

THE INSIDER (1999): NARRATIVE BREAKDOWN

Screenwriters: Eric Roth and Michael Mann

Screenplay: https://www.dailyscript.com/scripts/the-insider_shooting.html

Based on: The 1996 *Vanity Fair* article, "The Man Who Knew Too Much", by Marie Brenner (<https://www.vanityfair.com/magazine/1996/05/wigand199605>)

ACT ONE (PAGES 1 TO 25)

In Lebanon, we meet Lowell Bergman, a producer for CBS' *60 Minutes* news show. He puts himself in danger to secure an interview with Hezbollah's Sheikh Fadlallah.

During this opening exchange, we learn about the stellar reputation of *60 Minutes* and veteran host Mike Wallace (introducing a key theme).

We then move to Louisville, Kentucky, where we are introduced to Jeffrey Wigand, a corporate scientist who is leaving his job.

During the opening 10 pages, we also learn about Wigand's home life, including the communication issues he has with his wife, Liane (this will come back later).

Further exposition comes out as Wigand reveals he has been fired. Liane gets worried about losing the employee benefits. One of their kids is asthmatic, raising the stakes with regard keeping the employee health insurance.

We also first learn of the confidentiality agreement Wigand has with B&W. This becomes an obstacle to him going public with what he knows about Big Tobacco.

The next scene introduces us to Wallace and his impressive interview style on display. This provides an opportunity to reveal background on Wallace and Bergman's long-standing professional relationship (again, this will become important as the story unfolds).

We learn a little about Bergman's home life: a loving relationship and a blended family with grown sons.

On page 18, Bergman gets a box of tobacco industry documents from Philip Morris. They are technical in nature, and he needs help deciphering them.

Commentary: *The story really begins here, as the 'MacGuffin' docs put Bergman in touch with Wigand. [More on the MacGuffin in the next chapter]*

Bergman is given Wigand's contact details but is rebuffed when he reaches out. This intrigues the newsman. Why would Wigand be reluctant to talk to him?

Commentary: *From the opening scene, we already know that Bergman is perseverant and has a 'nose for news', so it's no surprise when he pursues Wigand, who eventually shows up at a meeting in a hotel.*

Wigand agrees to translate the documents (highlighting that he's highly knowledgeable about the tobacco industry). He then hints (unprompted) that he

knows a lot more than he is allowed to talk about under his confidentiality agreement. Now Bergman's interest is really piqued.

Wigand reveals that he was formerly the head of research and development for B&W.

Overview: Coupled with Bergman's realisation that what Wigand was earlier looking at from the hotel room was the B&W building, we now know that Wigand was fired from his job at B&W and has potentially damaging information. However, he is torn over whether to reveal that information, given that he stands to lose personally if he talks. At the end of the act, the questions raised include:

- What does Wigand know?
- Can Bergman get Wigand to break his confidentiality agreement and talk?
- What will be the consequences if he does?

ACT TWO PART 1 (PAGES 25 TO 75)

This section is all about Bergman trying to get Wigand to talk. Both men face increasing obstacles, as Wigand struggles with the decision of whether to blow the whistle on B&W.

We meet *60 Minutes* executive producer, Don Hewitt, and see further evidence of Bergman's passionate and committed working style as the team puts the Hezbollah story together.

Bergman asks his assistant to find out about the legal aspects of confidentiality agreements and Kentucky state law.

The stakes are raised for Wigand when he meets with B&W CEO Sandefur, who 'asks' Wigand to sign a revised confidentiality agreement and threatens to take away his benefits.

There is further conflict in the next scene, as Wigand angrily accuses Bergman of selling him out.

Wigand also has reason to believe he is being followed.

Commentary: *Note how this foreshadows the increased threat to Wigand and his family's safety.*

Bergman comes to Wigand's house to tell him in person that he did not sell him out to B&W. Wigand confirms that he has important information that could hurt Big Tobacco.

Wigand reveals background on his working life, and we learn some character motivation as Wigand discusses his guilt over taking the B&W job for the money. Bergman tells him, 'You're in a state of conflict, Jeff'. Wigand has a choice to make.

Bergman tells the *60 Minutes* team that he wants Wigand on the show.

The team discusses the obstacles in the way, including Big Tobacco's deep pockets and Wigand's confidentiality agreement.

Wallace agrees that it's a public health issue that needs to be aired.

The idea is raised that Wigand's confidentiality agreement would be negated if he were compelled to talk as a witness in legal proceedings.

Wigand seeks out a teaching job and the family is forced to move to a smaller house.

An intruder comes on to Wigand's property. Liane is disturbed, by the events and also by her husband's reaction.

Wigand reveals his fears to Bergman.

Bergman reaches out to a lawyer who has brought a tobacco case in Mississippi.

Someone leaves a bullet in the Wigands' mailbox.

Wigand gets angry and tells Bergman he wants to tape an interview.

Wigand takes Liane to New York but fails to tell her about the interview until it comes out at a dinner with Wallace and Bergman.

On page 75, we reach midpoint as Wigand tapes the revelatory interview with Wallace.

He accuses Big Tobacco of knowing about the addictive nature of nicotine and lying about its effects. Wigand's information is no longer secret. It's on tape. But that's not the end of the story.

Overview: *So, at the end of Act Two Part 1, Wigand has made the decision to blow the whistle, motivated in part by his guilt over working for Big Tobacco. Bergman is committed to bringing Wigand's story to air. However, there are significant obstacles facing both men, including:*

> Increasing threats to Wigand's safety and that of his family (this will develop further into a smear campaign later in the story).

> The confidentiality agreement (breaching this could lead to a lawsuit and a loss of Wigand's employment benefits).

> The might of Big Tobacco (we've already seen evidence of this in the Sandefur scene).

> The increasing divisions between Wigand and Liane (a subplot that will come to a head later).

Questions at the end of Act Two Part 1 are:

- What further obstacles and threats will Wigand face?*
- Will his interview reach the airwaves?*
- How will Big Tobacco respond?*

ACT TWO PART 2 (PAGES 75 TO 110)

Wigand begins his new life as a teacher and contacts the Mississippi lawyers who are suing Big Tobacco.

Commentary: *Note how we get to see Wigand in a different light, joking with the kids and sharing his love of chemistry. This helps to soften a character who is not very sympathetic.*

Liane tells Wigand that she can't support him anymore.

Wigand wants to talk when he gets back from testifying in Mississippi.

Wigand gets served with subpoenas at the airport. One of the subpoenas is a gag order preventing Wigand from testifying under threat of arrest when he returns home.

Wigand is shaken by this reality and doubts whether he should testify at all.

Wigand makes the decision to testify.

On the stand, he confirms that nicotine acts as a drug. This should clear the way for the *60 Minutes* interview to air without breaching the confidentiality agreement.

Wigand gets home to find that Liane has left with the kids.

Commentary: *Note how effectively the screenplay builds in tensions and obstacles, increasing the pressure organically. Also impressive is the way in which a story that has two protagonists intertwines their separate strands into a satisfying dramatic whole.*

Back in New York, further complications arise as CBS Corporate is reluctant for the Wigand *60 Minutes* story to air.

Bergman becomes suspicious and asks for a check on SEC filings related to CBS.

The president of CBS requests that a version of the show is cut that excludes Wigand's interview.

Bergman reacts angrily to the suggestion. He discovers that CBS is going to be taken over by Westinghouse Corporation. Being sued by B&W could jeopardise the sale.

Bergman gets into a heated disagreement about the show. He strongly objects to business interests taking precedence over editorial concerns.

Bergman and Wallace's strong working relationship comes under threat when the anchor takes Hewitt's side and agrees to go forward with an edited version of the show.

On page 99, Bergman says explicitly that he believes CBS is killing the show.

Wigand has moved into a hotel and tells Bergman that Liane has filed for divorce.

Bergman can tell that Wigand is not doing well emotionally.

Bergman tells Wigand that show might not air. Not unexpectedly, Wigand takes the news badly.

A private investigator (PI) shows up at the door of Wigand's first wife. A B&W smear campaign against Wigand gathers speed.

Hewitt gives Bergman a head's up on the damaging information that's been gathered on Wigand. A *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) exposé is planned that would ruin Wigand's reputation and call into question whether he was telling the truth about Big Tobacco.

Hewitt informs Bergman that the version of the show without the Wigand interview will be aired.

Over the telephone, Bergman blows up at Wigand over the fact he didn't tell him about the murky details of his past. He makes it clear that no-one would believe him about anything if he lied about other aspects of his life.

At the end of the conversation, Wigand is left in the phone booth, as described in the script, 'like a man in a glass booth, all alone'.

Meanwhile, an angry Bergman sets about trying to stop the *WSJ* story. He's not done yet.

Overview: So, Act Two Part 2 ends at a low point, with everything looking like a lost cause. Wigand has put his neck on the line and lost his family, but for what? CBS doesn't want to air the show and Bergman doesn't have the support of his team in moving forward.

The questions going into Act Three are therefore:

- *Now that he's talked, will Wigand's claims ever come to light?*
- *Can Bergman get the unedited show on air?*
- *Can Bergman counter the smear campaign that aims to discredit Wigand?*
- *What further repercussions will both men face over the decisions they've made?*
- *How will Wigand react emotionally?*

ACT THREE (PAGES 110 TO 145)

Bergman contacts his own investigators to discredit the claims of the smear campaign. He also asks the *WSJ* reporter to push the deadline on the Wigand story. The reporter agrees to look at Bergman's evidence.

Commentary: *Throughout, we've seen evidence of Bergman's ability to talk people into doing something, and also his proactive nature. Establishing this from the very first page means that his following actions make sense as the situation becomes more urgent.*

Hewitt confronts Bergman about an *Associated Press* story in which Bergman went on the record that he disagreed with the editorial decision to cut the Wigand interview.

Hewitt tells Bergman to take a vacation (i.e. to go away and stop making waves). Wallace tells Bergman he's not going to resign over the Wigand story.

Bergman gives the *WSJ* reporter a notebook that contains information disputing the damaging dossier B&W compiled on Wigand. The reporter agrees to push the deadline to follow up on the information.

Wigand sees on TV that the local news has the dossier, heaping on the pressure. He takes it badly. The *60 Minutes* show runs without Wigand's interview.

Bergman contacts an agitated Wigand and starts to believe he might hurt himself. He manages to calm Wigand and the relationship between the men appears smoothed over.

When the Mississippi lawyer contacts Bergman and asks him about the chances of getting the interview to air, the newsman admits, 'I'm about outta moves'.

Commentary: *Again, knowing the character as we do now, we know he's going to come up with something to overcome this final test.*

Bergman goes to Montana to secure an exclusive story on the arrest of the Unabomber.

Bergman contacts the *New York Times* (*NYT*) and tells a reporter about CBS Corporate influencing the decision to pull the Wigand interview. He is forced to betray his colleagues in a bid to get the truth on air.

The story makes it on to page one of the *NYT*.

Wallace confronts Bergman about the story. He accuses him of betrayal; of airing the station's dirty laundry in public.

The *WSJ* runs a story refuting the claims in the smear dossier.

The *60 Minutes* episode with the Wigand interview airs in full.

Wigand proudly watches his kids as they watch the show, seeing their dad in a heroic light.

Bergman gets his exclusive on the Unabomber to great applause from his colleagues.

However, Bergman later tells Wallace that he's quit *60 Minutes*. 'What got broken here... doesn't go back together again', he says.

Title cards reveal the professional fates of Bergman and Wigand.

Final comments: In Act Three, the story reaches a definite conclusion. The *60 Minutes* show airs in full. Wigand and Bergman achieve their goals.

The former reveals the damaging information on B&W, while the latter gets that information on air. Bergman is vindicated but his role at CBS becomes untenable, leaving his future in doubt. Likewise, we don't know what the future holds for Wigand, in terms of his family or whether he will face further recriminations from B&W.

However, we do know that Wigand has gone from a fired Big Tobacco corporate chemist with dirty secrets to an honest schoolteacher. In the process, he loses his wife but assuages his guilt over how he used to earn his living. He also starts to rebuild his relationship with his kids as a single father.

Meanwhile, Bergman starts and ends the story as a world-weary journalist willing to go the extra mile for an exclusive. But by the end, his eyes are opened to the demands of network news, which (like Wigand) made him a cog in a corporate wheel.

Both men are eventually able to move past these confines, remaining true to their beliefs and values. While they each lose something personally and professionally, they gain something of importance.

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