don't, the ABC editorial environment. And for a while this year, there was a festival of editorial freaking out and an orgy of upward referral. The most illustrative event for me was a debate over a sketch called "Baby Day Spa" which featured a 100% faked, safely and responsibly filmed satirical image of a baby getting a botox injection to look younger. There was concern, emanating from all sorts of unusual places in the ABC, that this sketch too might breach community standards. Another example is when filming of a different sketch was halted to prevent a volunteering mother from breastfeeding her own child on camera until DOCS the Department of Community Services gave the all clear. In both those instances, sanity prevailed ... eventually, which I guess is a cause for moderated pessimism. In my experience, the temporary insanity of editorial crises does slowly abate and fearless good judgement can re-emerge with time. I just hope the headcount of people at the ABC who are committed fearless good judgement doesn't shrink.

This is important because it is part of the ABC's purpose to broadcast for the entire Australian community. That does not mean limiting itself only to content which is acceptable to everyone in the country. In fact it should mean the opposite. Everyone should have something to *love* on the ABC, and that probably means they'll have something to be indifferent to, maybe even hate. But the ABC should provide a diverse range of content that meets the diverse tastes of

the Australian community. Personally I find the ABC's commitment to British cop drama very dull – but in order to service the large ABC audience which likes that crap, the ABC needs to disregard my pigheaded views. And it should disregard the views of people who only like staid British dramas, or *To the Manor Born*, or who don't like comedy at all, in making its decisions about what edgy comedy to present.

Now I want to be very clear here. I'm not defending the *Make a Realistic Wish* sketch – I agree with the ABC's conclusion that it shouldn't have gone to air. I wish I'd intervened to stop it myself – and I remember vividly the moment when the right call was on the tip of my tongue.

I'm also not suggesting that that it was only the secondary audience who didn't like that sketch. It's beyond any doubt that the massive majority of the audience, including the target audience, *really* didn't like those 58 seconds of *The Chaser's War on One Too Many Things*.

But I believe we should try to analyse the types of reaction that arise in moments of outrage, especially since there's no telling if the AFC is over. I think it's fair to divide the majority of people with a negative view of controversial content into three categories, and it's important to distinguish between them. The first is people who are hurt by it; the second is people who are offended or outraged by it; and then the last category is those who don't like it.

So I'd like to make a realistic assessment of the Realistic Wish audience, because I believe what's true of them is true of the Australian mainstream.

The first category – those who were hurt – is by and large are people who've been touched in a personal way by childhood cancer. They are the people that I'm sorry about. I know that they have, arbitrarily, been afflicted with grief caused by one of life's cruellest realities. You've got tears enough in your life if that happens. A comedy show shouldn't add to those pools of grief. Lest there is any misunderstanding, if you are one of those people, I want to reiterate my sincerest apology to you for the unwarranted pain that sketch caused when you have already have too much suffering in your life.

But the next category - people who were offended by the sketch - is in my view different. We live, thankfully, with genuinely free speech, which is a hallmark of a tolerant society. And it's not good speech, or nice speech, that needs to be tolerated. It's bad speech. Mediocre speech. Tasteless speech. Sometimes, hurtful speech. That is to say, most of what passes the lips of Kyle Sandilands . Even more chillingly, the entirety of *Hey Hey It's Saturday*. And a pretty fair chunk of The Chaser's work.

But the inevitable corollary to freedom of speech is that there is no such thing as a general right to not be offended. So to be honest, perhaps too honest, if you were just offended by that sketch I'm not really sorry. Of course, you have every right to be outraged and to express your offence to whoever you like. In many, but certainly not all, cases, I recognise that your outrage springs from a good place, from compassion for the suffering of others. But if you were just offended, unlike those who've been hurt, I don't believe you're owed an apology. You can demand one. And it's possible that some people will say sorry to you – some for noble reasons, some for cowardly ones, some just to get you to shut up. But offence is a much lesser category of wrong, and I believe it should be responded to most cautiously in dealing with questions of taste and decency.

And that's because of the third category – those who didn't find the sketch funny, who thought it was insensitive, ill-advised, or that it reflected poorly on its creators, but who weren't hurt by it or outraged by it. My sense is that there were more people in this latter category than media coverage of outrages acknowledges.

It's hard to know how big this group is compared to the offended. Because if there's one thing we know for certain, it's that the outraged are always the loudest. There is, quite simply, no objective data to measure these things.

But I want to argue tonight that the "mainstream" audience is more diverse than we tend to think, and that it deserves more credit than it's often given. In particular, a significant part of the mainstream audience is actually quite open-minded. Or to put it another way, it is **not** the Australian community's real standard that only content *which the majority of people agree with or like*, is acceptable content.

The Australian community understands that tastes vary. It accepts that, in matters of taste or opinion, reasonable minds can differ, and that unreasonable minds can call Alan Jones. It won't go quoting Voltaire at you. The Australian community's not that up itself. And no doubt, one of its standards is that if you stuff up, you should cop a heavy ear bashing. It expects that if you dish it out you've gotta be able to take it. But I don't believe that the Australian community actually wants narrower, more regulated, or even less offensive content.

The standards of the mainstream Australian community are, I believe, robust but fair-minded. They're better than our own kneejerk reactions, our harshest words, and the moments when we fail each other or ourselves.

They're better than the worst of the media.

To me, this is both a statement of fact and an article of faith, an aspiration. Because it's only if you believe in the fair-minded mainstream that you can create content for it. And even if you sometimes doubt this is what "most people" think, then, in fact especially then, it's still important to maintain belief in the better natures of our fellow citizens.

The evidence for the robust, fair-minded mainstream is everywhere. The most impressive recent example of this in Australian comedy is the massive success of Chris Lilley's accessible but subversive work at the ABC. The most enduring is Barry Humphreys. Gary McDonald was a pioneer. Australians have a taste for unusual content, indeed a hunger for it. It abounds, and not just on the public broadcaster. Think of the deeply unusual Roy and HG, not just on radio but at the Closing Ceremony of the Olympic Games for God's sake.

In drama there's things like *The Secret Life of Us* on Channel 10 and *Love My Way* on Foxtel, two recent examples I've chosen only partially due to a crush on Claudia Karvan. There's a big audience for quality international content also: things like *The Sopranos*, or even Rupert Murdoch's massive hit *The Simpsons*.

To return to an earlier point, the way to service the fair-minded mainstream of the Australian community, or any community, is not to pander to their presumed tastes, because if you do that you're bound to err on the narrow side, to the detriment of everyone. Guessing community standards is a difficult game, but its played most enthusiastically by those with the narrowest views. And they shouldn't be the judges. I've just mentioned a few hits, but in the creative sphere there will be misses too – and *The Chaser* one epic miss this year. But I also believe that being willing to take risks with content involves more respect for the fair-minded mainstream audience than erring on the side of the caution or striving to avoid offence.

In his time, Andrew Olle defined the discerning mainstream of Australian journalism. I didn't know the man, but I've done some research to find out about him. As far as I can tell, he had literally zero friends – that's verified by Facebook. In his entire journalistic career he did not write a single tweet. He seemed in a way to be the journalistic equivalent of a one man band: the popular drum of 702 breakfast strapped to his front, while simultaneously carrying the

cymbals of quality, the 7:30 Report and Four Corners, on his back. And a comedy horn for his morning radio chats with Paul Lyneham, which I fondly remember listening to on the way to university.

For some reason, what stands out in my memory of Andrew Olle is that voice, especially on the radio. Drifting into your consciousness with the clock radio alarm, intelligent but not superior, serious but warm, firm but gentle. There was something in his voice that said, "You can trust me." And he never betrayed that trust.

He had that independence of mind I referred to earlier, which is the essence of good judgement and media leadership. He served his audience by maintaining a professional detachment from it.

I'm glad that I never had to face his questions. I can just imagine him, in the face of something like the *Make a Realistic Wish* controversy, asking us, "Why didn't we know that this was going to happen?"

It's not an easy question to answer. All I could say is that we should have, and I wish we'd made a better call. But it was a serious lapse in a good process, not the inevitable outcome of a rotten one ... and it's one which I believe has, overall, served the audience well. One which is important in the interests of creating original content for the fair-minded mainstream of the Australian community. And one which I hope will continue.

When there's an error of judgement, the thing to do is renew your commitment to good judgment, not to compound the error with more.

A key part of good judgement is recognising that you're fallible, and when you've done wrong, taking responsibility for it and respecting the dignity of those you have hurt.

But an equally important part of good judgement is resisting the furious cries of the outraged mob or letting only the narrowest of tastes prevail.

Because the essence of good judgement is maintaining your independence.